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al-'Abbās b. al-Ma'mūn

Al-'Abbās b. al-Ma'mūn (d. 223/838) was the son of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198–218/813–33) and his concubine, Sundus. It is unclear whether he was ever formally designated heir apparent, but he was positioned to make a claim on the throne when his father died in 218/833. He first appears in al-Ṭabarī, who reports al-Ma'mūn's reaction to the news of the death of the caliph al-Amīn (r. 193–8/809–13) (3:1065). In 213/828 al-Ma'mūn made al-'Abbās governor of the provinces adjoining the Byzantine Empire and gave him an enormous amount of money. In 215/830 al-Ma'mūn's court moved to the frontier, but al-'Abbās was not displaced as governor. In 218/833 al-Ma'mūn dispatched him to fortify Ṭuwāna/Tyana (beyond the Cilician Gates), which had been captured in 216/831. He ordered his son to build massive fortifications and station there a large army in preparation for a major assault on Constantinople. These steps positioned al-'Abbās to assume the throne and placed him in direct rivalry with his uncle, al-Mu'taṣim, who would become caliph (r. 218–27/833–42). Al-Ma'mūn was en route from Tarsus

to join al-'Abbās and his army when, at the halfway point (Budandūn, modern Podandos), he took ill under suspicious circumstances. Al-'Abbās left his forces where they were and went to his dying father, where he found al-Mu'taṣim at al-Ma'mūn's side. Al-'Abbās was present at his father's death, but his uncle performed the funerary prayer. According to al-Ṭabarī's account (3:1136–45), which includes al-Ma'mūn's will, al-Ma'mūn, in a moment of lucidity during his fatal illness, appointed his brother as his heir. Al-Dīnawarī implies that al-'Abbās had already been designated heir. Whatever the case, the army expressed serious discontent upon the announcement that al-'Abbās had been passed over. Al-'Abbās was forced to go before them and swear allegiance to the new caliph, thus surrendering any immediate claim to the throne. The army quieted but was not completely mollified. In his first act as caliph, al-Mu'taṣim destroyed al-'Abbās's fortified position at Ṭuwāna, dispersed the restive army, and removed al-'Abbās from the governorship. Interestingly, we have at least one dirham minted in Arminiyya in 218/833–4 with al-'Abbās's name on it (American Numismatic Society, catalogue