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Al-Ḥumayma and the Abbasid Family

Al-Ḥumayma's claim to historical fame came in the first half of the eighth century AD, when the Abbasid family chose to live there as they organized their successful overthrow of the Umayyad caliphate in 749-750. This article has the objective of documenting the history of the Abbasid family's presence in Al-Ḥumayma. It seeks to examine when and why they came to Al-Ḥumayma and present the activities of the three generations of Abbasid family members who lived there (see also al-Hamarnah 2002).

This article does not attempt to examine the larger framework of the Abbasid revolution (see most recently Agha 2003 and Sharon 1990, 1983; Lassner 1986; Nagel 1972, among others). Rather it attempts to document the people and events of the Abbasid revolution only in so far as the site of Al-Ḥumayma was involved. The historical information about Al-Ḥumayma utilized in this article derives from three Arabic texts in particular: the anonymous tenth-century Akhbār ad-Dawlah al-'Abbāsiyyah (1971; see Daniel 1982), al-Balādhurī's ninth-century Ansāb al-Ashrāf (part 3: 1978) and aṭ-Ṭabarī's tenth-century history (1879-1901).

The Abbasid Family Before their Arrival in Al-Ḥumayma

The Abbasids were descendants of al-'Abbās, one of the Prophet Muḥammad's uncles, and his son, 'Abd Allāh bin al-'Abbās. 'Abdullāh spent the last years of his life in aṭ-Ṭā'if, where he died in 687-688 during the civil war between the Umayyads and the rival caliph 'Abdullāh bin az-Zubayr. At the time of his death, 'Abdullāh directed his children to go to Syria and pay allegiance to the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik. Later Abbasid tradition credits 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās with a vision that the first Abbasid caliph would come from the ash-Sharā

district of southern Jordan, in which Al-Ḥumayma is located (Akhbār 1971: 131; al-Balādhurī 1978: 53-55).

However, it seems that rather than leaving for Syria as soon as he died, 'Abdullāh's descendants continued to live in aṭ-Ṭā'if, under the patronage of Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, the third historically important son of 'Alī bin Abū Ṭālib (by the Ḥanafite woman, rather than Fāṭima, the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter) and head of the 'Alī family after the death of al-Ḥusayn at Karbulā' in 680.

Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya was a close lifelong friend of 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās and they lived together in the same places for much of their lives. Both were on generally good relations with the Umayyads and did not support the rival caliph, 'Abdullāh bin az-Zubayr (aṭ-Ṭabarī II: 693; Dixon 1971: 57-58). Because of 'Abdullāh bin az-Zubayr's presence in Mecca, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya and 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās found their position there intolerable, so they moved to aṭ-Ṭā'if (al-Balādhurī 1978: 53). Although 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās died in 687-688, soon after their move, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya continued to live in aṭ-Ṭā'if until his death some time around 700-705.

In 685, Mukhtār led a rebellion in al-Kūfa against the Umayyads to avenge the death of al-Ḥusayn in 680, but he also claimed to be acting on behalf of Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, whom he proclaimed to be the divinely guided *Mahdī*. Even though the Umayyads defeated Mukhtār's rebellion in 687, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, who had not taken an active part in the events, survived, and a core of supporters continued to maintain a skeletal revolutionary organization in al-Kūfa on his behalf. Otherwise, both Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya and 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās were for the most part able to avoid taking sides during the fighting be-

tween the Umayyads and ‘Abdullāh bin az-Zubayr (Dixon 1971: 25-81; Abū Sha‘r 1983).

In the view of his supporters, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, as a son of ‘Alī bin Abū Ṭālib, possessed charismatic spiritual authority and esoteric knowledge, which he passed on to his son ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim. During his later years, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya was recognized as the head of ‘Alī’s family, but after his death around 700-705 the next generation of the family split into different branches. After Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya’s death, ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim was the senior member of the family, but only the small group of survivors of Mukhtār’s rebellion transferred their loyalty to him and maintained their dormant revolutionary structure in al-Kūfa on his behalf, while others looked to ‘Alī bin al-Ḥusayn (Zayn al-‘Ābidin) and Zayd bin Ḥasan for the leadership of the family (Sharon 1983: 122). ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim found himself more closely tied with the Abbasid family than with his ‘Alid relatives. ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim quarreled with his ‘Alid relatives in Medina, and as a result, when he came on the pilgrimage in 710, the caliph al-Walīd, had him arrested and taken to prison in Damascus (Akhbār 1971: 173-175; Sharon 1983: 121, 128-130).

The members of the Abbasid family did not have the same sort of close relations with al-Ḥasan’s and al-Ḥusayn’s branches of ‘Alī’s family that they enjoyed with Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya’s branch. So after Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya died around 700-705, the Abbasids no longer had a patron, such as he had been, and they decided to move to Syria under the leadership of ‘Alī, whom ‘Abdullāh bin al-‘Abbās seems to have selected to succeed him as the new head of the Abbasid family.

‘Alī bin ‘Abdullāh and the First Generation at Al-Ḥumayma

‘Alī and at least a few other members of the Abbasid family would have arrived in Syria by 705, if not earlier, because the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (reigned 685-705) welcomed them and offered to let them settle wherever they wished (Akhbār 1971: 131, 154). The Abbasids first arrived at Udhrū’, the settlement just east of Petra, where the arbitration between Mu‘āwiyah and ‘Alī after the Battle of Ṣiffīn had taken place in 657 and where al-Ḥasan bin ‘Alī had pledged his allegiance to Mu‘āwiyah in 661 (aṭ-Ṭabarī II: 8, 198). In the Abbasid period, Udhrū’ was the capital of the ash-Sharā district of

the *Jund* of Dimashq and was inhabited by clients of the Banī Hāshim (al-Ya‘qūbi 1892: 326).

The Abbasids did not reside in Udhrūḥ for long. Instead, after a search ‘Alī decided to buy al-Ḥumayma, a remote village to the south in the ash-Sharā district. The word the Arabic sources normally use to identify Al-Ḥumayma is *qarya* (village) (al-Balādhurī 1978: 121; Akhbār 1971: 108), where the *manzil* (residence) of the Abbasids was (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī 1866-1873: II:342-343). The sources do not use the term *ḍay‘a* (estate). Al-Ḥumayma is located in a desert region, and the land values of such bleak desert property would never have been high, even when the site was occupied and had functioning water collection facilities. The historical sources do not state who the previous owner of the site was — whether the local residents and their tribal shaykhs or perhaps an aristocratic landowner — nor what the implications of the Abbasid’s purchase were for the residents there at the time.

In the early Islamic period, Al-Ḥumayma is described as located near the pilgrimage route from Syria to Mecca, so many travelers were constantly passing through (Akhbār 1971: 142). But Al-Ḥumayma was not an historically important site at the time. It is unattested after the early sixth century until the members of the Abbasid family came to live there; it is not mentioned in the accounts of the Islamic conquest of the 630s.

When they first arrived at Al-Ḥumayma, ‘Alī and the other Abbasids seem to not have yet developed any pretensions to rule. They were on generally friendly terms with the Umayyads. Their choice of Al-Ḥumayma would have been made without any thought as to how well it would serve their descendants once they began plotting their revolution.

Once he purchased Al-Ḥumayma, ‘Alī bin ‘Abdullāh built a *qaṣr* with a garden (Akhbār 1971: 154; al-Bakrī 1945-1951: 130; Sharon 1983: 121). ‘Alī (or Muḥammad, his son [aṭ-Ṭabarī II: 1592]) is said to have had 500 olive trees and to have performed two *rak‘ahs* at each one every day. He prostrated himself so much that he eventually developed calluses on his forehead and so acquired the nickname “the possessor of the calluses” (al-Balādhurī 1978: 75; Akhbār 1971: 144-145). Any such trees would have needed constant care to survive in the desert environment of Al-Ḥumayma.

But ‘Alī at first did not live in Al-Ḥumayma permanently. Instead he lived at the Umayyad court in Damascus as an intimate of the caliph ‘Abd al-

Malik (Akhbār 1971: 146; al-Balādhurī 1978: 74; Lassner 1986: 50-52; Sharon 1983: 123). Whether other members of the family stayed in Al-Ḥumayma and managed the property or also lived in Damascus is not specifically attested. But ‘Alī lost the favor of ‘Abd al-Malik, and after ‘Abd al-Malik died in 705 his son al-Walīd, the new caliph, banished him from his presence (Akhbār 1971: 138-139; al-Balādhurī 1978: 76; Lassner 1986: 41-43).

Whether at that point ‘Alī came to live permanently in Al-Ḥumayma is complicated by the incident of the murder of Salīṭ. Salīṭ claimed to be a son of ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abbās from a slave girl, and so claimed the right of inheritance as a member of ‘Abdullāh’s family. ‘Alī rejected Salīṭ’s pretensions, but the case was brought to the attention of al-Walīd. Al-Walīd was prepared to rule in favor of Salīṭ, when he disappeared. Given the obvious motive that ‘Alī had for foul play, an investigation was launched and Salīṭ’s murdered body was found. Where the murder took place and whether ‘Alī was personally involved are variously reported in the sources (al-Balādhurī 1978: 77-79; Akhbār 1971: 149-150; Yāqūt: II:634; Lassner 1986: 44-46; Sharon 1983: 123).

According to al-Balādhurī (1978: 77-79), the incident occurred when ‘Alī was in Damascus. Even though ‘Alī denied any involvement, al-Walīd had him beaten and then banished first to Dahlak, an island in the Red Sea and a standard place of banishment, and then to al-Ḥijr in the Ḥijāz. Only later, after the death of al-Walīd in 715 did the new caliph Sulaymān bin ‘Abd al-Malik bring ‘Alī back to Damascus and allow him to settle in Al-Ḥumayma.

Al-Walīd’s banishment of ‘Alī makes it possible that the Abbasids did not settle in Al-Ḥumayma during the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, but only in connection with ‘Alī’s banishment. The family could have settled in Al-Ḥumayma in order to be closer to him in al-Ḥijr, but such an idea can remain only speculation.

In any event, ‘Alī returned to favor after al-Walīd died and once again he is attested in Damascus at the court of Sulaymān bin ‘Abd al-Malik. In one recorded incident he told of his need for 30,000 dirhams to pay off a debt (Akhbār 1971: 139-140). That shows that the Abbasids had no great sources of income; the agricultural potential of Al-Ḥumayma was slight. Thus while the Abbasids were aristocrats, they were not particularly wealthy ones. The Abbasids were on good terms with the

Umayyad caliphs Sulaymān (715-717), ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (717-720), and Hishām (724-743), but their relations with Yazṓd II (720-724) are not documented. Other members of the family are attested at Damascus on occasion and they often took part in the summer military raids against the Byzantines (Akhbār 1971: 141, 173-174; Nagel 1972: 128).

Other references, however, place ‘Alī at Al-Ḥumayma. He was noted for his hospitality, which he extended to every traveler who passed by Al-Ḥumayma on his way between Syria and the Ḥijāz, including alms if requested (al-Balādhurī 1978: 72-73, 75; Akhbār 1971: 145; Sharon 1983: 160; Lassner 1986: 47, 48). One incident presumably took place after ‘Alī’s return from his banishment when a member of the Banū Makhzūm tribe met ‘Alī, with his sons and clients, at the mosque in Al-Ḥumayma. ‘Alī rejoiced at having a guest and asked for information about the Umayyad court (Akhbār 1971: 150-151). That could suggest that guests were few and far between, and ‘Alī was no longer up to date about affairs in Damascus.

‘Alī fathered some twenty-odd children, most of whom died while he was still alive (Akhbār 1971: 147-148; al-Balādhurī 1978: 72; Khuraysat 1987: 59). Some at least were born before the Abbasid family moved to Al-Ḥumayma. A number of ‘Alī’s sons in the Umayyad period are attested at various places throughout the caliphate, indicating that the family members did not spend all their time in Al-Ḥumayma. For some of the other sons, little is known beyond their names (al-Balādhurī 1978: 71-72, 80-114).

‘Alī passed on the leadership of the family to Sulaymān, his fourth son, not Muḥammad, his eldest son, to whom he passed on his esoteric knowledge (Nagel 1972: 42). ‘Alī died in Al-Ḥumayma around 735-736 at the age of 78 or 80 (al-Balādhurī 1978: 79-80; aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1592). By the time of ‘Alī’s death, Muḥammad had already begun to organize the revolution.

Muḥammad bin ‘Alī and the Second Generation at Al-Ḥumayma

Muḥammad bin ‘Alī was the instigator of the Abbasid revolution, which got off the ground when ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim, the son of Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, at the time of his death about 716-717, transferred the charismatic spiritual authority that he had received from his father to Muḥammad

bin 'Alī.

As noted earlier, the Umayyad caliph al-Walid brought 'Abdullāh Abū Hāshim to Damascus in 710 and imprisoned him there, but 'Alī bin al-Ḥusayn bin 'Alī interceded on Abū Hāshim's behalf, and he was soon released. Abū Hāshim became a member of the Umayyad court for a time, but eventually al-Walid banished him from the court (Akhbār 1971: 173-177). He continued to reside in Damascus, and from time to time he met Muḥammad bin 'Alī, who along with his brothers and sons were not affected by the banishment of 'Alī to Dahlak and al-Ḥijr and took part in the summer military raids against the Byzantines and defended the coastal cities. Over the years Abū Hāshim and Muḥammad formed the same sort of close personal relationship that 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās and Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya had developed (Akhbār 1971: 173). Abū Hāshim, the older of the two, had no surviving male children and came to regard Muḥammad as his heir and successor to the support of the small group of survivors of Mukhtār's rebellion in al-Kūfa.

'Alī seems to have disapproved of 'Abdullāh Abū Hāshim, but none the less around the end of al-Walid's reign or during the reign of Sulaymān, Abū Hāshim decided to move to Al-Ḥumayma, and arrange for the transfer of the loyalty of his followers to Muḥammad (Akhbār 1971: 183-184). Abū Hāshim, who seems to have been over 60 years old, became ill in Al-Ḥumayma and died, perhaps in 716-717. There are a number of different versions of Abū Hāshim's death and testament to Muḥammad (Moscati 1952; Nagel 1972: 14-18, 45-63; Sharon 1983: 130-140).

Most probably, 'Abdullāh Abū Hāshim had been resident at Al-Ḥumayma for some time and died a natural death after a lingering illness, but according to an account that is too dramatic to be believable, Abū Hāshim was murdered by Umayyad agents (Sulaymān bin 'Abd al-Malik was caliph at the time). They poisoned him with some adulterated milk that he drank while on his way to Al-Ḥumayma with Muḥammad from a trip to the court in Damascus (perhaps implying that Abū Hāshim had already been living in Al-Ḥumayma). The poison was slow-acting, so he managed to stay alive just long enough to be brought to Al-Ḥumayma and transfer his charismatic authority to Muḥammad (al-Balādhurī 1978: 80; Akhbār 1971: 183-184). Accompanying Abū Hāshim and Muḥammad from Damascus on that fatal journey to Al-Ḥumayma

were a number of Abū Hāshim's Kufan supporters (Akhbār 1971: 182-183, al-Balādhurī 1978: 114).

But 'Abdullāh Abū Hāshim faced difficulties in getting his followers to accept the transfer of his authority to someone like the Abbasid Muḥammad bin 'Alī who was not a direct descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad through Fāṭimah and 'Alī bin Abū Ṭālib, and it was only the influence of Salamah bin Bujayr, the son of one of Mukhtār's main supporters, that convinced them to acknowledge the transfer to Muḥammad and pledge their support to him (Akhbār 1971: 173, 188-191; Sharon 1983: 134-135).

The elaborate Abbasid traditions about Abū Hāshim's transfer of his esoteric knowledge to Muḥammad record a legend of a yellow scroll of prophesies about the Abbasid revolution in the possession of Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya, which passed to Abū Hāshim and from him to Muḥammad, and finally from Muḥammad to his son, Ibrāhīm the *Imām*. As the story goes, when the Umayyad caliph Marwān arrested Ibrāhīm (see below), the other Abbasids buried the parchment in a chest under olive trees in the ash-Sharā region. Those olive trees were the only ones in the ash-Sharā. After the success of the revolution, the Abbasids dug up all of the olive trees in the ash-Sharā, even digging until they hit water, but they were unable to find the chest (Akhbār 1971: 184-185; Sharon 1983: 139-140, 1990: 80-82).

With the transfer of authority from Abū Hāshim to Muḥammad, the Abbasids inherited his skeletal revolutionary organization in al-Kūfa and Khurāsān. The Abbasids were to stress their rights to the caliphate on the basis of this transfer, and only once their revolution succeeded did they change and emphasize their descent from al-'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad.

After Abū Hāshim's transfer was completed, Salamah bin Bujayr informed Muḥammad about the leaders of the organization in al-Kūfa, who were not present: 14 names are listed (Akhbār 1971: 191-192; Sharon 1983: 135-137). In 718-719 Muḥammad sent some agents to al-Kūfa, while Ibrāhīm bin Salamah stayed on in Al-Ḥumayma to act as a link between Muḥammad and the revolutionaries in al-Kūfa and to identify the other leaders whom he knew personally, but whom Muḥammad had not met (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1358; Akhbār 1971: 192).

Muḥammad kept the center in al-Kūfa small

and underground, and disassociated from activity on behalf of any descendant of 'Alī bin Abū Ṭālib. Strict secrecy was maintained, and only a few were aware of the identity of their leader. They only knew that they were supporting "the chosen one from the family of the Prophet" without knowing precisely who that person was (Akhbār 1971: 194). Many must have assumed that the "chosen one from the family of the Prophet" was a descendant of 'Alī bin Abū Ṭālib and Fāṭimah, among whom there were a number of plausible candidates, such as 'Abdullāh bin al-Ḥasan and his two sons Muḥammad the Pure Soul and Ibrāhīm, both of whom were to revolt against the Abbasids in 762, and Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq.

Contact between the Kufans and Al-Ḥumayma was kept to a minimum. Muḥammad went to Mecca and Medina for one or two months each year at the time of the annual pilgrimage, and those few revolutionaries who knew the identity of their *Imām* would meet him there, not in Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 86, 119). His revolutionary supporters would report on events in Khurāsān and hand over the large sums of money they collected on his behalf (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1726-1727, 1769, 1869, 1916, 1953, 1962).

Muḥammad also inherited an embryonic revolutionary movement in Khurāsān. The organization there on behalf of Abū Hāshim was begun by Bukayr bin Māhān (al-Hamarneh 2001), who in 716-717 went on the pilgrimage to Mecca and returned to al-Kūfa. After he had spent a year or so there, the death of one of the revolutionary leaders made it necessary for the Kufans to get in contact with Muḥammad in Al-Ḥumayma, and Bukayr was chosen for the assignment. He first traveled to Damascus and passed himself off as an itinerant spice dealer. After spending some time selling spices in the villages south of Damascus, he moved on to Al-Ḥumayma, where Ibrāhīm bin Salamah recognized him and introduced him to Muḥammad. Muḥammad recognized Bukayr from the list he had, as well as by the special way in which Bukayr greeted him. Bukayr told Muḥammad that he was not completely satisfied with the arrangements to maintain secrecy in Al-Ḥumayma. Bukayr recommended that Muḥammad move to a separate residence (*manzil*) of his own where he could communicate with his revolutionary followers without the knowledge of even other members of the family. Muḥammad acted on this suggestion and took up residence in a settlement called Kudād some two

miles away (Akhbār 1971: 195-197).

The place name Kudād is unknown today, and no ruins can be identified with it in the vicinity of Al-Ḥumayma. Musil makes the improbable identification of Kudād, under the variant spellings of Kdhūr or Krār, with the modern village of Muraygha (his al-Mrejjera), some 28km to the northeast up on the plateau, where Glueck reports a large but exclusively Nabataean period site (Musil 1926: 37, 61; Glueck 1934-1935: 64). Only one other resident of al-Kudād is attested (al-Balādhurī 1978: 83): Abū Ma'n al-Kudādī, who told a story about a group of insolent Umayyads who passed through Al-Ḥumayma once and insulted Muḥammad. Rather than take offense, Muḥammad chose to be forbearing.

Muḥammad later traveled to Damascus to take part in a summer raid against the Byzantines with Bukayr as a member of his sizable entourage. Muḥammad was accompanied by some of his brothers, three clients and Ibrāhīm bin Salamah. Bukayr and Muḥammad also established an intermediary link in Damascus between al-Kūfa and Al-Ḥumayma (Akhbār 1971: 197). Muḥammad and his son Mūsā took part in a military campaign against the Byzantines, in the course of which Mūsā died (al-Balādhurī 1978: 84).

In 718-719 Muḥammad sent some agents to Khurāsān to recruit supporters (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1358; Nagel 1972: 126-129). Muḥammad established further contacts with Khurāsān, by sending Abū 'Ikrimah Ziyād bin Dirham there around 722-723 (Akhbār 1971: 203-204; Sharon 1983: 156-157). Muḥammad later sent other agents, including Bukayr bin Māhān to Khurāsān and to al-Kūfa (al-Balādhurī 1978: 116-117). Whether these individuals, and others like them, were at Al-Ḥumayma, al-Kūfa, or elsewhere when they were sent on their missions is normally not explicitly stated.

The deviant propagandistic work of Khidāsh, one of Muḥammad's agents, in Khurāsān provoked a crisis for the Abbasids, and after Khidāsh was executed in 736 the revolutionaries in Khurāsān selected Sulaymān bin Kathīr as their head to enter into contact with Muḥammad during the pilgrimage to Mecca. He and Qaḥṭaba had not previously met their *Imām*. They went to Medina and were told that the *Imām* was in Syria and then went there and finally met Muḥammad. They asked him to send someone with them to Khurāsān, and Muḥammad sent Ziyād bin Dirham (al-Balādhurī 1978: 116; Sharon 1983: 173-174). Muḥammad also sent Bu-

kayr to Khurāsān in 738 as well as one of his clients (Sharon 1983: 158). However, satisfactory arrangements with the revolutionaries in Khurāsān were not fully worked out until after Muḥammad died in August 743 and his son Ibrāhīm succeeded him.

Some members of the Umayyad government also supported Muḥammad in secret. Khālid bin ‘Abdullāh al-Qaṣrī, Hishām’s governor of Iraq, gave financial support to Muḥammad and once sent 3000 dinars (al-Balādhurī 1978: 81-82; Nagel 1972: 126-129). On one of Muḥammad’s trips to the caliph Hishām, Hishām told him that the governor of the Al-Ḥumayma district had informed him that over the years the previous governors had illegally given the Abbasids 100,000 dinars worth of tax money. Hishām demanded the money back and imprisoned Muḥammad until ‘Īsā bin Ibrāhīm Abū Mūsā, the head of the Kufan revolutionaries, and Abū Muslim, his apprentice, were able to raise the money. Muḥammad then returned to Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 84-85). Muḥammad and his brothers came a second time to Hishām when he was in ar-Ruṣāfa. Hishām refused to give them some money with which to pay debts, so they returned to Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 86-87). Such incidents demonstrate again that the Abbasids were not particularly wealthy.

Muḥammad’s first wife was Rayṭah bint ‘Ubaydallāh, a noble woman from the Banū al-Ḥārith tribe, and former wife of ‘Abdullāh the son of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. He married her when ‘Umar bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was the caliph (717-720), after Abū Hāshim’s transfer of his authority. Muḥammad left Al-Ḥumayma for one year to spend the summer elsewhere and he married her in Qinasrīn, in northern Syria (Akhbār 1971: 201, 234; al-Balādhurī 1978: 82).

Muḥammad had a number of children (al-Balādhurī 1978: 114-290), who presumably were born and raised in Al-Ḥumayma. They included Ibrāhīm the Imām, born in 701-702, ‘Abdullāh Abū al-‘Abbās as-saffāh, who became the first Abbasid caliph — a group of people from Khurāsān came to Muḥammad shortly after the birth of Abū al-‘Abbās in Al-Ḥumayma around the early 720s (al-Balādhurī 1978: 81-82; aṭ-Ṭabarī III:88) — and ‘Abdullāh Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr, who became the second Abbasid caliph, born around 709-713 — Abū Ja‘far told of a vision about the Ka‘bah in Mecca he had while in Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 198). Muḥammad’s children are often at-

tested in places other than Al-Ḥumayma, again indicating that the members of the Abbasid family spent only a portion of their time in Al-Ḥumayma.

One story told of Muḥammad parallels the story about ‘Alī mentioned earlier. Muḥammad had 500 trees in Al-Ḥumayma and every day he would pray two *rak‘ah(s)* below each one. Muḥammad died around 742-743 around the age of 70, shortly before the death of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid (al-Balādhurī 1978: 80, 97). Muḥammad appointed his son Ibrāhīm as the next Imām.

Ibrāhīm and the Third Generation at Al-Ḥumayma

Between the death of Khidāsh and the death of Muḥammad, Zayd bin ‘Alī bin al-Ḥusayn revolted in 740 (Nagel 1972: 132-135). Supporters of the Abbasids avoided any involvement in Zayd’s revolt, which the Umayyads quickly crushed. They executed him, and three years later in 743 they murdered his son Yaḥyā, whose mother was a daughter of ‘Abdullāh Abū Hāshim. ‘Abdullāh bin Mu‘āwiyah’s revolt also collapsed in 746-747 (Sharon 1983: 127-142; Nagel 1972: 147-150). Several members of the Abbasid family joined ‘Abdullāh: ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Alī, ‘Īsā bin ‘Alī, and Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr bin Muḥammad (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1977).

Muḥammad had earlier sent Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr to al-Baṣrā to visit the religious scholars there and to propagandize (al-Balādhurī 1978: 114). He served ‘Abdullāh bin Mu‘āwiyah for a time as the governor of Idhaj in Khuzistān. On his way from Idhaj to al-Baṣrā Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr was captured by the Umayyads, but after his escape from prison he returned to Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 183). The failure of the revolts of Zayd bin ‘Alī and ‘Abdullāh bin Mu‘āwiyah eliminated potential rivals of the Abbasids and created a vacuum in ‘Alī’s family, and Ibrāhīm, the new Abbasid Imām, had new opportunities to channel the frustrated hopes of supporters of ‘Alī’s family to his own advantage.

When Muḥammad died, Bukayr bin Māhān spent several days in Al-Ḥumayma with Ibrāhīm and then went to al-Kūfa and the east (Akhbār 1971: 240). When the leaders were in al-Kūfa they learned of the death of Hishām, the Umayyad caliph, in 743.

Ibrāhīm continued Muḥammad’s policy of going on the pilgrimage to Mecca each year and meeting his supporters there, rather than in Al-Ḥumayma.

The pilgrimages of 743 and 744 were particularly important (Akhbār 1971: 241, 255-256; Lassner 1986: 75-97; Sharon 1983: 210-211). The meeting between Ibrāhīm and some agents in 743 was provoked by the death of Muḥammad shortly before, as well as the execution of Yaḥyā bin Zayd in 743. After the pilgrimage of 743 Bukayr bin Māhān and Abū Salama returned with Ibrāhīm to Al-Ḥumayma, and early in 743-744 they returned to al-Kūfa, where Bukayr met the young Abū Muslim, who soon became a major figure in the revolution. Abū Muslim was in the employ of Abū Mūsā, a saddlemaker with a prosperous trade that allowed the two of them to travel extensively without attracting attention.

In 744 Ibrāhīm sent Bukayr bin Māhān to Khurāsān, and the revolutionaries sent large sums of money and gifts to Ibrāhīm via him. Before Bukayr bin Māhān died in 744-745 he wrote to Ibrāhīm that he had selected Abū Salamah Ḥafā bin Sulaymān to be his successor in al-Kūfa. Ibrāhīm wrote to Abū Salamah confirming him in his new position and to the people in Khurāsān informing them of his appointment. Abū Salamah then went to Khurāsān (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1869; al-Balādhurī 1978: 118-119). The revolutionaries there gave Abū Salamah the contributions that they had collected and a fifth of their wealth to pass on to Ibrāhīm (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1917; Sharon 1983: 182).

In 745, three Abbasid agents went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and there they met Ibrāhīm and presented Abū Muslim to him. They also brought 20,000 dinars and 200,000 dirhams, along with much musk, garments, and other items (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1916; al-Balādhurī 1978: 118-119; Akhbār 1971: 241). Little of that money, or other donations, need have found its way to Al-Ḥumayma, even temporarily.

Ibrāhīm soon realized the need to establish a direct link with Khurāsān and so he sent his client Abū Muslim there in 745-746, while Abū Salamah remained the head in al-Kūfa. The Khurāsānī revolutionaries did not accept Abū Muslim initially. The people who did not accept him went to Mecca and met Ibrāhīm, who instructed them to obey Abū Muslim (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1937, 1960).

In 746-747, after Abū Salama had written to Ibrāhīm to send someone for Khurāsān, and Ibrāhīm had sent Abū Muslim, Ibrāhīm wrote to Abū Muslim to come and report to him. Abū Muslim set out on the journey in the company of some

seventy Abbasid agents on the pretense of performing the pilgrimage. Abū Muslim had only traveled part way when a letter from Ibrāhīm arrived, telling him to return to Khurāsān and openly proclaim the revolt, and to send on Qaḥtabah bin Shabīb in his place with the money and other things that they were bringing to give to Ibrāhīm. Abū Muslim had collected 360,000 dirhams and used part of it to buy silks, and melted the rest down into small ingots of gold and silver that they hid in the linings of their cloaks; the group loaded up 21 pack mules with their goods. Qaḥtabah returned to Khurāsān in 747-748 (aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1949-1953, 1962-1964, 2000).

A messenger from Abū Muslim to Ibrāhīm, who was on his way back to Abū Muslim with Ibrāhīm's reply, fell into the hands of the Umayyad caliph Marwān. Marwān wrote to al-Walīd bin Mu'āwiyah bin 'Abd al-Malik, the governor of Damascus, ordering him to write to the administrator of the al-Balqā' district to go to the *biyār* (cisterns rather than wells, of which there are none at the site) at Al-Ḥumayma (aṭ-Ṭabarī), or Kudād and Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī) and seize Ibrāhīm, bind him, and send him with a mounted escort to Marwān. The administrator caught Ibrāhīm and sent him to al-Walīd, who brought him to Marwān, who imprisoned him in Ḥarrān in 747 (Akhbār 1971: 392, 399-400; aṭ-Ṭabarī II:1974-1975, III:25-27; al-Balādhurī 1978: 121; Blankinship 1988). The departure of Ibrāhīm caused anxiety among the Abbasids living in Al-Ḥumayma, because the revolutionary apparatus was linked solely to him.

According to 'Uthmān bin 'Urwah bin Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin 'Ammār bin Yāsir, a supporter of the Abbasids who was with Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr and his two sons at Al-Ḥumayma when Ibrāhīm was arrested, the Umayyad agents seized the door of the mosque at the time of the dawn prayer. They arrested Ibrāhīm after he was identified to them, but when they brought him to Marwān, he realized that Ibrāhīm was not the person he wanted to have arrested. Marwān sent his agents back to Al-Ḥumayma to look for Abū al-'Abbās, but the Abbasids had already left for 'Iraq (aṭ-Ṭabarī III:25). The reference to the mosque implies a substantial structure. The Abbasids held their meetings and conversations and ate most of their meals in this mosque (Akhbār 1971: 195).

According to another version, a single Umayyad messenger came to Al-Ḥumayma and mistakenly

arrested Ibrāhīm, rather than Abū al-‘Abbās. A number of the leading Abbasids, including Ibrāhīm’s brother Abū al-‘Abbās, ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Alī, ‘Īsā bin ‘Alī, and ‘Īsā bin Mūsā, and their clients set out with Ibrāhīm, who had a concubine with him. The Abbasids made plans to kill the Umayyad when they reached the fork in the road leading either to northern ‘Iraq/Syria (al-Jazīrah) or southern ‘Iraq and then to go to ‘Iraq, but Ibrāhīm dissuaded them from it (Akhbār 1971: 399-401; al-Balādhurī 1978: 121; aṭ-Ṭabarī III:26). Such a version hardly describes the journey of a prisoner under arrest and supports the idea that Ibrāhīm left Al-Ḥumayma voluntarily. Ibrāhīm’s companions reached Damascus with him, but they then returned to Al-Ḥumayma, while Ibrāhīm continued on to Ḥarrān (Akhbār 1971: 400-401). Just what fork in the road to either Syria or southern ‘Iraq is meant is not apparent; there is no obvious candidate north of Al-Ḥumayma on the way to Damascus. One possibility could be Dawmat al-Jandal, south of Al-Ḥumayma in the northern Arabian peninsula, in which case the incident would be a garbled version of the Abbasids’ later move from Al-Ḥumayma to al-Kūfa (see below).

Ibrāhīm died in prison in Ḥarrān in August-September 749, perhaps from the plague, if not deliberately murdered (aṭ-Ṭabarī III:42-44; al-Balādhurī 1978: 121-122). He was around 48 years old. Ibrāhīm was noted for his generosity. He married Zaynab bint Sulaymān, and their children were presumably born and raised in Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 124-125, 127-128).

Abū al-‘Abbas and the Move to al-Kūfa

Following Ibrāhīm’s arrest and death, Abū al-‘Abbās was chosen as the new Imām (Sharon 1990: 234-242). Abū Ja‘far was not chosen to succeed Ibrāhīm, even though he was older than Abū al-‘Abbās, who was in his early 30s.

According to other versions of Ibrāhīm’s arrest, he advised his family to go to al-Kūfa with his brother Abū al-‘Abbās. Sābiq, one of Ibrāhīm’s clients who had stayed with him in Ḥarrān until his death, returned to Al-Ḥumayma with Ibrāhīm’s instructions. Al-Kūfa had just fallen into the hands of the advancing Abbasid army in August 749, and no member of the Abbasid family was living there. A dozen people, including several of his prominent uncles, were living in Al-Ḥumayma at the time and left for al-Kūfa. They and their families and clients

arrived in al-Kūfa in mid-September to mid-October 749 (aṭ-Ṭabarī III:27; Akhbār 409-410).

According to another version, the group of Abbasids traveled to al-Kūfa via Dawmat al-Jandal, where they met Dā‘ūd bin ‘Alī, an uncle of Abū al-‘Abbās, and his son Mūsā, who had been on their own way to Al-Ḥumayma. In this version, ‘Īsā bin Mūsā said that fourteen men left their homes and their families to stake their claim to rule, but only five individuals are listed (aṭ-Ṭabarī III:33-34). According to further report Abū al-‘Abbās came to al-Kūfa first, and his family came later (al-Balādhurī 1978: 128,178).

Some of those relatives, in particular ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Alī and ‘Īsā bin Mūsā, were seemingly better leaders than Abū al-‘Abbās and Abū Ja‘far. But because they were not children of Muḥammad bin ‘Alī, as was Abū al-‘Abbās, they could not lay claim to Abū Hāshim’s transferred charismatic authority and esoteric knowledge.

After their arrival in al-Kūfa, the Abbasids stayed in hiding for forty days before Abū al-‘Abbās was publicly proclaimed caliph. Those attested there include some additional family members to those recorded as having come from Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 143, 178).

Abū al-‘Abbās married Umm Salma in Filasṭīn (Palestine) and some of their children would have been born and raised in Al-Ḥumayma (al-Balādhurī 1978: 161, 179-180). Abū Ja‘far married Umm Mūsā bint Maṣṣūr (al-Balādhurī 1978: 275). His son and future caliph al-Mahdī might have been born in Al-Ḥumayma, if not in Idhaj in Iran, when Abū Ja‘far was there at the time of ‘Abdullāh bin Mu‘āwiyah around 743-745 (aṭ-Ṭabarī III:527).

The Archaeological Excavations at Al-Ḥumayma

The historical sources provide information about the people who lived in Al-Ḥumayma, but they say little about the site itself. The excavations directed by John Oleson since the 1980s (see the periodic preliminary reports in *ADAJ*) have revealed significant changes to the site in the early eighth century, characterized by much new building construction. This is clearest in the excavation areas B100 and F102, where clusters of houses were built above the Byzantine churches there, as well as in F103, where the Abbasid family *qaṣr* was located. While the F103 *qaṣr* can be linked with the Abbasids, whether the other building activity was connected

in some way with the arrival of the Abbasids or was independent of their presence remains a question for speculation. The move to Al-Ḥumayma by the Abbasids would have meant a jump in the size of the site's population and provided enhanced economic opportunities for earlier inhabitants and might have attracted others to move to the settlement.

It is the F103 structure, excavated by Rebecca Foote, which is of most interest, because of its identification as the Abbasid family residence. A few remarks are appropriate here. The F103 building is located at the southeast edge of the site. It is rectangular (61 x 50m) with rooms centered around a courtyard. It is large enough to accommodate the members of the extended Abbasid family — the sons of 'Abdullāh bin al-'Abbās, their wives and children — along with their servants and attendants. One passage in the Akhbār *ad-Dawla* al-'Abbāsiyyah (1971: 195-196) describes such a building. When Bukayr bin Māhān first visited Muḥammad bin 'Alī he entered a wide-open space or courtyard (*raḥbah*). In the open space was located the residence (*manzil*) of Muḥammad bin 'Alī and around the open space were placed the residences (*manāzil*) of his brothers, his son, and their clients. In the open space there was also a mosque where the Abbasids had their meetings, discussions and most of their meals, and a residence (*bayt*) for guests.

A small roughly square mosque is located just to the southeast of the *qaṣr* and can be dated to the Umayyad period. It is one of the smallest known mosques in Bilād ash-Shām in the early Islamic period and could hardly fit more than a few dozen worshippers, or roughly the adult male Abbasids and their clients. Its location to the southeast of the *qaṣr* is at the furthest point from the rest of the village settlement and so not convenient to anyone other than the Abbasid family members. No other mosque has been identified at Al-Ḥumayma. Perhaps few other Muslims were at Al-Ḥumayma when the Abbasid family lived there.

The locals today claim that the cemetery of the Abbasids is located in an open area several hundred meters north of the *qaṣr*, south of the Roman fort. But there are no obvious traces of graves there, and the area has not been investigated.

Given the Islamic credentials of the Abbasids an important issue to examine is the status of the Christians at Al-Ḥumayma when the Abbasids were there (Schick 1995). In B100 and F102, the Umayyad

houses built over the Byzantine period churches so completely destroyed the churches below that it is not possible to be sure whether they were still in use up to the time that the houses were built, or had already been abandoned by the early to mid-eighth century. In B100, pottery from below an upper late-phase church pavement, however, suggests that the church was renovated in the late seventh century, while the F102 church was constructed in the later part of the seventh century, based on the pottery found in a probe below the church pavement. The C101 lower church was certainly no longer in use as late as the eighth century. The church building remained structurally intact, although its church furnishings — altar, pulpit, marble chancel screen panels, and lamps — were dismantled and extensively robbed out, and the building was reused for some limited domestic occupation in the Umayyad period. A tight stratified corpus of pottery from the mid-seventh century found in one room adjoining the church provides the date for the abandonment of the church ('Amr and Schick 2001). Thus none of the churches can have remained in use while the Abbasids were there. There is no evidence to indicate that the churches were converted into mosques; that was definitely not the case in the built-over B100 and F103 churches. None of the literary references to the Abbasids hint at the continued presence of Christians, or for that matter to anyone other than the Abbasid family being at Al-Ḥumayma.

Al-Ḥumayma After the Abbasid Revolution

The site continued to be occupied after the Abbasids left. Although it is difficult to reach firm conclusions about the extent and nature of the Abbasid period occupation, in comparison with the early Roman-Byzantine and Umayyad periods, it does appear, nonetheless, that although the Abbasid period occupation may have been reduced from the earlier periods, it was still substantial and consisted of more than handfuls of seasonal nomads. Al-Ya'qūbī (1892: 114; Le Strange 1890: 455-456) and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1867:2:342-343) among other geographers, record Al-Ḥumayma in their list of place names but such attestations reflect more the former importance of the Abbasid family's presence there, rather than the contemporary significance of the site.

It is noteworthy that after the success of their revolution, the Abbasids forgot about the site. They

certainly did not invest any funds to aggrandize the site with monumental architecture; they built no shrine over the grave of Abū Hāshim, for example. Statements by later authors, such as al-Harawī (died 611/1215), about Al-Ḥumayma as “a village (*qaryah*) in which is the grave of Muḥammad bin ‘Alī bin ‘Abdullāh bin al-‘Abbās, the father of the Imām al-Manṣūr, may God be pleased with them” (1953: 17, 1957: 44) need not imply an active shrine at Muḥammad’s grave site. The architectural remains reflect a level of investment that the residents could have managed with their own limited resources. The F103 palatial structure continued to be occupied, although remodeled. There are some traces at Al-Ḥumayma of continual occupation up to the present, but the site eventually dwindled into insignificance. Al-Ḥumayma played no role during the Crusades.

Conclusions

Without the literary sources, one would never suspect that momentous events ever took place at Al-Ḥumayma. One could conclude from the F103 structure only that there was at least one wealthy aristocratic Muslim family living there in the Umayyad period, but not that they were the ones who overthrew the Umayyad Caliphate. After all, the political activities of secretive conspirators like the Abbasids do not manifest themselves in mundane aspects of material culture recoverable by excavation. The archaeological excavations have helped to show that the Abbasids had access to some money to build their *qaṣr*, but not on the scale of the Umayyad rulers, who clearly spent much greater funds for such building projects as Khirbat al-Mafjar. The standard of their *qaṣr* was on a par with that of the anonymous residents of, for example, the *qaṣr* at Umm al-Walīd. As a whole, Al-Ḥumayma was never more than a small settlement, whose inhabitants were able to gain a modest living from its desert environment and its location on a major travel route. The site was inhabited before the arrival of the Abbasids, and survived their departure; the Abbasid family members were extraordinarily large fish in a very small pond, but they were not the only fish in that pond. Al-Ḥumayma had little to offer the secretive Abbasid revolutionaries other than the virtue of its modest nature and isolated but accessible location.

But the Abbasids clearly did not spend all of their time in such an out-of-the-way place. Most of their

revolutionary activity was carried out elsewhere especially during the pilgrimage to Mecca, and the various members of the family frequently traveled to Damascus and elsewhere in the caliphate. Had the Abbasids chosen to live somewhere else, they would still have overthrown the Umayyads.

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