

## Baghdād under Būyid Rule

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### Introduction

In the first half of the ninth century, the city of Baghdād was a cosmopolitan cultural microcosm of the Islamicate World. Diverse ethnic and religious communities with different political interests resided in the city. The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate continued to enjoy its political and religious authority among the majority of Muslims, but soon the ongoing power struggle between the Turkish soldiers,<sup>1</sup> who were initially recruited to supply the army,<sup>2</sup> and the caliphal administration weakened this position. This struggle, however, was somewhat under control during the reign of Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 892-902), a period that witnessed the definitive return of the capital to Baghdād from Sāmarrā' (which had been founded by Caliph al-Mu'taṣim in 836 to house the evolving Turkish army in order to reduce the conflict that had arisen between them and the old 'Abbāsīd establishment). At this point, the city of Baghdād enjoyed prosperity and considerable building activity, especially on the eastern bank of the Tigris River.

This legacy of al-Mu'taḍid was continued by his son and successor Caliph al-Muktafi (r. 902-908), who spent generously on the reconstruction of the ruined parts of the city, improving the irrigation system, and building new palaces and mosques. By al-Muktafi's death in 908, there were more than 15 million *dīnārs* left in the treasury, an effective army under the control of the caliph and his civilian administrators, and control over major territories, such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

Thus, the death of al-Muktafi marked the peak of the so-called 'Abbāsīd revival of the late ninth and early tenth century. However, during the reign of

his successor Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932), the civilian bureaucrats became heavily involved in decision-making and civil administration. This resulted in constant tensions between those bureaucrats and the court party and army officers, which ended in the killing of al-Muqtadir in 932. Moreover, wars and conflicts had ravaged much of the land of the agricultural area (*sawād*) of Iraq, leading to the weakening of the resource base and fiscal system of the caliphate. These lands had previously generated revenue and wealth that sustained the 'Abbāsīd caliphs.<sup>3</sup>

The period after the death of al-Muqtadir was characterized by continuing anarchy with no end in sight. The military took over all the government functions. Leading military figures strove to control the caliphate and its revenues to the extent that they became in charge of appointing caliphs (unlike in previous times, when the reigning 'Abbāsīd caliph was able to choose his own successor, most often his son(s)).

This period also witnessed the rising power of the Barīdī family, which aspired to political power, collecting extensive taxes in southern Iraq, around Baṣra and in Ahwāz. Members of this family backed different groups in the army, but they soon developed an army of their own. When the need arose, they were able to raise considerable funds due to their financial expertise and to the lands that they controlled, which, unlike other areas of Iraq, had not been badly damaged by war. This enabled them to build up a strong position in the south of Iraq up until the consolidation of the Būyid regime.

The state of anarchy after al-Muqtadir's death continued due to the failure of the later 'Abbāsīd caliphs to recruit a reliable army and secure close relations with it. For example, the fact that Caliph al-Qāhir (r. 932-934) was unable to find loyal and capable officers led to the spread of further discontent among army members and officials, who continued their attempts to control the caliphate. This resulted in the fall of al-Qāhir, who was deposed and blinded while drunk, because of a conspiracy in 934 coordinated by Ibn Muqla (d. 940), who had been vizier up to the failure of Mu'nīs al-Muẓaffar's (d. 933) previous conspiracy against al-Qāhir.<sup>4</sup>

After the death of al-Qāhir, al-Muqtadir's son Muḥammad, who took the regnal name al-Rādī (r. 934-940), was appointed as caliph by the army. Caliph

1 Although these soldiers were referred to in the Arabic sources as "Turkish", in reality they consisted of diverse mostly Central Asian non-Arabic people.  
2 The period of the reign of Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842) witnessed the emergence of the Turkish army. From 814-815, al-Mu'taṣim bought slaves and trained them for military service. This became the basis of the Turkish army, which later became a key player on the political stage of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate. For more information on the rise of the Turkish army, see Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphate*, 158-171. For the caliphate of al-Mu'taṣim, see Jens Scheiner's contribution on the early 'Abbāsīds in this volume.

3 Kennedy, *Late Abbasid Pattern*, 360.

4 Mu'nīs al-Muẓaffar (The Victorious) was the military strongman in Baghdād during the reign of al-Muqtadir. His power ultimately resulted in tensions between him and the caliph, which finally led to a military coup in 932 led by Mu'nīs that ended in the final deposing of al-Muqtadir and the installation of al-Qāhir as caliph. Mu'nīs also planned a military coup against al-Qāhir, but this coup failed and resulted in the death of Mu'nīs himself in 933. See Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphate*, 189-196.