

**“The ‘Abbās after Whom Those
Who Rule in Baghdad Are Named”:
Al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd in Late Antique Accounts of the
Marwānids and the Third *Fitna****

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the representation of al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd’s involvement in the Muhallabid revolt (102/720) and the third fitna (126–36/744–54) across Arabic-Islamic and Christian sources. The contribution makes a case for the study of “minor figures” as a means to contend with the eulogizing and historiographical re-imagining of the Marwānid past by later ‘Abbāsīd compilers. It sheds light on the status of concubine-born sons of Marwānid caliphs, who were unable to become caliph until precisely this period and the generational shift that occurred in the 120s/740s. Al-‘Abbās appears in Arabic-Islamic sources as foreshadowing the impending fitna, warning of its consequences and attempting to dissuade his brother, Yazīd b. al-Walīd (d. 126/744), from revolting against the caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd (d. 126/744). Eventually “captured” by his brother Yazīd b. al-Walīd’s supporters, al-‘Abbās’ bay‘a (oath of allegiance) turns the tide in Yazīd’s favor. In contrast, late antique Christian sources in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, and Syriac see him as instrumental in the fall of al-Walīd b. Yazīd, wanting the caliphate for himself and betraying his cousin. The following analysis will demonstrate how Christian sources employed figures internal to their own traditions to understand and explain caliphal history. The overlapping but competing historiographies of al-‘Abbās shed light on the source material and agendas of Arabic-Islamic and Christian late antique sources. This study also helps to disentangle some of the conflicting elements of the fitna narrative, while underlining the polycentric nature of Marwānid rule and how members of the imperial elite were legitimized and exerted authority.

1. Introduction

Of the four *fitnas* of early Islamic history, the third (126–36/744–54) is the most confusing, at times a contradictory and tumultuous object of study.¹ Perhaps because of this, it has

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not attracted substantial scholarly interest, whereas scholars have discussed at length the background and the reasons for the success of the ‘Abbāsīd revolution—itsself arguably part of the *fitna*—reaching the point where even in the early 1990’s Humphreys noted the ‘Abbāsīd movement had “engendered a substantial scholarly literature.”² Just as many questions should be asked, however, of the events that preceded it, as the ‘Abbāsīd *da‘wa* was not the first or only revolt confronted by the Marwānīds in the turbulent 120s/740s.³ The present paper addresses these issues by looking at the role of al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd (d. 132/750), the eldest son of the third Marwānīd caliph, al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–15) and the events leading up to death of the eighth caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd (d. 126/744) as preserved in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, and Syriac sources.⁴ One of the difficulties with studying the *fitna* is undoubtedly the number of different figures who appear in the narratives; to aid with this a genealogical tree is available in the Appendix (Appendix 1).

Focusing on a “minor” figure such as al-‘Abbās touches upon issues of periodization and evidences the generational developments of the late Marwānīd period.⁵ The decision to focus on al-‘Abbās is informed not only by his presence across a variety of sources but also because, as Hämeen-Anttila noted in his study of Khālīd b. Ṣafwān (d. 135/752), “stories about minor characters are less prone to conscious manipulation. They have, obviously, also undergone changes during transmission but there is no strong hidden agenda behind these.”⁶ As we shall see, references to al-‘Abbās are confined to two major events, Yazīd b. al-Muhallab’s revolt in 102/720 and the third *fitna*. Both these events are described as *fitna*

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1. The third *fitna* is notoriously hard to date. The dating adopted here take as its extremities the rebellion against al-Walīd b. Yazīd in 126/744 (as per Hawting) and the defeat of the ‘Abbāsīd pretendant ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī in 136/754, which, as argued by Borrut, saw the consolidation of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty. See Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2000), 90; Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L’espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 354–81.

2. R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 104.

3. The work of Steven Judd is one exception to this; see Steven Judd, “The Third Fitna: Orthodoxy, Heresy and Coercion in Late Umayyad History” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997); idem, “Reinterpreting al-Walīd b. Yazīd,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128, no. 3 (2008): 439–58; idem, “Medieval Explanations for the Fall of the Umayyads,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, 89–104 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

4. Al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab al-Quraysh*, ed. E. Levi-Provencal (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 1953), 165. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ‘Umar al-‘Amrawī, 70 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1995), 36:438.

5. My characterization of al-‘Abbās as a “minor figure” is not a comment on his historical significance, but rather reflect the fact that accounts concerned with him are not widespread, but are confined to specific events. He does not have a significant presence in *adab* works, nor has he been focused on by secondary literature, and he is largely absent from the indices of major publications and historical overviews. The most recent *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on him goes some way to recognizing his significance. See K. Blankinship, “al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill Online).

6. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Portrait of an Eighth-Century Gentleman: Khālīd Ibn Safwān in History and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), vii.

in the Arabic-Islamic sources and are salient examples of the factionalism of the Marwānid state as well as of competing historiographies.⁷ Despite only featuring prominently in these two events, al-‘Abbās is depicted as the most senior figure of the late Marwānid state and is associated with narratives of piety, foreshadowing the looming *fitna*.

This study aims to disentangle some of the conflicting elements of the narrative as well as to underline the polycentric nature of Marwānid rule and the ways that members of the imperial elite were legitimized and exerted authority. This cannot be done using exclusively Arabic sources, which modern scholars have long recognized as having consolidated and synthesized conflicting memories of the past to generate an imperial and hegemonic narrative.⁸ It is necessary then to incorporate the sources of the wider late antique tradition, produced in regions within or peripheral to the Marwānid caliphate, in this case Armenian, Greek, and Syriac. This decision to adopt a comparative approach is greatly informed by the insightful and influential studies carried out by Conrad, Hoyland, Borrut, Conterno, and Vacca.⁹ All of these scholars have contributed by evidencing that many traditions circulated between different confessional and linguistic groups, although, as stressed by Hoyland and Vacca, this does not presume direct written textual transmission.¹⁰ Specifically, the present paper builds on the work of Borrut in choosing a figure who is present across a wide variety of late antique sources and studying the instances in which he appears across the canon.¹¹

The aim of this paper is to use a moment of tribulation and tension, paired with a relatively minor figure who has not been subjected to extensive historiographical re-imagining, to illuminate the ‘Abbāsīd-era memory of Marwānid collapse. It first investigates the depiction

7. For the Muhallabid revolt as *fitna*, see Ibn ‘Atham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, ed. S. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bukhārī, 8 vols. (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1975), 8:8; For a full discussion on competing historiographies in fourth-/tenth-century texts, see Antoine Borrut, “Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam,” *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients* 91, no. 1 (2014): 37–68, at 51. I aim to publish a more comprehensive comparative discussion of the various representations of *fitna* in Arabic sources in future.

8. Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40–43, esp. 41; Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 61–108.

9. Lawrence I. Conrad, “The Conquest of Arwad: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: I. Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, 317–404 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992); Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997); Theophilus of Edessa, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, trans. Robert G. Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011); Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*; Maria Conterno, *La “descrizione dei tempi” all’alba dell’espansione islamica: Un’indagine sulla storiografia greca, siriana e araba fra VII e VIII secolo*, *La “descrizione dei tempi” all’alba dell’espansione islamica* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Alison Vacca, “The Fires of Naxčawan: In Search of Intercultural Transmission in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, and Syriac,” *Le Muséon* 129, no. 3–4 (2016): 323–62.

10. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 34; Vacca, “The Fires of Naxčawan,” 353.

11. E.g., Borrut’s chapter on the generation of the heroic figure Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik (Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 229–82); This paper is also heavily influenced by Conrad and Vacca’s studies of a single event through the comparison of sources internal and peripheral to the Arabic tradition; see Conrad, “The Conquest of Arwād”; Vacca, “The Fires of Naxčawan.”

of al-ʿAbbās before the *fitna*, highlighting the circumstances faced by concubine-born sons of caliphs and how they participated actively within the polity despite seemingly being ineligible for the caliphate itself. This is followed by a brief discussion on the generational and genealogical changes that underpinned the third *fitna*: the emergence of a new generation of the Marwānid elite—grandsons or great grandsons of ʿAbd al-Malik—and the centrality of concubine-born sons. Finally, it turns to a comparative overview of the accounts of the *fitna* across our late antique sources, dealing with each narrative tradition separately to demonstrate how different communities and authors interpreted the fall of the Marwānids in different contexts of production. While al-ʿAbbās takes center stage in both the Arabic-Islamic and late antique traditions, he is seen as a pious and foreshadowing figure in the Arabic-Islamic tradition whilst in the late antique Christian tradition he is presented as the architect of the dynasty’s demise, actively wanting the caliphate for himself and betraying his cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd.

2. Al-ʿAbbās b. al-Walīd Before the *Fitna*

Al-ʿAbbās has perhaps not been the focus of extensive scholarship due to his perceived ineligibility for the caliphate: his mother was an unnamed concubine, or *umm walad* (lit. mother of child), making him *hajīn* (mixed).¹² He first appears in Islamic sources during the reign of his father al-Walīd, accompanying his uncle Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 121/738) on the raid of Tyana in 88/707 and playing a central role in its conquest.¹³ Maslama first appears only two years earlier, in 86/705, underlining al-ʿAbbās’ longevity in the source material and his advanced age for being a grandson of ʿAbd al-Malik; he was al-Walīd’s eldest son.¹⁴ Al-ʿAbbās was granted the governorship of Ḥimṣ by his father, which he would

12. See the recent *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on al-ʿAbbās: K. Blankinship, “al-ʿAbbās b. al-Walīd.” The use of *hajīn* here does not entirely reflect the language of our annalistic and genealogical sources, which typically refer to sons in relation to their parents’ generation, i.e., commenting that their mother was an *umm walad* (mother of child) or *jāriya*. However, in other genres such as poetry, eschatology, dictionaries, and *adab* sources we see it employed frequently. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, ed. ʿAẓm Maḥmūd Firdaws, 13 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Yaqāza, 1997), 9:249; al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, ed. Maḥdī al-Makhzūmī and Ibrāhīm al-Samārāʿī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, n.d.), 3:392; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿAryān, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 7:140; Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, ed. Sumayr b. Amīn al-Zuhayrī, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tawḥīd, 1991), 2:449; Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *The Book of Tribulations: The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition*, trans. David Cook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 265. For a discussion on how *hajīns* may have been viewed as non-Arab in the pre-Islamic period see, Rachel Schine, “Race and Blackness in Premodern Arabic Literature,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-1298>.

13. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 2 vols. (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Siyāḥa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1967), 1:399; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt’s History on the Umayyad Dynasty (660–750)*, trans. Carl Wurtzel (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 172–73; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, ed. M. T. Houtsma, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 2:350; idem, *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ Al-Yaʿqūbī: An English Translation*, trans. C. F. Robinson et al., 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3:1002; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 15 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 2:1194; idem, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 23, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House*, trans. Martin Hinds (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 142; anon., *Fragmenta historicorum arabicorum*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1869–71), 1:3.

14. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 1:359; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt’s History*, 159; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:350;

hold until 96/715.¹⁵ He regularly led the summer raid (*ṣāʿifa*) during his father’s reign and may have even led the *ḥajj* in 86/705 or 94/713.¹⁶ McMillan interprets al-Walīd’s *ḥajj* policy, which saw many of his sons lead the pilgrimage (including ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, al-‘Abbās, Bishr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān), as mirroring “his intention of keeping leadership of the community within that same family.”¹⁷ Al-‘Abbās was not the only *hajīn* to be granted the role; both Bishr and ‘Umar were born to *umm walads*, indicating that despite there not being a *hajīn* caliph until the third *fitna*, these individuals were not exempt from accumulating religious or military capital in the early eighth century.¹⁸

Al-‘Abbās is best remembered for his military legacy; al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 346/956) says that owing to his valorous nature (*shihāma*) he was known as *fāris Banī Marwān* (Horseman of the Marwānids).¹⁹ Al-‘Abbās is recorded as having raided the *thughūr* a total of nine separate times, most often in the company of his uncle Maslama.²⁰ Six of these raids took place during the caliphate of his father and three under his uncle Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 101–5/720–24).²¹ Al-‘Abbās appears to have fallen out of favor in the intervening reigns of his uncle Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 96–99/715–17) and cousin ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–20). Sulaymān removed him from his governorship in Ḥimṣ and seemingly barred him from military positions, but Yazīd restored him in 102/720, although, as will be discussed, he also fell out of favor during the rule of his uncle Hishām.²² The following section will explore al-‘Abbās’ absence during these five years to demonstrate the factionalism of the Banū Marwān and how the sons of previous caliphs were not guaranteed to maintain their positions of authority under a new ruler.

2.1 Al-‘Abbās between the Caliphate of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik and Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (96–101/715–20)

Evidence for al-‘Abbās’ loss of favor under Sulaymān can be seen in part of a larger speech given by the governor turned rebel, Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (d. 102/720), in which he explicitly

idem, *The Works*, 3:1002.

15. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 1:417; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat’s History*, 186.

16. M. E. Mcmillan, *The Meaning of Mecca: The Politics of Pilgrimage in Early Islam* (London: Saqi Books Publishers, 2011), 95–96.

17. *Ibid.*, 106.

18. Al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab al-Quraysh*, 165. Notably al-Mas‘ūdī highlights al-‘Abbās, Bishr, ‘Umar, and Yazīd as the only sons of al-Walīd deserving of praise; see al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar*, ed. and trans. Barbier de Meynard and A. Pavet de Courteille, 9 vols. (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1861–77), 5:361.

19. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 5:361.

20. I opt to use the Arabic *thughūr* (sing. *thaghr*) rather than “frontier,” reflecting the language of the sources. For more on the nomenclature, see Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange among Muslim and Christian Communities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), esp. 8.

21. Under al-Walīd in 88/707, 90/709, 93/712, 94/713, 95/714, 96/715; and under Yazīd in 102/721, 103/722, 104/722–23.

22. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 1:418; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat’s History*, 186. Khalīfa specifically states under the subheading of [governors] of the Syrian districts (*al-shāmāt*) that al-‘Abbās governed Ḥimṣ until al-Walīd died (*ḥattā mawt al-Walīd*), indicating he was removed after this.

states that Sulaymān wanted to remove al-ʿAbbās from the Banū Marwān but was talked out of it by Yazīd b. al-Muhallab.²³ That Sulaymān would be able to remove al-ʿAbbās from the Banū Marwān is indicative of the “liminal” status of *hajīns* under the Umayyads. Al-ʿAbbās’ loss of favor under his uncle Sulaymān is clear from his absence from the second siege of Constantinople (97–99/715–17) led by Maslama, which is surprising given how often the two are paired together in the source material. Borrut has pointed out that Maslama owes much of his “heroic” reputation to the siege.²⁴ If Maslama gained such prominence from a failed conquest, it is likely that al-ʿAbbās would have too, as we shall see later; his other activities on the *thughūr* led to a sustained memory of him in Syriac chronicles. So, al-ʿAbbās does not seem to have participated in the failed siege. One Syriac source does place him at the siege, but it appears to have muddled it with the already mentioned conquest of Tyana.

The only reference to al-ʿAbbās and the siege is found in the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, well known for its preservation of a unique narrative of the event. However, al-ʿAbbās only appears after the Marwānid defeat, routing a Roman army who had attempted to ambush the retreating, famished, and weakened Muslim forces.²⁵ The narrative ends with the conquest of Tyana and the sacking and raiding of the surrounding area. The author here appears to have mixed up the retreat of 99/716–17 with the 88/707 raid.²⁶ Indeed, the narrative as preserved in *Zuqnīn* fits much better with the events of Tyana found in al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and the *Chronographia* of Theophanes (d. 817). Both attest that the force led by Maslama and al-ʿAbbās wintered nearby, with Theophanes adding that the Muslims were considering turning back due to famine.²⁷ The famine experienced by the Muslim forces besieging Constantinople is well documented, and the retention of this

23. Francesco Gabrieli, “La Rivolta dei Muhallabiti nel ʿIrāq e il nuovo Balādūrī,” *Rendiconti della classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 14, no. 6 (1938): 199–236, at 226. Related on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/773–74), al-Balādhurī states: “wa-ʿāqir al-nāqat Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs—yaʿnī al-ʿAbbās—alladhī kāna Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik ʿazama ʿalā nāfihi fa-kalimatahu fihi ḥattā aqarahu ʿalā nasabihi (The one who hamstrung the she-camel, Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs—i.e., al-ʿAbbās—who Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik was determined to banish [*nafy*], but I [Yazīd] spoke to him concerning him [al-ʿAbbās] until he [Sulaymān] established his genealogy)” (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkar, 13 vols. [Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1997], 8:326). Identifying al-ʿAbbās as the wounder of the she-camel (ʿāqir al-nāqa) is a reference to the myth of the Thamūd, who, having been tasked by the prophet Ṣāliḥ to allow the she-camel of God (*nāqat Allāh*) to drink from their water on alternate days, were struck down after having hamstrung the camel (*fa-ʿaqarū-l-nāqata*, Q 7:77). The comparison here is that, like the Thamūd who were destroyed by God for having harmed His she-camel, al-ʿAbbās shall suffer for having opposed Yazīd’s revolt. On the Thamūdic myth, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

24. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 231: “Maslama doit essentiellement sa renommée à son expédition dirigée contre la capitale Byzantine.” For a full discussion, see the chapter on “La fabrique des héros Omeyyades: Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik, le héros combattant,” 229–82.

25. Anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn: Part III and IV, A.D. 488–775*, trans. A. Harrak (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 152.

26. Palmer alludes to this transposal but is not explicit; see Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 64.

27. Theophanes the Confessor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. Carl De Boor (Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri, 1883), 377; idem, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and near Eastern History A.D. 284–813*, trans. Cyril A. Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 525–26.

element in both Theophanes and *Zuqnīn* may account for the latter’s transposal to the siege narrative. Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī and *Zuqnīn* follow a similar sequence of events, with the conquest being preceded by a heavy loss for the Muslim forces, followed by al-‘Abbās taking matters into his own hands.²⁸ Tyana is then conquered and the Muslim army pillages the surrounding environs. Theophanes states, “They [the people of Tyana] accepted a promise of immunity and came out to the Arabs, leaving the city deserted until this very day.”²⁹ Tyana was conquered again a century later by Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) in 190/806, meaning that Theophanes’ comment about its depopulation derived from the source(s) he relied on rather than reflecting the realities of the early ninth century.³⁰ It is doubtful that it was raided again a decade later by the same two individuals since *Zuqnīn* does not preserve any earlier narrative regarding Tyana; the presence of al-‘Abbās in *Zuqnīn* should then be chalked up to a transposal rather than his participation in the siege. Possible confusion could even be attributed to an account in the *Breviarium* of Patriarch Nikephoros (d. 828) who claims that after Tyana a contingent of thirty troops went all the way to Chrysopolis (across from Constantinople) to burn the ferries on the Bosphorus.³¹ Al-‘Abbās’ relevance amongst non-Muslim communities living around the *thughūr* is made further evident by the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*’s characterization of him as “one among the famous of the caliphate.”³² The insertion of al-‘Abbās into the siege narrative was not an attempt to grant him status through the event; rather, it is indicative of his strong association with the *thughūr* and his uncle Maslama.

It is unlikely, then, that al-‘Abbās was involved in the siege of Constantinople, and this would support a five-year hiatus from military activity and the loss of his governorship under Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik. This was probably the result of the newly ascended caliph’s attempts to demote the sons of his predecessor al-Walīd, who had attempted to replace him with al-‘Abbās’ brother, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Walīd (d. 110/728–29).³³ ‘Umar b.

28. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1191–92; idem, *The History*, 23:140–1; anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 152. In al-Ṭabarī he invokes his troops by asking “Where are the people of the Qur’an who desire Paradise?” (‘*ayn ahl al-Qur’ān alladhīna yurīdūna al-janna*). In *Zuqnīn* he is said to have personally asked Maslama for a force to fend off the Byzantines.

29. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 377; idem, *The Chronicle*, 525–26; anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 152; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1191–92; idem, *The History*, 23:140–41.

30. For Theophanes’ sources on the eighth century, see Muriel Debié, “Theophanes’ ‘Oriental Source’: What Can We Learn from Syriac Historiography?,” in *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Marek Jankowiak and Federico Montinaro, 53–71 (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2015); on the conquest of Tyana as found in Theophanes, see Conterno, *La Descrizione dei Tempi*, 92–94; on Hārūn’s conquest of Tyana, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:710; idem, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 30, *The ‘Abbasid Caliphate in Equilibrium*, trans. C. E. Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 263.

31. Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, trans. Cyril A. Mango (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Research Library and Collection, 1990), 106–7. Notably, Nikephoros does not claim al-‘Abbās was present but rather that it was Maslama and Solymas (Σολυμαῆς), which is probably Sulaymān. However, no Sulaymān is found raiding until Sulaymān b. Hishām in 117/736. It could be a reference to Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik, but I have not found any record of him on the *thughūr*.

32. Anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 152.

33. On al-Walīd’s attempts to subvert the succession order, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1274; on poetry produced

‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who succeeded Sulaymān, instituted a change in military policy and ceased aggressive raiding, meaning that even if al-‘Abbās were to have regained his position, it is not visible in the source material.³⁴ His fortunes changed upon the accession of his other uncle, Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, under whose rule he led raiding expeditions three times over a four-year reign. This reversal is most visible in Yazīd’s decision to task al-‘Abbās and Maslama with suppressing the revolt of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab in 102/720, but would be short-lived as al-‘Abbās reportedly lost favor again under his uncle Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik.³⁵ The following section will investigate the representation of al-‘Abbās in the Muhallabid revolt, shedding light on how non-Arab heritage was often used to deride *hajīns* as well as al-‘Abbās’ matrilineal line.

2.2 The Rebel and the Hajīns

Yazīd b. al-Muhallab, once governor of Khurāsān under ‘Abd al-Malik and later also of Iraq under Sulaymān, had been imprisoned during the reign of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, escaping to Basra just before ‘Umar died; upon the accession of Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik he promptly refused to give him the *bay‘a* (oath of allegiance) and entered into open rebellion.³⁶ Yazīd b. al-Muhallab’s revolt throughout the narratives takes on a distinctly anti-Syrian tone and perhaps even serves as a foreshadowing for the ‘Abbāsīd “revolution.”³⁷ Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik dispatched his brother and nephew to deal with the revolt. Upon discovering the impending arrival of the two *hajīns* al-‘Abbās and Maslama to Iraq, Yazīd b. al-Muhallab exclaimed—according to al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868), on the authority of Khālīd b. Ṣafwān (d. 135/752)—during his *khutba* delivered in Wāsiṭ: “Maybe the rabble says: ‘Maslama has come, al-‘Abbās has come, and the Syrians (*ahl al-shām*) have come,’ but the people of Syria are nothing more than nine swords, seven of which are with me, and two of which are against me. As for Maslama he is a Yellow Locust (*jarāda ṣafrā*)’ whereas al-‘Abbās is *Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs*.”³⁸ A similar version is preserved in the *Futūḥ* of Ibn ‘Atham, who adds that Maslama was *Qusṭanṭīn b. Qusṭanṭīn*.³⁹ This notice is unique to the *Futūḥ*, with all other sources

to support his claim, see Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 114–15.

34. Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State: The Reign of Hishām Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 31–33.

35. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh* 2:372–73.

36. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh* 2:370. For what is still the best discussion of the revolt, see Gabrieli, “La Rivolta dei Muhallabiti.”

37. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 261.

38. *Innī qad asmā‘u qawl al-ra‘ā‘: wa-qad jā’a Maslama, wa-qad jā’a al-‘Abbās, wa-qad jā’a ahl al-Shām, wa-mā ahl al-Shām illā tis‘at asyāf, sab‘a minhā ma‘ī wa-ithnān minhā ‘alayī, wa-ammā Maslama fa-jarāda ṣafrā’, wa-ammā al-‘Abbās fa-Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs* (al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 3 vols [Beirut: Dār al-Jīl], 1:292–93). The nine swords here most probably refer to generals or military contingents; the assertion that seven of the Syrian swords are with him are indicative of the widespread support enjoyed by Yazīd b. al-Muhallab, whilst the two against him refer to the two named generals opposing him, i.e., Maslama and al-‘Abbās.

39. Ibn ‘Atham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, ed. ‘Alī Shīrī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā’, 1991), 7:225.

that preserve the insults levied by the rebel against the two *hajīns* referring to Maslama solely as “the Yellow Locust” and al-‘Abbās as *Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs*.⁴⁰ Borrut has noted that the “yellowness” ascribed to Maslama is a reference to the Byzantines, who are often called *banū al-aṣfar* in both *ḥadīth* and historical narratives, and thus stresses Maslama’s non-Arab descent.⁴¹ *Nasṭūs* or *Nasṭās* is the Arabic rendition of the Greek Anastasios, which accounts for the varied spellings of the lampoon.⁴² Both Maslama and al-‘Abbās were concubine-born, so we should view Yazīd’s comments as a means by which to undermine their “Arabness” as well as to present the Syrians as non-Muslim. Al-Balādhurī’s account of the event underlines this, as he describes the Marwānid force as composed of barbarians (*barābira*), Chaldeans (*jarāmqa*), Mardaites (*jarājima*), Nabateans (*anbāt*), sons of peasants (*abnā’ fallāhīn*), mixed riff-raff (*awbāsh akhlāt*) and Copts (*aqbāt*).⁴³

Urban has shown that *hajīns* in the early Islamic period proved themselves to the *umma* either through military service (using Maslama as an example) or through scholarship.⁴⁴ The presence of various *hajīns* on the frontier speaks to this phenomenon, whether it was because, as she posits, “they had one foot in the land of the conquerors, and one foot in the land of the conquered,” or more simply that Arab-born sons had more connections at birth to draw upon, and as such were better equipped to use tribal connections to attain the caliphate.⁴⁵ In the case of Marwān b. Muḥammad, the support generated through military leadership would eventually be sufficient to allow him to lay claim to the caliphate.

Al-‘Abbās’ non-Arab maternal heritage is stressed in the descriptions in al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh* and al-Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-ashrāf* of the pivotal moment when al-‘Abbās is “forced” to defect from al-Walīd b. Yazīd, in which he is referred to as *ibn Qusṭanṭīn* (a son of Constantine).⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Asākir reports on the authority of Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh (d. 193/809) that his mother was Christian.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, we do not know her name or anything else about her; like many women in premodern society, and particularly unfree women, her existence is only preserved due to her connection with a male member of the ruling elite. On this

40. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 8:318; anon., *Kitāb al-‘Uyūn*, 70; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* 5:454; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-‘Aryān, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983), 4:214. The *Kitāb al-‘Uyūn* reads *Basṭūs b. Basṭūs*, which should be corrected to read *Nasṭūs b. Nasṭūs*, as al-Balādhurī, al-Jāhiz, al-Mas‘ūdī, and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih preserve *Nasṭūs/Nasṭās*.

41. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 261.

42. For instance, al-Mas‘ūdī renders the regnal title of Emperor Anastasios II (r. 713–15) as *Nasṭās b. Filibiqūs*. This was not, in fact, the son of the preceding emperor Phillipikos, but his secretary. The assumption that Byzantine emperors achieved the post dynastically is noteworthy in and of itself but is deserving of separate treatment. See al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 141; idem, *Le Livre de l’avertissement et de la révision*, trans. B. Carra de Vaux (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1896), 225.

43. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 8:318.

44. Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves, and the Sons of Slave Mothers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 122.

45. Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam*, 131. Other *hajīn* sons of caliphs to feature on the *thughūr* are: Muḥammad b. Marwān, Sulaymān b. Hishām, and Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān.

46. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1798; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:177.

47. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 36:440.

occasion, the appellation may in fact reflect a kernel of historical truth: instead of *Nasṭūs* here we have *Qusṭanṭīn*, which underlines once again al-‘Abbās’ non-Arab heritage. The use of different catch-all and generic Greek names is significant in that across the sources there was a stress on the idea of al-‘Abbās’ non-Arab maternal line. These references to al-‘Abbās’ genealogy occur exclusively in narratives of *fitna* and internal caliphal violence. As pointed out by Borrut, for Maslama *vis-à-vis* the Muhallabid revolt, these narratives are influenced by two simultaneously competing historiographical strands: one that exalts Maslama, and the other Yazīd b. al-Muhallab.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it should be added that Khālīd b. Ṣafwān, who narrates the above-mentioned story, was in all probability an eyewitness to events and was, at the very least, “friendly” with Yazīd b. al-Muhallab.⁴⁹ Therefore, this narrative is told from a pro-Muhallabid perspective, lending credence to Borrut’s conclusions. Al-‘Abbās is afforded a less central role in these narratives and presented as a sidekick and a source of derision, contrasting with the more “heroic” Maslama with whom he appears.

The literary pairing of the two *hajīns* can be seen in another *khābar* (notice, report) narrated by Khālīd b. Ṣafwān and relating to events said to have occurred between Khālīd and al-‘Abbās at Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s (r. 105–25/724–43) court at Ruṣāfa. The first point of note is that the account states that the people flooded upon al-‘Abbās when he arrived at the caliphal capital, indicating the esteem in which he was held. He is also said to have been fasting, inserting a narrative of piety, as is common in depictions of al-‘Abbās.⁵⁰ He then prompted Khālīd to share the story of Aḥnaf b. Qays (d. 72/691)—the conqueror of Khurāsān—and how he allegedly won the day at Marw al-Rūdh by disguising himself and walking unnoticed amongst his own camp, in turn obtaining the inspiration on how to defeat the Hephthalite armies.⁵¹ So, al-‘Abbās is again presented as a military figure and as a visitor to Ruṣāfa, despite not having led any expeditions under Hishām, nor holding any governorate.

Khālīd’s narrative, in and of itself, says little about al-‘Abbās at the time of Hishām; however Hämeen-Anttila highlights it as an example of what he calls “the upgrading of interlocutors,” i.e., the replacement of a lesser-known figure in an anecdote by a more

48. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 262.

49. The relationship between the two is touched upon in Hämeen-Anttila, *Portrait of an Eighth-Century Gentleman*, 24, 75. There is even an anecdote involving Maslama and Khālīd after the death of Yazīd, where the former enquires about the pietist al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), with Maslama expressing shock at how a community led by such a figure could follow Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (*ibid.*, 156–58.).

50. See the discussion, translation, and full references of the *khābar* in Hämeen-Anttila, *Portrait of an Eighth-Century Gentleman*, 158–60. This *khābar* is preserved in Ibn Nubāta (d. 768/1366), al-Jarīrī (d. 390/1000), and Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176). This is not the only time al-‘Abbās is presented as pious as we shall see in the following discussion of the killing of al-Walīd. In al-‘Awtabī’s (d. early sixth/twelfth century) *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, a genealogical history of the tribe of ‘Azd with particular focus on the Muhallabids, upon returning to Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik with the captured Muhallabids, al-‘Abbās is said to have recited from *Sūrat Nūḥ* (Q 71:26–27) implying that in this case the *kāfīrs* are the Muhallabids. See Martin Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman: Al-‘Awtabī’s Account of the Muhallabids* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991), 75.

51. For a discussion of a similar narrative concerning Aḥnaf as found in al-Ṭabarī, see Robert Haug, *The Eastern Frontier: Limits of Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 84–86.

important one.⁵² In this case, other variations of the narrative identify Maslama as the interlocutor rather than his less famous nephew. This “upgrading” continues until allegedly it is Hishām himself who prompts Khālīd to talk about Aḥnaf.⁵³ The replacement of al-‘Abbās with Maslama reflects their roles in historiography, where we often find al-‘Abbās as subordinate to his uncle. There is some indication that al-‘Abbās opposed Hishām’s attempts to remove al-Walīd b. Yazīd from the succession, but this is only preserved in Ibn ‘Asākir.⁵⁴

A further *khbar*, narrated by al-Balādhurī on the authority of al-Madā’inī (d. 225/843), may reveal why al-‘Abbās lost favor under Hishām.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the Muhallabid revolt, al-‘Abbās is said to have gone to his uncle Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik to convince him to nominate his half-brother ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Walīd as his successor over Hishām.⁵⁶ Yazīd initially agreed but then was convinced by Maslama, who asked him: “Are the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik dearer to you or the sons of al-Walīd?”⁵⁷ The caliph listened to Maslama, and nominated their brother Hishām as his immediate successor, to be succeeded by his own son al-Walīd b. Yazīd.⁵⁸ This narrative indicates that some Marwānid *hajīns* had sufficient authority to attempt to influence succession. Al-‘Abbās, additionally, continues to mirror his uncle in these narratives; they are both *hajīn* military commanders and amongst the most senior members of the Banū Marwān, a position they used to shape succession politics. More importantly, this dialogue highlights a pivotal concern for the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik and stresses a generational component to succession. If the caliphate were to pass to a nephew, it is probable that older generations, and their progeny, would lose their status and individual spheres of influence. It is well documented that members of the Banū Marwān received sizable stipends and land grants, and privileged positions such as governorships probably augmented this.⁵⁹ The following section will place al-‘Abbās as having operated primarily around Ḥimṣ and the *thughūr*, to demonstrate the long-lasting effects of gubernatorial appointment and the continued elite status of members of the Banū Marwān.

52. Hämeen-Anttila, *Portrait of an Eighth-Century Gentleman*, 106–8.

53. *Ibid.*, 108, 160. One variation of the report even sees Mu‘āwiya b. Hishām prompt Khālīd.

54. This is introduced with: “I read in the writing (*khaṭṭ*) of Abū al-Ḥasan Rasha’ b. Naẓīf and he was informed by Abū al-Qāsim b. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm and Abū Waḥsh Subay‘a b. al-Muslim [...] Haythām b. ‘Adī (d. ca. 208/822) narrated to him from ‘Āmir b. Muslim al-Ḥaḍramī.” The letter is written in verse. See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 26:446–47.

55. As will be discussed in part 4, al-Balādhurī seems to be accessing al-Madā’inī directly.

56. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was the son of al-Walīd and his cousin Umm Banīn bt. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān, and thus his grandfathers were ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Al-Walīd had tried to replace Sulaymān as heir with his son, but was unsuccessful: upon Sulaymān’s death ‘Abd al-‘Azīz tried to seize the caliphate but renounced his claim when he discovered that his uncle ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had been chosen. For more on this, see S. Judd, “‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Walīd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill Online); on Umm Banīn, see al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab al-Quraysh*, 165.

57. *Yā amīr al-mu’minīn, awlād ‘Abd al-Malik aḥabb ilāyka am awlād al-Walīd?*; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 8:369–70.

58. *Ibid.*, 370.

59. See for instance the granting of Egypt as *ṭu’ma* to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān by his brother ‘Abd al-Malik in al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:335; *idem*, *The Works*, 3:985.

2.3 Locating al-ʿAbbās on the Thughūr

Khālīd b. Ṣafwān's placement of al-ʿAbbās at Ruṣāfa in the previous anecdote is noteworthy, as it fills in some of the gaps in al-ʿAbbās' career between Yazīd and the *fitna*. Al-Yaʿqūbī reports that he led the prayers over Hishām in 125/743 after he died in his capital of Ruṣāfa.⁶⁰ Al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī state that al-ʿAbbās was sent to the city by Hishām's successor, his cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd, to retrieve what riches were left there and imprison Hishām's sons.⁶¹ These notices make it probable that al-ʿAbbās was still operating out of Ḥimṣ despite being replaced as governor nearly thirty years earlier.⁶² If he were in Ḥimṣ, as I suggest, he would have been well positioned to go to Hishām's capital, as travel between the two took less than a week.

Tracing al-ʿAbbās across the forty years he is present in the source material we can determine a distinct geographical remit in which he operated; bounded by the Orontes in the West and the Euphrates to the East, al-ʿAbbās appears pre-eminent in the central *thughūr*.⁶³ The maintenance of the central *thughūr* may have been his responsibility at one point as well. Al-Balādhurī claims he fortified and built a congregational mosque (*masjid jāmiʿ*) in Marʿash at some point between 75/695 and 127/745.⁶⁴ Al-ʿAbbās is also reported by al-Balādhurī to have moved people from Qinnasrīn to Marʿash, indicating he had authority over his uncle Maslama's previous governorship.⁶⁵ Following al-ʿAbbās regaining favor under his uncle Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik, his actions in Marʿash should be dated to the aftermath of the Muhallabid revolt as Maslama saw his remit expand to encompass Iraq (from which he was quickly removed) and then to governor of the North under Hishām, leaving al-ʿAbbās to fill this void.⁶⁶ Eger defines Marʿash as “the divide between the western

60. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:394. For Hishām's death, see also Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 1:533; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat's History*, 245; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1729; idem, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 26, *The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate*, trans. Carole Hillenbrand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 71, where he is reported to have been prayed over by al-Walīd b. Yazīd and his son Maslama respectively.

61. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1751; idem, *The History*, 26, 100; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9:143.

62. Ibn ʿAsākir, for instance, explicitly states that he continued to live in Ḥimṣ. See Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 36:438.

63. On the characterization of the area largely correspondent to the Aleppan Plateau, see Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 34–68.

64. For the identification of the site, see *ibid.*, 66; these dates come from al-Balādhurī's placement of the notice between a raid in 75/695 by Muḥammad b. Marwān and its being rebuilt by Marwān b. Muḥammad after subduing the Emesenes (after 127/745). See al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 189; al-Balādhurī, *Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. P. Hitti and F. Murgotten (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 294.

65. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 189; idem, *Origins*, 294. How this information corresponds to Robinson's assessment that Qinnasrīn had been detached from the *jund* of Ḥimṣ (itself strongly based on al-Balādhurī) is not entirely clear. However, it does seem as if al-ʿAbbās had significant authority over the central *thughūr*. See C. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

66. For a very good discussion on Maslama's actions in the North, see Alison Vacca, “The Umayyad North (Or: How Umayyad Was the Umayyad Caliphate?),” in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham, 219–39 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 226–29. For his removal as governor of Iraq, see Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 1:473; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat's History*, 206.

thughūr al-shāmiyya and eastern *thughūr al-jazariyya*.”⁶⁷ The association of al-‘Abbās with Mar‘ash in the 100s/720s consolidates the image of him as an important figure on the *thughūr*, so that despite him seemingly not having an official role in the caliphate of his uncle, he seems to have remained active in Marwānid political life.

These links to the central *thughūr* become even more evident when one considers the construction of the city of ‘Anjar in modern day Lebanon.⁶⁸ The site is located approximately fifty kilometers northwest of Damascus in the Biqā‘ valley. The account of its foundation dates to the reign of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik and is preserved both in *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 846* and the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor. The former attributes it to al-Walīd, whereas the latter states that in 709–10 al-‘Abbās raided the location, took many captives, returned home, and began to build Garis in the region of Heliopoulis (Ba‘albek).⁶⁹ Mango identified this toponym as ‘Anjar or ‘Ayn al-Jarr. The construction of the city is further attested in *P. Lond. IV* 1434, a Greek papyrus dated to 96–97/714–16, which enquires about a worker from ‘Ayn al-Jarr (Αειναλγερ) who had returned to Egypt.⁷⁰ This papyrus corroborates that construction began during the reign of al-Walīd with the assistance of Egyptian workmen; the city was home to both a mosque and a *dār al-imāra* alongside minor palaces and a *ḥammām*.⁷¹ The coincidental dating of the building and al-‘Abbās’ successful raids and taking of captives led Chehab to speculate on whether or not these captives were used as labor in the city’s construction.⁷² If so, the city would have been constructed by a multilingual and multiethnic community from Egypt, Anatolia, and Syria. Epigraphic evidence from the quarries at Kamid, seventeen kilometers southwest of the city, indicates that a multilingual community was, in fact, present in 96/714–15. Five Syriac inscriptions refer to the year 96 of the Hijri calendar, and there is also one inscription in Pahlavi and one in Greek.⁷³ Three of the dated inscriptions announce the beginning of a trench-cut, indicating that the masonry used for the construction of ‘Anjar may have been from the nearby quarry. Chehab has demonstrated that some of the dressed

67. Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 66.

68. The city exists to this day and in the 1930s was resettled by Armenian refugees; archaeological work is ongoing.

69. E. W. Brooks, “A Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 51, no. 4 (1897): 569–88, at 581; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 377; idem, *The Chronicle*, 526.

70. H. I. Bell, “Translations of the Greek Aphrodito Papyri in the British Museum. IV,” *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients* 4 (1913): 87–96, at 87.

71. Aila Santi, “‘Anjar in the Shadow of the Church? New Insights on an Umayyad Urban Experiment in the Biqā‘ Valley,” *Levant* 50, no. 2 (2018): 267–80, at 269. The presence of a *dār al-imāra* and a congregational mosque validates its qualification as a *madīna*; on this see, idem, “The Mosque–*Dār al-Imāra* Complex at ‘Anjar: Preliminary Notes from a Multi-layered Exploration of Ceremonial Spaces in the Marwānid Period,” *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 30 (2022): 235–66.

72. Hafez K. Chehab, “On the Identification of ‘Anjar (‘Ayn al-Jarr) as an Umayyad Foundation,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 42–48, at 44.

73. Paul Mouterde, “Inscriptions en syriaque dialectal à Kāmed (Beq‘a),” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* 22 (1939): 73–106. They are numbered 5, 10, 20, 21 and 28.

stones seem to derive from the quarry; however, more work needs to be done in this regard before the two sites can be concretely linked.⁷⁴

Situated less than two days from Damascus, on the other side of the anti-Lebanon mountains, and on the main route between the Umayyad capital and Ḥimṣ (al-ʿAbbās' old governorate), ʿAnjar was well positioned to serve as an administrative center or gathering place. Al-Walīd, much like his father ʿAbd al-Malik, was known for his “itinerant kingship,” according to which the ruler travels around his dominion to maintain loyalty and publicly display authority.⁷⁵ Borrut has convincingly argued that this was not only undertaken by caliphs but also by “prince-soldiers,” indicating that perhaps ʿAnjar was constructed or used by al-ʿAbbās to generate his own sphere of influence.⁷⁶ It bears noting that the Arabic tradition does not contain any mention of ʿAnjar until the third *fitna*, when it was the site of the decisive battle between Marwān b. Muḥammad and Sulaymān b. Hishām.⁷⁷

Summarizing, al-ʿAbbās was an active military figure, tasked from a young age and early in his father's reign with a role on the *thughūr* and granted the influential governorship of Ḥimṣ. However, despite his prominence as eldest son he was never factored into the succession plan, probably due to his concubine-born status. By the time of the *fitna* he was amongst the eldest members of the Marwānid family (or the eldest son of the eldest son, i.e. al-Walīd), and al-Ṭabarī even cites a notice that says that al-ʿAbbās was “the head (*sayyid*) of the Banū Marwān” and that his son al-Ḥārith was old enough to be given the governorship of Iraq by Yazīd b. al-Walīd.⁷⁸ As we have seen al-ʿAbbās held considerable political and military clout, comparable to that of his uncle Maslama with whom he was often paired. Studying the two in conjunction reveals important aspects of the representations of *hajīns*; while concubine-born sons could prove themselves through external military actions, narratives that take place within the Marwānid polity conflict with other “historiographical filters” and use their matrilineal line as a source of derision.⁷⁹ Furthermore, al-ʿAbbās' removal from some anecdotes indicates that, despite his being an influential figure, later ʿAbbāsīd compilers “upgraded” their narratives by inserting more “heroic” and recognizable figures such as Maslama or Hishām. The high esteem in which Maslama was held by the ʿAbbāsīds, epitomized by the fact his family were allowed to maintain their positions in and around Ḥiṣn Maslama in the Balikh Valley of al-Jazīra, means that he was quite simply not an easy figure to forget.⁸⁰ Al-ʿAbbās, on the other hand, despite playing a bigger role than is

74. Chehab, “On the Identification of ʿAnjar,” 45.

75. For the most recent contribution on itinerant kingship in early Islam, see Antoine Borrut, “Pouvoir mobile et construction de l'espace dans les premiers siècles de l'islam,” in *Le gouvernement en déplacement: Pouvoir et mobilité dans l'Antiquité à nos jours*, ed. S. Destephen, J. Barbier, and F. Chausson, 243–67 (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

76. On the term “prince-soldiers,” see Borrut, “Vanishing Syria,” 58.

77. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1876–79; idem, *The History*, 26:249.

78. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:193; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1784, 1838; idem, *The History*, 26:137, 198. A similar notice is found in anon., *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, 133.

79. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 61–62.

80. Asa Eger, “Ḥiṣn, Ribāṭ, Thaghr or Qaṣr? Semantics and Systems of Frontier Fortifications in the Early Islamic Period,” in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. Paul M. Cobb, 427–56

typically recognized, was not as well remembered. The “forgetting” of al-‘Abbās can be seen in all four manuscripts of al-‘Awtabī’s (d. early sixth/twelfth century) *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, where he is found as al-‘Abbās b. Yazīd rather than al-Walīd.⁸¹ Like other sons of Marwānid caliphs, we can associate al-‘Abbās with a geographical space and region, strengthening the case for a polycentric understanding of Marwānid history and the generation of local support and legitimacy.

3. The Genealogical Context of the Third *Fitna*

Before investigating the long-term memory of al-‘Abbās across the sources for the third *fitna*, it is important to understand the generational changes of the elite that characterized the fall of the Marwānids. When accounting for the causes of the *fitna*, we can identify two novel demographic phenomena. First, all of the claimants to the caliphate—al-Walīd b. Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, Yazīd b. al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 126/744), and al-Ḥakam b. al-Walīd b. Yazīd (d. 126/744)—represented a new generation of the Marwānid elite; they were grandsons (or great-grandsons) of ‘Abd al-Malik, whereas up until that point every caliph was a son of ‘Abd al-Malik or ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.⁸² It might not be a coincidence that the victor to emerge from the inter-Marwānid conflict, Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān, who is depicted as avenging his murdered cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd (and al-Walīd’s sons al-Ḥakam and Ibrāhīm), belonged to an earlier generation.⁸³ This generational component informs the older generations’ anxieties regarding losing their status and, as discussed above, the restricting of the caliphal line appears to be a chief concern of the Banū Marwān. In other words, when the caliphate moved “vertically” down it was unlikely to move back up again.

The second demographic change brought to the fore by the *fitna* was that Yazīd b. al-Walīd, al-Ḥakam, and Marwān were all sons of *umm walads*, who had begun to form a much larger portion of the population of the Qurashī elite in the generations following Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 64–65/684–85).⁸⁴ Scholars have long noted that *hajīns* were impeded from becoming caliph within the early Umayyad polity.⁸⁵ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) in his *Naḡt*

(Leiden: Brill, 2012), 433, n. 23.

81. M. Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman*, 69, n. 184. Perhaps al-‘Awtabī’s original read correctly; however, that the copyists of the manuscript were unable to recognize the mistake speaks to the relatively unknown status of al-‘Abbās.

82. On the continued importance of Marwānid paternal descent, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 118.

83. Our Arabic sources claim to retain verses produced by al-Ḥakam nominating Marwān as his successor as the heir was in prison, further indicating that Marwān positioned himself as re-establishing the appropriate succession order. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 9:249; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1891; anon., *Fragmenta*, 1:156.

84. Robinson, making use of the *Nasab Quraysh* of al-Zubayrī (d. ca. 233/848), demonstrates that for the two generations after ‘Abd al-Malik concubine-born children account for 42% and 38% of Qurashī-born children. See Majied Robinson, *Marriage in the Tribe of Muhammad: A Statistical Study of Early Arabic Genealogical Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 96. For the mothers of Yazīd, Ibrāhīm, and Marwān, see al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab al-Quraysh*, 165, 167; for the mother of al-Ḥakam, see Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jamharat ansāb al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983), 91.

85. For instance, see the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry where Lammens claims, “The chance of [Maslama’s]

al-ʿarūs, states that: “In the first place no caliph was appointed who had an *umm walad* except Yazīd b. al-Walīd, Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd, and Marwān b. Muḥammad.”⁸⁶ This should not be viewed as prejudice or the idealization of pure-Arab identity (as championed by Goldziher). Rather, as shown by Majied Robinson, the absence of *hajīn* caliphs among the Umayyads of the East was owed instead to the informal tribal connections and alliances afforded by paternal and maternal familial relations, upon which the *hajīn* could not call.⁸⁷ Urban agrees with Robinson, adding: “As the Arabian tribesmen gradually migrated to the garrison towns and frontiers—away from their wives, mothers, other kin groups—these tribal ties ceased to operate and were replaced by other types of political networks, most notably military factionalism.”⁸⁸ The rise of Marwān b. Muḥammad fits in well with these ideas; as long-term governor of the North, Marwān was able to draw upon not only his local garrisons, but also apparently 15,000 Armenian cavalry led by Prince Ashot Bagratuni (d. 762).⁸⁹ Urban’s argument bears considerable weight here when one considers that all caliphs preceding al-Walīd b. Yazīd were products of unions made prior to or during the

birth—his mother was a slavegirl—prevented him from rising higher” (H. Lammens, “Maslama,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al. [Leiden: Brill Online]); while Rotter, in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, says, “Like his uncle Muḥammad b. Marwān, whom he [Maslama] succeeded in Asia Minor in many respects, he was, as the son of a slave-girl, excluded from the succession to the caliphate” (G. Rotter, “Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al., [Leiden: Brill Online]).

86. Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Rasāʾil Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Muʿassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2007), 2:104. No such limitations were in place during Ibn Ḥazm’s own lifetime, when it came to both the ʿAbbāsids and the Umayyads of al-Andalus, where caliphs were born nearly exclusively to concubines; see D. Fairchild Ruggles, “Mothers of a Hybrid Dynasty: Race, Genealogy, and Acculturation in al-Andalus,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 65–94.

87. The debate on whether there was a general prejudice against *hajīns* is a long one, starting with Goldziher, passing through Lewis, towards the slightly more nuanced interpretations of Bashear and ʿAthamina. Whereas Lewis uses this discrimination to argue for the success of the ʿAbbāsīd revolution, he brings minimal evidence to the discussion and makes use of discriminatory language. The other three instead inform Robinson’s assessment of the Goldziher argument, which he summarizes as: “Not all men took concubines; the majority seem to have been highly critical of the practice. The children of these unions were subsequently discriminated against as a result of the chauvinistic beliefs of the Arab majority; evidence for this is in the derogatory reports that claim to be dated to the time, as well as the lack of *hajīn* caliphs and the poor performances of *hajīns* in the marriage market. But over time these attitudes softened and with the arrival of the ʿAbbāsīds came greater tolerance” (Robinson, *Marriage*, 98–106, quote from 102). See also I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, 2 vols. (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), 1:98–136; Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 38–39; Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 39–40; K. ʿAthamina, “How did Islam Contribute to Change the Legal Status of Women,” *Al-Qantara* 28, no. 2 (2007): 383–408, at 395–96.

88. Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam*, 125–26.

89. Lewond, “The History of Lewond (Patmabanut’iwn Lewond),” in *Matenagirk’ Hayoc’*, ed. Geworg Tēr-Vardanean, 6:711–854 (Ant’lias: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2007), 6:817. *Et’ē ehas patrikn Hayoc’ i t’ikowns awgnaganowt’ean ew owni ənd iwr əntirs heceloc’ hngētasaz hazar aranc’ varelloc’*; translated in Jean-Pierre Mahé, Bernadette Martin-Hisard, and Alexan Hakobian, eds. and trans., *Lewond Vardapet: discours historique; avec en annexe La Correspondance d’Omar et de Léon* (Paris: Peeters, 2015), 124; Vacca cautions against viewing this as explicit support for Marwān’s claims to the caliphate, but a consequence of the Bagratuni-Mamikonean rivalry; see Vacca, “The Umayyad North,” 231.

second *fitna*.⁹⁰ By the third *fitna* considerable generational and demographic shifts had taken place amongst the imperial elite, with the descendants of ‘Abd al-Malik splintering into disparate factions in an attempt to achieve the caliphate. In turn, these factions began to be constituted around military ties that allowed individual heirs to draw upon local power bases, primarily in Syria, al-Jazīra, and the caliphal North. As evidenced by the case of Marwān b. Muḥammad, these dynamics favored heirs who had served on the frontier or as long-term governors, and our narrative sources place the events in these areas of the caliphate.⁹¹ As we shall see, both al-Walīd b. Yazīd and Yazīd b. al-Walīd, who had not enjoyed gubernatorial and military appointments, were highly reliant on the loyalty of their kinsmen who had. Maslama, as the scholarship’s *hajīn par excellence*, is said to have never become caliph due to lack of opportunity, the circumstances of his birth, and because he died during Hishām’s long reign.⁹² Al-‘Abbās, who outlived both Maslama and Hishām, saw both his concubine-born brothers take up the title of caliph, so why would he not throw his own name into the lot? As will be discussed in the subsequent section, the Christian tradition shows he may have, while the Arabic-Islamic sources present a figure who foresaw the *fitna* and aimed to prevent it.

4. Al-‘Abbās’s Role in Late-Antique Sources on the *Fitna*

The two main sets of sources used to reconstruct the role of al-‘Abbās in the third *fitna* are Arabic-Islamic sources and Christian sources in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. As can be seen in the following table these sources overlap considerably in their memory and presentation of al-‘Abbās, preserving raiding notices prior to the *fitna* as well as maintaining a similar chronology of events. Lewond, interestingly, omits the role of al-‘Abbās, but does make mention of al-Walīd’s killing. What is particularly notable is the fact that the Christian sources’ perception of al-Walīd b. Yazīd is in line with the notices in the Arabic-Islamic sources, where he is presented as a drunkard and unfit for the caliphate.⁹³ Furthermore,

90. The youngest of ‘Abd al-Malik’s sons to become caliph was Hishām, born in 72/691, the same year as the defeat of Muḥab al-Zubayr. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1466.

91. Blankinship argues that this model originates with Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, referring to Marwān b. Muḥammad as one of his protégés. As we have seen, al-‘Abbās appears at a very similar time, and perhaps the first *hajīn* to do this was Muḥammad b. Marwān. However, Blankinship correctly identifies the possibility of the generation of independent power bases established by various princes in the 100s/720s. See Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State*, 87–88.

92. As Robinson rightly points out, “There are other reasons [besides being concubine-born] why Maslama never became caliph such as his lack of opportunity (he died towards the end of the long reign of his brother Hishām) and his responsibility for the failed siege of Constantinople” (Majied Robinson, “Prosopographical Approaches to the *Nasab* Tradition: A Study of Marriage and Concubinage in the Tribe of Muḥammad, 500–750 CE” [PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2013], 126). For examples of Maslama’s ineligibility in the scholarship, see n. 85 in this article.

93. This is not only the case for al-Walīd, as shall be demonstrated, but also for Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik. Notably, the same cannot be said for ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, as his representation in Michael the Syrian is overtly negative whilst in other Syriac sources it is largely positive. See Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 303–5; This is not unique to the Syriac either, with the Armenian author Lewond stating that: “He [‘Umar] was, they say, the noblest of all those people of his lineage (*zsa asen aznowakanagoyñ k’an zamenayñ ars azgatoḥmi iwroyñ*)”

nearly all of the sources assessed here preserve the notice of al-‘Abbās’ arrival at Ruṣāfa and imprisonment of the Banū Hishām.

Table 1: Al-‘Abbās in Late Antique Sources.⁹⁴

Sources Information	Arabic						Armenian	“Eastern Source”					Syriac	
	Al-Layth b. Sa‘d	Al-Ya‘qūbī	Khalifa b. Khayyat	Al-Madā‘inī				Ēwond	Theophanes	Agapius of Manbij	“Dionysius”			Chronicle of Zuqnin
Al-Ṭabarī				Al-Balādhurī	Kitāb al-‘Uyun	Michael the Syrian	Chronicle 1234				Michael the Syrian (Arm)			
Conquest of Tyana	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	
Raid, 90/708–9			X	X				X	X	X				
Raid 93/711–12	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X		
Raid 94/712–13			X	X										
Raid 103/721–22		X	X	X					X		X	X		
Prays over Hishām		X												
Al-‘Abbās sent to Ruṣāfa (imprisoning Hishām’s sons)		X	X	X	X					X	X	X		
Put in charge of caliphate										X	X	X		
Mistreats Hishām’s family								X	X	X	X	X		
Desires caliphate										X	X			
Spreads rumors										X	X			
Betrays al-Walīd		X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Al-Walīd’s licentiousness		X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X		X
Concubine narrative										X	X	X		
Forced to betray al-Walīd for Yazīd		X	X	X	X	X								
Revolt in Ḥimṣ		X		X	X			X		X	X	X	X	
Al-‘Abbās dies in prison		X	X	X		X		X						
Mistakes al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd for ‘Abbāsids										X	X			

(Ēwond, *Patmabanuṭ‘iwn*, 6:761).

94. The categorization of the sources reflects the needs of the article and the divisions presented do not reflect late antique sources as a whole, as these are not easily classifiable or independent of one another based on the confessional identity of the author or language of production.

4.1 Arabic-Islamic Sources

The main Arabic-Islamic sources for reconstructing the third *fitna* are the histories of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 240/855), al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 284/897–98), and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). The following discussion will trace the role of al-‘Abbās in the killing of his cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd across the four Arabic-Islamic sources mentioned above, which do not appear to have been reconciled and demonstrate significant confusion and contradictions. For the sake of clarity, a brief outline of the main themes is warranted.

First of all, we must recognize that the only detailed narrative account of events is that of al-Madā’inī, which is accessed by al-Ṭabarī through the recension of Aḥmad b. Zuhayr, while al-Balādhurī seems to have been accessing the material directly.⁹⁵ The absence of the transmitter in Khalīfa’s account of the killing of al-Walīd—despite al-Madā’inī serving as one of his main sources prior to this—may indicate that he did not have access to this material, or that it did not fit the terse narrative style of his text. Khalīfa’s narrative corroborates the two al-Madā’inī transmissions of al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī; in it al-‘Abbās warns against the uprising against al-Walīd b. Yazīd, following which he was captured by his brother Yazīd’s supporters. The other possibility is that Khalīfa had yet to incorporate this material by the time Baqī b. Makhlād (d. 276/889) learnt his *Tārīkh* and brought it west, but this we cannot prove.⁹⁶ The sources (aside from al-Ya‘qūbī) all agree that al-‘Abbās tried to dissuade his brother Yazīd b. al-Walīd from opposing al-Walīd b. Yazīd. Second, paired with al-Ṭabarī’s classification of him as *sayyid Banī Marwān*, we should identify al-‘Abbās as the most senior figure in the wider Marwānid family. This responsibility may have prevented him from immediately joining the younger aggrieved factions of the Banū al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik and Banū Hishām, who appear explicitly as the opposition to al-Walīd b. Yazīd. That in both traditions he turns the tide of events testifies to his position within the polity, as well as foreshadowing the impending *fitna*. Third, al-‘Abbās’ high status indicates that *hajīns* were integral to late Marwānid politics and is a reminder that caliphal succession was often determined years, if not decades, prior to the event and thus should not reflect how we view the political realities of individual reigns.⁹⁷ Furthermore, almost all of the major figures presented in the narratives were *hajīns*: Yazīd b. al-Walīd, Bishr b. al-Walīd, ‘Umar b. al-Walīd, al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd, Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd, Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Ḥajjāj. This is probably not a coincidence; as mentioned above, they had been appointed to governorships and they led raids. In the increasingly fragmented Marwānid state they appear to be among the few members of the imperial elite who maintained a sustained territorial influence and could rely on military support. However, as in the case of

95. Ilkka Lindstedt, “The Transmissions of al-Madā’inī’s Historical Material to al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī: A Comparison and Analysis of Two Khabars,” *Studia Orientalia* 114 (2013): 41–64. On al-Balādhurī’s use of al-Madā’inī, see also Ryan J. Lynch, *Arab Conquests and Early Islamic Historiography: The Futuh al-Buldan of al-Baladhuri* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 78–79.

96. On the transmission of Khalīfa’s *Tārīkh*, see Tobias Andersson, *Early Sunnī Historiography: A Study of the Tārīkh of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 16–20.

97. As we saw earlier, al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s nomination was secured in the aftermath of the Muhallabid revolt in the early 100s/720s.

the Muhallabids, they also had to face anti-*hajīn* rhetoric, probably reflecting the anxieties of a “pure” Arabian elite in the face of growing practice of concubinage.⁹⁸ Fourth, all the build up to al-Walīd’s death at al-Bakhrā’ allows us to ascertain that al-‘Abbās was operating largely out of Ḥimṣ and was able to call upon active military support. This is a further reminder that even if a figure were removed from a position they could continue to enjoy the privileges and status associated with office.

Steven Judd has demonstrated that the narratives of the beginning of the third *fitna*, including al-Walīd’s killing in al-Bakhrā’, are often confused and anachronistic, reflecting the contemporary concerns of the ‘Abbāsīd-era compilers.⁹⁹ His analysis is built on the accounts as found in al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī, who nearly exclusively follow the Basran transmitter, al-Madā’inī (d. ca. 228/842–43). Despite their reliance on the same source, the two compilers focus on different aspects; al-Balādhurī highlights religious disputes, while al-Ṭabarī identifies tribal and factional divisions.¹⁰⁰ Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ’s account of the *fitna*, on the other hand, does not use what up until this point was his main source, al-Madā’inī, but a minor authority, Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm—Khalīfa may have used al-Madā’inī more for chronology than *akhbār*.¹⁰¹ As Steven Judd’s analysis does not include Khalīfa’s account, a brief outline of it is warranted, as it corroborates al-Madā’inī’s account but does not contain its pietistic and foreshadowing embellishments. The only legitimizing narrative present in Khalīfa’s account pertains to the killing itself, where he draws a comparison between al-Walīd b. Yazīd and another murdered caliph, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 35/654). According to the historian, when al-Walīd was surrounded he picked up the Qur’ān and said, “I shall be murdered the same way the son of my paternal uncle, ‘Uthmān, was murdered [i.e. reading the Qur’ān].”¹⁰² This is the only eulogizing or legitimizing narrative within his account of al-Walīd’s killing, and the fact that it is positioned after a *khabar* in which the caliph is referred to as a “sodomite” (*lūṭī*), and a sermon delivered by Yazīd b. al-Walīd, imply that it is doubtful that Khalīfa lent it much credence. Khalīfa downplays al-Walīd’s depravity and drunkenness, focusing on administrative and political matters.¹⁰³ There is no reference to the Qadarīs or Kalbīs, and Khalīfa’s matter of fact narration places the caliph’s cousins at

98. Robinson has shown that by the 100s/720s the percentage of Marwānid sons born to concubines outstripped the Qurashī average (Robinson, *Marriage*, 180–81). For the anxieties around the liminal status of *hajīns*, see the apocalyptic tradition stating that they will join the Byzantines (*al-rūm*) against the caliphate in Nu‘aym b. Ḥammad, *Fitan*, 2:449; idem, *The Book of Tribulations*, 265.

99. Judd, “Medieval Explanations,” 103–4.

100. Ibid., 91–93. This tribal distinction is strongly taken up by later compilers, e.g., al-Mas‘ūdī, *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, 8:323; idem, *Le Livre de l’avertissement*, 418.

101. As mentioned, his main source is Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm who, by my count, for the years between 126/743–44 to 130/747–48 is cited as his transmitter for seventeen of thirty-nine notices. This is operating on Wurtzel and Andersson’s suggestion that Khalīfa (or his transmitter Baqī b. Makhlad) may have regularly confused Ismā‘īl’s paternal grandfather, so Ismā‘īl b. Ishaq and Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm were counted as one and the same. See Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāṭ’s History*, 36; Andersson, *Early Sunnī Historiography*, 112, 119.

102. *Wa-qāla aqtula kamā qutla ibn ‘ammī ‘Uthmān* (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 2:550; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāṭ’s History*, 256).

103. Andersson, *Early Sunnī Historiography*, 270–71.

the forefront of the plot to overthrow him. The first *khbar* of his reign (after the notice regarding his date of death, age, birthplace, and regnal length) states:

Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm < ‘Abd Allāh b. Wāqid al-Jarmī, who was a witness to the killing of al-Walīd.

When they agreed to murder al-Walīd, they entrusted the leadership (*qalladū amruhum*) to Yazīd b. al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 126/744), a member of his family, pledged allegiance to him. Yazīd b. al-Walīd went out one night to his brother, al-‘Abbās, to consult him (*shāwara*) about killing al-Walīd. He advised him against it.¹⁰⁴

Khalīfa, therefore, does not provide a reason for the killing of al-Walīd but introduces the two main actors: Yazīd b. al-Walīd and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Yazīd b. al-Walīd was the son of al-Walīd and Shāh Afrīd bt. Fīrūz b. Yazdegerd (III), an *umm walad*.¹⁰⁵ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was a minor figure up until this point, the son of the *hajīn* al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Abd al-Malik and either an *umm walad* or Rayṭa bt. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd Allāh, the mother of the first ‘Abbāsīd caliph Abū al-‘Abbās.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz married a daughter of Hishām, Umm Salama, with whom he went on pilgrimage in 124/741–42.¹⁰⁷ Considering that al-Walīd had imprisoned Hishām’s family upon his accession, it is understandable that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was prominent in the anti-Walīd faction. He would be rewarded by Yazīd later, being named *walī al-‘ahd* (heir apparent) after Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd.¹⁰⁸ That Yazīd sought al-‘Abbās’ advice supports his position in the post-Hishām period as the head of the Marwānids. Khalīfa’s narrative continues with al-‘Abbās going to support al-Walīd at al-Bakhrā’ (21 km south of Palmyra) with an army of Ḥimṣīs (*jund min ahl Ḥimṣ*) who reached al-Walīd without their general, as he had been seized by his brother’s troops.¹⁰⁹ Al-‘Abbās was seized by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s generals and forced to swear the *bay‘a* to Yazīd, prompting a large defection from al-Walīd’s camp.¹¹⁰ The specification of *ahl Ḥimṣ* indicates that for our chroniclers al-‘Abbās maintained authority in his old governorate, despite his removal nearly thirty years prior. Syrian military loyalty, therefore, is presented as not being to al-Walīd but to al-‘Abbās,

104. *Wa-kāna shahada qatal al-Walīd qāla lammā ajma‘ū ‘alā qatal al-Walīd qalladū amruhum Yazīd b. al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, wa-bāy‘ahu min ahl baytahu ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Abd al-Malik fa-kharaja Yazīd b. al-Walīd fa-atā akhāhu al-‘Abbās laylan fa-shāwara fī qatl al-Walīd fa-nahāhu ‘an dhālīka* (Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 2:548; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat’s History*, 254).

105. Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab al-Quraysh*, 165; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 8:66.

106. In the early *nasab* tradition he is the son of an *umm walad* (see al-Zubayrī, *Nasab al-Quraysh*, 168); whereas later he is found as the daughter of Rayṭa (Ibn Ḥazm, *Rasā‘il*, 2:147; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 36:269–71); for the mother of Abū ‘Abbās, see al-Zubayrī, *Nasab al-Quraysh*, 30; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-‘Arab*, 20.

107. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1727; idem, *The History*, 26:68.

108. Marsham, *Rituals*, 120.

109. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 2:549; on Bakhrā’, see D. Genequand, “Al-Bakhra (Avatha), from the Tetrarchic Fort to the Umayyad Castle,” *Levant* 36 (2004): 225–42.

110. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 2:549; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyat’s History*, 255.

indicating that the *hajīn*, although not the caliph, as *sayyid Banī Marwān* swayed loyalties and allegiances.

4.1.1 *Al-Madāʿinī's account of al-ʿAbbās' role*

As noted previously, al-Balādhurī's and al-Ṭabarī's narratives of the killing of al-Walīd are transmitted on the authority of al-Madāʿinī.¹¹¹ The fifth/eleventh century *Kitāb al-ʿUyūn wa-l-ḥadāʾiq fī akhbār al-ḥaqāʾiq* also makes use of al-Madāʿinī; however it is more or less the same account as that of al-Balādhurī with minor variations. This means we are able to reconstruct al-Madāʿinī's narrative as preserved across these three sources, but because of the texts' dates of production and the similarities between the *Ansāb* and the *ʿUyūn*, the main comparison will be between al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī. This will be done by undergoing a thorough overview of the *akhbār* narrated on the authority of al-Madāʿinī, which will be compared to the "Dionysius circuit" later. To repeat, according to al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī, al-Walīd b. Yazīd sent al-ʿAbbās to Ruṣāfa to imprison Hishām's progeny and secure the treasury or storehouses (*al-khazāʾin*).¹¹² According to al-Ṭabarī, al-Walīd's *kātib*, ʿIyād—who had been imprisoned at Ruṣāfa by the caliph—ordered the storehouse/treasury doors (*abwāb al-khazāʾin*) to be shut upon Hishām's death.¹¹³ How the imprisoned scribe managed to do this is difficult to imagine; however, as we shall see, the Syriac sources report that al-ʿAbbās entered into the treasury (*gazzā*) as well. The narrative of ʿIyād being sent to secure the *khazāʾin* upon Hishām's death and al-ʿAbbās' imprisonment of the caliph's sons may indicate that al-Walīd feared he would not be granted access to the riches of the caliphate, hampering his succession.

Although al-Madāʿinī's account does not contradict that of Khalīfa, literary embellishments are much more common in his narrative, with the inclusion of poetry and conversations. Al-ʿAbbās is employed to foreshadow the impending *fitna* and warn of regicide, seemingly the only figure who perceived that the dispute between al-Walīd b. Yazīd and Yazīd b. al-Walīd would bring about the fall of the Banū Marwān. In terms of how our two main sources accessed this material, Lindstedt has argued that al-Balādhurī's *isnāds* make it appear as if he is accessing the material directly, whilst al-Ṭabarī always cites it on

111. Judd, "Medieval Explanations"; Judd, "Reinterpreting Al-Walīd b. Yazīd." The anonymous *Kitāb al-ʿUyūn* largely contains the same notices, conforming more closely to al-Balādhurī's version. But due to its late date of production (late eleventh century) and close use of earlier sources, it does not factor greatly into my discussion here.

112. To what exactly *khazāʾin* refers here is difficult to say. Hillenbrand has opted for "storehouses" in her translation, but texts such as the *Kitāb al-Amwāl* of Qudāma b. Jaʿfar seem to imply that *khazāʾin* were used to store *ghanāʾim* and tribute (*jizya*). A more in-depth study of the terminology in question would be helpful. Al-Ṭabarī frequently uses *khazāʾin* throughout his text, while Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ includes it in his list of caliphal administrators as separate from *bayt al-māl* but still under that individual's purview, e.g., for Hishām: *al-khazāʾin wa-buyūt al-amwāl* ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-Ḥarith ([Administrator] of the warehouses and treasuries) (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 2:545; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt's History*, 252). For a recent discussion of these lists in Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, see M. Legendre, "The Translation of the *Dīwān* and the Making of the Marwanid 'Language Reform': Secretarial Agency, Economic Incentives, Regional Dynamics in the Umayyad State," in *Navigating Language in the Early Islamic World*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Alison Vacca (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

113. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1751; idem, *The History*, 26:100.

the authority of Aḥmad b. Zuhayr (d. 279/892).¹¹⁴ Although there are a variety of differences in the two authors’ accounts, for the sections dealing with al-‘Abbās they preserve similar material.¹¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī corroborates Yazīd’s consultation with the head of the Marwānids, following a discussion between Yazīd and one of his supporters:

According to Aḥmad b. Zuhayr < ‘Alī (al-Madā’ini):

If al-‘Abbās gives you [Yazīd b. al-Walīd] the oath of allegiance, no one else will oppose you (*bāya‘aka lam yukhāllifka aḥad*). If al-‘Abbās refuses, then the people will be more likely to obey him. If you insist on sticking to your opinion, then proclaim publicly that al-‘Abbās has given the oath of allegiance to you [...] Yazīd came to his brother al-‘Abbās and told him what had been happening. Yazīd asked his advice (*shāwarahu*) and spoke abusively of al-Walīd. Then al-‘Abbās said to him: “Go easy, Yazīd. By breaking God’s oath (*‘ahd Allāh*) you corrupt both true religion and this life on earth.”¹¹⁶

Al-‘Abbās is again presented as pious, as a protector of the covenant of God, and as the most influential of the Marwānids. The use of the terms *shūra/shāwara* and *‘ahd Allāh* in the *khbar* is reflective of the language of succession in the early Marwānid period.¹¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī’s *isnād* is problematic here since al-Madā’ini was born nearly a decade after the events, and thus could not have been an eyewitness, and we have no other indication of where the information comes from.¹¹⁸ Kilpatrick points out that al-‘Abbās’ alleged piety in this matter drew comparison with his most pious uncle, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.¹¹⁹ Yazīd returned to his brother to convince him again, but was called “the most inauspicious lamb (*ashām sakhla*) of the Banū Marwān,” and al-‘Abbās even threatened to tie him up and send him to al-Walīd.¹²⁰ Al-Madā’ini’s account contains further references to al-‘Abbās’ opposition, such as a confrontation with his brother in reaction to Marwān’s letter of support for al-Walīd b. Yazīd, which Marwān, the governor of the North, had sent to Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, the governor of Palestine, who forwarded it to al-‘Abbās.¹²¹ Al-‘Abbās summoned (*da‘ā*) Yazīd and threatened him. Yazīd responded that Marwān’s

114. Ilkka Lindstedt, “The Role of al-Madā’ini’s Students in the Transmission of His Material,” *Der Islam* 91, no. 2 (2014): 295–340, at 307.

115. For a comparison between how the two compilers used the *akhbarī*’s material, see Lindstedt, “The Transmissions.”

116. Al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, 2:1784; idem, *The History*, 26:137.

117. We should not, however, assume that this was fully formulated, nor does its appearance here indicate the veracity of the report; see Marsham, *Rituals*, 114–17.

118. Lindstedt, “Transmission,” 42.

119. Hilary Kilpatrick, “Images of the Umayyads,” in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, 63–87 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 69; on ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s image as the most pious caliph, see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 283–320.

120. Al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, 2:1785; idem, *The History*, 26:138.

121. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:170–71; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1785–88; idem, *The History*, 26:139–41; Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 129.

claims of rebellion were lies (*irjāf*), and he promised (*khalafa*) his brother that he would abandon the opposition (*mu'āraḍa*) and not attempt to depose al-Walīd.¹²²

Therefore, in al-Madā'inī's narratives, al-ʿAbbās wishes to preserve the status quo and exerts substantial authority. His allegiance, in the eyes of our compilers, would be enough to sway the dispute. Furthermore, his status as a senior member of the Marwānids is evident in his summoning of Yazīd as well as in his being Sa'īd's port of call on how to proceed. Sa'īd's presence in the narrative is curious as, despite being a son of ʿAbd al-Malik, he defers to al-ʿAbbās. Sa'īd was a *hajīn* and led the *ṣā'ifa* in 106/725.¹²³ The *nasab* tradition is not always organized chronologically; however the fact that he is placed nearly last in both al-Zubayrī's and al-Ya'qūbī's lists of ʿAbd al-Malik's fourteen sons (he is eleventh) may indicate that he was in fact amongst the youngest. This is further supported by his late appearance in the sources and the fact that he was still active in the 120s/740s. Al-ʿAbbās' pre-eminence amongst the Marwānids is probably owed to his relatively advanced age by this point, as well as his greater military experience.

Al-ʿAbbās' opposition to the impending regicide is reported in another *khavar* relayed by his nephew, the unnamed son of Bishr b. al-Walīd, on the authority of al-Madā'inī, that takes the shape of a conversation between al-ʿAbbās and his brother Yazīd.¹²⁴ Bishr urges his brother, al-ʿAbbās, to support Yazīd but is again rebuffed, prompting al-ʿAbbās to exclaim, "I believe God has permitted your destruction."¹²⁵ The foreshadowing and anachronisms in the representation of al-ʿAbbās are most probably a literary construct aimed at warning against regicide and urging the avoidance of *fitna* at all costs. This motif is alluded to in a poem attributed to al-ʿAbbās and set after his conversation with Bishr:

May God protect you from tribulations (*fitan*)
Looming like mountains, which then violently erupt.
Indeed, the creatures have grown weary (*mallat*) of your (pl.) policy (*siyāsatakum*)
So, hold tight to the pillar (*ʿamūd*) of religion and withhold yourselves.¹²⁶

Again, al-Madā'inī presents al-ʿAbbās as wanting to preserve Marwānid rule, while the foreshadowing imagery of the mountains and the use of *fitan* are anachronistic projections. Al-ʿAbbās is presented as pious, dissuading Yazīd's faction from following through, becoming the bulwark trying to hold back the oncoming *fitna*. Writing in the aftermath of the fourth *fitna*, issues of regicide and factional disputes must have been particularly relevant for

122. Despite both citing al-Madā'inī as their source, the conversation between the two brothers appears quite different linguistically when comparing the two sources. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9:171; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1787; idem, *The History*, 26:140–41.

123. Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab al-Quraysh*, 165; Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 2:491; idem, *Khalifa Ibn Khayyat's History*, 217; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:394; idem, *The Works*, 1049.

124. The chain of transmission is Aḥmad b. Zuhayr < ʿAlī al-Madā'inī < Ibn Bishr al-Walīd.

125. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9:171; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1787–88; idem, *The History*, 26:141.

126. The translated verses (my own) are the shorter variants found in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9:171; an extra *bayt* is found in the version narrated in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1788; idem, *The History*, 26:141.

al-Madāʾinī.¹²⁷ Al-Madāʾinī’s narrative comes full circle in the lead up to al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s death. As in Khalīfa, al-‘Abbās is intercepted by one of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s generals, Manṣūr b. Jumhūr or Ya‘qūb b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kalbī, and forced to go over to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and give his allegiance to Yazīd.¹²⁸ In al-Balādhurī, Manṣūr calls al-‘Abbās Ibn Quṣṭantīn, whilst in al-Ṭabarī it is Ya‘qūb; this is the only significant variation in the account, and both sources even agree he was accompanied by thirty men, corroborating Khalīfa.

When al-‘Abbās was forced to swear the *bay‘a* to his brother, Yazīd b. al-Walīd, his supporters raised the banner of al-‘Abbās (*naṣabū rāyatan*) and announced that he had given his allegiance to the *amīr al-mu‘minīn*, Yazīd, prompting again a major defection from al-Walīd’s camp. Al-‘Abbās is then reported to have exclaimed, “This is one of the wiles of the devil (*khud‘a min khudī‘ al-shayṭān*). The Banū Marwān are destroyed!”¹²⁹ Al-‘Abbās’ capture is made explicitly clear by both al-Balādhurī and the *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, which add: “he was like a prisoner amongst them.”¹³⁰ The lack of this notice in al-Ṭabarī indicates some editing by our authors. A variant of the capture is preserved in al-Ṭabarī, still attributed to al-Madāʾinī but this time on the authority of al-Muthannā b. Mu‘āwiya, an alleged eyewitness in al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s camp.¹³¹ Al-‘Abbās is said to have sent a messenger to al-Walīd, but on this occasion we are informed that al-Walīd suspected (*ittahama*) al-‘Abbās and asked him to go to the caliph’s camp. The return messenger was intercepted by Manṣūr, who threatened al-‘Abbās, ordering him to stay in place. After being ambushed by the troops of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj, al-‘Abbās went to his brother’s camp, and al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s men seeing this (al-‘Abbās going to the other side), retreated.¹³²

Al-Balādhurī has a similar narrative, but not on the authority of al-Madāʾinī; instead it is narrated by Hishām b. ‘Ammar (d. 245/859). According to this account al-‘Abbās fought on the side of al-Walīd, confirming his *bay‘a*, but was thrown from his horse by one of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s men. He then went over (*‘adala*) to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, again prompting defection, and the *khābar* ends with Yazīd pardoning (*ṣafaḥa*) and freeing his brother.¹³³ Al-‘Abbās is therefore again able to single-handedly prompt large-scale defection from al-Walīd’s camp. These variants fill in some of the gaps, such as how Yazīd’s supporters knew where to intercept him but leave quite a few questions unanswered. If al-‘Abbās was dedicated to al-Walīd’s cause, why did he retreat to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and what happened to his

127. Significantly al-Ṭabarī’s account of the fourth *fitna* also comes from al-Madāʾinī; see T. El-Hibri, “The Regicide of the Caliph al-Amīn and the Challenge of Representation in Medieval Islamic Historiography,” *Arabica* 42, no. 3 (1995): 334–64.

128. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1798–99; idem, *The History*, 26:152; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:177–78. This part is introduced with the *isnād* Aḥmad b. Zuhayr < ‘Alī al-Madāʾinī < ‘Amr b. Marwān al-Kalbī < Ya‘qūb b. ‘Ibrāhīm al-Walīd.

129. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1799; idem, *The History*, 26:152–53; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:178; anon., *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, 141.

130. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:178; anon., *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, 141.

131. The full *isnād* is Aḥmad b. Zuhayr < ‘Alī al-Madāʾinī < ‘Amr b. Marwān al-Kalbī < al-Muthannā b. Mu‘āwiya.

132. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1804–5; idem, *The History*, 26:157–59.

133. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:180.

cavalry, of which we are told but who do not seem to have witnessed his “imprisonment”? Conveniently, their failure to witness the ambush prompts their defection, thinking their leader had himself defected.

Al-‘Abbās’ role in al-Madā’inī’s narrative, therefore, does not contradict that presented in Khalīfa’s, but the account is embellished with lines of verse and direct conversations, foreshadowing motifs that warn of the dangers of *fitna* and regicide. Al-‘Abbās appears as the only figure who foresees that the dispute between al-Walīd b. Yazīd and Yazīd b. al-Walīd would bring about the fall of the Marwānids. However, reading between the lines, it also conveys the sense that he enjoyed substantial authority over the Marwānids, as is evident in his being a port of call for *shūra*. Additionally, al-‘Abbās allegedly swayed the outcome of the dispute simply by offering his *bay‘a*. Al-Madā’inī’s narrative clearly shows how al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s progeny had strongly linked themselves to those of Hishām, with al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s treatment of them sparking significant anger, exacerbated by his alleged appropriation of a *jāriya* belonging to the family.¹³⁴ Al-‘Abbās’ role in the imprisonment of Hishām’s sons, as well as his support for al-Walīd, curiously do not seem to have drawn much ire from his fellow Marwānids. Al-Balādhurī’s inclusion of an element in which al-‘Abbās is pardoned may indicate that there was bad blood, but it is only preserved in a single *khobar*, transmitted on the authority of a figure who did not live under the Umayyads. This is why al-‘Abbās’ defection narrative is unsatisfying in explaining the partisanship of the *fitna* and simply too convenient for Yazīd b. al-Walīd’s faction. Al-Madā’inī’s use of al-‘Abbās as the figure to warn of looming *fitna* serves to foreshadow the ensuing events, of which the audience, living after the fall of the Marwānids, would have been acutely aware.

4.1.2 Al-Ya‘qūbī and the Ḥimṣī revolt

Al-Ya‘qūbī’s account of the death of al-Walīd contains no mention of al-‘Abbās and appears too difficult to reconcile with the narratives unless we entertain, as I suggest below, that the author or the copyists may have mixed up the reigns of al-Walīd b. Yazīd and Yazīd b. al-Walīd. Al-Ya‘qūbī’s relatively short account of the caliph’s reign is characterized by al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s mistreatment of Hishām’s maternal family and his governors, and narratives of his wine drinking, building a drinking tent atop the Ka‘ba, and general neglect for caliphal affairs.¹³⁵ The narrative contains some tribal elements as found in al-Ṭabarī, but no mention of Yazīd’s Qadarī affiliation (as found in al-Balādhurī) until the latter’s death.¹³⁶ Al-‘Abbās does not feature in the narrative until the reign of his brother Yazīd b. al-Walīd, where he is reported to have rebelled against the reigning caliph, but to have been saved

134. Judd, “Reinterpreting al-Walīd b. Yazīd,” 450. This is also from the al-Madā’inī circuit; see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1776.

135. The account of al-Walīd’s reign is very short, occupying less than two folios of the Manchester manuscript. See Arabic MS 231 [801], fols. 288–89, <https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Man4MedievalVC~4~4~993914~163319>. For a discussion of the Manchester manuscript (the older of the two extant manuscripts), see al-Ya‘qūbī, *The Works*, 1:23–26.

136. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:397–400, 402; idem, *The Works*, 1052–56.

by Sulaymān b. Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik.¹³⁷ However, al-Madā’inī’s account has al-‘Abbās imprison Sulaymān on al-Walīd’s orders. We are then told Sulaymān escaped from prison in Amman upon al-Walīd’s death and went to Yazīd b. al-Walīd, who proceeded to marry Hishām’s daughter Umm Hishām.¹³⁸ The inclusion of this marriage notice after Sulaymān’s escape may be a means for the compilers to express a further consolidation between the sons of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik and those of Hishām.

This is one of the major contradictions in al-Ya‘qūbī’s section on the *fitna* and warrants considerable skepticism: if al-‘Abbās had revolted against Yazīd, why would Sulaymān come to his aid? Sulaymān would be Yazīd’s general at ‘Anjar against Marwān b. Muḥammad, and his imprisonment under al-Walīd b. Yazīd speaks to his loyalty to his cousin, evidenced also by the marital connection. Other figures reported by al-Ya‘qūbī to have rebelled against al-Yazīd b. al-Walīd are Bishr b. al-Walīd in Qinnasrīn, ‘Umar b. al-Walīd in Jordan, and Yazīd b. Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik in Palestine.¹³⁹ This means that, in al-Ya‘qūbī, three of four revolts against Yazīd b. al-Walīd were carried out by his own brothers, which contradicts the strong fraternal aspect of the other accounts. In the notice from al-Madā’inī discussed above, Bishr attempts to convince al-‘Abbās to join their brother Yazīd’s cause and ‘Umar admonishes al-Walīd b. Yazīd regarding his appropriation of a *jāriya*.¹⁴⁰ Bishr is also depicted in most sources as opposing Marwān b. Muḥammad during the reign of his brother Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd, and al-Ṭabarī claims that he was given the governorship of Qinnasrīn only under Yazīd.¹⁴¹ ‘Umar is recorded as governor of Jordan under his father al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, and like al-‘Abbās it seems he retained his influence there long after his official post ended.¹⁴² It is clear that there was no love lost between al-Walīd b. Yazīd and his cousins; therefore their rebellion against their own brother Yazīd seems unlikely. The only revolt that fits with what we have already seen is that of Yazīd b. Sulaymān in Palestine, who was raised up by the Palestinian *jund* at the expense of Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-Malik who escaped to Yazīd.¹⁴³ Exacerbating the contradictions in al-Ya‘qūbī is the fact that the notice of al-‘Abbās’ revolt is introduced with the claim that he was supported by the people of Ḥimṣ (*shāya‘ahu ahl Ḥimṣ*), his ex-governorate. As we shall see shortly that is not the case; al-‘Abbās features as the main victim of this revolt due to his defection from al-Walīd in both the “al-Madā’inī circuit” and the Christian sources. In their translation of al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Tārīkh*, Robinson et al. have posited that the text suffered some corruption when it comes

137. Al-Ya‘qūbī, 2:401; idem, *The Works*, 1057.

138. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1827; idem, *The History*, 26:185.

139. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:401; idem, *The Works*, 1057.

140. For Bishr, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:171; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1787–88; idem, *The History*, 26:141. For ‘Umar, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1776; anon., *Uyūn*, 131.

141. Bishr met Marwān in the vicinity of Aleppo, less than a day’s march from Qinnasrīn. See Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 2:564; idem, *Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt’s History*, 267; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:199–200; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:403; idem, *The Works*, 1058; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1876; idem, *The History*, 26:250.

142. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 2:417.

143. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1831; idem, *The History*, 26:189–90. This is, again, on the authority of al-Madā’inī.

to these notices, and the incongruity of the report of this revolt when compared with other sources seem to support this.¹⁴⁴

I would cautiously suggest these notices were transposed accidentally into the account of Yazīd b. al-Walīd's caliphate when they were originally included in the reign of al-Walīd b. Yazīd. This suggestion is based, firstly, on the fact that the similarity of their names makes misattribution likely.¹⁴⁵ A second reason for suspecting misattribution is that in both notices the author states that the "regions went into revolt (*iqṭarabat*)." However, for al-Walīd no examples are given, whilst for Yazīd we are provided with the examples of the three sons of al-Walīd and that of Sulaymān.¹⁴⁶ As pointed out by Lliteras in her study of marginalia in Arabic manuscripts from Timbuktu, "confusion in the copying occurs when a word is repeated in the text, causing the scribe to skip the sentence or words immediately following which ended with the repeated word."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the similarity in the names al-Walīd and al-Yazīd coupled with the formulaic nature of the text may have led to a mistake, especially when considering the factional dynamics presented by other sources. As we have seen, it is more likely that the sons of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik revolted under their cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd rather than under their own brother Yazīd b. al-Walīd. Furthermore, in the following sentence of al-Ya'qūbī's account, we are informed that Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik had been made commander by the men of Jordan and defied Yazīd's brother Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd.¹⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, still on al-Madā'inī's authority, indicates that Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik had opposed Yazīd in Jordan.¹⁴⁹ This indicates that 'Umar b. al-Walīd had been ousted by the *jund* of Jordan due to his role in the regicide of al-Walīd b. Yazīd, similarly to what occurred to Sa'īd b. 'Abd al-Malik. Thus, al-Ya'qūbī's notices about the revolts under Yazīd b. al-Walīd would require us to re-evaluate the partisanship of the *fitna*. I am more inclined to attribute this to a scribal error that saw the initial notices of both caliph's reigns get swapped, or textual corruption, rather than internal contradictions within al-Ya'qūbī's text, as he does not often provide alternative versions of events.

Despite the obvious contradictions and inaccuracies in al-Ya'qūbī's narrative, he does corroborate al-'Abbās' long-standing influence in Ḥimṣ and indicates that a revolt occurred there in the aftermath of al-Walīd b. al-Yazīd's death. This revolt is also found in the al-Madā'inī circuit, where we find that the Ḥimṣī population, upon discovering al-'Abbās

144. Al-Ya'qūbī, *The Works*, 3:1057, n. 2545.

145. I would be lying if this confusion had not occurred to me throughout the course of writing, and I have spent more time engaging with the account than a copyist would have. The Cambridge manuscript is in all probability a descendant of the earlier Manchester manuscript. Despite there being two extant manuscripts, then, they are not independent, meaning a scribal error may have been transposed if the scribe or owner did not have a different version of the text to consult.

146. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:400–401; idem, *The Works*, 1056.

147. Susana Molins Lliteras, "A Preliminary Appraisal of Marginalia in West African Manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library Collection (Timbuktu)," in *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Islamic Manuscript Cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Andrea Brigaglia and Mauro Nobili, 143–78 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 157.

148. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:402; idem, *The Works*, 1057.

149. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1831; idem, *The History*, 26:189–90. The *isnād* is Aḥmad b. Zuhayr < 'Alī al-Madā'inī < 'Amr b. Marwān al-Kalbī < Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Ḥassān al-Urdunnī.

had defected, wrecked and looted al-‘Abbās’ home, took his wives and household, and imprisoned his sons. Al-‘Abbās then escaped to Yazīd.¹⁵⁰ So, although al-‘Abbās enjoyed the support of the Ḥimṣī military (or a section of it), loyalists of al-Walīd were also present in Ḥimṣ and blamed al-‘Abbās for his defeat. The mention of his house serves as final indication that he was based out of Ḥimṣ as well as providing another example of how strongholds held by participants in the anti-Walīd faction turned against their leaders upon the caliph’s murder. It bears noting that Ḥimṣ does appear to have had a large military population due to its proximity to the *thughūr*, much like Qinnasrīn. Therefore, it is possible the Ḥimṣī response was in part owed to Yazīd b. al-Walīd’s infamous reduction of military salaries, from whence came his *laqab al-Nāqīṣ* (The Reducer).¹⁵¹

After the revolt in Ḥimṣ, al-‘Abbās disappears from the narrative, aside from the notices about his son being named governor or deputy governor of Iraq by Yazīd b. al-Walīd that have been mentioned earlier.¹⁵² He returns during Marwān b. Muḥammad’s caliphate, imprisoned in Ḥarrān. A detailed imprisonment narrative is not known to me; however, we can assume that due to Marwān’s positioning of himself as avenger of al-Walīd, al-‘Abbās’ role in turning the tides must not have endeared him to the new caliph. We therefore find him again in prison in Ḥarrān with the ‘Abbāsīd *imām* Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad (d. 132/750) and Yazīd’s governor of Iraq, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.¹⁵³ There are many varying accounts of how the prisoners died, with the most oft repeated being that of disease breaking out.¹⁵⁴ But a variant account, narrated by quite a few sources, is that al-‘Abbās and ‘Abd Allāh were attacked by *mawlās* and smothered using pillows, while Ibrāhīm had his head stuck into a bag of unslaked lime (*nūra*).¹⁵⁵ Although suffocation is a relatively common *topos* in early Islamic literature, I do not know of any other instance where unslaked lime was used for this purpose.¹⁵⁶ The uniqueness of this method is reflected by its preservation across a variety of sources without a specific transmitter ascribed to it; it was rare and strange enough to merit preservation and transmission. The only other instance known

150. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1826; idem, *The History*, 26:184.

151. On the nature of Ḥimṣ, see Cobb, *White Banners*, 13; on the origin of the nickname, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9:189–90; Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 2:556; idem, *Khalifa Ibn Khayyat’s History*, 261; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:401; idem, *The Works*, 3: 1057. Ḥimṣ throughout the *fitna* appears to have been constantly in revolt, first against Yazīd and then against Marwān, despite the Ḥimṣīs claiming to support the children of al-Walīd, whom Marwān claimed to have avenged.

152. See above, n. 78. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9: 193; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1784, 1838; idem, *The History*, 26:137, 198. A similar notice is found in anon., *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, 133.

153. On Ibrāhīm’s capture and imprisonment by Marwān, see Khalid Blankinship, “The Tribal Factor in the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 4 (1988): 589–603.

154. See the following two *Encyclopaedia of Islam* articles: K. V. Zettersteen and F. Gabrieli, “al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online); Blankinship, “al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd.”

155. Unslaked lime was traditionally used as a depilatory. This would have led to Ibrāhīm’s suffocation and would have been quite a painful death. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 1996, 4:122; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:409; idem, *The Works*, 3:1065; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 6:71–72; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, 5:222.

156. See, for instance, the narrative of the caliph al-Hādī’s death in 170/786 in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:569–71; idem, *The History*, 30:42–55.

to me within adjacent historical traditions is in the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor where, amazingly, as we shall see shortly, it is not Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad who is suffocated with unslaked lime, but al-ʿAbbās.¹⁵⁷

The incongruities across the Arabic-Islamic written tradition and the overtly foreshadowing role and anachronistic representation of al-ʿAbbās in al-Madāʾinī leave a few unanswered questions. Why, if he was like a prisoner in Yazīd’s camp, as al-Balādhurī points out, was he then let go, particularly given he had done al-Walīd’s bidding in imprisoning the sons of Hishām and effectively permitting him to assume caliphal office? And why would his son be named as governor of Iraq under Yazīd b. al-Walīd, if his father had opposed him? Furthermore, his imprisonment under Marwān indicates the influence he wielded and probably his support of Yazīd b. al-Walīd. In sum, al-ʿAbbās’ actions in the immediate aftermath of the killing of al-Walīd seem irreconcilable with the narrative presented of al-ʿAbbās warning against *fitna* and defecting to his own brother. If the Arabic sources were all we had this would probably close the chapter on al-ʿAbbās; however sources written in Christian milieus in a variety of languages remember al-ʿAbbās as playing a very different role, with a far more nefarious agenda. They represent him as central to al-Walīd’s downfall, which he had planned from when he first set foot in the caliphal treasury at Ruṣāfa.

4.2 Christian Sources in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, and Syriac on the Role of al-ʿAbbās

The stark contrast between the depiction of al-ʿAbbās’ role in the caliphate of his cousin al-Walīd in late antique Christian sources and that given in the Arabic-Islamic tradition merits us turning our attention to this adjacent discourse. The sources used for the following discussion are the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (d. 1199),¹⁵⁸ the anonymous *Chronicle of 1234*,¹⁵⁹ *The Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor, the *Kitab al-ʿUnwān* of the Melkite author Agapius of Manbij (d. 941–42),¹⁶⁰ the *History (Patmabanut ʿiwn)* of the second/eighth century Armenian chronicler Lewond,¹⁶¹ and the anonymous Syriac chronicles of Zuqnīn and 846. These first four sources, however, appear to share a common source, what has been termed in scholarship the “Eastern source” associated with Theophilus of Edessa (d. 775).¹⁶²

157. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 421; idem, *The Chronicle*, 583.

158. Michael the Syrian, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. J. B. Chabot, 4 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1910) [hereafter referred to as MSyr].

159. Anon., *Chronicon anonymi auctoris ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens [Textus]*, ed. J. B. Chabot, 2 vols. (Louvain: Durbecq, 1917–20.) [hereafter referred to as *Chron 1234*].

160. Agapius, “Kitab al-ʿunvan, histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj,” in *Patrologia Orientalis*, ed. A. A. Vasiliev, 399–547 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1912).

161. On the debate around the dating of Lewond, see Tim Greenwood, “A Reassessment of the History of Lewond,” *Le Muséon* 125 (2012): 99–167; C. Settiani, “The Seventh-Century Bagratids between Armenia and Byzantium,” in *Constructing the Seventh Century*, ed. C. Zuckerman, 559–78 (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2013); Jean-Pierre Mahé, “Le problème de l’authenticité et de la valeur de la chronique de Lewond,” in *L’Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et culture*, 119–26 (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2015).

162. Conrad, “The Conquest of Arwad”; Theophilus, *Theophilus*. I believe that the above-mentioned works have done a great deal to raise awareness and push the field towards more comparative and source-critical

Furthermore, the first two are dependent on the now lost chronicle of Dionysius of Tel Mahrē (d. 845) and place al-‘Abbās as central in their narratives of the *fitna*.¹⁶³ However, the other two sources, namely those of Theophanes the Confessor and Agapius of Manbij, also retain a prolonged memory of al-‘Abbās. Lewond does not mention al-‘Abbās but largely supports the depictions of al-Walīd found across the sources. Al-‘Abbās’ absence from this text further attests to his geographical influence being confined to the central *thughūr*, with the Armenian chronicler’s focus being on those *hajīns* who operated in the North, as well as Sulaymān b. Hishām.¹⁶⁴ The fact that so many Syriac chronicles were produced in this region may be one reason why al-‘Abbās is so well recorded.¹⁶⁵ This geographical focus can also be seen in their regular recording of his raiding activities for the years 707–8, 709, 711–13, and 721–22, indicating he was internal to their tradition. The sources that align most closely with the events of Arabic-Islamic tradition are those written in Syriac, and it is to these we shall turn next, after which we will move on to the account of al-‘Abbās’ death preserved in Theophanes and his depiction as forefather of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty in the *Chronicle of 1234*.

The Christian sources maintain the same sequence of events as the Arabic-Islamic tradition: al-‘Abbās being sent to Ruṣāfa, the emergence of the conspiracy against al-Walīd, al-Bakhrā’, the revolt in Ḥimṣ and then the death of al-‘Abbās in prison. However, in these accounts al-‘Abbās appears as an antagonist rather than as a supporter of his cousin and is given a central role in the conspiracy, allegedly even using the trust al-Walīd b. Yazīd placed in him to betray the caliph.

4.2.1 The Dionysius circuit

The *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* and *Chronicle of 1234* are said to have both made use of the now lost writings of Dionysius of Tel Mahrē, and in all probability we can attribute their narrative of events to this common source. It is therefore tentatively possible to place the generation of these narratives not in the late twelfth/mid-thirteenth century, but as a product of mid-ninth-century Syriac historiography. Obviously, it is necessary to caution

approaches. However, the identification of a single source used by these four sources seems unlikely. Rather, following the conclusions of Conterno, Debié, and Hilkens, I prefer to refer to a Semitic source or source(s). For recent scholarship on the matter, see Andy Hilkens, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 and Its Sources* (Louvain: Peeters, 2018), 274–79. See also A. Papaconstantinou’s review of R. G. Hoyland, *The Chronicle of Theophilus* in *Le Muséon* 126, nos. 3–4 (2013): 459–65.

163. Hilkens, *Chronicle of 1234*, 274.

164. For whom they do remember, see Vacca, “The Umayyad North.”

165. For an outline of the sources including place of production, see Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 62 (Zuqnin), 73 (MSyr), 74 (Chron 1234); for a recent publication on Dionysius, see Philip Wood, *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre c. 750–850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021). The Syriac sources frequently mention the building of infrastructure such as canals and irrigation projects on the Euphrates. For example, Maslama and Hishām are credited as having built a canal in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, while in the *Chronicle of 846*, the anonymous chronicler characterizes Hishām’s reign by his building projects. See anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 160–61; Brooks, “A Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846,” 584. On the identification of these canals along the Euphrates, see Eger, *Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 82.

that the text may have undergone significant revision by the time it was used by either of these authors, and one or both may have accessed it through an intermediary. However, for the sake of clarity, their narrative shall be referred to as the “Dionysius circuit” where they are in close agreement, in the same way I have referred to the “al-Madāʿinī circuit” in the previous section. This does not mean that we can reconstruct the history of the ninth-century Dionysius, but rather that these two sources’ common use of this material allows us to view these narratives as connected. Picking up from Hishām’s death in 125/743, Michael and *Chronicle of 1234* support the narrative that al-Walīd b. Yazīd immediately acted against Hishām’s progeny and “mistreated his household and plundered their houses (*w-ʾabeš l-bnay bayteh d-Hašīm w-bazz bātayhôn*).”¹⁶⁶ This accords with the Arabic-Islamic sources, lending further credence to the imprisonment of Hishām’s sons and the idea that they were a threat to al-Walīd b. Yazīd. The two Syriac sources—and the Armenian recension of Michael—place al-ʿAbbās center stage at Ruṣāfa after Hishām’s death, but with a different agenda:

When this ʿAbbās came to be in charge of the treasury of the kingdom and when he fell upon the sea of gold of the house of Hishām, he desired to seize the rule from Walīd. He deceitfully won over to himself all the chiefs of the Arabs by ascribing to Walīd all manner of odious vices. Yet the king trusted him as he trusted himself.¹⁶⁷

When paired with the notice about locking the storehouse/treasury upon Hishām’s death in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, a serious concern about imperial finances during the transition of caliphal authority becomes apparent in the texts.¹⁶⁸ That there would even be a “sea of gold” at Ruṣāfa is corroborated within Christian sources: Agapius and Dionysius both characterize Hishām as avaricious and imposing high taxes.¹⁶⁹ This can also be found in the Arabic-Islamic sources, where Hishām is presented as miserly.¹⁷⁰ This common

166. MSyr, 4:463; *Chron 1234*, 1:314; Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240. The Armenian reads “And he did evil to the house of Hishām” (*ew arar čʿar tann Heshmay*); Michael the Syrian, *Zhamanakagrutʿiwn Tearn Mikhayēli Asorwotsʿ Patriarkʿi, haneal i hnagoyn grchʿagrē* (Jerusalem: I Tparani Srbotsʿ Hakovbeantsʿ, 1871), 342 [hereafter referred to as MSyr Arm]. Notably, we can also see this in Agapius; however, he should not be constituted as part of the Dionysius circuit (see Agapius, “Kitab al-ʿunvan,” 510).

167. *Chron 1234*, 1:314, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240; MSyr, 4:463, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240. “When he fell upon the gold of the empire, which was like the sea, he desired to seize the rule. He won over to himself the chiefs of the Arabs by ascribing to Walīd odious vices. Yet the king trusted him as he trusted himself.” The Armenian recension reads: *ew ēarkʿ əzna yoski ew I ganj tʿagaworowtʿeann Tačkatsʿ ibrew i cov* (“he [al-Walīd] sent him [al-ʿAbbās] to the royal treasury of the Arabs, which was like a sea of gold”); MSyr Arm, 342. On the Armenian recension of Michael, see A. Schmidt, “The Armenian Versions I and II of Michael the Syrian,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 16 (2013): 93–128.

168. It is probable that there was no clear division between caliphal finances and personal wealth, and since Hishām’s successor was not one of his sons, it is possible that his sons may have been able to claim it as inheritance. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1751; idem, *The History*, 26:100.

169. Agapius, “Kitab al-ʿunvan,” 505; MSyr, 4:457, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 224; *Chron 1234*, 1:309, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 224.

170. E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1733; idem, *The History*, 26:75; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, 5:479, where Maslama calls Hishām “miserly” (*bakhīl*) and “cowardly” (*jabān*).

representation of the caliph is a testament to the interconnectedness of these traditions and the fact that these sources drew upon a collective memory of Hishām.¹⁷¹ The idea that al-‘Abbās coveted the caliphate for himself is not found in the Arabic tradition, as we have seen, but for now cannot be discounted as mere conjecture.

The notice that al-‘Abbās generated rumors about his cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd is novel; this refers to al-Walīd’s reputation as a figure prone to debauchery.¹⁷² The Dionysius circuit mentions his penchant for drinking, gambling, and pleasure-seeking later on, informing the assumption that this is to what they refer.¹⁷³ This representation is preserved not only in Michael and *Chronicle of 1234* but also in the anonymous Syriac *Chronicle of 846*, which characterizes the caliph as “a man given to wine and debauchery.”¹⁷⁴ Lewond substantiates this claim stating that “he [Vlit’/al-Walīd] also occupied himself with drunkenness [and] in unhindered sordid fornication.”¹⁷⁵ This characterization of al-Walīd across Arabic-Islamic, Christian Arabic, Armenian, and Syriac literature draws upon a common memory and perception of the caliph.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, if al-‘Abbās spread these rumors, he certainly was very successful, but it is instead more likely that these sources are picking up on a narrative promoted by the opposition to al-Walīd, i.e., that he had shown himself unfit to be caliph. Thus, al-‘Abbās is also presented as a pivotal figure in the fall of al-Walīd in the Syriac sources.

The Dionysius circuit continues, setting the scene for al-Walīd’s death; the locations vary but are largely in agreement with the Arabic-Islamic sources: Michael simply states it occurred in the desert, while the *Chronicle of 1234* correctly places it at al-Bakhrā’.¹⁷⁷ The other Christian sources such as Agapius do not reference al-‘Abbās, and the events are given very little mention, focusing on the later events in Damascus. Agapius, however, does reference ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj as Yazīd’s general, as does *Zuqnīn*.¹⁷⁸ Returning to the circuit, Michael the Syrian does not mention ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, but he does claim that these events were owed to al-‘Abbās’ imperial ambitions, and the *Chronicle of 1234* also

171. It bears noting that conquered populations under early Islam often characterized rulers as overly zealous in taxation. However, the presence of the treasury narrative in both sources should be enough for us not to view it simply as a *topos*. For a recent comparative discussion between Armenian and Syriac sources on taxation, see Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 204–8, also 191 on taxation as humiliation.

172. For an overview of the negative perception of al-Walīd in the Arabic sources, see Judd, “Reinterpreting al-Walīd b. Yazīd.”

173. MSyr, 4: 463–64, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246; *Chron 1234*, 1:315–16, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246–47.

174. Brooks, “Chronicle of 846,” 586.

175. Lewond, *Patmabanut’iwn*, 6:814. *verēr ant nmin arbašrout’eamb yanargel giḡout’iwn igaxazout’ean*. I’d like to thank Alison Vacca for corrections to this translation.

176. Agapius, “Kitab al-‘unwan,” 511–12.

177. Of the non-Dionysius-reliant sources, *Zuqnīn* says “near the town of al-Qurā,” on the road from Palmyra, while Agapius believes it occurred at Palmyra; see *Chron 1234*, 1:315–16, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246–47; MSyr, 4:463–64, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246; Agapius, “Kitab al-‘unwan,” 511–12, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 245–46; anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 166, n. 5.

178. Agapius, “Kitab al-‘unwan,” 511–12, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 245–46; anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 166.

places al-ʿAbbās center stage. The Dionysius circuit therefore states that al-ʿAbbās enjoyed substantial authority over the caliphate at this point, something that is present but not explicit in the Arabic-Islamic sources.

The Dionysius circuit notably maintains that al-ʿAbbās’ rule would not have been recognized by the Arabs (*ṭayyāyê*) because he was the son of a concubine (*bar druktā*).¹⁷⁹ The recognition that *hajīns* could not become caliph is surprising in twelfth/thirteenth century texts, particularly as the ʿAbbāsids and Umayyads of al-Andalus had no such limitations and all ʿAbbāsīd caliphs after al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833) were born to concubines.¹⁸⁰ Thus, this knowledge of succession practices lends credence to the idea that these notices derive from Dionysius, as it is unlikely that later sources would have remembered or viewed his birth status as an impediment, given the predominance of concubine-born rulers under the later ʿAbbāsīds. That this notice lines up with the historical context of Marwānīd succession indicates an earlier provenance of this material and its historical accuracy. The Dionysius circuit then states that due to this impediment Yazīd was made caliph, while the *Chronicle of 1234* specifies that he was born to a free woman (*bar ḥêrtā*), which is not the case as he was the son of Shāh Afrīd bt. Fīrūz b. Yazdegerd, the granddaughter of the last Sasanian shāh.¹⁸¹ The insertion of details of al-ʿAbbās’ ineligibility demonstrates how these sources aimed to justify why this figure, so central to their narrative of the *fitna*, did not end up as caliph. Al-ʿAbbās’ concubine-born status may have previously been an impediment, but in this context he may have harbored imperial ambitions as a senior member of the family.

Michael then proceeds directly to al-Walīd’s decapitation whilst the *Chronicle of 1234* provides a more detailed narrative, including Yazīd sending his general ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Ḥajjāj and informing “ʿAbbās, his brother, of the day on which they would be at the place where the king would be encamped on such a day. Walīd did not suspect any treachery at all, and it did not occur to him that he would encounter any harm from his brother ʿAbbās.”¹⁸² This notice implies that al-ʿAbbās partook actively in the conspiracy against al-Walīd and used that trust against the caliph. Unlike in the Arabic-Islamic sources, al-ʿAbbās is informed of his brother Yazīd’s location; this may be an allusion to his later defection, implying it was a planned betrayal. The statement that he and al-Walīd were brothers is incorrect and

179. MSyr, 4: 463–44, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246–7; *Chron 1234*, 1:315, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 247.

180. ʿAthamina states, “Clear evidence of this change of attitude may be seen in the fact that only three of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphs, whose number was 38, were born to Arab mothers, while the rest were born to freed slave women (*ummahāt awlād*)” (ʿAthamina, “How did Islam Contribute,” 395). Those born to Arab mothers are: Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ (r. 132–36/750–54) whose mother, Raytā, we have already seen; al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85) whose mother was Arwā bt. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥimyārī (d. 146/764); and Muḥammad al-Amīn (r. 193–98/809–13) whose mother was Zubayda bt. Jaʿfar bt. Abī Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (d. 216/831).

181. MSyr, 4: 463–64, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246–47; *Chron 1234*, 1:315, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 247. *Chron 1234* gives al-ʿAbbās more agency, while MSyr uses the plural, implying it was the Arabs who selected Yazīd. Hoyland states (without referencing) that al-ʿAbbās’ mother was a slave whilst Yazīd’s was a free woman. The *nasab* sources are unanimous that she was an *umm walad*, and an *umm walad* is by definition “a slave woman who had produced a child by her master.” See Robinson, *Marriage*, 90; Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 246, n. 711.

182. *Chron 1234*, 1:315, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 247.

may indicate confusion with the familial make up of the late Marwānids or it may be used to indicate their closeness but not necessarily imply a genealogical bond. When al-Walīd is first introduced he is categorized correctly as son of Yazīd [b. ‘Abd al-Malik].¹⁸³

That this active role in the conspiracy is only found in the *Chronicle of 1234* indicates that these insertions do not come from Dionysius, but from a later source or the author himself.¹⁸⁴ Paired with the notices from the Arabic-Islamic sources, al-‘Abbās’ defection seems a means to defeat al-Walīd. Al-‘Abbās is also said to have revolted against al-Walīd in *Zuqnīn* implying that it was he, rather than Yazīd, who was the mastermind.¹⁸⁵ So, Christian sources ranging from the late eighth to mid thirteenth centuries are largely unanimous in remembering that al-‘Abbās was central in the plot against al-Walīd, contrary to the Arabic-Islamic. The fact that this is preserved in the Dionysius circuit, as was the claim that the defection was planned as a means to betray al-Walīd, fills in the gaps of the Arabic-Islamic account of a forced defection. If this was ever circulating in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, it would be remarkable that the sources would have rehabilitated the figure who sparked the *fitna* into one who forewarned it; rather it should be seen as further indication of how the sources used a figure within their own tradition to generate a collective “historical” memory of the end of the Marwānids. The Arabic-Islamic tradition presents al-‘Abbās as the upholder of legitimacy and respect of caliphal precedent, which is in line with other pious depictions of him. This does not mean that the narrative presented by the Dionysius circuit should be discarded as ahistorical, especially given the structural narrative similarities, but perhaps these were accusations lobbied against al-‘Abbās that gained traction within communities who already viewed him in a negative light. In fact, even in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, we have seen that the Ḥimṣī partially blamed al-‘Abbās, indicating an accusatory undercurrent. The negative perception of al-‘Abbās in Christian sources is evident in the case of Theophanes, the focus of the next section, and is probably owed to his raiding activity.

4.2.2 Al-‘Abbās’ death and legacy

After al-Walīd’s decapitation and Yazīd’s seizure of rule, al-‘Abbās disappears from the Syriac narratives, except when it comes to the ensuing events at Ḥimṣ. The Ḥimṣī reaction to al-‘Abbās’ betrayal of al-Walīd is only preserved in the *Chronicle of 1234*, supporting Hilkens’ suggestion that the chronicler had access to an Arabic source for the rise of Marwān.¹⁸⁶ The chronicle corroborates that the people of Ḥimṣ “pulled down and destroyed

183. *Chron 1234*, 1:314, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240.

184. Compare with MSyr, 4: 463, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240. Hilkens has shown that the anonymous chronicler often inserted differing episodes or further expanded where available, particularly when compared with Michael. See Hilkens, *Chronicle of 1234*, 20. It is highly likely that the anonymous chronicler was making use of Arabic sources to augment Dionysius’ narrative (see Hilkens, *Chronicle of 1234*, 281–91, esp. 285–86).

185. “During this year civil war broke out in the whole country because of the rebellion which ‘Abbas and his brothers had instigated against Walid (II)” (anon., *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 166).

186. Hilkens, *Chronicle of 1234*, 286; see also, as Hoyland points out, the transliteration of *fitna* as *ptnā* two lines later in *Chron 1234*, 1:316, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 248, n. 717.

the villas, taverns, inns and all the property that belonged to ‘Abbas in their city in their zeal for the murdered king.”¹⁸⁷ As in al-Madā’inī’s narrative, al-‘Abbās’ property is targeted by the revolting Ḥimṣīs, further testament to a perception of his betrayal of al-Walīd and his entrenchment in the city.

Ḥimṣ is also the location of the final reference to al-‘Abbās within the Christian sources, where Theophanes narrates al-‘Abbās’ death, dating it to the year AM 6236/743–44. The strangeness of Theophanes’ narrative merits quoting it in full:

He [Marwān] killed Abas in prison—a man who had shed much Christian blood and had devastated and depopulated many places. The Ethiopian who was dispatched by Marouam [Marwān] to carry out this task filled a bag with unslaked lime (ασβέστου) and having approached Abas, placed it over his head and nostrils and so smothered him, thus contriving a just punishment for the magician. For he had wrought much evil to the Christians by means of magic and the invocation of demons. He had also shared in the murder of Oualid [al-Walīd].¹⁸⁸

This narrative immediately recalls the account of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad’s death discussed earlier, but instead of taking place in a prison in Ḥarrān in 750, it is in Ḥimṣ in 744–45. The narratives seem to be drawing upon the same event, but Theophanes dated it to four or five years prior and “upgraded” Ibrāhīm to al-‘Abbās. The absence of al-‘Abbās’ death from the other sources, means in all probability it does not come from the “Eastern source” used by Agapius, Michael the Syrian, and the *Chronicle of 1234* but from an underlying Christian, potentially Greek, source available to Theophanes.¹⁸⁹ As suggested by Conterno, remembering al-‘Abbās as a “magician” (γόητι) and an invoker of demons may indicate that the material on his death originated from Christian communities on the *thughūr*, for whom al-‘Abbās was an important figure due to his raiding.¹⁹⁰ Notably, Maslama is not even afforded a death notice, though he too is often described in negative terms within the *Chronographia*.¹⁹¹ The specification that it was an Ethiopian who carried out the murder is peculiar; in the Arabic sources it is reported as having been a *mawlā*. Thus the perpetrator is “othered” in both narrative circuits. It is not improbable to think that frontier or local communities would have taken an interest in the prince’s death; since Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad was not a figure

187. *Chron 1234*, 1:316, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 248.

188. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 421; Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, 583.

189. Conterno, *La “descrizione dei tempi,”* 94.

190. Conterno goes a step further than this in asserting that this may be the same source that provides Theophanes’ account of the conquest of Tyana (Conterno, *La “descrizione dei tempi,”* 94). Theophanes (or his source) seemed quite keen on describing people as magicians. For example, our iconophile author blames the adoption of Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s iconoclast policies on a Jewish magician (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 402).

191. Maslama (found as Μασαλαμας) is often described as cowardly and deceitful. E.g., AM 6222 [729–30] and AM 6223 [730–31] in Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 409; idem, *The Chronicle*, 567. The only Christian source known to me that records Maslama’s death is the *Chronicle* of Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046), though he is here drawing upon an Islamic source. See Elias of Nisibis, *La Chronographie*, trans. L. J. Delaporte (Paris: H. Champion, 1910), 103.

that was relevant to these communities, he was “upgraded” to al-‘Abbās.¹⁹² In fact, the *Chronicle of 1234*, although remembering that an Ibrāhīm was in jail in Ḥarrān, mistakes him for the caliph Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd, stating that the imprisoned Ibrāhīm was the brother of the “tyrants ‘Abbās and Yazīd.”¹⁹³ Additionally, despite not providing a detailed account of al-Walīd’s death, Theophanes identifies al-‘Abbās as a participant in the plot, creating a unanimity about his involvement across Christian sources.

Theophanes’ focus on al-‘Abbās’ death brings us to the most startling assertion in the Christian sources, namely the claim by the *Chronicle of 1234* that al-‘Abbās “is the ‘Abbās after whom are named those in Baghdad who rule in our day and are called ‘Abbāsīd caliphs, and from him they have this name and it is not, as some uneducated Arabs think and say, from the name of ‘Abbās, uncle of their prophet Muḥammad.”¹⁹⁴ This material is in all probability not from Dionysius, as it is not found in Michael the Syrian; therefore either Michael omitted it knowing it was false or it was not part of Dionysius in the first place. It might therefore be a later addition from another source that mentioned al-‘Abbās, or an interjection from the anonymous chronicler. The source does, however, show a knowledge and understanding of ‘Abbāsīd legitimizing discourse. Later, during its treatment of the reign of Nūr al-Dīn (d. 564/1174), the *Chronicle of 1234* does support the traditional etymological explanation, i.e., that the ‘Abbāsīds took their name from the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 32/653).¹⁹⁵ This speaks to Hilkens’ conclusion regarding the composite nature of the text and how it draws from a variety of sources for different sections.¹⁹⁶ The *Chronicle* also says, after the defeat of Marwān at the Zāb in 132/750, that this marked a shift from the Umayyads to “the sons of Hashim.”¹⁹⁷ The addition of “who rule in our time” does not help us understand where this notice comes from; however, an earlier notice may. Recounting that Hishām appointed Marwān as governor over Armenia in 732, the *Chronicle of 1234*, states, “This Marwān was the one who made his seat at Mayferqat [Mayyāfāriqīn], and he named it his capital. Until today the descendants of Marwān are famous there.”¹⁹⁸ As Hoyland notes, this is obviously a reference to the Kurdish Marwānīds who ruled from

192. The author does later mention Ibrāhīm in the context of the ‘Abbāsīd revolution for the year AM 6240 [747–48]. See Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 424; Theophanes, *The Chronicle*, 587. He does not mention his death or imprisonment, unlike Agapius or *Chron 1234*, lending further credence to their use of an Arabic-Islamic source. See Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 274–75.

193. *Chron 1234*, 1:324–25, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 275.

194. *Chron 1234*, 1:314, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 240. *hānā itaw(h)y ‘Abbās haw d-metknēn hānnōn dab-Baḡdād w-yawmānā sīmīn w-metqrēn kalīpē ‘Abbāsāyē. w-menneh it lhōn hānā šmā. w-law ‘ayk d-sābrīn lā yāddū‘ē d-ṭayyāyē; w-āmīn d-men ‘Abbās lam dādeh d-Muḥammad nbīyā dīlhōn it lhōn šmā hānā.*

195. *Chron 1234*, 2:162; anon., *Chronicon anonymi auctoris ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, trans. J. B. Chabot and A. Abouna, 2 vols. (Louvain: Durbecq, 1937–74), 2:122. I am grateful to Andy Hilkens for pointing out that the *Chronicle* inserts the Prophet’s uncle as accompanying ‘Umar into its narrative of the conquest of Jerusalem. This insertion probably comes from the chronicler’s use of Islamic sources. See *Chron 1234*, 1:254–55, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 116.

196. Hilkens, *Chronicle of 1234*, 325–30, especially 327.

197. *Chron 1234*, 1:330, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 278.

198. *Chron 1234*, 1:310, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 230.

380–478/990–1085, indicating that the source for this material can be dated at the earliest to the end of the tenth century.¹⁹⁹ These two attempts at genealogical and nomenclatural identification may derive from the same source, ruling out Dionysius as the origin of this material as he predates the Kurdish Marwānids. As with Theophanes' focus on al-ʿAbbās, these identifications of contemporary ruling powers with Marwānid figures demonstrate how certain figures known for their raiding, who appear as largely peripheral in the Arabic sources, were used as reliable and central references in the Christian tradition.²⁰⁰

Theophanes' "upgrading" of al-ʿAbbās in the narrative of the death of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad paired with the *Chronicle of 1234*'s assertion that it was the Marwānid al-ʿAbbās who was the forefather of the ʿAbbāsids raises questions about the ʿAbbāsīd *daʿwa* as presented in Arabic sources. It is clear that Christian communities in the west of the caliphate explained the dynastic shift through figures internal to their own traditions and concerns. Perhaps we should not simply assume that these sources are mistaken though, and instead interpret these notices as testaments to the gradual development and articulation of the narrative of the ʿAbbāsīd call to *riḍā* (satisfaction or agreement [with the leader of the Islamic *umma*]), the origins of which are still debated and which undoubtedly underwent significant reworking to establish ʿAbbāsīd legitimacy.²⁰¹ The development of the ʿAbbāsīd *daʿwa* is a complicated topic, best reserved for a study of its own. However, as demonstrated by Blankinship, the ʿAbbāsīd sources were "informed by the needs of the ʿAbbāsīds to make the interregnum as short as possible to help establish their own legitimacy."²⁰² Blankinship goes on to say that "following these conclusions we can reject [...] [Ibrāhīm's] designation of Abū al-ʿAbbās (d. 137/754) as his successor, as apocryphal." Therefore, the role of al-ʿAbbās b. al-Walīd in the Christian tradition is testament to the fact that the narrative of the ʿAbbāsīd revolution had not yet developed in the 130s/mid-eighth century.

Overall, the Christian tradition places al-ʿAbbās center stage and corroborates what we saw in the Arabic sources; Umayyad family and Syrian loyalty appears to have been towards him rather than al-Walīd. In both textual traditions, al-ʿAbbās' change of allegiances (whether purposeful or not) was a crucial turning point in the earliest part of the third *fitna*. These sources leave no doubt that al-ʿAbbās is the subject of their focus due to his activities on the *thughūr*; his raiding is regularly recorded, and Theophanes' account of his death refers to his actions against Christians. Furthermore, his *hajīn* status is specified by the Syriac sources. This may have been an attempt to delegitimize al-ʿAbbās, although this seems unlikely as it may come from Dionysius who was typically positive about the

199. Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 230, n. 655.

200. We can see the same for Muḥammad b. Marwān and Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik in the Armenian sources, where their frontier activities are re-dated or reinterpreted to fit the agenda of the sources. See Vacca, "The Fires of Naxčawan," 346–47; Greenwood, "Reassessment," 131.

201. On the development of the ʿAbbāsīd *riwāya* (recension) of the revolution, see Saleh Said Agha, *The Revolution Which Toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab Nor ʿAbbāsīd* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), especially chapters 1 and 5, 7–38, 117–44; on the call to *riḍā* see, Patricia Crone, "On the Meaning of the ʿAbbāsīd call to *Riḍā*," in *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times*, ed. C.E. Bosworth et al., 95–111 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1989).

202. Blankinship, "The Tribal Factor in the ʿAbbāsīd Revolution," 603.

‘Abbāsids, especially al-Maʿmūn, who was born to an *umm walad*, Marājil.²⁰³ We are also presented with the same sequence of events as is given in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, corroborating the framework of the al-Madāʿinī dominated narrative. The absence of a *shūra* narrative makes a convincing case that the Christian sources were not drawing upon Islamic sources for their accounts of al-‘Abbās’ imperial pretensions; rather, it most probably reflects localized memories and interpretations of events. Al-‘Abbās’ relevance within these sources is clear throughout; he was a referenceable figure that the reader would recognize.²⁰⁴

5. Conclusions

The various accounts of al-‘Abbās’ involvement in al-Walīd’s death as told in the Arabic, Armenian, Greek, and Syriac sources, raise a variety of questions related to the development of Late Antique historiography and memory. By assessing these narratives, we can see that al-‘Abbās is representative of the changes that occurred during the establishment and development of early Islamic rule. Not only is he remembered in sources largely internal to the centralizing narratives of fourth-/early-tenth-century caliphal historiography, but he is center stage in sources adjacent to these discourses. As I have argued, the focus on him is due to his long-term presence and impact on the central *thughūr* and his raiding practices, rather than the result of a legitimizing rhetoric aimed at promoting imperial or religious ambitions. It is exactly this localized influence that allowed him to impact succession and maintain a power base in the central *thughūr*. Al-‘Abbās is not the only Marwānid who was able to do this; his brothers appear to have maintained influence in their ex-governorates as well.²⁰⁵ Al-‘Abbās should then be viewed as another Maslama, the two having had relatively parallel careers, as that is how the primary sources remember him: an important military figure and a leading member of the family. While secondary scholarship has actively focused on Maslama—probably due to his role in the siege of Constantinople—al-‘Abbās has not received the same treatment, due to his presence across fewer events, which in turn informs our understanding of how these authors produced their narratives.

Neither Maslama nor al-‘Abbās became caliph. However, the lack of discussion on *hajīn* succession during the third *fitna* may, in fact, indicate this was not the barrier to the throne that recent scholarship has assumed it to be.²⁰⁶ Certainly, al-Walīd’s nomination of his own

203. On the relationship between the two figures, see Wood, *The Imam of the Christians*, 161–85; Hilken, *Chronicle of 1234*, 289; on al-Maʿmūn’s mother Marājil, see al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2:538; idem, *The Works*, 1205.

204. E.g., when recounting Marwān’s uprising against Yazīd and Ibrāhīm, Yazīd is identified as “the brother of ‘Abbās.” See *Chron 1234*, 1:316–17, translated in Theophilus, *Theophilus*, 249–50.

205. ‘Umar b. al-Walīd in Jordan and Bishr b. al-Walīd in Qinnasrīn.

206. Bashear uses a poem attributed to al-Walīd b. Yazīd against Yazīd b. al-Walīd and found in Ibn ‘Asākir to argue that being “a *hajīn* was a reason for the rejection of his claim to the throne” (Bashear, *Arabs and Others*, 39–40). However, this same poem is attributed to al-Walīd’s son al-Ḥakam in al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, in the *Fragmenta Historicorum Arabicorum* (ed. de Geoe), as well as later on in Ibn ‘Asākir. Al-Ḥakam was himself a *hajīn*, meaning we should read the verse: *a-tankuthu bay‘atī min ajli ummī // wa-qad bāya‘tumū qablī hajīnā* (“Did you break your oath to me on account of my mother?// when you have pledged allegiance to a *hajīn* before me?”) as a means of establishing his (and Marwān’s) eligibility rather than as a means to discredit

hajīn son al-Ḥakam and the eventual succession of Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān as the final Marwānid caliph should suffice to show that towards the end of the Marwānid period sons of concubines were eligible for the caliphate.²⁰⁷ Representations of Marwān as the rightful heir of al-Walīd b. Yazīd's sons indicate the generation of a layer of historical memory that aimed to maintain a narrative of continuous succession and an attempt at legitimizing the final Marwānid caliph.²⁰⁸

The comparative approach used in this study serves to draw out various layers of historical memory and, by seeing where sources agree, to understand what they identified as relevant. As already mentioned, al-Walīd b. Yazīd was the first of a new generation of Marwānids—grandsons of ʿAbd al-Malik—to come to power. Unlike his cousins, however, al-Walīd had not benefited from sustained governorship or raiding activity. Furthermore, given the extended rule of Hishām and the time al-Walīd spent as heir (more than any other *walī al-ʿahd*), the sons of other previous caliphs were in a strong position to make a claim.

Tracing the changing role of *hajīns* and understanding the nuances of succession policy within the Umayyad polity is not the sole benefit of studying al-ʿAbbās. Like Maslama, he is extremely well documented across the source material; however, unlike Maslama, no “heroization” took place, leaving us with a more conflicting but perhaps less problematic picture of him.²⁰⁹ The question of reliability of sources is the foremost one raised by an analysis of this nature. However, the narratives about al-ʿAbbās do not appear reconcilable, nor should we expect them to be. Whether al-ʿAbbās had planned to betray al-Walīd or was captured is beyond our ability to determine. Thus we cannot know the “correct” account, but by investigating we can shed light on what the authors wanted to convey. As Vacca has put it when assessing the burning of Armenian churches at Naxčawan, “these discrepancies in fact reveal the tampering of the compiler or historian. If so, the misinformation is at least as significant as the ‘correct’ account, because it provides clues to the goal of the historian.”²¹⁰

The near absence of any internal Arabic narrative for al-Walīd's death that is not transmitted on the authority of al-Madāʿinī raises the question of the agenda behind their transmission. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ's account, as demonstrated, is terser than al-Madāʿinī's but does not contradict it. Al-Yaʿqūbī provides an extremely short and muddled account for al-Walīd's reign. Al-Madāʿinī's use of al-ʿAbbās to warn of *fitan* and to foreshadow

Yazīd b. al-Walīd. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:1891; anon., *Fragmenta*, 1:156; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:249; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 15:81, 83.

207. On the documents for al-Ḥakam's nomination, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 146–64.

208. In the same poem as referenced in n. 206, attributed to al-Ḥakam b. al-Walīd while imprisoned, the short-lived heir nominated Marwān as caliph after himself: *fa-inna ahlaku anā wa-walī ʿahdī // fa-Marwānun amīru al-muʿminīnā* (“If I and my heir-apparent [*walī ʿahdī*] should die//then Marwān [should be] commander of the faithful”) (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 9:249).

209. Borrut's analysis of Maslama's “héroisation” touches upon a plethora of eulogizing narratives that are used to redeem his memory. The lack of these narratives for al-ʿAbbās who, as we have seen, fulfilled a very similar role, may indicate a less worked and perhaps earlier historical memory. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 271–84.

210. Vacca, “The Fires of Naxčawan,” 351.

coming events appears anachronistic or teleological at best, while Khalīfa does not have this undercurrent and merely points out that he dissuaded Yazīd from his political ambitions. The fact that all extant Arabic sources were produced after al-Ma’mūn’s killing of his brother al-Amīn must be borne in mind. El-Hibri has outlined the similarities between these two narratives of regicide—both narrated by al-Madā’inī—which focus on al-Walīd and al-Amīn’s inadequacies for caliphal rule and even include mirroring accounts of their deaths.²¹¹ The notion of how the source material grapples with regicide and adhere to the “orthodox” succession narrative is an important one, and further work comparing the two accounts is warranted.

The Arabic-Islamic and Christian traditions both attribute the beginning of the end of the Umayyad dynasty to al-‘Abbās’ eventual support of his brother Yazīd. Al-‘Abbās’ representation as pious in the Arabic sources runs against the Christian sources, which present him as orchestrating al-Walīd’s death. Theophanes’ “upgrading” of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad for al-‘Abbās may demonstrate that the Christian sources were attempting to contextualize the fall of the Umayyads through a figure internal to their historical tradition. However, it is highly unlikely that Theophanes’ narrative of al-‘Abbās’ death is entirely independent of that in the Arabic-Islamic sources; suffocating someone with lime is hardly common. This is not to suggest that the chroniclers used the same sources. Rather, these traditions were circulating amongst different linguistic and confessional groups, who interpreted and reappropriated them to fit their needs. It is apparent from the Christian sources that there was not a strong understanding of where the ‘Abbāsids came from, which is unsurprising given that this was still being conceived and formatted in precisely this period. Thus, they explained it through a different al-‘Abbās rather than the Prophet’s uncle, as is visible in the *Chronicle of 1234*’s preservation (or insertion) of the claim that al-‘Abbās was the forefather of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty.

Therefore, despite their similarities in chronological structure, the sources emphasize different aspects to suit their contexts of production and target audience. Within linguistic groupings we cannot and should not expect to find agreement. The shared use of al-Madā’inī by al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī, though, does indicate the use and interpretation of a single tradition, while the accounts of Khalīfa and al-Ya‘qūbī demonstrate the fact that the narrative of al-Walīd’s death did not develop uniformly. In a similar way, Michael the Syrian and the *Chronicle of 1234*’s common use of Dionysius of Tel Mahrē indicates the centrality of succession narratives for Syriac sources, which use caliphal order to structure their texts, underlining the fact that their historiographical tradition was internal to caliphal history.

211. Like al-Walīd, al-Amīn “stands out as the epitome of political incompetence and reckless behavior. A man deficient in political wisdom, most at home in extended sessions of drinking and revelry, and with a flair for unpredictable eccentricities.” El-Hibri’s analysis at times may be overstated and the literary nature of the sources over-emphasized; however, the question of how one discusses the killing of a recognized Caliph was undoubtedly one ‘Abbāsīd-era sources grappled with. See T. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 59–94, at 59.

Theophanes' focus on al-ʿAbbās but not on wider succession issues, by contrast, indicates the localized focus of the non-Roman elements of his narrative.

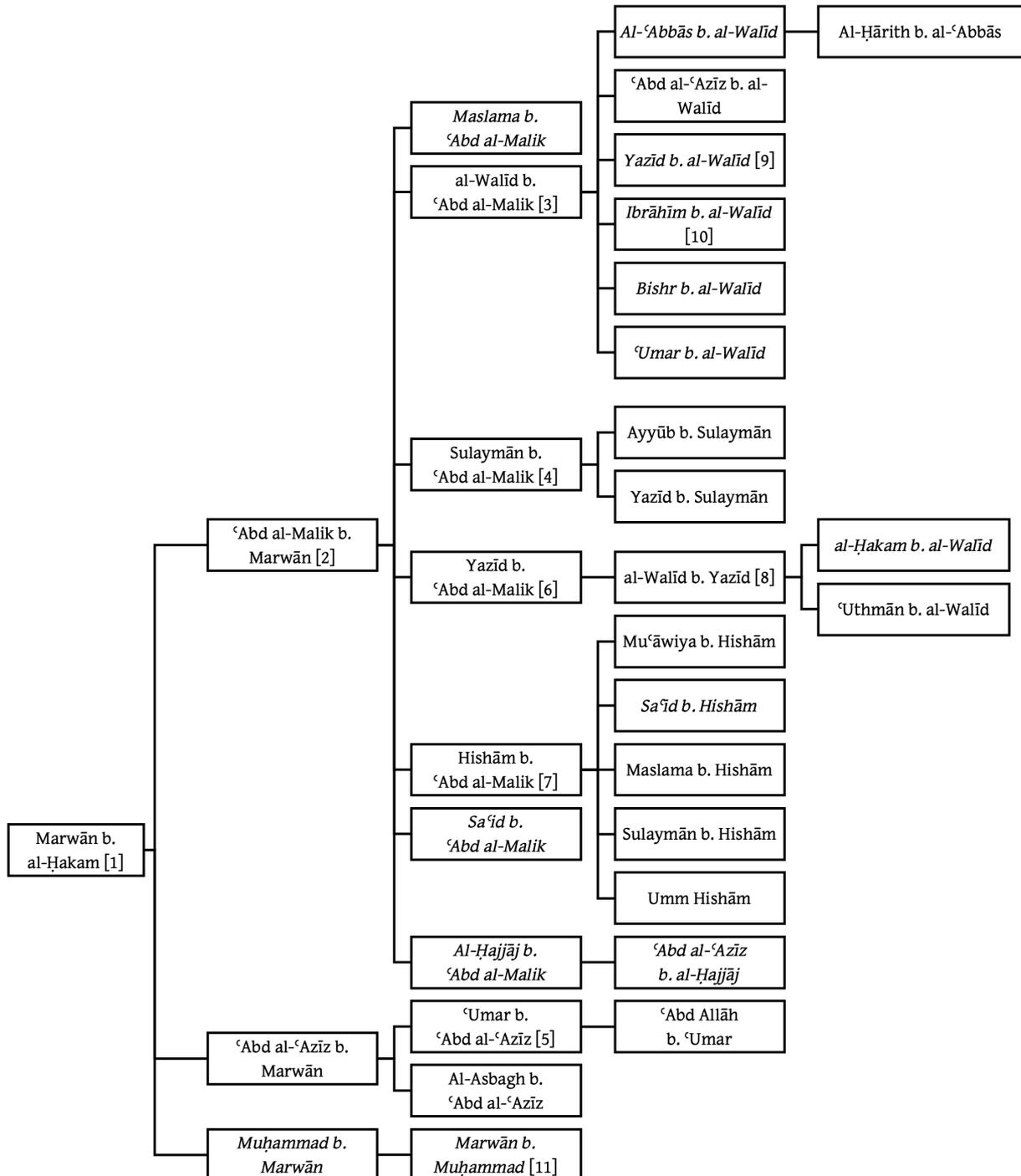
This article has demonstrated that al-ʿAbbās is a significant figure in early Islamic history and historiography despite his presence in only two events recounted in the primary sources and the minimal attention hitherto paid to him in secondary literature. However, both events, the Muhallabid revolt and the third *fitna*, are fundamental for understanding the ʿAbbāsid memory of the Marwānid period. Moments of tribulation and tension reveal the nuances and agenda of the source material. At the very least it is hoped that the present contribution will serve to incorporate al-ʿAbbās into footnotes concerned with “caliphs that could have been” like Maslama and add to the growing body of work on *hajīns* and the demographic changes of the late Marwānid period.

Appendix 1: Marwānid family tree

Legend:

[#] — indicates order in Marwānid succession

Al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd — Italicised name indicates they were born to an *umm walad*.



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