

Nabia Abbott

Two Queens of
Baghdad

Mother and Wife of
Hārūn al-Rashīd

Al Saqi Books

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With a foreword by Sarah Graham-Brown

Foreword

Sarah Graham-Brown

Two Queens of Baghdad, published in 1946, is the second of Nabia Abbott's historical biographies of women in the early centuries of Islam. The first, *Aishah—the Beloved of Mohammed*, recounts the life of Mohammed's most influential wife, who after his death played a significant role in political affairs. Through the story of Aishah, Abbott also examines the attitudes of Mohammed and his followers towards women in both public and private life, which were to influence future generations.

In *Two Queens of Baghdad* she continues this theme in her account of the lives of the mother and wife of the most famous of the Abbasid caliphs, Harun al-Rashid, 'hero of many an *Arabian Nights*' tale'.

Abbott felt that Khaizuran and Zubaidah, like Aishah, had not received serious attention from historians and biographers. As she remarks in the preface: 'His (Harun al-Rashid's) recent biographers have tended either to exaggerate or to underestimate the role of these royal women, and all have treated them more or less summarily.'

She therefore sought to use Arab historical sources to create a picture of the life and times of Khaizuran and Zubaidah. In many ways there are sharp contrasts between the two women. Khaizuran came to the court of the Caliph Mansur in Baghdad as a young slave brought from Arabia. She became first mistress and then wife to Mahdi, the next caliph, and later played a significant part in the power struggle between her two sons, Musa al-Hadi and Harun al-Rashid.

Zubaidah, in contrast, was born to court life and high social status. As Harun al-Rashid's wife she too had considerable influence not only within the harem but also in public affairs. She is also remembered for a more practical reason. Immensely wealthy in her

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Introduction

I

THE stories of Khaizurān and Zubaidah ran their partly overlapping course in that period of Islamic history conceded by all to be the Golden Age of the 'Abbāsīd Empire. Golden politically, economically, and culturally, this period stretched from the middle of the eighth to about the middle of the ninth century of our era. It included the reigns of the first nine 'Abbāsīd caliphs, six of whom were involved, directly or indirectly, with either Khaizurān or Zubaidah or with both of these queens.

The short reign of the first 'Abbāsīd, Abū al-'Abbās al-Saffāh, "The Shedder of Blood" (A.H. 132-36/A.D. 750-54), accomplished the destruction of the Umayyads. It was left for his half-brother, Abū Ja'far al-Manšūr, "The Victor" (136-58/754-75), to consolidate the dynastic victory. Manšūr is rightly accounted the greatest of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. He brought to his imperial task a great personal talent for sound organization and an unerring industry for effective administration. His vigilant eye watched every avenue of state finance. He realized, better than any of his successors, that "money was not only the sinews of war but an insurance for peace." His unrelenting thrift, however, earned for him the title of Abū al-Dawānīq, or "Father of Farthings."¹

¹ Ibn al-Bannā, *Tārīkh* ("Annales"), ed. de Goeje (15 vols.; Lugduni Batavorum, 1879-1901), III, 404-5, 444; Tha'ālibī, *Latā'if al-Ma'ārif*, ed. P. de Jong

Not the least of his great boons to the dynasty he established was the new, safer, and more central capital—Baghdad, the Round City of Manṣūr. The original unit took several years to build and cost close to five million dirhams.² The ambitions that this caliph cherished for the city of his choice and creation are reflected in the names he bestowed on royal palace and capital—the Golden Palace in the heart of the City of Peace and the Palace Immortal without the city wall. Here, then, arose the Round City of Manṣūr, with its huge concentric fortifications, to expand and prosper, to match fame and glory with imperial cities past and to come, and to live forever in memory and legend as the historic capital of the ‘Abbāsids and the magic city of the *Arabian Nights*.³

Vast empire won and new capital established, Manṣūr next used his wealth for the “winning of hearts.” This meant securing the prosperity of a strong, united, aggressive political party. It was, however, Manṣūr’s favorite son, Mohammed al-Mahdī, “The Well-guided,” who was to reap the ultimate benefits of his father’s

² Lugduni Bavorum, 1867), pp. 16, 81; cf. Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History*, trans. John Southerland (London, 1892), pp. 107-45.

³ Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-Taʿārif* (“Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum [BG.A],” Vol. III [Leiden, 1906]), p. 121; Tabari, III, 326; Ibn Tīqīqā, *Al-Fakhrī*, ed. Derenbourg (Paris, 1895), p. 220.

⁴ For the topography, buildings, and growth of Baghdad see Abū Bakr al-Khatīb, *Tarīkh Baghdād* (14 vols.; Cairo and Baghdad, 1931), Vol. I, and the part of this volume translated by Georges Salmon, *L'Introduction topographique l'histoire de Bagdad* (Paris, 1904); Guy Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate* (Oxford, 1900); Reuben Levy, *A Bagdad Chronicle* (Cambridge, 1929); K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1932 and 1940), II, 1-38.

great expenditures and vast accumulations. It was for him that Manṣūr bought the succession, at no small figure, from a reluctant but threatened and outwitted cousin. He spared neither pains nor treasure in establishing the prestige of his chosen heir. To accommodate the prince and his large military retinue, Manṣūr ordered the construction of Ruṣāfah, known also as Mahdī's Camp. This royal suburb, complete to palace, garden, and barracks, rose on the eastern bank of the Tigris across from the Round City itself. Finally, Manṣūr left Mahdī an enormous legacy.⁴ “Look to this City (Baghdad),” said Manṣūr to his son in his last instructions, “and beware of exchanging it (for another capital). I have accumulated in it for you so large a sum that if the land revenue should fail you for ten years, you will still have enough for the pay of the army, the civil expenditures, the family allotments, and the weal of the border. Watch over it; for as long as your treasury is sound and full you will continue to be mighty. But,” he added, “I do not think you will do (as I say).”⁵

Manṣūr's keen prediction proved right. For Mahdī, in the ten-year reign (158-69/775-85) that was allotted him, came to neglect the Round City of Manṣūr for his outer suburb of Ruṣāfah. His father's well-considered disbursements he replaced with lavish expenditure. The contents of the overflowing treasury of the “Father of

Tabari, III, 345, 347, 352, 364; Mas'ūdi, *Murāj al-Dhahab* (*Les Prairies d'Or*), ed. C. Barbier de Meynard (9 vols.; Paris, 1861-77), VI, 222; cf. his *Ma'ād al-Tanbīh wa al-Ashrāf* (BG.A, Vol. VIII [Leiden, 1893]), p. 342; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (“Biographical Dictionary”), ed. and trans. W. M. de Slane (4 vols.; Cairo, 1925-30), IV, 353; *Fakhrī*, p. 235.

⁵ Tabari, III, 444; cf. *ibid.*, p. 404.

Farthings" soon flowed back into the wide channels of empire. But it was largely Mahdī's personal temperament together with the expansive spirit of the times that opened up several avenues of liberal spending that verged on prodigality. One such outlet centered round Mahdī's social and family life. The economically administered court of Maṣṣūr, where levity dared not raise its head, yielded to sumptuous living. While theologians, scholars, and serious-minded poets provided intellectual stimulation, Ovidian bards, court jesters, musicians, and singing girls catered to the emotions. All were royally rewarded. There was next the demand of the royal harem itself, with its multiple wives and numerous concubines who vied among themselves and strove to match the scale set them by the royal master.

Mahdī himself was incapable of saving for a near future that promised to grow evermore prosperous. The promise was fulfilled in the reigns of his son, Mūsā al-Hādī, "Moses the Guide" (169-70/785-86), and Hārūn al-Rashīd, "Aaron the Rightly Guided" (170-93/786-809). Hārūn, despite a reign of magnificent display and spectacular liberality, is said to have left his heirs a legacy of over 900,000,000 dirhams, or 48,000,000 dinars, believed, in either case, to be the greatest sum left by an Abbāsīd caliph.⁶ It was in this literally golden age that

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 764; H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth, *The Eclipse of the Abbāsīd Caliphate* (7 vols.; Oxford, 1920-21), I, 238; IV, 268; cf. Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh* (BGZ, Vol. VIII), p. 342; Tha'ālībī, *Lata'if al-Ma'ārif*, pp. 71-72; Ibn Khallikān, IV, 353; Suyūfī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (Cairo, 1305/1888), p. 116. See below, pp. 36-37, for the rate of exchange. The sums mentioned vary somewhat.

Mahdī's Khaizurān and Hārūn's Zubaidah held lavish court at Baghdad.

It was not only in matters of finance that Maṣṣūr prepared the way for his heir. He himself acted as Mahdī's mentor and preceptor and surrounded him with men of administrative ability and strength of character. Among his several parting precepts to his son was the following: "Put not off the work of today until tomorrow; attend in person to the affairs of state; and sleep not (at your post) even as your father has not slept since he came to the caliphate, for, when sleep closed his eyes, his spirit remained awake."⁷ Nevertheless, this fond father was not blind to the weak points—serious defects these from the parent's point of view—of his son's character, namely, liberality, sociability, and a fondness for the fair sex. Perhaps he hoped that the type of men he associated with Mahdī would restrain him as caliph. Chief among these were the Barmakid (Barmecide) governor, Yaḥyā ibn Khālid, and Mahdī's secretary, Abū 'Ubaid Allah ibn Yassār.

Coming on the political scene with the Abbāsīds was the Persian family of Khālid ibn Barmak, destined to play a significant role in the administrative and cultural evolution of the early Abbāsīd Empire. The able and industrious Khālid rose rapidly to power. He and his son Yaḥyā rendered Maṣṣūr strategic service, the father in the financial administration of the empire and the son with Prince Mahdī in Khurāsān. In Abū 'Ubaid Allah, Mahdī had a faithful and serious-minded minister who

⁷ Tabarī, III, 448.

had won Manšūr's approval and kept an eye on Mahdī's companions and expenditures. In his next wazir, Ya'qūb ibn Dā'ūd, Mahdī found not only an able servant but also a congenial spirit who flattered the inclinations of the caliph and succeeded in obtaining for himself the entire administration of state. Mahdī, therefore, threw overboard his father's parting instructions to attend to the affairs of state in person. The blind poet, Bashshār ibn Burd, partly out of personal grievance and partly out of public indignation, wrote a scathing verse that not only denounced the caliph and his wazir but had public and dynastic implications. "O sons of Umayyah," cried this poet, "wake up! Too long have you been asleep. Verily, Ya'qūb ibn Dā'ūd is the caliph. O people, your caliphate is ruined! Look for the caliph betwixt the wineskin and the lute."⁸

The early 'Abbāsids were patrons of learning and culture according to their light. This light grew progressively powerful until it shone with dazzling brilliance in the reign of Ma'mūn, the last caliph of our story. Keen rivalry existed among the different provinces of the empire for intellectual leadership and recognition. 'Irāq, already in the lead in late Umayyah times and now itself the imperial province, yielded place to none. Within her own borders the long-rival cities of Baṣrah and Kūfah proclaimed their superior merits and staged some spectacular contests. But, as all roads soon led to

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-90, 508-10; Ibn 'Abdūs al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-N'uzarā' wa al-Kutāb*, ed. Hans V. Mīlik (Leipzig, 1926), pp. 185-86. For variation of verse see Abū Faraj al-Isbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghārī* (20 vols.; Būlāq, 1285/1868), III, 71; Khaṭīb, VII, 262-63; Ibn Khallikān, IV, 354; *Fakhrī*, pp. 247-50.

the new wonder city of Baghdad, leading 'Irāqī scholars and poets, like others, found themselves in the beckoning capital. Some of the most brilliant of intellect became attached to the court of one or more of the early caliphs. The most distinguished scholars were sought after as tutors for the numerous princes in the palace. Once in favor, a poet had an excellent opportunity to acquire a small fortune, especially if he displayed both wit and talent. For, with the exception of Manšūr, these caliphs of the Golden Age and of our story literally showered the poets with tens of thousands of the coin of the realm for an apt phrase or verse at just the right place and moment.

Royalty's great interest in poetry and poets had a source of motivation over and above personal literary tastes and dynastic cultural patronage. From pre-Islamic times the poets were akin to the soothsayers and prophets in that they were believed to be spirit-inspired. As such they were a powerful element in the generation of emotion as a springboard for public action. The prophet Mohammed, fearing this very power, cast reflection on them, but in time he, too, came to have his own court poets. The poets once again gloried in their privileged position as formers and molders of public opinion. Honest eulogist and dishonest flatterer floured side by side. The quality of neither the honesty nor the flattery was ever strained, since it blessed both poet and patron, the one with fame and fortune, the other with power and glory. Many a poet, therefore, will be met with in the course of our story.

Music was early frowned upon by the strictly ortho-

dox and soon became a subject for controversy. But while this controversy raged among the theologians, music itself made headway and prospered. Professional musicians were, as a class, under a social and moral stigma. Nevertheless, the sophisticated capitals of province and empire developed a measure of bohemianism among the upper classes who mingled freely with these artists. At the court one finds princes and princesses engaged in the art of poetry and music. Quite a few of these showed remarkable gifts, inherited as frequently as not from their talented mothers—concubines whose readiness with verse or skill of voice and fingers charmed the hearts of caliphs. The Qur'ān expressly forbids intoxicating drinks. But the prophet Mohammed was known to have used some grape and date juices. This proved an entering wedge, for fermented wines passed frequently for simple juices. In the controversies that raged over music and drink, 'Irāq was partial to wine and the Hijāz to song. At the court of Baghdad slave women completed the famous trio.

The social and moral standards which came to prevail at the court of the early 'Abbāsids are to be understood in the light of certain institutions and the general weakness of human nature which, with luxury and ease, tends on the whole to degeneration. The institutions involved were the trio of polygamy, concubinage, and seclusion of women. The seclusion of the harem affected the free-born Arab woman to a greater extent than it did her captive or slave-born sister. The choicest women, free or slave, were imprisoned behind heavy curtains and locked doors, the strings and keys of which were in-

trusted into the hands of that pitiable creature—the eunuch. As the size of the harem grew, men indulged to satiety. Satiety within the individual harem meant boredom for the one man and neglect for the many women. Under these conditions, as in like or parallel circumstances in human history, satisfaction by perverse and unnatural means crept into society, particularly into its upper classes.⁹ Not that all or even the majority of this high society was personally involved, but there were princes and poets, generals and judges, whose clandestine conduct colored the tone of that society and on occasion, as will be seen later in the story, helped to direct the very course of Islamic history.

Feeding the tastes and vanities of both men and women were the resources and products of the wide empire and beyond. The slave trade, extensive in its ramifications, developed into a thriving industry. Human flesh was sorted, graded, and put on the market. The bulk of the stock was sold at auction at the first opportunity and found its way into domestic service or the crafts. The cream that was separated out was held for the luxury trade and consisted usually of young eunuchs and gifted slave girls, both of whom went through a thorough physical grooming. Those who showed musical talent were sent to the leading musical institutions of the Hijāz for long and exacting training. So it happened

⁹ For sex-morality cf. Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Hayawān* (7 vols.; Cairo, 1323-25/1905-7), I, 48-81; Zamakhshārī, *Rauḍ al-Akhyār al-Muntakhab min Rabī' al-Ḥār* (Cairo, 1280/1863), pp. 180-95; Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb Muḥāḍarāt al-Udabā' wa Muḥāwarāt al-Shu'arā' wa al-Bulaghā'* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1377/1870), I, 64, 136; II, 143-64; Nuwairī, *Nihayāt al-Arab fī Funūn al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1342—/1923—), II, 198-210.

that a connoisseur of slaves often spent large sums of money on the professional education of his slave boy or slave girl before they were ripe for the lucrative market. Great as was the supply of slaves, the demand for these choice ones was always greater. It is for this item of the slave trade, this polished black or white gem, that caliphs and nobles paid the fabulous sums mentioned in our story.

II

The political and domestic roles of Khaizurān and Zubaidah reflect and continue the development of woman's position in the early Islamic state. Khadijah, Mohammed's first wife, was his staunch supporter who fully shared his confidence. Aishah, his favorite wife, played the major part in the first civil war of Islam. Several of the Umayyad queens had great personal influence on their husbands; others added grace and luster to the court.¹⁰

There was in latter Umayyad times a current belief that an 'Abbāsīd born of a Hārithite woman would establish an 'Abbāsīd dynasty. The woman of the "prophesy" was Raiṭah the Hārithite. One of her three sons, 'Abd Allah the Younger, later became the first 'Abbāsīd caliph, Saffāh. Some accounts make her the mother of a second 'Abd Allah whom they identify with the caliph Maṅṣūr. This is certainly an error, as will be seen presently. Outside the probable dynastic significance of her

¹⁰ Cf. Nabia Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (formerly *JNES*), I (1942), 106-26, 341-68; *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed* (Chicago, 1942).

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tribal connection, Raiṭah the Hārithite is little heard of in 'Abbāsīd records.¹¹

Umm Salāmah, the aristocratic Makhzūmite wife of Saffāh, fared better than did his mother at the hands of the historians. The story of their marriage is reminiscent of that of the wealthy widow Khadijah to the needy youth Mohammed. Umm Salāmah had outlived two distinguished Umayyad husbands. One day she chanced to see the youthful Abū al-'Abbās and was intrigued by his handsome appearance. She inquired about him and was informed of his genealogy. She then sent him a proposal of marriage through one of her freedwomen. The young man pleaded his poverty. But the rich widow had foreseen that obstacle and had sent with her messenger the funds needed for the wedding. The young man was willing. Umm Salāmah, seated on her bridal couch, her person literally covered with jewels, graciously received her groom and won his favor. He promised her, on oath, never to marry another woman or even to take a concubine. And he kept his promise. During the extremely difficult years that followed, in which the 'Abbāsīds plotted for the caliphate, he, the future Saffāh, took no decisive measure without Umm Salāmah's advice and approval. Their only son died young, but a daughter, Raiṭah, later married her cousin, the caliph Maḥdī.¹² Great as was her stock of jewelry at the time of her

¹¹ Ya'qūbi, *Tārīkh* ("Historiae"), ed. Houtsma (2 vols.; Lugduni Batavorum, 1883), II, 369; Tabari, III, 88, 2499; Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī, *ʿIqd al-Farīd* (3 vols.; Cairo, 1293/1876), II, 352; Khaṭīb, I, 63-64; Ibn Khallikān, II, 103, 109.

¹² Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, VI, 110-12; Ibn 'Abdūs, p. 91; Tabari, II, 840; *Aghānī*, IX, 131; but cf. *ʿIqd*, III, 52.

marriage to Saffāh, fate enabled the latter to intrust Umm Salāmah with the rich loot acquired from the fallen Umayyads. His uncle 'Abd Allah, the governor of Syria, strove to exterminate the fallen Umayyads. He acquired, in the process, great quantities of valuables and jewels, including a special heirloom of the royal harem. This was a sleeveless jacket with a row of large rubies down the front and back. It had belonged to 'Ārikah, wife of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, and was inherited by her niece 'Abdah, wife of the caliph Hishām. Umm Salāmah must have seen and admired, if not indeed coveted, it. When 'Abd Allah sent his ill-gotten loot to Saffāh, the latter turned it over to Umm Salāmah. She at once missed 'Abdah's jacket and induced Saffāh to write for it. 'Abd Allah substituted another jacket, which Umm Salāmah recognized as belonging to one of Hishām's concubines. Again 'Abd Allah was ordered to send 'Abdah's jacket, and this time he claimed he did not know where it was. Umm Salāmah demanded that 'Abdah herself be sent to her. The ill-fated 'Abdah was started on her journey but never reached her destination. Presently Manšūr succeeded Saffāh, grew suspicious of the ambitious 'Abd Allah, and brought about his downfall. His hoard of wealth and jewels was sent to Manšūr. And there, among them, was 'Abdah's jacket. In time the heirloom came into the possession of Manšūr's favorite granddaughter, Queen Zubaidah, who, as will be seen later, made excellent use of it.¹³

¹³ Tabarī, III, 51, 90, 102, 126; Ghuzūlī, *Maṭāli' al-Budūr fī Manāzil al-Surūr* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1299/1882), II, 139-40.

There were some in Saffāh's court who could not appreciate his fidelity and devotion to his wife. Once Khālid ibn Ṣafwān made bold to broach the subject to his royal master. He could not understand why the caliph contented himself with one woman when his vast empire offered so rich a variety. He dwelt on the characteristic charms of more than a dozen types of alluring beauties. Saffāh listened to the tempter with avowed pleasure. Khālid departed, fully expecting a royal gift to follow him. Saffāh, in the meantime, fell to thinking of Khālid's words. Presently Umm Salāmah entered and immediately sensed something was wrong. Before long Saffāh, yielding to her persistent questioning, told her the entire story. So it happened that, instead of the expected gift-bearing messengers of Saffāh, a murderous-looking group of men sent by the infuriated Umm Salāmah presented themselves before Khālid's door. He locked himself out of their reach just in time.

Three days later he was summoned once again before Saffāh, who asked him to repeat his delightful talk of their previous meeting. Khālid suspected that Umm Salāmah was listening. He proceeded, therefore, to tell an altogether different story, the gist of which was that monogamy was the wisest marriage policy. Hearing laughter from behind the curtains, he added, "I also told you that the Makhzūm are the flower of Quaraish and that you, possessing the flower of flowers (the Makhzūmite Umm Salāmah), need not covet any other woman, free or slave."

"You speak the truth indeed," came Umm Salāmah's approving words from behind the curtain. Saffāh's pro-

tests availed him nothing. Umm Salāmah now rewarded the "truthful" Khālīd with a generous gift.¹⁴

Saffāh, the Shedder of Blood, was himself cut down in the prime of life by the smallpox. To many in high places and in the 'Alid opposition his death was a ray of hope for the security of their own lives. To Umm Salāmah, however, his passing-away brought a great sorrow and drove all laughter from her heart.¹⁵

Manšūr, elder half-brother to Saffāh but born of a Berber slave girl named Sallāmah, succeeded to the throne, with a nephew, also born of a concubine, as second in the line of succession. The 'Alids taunted the new caliph with being the son of a concubine. Manšūr, in his turn, replied with a long list of distinguished sons of concubines, starting with Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar. The 'Alids claimed the caliphate on the basis of their descent from Fāṭimah, the daughter of the prophet Mohammed. They found that basis challenged by Manšūr and his successor on the grounds that a woman can neither inherit nor acquire the supreme power and that, therefore, she cannot transmit it. Such ideas were bound to enhance the prestige of royal concubines. Some of these would naturally intrigue to secure the succession for their offspring. Manšūr, therefore, helped to confirm ideas and practices already current under the later Umayyads and to make of these an 'Abbāsīd dynasty

¹⁴ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, VI, 112-18; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Adhkiyā*, trans. O. Rescher (Galata, 1925), pp. 168-72; Ibn Hūjah (on margins of *Rāghib Muḥāḍarāt* [Cairo, 1287/1870]), II, 214-44.

¹⁵ *Aghānī*, IX, 131; Ibn al-Jawzī, *ʿAkhbār al-Zurraf wa al-Muṭamājin* (Damascus, 1347/1928-29), p. 74.

policy. Henceforth the sons of slave mothers were to be no longer taunted with that fact, while a sort of 'Abbāsīd "Salic Law" functioned in matters of succession.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Manšūr was fully aware of the political significance of marriage alliances. His wives represented leading tribes and families. Political considerations prevented him from at least one marriage of inclination. Furthermore, he denounced political marriage alliances among the 'Alids and among his own ambitions generally.¹⁷

The most vivid of Manšūr's wives was Arwā, better known as Umm Mūsā, whose lineage went back to the kings of Himyar. Their marriage took place before the 'Abbāsīd conspiracy had progressed enough to bring Manšūr into prominence. Umm Mūsā demanded, as a condition to her marriage, a written agreement that her suitor would take neither wife nor concubine for as long as she lived. Later, as caliph, Manšūr regretted his promise and tried repeatedly to have it legally voided. But Umm Mūsā always knew when a judge was being approached for that purpose, and her bribes never failed to reach the magistrate in question. In the end she named the chief justice of Egypt as the only judge to whom she would submit her case. He was, therefore, brought from his distant province to 'Irāq to try the case between the royal couple. Umm Mūsā produced her

¹⁶ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, VI, 157-58; cf. his *Tanbīh*, p. 540; *Aghānī*, XV, 33; Tabarī, III, 87, 209-13.

¹⁷ Tabarī, III, 114-15, 175-76, 185, 187-89, 442-43; *Iqd*, III, 53; Balādhuri, *Ansāb*, V (Jerusalem, 1936), 111; Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, VI, 182, 223-24.

marriage contract as evidence, and the just judge decided the case in her favor.¹⁸

This determined queen, who insisted on her own contractual rights, showed an unusual interest in woman's welfare. She established an endowment for the benefit of that unfortunate member of the Moslem harem—the concubine whose children were all girls. She herself presented Maṣṣūr with two sons: Mohammed—the future Maḥdī—and Ja'far. They were the only sons Maṣṣūr ever considered for the succession.¹⁹

After Umm Mūsā's death, in the tenth year of his reign, Maṣṣūr was offered a hundred virgins by his sympathetic subjects. His harem, therefore, was large and his sons many. Yet he was not unduly influenced by the women, since he seldom allowed the pleasures of the harem to interfere with his conduct of state affairs.²⁰

Maṣṣūr allowed 'Abbāsīd women freedom when no adverse political complications were involved. He permitted two princesses to accompany the expedition of 139/756 against the Byzantines. Again the 'Abbāsīd Princess Asmā helped, in 145/762, to defeat an 'Alid rebellion at Medina. Motivated by a personal hatred for the leader, Mohammed, she contrived the unfurling of the 'Abbāsīd standard from the tall minaret at Medina, where Mohammed and his men awaited Maṣṣūr's

¹⁸ Jāḥiẓ (pseud.), *Kitāb al-Maḥāsīn wa al-Aḥdād*, ed. van Vloten (Leiden, 1898), p. 232; Kindī, *Kitāb al-Walāh wa Kitāb al-Qudāh* ("Governors and Judges of Egypt"), ed. Guest (Leiden and London, 1912), pp. 274-76.

¹⁹ Ṭabarī, III, 400, 442, 752; Jāḥiẓ, *Maḥāsīn*, p. 282.

²⁰ Ṭabarī, III, 306, 308, 362-63, 442-43; 'Iqd, III, 53; *Aghānī*, IX, 49, 134; Ya'qūbī, II, 468, 471.

forces. The 'Alids, therefore, concluded that the 'Abbāsīds had made an effective entry into the city. Further demoralized by Asmā's well-placed criers of "flight," they deserted Mohammed in large numbers, leaving him to fight a heroic but helpless battle that ended in his martyrdom. Asmā's house and those of a few others were declared points of refuge.²¹

Such indirect service as any woman rendered the state, Maṣṣūr was, no doubt, glad to accept. He kept his own harem, however, in the background and out of all state affairs. He watched the growth of Maḥdī's harem and took note of that prince's weakness for the fair sex. Shouldering his parental responsibility to the last, he included in that now famous set of last instructions to his heir this word of warning: "Beware of taking the women into your counsel and your affairs. But," added this shrewd judge of men, "I think you will take them in."²²

Such, then, were some of the varied highlights of this Golden Age of the 'Abbāsīds. Maṣṣūr the Victor set the stage for high drama at the imperial city of Baghdad. He played the hero's role in Act I and turned the limelight on his son Maḥdī, who in turn made way for his heirs, Mūsā al-Hādī and Hārūn al-Rashīd. But sharing the center of the stage, providing both variety and contrast, came, among others of the fair sex, the two most remarkable women of early 'Abbāsīd times. First in this unfolding drama was Khaizurān, slave-concubine of

²¹ Ṭabarī, III, 125, 244-45, 253; Ya'qūbī, II, 452-53.

²² Ṭabarī, III, 444.

Mahdī and mother of his two heirs. Second on the scene was Zubaidah, born to the purple, granddaughter of Manṣūr, royal cousin and consort of Hārūn al-Rashīd, and sharer of his historical and legendary fame.

In the following pages an attempt will be made to tell the stories of these two queens of Baghdad in as far as the historical records have preserved them.

PART I

Khaizurān

Royalty and Romance

I

THE young Zubaidah, beloved though she was of her royal cousin and husband Hārūn, had, nevertheless, two major personal problems to contend with—harem rivals and delayed motherhood. Her earliest rival in the legal wife status was probably either her own cousin, ‘Azīzah, the daughter of Ghitrif, or Ghādir, the slave girl of Hādī, both of whose stories have already been told.¹ After the latter’s death in 173/789, Zubaidah was seemingly the sole legal mistress of the harem (nothing more is known of ‘Azīzah) for some fourteen years. But from 187/803 on she had to share that privileged status with three noble women—Umm Mo‘ammed, ‘Abbāsah, and an ‘Uthmānid lady from Jurash, all of whom, like Zubaidah, outlived Hārūn.² Except for Ghādir, none of these legal wives figured romantically in the harem scene. Zubaidah’s real rivals, therefore, were to be found among Hārūn’s numerous

¹ Cf. above, pp. 68 and 99-101.

² Tabari, III, 757-58; Ibn Athīr, VI, 148; *Iqd*, III, 54.

concubines and singing girls. The records speak of Hārūn's two hundred slave girls, list some two dozen concubines who bore him one or more children,³ and relate many an anecdote of singing girl and palace maid that caught Hārūn's passing fancy.

Hārūn's earliest known concubine was a slave girl of Yaḥyā the Barmakid named Hailānah (Helen). It was she who begged Hārūn, while he was yet a prince, to take her away from the elderly Yaḥyā. Hārūn then approached Yaḥyā, who presented him with the girl. Three years later she died, and Hārūn mourned her deeply with verses that proclaimed joy to have departed forever from his heart.⁴ The probabilities are that her death occurred before Hārūn's wedding to Zubaidah in 165/781-82. For the next few years Zubaidah so charmed Hārūn that he was about to renounce his claims to the throne and retire to his harem to enjoy to the full this young wife's company. Yaḥyā prevented the retirement, and fate cast a shadow over the romantic couple, as the passing years brought them no offspring.⁵

In other ways, too, the course of their true love did not run so smoothly. There was, for instance, another slave girl of Yaḥyā's who crossed Zubaidah's royal road of romance. This was the gifted yellow songstress, Danānīr the Barmakid, so called because of her affiliation with that powerful family. She had been educated

³ Tabarī, III, 758-59; Ibn Athīr, VI, 148; *Iqd*, III, 54; Ya'qūbī, II, 52; Rāghib, *Muḥaddarāt*, II, 157-58.

⁴ Sūlī, *Kitāb al-Awraq*, ed. Heyworth Dune (Cairo, 1934), pp. 18-19; Khaṭīb, I, 97-98; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 362-63; cf. Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh*, p. 116, trans. H. S. Jarrett (*History of the Caliphs* [Calcutta, 1881]), pp. 304-5.

⁵ Cf. above, p. 102.

at Medina and had studied instrumental and vocal music with the best teachers, both men and women, which that music-loving city had to offer. Yaḥyā's keen ears did not deceive him as to the high quality of her musical talent. He was, however, anxious to have her approved by the famous court musician, Ibrāhīm al-Mausīlī. One day Danānīr informed him that she had composed a new melody with which she herself seemed to be very well pleased. Yaḥyā put both her ability and her taste to the test by arranging for an audition with Ibrāhīm. The girl sang her song before the master, who was extremely delighted with it. He called for a second and a third performance, listening critically for a possible flaw to detect and correct. Finding none, he pronounced the air perfect and the girl a first-class musician, much to the joy of Yaḥyā, who perhaps had more than an artistic interest in the maid.⁶

It was in Yaḥyā's palace that Hārūn first heard this talented girl. Thereafter, his visits increased as his pleasure mounted, and his gifts to her grew proportionately in both size and frequency. One night he presented her with a necklace that was worth thirty thousand dinars. Zubaidah, alarmed at the trend of affairs, complained of Hārūn's infatuation to his uncles, who took him to task. "I am not interested in the girl herself," said Hārūn, "but only in her singing. Listen to her yourself and see if her singing (alone) does not justify my friendship." So Danānīr came to perform before the ranking 'Abbāsīd princes, and these, having heard her,

⁶ *Aghānī*, XVI, 136-37; V, 43-44; VI, 72; 'Alī ibn Zāfir al-Azdi, *Badā'ih Bidā'ah*, p. 48; Nuwairī, V, 90.

forgave Hārūn his conduct. They returned to Zubaidah to explain and to advise her not to nag Hārūn over Danānīr. She accepted the situation, and, by way of an apology for her unfounded jealousy, she herself presented Hārūn with ten slave girls, among them the future mothers of three of his sons, two of whom were to succeed, in time, to the 'Abbāsīd throne.⁷

This method of gaining favor with one's husband, strange and drastic as it seems, is not so uncommon or incomprehensible in a polygamous royal society. The Moslem mind, accepting the assumption that the best gift is that which the recipient desires and which hurts the most to give, rationalizes it thus: "Should a woman of the royal harem possess a slave girl whom she knows the king desires and rejoices in, then it is her duty to present the king with this girl completely equipped and adorned in the best of finery. If she does this, then it is due her that the king should give her preference over all his women and place her in a unique position of increased honor. For he should realize that she has placed his desires over her own and has rendered him a peculiarly unselfish service of which women—except for a few of them—are incapable."⁸

The above episode, which took place while Hārūn was yet prince, is to be placed in 169 or earlier. It most probably occurred after Maḥdī's death, since he does not ap-

⁷ *Aghānī*, XVI, 137; Nuwairī, V, 90. Cf. L. Bouvat, "Les Barmécides d'après les historiens Arabes et Persians," *Revue du Monde musulman*, (1912), 52.

⁸ Jāhīz, *K. al-Tāj*, p. 148; cf. Mary Leonora Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London, 1856), pp. 203-4, for the practice in the Persian royal family.

pear in the story. At any rate, Marājil,⁹ one of the ten maids involved, presented Hārūn with his son 'Abd Allah—the future Ma'mūn—on the night of Hārūn's accession to the throne, in Rabī' I, 170/September, 786. She came from distant Bādhaghīš¹⁰ in Persia and is generally referred to as a Persian slave girl. She died at the birth of her son,¹¹ and Zubaidah claimed that she herself had helped to raise the orphaned 'Abd Allah.¹² Some six months later, in the month of Shawwāl, 170/March-April, 787, Zubaidah gave birth to her only child, Mohammed—the future Amīn—who, because of his doubly royal birth and the favored position of Zubaidah, overshadowed the older 'Abd Allah and the several sons of Hārūn who were born within the next few years. Among these were 'Alī, the son of Ghādir, and Qāsim, the son of Qaṣīf, this latter a concubine of whom little else is known, though her son Qāsim was later to figure as an heir to the throne.

Among the ten girls said to have been given to Hārūn by Zubaidah was one named Māridah, daughter of a Sughdian, though she herself was born in Kūfah. She is credited with bearing Hārūn no less than five children. These were Abū Ishāq—the future Mu'taṣim—Abū Ismā'īl, Umm Ḥabīb, and two others whose names are

⁹ There is another, though highly questionable, version of how Zubaidah forced Marājil, the kitchen maid, on Hārūn's attention (cf. *Sigā*, III, 430; Damiri, *Ḥayawān*, I, 108). Mas'ūdī, VI, 424-25 gives yet another version, according to which Hārūn purchased Ma'mūn's mother (unnamed).

¹⁰ E.g., Yā'qūbī, II, 538; for the town cf. Yāqūt, *Geog.*, I, 461.

¹¹ *Fawā'id al-W'afāyā'*, I, 306; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 482.

¹² Dinawari, *Kitāb Akhbār al-T'iwā'* (Leiden, 1888), p. 392; cf. below, pp. 221, and 241.

not known.¹³ Abū Ishāq, generally mentioned first in the list, was probably not the oldest of the five, since his birth is placed in 179 or 180,¹⁴ that is, some ten years after his mother was presented to Hārūn.

There are several indications that Hārūn was passionately attached to Māridah and that she used her ready wit to keep him so.¹⁵ But they, too, had their lovers' quarrels. Hārūn, during one of these peevish, departed for Baghdad, leaving Māridah behind at his court in Raqqah. Presently, growing very lonesome for her, he composed four verses to express his mood and asked the court musicians to set them to music. Twenty different tunes were submitted. Selecting the melody that pleased him most, he ordered Ibrāhīm al-Mausūlī to sing it. When his verses reached Māridah in Raqqah, she called on Abū Ḥafṣ al-Shaṭranjī (Abū Ḥafṣ the chess-player), a poet much in favor with Hārūn's talented sister, ʿUlaiyah. Abū Ḥafṣ composed eight verses in answer. The burden of these was to marvel at the discrepancy between Hārūn's words and actions and to ask why, if he were indeed the yearning lover, did he leave her at Raqqah while he enjoyed himself with others at Baghdad. No sooner did Hārūn read this gentle rebuke than he sent his man posthaste to bring her to him in Baghdad.¹⁶

Their estrangement on yet another occasion seems to have been a little more serious. The episode, according to an earlier account, is to be placed in the latter part of

¹³ Tabarī, III, 758, 1329; Ibn Athīr, VI, 374; *ʿIqd*, III, 54, 433.

¹⁴ Tabarī, III, 1324; Ibn Athīr, VI, 373; Khaṭīb, III, 342.

¹⁵ Cf. Ibn Ḥijjah, II, 102. ¹⁶ *Aghānī*, XIX, 70-71; XVII, 77-78.

Hārūn's reign when Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ was his wazīr (187-93/803-9).¹⁷ Later accounts place it earlier, substituting Jaʿfar the Barmakid for Faḍl. Hārūn is described as dying for the love of his Māridah but too proud to make the first move toward a reconciliation. Māridah, too, would not take the first step. Faḍl was alarmed for Hārūn and called on the poet ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf to compose appropriate verses, some of which have been literally translated as follows: "Return to the friends you have abandoned; the bondsman of love but seldom shuns (his mistress). If your mutual estrangement long endure, indifference will glide (into your hearts) and (lost affection) will hardly be retrieved."¹⁸ Ibrāhīm was now asked to contrive to sing them before the caliph. This he did with the result that Hārūn immediately hastened to Māridah, and the two were reconciled. There followed the usual liberal gifts to the poet and musician who had been instrumental in bringing about the happy ending.¹⁹

Several others of Hārūn's concubines must have offered competition to both Zubaidah and Māridah. Hārūn and his poets sang the praises of a trio of them who consisted of Dhāt al-Khāl, Sīḥr, and Diyā, that is, "Lady of the Beauty Spot," "Charm," and "Splendor."²⁰ Diyā passed away, much to Hārūn's sorrow.²¹

¹⁷ Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, pp. 120-21.

¹⁸ Ibn Khallikān, I, 21.

¹⁹ See two preceding notes and Zamakhsharī, *Rauḍ al-Akhyār*, pp. 246-7; Ghuzūlī, *Mafāhīṣ al-Budūr*, pp. 194-96.

²⁰ *Aghānī*, V, 67; XV, 81-82; Khaṭīb, XIV, 12; Nuwairī, II, 144.

²¹ Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 363.

Sihr is evidently to be identified with the mother of Khadijah, daughter of Hārūn.²² There is a possibility that Dhāt al-Khāl, whose personal name is variously given, is to be identified as the mother of Hārūn's son, Abū al-Abbās.²³ Be that as it may, she did, for some length of time, disturb the caliph's emotions.

The Lady of the Beauty Spot had a mole on the upper lip or on the cheek, which, as the taste of the day went, enhanced her beauty. She was an accomplished songstress, belonging to a slave-dealer who was himself a freedman of ʿAbbāsah, the sister of Hārūn. She caught the fancy of Ibrāhīm al-Mausilī, whose songs in praise of her soon reached the attention of Hārūn, who bought her for the enormous sum of seventy thousand dinars. Hārūn, alas for his pride and peace of mind, questioned her as to any intimate relations with Ibrāhīm, threatening to check on her answer by questioning the latter also. The girl, thus cornered, told the truth, whereupon Hārūn's love turned into hate. Heaping insults on her head in an effort to wipe out the injury her past revealed, he presented her to one of his slaves named Hammawaih. But Hārūn missed the girl and her song and took the slave to task for keeping her talents all to himself. The slave humbly assured him that the girl was at his command. Hārūn then and there informed him that he would pay her a visit on the morrow.

Hammawaih hastened to the jewelers to rent twelve

²² *Aghāni*, XXI, 159; Tabari, III, 758; *Iqd*, III, 54.

²³ The basic written form of the name variously dotted and vowelized can account for its different readings (cf. Tabari, III, 758; *Iqd*, III, 54; *Aghāni*, V, 61; XV, 81).

thousand dinars' worth of jewelry with which to adorn the girl for the occasion. Hārūn, surprised at the great display of wealth, asked its source. Finding how the matter stood, he sent for the jewelers, paid their price, and presented Dhāt al-Khāl with the jewels. He swore, furthermore, that on that day no request of hers should go unanswered. The happy and grateful girl asked that Hammawaih be appointed to a number of high offices in the Persian province of Fars for a period of seven years. This Hārūn did, directing his heir that the period was to run its course, if he himself should die before the seven years were out.²⁴ The historians report Hammawaih as in office in Fars in the last three years of Hārūn's reign,²⁵ thus helping to date the above episode.

There is yet another anecdote told of Hārūn and Dhāt al-Khāl, with no clue, however, as to its date. The girl once secured a promise from Hārūn to visit her. On the way to her apartment he was tempted by another charmer who persuaded him to visit her instead. This so upset Dhāt al-Khāl that she came as near as possible to literally cutting off her nose to spite her face. For in her jealous rage she cut off her mole to annoy Hārūn, who had a weakness for the beauty spot. When Hārūn heard what had happened, he hastened to appease her with the ever ready verses of the poets and the golden voice of Ibrāhīm.²⁶

It would be logical to infer that Māridah and Dhāt al-

²⁴ *Aghāni*, XV, 79-80; Nuwairi, V, 88-89; cf. H. G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music* (London, 1929), p. 135, where it is stated, without authority given, that she married the slave and on his death returned to Hārūn's harem.

²⁵ Tabari, III, 712, 764; Ibn Athir, VI, 152.

²⁶ *Aghāni*, XV, 81.

Khāl were among the most serious harem rivals from Zubaidah's point of view. The records, however, seem to be silent on their direct relationships. Whether the two were congenial and even friendly, as sometimes does happen with harem inmates, or whether some of Zubaidah's reported but unexplained quarrels with Hārūn were linked with either of them is not known.

It is on record, however, that Zubaidah was alarmed at Hārūn's preoccupation with yet another songstress, 'Inān, the slave girl of Naṭīfī, who is described as "a yellow maid born and brought up in the Yamamah" in central Arabia. Her poetic gifts were considered of the highest order, and she excelled at witty retorts and extempore composition in competition with the ranking poets of the day. She won the approval and affection of that most gifted but reprobate poet of the court, Hasan ibn Hānī, better known as Abū Nuwās of *Arabian Nights*' fame. Though she parried words and verses with the poet, she scorned his affection. She lacked not for other admirers but preferred to remain fancy free.

Her verses were brought to Hārūn's attention quite dramatically at a pleasure session when he called on those present to match some verses of Jarīr, the famous poet of the Umayyads. None present was able to measure up to the test. An attendant hastened with Jarīr's verse to the house of Naṭīfī, where 'Inān dictated three verses which surprised and pleased Hārūn so much that he determined on purchasing her that very night, and, according to one version, he did buy her for 30,000 dinars.²⁷ According to another version, however, her master

²⁷ *ʿIqd*, III, 258.

would not sell her for less than 100,000 dinars. Hārūn was willing to pay this price at the rate of seven dirhams to the dinar, which rate of exchange Naṭīfī refused to accept.²⁸ Hārūn therefore returned the girl but could not forget her. Seemingly, she, too, did not forget him, to judge by some verses she addressed to him, the effects of which the shrewd courtier and able scholar, Aṣma'ī, was quick to detect and profit by.²⁹

It must have been at this point that Zubaidah, becoming alarmed, sought to enlist Aṣma'ī's aid, who was to be free to ask what he wished provided he could bring Hārūn to forget the girl. The courtier bided his time. One day Hārūn expressed himself on Naṭīfī's attitude in terms of extreme displeasure and added that he had no interest in the girl except for her poetry. With Zubaidah's request and offer in mind, Aṣma'ī struck while the iron was hot with, "Indeed, by God, poetry is her only gift. Would the Commander of the Believers fall in love with Farazdaq?" referring to that other famous poet of the Umayyads and lifelong rival of Jarīr. Hārūn broke into hearty laughter and was sufficiently cured of his infatuation to forget 'Inān for a while. But, on the death of her master, he sent his trusted servant, Masrūr, to bid for her at public auction. Masrūr was outbid by a Khurāsānian who bought the girl for 250,000 dirhams and took her away with him to Khurāsān, where she died in 226/840-41, long after first Hārūn and then Zubaidah had gone to their rest.³⁰

²⁸ Nuwairī, V, 78; cf. above, p. 37, n. 51.

²⁹ *ʿIqd*, III, 258-59; cf. Khaṭīb, XIV, 9-10; Ali ibn Zāfir al-Azdi, *Baḍāʾiḥ al-Bidāʾiḥ*, p. 117.

³⁰ Nuwairī, V, 78-79; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 670-71.

Hārūn's attempt to purchase a highly priced girl fell through on yet another occasion. This time, too, the owner had vowed he would not part with his slave for less than 100,000 dinars. Hārūn, on seeing the girl, was delighted with her beauty and intelligence as also with her training and manners. He decided to pay the price asked and sent word to Yaḥyā to send him the money. Yaḥyā, alarmed lest this set an evil precedent, claimed that he was unable to meet the demand. Hārūn, greatly angered, questioned his minister's veracity and reiterated his order for the huge sum. The wily Yaḥyā now sent the sum in question, not in gold dinars but in silver dirhams, so that there was involved a veritable hillock of moneybags. He had these placed at a point where the caliph could not fail to see them. Hārūn saw and wished to know what all that money was doing there. "It is the price of the maiden," he was informed. Hārūn stopped and reconsidered, as, indeed, Yaḥyā had hoped he would. He called the sale off and sent the girl back to her master. But he did not return the money to Yaḥyā and the treasury. Instead, it formed the initial capital in a new private treasury which Hārūn named the "Treasury of the Bride."³¹

While physical charm and artistic talent were generally the open-sesame to Hārūn's heart, there were times when learning and culture played the major role on their own merits. Hārūn, while at Raqqah, acquired two slave girls said to be highly educated. He sent to Baghdad for Aṣma'ī, the ranking scholar of the day, to hasten to him in order to examine them. Aṣma'ī found himself

³¹ Tabarī, III, 1332-33.

facing an imposing pair of girls. Turning to the more impressive of the two, he wished to know what branches of learning she had studied. "First," answered the girl, "that which Allah has commanded in his Book. Then, that which engages the people's mind in poetry, language and literature, and historical narration." The scholar then put the girl to an exacting test in the various readings of the Qur'ān, in grammar and prosody, in poetry and history, and found her to excel in one and all. The second girl now took her turn. Aṣma'ī's verdict was that he had never seen a woman take hold of learning like a man as did this first girl; and that the second girl, though not as yet the equal of the first, would, with proper training, measure up to her. Hārūn then gave orders to have the "perfect" one prepared immediately for his company and pleasure. When Aṣma'ī departed, he was overtaken by a man and a maidservant who brought him a rich purse of a thousand dinars and said, "Your 'daughter' wishes to share her good fortune with you." "This," concluded Aṣma'ī, "she continued to do until the civil war of Amīn, when I lost track of her."³²

Hārūn's harem was thus constantly growing or being replenished by purchase and supplemented by gift and capture. The most spectacular instance of the latter was the captive daughter of a Greek churchman of Hircalah (Heraclea) acquired with the fall of that city in 190/806.³³ Gifts were more numerous. Zubaidah herself once

³² Khaṭīb, X, 411-13.

³³ Cf., e.g., Ibn Qutaibah, *Ma'ārif*, p. 144; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 961-62; Tabarī, III, 709-10; Zamakhsharī, *Rauq al-Akhyār*, p. 238; Nuwairī, II, 163-65. The sources, perhaps confusing Greek ecclesiastic terms, refer to the churchman as a patriarch.

more presented him with one of her personal maids who had caught his fancy, though on another occasion she vowed that she would neither sell nor give him one of her maids whom he very much desired.³⁴

Hārūn's half-brother, while governor of Egypt (179-81/795-97),³⁵ sent the caliph an Egyptian maid who immediately won a place in his large and receptive heart. But she soon took ill, and none of the court physicians could cure her. Hārūn sent for the best physician in Egypt, who came to attend on her and brought with him some Egyptian dainties for the patient. The girl, who was seemingly suffering from homesickness, recovered, and Hārūn saw to it that thereafter she had her Egyptian diet.³⁶

But wives, concubines, and songstresses notwithstanding, Zubaidah held a unique position in Hārūn's affections and seemingly enjoyed more of his company than did the rest of the inmates of the harem. He would, on occasion, tease her even to playing tantalizingly on her more dignified name of Umm Ja'far,³⁷ over against her pet name of Zubaidah. Once, when she thought

³⁴ *ʿIqd*, III, 432; Zamakhshari, *Rauḍ al-Akhyār*, pp. 21-22. This second incident, however, would seem to be confused with a similar and early story involving the slave girl, not of Zubaidah herself, but of her brother. Hārūn eventually secured the girl, thanks to the ready accommodation of the courtier judge, Abū Yūsuf (cf. Ibn Khallikān, IV, 280-81; Yāfiʿi, I, 385-86; Damiri, *ʿIyāwān*, I, 195-96). For other reported instances of Abū Yūsuf's accommodating decisions see Ibn Khallikān, IV, 275-76; Suyūṭi, *Tārīkh*, p. 114; and Qāzwini, *Athār al-Bilād*, ed. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1848), pp. 211-12.

³⁵ Kindi, pp. 137-38.

³⁶ Eutychius, *Annales*, ed. Poccock (Oxford, 1656), II, 409-10.

³⁷ Al-Sirāfi, *Akhbār al-Nahwīyīn al-Baṣriyyīn* ("Biographies des grammariens de l'École de Basra"), ed. F. Krenkow (Paris, 1936), p. 64.

Hārūn was free, she sent word to remind him that she had not seen him for three (long) days. Hārūn sent word in answer that the musician Ibn Jāmi⁶ was with him. Whereupon came her next message: "You know that I never enjoy any entertainment—drinking, musical, or any other kind—unless you share it with me. What would happen if I were to share with you what you now have!"

Hārūn decided to do just that, that is, share his company with her. He sent word back that he was on his way to visit her, and, taking Ibn Jāmi⁶ by the hand, he led him to her quarters. This unexpected presence of a "stranger" in the secluded harem caused some initial commotion and excitement. But presently the singer was led to a spot where he could be heard but not seen. Then Zubaidah came forth to greet her royal husband, who embraced her affectionately and, having seated her by his side, ordered the hidden musician to sing. His four verses in the background of this happy surprise party so pleased Zubaidah that she rewarded him most liberally. Hārūn commented, perhaps half in approval and half in gentle rebuke, on the speed and generosity with which she rewarded one who was his own guest and companion. The entertainment over, Hārūn sent Zubaidah a dinar for each dirham it had cost her, a golden way of insisting on his prior right to liberality as royal host and husband.³⁸

Another incident, involving the transfer of hundreds of thousands of dinars, is thus told. Hārūn one day came out of Zubaidah's apartment laughing. He was asked

³⁸ *Aghānī*, VI, 77.

the cause of his laughter by some courtier. His answer was that he had recently received 300,000 dinars from Egypt which he presented to Zubaidah, who, nevertheless, scolded him and disclaimed that she had ever received any benefit at his hand.³⁹ There must have been more to this incident than either Hārūn or the record told. That Hārūn was a generous husband at all times is to be inferred from Zubaidah's luxurious way of private life and her spectacular public expenditures.

The mettlesome Zubaidah did on occasion match Hārūn's impetuous wrath with her own sustained disdain, as is seen from the following incident. Hārūn had for some unspecified reason, lost his temper with her. He must, on second thought, have regretted the incident since he took steps to reconcile her. But she refused to be reconciled. One night, unable to sleep, he watched the rising waters of the Tigris flow by. Presently, he heard a song in the air—the song of a river winding its way to the valley of the beloved, the song of the romantic Tigris. Hārūn located the house whence came the singing and sent for the singer. The latter informed him that the verses were the composition of 'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf who was next sent for. Poet and musician entertained the caliph, repeating the song over and over again, until the break of dawn. Then dismissing his company, he swallowed his pride and went the whole way to visit and make his peace with his estranged but beloved Zubaidah.⁴⁰

³⁹ Zamakhsharī, *Rauḍ al-Akhyār*, p. 183. See above, pp. 45-46, for Mahdī's experience with Khaizurān.

⁴⁰ *Aghānī*, XVIII, 77.

There seem to have been one or perhaps two occasions when a stormy scene between the royal couple almost broke up their union. Zubaidah, so one story goes, once consigned her cousin and husband to hell-fire. Hārūn, no doubt burning with rage, pronounced the dreaded triple formula of final divorce. Then, as he cooled off and realized the seriousness of the situation, he regretted his words. He therefore called on his jurisconsults to help him out of his difficulty by finding a way to nullify the divorce. Accommodating service was rendered, among others, by Abū Yūsuf.⁴¹

Under more normal conditions, Zubaidah, no doubt, considered her husband's moods and kept herself informed as to his whims and comforts. Once she learned that Hārūn had presented one of the court poets with a valuable ring that she knew Hārūn himself fancied. She therefore redeemed the ring. Hārūn, however, let the poet keep ring and price rather than be considered an "Indian giver."⁴² When Hārūn was known to be indisposed, Zubaidah's messengers were among the first of those who waited at the royal entrance to deliver her greetings and make solicitous inquiries about his health. One shrewd doorkeeper, on such an occasion, made himself a large fortune by ranking the numerous inquirers and giving the first entry to the royal chamber to Zubaidah's messenger.⁴³

There were times, however, when Zubaidah felt unequal to holding her own with Hārūn, against some new

⁴¹ Qazwīnī, *Athār al-Bilād*, pp. 211-12; cf. E. H. Palmer, *Haroun Alraschid* (London, 1881), pp. 157-58.

⁴² Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 464.

⁴³ Tabarī, III, 746.

glamorous rival, without the aid of some of her in-laws. She seems to have been on particularly good terms with her young sister-in-law, 'Ulaiyah. Spirit, talent, beauty, and courage were the weapons that this gay and sophisticated princess employed to bend her half-brother, Hārūn, and his court to her pleasure. The occasion that led Zubaidah to seek her aid was the gift to Hārūn of a new maid, "perfect in beauty." Hārūn staged, in her honor, a big entertainment at which were present hundreds of the palace personnel in colorful and gay costumes. The jealous Zubaidah could not endure this in silence. She complained to 'Ulaiyah, who comforted her with, "Don't let the incident alarm you. For, by Allah, I shall bring him back to you." Then she explained her plan. "I shall compose a new verse and set it to a new melody and teach it to all my maids. Let all your maids, too, learn it along with mine."

When evening came and Hārūn was taking the fresh air in his palace courtyard, 'Ulaiyah and Zubaidah, each at the head of her train of maids, all splendidly and colorfully attired, rushed into his presence singing, as though with one voice, the new melody and song that began with, "Departed from me, though my heart will not part from him. . . ." Hārūn was flattered and overjoyed. He rose to meet the ladies and remained to enjoy their company, declaring he had never before had such a happy day. Neither had the rest of the gathering seen anything like that day which ended with a heavy shower of thousands upon thousands of dirhams scattered in their midst.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Aghāni*, IX, 88.

Apart from her personal affairs of the heart, Zubaidah's attention must have been, at times, engaged with other court romances, legitimate or clandestine. There was, for instance, the infatuation of 'Ulaiyah herself for two of Hārūn's page boys to whom she addressed a goodly number of her short lyrics that told of burning passion. Hārūn sent away the first of these boys and at one time forbade 'Ulaiyah even to mention the other. But, later, he relented and presented her with the boy in question.⁴⁵ Perhaps it was in connection with these love affairs that Hārūn was once so severely angered with her that she called on the blind poet Abū Hafṣ to produce some verses which would soften his heart. She herself then set them to music and taught them to a group of Hārūn's maids. Hārūn was touched on hearing the song and its story. He sent immediately for his sister, greeted her affectionately, accepted her apology, and asked her to sing the song herself. This she did so effectively that she brought tears to his eyes and the voluntary promise that he would never again be wroth with her.⁴⁶

The gay-spirited, gayly attired 'Ulaiyah with the magnificent head ornament, which she herself had designed so as to cover a blemish on her forehead, was the talk of the court. Her excellent taste and passionate love for music brought her into competition with leading musicians of the day, including her half-brother, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdi, and that master-musician, Iṣḥāq al-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84; *Fawā'id*, II, 125; *Huṣṣī*, I, 11-12.

⁴⁶ *Aghāni*, XIX, 71.

Mauṣilī. She easily surpassed the former but had to resort to ruses and threats to keep pace with the latter.⁴⁷ Hārūn had yet another half-sister whose beauty and wit brought her a dramatic court career that Zubaidah must have watched with interest if not indeed with some envy. This was his oldest sister, ʿAbbāsah, thrice married and thrice widowed⁴⁸ while still comparatively young, if not in years then certainly in mind and spirit. Hārūn enjoyed her wit and sought her company as he did that of Jaʿfar the Barmakid. But time spent in the company of his sister was time robbed from the company of Jaʿfar and vice versa. For ʿAbbāsah's high birth and consequent seclusion made it improper for her to appear before her brother in Jaʿfar's presence. So Hārūn, thinking he had a brilliant idea that would enable him to enjoy the company of these two at one and the same time, arranged for a legal formal marriage—that and no more—between them. Had this been a true marriage, it might have helped to ease the racial and social tension between the conquering Arab and the conquered Persian. As it was, the very restriction placed on the marriage, that is, there was to be no thought of its consummation, and that Jaʿfar and ʿAbbāsah were never to meet except in Hārūn's presence,⁴⁹ emphasized the gap between the Arab ʿAbbāsah's royal station and the Per-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 83; *Fawā'id*, II, 125.

⁴⁸ Cf. above, p. 21; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, III, 200; Ibn Qutaibah, *Maʿārif*, p. 117; Zamakhsharī, *Rauḍ al-Akhyār*, p. 264; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 465, 469; Horowitz in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I, 13.

⁴⁹ Tabarī, III, 676-77; Ibn Athīr, VI, 118-19; Masʿūdī, VI, 387-88; *Fakhrī*, p. 288; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 516.

sian Jaʿfar's subject status. This bizarre arrangement functioned well enough for a while when Hārūn enjoyed to the full the joint company of these two at delightful sessions from which, by the nature of Moslem society in general and Hārūn's honor in particular, Zubaidah herself was excluded. But propinquity is oftentimes the handmaid of romance. At any rate, nature, with the couple in question, rebelled at the fantastic arrangement and found means to circumvent it. Unfortunately, however, Jaʿfar's political interest lay athwart Zubaidah's path. This dual development gave Zubaidah reason for resentment and opportunity for impetuous revenge, as will be told elsewhere in this story.⁵⁰

The affairs not only of Hārūn's sisters but also of his daughters must have occupied some of Zubaidah's thoughts, though here conventional marriages rather than sophisticated romances were the rule. Here, too, Jaʿfar the Barmakid once played a part when he, on his own authority, promised the hand of ʿĀliyah⁵¹ to a distant royal cousin, which promise was presently approved and carried out by an amused caliph.⁵² Hārūn himself kept his word given to his brother, Mūsā al-Hādī, when he arranged for the marriage of two of his several daughters, Fāṭimah and Ḥamdūnah, to Hādī's sons, Ismāʿil and Jaʿfar, respectively.⁵³ There were also

⁵⁰ Cf. below, pp. 191-200 and 262.

⁵¹ Tabarī, III, 759, mentions a daughter named Ghāliyah, but none named ʿĀliyah; the two are no doubt identical, since the different names can readily be understood as a slight scribal error.

⁵² Ibn ʿAbdūs, p. 262-63; Ibn Khallikān, I, 303-5.

⁵³ Tabarī, III, 576-78; Masʿūdī, VI, 284-85; cf. above, p. 93.

the marriages of the young heirs. Though no definite date is given for the marriage of either heir, the two events were probably not far apart and seem to have involved two of Hādī's daughters.⁵⁴ Ma'mūn's marriage to his cousin, Umm 'Īsā, could not have taken place either much before or much after Hārūn's death in 193/809, since the pair is credited with two young sons by 196.⁵⁵

But Islamic royalty, democratic in its social contacts with the large personnel of its numerous establishments, does frequently take an interest in—or even lend a hand to—the progress of the love affairs of the humbler members of the royal harem. The case of 'Utbah and the poet Abū al-ʿAtāhiyah in the time of Mahdī and Khaizurān is one in point. That particular case came to light again in Hārūn's reign, for Hārūn enjoyed the poet's love verses and would not hear of his giving them up for an ascetic mode of life and turn of thought. Eventually, the poet, weary of his long unrequited love longing for peace of heart and mind, and preoccupied with otherworldly thoughts as age advanced upon him, renounced his passion for 'Utbah.⁵⁷ Later, in the reign of Ma'mūn, the poet was ushered into the presence of Fadl ibn al-Rabī, who was talking to some woman. Turning to the poet, Fadl asked, "Does 'Utbah still hold a place in your heart?"

⁵⁴ Ya'qūbi, II, 529; Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, p. 773; but cf. below, p. 222.

⁵⁵ Tabarī, III, 836; *ʿIqd*, III, 55.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Aghānī*, III, 140-41, 151; VIII, 24-25; cf. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 135

91.

⁵⁷ Cf. Mas'ūdī, VII, 84; Khaṭīb, VI, 258.

"That is all gone and departed," answered Abū al-ʿAtāhiyah.

"There still remains something of it though," said Fadl.

"No, by Allah," insisted the poet.

"This, by Allah, is 'Utbah," said Fadl, indicating the woman before him. The poet took one glance at her and rushed out running, leaving, in his haste and confusion, his sandals behind him.⁵⁸ Though Zubaidah is not linked specifically with these anecdotes, her partiality to the poet and her frequent use of his talents in her service would lead one to suspect that she was interested in the ups and downs of his romance with 'Utbah.

Zubaidah herself had a maid whose love affair recalls the case of 'Utbah. This time the unrequited lover was the court jester, Husain ibn al-Daḥḥāk. He enlisted the services of a nobleman in favor with Zubaidah. The nobleman pleaded with the queen, but Zubaidah would not part with her maid.⁵⁹

Sometimes Zubaidah was called upon to help in love affairs that did not involve her own palace personnel. There was, for instance, the case of the Kūfan merchant, 'Alī ibn Ādam, who fell in love with a maid named Minhalah. The girl was sold to a member of the imperial family and taken away from Kūfah, presumably to Baghdad. The unhappy lover went to the capital to enlist Zubaidah's aid only to be told that between him and his love were insurmountable obstacles. He returned to Kūfah and died, on arrival, of a broken

⁵⁸ Ibn Taifūr, *Kitāb Baghdad*, ed. H. Keller (Leipzig, 1908), p. 21.

⁵⁹ *Aghānī*, VI, 203.

heart. When the girl heard of her lover's sad end, she too, alas, lay down and died.⁶⁰

Royal and palace romances aside, Zubaidah devoted attentive care to the training of her own large retinue of palace boys (eunuchs) and girls. She bid high for those of reputed talents and guarded jealously her own accomplished group.⁶¹ Among her many slave girls there were said to be a hundred who were expert at chanting the Qur'ān in successive relays of tens so that the hum of their voices issued from her palace all the day long.⁶² She was the first to organize units of girls and page boys, the uniformed and mounted *shākiriyyah*, to do her bidding and run her errands.⁶³

Large numbers of her girls were, no doubt, occupied with entertaining her guests at the numerous harem functions. Examples have already been given of the use she made of some of them to win and retain Hārūn's favor. As the years passed, and her only son, Mohammed al-Amin, grew to manhood, Zubaidah found, in connection with him, yet another use for some of her most elegant and charming maids.⁶⁴

II

There was for Zubaidah in Hārūn's time yet another type of romance—the thrill of political intrigue and personal power. Her major political interest centered round

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 51-52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 99; VII, 34.

⁶² Ibn Khallikān, I, 533.

⁶³ Mas'ūdi, VIII, 298. The word is arabicized from the Persian *chāhār*, a hired man or maid.

⁶⁴ See below, p. 212.

the succession to the throne and will be detailed elsewhere in this study. For the rest, the urge for personal power found outlet mainly in her contact with this or that poet whose talents were at her disposal or with here and there a judge who could be bribed or intimidated into doing her bidding. There were times, too, when she did not hesitate to order Hārūn's chief of police about or to poke fun at one of his ranking generals.

Poets of varying ability and rank sought this queen in the hope of profiting by her influence or generosity or both. Seldom did she disappoint even the least gifted of these. When once a mere novice of a poet blundered in his verses in praise of her liberality, her attendants handled him roughly. But Zubaidah came to his rescue, explaining that he meant well but went astray, and added that she preferred such to those who mean ill and achieve it. She closed the incident with, "Give him what he had hoped for and explain to him his error."⁶⁵

Once a group of poets and singers had congregated in her palace. Presently, in came one of Zubaidah's slave girls with her sleeve full of silver coins and asked to know who the author was of the verse, "Who dares reproach you for a weeping eye? Saw you ever a weeping eye to be reproached?" It turned out that 'Abbās ibn al-Ahnaf was the lucky author, into whose lap, therefore, the girl emptied her sleeveful of coins. 'Abbās, himself no miser, scattered them around for the attendants to pick up. The girl, having no doubt reported the scene to Zubaidah, returned presently, followed by three serv-

⁶⁵ Ḥuṣrī, I, 317; Rāgīb, *Muḥādḍarāt*, I, 54-55; Waṭwat, p. 227.

ants each carrying a bag of silver coins to be delivered at the poet's house.⁶⁶

Among the poets whom Zubaidah openly favored was Abū al-ʿAtāhiyah, whose verses in praise of Amin, along with similar verses of other courts poets, will be met with later. At one time this poet incurred, through his sharp lines, the displeasure of Prince Qāsim,⁶⁷ who ordered him to be flogged and then locked up in his residence. The poet appealed to Zubaidah, who brought the incident to Hārūn's attention and secured his release. Hārūn himself insisted that the young prince exonerate the poet and render him an apology.⁶⁸

Zubaidah had recourse to the poets when Hārūn, weary of Baghdad and its climate, decided in 180/796 to move his court to Raqqah,⁶⁹ the port of the Syrian Desert on the Upper Euphrates. He used to say that there were but four cities in this whole world—Damascus, Raqqah, Rayy, and Samarqand—and that he had been privileged to dwell in the first three.⁷⁰ He took an active interest in the further development of the city with its new canals and palaces and other surrounding estates, some of which were to come, in time, into the possession of Zubaidah herself.⁷¹ He had with him at

⁶⁶ *Aghānī*, VIII, 23-24.

⁶⁷ See above, p. 141.

⁶⁸ *Aghānī*, III, 159.

⁶⁹ Tabarī, III, 644-46; *Fakhri*, p. 319. For Raqqah see Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 802-4; *BGA*, II, 225-26; III, 141, 145; VI, 98; 216-18; *EL*, art. "Rakka." K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1932 and 1940), II, 39-49.

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Faḥīh al-Hamadhānī, *K. al-Buldān*, ed. de Goeje (*BGA*, Vol. V [Lugduni Batavorum, 1885]), p. 273.

⁷¹ Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 112, 862, 889, 994; Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, pp. 179-80.

this northern capital not only that burden-bearer, Yahyā the Barmakid, and his retinue of administrative personnel, but also some of his boon companions, including Ishāq al-Mausili. The latter could not quite overcome his homesickness for Baghdad, and his nostalgic longings proved, on occasion, contagious for Hārūn himself.⁷² Eager poets, keeping up with the caliph's move, sang the praises of the city of his choice and won favor for themselves, as did in particular the new court poets Ashja'⁷³ and Mohammed al-Umānī.⁷⁴ Zubaidah now called on the poets to compete in producing a poem in praise of Baghdad, promising a rich prize for the winner whose verses would cause Hārūn to long for the city of her own choice. The prize—a gem valued at 800,000 dirhams—went to Manšūr al-Namrī, whose nostalgic verses led Hārūn to visit Baghdad.⁷⁵

Zubaidah's luxurious mode of life matched that of Hārūn. Her agents, like those of Khaizurān, were everywhere seeking to procure the best for the queen, while her secretaries at the capital administered her vast states. It was in connection with such matters that Zubaidah's personal power was, at times, felt outside the palace, as the following incidents reveal. Agents and secretaries were, by their very position, men of power. They were sought after by persons in high office who hoped for help or favor from Zubaidah;⁷⁶ or they were

⁷² *Aghānī*, XVII, 75; cf. *ibid.*, p. 77-78.

⁷³ *ibid.*, pp. 30-31, 48; Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Tabaqāt*, pp. 117-18; Khaḍīb,

Vol. 25; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 961-62.

⁷⁴ *Aghānī*, XVII, 80-81.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Tabaqāt*, p. 115; cf. Khaḍīb, I, 51-52, 68.

⁷⁶ Kündi, *Governors and Judges of Egypt*, ed. Guest, p. 392.

envied and denounced by others less fortunately placed. Her secretary Sa'dān was once denounced in verse for his bribery and partiality. Hārūn remonstrated with Zubaidah, who asked him to repeat the verse in question. Rising to the defense of Sa'dān, she replied with an even more damaging verse—suspected of being her own extemporizing—concerning Hārūn's minister of the tax bureau. "These are lies," said Hārūn, "about both your secretary and mine," and therewith dismissed the matter.⁷⁷

Whatever their public sins, Zubaidah's secretaries guarded her interests, which clashed at times with those of her agents. Once her secretary Dā'ūd saw fit to imprison an agent in charge of some of the queen's estate for a shortage of 100,000 dirhams. The agent appealed to two of his friends, who decided to put in a word for him with Dā'ūd. On their way to see the latter, they met Mahdī's old wazir, Faiḍ ibn Šāliḥ (d. 173/789-90), who joined them on their friendly mission. But the secretary stated he could take no action in the case without Zubaidah's permission. He informed her of their request for the agent's release and received her note of refusal which he showed to his guests. Faiḍ now suggested that they meet the payment out of their own funds. They signed a security note to that effect. Dā'ūd informed Zubaidah of this move, too. Quickly came back her answer: "It is not for Faiḍ to be more generous than we. Return his note and release the man."⁷⁸ The episode leaves the strong impression that Zubaidah's secretaries

⁷⁷ Ibn 'Abdūs, pp. 323-24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95; cf. *Fakhrī*, pp. 256.

took no major step without her knowledge and that she herself was quick at jotting down her instructions, brief and to the point, in their correspondence.⁷⁹

But it was not always on such a generous note that the queen's claims and legal cases were resolved. One of her agents once bought goods from a Khurāsānian and withheld the payment for a long time. The merchant sought the advice of the judge, Ḥafṣ ibn Ghaiyāth, an honest man who had refused the Baghdad judgeship until dire poverty had compelled him to accept it. He took office in 177/793 and served the capital for two years. He advised the merchant to bring the case to trial. Having secured an admission of the debt, he ordered the agent to pay it. But the latter sought refuge in the repeated phrase, "It is the queen's debt." "Fool," said Ḥafṣ, "you acknowledge the debt and then place the responsibility on the queen!" He then sent him to the debtor's prison.

When Zubaidah heard of what had happened, she sent word to Hārūn's chief of armed police⁸⁰ to release her man, which he did immediately. It was Ḥafṣ' turn now to be indignant. The judge refused to sit on the bench until the agent was returned to prison. The alarmed chief of police prevailed on Zubaidah to yield up her agent. But, far from yielding the case, she turned to other tactics. "O Hārūn," she said to her royal husband, "your judge is indeed a fool. He belittled and im-

⁷⁹ Cf. Jābir, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (Cairo, 1332/1913-14), I, 59, where the lady in question is far more likely to be Queen Zubaidah than Zubaidah, the mother of Ja'far ibn Yahyā.

⁸⁰ Tabarī, III, 681-83; Ibn Khallikān, 310-11, 318.

prisoned my agent. Command him not to try the case; but let it be brought instead before (Chief Justice) Abū Yūsuf." Hārūn was willing to oblige her and sent word to Ḥafṣ to transfer the case. The caliph's messenger arrived with the letter which Ḥafṣ refused to take until after he has rushed through the case and passed judgment. The messenger, who realized full well the significance of Ḥafṣ's refusal and haste, threatened to inform Hārūn. "Tell him what you please," said the judge. When Hārūn was told of the scene, he was greatly amused and himself sent Ḥafṣ the sum owed by Zubaidah's agent.

Hārūn's wazir, Yahyā, rejoiced and praised Allah that a just judge had come to sit in judgment. But not so Zubaidah, who informed Hārūn that she would have nothing to do with him until and unless he expelled Ḥafṣ from office. Hārūn refused to comply at the time. But Zubaidah, whose pride had been doubly wounded in this skirmish, soon returned to the fight and prevailed on her husband to transfer the good judge to Kūfah.⁸¹

The reader will have gathered from the above incident that the chief justice, Abū Yūsuf, who solved many of Hārūn's legal perplexities,⁸² was willing, on occasion to do as much for Zubaidah. The record of one such instance has survived, though the nature of the case involved is not specified. Zubaidah rewarded the judge handsomely and elegantly, for her gift consisted not only of silver and gold but also of exquisite perfumes and fine raiments and two young slaves with their mounts. When the royal gift arrived, those present

⁸¹ Khaṭīb, VIII, 189-94.

⁸² See above, pp. 150 and 153.

hinted that the Prophet Mohammed had said that, when a man receives a gift, he should share it with those of his companions who are present with him. To this Abū Yūsuf replied that that was when the usual presents consisted of dates and figs and not of silver and gold and other precious things. He ended up with the Qur'ānic verse. "That is the bounty of Allah. He bestows it upon whomsoever he pleases. Allah is of infinite bounty."⁸³

One suspects that Zubaidah possessed a sense of humor that enabled her to enjoy a joke even at her own expense. The poet Abū Nuwās may or may not have put her to the test in this respect. But it took a madman's courage to claim her for his kind. There was the crazed Bahlūl the Possessed, who certainly had method in his madness and who was a sort of celebrity. Hārūn was once visiting with Zubaidah and her brother 'Isā, when Bahlūl was brought in to amuse them. The caliph asked the madman to enumerate for him the insane.

"I am the first," said Bahlūl.

"Right," said the caliph.

"And this one here is the second," he added, pointing to Zubaidah. It was not the latter but her indignant brother 'Isā who shouted:

"Why you son of a vile mother, how dare you say that of my sister!"

⁸³ Sūrah 57:21; Masūdi, VI, 294-95; Khaṭīb, XIV, 252; Ibn Khallikān, IV, 282; Yāqūt, *Miṣbāḥ al-Jānān* (4 vols.; Hyderabad, 1337-40), I, 387. It is this same judge who, though he gave Islam, at the specific request of Hārūn, its first book on taxation, robbed Allah and the state of his own contribution by writing his property in his wife's name in order to avoid paying taxes on it. Cf. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Būlāq, 1302/1884); Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* (4 vols.; Būlāq, 1289/1872), I, 17.

"And you yourself are the third, you ill-natured one," said Bahlūl undaunted. Hārūn, thinking, no doubt, that the "joke" had gone far enough, ordered Bahlūl out of the room.

"And you are the fourth," shot back this madman at the caliph as he made his exit.⁸⁴

Zubaidah had certainly developed a craze for her pet monkey, whom she had named Abū Khalaf.⁸⁵ Girt with girdle and sword, Abū Khalaf had thirty men to wait on him and take him on his outings. Zubaidah herself took the attitude of "Love me, love my monkey," for she required all who came to court to pay homage to her to show respect also to her pet by kissing the creature's hand. This homage she demanded from no less a personage than one of Hārūn's ranking generals, Yazīd ibn Mazyad (d. 185/801), a man not to be trifled with.⁸⁶ Outraged at the demand, he drew his sword and cut the monkey in two and turned away in anger. The tenor of Zubaidah's complaint to Hārūn can be well imagined. The caliph summoned the seasoned general and demanded an explanation.

"O Commander of the Believers, shall I then serve apes after having served caliphs? No, by Allah, never! Hārūn saw the point and forgave his general.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Zubaidah's great grief over the loss of her spoiled

⁸⁴ Rāghib, *Muḥāḍarāt*, II, 425.

⁸⁵ Yāqūt *Irshād* ("Dictionary of Learned Men") (Gibb Memorial Series" [7 vols.; Leyden, 1907-27]), VI, 75, and following note.

⁸⁶ Ṭabarī, III, 597, 650.

⁸⁷ Ibn Isfandiyyār, *History of Ṭabaristān*, trans. Edward G. Browne ("Gibb Memorial Series," Vol. II [London, 1905]), p. 45. Cf. Abū al-ʿAlāʾ Maʿarrī, *Riʾālat al-Ghifrān*, ed. Kāmil Kilānī (Cairo, 1925), II, 51-52.

pet was known to all in her service, big or small. Some went so far as to send her a letter of condolence which was graciously acknowledged and amply rewarded.⁸⁸

But sumptuous living and royal romance, poets, judges, generals, and monkeys were not enough to absorb completely the Lady Zubaidah. She had, concurrent with one or more of these, two major interests of far-reaching significance for the welfare and future of the empire. These were spectacular philanthropy, on the one hand, and the imperial succession, on the other. We turn first to the latter of the two.

⁸⁸ Ḥuṣrī, III, 281-82.

foster-) with an establishment on a scale that put four hundred slave girls at her command.² Zubaidah, guarding the interest and prestige of her son, Prince Amīn, can be imagined as doing the best in her power to see that his establishments were not overshadowed for long and that the magnificence and brilliance of her own palaces reflected to his glory.

There can be little doubt that the urge to hold her own, together with her naturally generous impulses, kept her abreast of Hārūn's magnificent scale of life and royal innovations, for Islamic history credits each of them with a series of "firsts" on which rests much of their claim to worldly fame. One reads that Hārūn was the first in Islam to indulge in polo, in bow-and-arrow and ball-and-racket games, and in chess and backgammon—in all of which his example was followed by his court. Again, one is intrigued by the passage which states that Zubaidah was the first for whom was made the finest of fine brocades costing fifty thousand dinars per piece; the first who organized a body of mounted page boys and palace maids who ran her errands and delivered her messages; the first to use palanquins of silver, ebony, and sandalwood ornamented with gold and silver hinges and covered with sable, brocade, and silk cloth in colors of red, yellow, green, and blue; the first to use slippers studded with jewels; the first to burn candles made of ambergris—the scent being much

pp. 243-44; Reuben Levy, *A Baghdad Chronicle* (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 536-37. A "Barmecide (Barmakid) feast" has come to mean in English, through the *Arabian Nights*, an imaginatively sumptuous repast.

² Mas'ūdi, VI, 407; Khaṭīb, VII, 156-57; Ibn Khallikān, I, 315.

In the Hall of Fame

THE lavish mode of life that set in with Maḥdī and Khaizurān reached its climax in the court and palace of Hārūn and Zubaidah. The fabulous wealth of the 'Abbāsīd Empire at this its highest point of material prosperity was expansively reflected in the spectacular and luxurious living of this its most romantic and intriguing royal couple. Blue-blooded Arab nobility and high-ranking officers of the empire, Arab and non-Arab alike, reflected in their turn the splendor of the court. The Barmakids lived royally and dispensed largess and hospitality with such regal grace that their very name worked its way into the Arabic language and its literature as a synonym for genuine liberality and as a rich theme for many a poet. Ja'far is credited with a palace that some thought eclipsed even the palace of Hārūn and roused that autocrat's jealous resentment. On sound friendly advice Ja'far was induced to present his political ward, Prince Ma'mūn, with the magnificent structure and all its sumptuous equipment and furnishings.¹ This same Ja'far provided his mother (step-

¹ Tabarī, III, 672-73; Ibn Khallikān, I, 304-5; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, I, 806-7; cf. Guy Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate* (Oxford, 1900).

in favor with her and with Ma'mūn³—and the first to dress up palace girls as page boys—setting the fashion in all these innovations for high society.⁴ To this list of “firsts” others add one more, namely, that she was the first woman to prefer swift camels to asses for use on her pilgrimages.⁵ The queen's taste and ingenuity in other phases of palace boudoir and salon life must be gauged accordingly.

Zubaidah's influence in these, as in other, matters spread far beyond the capital and the imperial province as she herself journeyed to pleasure and health resorts along the banks of the Tigris, or joined her royal husband at his favorite Raqqah in northern Syria, or undertook her several pilgrimages to the sacred cities of Islam. She lent her name to several sites in capital and empire, all called “Zubaidiyah” in her honor. Two of these were extensive and choice fiefs in western Baghdad, where the queen's palaces, gardens, and retainers' quarters were located.⁶ Another Zubaidiyah was close to Wāsiṭ al-ʿIrāq, most probably in the region of the Nahr Maimūn Canal, which was dug at her orders.⁷ A fourth Zubaidiyah lay farther east on a healthy site in the Persian district of Jibāl.⁸ At least three Zubaidiyahs

³ “Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum [BGA],” VII, 369; Nuwairi, XII, 54-55.

⁴ Mas'ūdi, VIII, 295-99.

⁵ BGA, VII, 195; cf. Thaʿālibī, *Latāʾif al-Maʿārif*, p. 15; Ghuzūlī, II, 185.

⁶ Khaṭīb, I, 71, 87, 89, 93, 110; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 917; IV, 132, 141; Le Strange, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 113-17, 124, and Map V.

⁷ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 291; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 719; II, 917.

⁸ BGA, IV, 19, 198; II² (1939 ed.), VII, 165, 270; cf. Guy Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 192.

were located on the Pilgrim Road from Kūfah to Mecca.⁹ There were, furthermore, several other holdings and sites which were associated with her personal presence and pleasure. Chief among these was her fief in Wāsiṭ al-Raqqah with its considerable building activity.¹⁰ Her fief of Fam al-Šilḥ has already been mentioned,¹¹ and reference to her holdings at Mecca and Ṭāʾif follows presently.

The earlier Arab sources have left no record of any visits of Zubaidah to the distant regions of northern and central Persia. Nevertheless, later Persian sources credit her, very generously, with no less than the foundation of the northern city of Tabriz in 175/791¹² and of the central town of Kāshān,¹³ as they credit her also with a Zubaidiyah fief in Rayy.¹⁴ That Zubaidah ever visited these cities may be questioned. However, it is not at all improbable that she did indeed, perhaps, cause a fort or a mosque, a guest house, bridge, or canal to be built in these places—as, for instance, a mosque at Tabriz¹⁵—to which may be traced some of the later obviously

⁹ Cf. below, p. 245.

¹⁰ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 180; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 889, 994.

¹¹ Cf. above, pp. 230-31 and 234.

¹² Ḥamd-Allah Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-Ḥulūb* (“Gibb Memorial Series,” Vol. XXIII¹⁻²), ed. Le Strange (2 vols.; London, 1915), p. 75, and translation, p. 78; cf. *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 161.

¹³ Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-Ḥulūb*, p. 67, and translation, pp. 71-72; cf. *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 209.

¹⁴ Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 895; but cf. *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, pp. 215-16, 218.

¹⁵ Cf. Mary Leonora Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London, 1856), p. 92; Eric Schroeder, in *Survey of Persian Art*, ed. A. U. Pope, II (1939), 943, and André Godard, in *Arts Islamica*, VIII (1941), 4.

exaggerated traditions. For Zubaidah is known to have indulged in extensive public works in several provinces, near or distant, of the empire. An earlier Arab source, for instance, credits her with a fortified monastery in the far-distant border city or region of Badakhshān, just west of the river Oxus and famed for its mines of precious stones. But a later Persian source makes her the very foundress of that mighty city itself.¹⁶ The border fort of Warathān in the northern province of Adhar-bāyjān had been first constructed by the Umayyad Marwān II (127-32/744-50) but fell later to Zubaidah, who saw to its repair and upkeep.¹⁷ Farther west on the Syrian-Byzantine border, Zubaidah had a guest house or wayfarer's inn in the mountain town of Baghrās.¹⁸

But the queen's philanthropy reached far beyond these endowed establishments on the distant borders of the empire that ministered to lonely soldier, traveling merchant, pious monk, or needy beggar. It embraced major public work projects that were intended to bring comfort and joy to the inhabitants of the sacred city of Mecca, on the one hand, and to Islam's great pilgrim host, on the other. For, over and above such cash disbursement as Zubaidah may have made to both Mecca and Medina,¹⁹ she undertook to give the Meccans and

¹⁶ *BGA*, III, 303; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, I, 528; cf. Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 436; *Ḥudūd al-ʿĪlam* ("The Regions of the World") ("Gibb Memorial Series: New Series," Vol. XI [London, 1937]), trans. V. Minorsky, p. 349, and references there cited.

¹⁷ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 329; *BGA*, V, 284; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 919.

¹⁸ *BGA*, I, 65; *Ḥudūd al-ʿĪlam*, p. 150.

¹⁹ Khaṭīb, XIV, 433-34.

their annual pilgrim guests, on the way and in the sacred city itself, the great boon of refreshing waters to a thirsty land. In her generous and pious concern for the welfare of the sacred cities, Zubaidah was following a well-established precedent in the tradition of Arab royalty. She had, furthermore, the example of Hārūn to live up to. Nevertheless, her interest did not spring from a mere sense of detached duty or a competitive desire to keep up with the caliphs. For Zubaidah herself traveled the Pilgrim Road and dwelt for some months in the sacred precincts of Mecca. Here she had at least two establishments and some property that had formerly belonged to Jaʿfar the Barmakid.²⁰ And, following the fashion of the Meccans, she, too, had her gardens in the near-by resort city of Ṭāʾif,²¹ where she undertook the repairs of a mosque associated with Mohammed and adjoining the tomb of the arch-Traditionist, ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbās. On one of the walls of the mosque appeared the inscription that recorded her philanthropy: "The Lady Umm Jaʿfar, daughter of Abū al-Faḍl and mother of the heirs presumptive to the Moslem throne—may Allah prolong her life!—ordered the restoration of the mosque of the Prophet at Ṭāʾif wherein it was accomplished in the year one hundred and ninety-two [807-8]."²²

²⁰ F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka* (4 vols.; Leipzig, 1857-61), I, 319, 328, 330, 462; II, 13; III, 137, 159; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, II, 523.

²¹ Ḥamdānī, *Ḥazrat al-ʿArab*, ed. D. H. Müller (2 vols.; Leiden, 1884 and 1891), I, 120.

²² Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, II, 76; *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie Arabe*, I (Cairo, 1931), 66.

Hārūn and Zubaidah were both given to frequent pilgrimages. Hārūn began his reign with an avowed determination to lead in sacred pilgrimage and sacred war in alternate years but was, for various reasons, unable to live up to his intentions. He is, nevertheless, credited with from six to nine pilgrimages in all.²³ Zubaidah has five assured pilgrimages to her credit, with a possibility of a sixth. The first of these was made in 173/790 in the company of Hārūn, who was making the journey on foot.²⁴ The next one was in 176/792.²⁵ It is not quite certain that she accompanied Hārūn on that fateful pilgrimage of 186/802, though the great issues at stake and the indirect reference to her displeasure at Ja'far the Barmakid's conduct on that occasion may imply her actual presence.²⁶ There is, however, no doubt about her pilgrimage of 190/805, when she must have witnessed the effects of recent droughts and the people's great suffering from thirst, which both she and Hārūn undertook to relieve, in part, by increasing the depth of the sacred well of Zamzam.²⁷

Perhaps it was the above experience that led the queen to undertake, on behalf of the Meccans and the annual pilgrims, waterworks that were bolder in conception and more extensive in scope than anyone had previously

²³ Ibn 'Abdūs, p. 252; *BGA*, VIII, 346; Mas'ūdī, IX, 66-68; *Ma'arīf*, pp. 193 ff.; Ya'qūbī, II, 521-22, 526; Tabarī, III, 701; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, IV, 179, 184.

²⁴ Cf. above, pp. 99-101; *ʿIqd*, III, 350.

²⁵ Mas'ūdī, IX, 67; Tabarī, III, 628-29; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 482.

²⁶ Cf. above, pp. 189-91.

²⁷ Ya'qūbī, II, 519; cf. *BGA*, VII, 43.

considered. The ambitious project included the central waterworks around the Spring of Hunain some twelve miles east of Mecca, a number of smaller springs, large water reservoirs, and a subterranean aqueduct that brought the water to Mecca and to the precinct of the sacred territory. Famous among this complex of waterworks was the "Spring of Zubaidah" on the Plain of 'Arafāt—a veritable and priceless boon to the tens of thousands of annual pilgrims. Equally famous was the Mushhāsh Spring in Mecca itself, which ministered to the inhabitants the year round. The magnitude of the task can be understood only when one considers the extremely difficult terrain of mountain and hard rock that had to be cut through and under before success could be achieved. Neither was success achieved with the first trial. But Zubaidah, once committed to the meritorious task, would not be discouraged by either technical difficulties or excessive costs. She urged the engineers to greater effort and declared she would go through with the project were every stroke of the pickaxe to cost her a gold dinar. The engineering feat was accomplished at a cost of some one and three-quarter million dinars, including gifts and charities incidental to the occasion.²⁸

Work on this project had already begun in the reign of Hārūn and was in progress at the time of his death. Zubaidah, shortly after her arrival at Baghdad from Raqqah with Hārūn's great treasure, left in Ramadhān

²⁸ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, I, 444-45; II, 33-34, 52; III, 334-35; IV, 185-87; *BGA*, VII, 316; Mas'ūdī, VIII, 297; Khaṭīb, XIV, 433-34; Ibn Khallikān, I, 533 and n. 1; Yāfī, II, 63; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 631-32.

of 193/June-July, 809; for Mecca. She took with her Amin's gift to the Holy City—some twenty thousand dinars' worth of gold bullion which was used as nails and gilding for the door of the sacred Ka'bah. While in Mecca she herself witnessed the erection of fortifications, tanks, and canals in connection with her project, which, however, was not finished until the next year and after she had returned to 'Irāq.²⁹ On the arch over the gate of the reservoir in Mecca went up the following inscription: 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no God but Allah alone without any partners. The blessings of Allah be on Mohammed his servant and messenger. The grace of Allah (be with us all)! Umm Ja'far the daughter of Abū al-Fadl Ja'far the son of the Commander of the Believers Manṣūr—may Allah be pleased with the Commander of the Believers—ordered the construction of these springs in order to provide water for the pilgrims to the House of Allah and to the people of his Sanctuary, praying thereby for Allah's reward and seeking to draw nigh unto him. By the hand of Yāsir, her servant and client in the year one hundred and ninety-four [809-10].'³⁰

The task accomplished, Zubaidah's chief agents and workmen presented themselves at her palace overlooking the Tigris to render an account of their expenditures. She received their ledgers and promptly cast them into

²⁹ Ya'qūbi, II, 526; Hamdāni, *Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, I, 267; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, IV, 185.

³⁰ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, II, 33; *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie Arabe*, I, 69-70.

the river, announcing regally, if not indeed piously, "We have left the account to the Day of Accountings. Let him who has a cash balance keep it, and he who is our creditor, him we will repay." Then having bestowed upon them suits of honor, she dismissed them, and they departed full of praise and thanks.³¹

Parallel with her interest in Mecca went her concern for the welfare of the pilgrims on the road that she herself no doubt traveled, namely, that from Kūfah to Mecca, a distance of some nine hundred miles. It is interesting to note that, though she did at times undertake philanthropic work at some well-known station on the road, such as Haitham,³² her main objective seems to have been to minister especially to the poorer or more pious pilgrims who, either from necessity or from choice, made the long pilgrimage on foot. For, as one follows the course of her "stations" on the Mecca Road, it soon becomes apparent that these were located mostly at some "halfway" spot between older established stations and towns. At least nine sites are associated with her activities on the road between Kūfah and the southern junction of Ma'dan al-Naqirah, where the road branches to Medina and to Mecca.³³ A tenth station, Muḥdath, lay

³¹ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, III, 335; IV, 186. Contrast her action with that of Manṣūr, who held the builders of Baghdad to strict account (cf. above, p. 2).

³² Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 998; for itineraries of this road cf. *BGA*, I, 27; II, 40; VI, 125-34, 185-87; VII, 174-80, 311-12; Hamdāni, *Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, I, 183-85; for identification and mapping of cities cf. B. Moritz, *Arabien* (Hanover, 1923), map facing p. 58; Alois Musil, *Northern Nejd* (New York, 1928) and *Northern Arabia* (maps) (New York, 1926).

³³ E.g., *BGA*, II (1937-38 ed.), 40; VI, 186-87; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 804.

beyond this on the way to Medina.³⁴ Three of the sites, all in the first third of the road from Kūfah, were named in her honor, the best known of the three being the first.³⁵ At all these places was to be found at least either a well or a cistern, though some, as at Haitham, had in addition a shelter for rest or prayer and a fortification of some sort,³⁶ while one station boasted the still further addition of a mosque.³⁷

Her philanthropic interest continued throughout her life and took the form of endowments for the upkeep of her establishments and public works and a readiness to supplement these. A touching story is told in this connection. Ma'mūn's governor of Mecca wrote that caliph in 210/825-26 of the need for some supplementary cisterns and canals in the city itself and was told to undertake their construction. The work was completed and the occasion was celebrated with public festivities. When Zubaidah heard of the new project, she was much pained. It was probably in connection with this very project that she was anxious to make the pilgrimage once more and used Būrān's influence with Ma'mūn, on the happy occasion of their wedding later that same year, to secure that end. When she did make the pilgrimage the very next year, the governor came to pay her his respects. She took him to task thus: "Why did you not write to me so that I could have asked the Commander

³⁴ *BGA*, VII, 176; Yāqūt, *Geog.*, IV, 424.

³⁵ Yāqūt, *Geog.*, I, 591; II, 917; *ibid.*, II, 61; IV, 585; *ibid.*, II, 98; III, 827, for the three Zubaidiyahs in order.

³⁶ E.g., *ibid.*, II, 98, 270; III, 732, 827; IV, 75.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 778.

of the Believers to assign me that project? I would have undertaken its costs as I undertook the expenses of this other cistern so as to accomplish in full my intentions toward the people of the Sanctuary of Allah."³⁸

This pilgrimage of hers seems to have been the last occasion on which Zubaidah appeared in public, though she had some six years of life yet to live. Neither does there seem to be any further reference to her private life during this period, in which she, now approaching her seventies, may have been overshadowed by the younger and much-gifted Būrān. Yet, it is difficult to imagine the ever resourceful and readily adaptable Zubaidah as anything but happily active, even though overtaken by old age. Her last call came on the twenty-sixth of Jumādā I, 216/July 10, 831, about a week after Ma'mūn had started on his campaign of that year against the Byzantines.³⁹ Ma'mūn's absence from the capital may have prevented an elaborate burial for his "mother," such as Hārūn had accorded Khaizurān. The role of the chief mourner fell, no doubt, to her only surviving grandson, 'Abd Allah, the son of Amin.⁴⁰

The early records give Zubaidah the briefest of death notices, mentioning neither the cause of her death—which may or may not have been old age—nor yet the place of her burial. The first historical reference to her tomb is given by Ibn Athīr, an early twelfth-century historian whose too short and incidental reference places the original tomb in the general neighborhood of

³⁸ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, I, 445; II, 34.

³⁹ Tabarī, III, 1104-5; Ya'qūbī, II, 568; Ibn Khallikān, I, 533.

⁴⁰ Cf. above, p. 231.

Kāzīmān. He adds, however, that the tomb was burned, along with those of her father and son among other tombs near by, in 443/1051 on the outbreak of severe rioting between the Sunite and Shi'ite Moslems of Karkh or western Baghdad. Unfortunately, the reference to the original location of the tomb is too general to be conclusive.⁴¹

It was left for modern travelers and scholars to get on the trail of the tomb of the Lady or Sitt Zubaidah. The first exciting news was given out by Niebuhr, whose travels took him to Baghdad early in 1766 and who, among his observations on that city, published an inscription found in connection with a prominent and beautiful monument near a mosque in Karkh or western Baghdad. The inscription stated briefly, as Arabic inscriptions of the Ottoman Turkish period usually did, that the monument enshrined the tomb of the blessed and forgiven departed, the doer of good deeds, the handmaiden (of Allah) Sitt Zubaidah, the daughter of Ja'far, the son of the 'Abbāsīd Manšūr al-Dawānīqī ('Father of Farthings'),⁴² and wife of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, and that she died in the year 216. But a second inscription added that Hasan Pashah, Turkish governor of Baghdad, buried his wife, Aishah

⁴¹ Ibn Athīr, IX, 395. The traveler Ibn Baṭūṭah (728/1328) reported Amin's tomb to be among the tombs of the caliphs in Ruṣāfah or eastern Baghdad. But, inasmuch as he places the tomb of Mahdī along with the rest, when Mahdī was buried at Radhdh (see above, p. 75), one is compelled to question the accuracy of his report at this point (cf. Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Riḥlah*, [2 vols.; Cairo, 1287], pp. 135-36).

⁴² Cf. above, p. 1.

Khānum, in this same mausoleum in Ramadhān, 1131/July-August, 1719.⁴³

For over a hundred years after Niebuhr's publication the monument was accepted as the tomb of Zubaidah.⁴⁴ But around the turn of the present century, it came to be questioned as such both on historic and on architectural grounds. Scholars like Le Strange⁴⁵ and Oppenheim,⁴⁶ the first basing his arguments on Ibn Athīr's information and the second on architectural grounds, discredited the association between the present monument and the original tomb of Zubaidah. Massignon,⁴⁷ on the other hand, rightly questioned Le Strange's too rigid interpretation of Ibn Athīr's text, while Herzfeld, largely for architectural and sentimental reasons, believes the present monument to have been built as a genuine and fitting commemoration of Zubaidah. He sees in it a thirteenth-century replacement of the original mausoleum of the famed queen.⁴⁸ There the academic contro-

⁴³ Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien* (2 vols.; Copenhagen, 1774 and 1778), II, 300-301. For Hasan Pashah and his wife see Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925), pp. 123-27.

⁴⁴ E.g., J. R. Wellsted, *Travels in the City of the Caliphs* (2 vols.; London, 1840) I, 237-38; H. C. Rawlinson, art. "Baghdad," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (9th ed.); cf. Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 164-65, 350-52.

⁴⁵ *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 164-65, 350-52.

⁴⁶ *Vom Mittelmeer zum Persischen Golf* (2 vols.; Berlin, 1899 and 1900), II, 244.

⁴⁷ *Mission en Mésopotamie (1907-1908)* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1910 and 1912), II, 79, 108-10.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat und Tigris Gebiet* (4 vols.; Berlin, 1911-20), I, 239; II, 157, 173-79; Herzfeld,

versy of the tomb rests while the stately, snow-white, honeycombed cone, a perfect specimen of its architectural type, continues to be popularly accepted as marking Zubaidah's final resting-place.

But if the Moslem historians neglected to provide adequate information as to Zubaidah's original tomb and its subsequent history, they have, nevertheless, taken considerable pains to perpetuate her memory and to detail several instances where her originality and philanthropy served as an inspiration to others in the course of the centuries. The queen's first post-mortem anecdote, though made of the hazy stuff of dreams, is nevertheless quite significant: The departed Zubaidah was seen in a dream and was asked about her condition in the other world. To which she replied: "Allah forgave me with the very first stroke of the pickax on the Mecca Road."⁴⁹ Dreams apart, the story is an indication of the great value that Zubaidah's fellow-Moslems of the time set on her crowning charity—the pilgrim road from Kūfah to Mecca. The road came to be known as Darb Zubaidah or the Zubaidah Road. It still exists under that name even today, though it is referred to also as the Persian Pilgrim Road or the Sultānī Road—that is, the State Highway.⁵⁰

More tangible testimony to her contemporaries' appreciation of her great philanthropies comes from

⁴⁹ "Damascus: Studies in Architecture—I," *Ars Islamica*, IX (1942), 24-25, and Fig. 63.

⁵⁰ Khaṭīb, XIV, 433-34.

⁵¹ Cf. Musil, *Northern Nejd*, pp. 158, 178-79, 205-12; Great Britain, Admiralty, *A Handbook of Arabia* (London, 1920), I, 76, 81, 394.

Azraqī's (d. 219/834) well-known history of Mecca, which was in the writing in Zubaidah's day.⁵¹ Having detailed the construction of her waterworks, the historian adds: "It has become for her an honor hitherto unattained by any other, while she herself experienced more satisfaction in this, her bounty, than did any other; for the people of Mecca and the pilgrims owe their very life to her next to Allah."⁵²

Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869, aged ninety) reckons Zubaidah as one of the great personalities of the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. "There gathered," says he, "round (Hārūn) al-Rashīd such an excellent and jovial company as was never assembled round any other (caliph). He had for wazirs the Barmakids, the like of whom was never seen for generosity and glory; for his judge, Abū Yūsuf; for his poet, Marwān ibn Abī Ḥaṣṣah, who was for his age what Jarīr had been for his own time; for boon companion, 'Abbās ibn Mohammed, paternal uncle of his (Hārūn's) father; for chamberlain, Faḍl ibn al-Rabī', the most dignified of bearing and the most given to grandeur; for singer, Ibrāhīm al-Mauṣilī, unique in his day in his profession; for stringed instrumentalist, Zalzal; for piper, Barsaumā; and for wife, Umm Ja'far (Zubaidah), the most desirous of the good, swiftest to perform pious deeds, and readiest in benefactions—she, among her other benevolences, brought water to the Sanctuary, after the supply had failed."⁵³

⁵¹ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, I, 443.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 445.

⁵³ Khaṭīb, XIV, 11; Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 549; Suyūfī, *Taṭrīkh*, p. 112, and translation, p. 294; cf. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music* (London, 1929), pp. 116 and 913f, and references there cited for the three musicians named.

Fākihī, another early historian of Mecca, writing in 272/885, gives the best and fullest account of her works and sees in their eventual successful flowing Allah's graciousness to all, including Zubaidah, whose endowments still provided for the upkeep of the system.⁵⁴

The blind but brilliant court wit, Abū al-'Ainā' (ca. 190-283/806-96),⁵⁵ was much impressed with Zubaidah's royal relation to the numerous caliphs and heirs to the throne from her grandfather, Maṣū'ūr, down to her stepgrandson, Mutawakkil. He compares her in this respect to the Umayyad queen par excellence, 'Ātikah, wife of 'Abd al-Malik.⁵⁶ Some of the earliest records have preserved, on the other hand, Ḥasan ibn Sahl's testimony to the excellence of her wisdom and understanding.⁵⁷

The classic incident of the next century that was to help in perpetuating Zubaidah's memory dates from the reign of Qāhir (320-22/932-34). The story is preserved by Mas'ūdī (writing in 333/944-45), who received it firsthand from an able narrator of history, the Khurāsānian Mohammed ibn 'Alī, who was in favor at the court. Qāhir was anxious to learn the true history of all the 'Abbāsīd caliphs who had preceded him. He called on this Mohammed to give him the historical facts with-

⁵⁴ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, II, 33, 35.

⁵⁵ Ibn Khallikān, III, 56-61.

⁵⁶ Tha'ālībī, *Laiḥīf al-Ma'arīf*, pp. 54-55; quoted in Suyūfī, *Tārīkh*, p. 120, and translation, pp. 317-18; for 'Ātikah see Nabīa Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, I (1942), 349-51.

⁵⁷ Ibn Taifūr, p. 210; Tabarī, III, 1084.

out any varnish, on pain of death, shaking his javelin at him the while to reinforce his command. Mohammed, having begged for and received the promise of assurance of life, proceeded with his tale, which in due time brought him to the events of the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. He dwelt at some length on the glories of that magnificent reign. In the course of his narration, he mentioned Zubaidah briefly as performing the most excellent of deeds in the reign, namely, the Meccan works, the pilgrim road, and her charitable establishments at Tarsus and the Syrian border. He proceeded next to mention, also briefly, the Barmakids. Then, having listed all of Hārūn's "firsts," he concluded his account of that monarch's reign and waited on the caliph for his next cue.

"I see," said Qāhir, "that you have cut short your account of Umm Ja'far's deeds. Why is that so?"

"O Commander of the Believers!" answered Mohammed, "it was for the sake of brevity while awaiting (your) permission."⁵⁸

Qāhir, eyes flashing with rage, reached for his javelin and shook it so that Mohammed thought he saw "red death at its tip." He resigned himself to his fate, not doubting but that the very angel of death had, indeed, come to take his life. However, when the caliph did hurl the javelin at him, Mohammed still had enough wits about him to leap out of its path.

"Woe to you," exclaimed Qāhir. "Are you then at enmity with your own head and weary of your very life?"

⁵⁸ Cf. above, pp. 128-29.

"What is the cause of your displeasure, O Commander of the Believers?" begged Mohammed.

"The history of Umm Ja'far. Tell me more of it," said Qāhir.

"Gladly," said Mohammed and continued. "In her deeds and noble conduct, both the serious and the frivolous, she eclipsed (all) others. As for her serious and monumental acts, the like of which was not known in Islam, there is, for instance [here followed a more detailed account of her extensive philanthropies, headed by the Meccan waterworks and ending with her general concern for the poor and destitute classes]. As for the second type of deeds (frivolous by contrast to the preceding)—such as those in which kings take pride, those that make for their enjoyment of a life of ease and affluence, those that insure the safety of their empires, and those that history records of their life and work—they were that she was the first [here followed the list of her 'firsts,' already given, which ended with Zubaidah's girl pages]. This last institution had survived until then, for Qāhir himself was surrounded with a large group of these girls in boys' attire who waited on him. Mohammed's account of the origin and description of Zubaidah's page girls greatly amused and pleased the caliph, who, holding out his wine cup to be refilled, called out loudly and hilariously for a toast in honor of Mohammed's descriptive efforts.⁵⁹

But it was not only for her worldly frivolity that Zubaidah found royal imitators. The mother of Muta-

⁵⁹ Mas'ūdī, VIII, 289, 294-300, 304; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, II, 128; cf. above, p. 212.

wakkil (232-57/847-61) took special interest in the water supply of Mecca and on two different occasions came to the rescue of the Meccans.⁶⁰ The history of Mecca is replete with references to the interest that royalty and nobility took in the upkeep and repair of the city's waterworks.⁶¹ Of special interest is the case of the Turkish Sulṭānah of the household of the Ottoman emperor, Sulaimān the Magnificent (926-74/1520-66). She entreated the emperor, as a special favor, for permission to undertake extensive and expensive repairs to the water system that seems to have fallen on bad days indeed. Her plea was that, since it was a woman, the 'Abbāsīd Zubaidah, who had first provided the system, it would be but fitting that a second woman, herself, should undertake its major reconstruction. Sulaimān graciously agreed, and the work was begun in 969/1561 with much publicity and great expectations. But there were several disappointments in store, alike for patrons, engineers, and inhabitants; for the tremendous project, whose very difficulties reflected afresh to Zubaidah's glory, took ten long, hard years ere it was crowned with success in the reign of Salim II.⁶²

"That which history records of the life and deeds of royalty," to quote the historian Mas'ūdī, seems to have been by about his time pretty well ascertained and recorded so far as Zubaidah was concerned. For it is little, indeed, that can be considered of first-rate importance

⁶⁰ Tabari, II, 1440; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, I, 398; III, 129.

⁶¹ Cf. Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, IV, 248 ff., 309 ff.; Ibrāhīm Rif'at Pāshā, *Mir'āt al-Haramain* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1925), I, 207-24.

⁶² Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, III, 341-49; IV, 309-13.

that the later historians, geographers, and travelers add to her story. This does not mean that the better informed of all these three classes ignored or neglected the remarkable queen but only that most of them repeat, either in whole or in part, the earlier accounts. The Arabic sources of this later period tend, on the whole, to be brief and factual and are, as a rule, partial to Zubaidah's philanthropies, for which not infrequently they call down Allah's blessing on her head.⁶³ Some exaggerate her influence over Hārūn in one brief sentence, such as, "Zubaidah had (complete) control over Hārūn's mind and did with him as she pleased."⁶⁴ Others, too generously, credit her with *all* the water supply on the Baghdad to Mecca road.⁶⁵ There is, here and there, a tendency to associate her famous name with events that perhaps should be credited to some other 'Abbāsīd princess. A clear case of false association is met with when she is credited with the famous palace of Ma'shūq, built by Mu'tamid (256-79/870-92) on the west bank of the Tigris across from Samarrā.⁶⁶ Late Arabic sources

⁶³ E.g., Khaṭīb, XIV, 433-34; Ibn Jubair, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9; Ibn Khallikān, I, 532-33; Yāqūt, II, 63-64; Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Rihlah*, I, 102-3; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, II (Fās), pp. 32-35; Ghuzūlī, I, 185; Suyūfī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 112-13, 120.

⁶⁴ Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, III, 115.

⁶⁵ Ibn Baṭūṭah, I, 103.

⁶⁶ *BGA*, VII, 268 (says east bank); Yāqūt, *Irshād*, V, 476; Ibn Jubair, *op. cit.*, p. 232; Ibn Baṭūṭah, I, 103, 140. Herzfeld, and after him Creswell, identify Ma'shūq with the still-existing ruins of 'Ashīq on the western bank of the river (K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* [2 vols.; Oxford, 1932 and 1949], II, 364). Cf., however, Jean de Thevenot, *Travels* (3 vols. in 1; London, 1686-87), II, 60, according to whom there were, in 1664, *two villages* known as 'Ashīq and Ma'shūq, that is, "Lover" and "Beloved" of the oral Arabic tradition; cf. Musil, *The Middle Euphrates* (New York, 1927), p. 53.

of a class different from the above do, now and again, throw in an unsupported off-color comment or anecdote about the queen that is probably yet another sort of false attribution.⁶⁷

In contrast to the late Arabic sources, the Persian accounts of Zubaidah tend to be more exaggerated and given to romancing.⁶⁸ No less a statesman and author than the wazīr Nizām al-Mulk indulges in romancing dreams as a preliminary to Hārūn's and Zubaidah's philanthropies.⁶⁹ When it comes to Zubaidah's relationship to the Barmakids, the Persian sources stress her enmity toward the family and exaggerate her role in its sudden fall.⁷⁰

Persian and Arabic sources alike were purloined and juggled to provide many an anecdote and basic plot for the several stories that are woven around the magic names of Hārūn and Zubaidah in that entertainment classic, *The Thousand and One Nights*. In these *Arabian Nights* tales, as in the more solid historical records, Zubaidah, as a forceful and glamorous character, comes out second only to Hārūn al-Rashīd himself. Analysis of these stories of Zubaidah reveal an overemphasis on her romantic temperament, her love of splendor, her influence with Hārūn, and her hatred for the Barmakids.

Too few of the sources under consideration stop either

⁶⁷ E.g., Zamakhsharī, *Rauḍ*, p. 223; Damīrī, *Hayawān*, I, 108; Rāghīb, *Muḥāḍarāt*, I, 65.

⁶⁸ Cf. above, pp. 239-40.

⁶⁹ *Siasat Nameh* (Paris, 1891), pp. 126-28, and the translation by Charles Schefer (Paris, 1893), pp. 185-88.

⁷⁰ E.g., 'Abd al-'Azīm Gurrkānī, *Akhhār-i-Barāzīkākāh* (Teheran, 1312/1934). This work, written by a modern Persian who has brought several Persian texts together, is typical of the Persian point of view on this question.

to appraise or to characterize the long-departed Zubaidah. One is informed by Ibn al-Ṭiqṭiqā (ca. 700/1300) that she was wiser than her son.⁷¹ Ibn Taghribirdī, as an exception to the rule, treats the reader to a brief characterization. "Zubaidah," he writes, "was the greatest woman of her age in respect to godliness, nobility of birth, beauty, chastity, and benevolence." He mentions next the Pilgrim Road and the Meccan waterworks, the hundred girls who chanted the Qur'ān in her palace, her large retinue of servants, and the great pomp of her establishment under all three caliphs—Hārūn, Amīn, and Ma'mūn. "She was," concludes his account, "in addition to being beautiful and glorious, eloquent, intelligent, wise, and farsighted."⁷²

Coming down to modern times, one finds that the archeological interest in her tomb is overshadowed by a wider interest, among Easterners and Westerners alike, in her Pilgrim Road and Meccan waterworks. Testimony is given to one, or the other, or both of these projects, by several venturesome Western scholars and travelers who, in one guise or another, either trod the Zubaidah Road or quenched their thirst at her fountains in Mecca and 'Arafāt. Among the earlier references is that of the Spanish Moslem traveler of the first decade of the nineteenth century. Burckhardt, visiting Mecca in the next decade, refers to the initial construction as undertaken by Zubaidah as "a work of vast labor and magnitude."⁷³ Snouck Hurgronje, visiting Mecca in the

⁷¹ *Fakhrī*, p. 295.

⁷² Ibn Taghribirdī, I, 631-32.

⁷³ *Travels in Arabia* (2 vols.; London, 1829), I, 194-96. Cf. *The Travels of Ali Bey (Badia y Leblich)* (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1816), II, 53, 84.

middle eighties, expressed the hope that the Turkish governors would continue the upkeep of the waterworks "which have made the name of Zubaidah immortal in Mecca."⁷⁴

Ibrāhīm Rif'at Pasha, thrice leader of the Egyptian Pilgrims in the first decade of the present century, details the long history of the important waterworks and concludes his appreciative account with a paean of grateful praise for "Zubaidah's immortal deed."⁷⁵

That so great a blessing as this vitally needed and excellent water should come to be considered as sacred and be associated with miraculous powers is something that can be readily understood. "Sweet water refreshes the soul," cry out the water-carriers of Mecca, alternating with, "Drink of the sacred water of the Spring of Zubaidah."⁷⁶ But, on this point, let a genuine Persian pilgrim, "with his thorough English education," and his illiterate Meccan guide, Sayyid 'Alī, speak for themselves, on a crowded day at 'Arafāt:

On reaching the bottom [of the hill] we turned for 'Ain Zubaidah. To this spring has been given the power of working miracles: merely dip a black cloth in it, and it will be washed as white as milk. No dye can resist its cleansing property, no stone withstand its charm. I might believe this or not as I liked said Sayyid 'Alī; for his part he would demand no greater wonder than that it should quench his thirst—a thirst that was insatiable, he begged Zubaidah Khānum to believe. Throwing himself on his stomach, he wriggled through the crowd to the water's brink; I did likewise; and then having washed our hands and feet and quenched our thirst, we crawled back and

⁷⁴ *Mecca* (2 vols.; The Hague, 1888-89), I, 6-10.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, I, 207-24.

⁷⁶ Hadji Khan and Wilfrid Sparrow, *With the Pilgrims to Mecca* (London and New York, 1905), pp. 14, 224.

said a two-prostration prayer out of the gratitude of our hearts. "God bless Zubaïdah!" cried Sayyid 'Alī, "may her fountain never run dry!"⁷⁷

For more than eleven hundred years now, the cry of "God bless Zubaïdah!" has echoed through the sands of Arabia, the valley of Mecca, and the mountain-plain of 'Arafāt. One can well imagine it still echoing through the coming centuries and rest assured that "her fountain will never run dry" so long as Moslem rulers strong of arm, enlightened of mind, and pious of heart hold sway in one or more of the lands of the far-flung world of Islam.

Zubaïdah's long royal career unfolds, as in the case of Khaizurān, with a series of pictures that pass in review before one's mind. Born to the purple and christened Amat al-'Aziz, or "Handmaiden of the Almighty," the girl grows into a fair and chubby child. She is, for that very reason, nicknamed "Zubaïdah," or "Little Butter Roll" by an affectionate grandfather—that simple family man and great empire-builder, Manšūr. Like all princesses royal (the case of her girl-cousin Bānūqah was a rare exception to the rule), she was kept close within the harem so that virtually nothing is known of her early girlhood.

When next on the scene, she is the lovely, lively young maiden who has captured the heart of the handsome young warrior and royal prince, Hārūn al-Rashīd, her own double cousin and heir to the 'Abbāsīd throne. So strong and sweet is her hold that Hārūn, influenced, it is true, by the dangers of succession, thinks for a while in

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

terms of renouncing his heirship in anticipation of long and undistracted enjoyment of her company.

The next scene reveals her in pangs of jealousy as some young charmer catches the romantic Hārūn's passing fancy. But the lovable Zubaïdah, be it said to her credit, has her in-laws on her side. When these prove her jealousy to be unfounded, a repentant Zubaïdah rises with rare generosity of heart to the supremely acid test of a model Moslem wife and herself presents Hārūn with not one but several concubines.

As the next scene unrolls, Zubaïdah is seen caring tenderly for 'Abd Allah, the orphaned son of one of these very maidens, as she herself, now queen, awaits the arrival of her firstborn. Hers is a joyous motherhood until her stepson's richer natural endowments force themselves on Hārūn's attention to the increasing detriment of her own son, Mohammed. The fair Zubaïdah is now caught in a long and steady struggle between the deep-rooted instincts of mother love and a natural sense of fair play. Blood being so much thicker than water, she seeks at different points to shield her young son, "the flower of her heart and the apple of her eye for whom she had much compassion." She is anxious to protect his interests against fancied or real encroachment on behalf of her stepson, 'Abd Allah, who might replace Mohammed in the order of succession.

The Zubaïdah of the next scene is a troubled mother and resentful queen. She fears the Barmakids because of their tremendous weight in Hārūn's succession plans and she chafes at Yahyā's strict control of the movement of the inmates of her own palace. Granting, at this

point, the Ja'far-Abbāsah story, granting even Zubaidah's stated share in its deadly revelation, there still is nothing conclusive to characterize her action as one with malice aforethought. It is, if at all, an instance of hasty words spoken in anger and repented in belated compassion. Thus only can one explain Zubaidah's willingness to brave the distracted Hārūn's fearsome wrath with a petition for the release of the broken and imprisoned Yahyā.

In these last distressed and distressing years of Hārūn's reign—years that see several other legal wives in the royal harem—Zubaidah herself is finally caught in an absorbing external interest: the Pilgrim Road and the Meccan waterworks. Liberal by nature and regal to her very fingertips, she stints neither effort nor funds in the accomplishment of the tremendous task *fi sabil Allah*, "in the cause of Allah," faithfully hoping for a heavenly reward for her earthly charities.

Time passes and Hārūn's sun sets in at Tūs, leaving Zubaidah to mourn in the twilight "a master who was never negligent." The dark shadows gather as the relationship of son and stepson becomes more and more threatening. Zubaidah is now seen faced with a hard choice—perhaps the hardest with which a sensitive and loving mother is ever comforted. Was she to continue to shield her son despite his folly and error or was she to cry out for fair play for the distant stepson? Courageously she chooses the second alternative the while she desperately strives to restrain her son. She stays with the latter to the tragic end, despite bitter words that must have cut to the quick. Darker grows her long night

as humiliation and defeat bring her at last to her darkest zero hour, with death for her son and captivity for herself and grandsons. She emerges from her long ordeal with sufficient strength to turn aside the tempter's bait of a cry for blood revenge.

The new day is saved as much by Zubaidah's unquibbling submission to, and her sincere regard for, the victorious Ma'mūn as by any of the nobler qualities of that stepson now become caliph. Resuming, in time, the pomp that characterizes her in three reigns, Zubaidah leaves politics alone to attend to her palace, her vast fortune, and her charities. Approaching old age and the pious hope of a reward in the hereafter, add further incentive to her lifelong right-regal generosity. So at Mā'mūn's wedding to Būrān, Zubaidah, to do fitting honor to her royal stepson and his bride, parts with a fabulous heirloom, an extensive estate, and a purse that would more than ransom a king. And in her very last public appearance she is seen deeply grieved at the loss of an opportunity to hasten once more to the aid of the Meccans. A cheerful giver is she who has early awakened to the fact that it was indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

When in the last scene the Grim Reaper makes his call, Zubaidah, the Handmaiden of the Almighty, having spent her golden talents to give a cup of water to the least of Allah's pilgrims, is gratefully believed by these to have entered into the joy of her Lord. She is gone but not forgotten. It matters little if her remains rest in that tomb outside East Baghdad that goes by her name or in some other spot, be it ever so humble or ever

so great. The spirit of this generous woman of royal romance and splendor, of tact and vision, of head and heart, is confined to no one single spot on earth. Her place is secure in Islam's Hall of Fame for as long as Allah's hosts of pilgrims progress down the Zubaidah Road to their goals of Mecca and 'Arafât, there to quench a physical thirst at her springs and satisfy a spiritual one at Islam's Holiest of Holies and Allah's Mount of Mercy. Within and without Islam, her memory lives so long as history continues to instruct and the *Arabian Nights* continue to entertain. Cleopatra! Zenobia! Zubaidah! Magic names these to set the fancy free to work and play in the realms of history, legend, and romance.

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