



حبر أبيض
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Dr. Ali Al-Bassam

Barmakid Dynasty and Authoritarianism in Abbasid Era

Historians talked about the personality of Khaled Al-Barmaki, the first founder of the Barmakids, and his life with some ambiguity and lack of clarity about his Islamic upbringing. Some of them believed that he grew up on the Magian religion of his ancestors and that he began his political activity with the emergence of the Abbasid call and its launch against the Umayyad state. Then with the passage of time and the establishment of the Abbasid state he became favored and had his prestige with the Abbasids, as Caliph Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah entrusted him with the distribution of spoils and the legacies of the Umayyads, and then the management of land tax affairs, their registration and revenues, in addition to the supervision of managing the financial affairs of the nascent Abbasid army. In addition, he had a major role in curtailing the authority of Abu Muslim al-Khorasani, commander of the Abbasid Revolutionary Army, when Khalid succeeded in separating several soldiers from their leader without him realizing it. This encouraged the Barmakids to advance more prominently in the Abbasid ladder of power.

Whoever looks closely at the hidden aspects of the history of the Barmakids would clearly realize how this originally-Persian family took advantage of its social ties with the house of the Abbasid caliph to infiltrate and reach major positions in the Abbasid state, increasing its influence and control over its joints. One of the historians mentioned them, saying: "In The state of Al-Rashid, there is another state of Barmakid kings". This matter is not surprising for those who succeeded in establishing a network of political, social, cultural and economic relations by soliciting persons loyal to the Barmakids, or, at least, neutralizing some in its favor. Meanwhile, they indirectly fought their opponents from the Arabs. Whoever goes deeper into the history of the Barmakids will find that this matter was ramified and rooted in the lineage of this family, one generation after another, and could not be realized at first sight.

There are some historical evidences that would help building an opinion about the phenomenon of the authoritarian Barmakids; such as its exploitation of poets by giving them financial gifts to an unpredictable degree. It seems that it was one of the methods adopted by the Barmakids in gaining reputation and authority in the Abbasid administration and society at the same time. Perhaps the complaint of one of the prominent poets, Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa, from the court poets of the caliph Harun al-Rashid, to one of his acquaintances, that the Barmakids gave their poet, Aban ibn Lahiq, for one poem, what equals all what Caliph gave him during the entire period he spent in praising him!! This is an indication of the growth of the Barmakids influence during the reign of Harun al-Rashid and its impact on the situation in the Abbasid court. Even though Khalid al-Barmaki laid the foundation for Barmakids' domination, yet his son, Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki, emerged after him and had the supreme word in state affairs. He has the Ministry and all bureaus, in addition to serious privileges. He was the first minister authorized to independently write to the governors, where such correspondences were strictly issued by the Caliph himself. Yahya, the Barmakid, gathered all political, administrative and economic powers in his hand. About that, historian Al-Masoudi said: "None of Khalid ibn Barmak's sons was in his generosity, quality, opinion, strength, knowledge and all his traits, except for Yahya in his wisdom and mind".

Hence, the star of Yahya Al-Barmaki began to raise and shine during the period of his father's assumption of positions during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph. Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, as well as during the short reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Hadi. Yahya al-Barmaki replaced his father as the leader of the Barmakids, which emerged even greater during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, to the extent of distributing all major and critical positions the Abbasid state to Barmakid persons. It was not spontaneous and we are almost certain that this distribution aimed at besieging Al-Rashid himself and surrounding him from every side so that he would not move except through the directives of the Barmakids. Historical sources indicate that most of the prominent men in the state of Al-Rashid found it very difficult to spot men who were not related to the Barmakids to take charge of some of Abbasid state's affairs, as the hidden network created by the Barmakids was very wide-spread, deep-rooted and branched in the depth of the Abbasid administration.

There is no doubt that this important aspect was followed by the Barmakids domination of the state's funds and treasury, where their annual revenue amounted to twenty thousand dirhams. What fell under their hands of money was more than what fell under the hands of the caliph himself. They gave gifts abundantly and in extravagant manner. They were truly a state within the state, or a "Deep State", according to the modern political term. Anyway, such family phenomenon is unfortunately repeated in our Islamic history.