

THE UPBRINGING OF THE ABBASID CALIPHS' SONS

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Abstract:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. May peace and blessings be upon the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, our master Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Upbringing and education merit close examination due to their decisive role in shaping society and influencing collective behavior. This importance becomes even more pronounced when these processes are tied to the supreme authority of governance and the caliphate—the central concern of this study, entitled *The Upbringing of the Abbasid Caliphs' Sons*.

Keywords: The Upbringing, the Abbasid Caliphs' Sons.

Introduction:

From inception, the Abbasid Caliphate displayed a distinctive moral and intellectual orientation, and the Abbasid era in general witnessed a remarkable flourishing of scientific and scholarly pursuits. This cultural environment inevitably shaped the caliphs themselves, influencing how they raised and educated their children. From the earliest stages of childhood, Abbasid caliphs took personal responsibility for their offspring's moral, religious, and intellectual formation.

This study explores the efforts of the Abbasid caliphs in raising their sons, the Abbasid princes who did not themselves ascend to the throne. Such efforts were not confined to a single phase of the Abbasid Caliphate but represented a continuous responsibility borne by the caliphs. They endeavored to provide their sons with a well-rounded religious, ethical, and intellectual education, frequently entrusting this task to the most distinguished scholars, teachers, and mentors of their age.

Our study encountered certain challenges stemming from the limited attention given in historical texts and narratives to the upbringing and education of Abbasid princes, particularly those who were not closely connected to the caliphate. Moreover, little emphasis was given to the private lives of Abbasid princes in their various dimensions. Instead, historical accounts primarily focused on those who attained power, assumed the caliphate, or were in proximity to authority. It is noteworthy that this subject received greater attention during the early Abbasid period than in the later stages of the caliphate—a disparity likely attributable to various factors, foremost among them the shifting political circumstances the Abbasid state confronted.

The most significant sources I relied upon in this study are *The History of Prophets and Kings* by al-Ṭabarī (Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, d. 310 AH/922 CE). This work is considered one of the most valuable references, as it contains important accounts that highlight the upbringing of Abbasid princes.

I also drew upon *The Poems of the Caliphs' Sons* by al-Šūlī (Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā, d. 335 AH/947 CE), as it contains clear indications regarding the literary and intellectual upbringing of the Abbasid caliphs' sons, particularly the princes.

Another key source is *al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Umam wa-al-Mulūk* by Ibn al-Jawzī (Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad, d. 597 AH/1200 CE). This work offers valuable accounts spanning the entire Abbasid period, encompassing diverse social, political, and economic narratives directly relevant to the present study.

I also relied on *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* by Ibn al-Athīr (Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Abī al-Karam Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid, d. 630 AH/1232 CE). This source furnishes valuable accounts on the upbringing of Abbasid princes and highlights the caliphs’ role in directing their sons’ ethical and intellectual formation.

I also consulted *Mukhtaṣar al-Tārīkh min Awwal al-Zamān ilā Muntahā Dawlat Banī al-‘Abbās* by Ibn al-Kāzarūnī (‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, d. 697 AH/1297 CE). This work contains clear references to the Abbasid princes and the qualities for which they were distinguished, particularly in the later periods of the Abbasid Caliphate.

The Upbringing of the Abbasid Caliphs’ Sons

Islamic law obliges fathers to undertake the responsibility of raising, caring for their children and to provide them with a sound education that ensures the preparation of a cultured and knowledgeable generation. This is affirmed in the Holy Qur’an, where the Almighty says: (Are they better’ or those who worship ‘their Lord’ devoutly in the hours of the night, prostrating and standing, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of their Lord? Say, ‘O Prophet,’ “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” None will be mindful ‘of this’ except people of reason)¹, and Almighty says: (Believers, make room in your sitting places when it is asked of you, and Allah will make room for you. When you are asked to move, so move, and Allah will raise up in ranks those who believed among you and those who have been given knowledge. Allah is Aware of what you do)².

The Qur’anic verses emphasize the importance of upbringing and intellectual education in Islam. This constitutes one of the rights that children are entitled to from their parents, as affirmed by the teachings of Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) likewise urged and obligated parents to provide proper care for their children. The foremost duty of a guardian toward those in his care is to ensure their proper upbringing and education, particularly in matters of religion—most importantly the Qur’an, which provides the principles and moral foundations essential for shaping, nurturing, and guiding individual conduct. This is illustrated in the saying of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him): “*The best among you are those who learn the Qur’an and teach it*.”³ The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) encouraged the pursuit of all forms of knowledge and affirmed the distinguished status of scholars within society. He (peace be upon him) said concerning the virtue of knowledge and scholars: “*Whoever follows a path in pursuit of knowledge, God Almighty will thereby ease for him a path to Paradise. Indeed, the angels lower their wings in approval for the seeker of knowledge. And verily, all those in the heavens and the earth—even the fish in the depths of the sea—seek forgiveness for the scholar. The superiority of the scholar*

¹ Qur’an, Sūrah Az-Zumar, verse 9.

² Qur’an, Sūrah al-Mujādalah, verse 11.

³ Abū Dāwūd, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash’ath ibn Ishāq ibn Bashīr al-Azdī al-Sijistānī (d. 275 AH/888 CE), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, edited by Shu’ayb al-‘Arnā’ūt and Muḥammad Kāmil Qaraballī (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah, 1430 AH/2009 CE), vol. 2, p. 583.

*over the devout worshiper is like the superiority of the full moon over the rest of the stars. Truly, the scholars are the heirs of the prophets, and the prophets did not bequeath gold or silver; rather, they bequeathed knowledge. Thus, whoever acquires it has indeed gained an abundant share."*¹

Regarding the Abbasid era, it is evident that the responsibilities of governance and the demands of the caliphate neither preoccupied the Abbasid caliphs nor caused them to neglect their private duties and responsibilities toward their children. Instead, their upbringing was carried out with great care and diligence, as the finest scholars of the Abbasid age were chosen to instruct and discipline them, ensuring they acquired the refinement befitting their status as sons of the ruling elite and heirs to the caliphate. Moreover, this education prepared them for the assumption of future duties and responsibilities in various aspects of public life. This study, however, will focus specifically on the role of the caliphs in the upbringing of their sons, the princes.

Beginning with the first caliph, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh (132–136 AH / 749–754 CE), who was renowned for his eloquence of speech and his mastery of expression in the language of discourse². He was also known for his interest in knowledge, being described as one of the most prominent men of learning in his time³. Historical sources indicate that Caliph al-Saffāh showed particular concern for the upbringing of his son Muḥammad, entrusting his education and instruction to Ḥammād ‘Ajrad⁴. It was likely Ḥammād’s abilities that encouraged the caliph to select him as tutor for his son⁵. The relationship between Prince Muḥammad and ‘Ajrad appears to have evolved into a close friendship, particularly after Muḥammad, the Abbasid prince and son of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh, reached maturity and was appointed governor of Basra during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr (136–158 AH / 754–775 CE). During this period, he maintained strong ties with Ḥammād and entrusted him with his personal affairs.⁶

¹ Ibn Abī Shaybah, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shaybah ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Khwāstī al-‘Absī (d. 232 AH/849 CE), *Musnad Ibn Abī Shaybah*, edited by ‘Ādil ibn Yūsuf al-‘Azāwī and Aḥmad Farīd al-Muzaydī (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1418 AH/1997 CE), vol. 1, p. 55; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 3, p. 317.

² Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar (d. 538 AH / 1143 CE), *Rabī‘ al-Abrār wa Nuṣūṣ al-Akhiyār*, Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilmī, 1412 AH / 1990 CE, Vol. 5, p. 230.

³ Al-Māwardī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb (d. 450 AH / 1058 CE), *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, edited by Muḥammad Jāsim al-Ḥadīthī, Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriyya li’l-Ṭibā’a wa’l-Nashr, 1406 AH / 1986 CE, p. 136.

⁴ Ḥammād ibn ‘Umar ibn Yūnus ibn Kalīb, known by his kunyah Abū ‘Amr, was a mawla of Banī Sūwa’a ibn ‘Āmir ibn Ṣaṣ’aṣa. He initially served as a teacher and later became known for his poetry praising rulers. Accounts differ regarding his city of origin: some say Wasit, others Kūfa. His nickname “‘Ajrad” reportedly arose when an Arab passing by saw him, a boy playing outdoors in intense cold without clothes, and said: “ta’ajjardta, O boy,” hence the name ‘Ajrad. (See: Ibn al-Mu’tazz, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Mu’tazz al-‘Abbāsī (d. 269 AH / 909 CE), *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu’arā’*, edited by ‘Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad, 3rd ed., Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, n.d., p. 69).

⁵ Al-Ṣūlī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā (d. 335 AH / 947 CE), *Ash’ār Awlād al-Khulafā’*, Cairo: Maṭba’at al-Ṣāwī, 1355 AH / 1936 CE, p. 4.

⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

Caliph al-Manṣūr (136–158 AH / 754–775 CE) was renowned for his pioneering intellectual inclinations and held a scholarly stature attested by history. His era was the period during which the Abbasid realm was consolidated through his authority and firmness. In his praise, it was said: *“He was the outstanding figure of the Abbasids—possessing dignity, courage, firmness, sound judgment, and commanding power. He amassed wealth, refrained from frivolity and amusement, was of complete intellect, well-versed in learning and literature, and endowed with a discerning, juristic mind.”*¹ This is clearly reflected in Caliph al-Manṣūr’s counsel to his son Muḥammad al-Mahdī, when he entrusted him with authority and urged him to uphold knowledge and honor the scholars. In his testament to his son, al-Manṣūr stated: *“Entrust your concerns to those capable of managing them; attend to matters both great and small; and prepare for affairs before they arise, for the fruit of negligence is loss. Be at the head of your affairs, not at their tail, for he who anticipates events is in command, while he who lags behind is overtaken. ... This is a duty incumbent upon the sovereign to observe, for in it lies the safeguarding of religion and the preservation of the realm. The essence of this lies in giving due regard to knowledge and its people.”*²

What has been noted underscores Caliph al-Manṣūr’s profound concern for knowledge and learning. Proceeding from his awareness of the importance of nurturing and educating his sons in this regard, his son, Prince Sulaymān ibn Abī Ja‘far, became highly eloquent in the Arabic language and skilled in composing poetry on various occasions. This reflects the outcomes of early education and upbringing, which he later employed effectively upon assuming governorships, demonstrating notable proficiency in utilizing his abilities³.

The caliphs’ attention to even seemingly minor matters was aimed at reinforcing the role of their sons, the princes, across all spheres of life, ensuring they embodied the image of the caliphate in every office they held—social, administrative, or political. It was thus only natural that, from their earliest years, the sons of the Abbasid caliphs were given a distinctive upbringing and education. Motivated by his keen interest in their proper rearing, the caliph entrusted their education to tutors⁴. It appears that al-Manṣūr’s efforts in nurturing and educating his children bore fruit, as evidenced by their roles and contributions in public life.

Caliph al-Mahdī (158–169 AH / 775–785 CE) followed the example of his father in entrusting the upbringing of his sons to men of learning. He assigned the education of his son ‘Īsā ibn al-Mahdī to *Mubārak al-Turkī*⁵, while he entrusted the upbringing of his son, Prince ‘Alī, to *Ismā‘īl ibn*

¹ Al-Māturīdī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd, Abū Manṣūr (d. 333 AH / 944 CE), *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, edited by Majdī Bāslūm, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1426 AH / 2005 CE, Vol. 1, p. 18.

² Al-Māwardī, *Tashīl al-Nazar wa Ta’jīl al-Zafar fī Akhlāq al-Mulk wa Siyasat al-Mulk*, edited by Muḥī Hilāl al-Sarḥān and Ḥasan al-Sā‘ātī, Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiyya, 1401 AH / 1981 CE, p. 278.

³ See: al-Ṣūlī, *Ash‘ār Awlād al-Khulafā’*, p. 11.

⁴ See: Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm (d. 380 AH/990 CE), *Al-Fihrist*, edited by Shaykh Ibrāhīm Ramadān, 2nd edition, Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1417 AH/1997 CE, p. 18.

⁵ He was a prominent scholar who held influence under the Abbasid Caliph al-Hādī. He gained the trust of Caliph al-Mahdī in the care and upbringing of his sons. Some estates were assigned to him, especially the city of al-Mubārak in the region of Qazwin; hence, he was sometimes known as al-Mubārak al-Turkī or Manāzil al-Turkī.

*Ja'far*¹. The latter remained in this role until he died in Baghdad, where he was laid to rest in the Khayzurān cemetery.²

Similarly, the sons of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–193 AH / 786–809 CE)—renowned for his extensive learning and mastery of poetry—were afforded the same careful upbringing. Al-Rashīd was keen to ensure that the education of his sons, the princes, was no less rigorous than that of their brothers who were destined for the caliphate. Among his sons was al-Qāsim ibn al-Rashīd, whose education and care were entrusted to 'Abd al-Malik ibn Šālih.³

Caliph al-Rashīd was deeply committed to the careful selection and close supervision of his sons' tutors, as well as their methods and approaches to education. Indeed, he was particularly attentive to shaping the very framework of instruction to be followed by both his children and their instructors, including the subjects to be imparted to his sons. This concern is clearly reflected in his conversation with his sons' tutor, Khalaf al-Aḥmar⁴. "O Aḥmar, the Commander of the Faithful has entrusted to you the very essence of his soul and the fruit of his heart. Let your authority over him be unrestrained, and let obedience to you be binding upon him. Be to him as the Commander

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- See: Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Haytham al-Marwānī al-Umawī al-Qurashī (d. 356 AH/975 CE), *Maqātil al-Ṭalibiyyīn*, edited by Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d., p. 379.

¹ He was Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far ibn Abī Kathīr al-Anṣārī, a freedman of Banu Zuraik and a Qārī' (reciter of the Qur'ān). He was originally from Medina, where he grew up and lived. He studied recitation under Shaybah ibn Naṣāḥ and excelled in it, then moved to Baghdad where he disseminated his knowledge. He was described as trustworthy and accurate, with few errors during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, and he died in Baghdad in 180 AH/796 CE.

- See: Ibn Sa'd, Muhammad ibn Sa'd ibn Manī' al-Zuhri (d. 230 AH/845 CE), *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, edited by 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1421 AH/2001 CE, vol. 7, p. 237.

² See: Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 7, p. 236; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī (d. 463 AH/1071 CE), *Tārīkh Baghdād*, edited by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1417 AH/1997 CE, vol. 4, p. 417.

³ He was 'Abd al-Malik ibn Šālih ibn 'Alī al-'Abbāsī, known for his extensive knowledge and competence, and he was among the close associates of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. He gained the Caliph's trust in disciplining and educating his sons, in addition to his administrative role. He was entrusted with the governance and taxation of Egypt but never entered it. He died in 190 AH.

- See: al-Kindī, Abū 'Umar Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Miṣrī (d. 350 AH/961 CE), *Al-Wulāt*, edited by Rafn Kest, Beirut: Jesuit Press, 1326 AH/1908 CE, p. 136.

⁴ He is Abū Muḥarriz Khalaf ibn Ḥayyān, known for his scholarship in *al-gharīb* (rare expressions), grammar, genealogy, and historical reports. He was also noted as being more poetic than most of his scholarly contemporaries. He died in 180 AH.

- See: Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Muslim (d. 276 AH/889 CE), *al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1423 AH/2003 CE, vol. 12, p. 776

of the Faithful has appointed you. Teach him the Qur'ān, acquaint him with historical accounts, recite to him poetry, instruct him in the traditions, and train him in the proper use of speech and its occasions. Forbid him from laughter except at its appropriate times and accustom him to revere the elders of the Banū Hāshim..."¹. Caliph al-Rashīd also entrusted the upbringing of his son Abū Aḥmad Muḥammad to Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī². The caliph, however, was careful to remind this prince of his duties, continually strengthening his resolve by invoking the privilege of his belonging to the Prophet's Household—a distinction that bound him, more than others, to the upholding of truth. Thus, he admonished him with the following words:

**"Indeed, the right of discipline is akin to the right of fatherhood,
as recognized by people of reason and of virtue.**

**And those most entitled to know and uphold the truth
are none other than the Household of Prophethood."**³

As for Prince Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn al-Rashīd, his instruction and discipline were entrusted to the poet Ya'lā ibn 'Aqīl.⁴

This demonstrates that the care and attention devoted to the princes, the sons of the caliphs, was in no way less than that afforded to the caliphs themselves. They remained under the close supervision of the Abbasid caliph, whose purpose was to shape them into exemplary members of society.

It appears that Caliph al-Ma'mun (198–218 AH / 813–833 CE) followed the example of his predecessors in their commitment to the upbringing and education of their children. He entrusted them with proper moral and intellectual formation, including his son al-'Abbas, whose care and

¹ See: al-Mas'ūdī, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-'Alī (d. 346 AH/957 CE), *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, edited by Kamāl Ḥasan Mar'ī, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1425 AH/2005 CE, p. 291.

² He is Abū 'Amr Ishāq ibn Marār al-Shaybānī, born in Kūfah in 110 AH/728 CE. He was known as a scholar of ḥadīth, language, grammar, and poetry, and he compiled and organized these works. He was also knowledgeable about Arab historical events. It is narrated from 'Amr ibn Abī 'Amr that when his father compiled the poetry of the Arabs, it included 88 tribes; for each tribe he transcribed the collection and placed it in the Kūfah Mosque, ultimately producing 88 manuscripts in his own handwriting. He also studied the Diwans of the Arabs from al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, which were transmitted to him by Abū Ḥasan. He died in 206 AH/821 CE.

- See: al-Anbārī, Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Ubayd Allāh al-Anṣārī (d. 577 AH/1181 CE), *Nuzhat al-Albā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Adabā'*, edited by Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarā'ī, 3rd edition, Zarqā': Maktabat al-Manār, 1405 AH/1958 CE, p. 77.

³ See: al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 5, p. 96.

⁴ He is Ya'lā ibn 'Uqayl ibn Ziyād ibn Sulaym ibn Hind ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Rabī'ah ibn Ilyās. He was a poet appreciated and trusted by his contemporaries, and he also earned the trust of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, who entrusted him with the education of his son Abū 'Īsā ibn al-Rashīd. He was transmitted from by Abū 'Umar al-Muqri' al-Dawrī and Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-'Arūdī al-Naḥwī.

- See: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 14, p. 355.

instruction he assigned to al-Hasan ibn Mālik Abū al-‘Āliyah¹. Abū al-‘Āliyah had likely come to Baghdad specifically to serve as a tutor for al-Ma'mun's children, under the direct supervision of the Caliph himself. This reflects al-Ma'mun's keen interest in selecting only the most distinguished scholars for this task². It is evident that the Caliph personally ensured that those entrusted with the education of his children were of the highest caliber and operated under his close oversight. Al-Ma'mun is also reported to have praised God for the elevated status of his sons—attributed not to lineage or worldly prestige, but rather to their conduct and knowledge.³

Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim bi’llāh (218–227 AH / 833–842 CE) was no less attentive than his brother al-Ma'mun in matters of education and intellectual cultivation. He was known for his deep interest in knowledge and emphasized the importance of engaging in the sciences, noting that it refines and disciplines the soul towards praiseworthy pursuits⁴. He entrusted the education of his sons to Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī⁵, the renowned scholar whose intellectual reputation had widely spread.⁶ It appears that the upbringing and education of the caliphs' sons were not limited to literary studies and Qur’anic recitation alone. Mathematical sciences also played a role in their intellectual formation and were part of the broader educational care provided to them. This is evident in the

¹ is Al-Hasan ibn Malik Abu al-‘Aliyah al-Shami, one of the most prominent poets and writers of the early Abbasid period. His lineage traces back to the Banu ‘Am, a group from Persia who settled in Basra among the Banu Tamim during the time of Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (τ), and converted to Islam. He came to Baghdad by the order of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'mun to tutor and educate his son, Prince Abbas. He was known as a literary figure and poet and had studied under Al-Asma‘i. (See: *Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu‘jam al-Udaba’: Irshad al-Arib ila Ma‘rifat al-Adib*, ed. Ihsan Abbas, Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1414 AH / 1993 CE, vol. 3, p. 975).

² (See: *Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu‘jam al-Udaba’*, vol. 3, p. 975).

³ (See: Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, Abu al-Qasim Al-Hasan ibn Muhammad (d. 502 AH / 1108 CE), *Muhadarat al-Udaba’ wa Mahawarat al-Shu‘ara’ wa al-Bulgha’*, Beirut: Dar al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam, 1420 AH / 1998 CE, vol. 1, p. 151).

⁴ Ibn ‘Asakir, Ali ibn Hasan ibn Hibat Allah al-Dimashqi (d. 571 AH / 1175 CE), *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq wa Dhikr Fadliha wa Tasmiyat Man Hallaha min al-Amathil aw Ajtaza Bi Nawa’iha min Waridiha wa Ahlaha*, ed. Muhib al-Din Abu Sa‘id ‘Umar ibn Gharamah al-‘Amuri, Damascus: Dar al-Fikr lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’, 1415 AH / 1995 CE, vol. 73, p. 246.

⁵ is Abu Yusuf Ya‘qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, born in Kufa in 200 AH / 815 CE. He was renowned for his extensive knowledge across various fields and was described as the “Philosopher of the Arabs.” He authored numerous works, some of which combined the principles of Sharia with rational philosophy, and wrote books and letters for Caliph Al-Mu‘tasim bi-Allah. Accounts differ regarding his religion; some say he was Jewish and converted to Islam, while others claim he was Christian. He died in 259 AH / 873 CE. (See: *Ibn Abi Usaybah, Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad ibn al-Qasim ibn Khalifah ibn Yunus al-Khazraji* (d. 668 AH / 1269 CE), *‘Uyūn al-Anbā’ fī Ṭabaqāt al-A‘ṭibbā’*, ed. Dr. Nizar Rida, Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, n.d., p. 286).

⁶ is Ibn Fundamah, Abu al-Hasan Zahir al-Din ‘Ali ibn Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi (d. 565 AH / 1169 CE), *Tatimmat Suwan al-Hikmah*, Tehran: Institute for Historical Medical Studies, 1395 AH / 1969 CE, p. 5.

case of Ātā Mish al-Turki¹, who was responsible for educating Prince al-‘Abbās, the son of Caliph al-Musta‘īn bi-llāh (248–252 AH / 862–866 CE). Ātā Mish is reported to have instructed the prince in horsemanship. However, he became notorious for his excessive spending and misuse of the Caliph’s wealth². Moreover, the upbringing and education of the caliphs’ sons were not immune to the turbulent political circumstances that afflicted the Abbasid Caliphate, particularly during the period of Turkish ascendancy. The significance of the Turkish element extended beyond the political sphere, reaching even into the realm of royal education. As previously noted, Ātā Mish al-Turki played a role in instructing Prince al-‘Abbās in certain mathematical sciences, an example of such influence.

This observation affirms that, despite the reputation of tutors during the Abbasid era for their dedication and sincere commitment to the education and care of the caliphs’ sons, there were nonetheless instances of ambition among some of them. The considerable authority granted to certain figures in this context may have opened the door to greed and misconduct.

Caliph al-Mu‘tazz bi-llāh (r. 252–255 AH / 866–869 CE) was keenly attentive to the upbringing and education of his sons. He entrusted their instruction to a group of tutors, among whom ‘Abd Allāh was placed under the care of Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd al-Dimashqī.³

As for Caliph al-Muhtadī bi-llāh (255–256 AH / 869–870 CE), his sons became known for their piety and proper upbringing. It is even reported that they served as preachers in the mosques, a role that reflected their moral integrity, virtuous character, and the elevated status they enjoyed⁴. Likewise, Caliph al-Muqtadir bi-llāh (r. 295–319 AH / 912–932 CE) was equally attentive to the

¹ was a military commander of Turkish origin who rose to prominence during the caliphate of Al-Musta‘īn bi-Allah. Although not initially the caliph’s military commander, he effectively became the caliph’s vizier and was entrusted with the care of his son, Prince Abbas. This allowed Atamish to monopolize state funds and expenditures, eventually depleting the treasury. His overreach provoked the ire of the Turkish factions, leading to his assassination in a conspiracy they orchestrated in 249 AH / 863 CE. (See: *Al-Tabari, Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarir (d. 310 AH / 922 CE), Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, 2nd ed., Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1378 AH / 1922 CE, vol. 9, p. 356; Ibn al-Athir, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Abi al-Karam (d. 630 AH / 1232 CE), Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, ed. ‘Umar Abd al-Salam Tadmuri, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi, 1417 AH / 1997 CE, vol. 6, p. 194).*

² (See: Ibn Kathir, ‘Imad al-Din Abu ‘Abdallah Isma‘il ibn ‘Umar (d. 774 AH / 1373 CE), *Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya*, ed. ‘Abdallah ‘Abd al-Hasan al-Turki, Cairo: Dar Hijr lil-Tiba’a wa al-Nashr, 1418 AH / 1998 CE, vol. 14, p. 469).

³ is Abu al-Hasan Ahmad ibn Sa‘id ibn ‘Abdallah al-Dimashqi. He transmitted from Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkar, Muhammad ibn Wazir, and Hisham ibn ‘Ammar, and was in turn narrated from by Shaykh ‘Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Ja‘far ibn Hayyan al-Isfahani and Ahmad ibn al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abdallah al-‘Askari. He reportedly came to Baghdad to educate the sons of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mu‘tazz bi-Allah, specifically Prince ‘Abdallah ibn Al-Mu‘tazz, whom he never left. He died in 306 AH / 923 CE.

⁴ See: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, Shams al-Dīn Abū al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf ibn Qiz-Oghlī ibn ‘Abd Allāh (d. 654 AH/1256 CE), *Mir’āt al-zamān fī tāriḫ al-a’yān*, ed. Muḥammad Barakāt et al. (Damascus: Dār al-Risālah, 1434 AH/2013 CE), vol. 15, p. 384.

upbringing of his sons. He entrusted the care and education of some of them to his chamberlain¹, Abū Naṣr², while Prince ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn al-Muqtadir³ was placed under the tutelage of the grammarian Ibn al-Anbārī⁴. There were also special assemblies held for the caliphs’ sons with scholars, in which various scholarly matters were discussed. These gatherings were initiated by the Abbasid caliphs, reflecting their role in bringing scholars closer to their children and their concern for ensuring that their upbringing combined sound moral and intellectual formation. The scholars who attended such assemblies were Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamdūn⁵ and Ibn al-Munajjim⁶. These assemblies were devoted specifically to the education of Caliph al-Muqtadir bi-llāh’s sons, and this practice continued unchanged during the reign of Caliph al-Rāḍī bi-llāh (322–329 AH / 934–940 CE)⁷. The Abbasid caliphs continued their practice of raising and educating their sons in both religious and scholarly disciplines, a tradition that extended into the reign of

¹ See: ‘Urīb ibn Sa‘īd al-Qurṭubī (d. 369 AH/979 CE), *Ṣilat Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (Leiden: Brill Press, 1317 AH/1897 CE), p. 154.

² He was the chamberlain (*ḥājib*) of Caliph al-Muqtadir bi-llāh, renowned for his distinguished standing and high rank with the caliph. He was known for his piety and prudence, and he also played a significant role in the military sphere, being entrusted with the responsibility of confronting the Qarmaṭian threat. It was even said that he expended from his own wealth in addition to that of the caliph to equip his army. However, he soon fell ill, and the illness led to his death in the same year, 316 AH/929 CE. (See: Ibn al-Jawzī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad (d. 597 AH/1200 CE), *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1412 AH/1992 CE), vol. 13, p. 278).

³ al-Ṣūlī, *al-Awrāq*, vol. 2, p. 9.

⁴ He is Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Bashshār ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Bayān ibn Samā‘ah ibn Furwah, one of the most learned in grammar and literature, and among the greatest memorizers of his time. He was born in 271 AH/884 CE. Among those who transmitted from him was Ismā‘īl ibn Sa‘īd ibn Suwayd. (See: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 3, p. 399).

⁵ He is Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamdūn al-Naysābūrī, the ḥadīth transmitter and ascetic, widely sought after for his knowledge. He studied under Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ḥamdūn ibn Khālīd and Abū Ḥamid ibn al-Sharqī. He died in 390 AH/1000 CE. (See: al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Ḍabī (d. 405 AH/1014 CE), *Tārīkh Naysābūr*, ed. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan and Bahman Karīmī (Tehran: Maktabat Ibn Sīnā, n.d.), p. 116).

⁶ He is Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Munajjim, regarded as one of the foremost scholars of his age in both stature and intellectual contribution. He was closely associated with the Abbasid caliphs and their scholarly assemblies, and he was a leading theologian among the Mu‘tazilites. He died in 327 AH/938 CE at an age exceeding ninety. (See: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 5, p. 4324).

⁷ (See: *Akhbar al-Radi bi-Allah wa al-Muttaqi li-Allah = Tarikh al-Dawla al-Abbasiyya*, from *Kitab al-Awraq*, ed. J. Hurworth Dunn, Cairo: Matba‘at al-Sawī, 1357 AH / 1935 CE, vol. 1, p. 102).

Caliph al-Muqtaḍī bi-Amr Allāh (467–487 AH / 1075–1094 CE). The caliph's sound judgment and prudent conduct are often attributed to the upbringing he received under his grandfather, Caliph al-Qā'im bi-Amr Allāh (422–467 AH / 1031–1075 CE), in whose care he was raised. Al-Muqtaḍī thus proved himself a worthy successor to his predecessors. Foremost among the evidence of this is the decree he issued in the wake of the civil strife that afflicted the realm in 478 AH / 1085 CE. The decree stated: *'A proclamation was issued by al-Muqtaḍī bi-Amr Allāh ordering the demolition of the elevated dwellings of the Banū al-Ḥarār, the closure of doors facing the mosque, and an injunction upon them to lower their voices when reciting the Torah in their homes, as well as the imposition of wearing distinguishing marks upon their heads. It further proclaimed the enforcement of the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong, ordering the governor of every quarter to block the assembly of the Ṣumaydiyya sect. Wine was poured out, instruments of amusement were broken, and the houses of corruption were demolished...'*¹

It is noteworthy that the upbringing and education of al-Muqtaḍī bi-Amr Allāh inclined his concerns and priorities toward knowledge and religion—most notably the establishment of scholarly centers and kuttāb schools, designed as institutions for seekers of learning, foremost among them his own sons, the princes and future caliphs. This course of action adopted by the caliph may be understood to have had a broader impact, extending its influence on the Abbasid household.

As for Caliph al-Mustazhir bi-llāh (487–512 AH / 1094–1118 CE), he was renowned for his interest in the religious sciences, particularly the study of Prophetic ḥadīth. Reference is made in this context to his sons, among them Prince Abū Ṭālib al-'Abbās, who was himself a scholar of ḥadīth, and Prince Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī, known for his deep piety and described as a devout ascetic.² Caliph al-Mustashid bi-llāh (512–529 AH / 1118–1135 CE), owing to his upbringing and education, was known for personally supervising the chancery correspondence of the caliphate. He is described as follows: *'None of the caliphs wrote more skillfully than he. He would review the work of his secretaries, correcting their errors, and Ibn al-Anbārī would say: I am merely the copyist of the chancery, while the master of authority himself attends to the matter with his own noble hand'*³. This account affirms that the intellectual attainments of the Abbasid caliph may well have surpassed those of the scholars and secretaries of his time. It is therefore likely that the upbringing of their sons will likewise combine religious and scholarly instruction, even if the historical sources do not shed much light on the education and training of the princes. Such an approach, however, was the prevailing norm within the Abbasid household, and the relative silence of many historical texts on this matter may reflect the assumption that it was a self-evident practice consistently upheld by the Abbasid caliphs.

As for Caliph al-Mustanjid bi-llāh (555–566 AH / 1160–1170 CE), he was renowned for his strong scholarly inclination, to the extent that *'it is said he composed a book in every branch of*

¹ (See: Ibn al-Jawzi, *Al-Muntazam*, vol. 16, p. 234).

² See: Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil*, vol. 8, p. 629; Ibn al-Kazruni, *Mukhtasar al-Tarikh*, p. 232.

³ Al-Dhahabi, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Uthman ibn Qaymaz (d. 748 AH / 1347 CE), *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut, 3rd ed., Beirut: Maktabat al-Risala, 1405 AH / 1985 CE, vol. 19, p. 652.

knowledge. He was a man of opinion, discernment, sound judgment, and firm faith¹. 'Undoubtedly, his love of learning and devotion to knowledge were reflected in the upbringing and education of both his sons and daughters.

As noted, the upbringing and education of the Abbasid caliphs' sons received consistent attention from successive rulers and was not confined to any single reign or era. Indeed, in the later Abbasid period, this concern only intensified. This is evident in the case of Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (575–622 AH / 1180–1225 CE), who oversaw the education of his sons according to specific foundations and doctrinal orientations. He entrusted the upbringing of his two sons, Abū Naṣr Muḥammad and Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī, to one of the most renowned instructors of the Nizāmiyya madrasa, Abū Ṭālib al-Karkhī², a Shāfi'ī jurist, who began by teaching them calligraphy.³

Caliph al-Zāhir bi-Amr Allāh (622–623 AH / 1225–1226 CE) was likewise known for his strong commitment to the education of his children. He sought to treat them all with fairness by selecting the finest tutors—men who were trusted and of proven integrity. Among those entrusted with their instruction was Aḥmad ibn al-Nāqid⁴, who was renowned for his mastery of the Qur'ān.⁵

We also observe this in the case of Caliph al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (623–640 AH / 1226–1242 CE), who entrusted the upbringing of his sons to prominent tutors⁶, and placed the education of his son 'Abd al-'Azīz under the care of (Majd al-Dīn 'Abd al-Malik al-Lamghānī)⁷. The caliph did not

¹ Ibn al-Sa'ī, 'Alī ibn Anjab ibn 'Uthman ibn 'Abdallāh (d. 674 AH / 1276 CE), *Mukhtasar Akhbar al-Khulafa'*, Bulaq: Al-Matba'a al-Amiriyya, 1309 AH / 1891 CE, p. 108.

² is Al-Mubarak ibn al-Mubarak ibn al-Mubarak, Abu Talib al-Karkhi ibn Abi al-Barakat, a Shafi'i jurist. He studied under Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Khall for an extended period until he became highly proficient in jurisprudence, mastering the school's principles and excelling in scholarly debate. He taught at the school of Kamal al-Din Abu al-Futuh Hamza ibn Ali ibn Talhah al-Razi, located at Bab al-'Ammā al-Mahruws, following the death of his teacher Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Khall, and later at al-Nizamiyya. He was described as virtuous, ascetic, devout, pious, and unmatched in calligraphy of his time. He died in 584 AH / 1188 CE. (See: *Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Udaba'*, vol. 5, p. 2261).

³ See: Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Mir'āt al-Zaman*, vol. 21, p. 375; Ibn Kathir, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya*, ed. Ahmad 'Umar Hashim and Muhammad Zainhum Muhammad 'Azb, Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 1413 AH / 1991 CE, p. 772.

⁴ is Nasir al-Din Abu al-Azhar Ahmad ibn al-Naqid, the milk-brother of Caliph Al-Zahir bi-Amr Allah. He grew up devoted to scholarship and diligence in learning, later holding the office of vizier following his professorship at the House of the Caliphate in 629 AH. He enjoyed widespread respect and passed away in 642 AH.

⁵ See: Ibn al-Kazruni, *Mukhtasar al-Tarikh*, p. 263; Ibn al-Futi, Kamal al-Din Abu al-Fadl 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Sabuni (d. 723 AH / 1323 CE), *Al-Hawadith al-Jami'a wa al-Tajarib al-Nafi'a fi al-Mi'a al-Sabi'a*, ed. Mustafa Jawad, Baghdad, 1351 AH / 1932 CE, p. 291; Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, vol. 20, p. 290.

⁶ See: Ibn al-Taqtāqā, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ṭabāṭabā (d. 709 AH / 1309 CE), *al-Fakhrī fī al-Ādāb al-Sultāniyya wa-l-Duwal al-Islāmiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Muḥammad Māyū (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1418 AH / 1997 CE), p. 319.

⁷ He is 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Lamghānī, a widely learned scholar who taught at the shrine of Imam Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān in Baghdad. He came from a family distinguished for knowledge and scholarship, particularly his brother 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who taught at the Nizāmiyya Madrasa and was prominent in the judiciary of Baghdad. 'Abd

limit himself to ensuring his sons' instruction in various sciences, but was equally keen to oversee their study—and memorization—of the Qur'ān, the principal source of all knowledge and an honor surpassing all others. Indeed, his son, Prince Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Mustanşir bi-llāh, attained this honor by memorizing the Qur'ān and receiving instruction under (al-'Adl 'Alī Muḥammad al-Nayyār)¹, an achievement that was deemed worthy of celebration. The caliph did not forget this teacher's efforts on behalf of his son, and thus refrained from offering him a conventional reward in recognition of his services in teaching the prince to memorize the Qur'ān. We are informed of this in the following report: *'On the fourth of the month of Rabī' al-Awwal, Prince Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-'Azīz, son of the Imām al-Mustanşir bi-llāh, Commander of the Faithful, attained honor upon honor by completing the recitation of the Qur'ān under the supervision of his tutor, Muḥammad al-Nayyār. On this occasion, festivities were held, and robes of honor were bestowed...'*²

This, in turn, reflects the sound education and earnest efforts exerted by Caliph al-Mustansir Billah in raising his children. Despite the weighty responsibilities of the caliphate, he remained committed to personally overseeing their education and selecting the most distinguished scholars of the time to instruct them. Such occasions likely served as opportunities for the Caliph to instill in his subjects an awareness of the caliphate's dedication to establishing the foundations of scientific and religious education, beginning with parents' responsibility toward their children and grounded in principles aligned with Islamic law. This approach exemplifies the Caliph's vision and mirrors the broader concern of Abbasid Caliphs for the upbringing of their sons. It also highlights their attentive care toward the scholars and educators entrusted with this task—going so far as to lavish them with honor and generous patronage, thereby encouraging their dedication to nurturing the caliphal heirs. Furthermore, this reflects the caliphs' broader intent to raise public awareness among their subjects regarding the importance of raising their own children according to religious and moral values, far removed from lives of frivolity and excess.

Abbasid Caliph al-Musta'şim bi-llāh (640–656 AH / 1242–1258 CE) was equally passionate about knowledge. Owing to the diligent efforts of his father, Caliph al-Mustanşir bi-llāh, in ensuring that he and his brothers received a proper education, al-Musta'şim grew up with an innate inclination toward learning. He was particularly known for his interest in religious sciences. This is further reflected in the initiative of his wife, Bāb Bashīr, who established a school known as *al-Madrasa*

al-Malik was noted for his status and rank among the Abbasid household and for his role in educating the caliphs' sons. He passed away in 684 AH / 1250 CE and was buried in the Khayzaran Cemetery in Baghdad. (See: al-Qurashī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Naşr Allāh ibn Sālim ibn Abī al-Wafā' (775 AH / 1373 CE), *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍīya fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥalw, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār Hījir, 1413 AH / 1993 CE), vol. 2, p. 472)

¹ He is Şadr al-Dīn Abū al-Muẓaffar 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Nayyār, one of the scholars of the Abbasid period and tutor of the caliphs' sons. He studied and resided at the Aşḥāb Madrasa, where he gained advanced knowledge, and later became supervisor of the library at the Nizāmiyya Madrasa. (See: Ibn al-Fūṭī, *al-Ḥawāḍith al-Jāmi'a*, p. 88; al-Ghassānī, al-Malik al-Ashraf Ismā'īl ibn al-'Abbās (803 AH / 1400 CE), *al-'Asjad al-Masbūk wa-l-Jawhar al-Maḥkūk fī Ṭabaqāt al-Khulafā' wa-l-Mulūk*, ed. Shākir Maḥmūd (Baghdad: Dār al-Bayān, 1395 AH / 1975 CE), p. 637)

² al-Ghassānī, *al-'Asjad al-Masbūk*, p. 464.

al-Bashīriyya. This institution specialized in the teaching of religious sciences according to the four Sunni legal schools (*madhāhib*), and it was staffed with some of the most distinguished scholars of the Abbasid era¹. The impact of this educational environment extended to the Caliph's children. His son, Prince Abū al-Manāqib al-Mubārak, was noted for his deep interest and proficiency in religious sciences, particularly in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. His passion reached the extent that he himself became a recognized scholar in these disciplines². This intellectual and religious orientation was likely adopted by all the sons of Caliph al-Mustaʿīm bi-llāh.

Conclusion

Through our examination of the topic “*The Upbringing of the Abbasid Caliphs’ Sons*”, it becomes evident that:

- The Abbasid caliphs devoted extensive and diligent efforts to the moral and intellectual upbringing of their sons, aiming to prepare them as exemplary figures for their peers within Arab-Islamic society. The educational and ethical foundations instilled in the caliphs themselves were, in turn, reflected in the character and conduct of their children.
- The upbringing of the Abbasid princes was characterized by close supervision and oversight from the caliphs, whose responsibilities in governance and leadership did not distract them from the care of their sons. Numerous examples demonstrate the caliphs’ direct involvement in instructing the tutors and educators of their children, providing them with specific principles and guidelines to follow in the princes’ education.
- The education and upbringing of the Abbasid princes was not confined to a particular era or period; rather, it consistently stood at the forefront of the caliphs’ priorities, even amid the political upheavals that frequently beset the caliphate.
- The central aim of educating the Abbasid princes was to prepare them as vital pillars of leadership within the Abbasid state, whether in administrative, political, or intellectual domains.
- The upbringing imparted by the caliphs had a clear and tangible impact on the conduct of their sons, particularly in their interactions with all segments of society.
- It is certain that the education and upbringing of their sons was a matter of great concern and preoccupation with the Abbasid Caliphs. Accordingly, it was regarded as one of their foremost responsibilities, for the princes were seen as the elite members of society. Their conduct and upbringing, therefore, could not be tainted by reproachable traits that might bring discredit upon the Abbasid household

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