

## ABŪ JA 'FAR AL-MANṢŪR AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ABŪ MUSLIM AL-KHURASANI

Oleh:

Norhayati Haji Hamzah \*

Jamaluddin Aziz \*\*

### Abstrak

*Pemerintahan al-Manṣūr, khalifah kedua kerajaan 'Abbasiyyah (A.H.136-158/A.D.753-774) menyaksikan pergelutan di antara khalifah dan Abū Muslim al-Khurasani, tokoh terpenting dalam dakwah 'Abbasiyyah dan gabenor Khurasan yang telah memainkan peranan utama dalam pembentukan kerajaan 'Abbasiyyah. Pergelutan ini yang berakhir dengan peristiwa pembunuhan Abū Muslim merupakan peristiwa penting di dalam sejarah Islam umumnya dan kerajaan 'Abbasiyyah secara khusus. Artikel ini akan membincangkan secara terperinci latar belakang dan faktor yang membawa kepada perselisihan di antara kedua-dua tokoh tersebut berdasarkan sumber-sumber primer oleh al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī, Al-Ya'qūbī dan lain-lain. Ia turut menghuraikan faktor kejayaan Abū Ja'far dalam mengatasi kekuasaan Abū Muslim.*

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\* Norhayati Haji Hamzah, M.Litt. is a lecturer at the Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

\*\* Jamaluddin Aziz, Ph.D, is a lecturer at the Department of English Language, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang.

## Introduction

The first 'Abbasid caliph, Abū'l 'Abbas al-Saffaḥ died on the 13 Dhu'l - Ḥijja 136 H/ A.D. 754, that is, after a short reign of about four years (A.H. 132 -136/ A.D.749-754).<sup>1</sup> He appointed his brother, Abū Ja'far 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Manṣūr as his apparent heir, and 'Isā b. Mūṣā, his nephew, was next in line for the succession. Al-Saffaḥ purposely nominated 'Isā b. Mūṣā as al-Manṣūr's succession as a precaution, in case al-Manṣūr was to be assassinated or died before he could control the caliphate.<sup>2</sup> This fear arises due to the fact that there was a strain relationship between al-Manṣūr and Abū Muslim, the person who had been given the responsibility both to mobilize the Khurasani armies against the Umayyad Caliphate, and also for the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate since the beginning of 'Abbasid Caliphate.<sup>3</sup> Al-Saffaḥ's fear was also grounded on the fact that al-Manṣūr then was leading a pilgrimage to Mecca together with Abū Muslim. Al-Saffaḥ's also sees 'Isā b. Mūṣā as a competent and powerful man who could take over the power if anything happened to al-Manṣūr. The faith in 'Isā b. Mūṣā was paid of as the oath of allegiance was taken on behalf of al-Manṣūr by 'Isā b. Mūṣā on the day al-Saffaḥ died and in the early A.H. 137/ A.D. 754. The oath, which makes al-Manṣūr the second caliph, was officially taken to Abū

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr (1964), *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, I, ed. M.J. Geoje et. al., Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 339; Al-Ya'qūbi, Aḥmad b. Ya'qub (1955-1956), *Tarīkh*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, pp. 32 & 434; Al-Azdī, Abū Zakarīya (1967), *Tarīkh al-Mawsil*, ed. A. Habibah, Cairo, p. 245; Al-Mas'ūdī, 'Alī b. al-Husayn (1938), *al-Tanbīh Wa'l Ishrāf*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Isma'il al-Sāwī, Qahirah: Dār al-Sāwī, p. 292; Ibn al-Tiḡtaqā, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Tabātabā (1966), *al-Adāb al-Sultāniyya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyyah*, Beirut: Dār Sādir, p. 168; Sir William Muir, KCSI (1984), *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, London: Darf Publishers Ltd, p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1981), *The Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History*, London: Croom Helm, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> M.A. Shaban (1971), *Islamic History: A New Interpretation I A.D. 600-750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 222-224.

Ja'far al-Manṣūr when he was in al-Anbar. The continuous conflict and struggle between Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr and Abū Muslim reached its climate during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr which ironically led to the assassination of Abū Muslim in A.H. 137/ A.D. 754.

### **The 'Abbasid Movement And The Role Of Abū Muslim In Khurasan**

The significant role played by Abū Muslim al-Khurasani in the history of the 'Abbasid is undeniable either by the early sources such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī and al-Ya'qūbī or the modern historians like Omar Farouk, Kennedy and Nicol, although he was originally only a slave. There is a discrepancy in the record of his slave background; while according to al-Balādhurī, he was a slave of Banū Ma'qil at Iṣfahān, al-Kufī on the other hand claims that he was a slave of 'Isā b. Ma'qil of Banū 'Ijl in Khurasan.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Abū Muslim was eventually sold to Ibrāhīm who was the 'Abbasid Imām in the year A.H. 125/ A.D. 745. Then, he was chosen as the coordinator of the 'Abbasid movement in Khurasan. His selection lies heavily on the fact that he did not have any relationship with Arab groups in Khurasan and that he could encourage the non-Arab Muslims to support the 'Abbasid.<sup>5</sup>

'Abbasid movement began its propaganda against the Umayyad Caliphate in A.H. 100/A.D.718, that is the time when the 'Abbasids, based on Humayma in Southern Jordan, appointed twelve *naqībs* to represent their interests in Khurasan (situated on the north-eastern province of Iran).<sup>6</sup> Apart from that, 70 propagandists had been appointed

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā (1971), *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, Jerusalem: Magnum Press, p. 119; Al-Kūfī, Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān (1975), *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, Hyderabad: Dā irah al-Ma ārif al-'Uthmāni, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1981), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1986), *The Prophet And The Age Of The Caliphates: The Islamic*

by the 'Abbasids in different places especially in Khurasan where they worked in secret cells. Khurasan was chosen by the 'Abbasid because the Muslims there, especially the *mawālī* (non-Arab Muslim), were unhappy under the rule of the Umayyads, Some Muslims saw Umayyads as an unfit ruler since they did not belong to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Their unhappiness was exacerbated when al-Husayn, the prophet's grandson, was assassinated at Karbala during the Umayyad's reins. In addition to that, the Umayyad caliphs' secular leadership and social injustice that was spreading rampantly throughout the caliphate had further created the feeling of discontentment and hatred among the Muslims in Khurasan. Likewise, being denied their rights as Muslims, *Mawālī* was against the Umayyads. The discontentment was intensified,<sup>7</sup> especially at this time, a large number of non-Muslims converted to Islam and became *Mawālī*, under the patronship the 'Arabs. According to Islam, only the non-Muslims had to pay *jizyah* (poll-tax levied on non-Muslims). But during the Umayyads, the *mawālī* had to pay the same taxes as non-Muslims since taxes collected from non-Muslim were the sources of revenue for the Umayyads. All of these problems resulted in the Muslims' searching for another caliph from the house of the Prophet that would install justice and implement the Islamic law according to the genuine teaching of Islam, and the 'Abbasids had definitely benefited from this trouble. The 'Abbasids was then given the trust to lead the 'umma especially by the Muslims in Khurasan who had given a continuous support to the 'Abbasids since the beginning of the movement.

Given the importance of Khurasan as mentioned above, Abū Muslim was sent to Khurasan in A.H.125/ A.D. 745 and began to

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*Near East From The Sixth To The Eleventh Century*, London and New York: Longman, pp. 126-127; Moshe Sharon (1983), *Black Banner From The East: The Establishment Of The 'Abbasid State-Incubation Of A Revolt*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, pp. 155-159.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1986), *The Prophet and The Age Of The Caliphates*, p. 126.

prepare for a revolution against the Umayyad Caliphate. The vital role played by Abū Muslim was in recruiting and mobilizing the Khurasanis for the 'Abbasid cause.<sup>8</sup> He succeeded in convincing the Khurasanis and later, the 'Abbasid movement became bigger than that of Kūfā.<sup>9</sup> The success of Abū Muslim in establishing himself as the head of the 'Abbasid movement in Khurasan marked the importance of Abū Muslim in the history of 'Abbasid movement. Revolution against the Umayyads started with civil wars and rebellions during the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan b. Muḥammad, which led to a breakdown of the government's authority in Khurasan. Consequently, the governor, Naṣr b. Sayyār became weak and various groups tried to take advantage of this. Abū Muslim took advantage by declaring a revolt and later took over a place called Marw in Khurasan in A.H. 130/ A.D. 748.<sup>10</sup> The revolt continued for about 2 years (A.H. 130-132/ A.D. 748-749) and in A.H. 132, the Khurasani armies moved towards Kūfā and declared Abū'l 'Abbas b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī as the first 'Abbasid caliph in the great mosque of Kūfā on the order of Abū Muslim.<sup>11</sup> The proclamation of Abū'l 'Abbas witnessed the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in Kūfā and a few months later, Marwan was officially defeated and the Umayyad Caliphate came to an end. The victory achieved by the 'Abbasid was in fact the effort of the Khurasani

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<sup>8</sup> W. Barthold (1968), *Turkestan Down To The Mongol Invasion*, London: Messrs. Luzac And Company LTD, pp. 193-194.

<sup>9</sup> Kūfā was the centre of the 'Abbasid movement at the beginning of the movement but later transferred to Khurasan due to the feeling of discontentment of the Arabs and *Mawālī* against the Umayyads. In addition, Khurasan was far from the centre of Umayyad power and the caliph did not give great attention to it. This gave a huge opportunity to the 'Abbasid to spread their propaganda and attract the Khurasanis in supporting them.

<sup>10</sup> R. Fyre (1947), "The Role of Abū Muslim in the 'Abbasid Revolution' in *Muslim World*, vol. 37, pp.28-38.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, p. 220; Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, pp. 30-32; Al-Azdī, *Tarīkh al-Mawil*, 240; Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, pp. 115-120; Al-Ya'qūbī (1892), *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. Georje, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 250.

and Abū Muslim particularly. The above explanations proved the vital role played by Abū Muslim in the 'Abbasid movement and revolution and that through his efforts the 'Abbasid Caliphate was established.

### **The Danger Of Abū Muslim And The Struggle Between Abū Ja'far Al-Manṣūr And Abū Muslim Al-Khurasani**

After the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in Kūfā, Abū Muslim remained in Khurasan and administered Khurasan and the East on behalf of the caliph, Abū'l 'Abbas al-Saffaḥ. He was very powerful in khurasan and succeeded to increase his power in the East with the support of the Khurasani army. Indeed, Abū Muslim became more influential there than the caliph himself.<sup>12</sup> Abū Ja'far realized the power of Abū Muslim in the East and his threat towards the 'Abbasid Caliphate and that he advised the caliph, al-Saffaḥ to murder Abū Muslim. But this course of action was rejected by al-Saffaḥ because of the contribution made by Abū Muslim to the 'Abbasid cause.<sup>13</sup> The above event manifests the apparently hostile relationships between Abū Ja'far and Abū Muslim since the caliphate of Abū'l 'Abbas al-Saffaḥ. This is witnessed through the event after the proclamation of al-Saffaḥ as caliph in A.H. 132/ A.D. 749. Al-Saffaḥ sent Abū Ja'far to impose the bay'ah from Abū Muslim in Khurasan but Abū Ja'far

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<sup>12</sup> The prove of this statement can be seen during the event of the pilgrimage in the year 136 H where Abū Muslim preceeded Abū Ja'far after the pilgrimage. Abū Ja'far was angry with the attitude of Abū Muslim but he was advised by Yazid b. Usayd al-Sulami not to join Abū Muslim on the road because the people are Abū Muslim's troops and they are more obedient to Abū Muslim than to Abū Ja'far. In addition, they are more afraid of him rather than Abū Ja'far. This shows the power of Abū Muslim among the khurasanis. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-Tiḡtaqā, Muḥammad b. 'Ali b. Tabā tabā (1966), *al-Adāb al-Sultāniya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyah*, p. 168; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, p.85; Sir William Muir, KCSI (1984), *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, pp. 440-441.

was treated with disrespect and he therefore complained and asked al-Saffaḥ to kill Abū Muslim.<sup>14</sup> Al-Saffaḥ realized the power of Abū Muslim but he thought of the contribution made by the the latter for the caliphate and disagreed with the idea of killing him.

Another event that marks the beginning of the crisis between Abū Ja'far and Abū Muslim is regarding the pilgrimage in the year A.H. 136/A.D. 754. Al-Ṭabarī reports that "According to Aḥmad b. Zuhayr, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, Salāmah b. Muhārib, Muslim b. al-Mughīrah and others:

*"In the year A.H. 136 / A.D. 754, Abū Muslim wrote to Abū'l 'Abbas al-Saffaḥ asking his permission to perform the pilgrimage, but infact, he wanted to pray with the people (that is to lead the pilgrimage). Abū'l 'Abbas gave him his permission and he then wrote to Abū Ja'far, who was the governor of al- Jazira, Armenia and Adharbayjan: Abū Muslim has written to me seeking permission to go on the Hajj, and I have given him my consent, but I think that when he arrives, he will ask me to appoint him the leader of the pilgrimage. Write to me asking my permission to go on the hajj because if you are in Mecca, he will know it is impossible for him to take precedence over you. So, Abū Ja'far wrote to Abū'l 'Abbas seeking his permission to perform the pilgrimage and he granted him permission. Abū Ja'far came to al-Anbar and Abū Muslim said: Could not Abū Ja'far find a different year to perform the pilgrimage rather than this one?" He held it as a grudge against him."<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp.85; Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, pp. 220 & 421.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 85-86.

The above event is mentioned both by al-Ṭabarī and al-Ya'qūbī and there are similarities among them. Both al-Ya'qūbī and al-Ṭabarī agree that Abū Muslim had written to Abū'l 'Abbas seeking his permission to perform pilgrimage in the year 136 H. Besides that, both texts mention that Abū Ja'far and Abū Muslim went on hajj in the same year and Abū Ja'far was appointed as the heir by Abū'l 'Abbas during his sickness.<sup>16</sup> Although both texts agree that Abū Muslim had asked permission to come to al-Anbār in the year 136 H, al-Ṭabarī gives more detail account of this event. Al-Ya'qūbī simply mentions about the coming of Abū Muslim to al-Anbar, but Ṭabarī narrates that Abū'l 'Abbas asked Abū Muslim to come with 500 men. Concerned about his safety, Abū Muslim brought 800 men instead and left a number of them between Nishapur and al-Rayy.<sup>17</sup> There are two significant conclusions that can be drawn from the above quotation by al-Ṭabarī. The first is that al-Ṭabarī gives hint regarding the danger of Abū Muslim. Abū Muslim had written letters to Abū'l 'Abbas asking permission to come to Iraq and to go on hajj. By asking permission to go on the hajj, Abū'l 'Abbas had no reason to reject Abū Muslim's coming to Iraq. Indeed, Abū Muslim succeeded to use hajj as the reason to come to Iraq from Khurasan. However, the exact reason for Abū Muslim's coming to Iraq remains unknown. According to Kennedy, Abū Muslim would like to see for himself the matters at the caliph's court and perhaps also to renew contact with those Khurasani military leaders who had remained in Iraq after the revolution.<sup>18</sup> Another sign of danger is that Abū Muslim wanted to come with a big number of army (800 men) although the caliph only advised to bring 500 men. This obedience shows that he was becoming as powerful as the caliph.

The second conclusion drawn from the above quotation is that it shows Abū Muslim's attitude towards Abū Ja'far and the beginning of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87 & 233; Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1981), *The Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 60.



enmity and struggle between them. There was a 'cold' relationship between Abū Muslim and Abū Ja'far from the beginning of the caliphate and al-Ṭabarī shows how this coldness gradually reaches its climate with the assassination of Abū Muslim.<sup>19</sup> The above passage shows that Abū Muslim's dislike for Abū Ja'far had turned into leadership rivalry, for example, upon hearing that Abū Ja'far was going to the pilgrimage on the same year he was angry at the prospect of not being the leader of the pilgrimage.<sup>20</sup>

When the people set off from the pilgrimage, Abū Muslim set off before Abū Ja'far and preceded him.<sup>21</sup> On receiving news of the death of al-Saffaḥ, Abū Ja'far returned immediately to Kūfā and was declared the next 'Abbasid caliph. He later proceeded to the place at al-Anbār and assumed the name of al-Manṣūr (the victorious). Meanwhile, when a letter bearing the news of the death of Abū'l 'Abbas and the appointment of Abū Ja'far as his successor reached Abū Muslim, he wrote to Abū Ja'far expressing his condolences, but purposely did not congratulate him on his appointment as the new caliph. Al-Ṭabarī gives details of the content of Abū Muslim's letter to Abū Ja'far, expressing his condolence on the death of Abū'l 'Abbas and how he had apparently delayed giving the oath of allegiance to Abū Ja'far. This shows that not only Abū Muslim did not respect Abu Ja'far as the new caliph but also continue ruling by his way without the permission of Abū Ja'far. He neither waited so that Abū Ja'far could catch up with him nor did he return. Abū Ja'far became angry and asked Abū Ayyub, the Vizier, to write a harsh letter to Abū Muslim. When the letter reached Abū Muslim, then only he wrote to Abū Ja'far congratulating him on the caliphate. Abū Muslim then went to al-Anbār and called on 'Isā b. Mūṣā to let him give his oath of allegiance to him,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-Tiḡtaqā, *Al-Fakhrī fī al-Adāb al-Sultāniya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyah*, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *op.cit.*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

but 'Isā refused.<sup>22</sup> This event shows not only the hostile relation between Abū Muslim and Abū Ja'far especially by Abū Muslim's purposely delaying the bay'ah to Abū Ja'far since he was in favour of 'Isā b. Mūṣā. After the death of al-Saffāḥ, the enmity between both of them became obvious and Abū Ja'far later had no choice but to kill Abū Muslim to maintain his position and power.

As mentioned above, according to al-Ṭabarī, Abū Muslim preceded Abū Ja'far after the pilgrimage while Abū Ja'far went to Kūfā. Al-Ṭabarī also claimed that immediately after the proclamation of al-Manṣūr as the caliph, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī, his uncle, declared his opposition against him. 'Abd Allāh believed that he was the right person to be the caliph by quoting the saying of the late caliph (al-Saffāḥ) that "*whoever fight the Byzantine, he will be my heir-apparent.*" And since 'Abd Allāh and his armies (the Khurasanis and the Syrians) had volunteered to be involved in a summer raid against the Byzantine,<sup>23</sup> he claimed the throne was rightly his. The armies confirmed the truth of his statement and they supported him. Al-Manṣūr then ordered Abū Muslim to fight 'Abd Allāh and upon Abū Muslim's advance, 'Abd Allāh marched to a place called Nasibin. But on his way, he became suspicious of the Khurasanis in his army (he was afraid that the Khurasanis would support Abū Muslim) and it was reported (by al-Ṭabarī) that he then killed around 17,000 of them. In 137 H/A.D. 754, a battle broke at Nasibin and 'Abd Allāh was defeated due to the division that took place among his armies. Immediately after the defeat of 'Abd Allāh, Abū Ja'far sent a courier named Abū Khasib to count the booty.<sup>24</sup> Abū Muslim was angry with Abū Khasib and thought of killing him.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> F. Omar (1960), *The Abbasid Caliphate: 132/750-170/786*, Baghdad: National Print and Pub. Co., p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn al-Tiḡtaqā, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Tabā tabā (1966), *al-Adāb al-Sultānīya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyah*, p. 168; Al-Ṭabarī (1964), *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp.102-103.

When Abū Khasib returned to Abū Ja'far, he told him what had happened. It was reported by al-Balādhurī that Abū Ja'far was afraid that Abū Muslim would return to Khurasan and that he wrote to him saying that, "I appoint you to Syria and Egypt, both of them are better than Khurasan and that you will be near to the caliph [...]". The letter was sent by Yaqtin and upon receiving the letter, Abū Muslim angrily remarked: "He makes me governor of Syria and Egypt but Khurasan belongs to me."<sup>25</sup> Abū Muslim could not accept the offer, which would only mean that he would be under the observation of the caliph in Iraq. Indeed, this also means that he would be isolated from his supporters in Khurasan.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, he was determined to go to Khurasan which he regarded as his territory. By doing that, Abū Muslim disregarded Abū Ja'far's order, and this directly implies Abū Muslim's disobedience to the caliph. Abū Ja'far would not allow Abū Muslim to rule Khurasan and make it an independent government since it would weaken his authority as a caliph. Consequently, Abū Ja'far went to al-Madāin and wrote to Abū Muslim who stopped by in Hulwān on his way to Khurasan, asking him to return to the caliph.<sup>27</sup> An angry correspondence was exchanged between Abū Ja'far and Abū Muslim, and the latter began to march to Khurasan.<sup>28</sup> This for Abū Ja'far means that Abū Muslim is a threat to his caliphate.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Abū Ja'far tried his best to make Abū Muslim return to him. In the beginning, he responded to the letter written by Abū Muslim who mentioned about the Sassanid government and how the

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<sup>25</sup> The Cambridge history of Iran (1975), *The Period From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. R.N. Frye, London: Cambridge University Press, p. 64; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, p.103; Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1981), *The Abbasid Caliphate*, p.61.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, pp. 203-104.

<sup>28</sup> Sir William Muir, KCSI (1984), *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, pp. 444-445.

<sup>29</sup> F. Omar (1960), *The Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 109.

ministers became afraid if the masses were quiet.<sup>30</sup> Abū Ja'far tried to persuade Abū Muslim to return, comparing him with the Sassanid ministers who he said deceived their king due to the crimes they had done. According to him, Abū Muslim was in his obedience to the caliph, therefore, he should not make himself equal to them. The next step done by Abū Ja'far was to send Jarir b. Yazid b. 'Abd Allāh al-Bajali to Abū Muslim. Later on, Abū Ja'far ordered 'Isā b. Mūṣa and other 'Abbasids to write to Abū Muslim, thanking him for what he had done for the caliphate and asking him to remain obedient to the caliph as well as persuaded him to return and apologize to the caliph. As a result, Abū Ja'far sent Abū Humayd to 'gently' persuade Abū Muslim to return to the caliph. However, if he fails to make him return and could not expect anything good from him, Abū Ja'far asked him to say the following:

*"I do not belong to al-'Abbas and I am free from Muḥammad, if you go on away in opposition and do not come to me, and if I make someone else responsible for your affair (hunting and killing you), and if I do not undertake myself to pursue and kill you. And if you wade in too and if you jump in the fire, I will jump in too until I kill you or I die before that."<sup>31</sup>*

Abū Ja'far was firm in his decision to pursue or kill Abū Muslim if he did not return to him. Abū Ja'far was extremely committed to this task, willing to renounce his genealogy (roots) and religion if he failed to do what he was ordered to do. This signifies Abū Ja'far's desperation

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<sup>30</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn al-Tiqaqā, Muḥammad b. 'Ali b. Tabā tabā (1966), *al-Adāb al-Sultānīya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyah*, p. 170; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 106-107; Al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad b. Yahyā (1971), *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, pp. 202-203.

to have Abū Muslim back. Realizing Abū Ja'far's conviction, Abū Muslim returned to Abū Ja'far. Another interpretation of the above statement is that Abū Ja'far had found a good reason to get rid of Abū Muslim since the caliphate of al-Saffāḥ. The enmity between Abū Ja'far and Abū Muslim became obvious after the death of al-Saffāḥ and the former used Abū Muslim's reluctance to return as the reason to kill him.

### **The Death Of Abū Muslim And The End Of The Struggle Between Abū Ja'far And Abū Muslim**

As mentioned before, Abū Humayd was ordered by Abū Ja'far to meet Abū Muslim. Consequently, Abū Humayd went to Abū Muslim and made every effort to persuade him to return and to apologize to the caliph, only to be replied with hostility by the latter. Al-Ṭabarī reported that Abū Muslim said to him (Abū Humayd), "*Go back to your master (Abū Ja'far). I have decided not to come to him.*"<sup>32</sup> Abū Humayd kept persuading him, but to no avail. When Abū Muslim had convinced Abū Humayd that there was no hope of him returning, he uttered the above statement as ordered by Abū Ja'far. Upon hearing the statement, Abū Muslim was silent for a long time, frightened by Abū Ja'far's strong conviction.

The above event made Abū Muslim unsure of his action, that is, whether to proceed to Khurasan or to obey the caliph's order. Abū Ja'far by then became suspicious of Abū Muslim and wrote to Abū Dāud who was Abū Muslim's deputy in Khurasan. Abū Ja'far told Abū Dāud that "*the governorship over Khurasan is yours for the rest of your life.*"<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

This offer shows Abū Ja'far's effort to gain the support of Abū Dāud in getting rid of Abū Muslim. Consequently, Abū Dāud later wrote to Abū Muslim saying that: "*we did not revolt to disobey God's caliphs and the family of the Prophet ( Peace Be Upon Him). Do not oppose your Imam (leader), and do not return without his permission.*" Abū Dāud's letter shows that his loyalty had now transferred to Abū Ja'far. Abū Dāud's letter was the last straw on a camel's back for Abū Muslim; his fear and anxiety exacerbated and he had no choice but to return to the caliph. Abū Dāud's support in effect means that Abū Ja'far had won over Abū Muslim.

Abū Muslim began to have doubt about going to Khurasan. He subsequently send Abū Ishāq, one of his trusted men, to the caliph with the purpose of learning caliph's opinion about him. Abū Ishāq arrival at al-Madāin was treated cordially by the 'Abbasids. He was then asked by the caliph to advise Abū Muslim to obey the caliph and in return, Abū Ishāq was promised the governorship of Khurasan, the same offer that was made to Abū Dāud earlier. When Abū Ishāq returned to Abū Muslim, he mentioned the 'Abbasids cordial treatment and said that, "*I could not find anything wrong. I saw that they attach great importance to your rights, they think what is due to themselves is also due to you.*"<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Abū Ishāq advised him to return to the caliph and apologize for what he had done.

Abū Muslim was relieved by Abū Ishāq's report and decided to meet Abū Ja'far in al-Madain, and decision that was disagreed by Nizak, one of his close companions who had before advised him to go to al-Rayy and settle in Khurasan. Nizak believed that Khurasan was still under the power of Abū Muslim and the Khurasanis were loyal to him. Abū Muslim was determined to obey the caliph, much to Nizak's chagrin: "*Since you have decided to do so, may God give you the right choice. Remember one thing I am going to tell you, when*

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10; W. Barthold (1968), *Turkestan Down To The Mongol Invasion*, p.196.

you go in to see him, kill him and then give the bay'ah to anyone you like, the troops (the Khurasanis) will not oppose you." Nizak had the hunch that Abū Muslim would be in danger. Nizak's concern reflects the loyalty of the Khurasanis towards Abū Muslim.

Abū Muslim then wrote to Abū Ja'far, informing him of his decision. Based on the advice of his counsels, Abū Dāud and Abū Ishāq, Abū Muslim decided to return to the caliph and was confident that the caliph will pardon him. The unfortunate man then departed from Hulwān and arrived at al-Madāin on 23 Sha'ban 137 H (10 February 755).<sup>35</sup> The caliph waited for him and doped him by Abū Ayyub into believing that the caliph's had pardoned him. Abū Muslim was advised to rest and that the caliph will meet him the following day. The meeting on the following day was used by Abū Ja'far to get rid of his enemy. Abū Muslim was bombarded with false and trivial accusations such as the reason why he had slighted him on the pilgrimage, his disobedience to return to the caliph and the murder of Ibn Kathīr, who was among the early and faithful supporters of the 'Abbasid and others. Abū Muslim pleaded for forgiveness and mercy, desperately reminding the caliph of his loyalty and contribution to the caliphate. Abū Ja'far took advantage of the situation that he had been waiting for since the caliphate of al-Saffaḥ, ordered 'Uthmān b. Nahik, the Khurasani captain of the guard, to murder Abū Muslim.<sup>36</sup> This took place in the year A.H. 137 / A.D. 754/5 and that was the end of an important man who had played a vital role in the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate and who had been loyal to the 'Abbasid until the end of his life.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Kennedy (1981), *The Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, pp. 111-116; Ibn al-Tiqtāqā, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Tabā tabā (1966), *al-Adāb al-Sultāniya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiya*, pp. 168-170; Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, pp. 205-207; Al-Ya'qūbī (1892), *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. Georje, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 250; Sir William Muir, KCSI (1984), *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, pp. 444-445.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, 'Alī b. al-Husayn (1938), *Al-Tanbīh Wa'l-Ishrāf*, p.295; Al-Mas'ūdī,

## **Reasons For Abū Ja'far's Success In The Struggle With Abū Muslim**

There are reasons for the success of Abū Ja'far in the struggle with Abū Muslim. The first relates to the leadership of Abū Ja'far in manipulating critical situations. Abū Ja'far knew that he should have done something to Abū Muslim and he stuck to his earliest decision to kill him. Abū Ja'far's determination and threat to Abū Muslim eventually had an effect on Abū Muslim. Abū Muslim became worried and frightened because he knew that Abū Ja'far really meant what he said. Abū Muslim's fear of Abū Ja'far left him in doubt of his actions. He desperately sent Abū Ishāq to the caliph to investigate what the caliph really thought about him. Abū Ja'far's false promises eventually managed to fool Abū Muslim, resulted in his execution.

The second reason is that Abū Ja'far's ability to gather support, for instance from Abū Dāud, Abū Muslim's deputy in khurasan. In return, Abū Dāud was promised the governorship of Khurasan for the rest of his life. Abū Dāud, who was Abū Muslim's trusted companions betrayed him by advising him to obey the caliph ("Do not oppose the caliph" – the same sentiment expressed by Abū Humayd) and to return only with the caliph's permission. Consequently, he was brimming with anxiety and decided to send Abū Ishāq to the caliph. Abū Muslim could no longer get the support of Abū Dāud and the most importantly, Abu Dāud was now a threat to him since he was offered the governorship of Khurasan while Abū Muslim was still alive. Probably, Abū Dāud would not allow Abū Muslim to enter Khurasan without the approval of the caliph.

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<sup>4</sup>Alī b. al-Husayn (1967), *Al-Tanbīh Wa'l Ishrāf*, ed. M.J. Georje et. al., Leiden: E.J. Brill, p.321; The Cambridge History of Iran (1975), *The Period From the Arab Invasion To the Saljuqs*, p.64.



Another reason for Abū Ja'far's success is that his title and power were sanctioned by God. In other words, Abū Ja'far was the legitimate caliph and he belonged to the family of the prophet and this implies that nobody should oppose him. This can be seen through the letter of Abū Dāūd to Abū Muslim stated, "*We did not oppose God's caliphs and the family of His Prophet.*" The word 'God caliph' in this context refers to Abu Ja'far and he was regarded by the 'Abbasids and the Khurasanis as the legitimate caliph. Since his power was sanctioned by God, they should follow his decision. When Abū Muslim received the letter, he became worried and felt guilty of disobeying the caliph.

Last but not least, the hospitality shown to Abū Ishāq is another tactic used by Abū Ja'far in persuading Abū Muslim to return to him. Abū Ja'far was trying to say that there was nothing wrong between him and Abū Muslim and he just wished Abū Muslim to return and be the governor of Syria so that he could be near him. It is also mentioned that Abū Ja'far offered Abū Ishāq the governorship of Khurasan if he could persuade Abū Muslim to return. This really showed that Abū Ja'far was desperate to get rid of his political rival. Fooled by Abū Ja'far, Abū Ishāq told Abū Muslim of the caliph's hospitality and his willingness to accept Abū Muslim, a report that was taken in good faith by Abū Muslim, resulted in his execution.

### **Conclusion**

Abū Muslim was undeniably an important man in the history of the 'Abbasid caliphate in general and in the province of Khurasan in particular. His leadership was proven a success when he managed to establish power in Khurasan with the support of the Khurasanis. So powerful he became that the caliph, Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr, felt threatened by it, creating the inevitable tension and rivalry. Abū Ja'far's rivalry and hatred towards Abū Muslim started since the 'Abbasid caliphate, and this power struggle exacerbate his hostility even further.

His murderous intention was objected by al-Saffah, considering Abū Muslim's contribution to the caliphate. The power struggle between Abū Muslim and the caliph continues, and the latter was desperate to have the first killed. Abū Ja'far was able to maintain his position as the Amir al-Mu'minin of the 'Abbasid caliphate, but through the murder of his arch-enemy.