5 Swearing Abū al-Jaysh into Office: The Loyalties of Ṭūlūnid Egypt

MATTHEW S. GORDON

Introduction

Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the autonomous governor of late third/ninth-century Abbasid Egypt (254–270/868–884), staged a ceremony of succession in 270/884 for his son and heir Abū al-Jaysh Khumārawayh. What follows is a reading of the close account left by ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Balawī (fl. later fourth/tenth century) in his *Sīrat Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*, an underutilized text in the study of Abbasid Egypt.[1] The *amīr*, as the sources knew him, died shortly thereafter of an apparent wasting disease contracted outside Tarsus on the Byzantine–Abbasid frontier.[2] The ritual moment was fraught, for reasons typical of any such transfer of office, but also for reasons specific to the Ṭūlūnid case. The governor, in securing support for the handover and the candidacy of his heir alike, sought to assure the continuity of his house. He thus had also to contend with the hostile response to that initiative by the Abbasid court in Samarra, presided over at that point by Abū Aḥmad

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1 *Sīrat Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*, Ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Taraqqī, 1358/1939), 336–43.

2 For recent scholarship on Ibn Ṭūlūn's reign, see Thierry Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Ṭūlūn to Kāfūr, 868–969," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Vol. 1, Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86–119; Michael Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad: The Damascus Assembly of 269/883," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (2010): 573–605; Matthew S. Gordon, "Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill); Mathieu Tillier, "L'étoile, la chaîne et le jugement: Essai d'interpretation d'un élément de décor dans la mosquée d'Ibn Ṭūlūn," *Der Islam* 92 (2015): 332–66; Matthieu Tillier, "Dans les prisons d'Ibn Ṭūlūn," in *Savants, amants, poètes et fous: Séances offertes à Katia Zakharia*, ed. Catherine Pinon (Beirut and Damascus: Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2019): 233–51; and Luke Treadwell, "The Numismatic Evidence for the Reign of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017): 14–40. A dated but still useful history of the Ṭūlūnids is Zaky Mohamed Hassan, *Les Tulunides: Etude de l'Egypte Musulmane à la fin du IXe siècle 868–905* (Paris: Établissements Busson, 1933).

al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/891), this in his capacity as regent. That the event points to the unraveling of the once formidable Arab-Islamic Empire is clear to us in hindsight.[3] But it appears to have been no less significant an event to contemporary observers: Ibn Ṭūlūn, in appointing his son, and in such highly visible fashion, was usurping what had been, and in Abbasid eyes remained, a caliphal prerogative: the naming of provincial governors. No source says as much explicitly, but his Abbasid detractors must certainly have dismissed the appointment as illegitimate.[4]

In seeking to secure a commitment to the future of his polity and a realignment of imperial loyalties, Ibn Ṭūlūn was asking much of his audience. He was, if we follow al-Balawī's account, seeking not only a tightening of social and political bonds already in place, but their redefinition, that is, a transfer of ties to his heir and the governing household. The present discussion speaks directly to the central theme of this volume, that is, the relations of loyalty, common interest, and reciprocal support that sustained early Islamicate imperial society. Ibn Ṭūlūn's act (staged and highly visible) was an acknowledgement that socio-political relations required careful tending. At work was a specific instance in which a prominent actor of early Abbasid political history put to the test the web of relationships on which he had established himself in office. It was, in these terms, an experiment in which conventional instruments (the ritual of succession and a bid to rally client support) were put to use in unconventional manner.[5] In Abbasid eyes, the moment was one of crisis, to the Ṭūlūnid house, one of uneasy opportunity.

A number of written sources, including those produced by early Egyptian scholars, including not only al-Balawī but also Ibn al-Dāya (fl. mid-fourth/tenth century), Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 350/961),[6] and al-Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm b. Zūlāq (d. 386/996),[7] make clear the transfer of office to Abū al-Jaysh. The numismatic record,[8] and as yet mostly unstudied papyrus

[3] See Michael Bonner, "The Waning of Empire, 861–945," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 1, The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 305–59, esp. 320–22, and, more generally, Hugh Kennedy, "The Decline and Fall of the First Muslim Empire," *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 3–30.

[4] On Ṭūlūnid–Abbasid relations, see this author's "Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn and the Politics of Deference," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, eds. Behnam *Sadeghi et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 229–56.

[5] See, for further discussion, the introduction to this volume by Edmund Hayes and Petra M. Sijpesteijn.

[6] *Kitāb al-Wulāt*, ed. Rhuvon Guest (London and Leiden: Luzon and E.J. Brill, 1912), 233ff.

[7] *Shadharāt min kutub mafqūda fī al-tārīkh*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 215–19.

[8] See Giulio Bernardi, *Arabic Gold Coins: The First Essay of a Corpus*, 2nd ed. (Trieste: Edizioni Università Trieste, 2012), 213–14.

documents,[9] attest to his tenure in office. It is striking, however, particularly in light of the otherwise considerable attention devoted to the Ṭūlūnids in Egyptian historiography, that so little interest is paid to the event of the succession itself. Only two early accounts survive: that of al-Balawī and a much shorter and rather different version by Ibn al-Dāya.[10] If Ibn Zūlāq produced an account (one later Syrian author, Ibn al-ʿAdīm, cites him as the author of a *Sīrat Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*) it is lost to us, as are, it seems, nearly all of Ibn Zūlāq's works.[11] Al-Kindī, for his part, refers only in passing to the oath of loyalty extracted by Khumārawayh from his irksome older brother, al-ʿAbbās, and the latter's almost immediate disappearance thereafter.[12]

To reconstruct the event, then, we can move ahead only a few paces: al-Balawī's account stands almost alone and, for the most part, cannot be checked. The account offers much to consider nonetheless, and such is the task I set out here. I first compare the account to that of Ibn al-Dāya, then discuss it on its own terms. As seen below, in al-Balawī's introduction to the *Sīra*, he appears to address a patron, specifically the latter's demand for a properly rendered chronicle of Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure. On one level, then, and perhaps in response to a direct commission, which is nowhere clear, al-Balawī seeks to demonstrate an expertise in Ṭūlūnid history. In doing so, as he states outright, he hewed closely to the copious information at his disposal. His main source was Ibn al-Dāya himself: al-Balawī draws generously on two of the latter's writings. The demonstration of expertise was essential to the success (one might say legitimacy) of his book.

Several concerns inform the succession account: the integrity of the Ṭūlūnid household, understood to encompass the members of the immediate family as well as a supporting cast of elite military and civilian persons;

[9] See Josef von Karabacek, *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer, Führer durch die Ausstellung* (Vienna: Selbstverlag der Sammlung, 1894), 224–29.

[10] I borrow the question (Did the event take place?) from Bonner's invaluable discussion of the earlier and no less public (and controversial) event in Ibn Ṭūlūn's career, the so-called Damascus Assembly of 269/883. See his "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," pp. 577, 578, 581, and 603.

[11] Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī tārīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988): 2:834. On Ibn Zūlāq, see "Ibn Zūlāḳ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition*, ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford E. Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel, and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill). The reference, I believe, is unique, and one possibility is that Ibn al-ʿAdīm had in mind the biography of a somewhat later Egyptian strongman, also of Samarran Turkic origins, Muḥammad b. Ṭughj al-Ikhshīdī. See Richard Gottheil, "al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Zūlāḳ," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 28 (1907): 254–55, 257.

[12] *Kitāb al-Wulāt*, 233. Given the extent of his coverage of the Ṭūlūnid period, it is surprising that Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1st edition, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (London: al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1423/2002), 2:100, and *Al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1411/1991), 3:812, offer so little comment on the succession event.

the management of the Ṭūlūnid economy; and the shaping of a response to Ibn Ṭūlūn's imperial detractors. Each concern appears as a source of "anxiety" informing what was the penultimate public act on the *amīr*'s part.[13] Each points, in other words, to an uneasiness underlying Ibn Ṭūlūn's efforts at autonomous state-building. The threefold commitment demanded by Ibn Ṭūlūn (at its heart, a call for new-style loyalties) required all on hand to proceed headlong onto untilled political ground.[14] There was the clear if unstated challenge to the caliphate and integrity of the empire. There was the problem that Ibn Ṭūlūn was asking for a transfer of loyalties from his own person to his young heir. And there was the issue of the latter's suitability for office: the thrust of much of what the text has Ibn Ṭūlūn say to his son and audience alike implies a lack of experience on Khumārawayh's part.

But al-Balawī sought to do his sources, and Ibn al-Dāya in particular, one better. He uses the opportunity to draw out the "lessons" of Ibn Ṭūlūn's succession ceremony. Read as such, the account becomes an exercise in advice-giving that speaks not simply to the challenge confronting the Ṭūlūnid house at a particularly delicate moment (the transfer of office). Rather, it attempts to speak to the wider question of effective governance and the character of decision-making. The *Sīra*, read in this fashion, is to be understood as an early example in the pre-modern Islamic era of a long-standing and widely variant category of Middle Eastern literary production, the "advice" or "mirror" literature.[15]

The Two Accounts

Questions surround al-Balawī's version of the succession ceremony. A first such question concerns his sources. One understands, in part from his own comment, which is provided below, that al-Balawī derived much of the *Sīra* from a chronicle of the Ṭūlūnid period by his predecessor and possibly

[13] A final act, according to al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 341–42, was to order (from the litter on which the dying governor was being carried) the sealing of cracks in the walls enclosing al-Qaṭā'ī', the governor's administrative center adjoining al-'Askar and al-Fusṭāṭ. As a symbolic act, the gesture seems obvious.

[14] On the connection between innovative local politics and the breakup of the Arab-Islamic Empire, see Annliese Nef and Mathieu Tillier, "Introduction," *Annales islamologiques* 45 (2011): 1–19.

[15] See Louise Marlow, "Advice and advice literature," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill) (under "Epistles and Testaments"). For a full study, see Marlow's two-volume *Counsel for Kings: Wisdom and Politics in Tenth-Century Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). I have also benefitted from reading Neguin Yavari's *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

older contemporary Aḥmad b. Yūsuf, better known as Ibn al-Dāya.[16] The indications are that Ibn al-Dāya, like his father before him, worked in the later Ṭūlūnid administration, and that, in composing his history of the dynasty, he drew on a body of first-hand information provided him by personal contacts.[17]

Only the first part of Ibn al-Dāya's text survives, however: the biography of Ibn Ṭūlūn, in Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī's seventh/thirteenth-century work *al-Mughrib fī ḥulā al-Maghrib*.[18] A second of Ibn al-Dāya's works, the *Mukāfaʾa*, contains a number of additional passages on Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Balawī likely made use of it as well.[19] The assessment by Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī, whose edition of the *Sīra* appeared in 1939, is that al-Balawī adopted "roughly fifty stories (*naḥwa khamsīn qiṣṣa*)" from those provided by Ibn al-Dāya, to which he added another forty or so of unclear origin.[20] That Ibn al-Dāya's original chronicle is missing, however, means that we are unable to fully assess the manner and extent of al-Balawī's reliance on his predecessor. Two modern scholars refer to the surviving text as an abridgment without explanation, which may be an unwarranted clouding of the waters: Ibn Saʿīd does not say that he edited Ibn al-Dāya's work, only that he selected it from various books on Ibn Ṭūlūn that were at his disposal ("I decided to limit myself to the book … of Ibn al-Dāya").[21]

The question of al-Balawī's sources and, specifically, the uncertainty that surrounds his reliance on Ibn al-Dāya are underscored by al-Balawī's use of the phrase *qāla muʾallif hādhā al-kitāb* ("the author of this book stated that"). He uses the phrase throughout the *Sīra*, including in one part of his account of the succession event. To whom does the phrase refer and where does the stress fall? The passages in question may have derived as well from Ibn al-Dāya's original book, and, in this case, al-Balawī used the phrase to mark off that same material. But a better reading is that it is al-Balawī's way

[16] See Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 579–80; Gladys Marie Frantz, "Saving and Investment in Medieval Egypt" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978), 8–18; and this author's "al-Balawī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. These rely, in good part, on Muhammad Kurd ʿAlī's introduction to the *Sīra*.

[17] Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn al-Dāya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition*, ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford E. Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel, and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill).

[18] Ed. Zaky Moḥamed Ḥassan *et al.* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Fuʾād al-Awwāl, 1953), 73–133.

[19] *Kitāb al-Mukāfaʾa wa-ḥusn al-ʿuqbā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, n.d.). For a different reading of the text, see Arie Schippers, "'Tales with a Good Ending' in Arabic Literature: Narrative Art and Theory in the Arabic World," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 4 (1986), 57–70. My thanks to Louise Marlow for bringing the article to my attention.

[20] *Sīra*, 10–11.

[21] *Mughrib*, 73 (*wa-qad ʿitamadu fī hādha al-makān an aqtaṣir ʿalā kitāb … li-Ibn al-Dāya*). See Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 573–80. It is unclear whether Ibn Saʿīd had access to al-Balawī's *Sīra*.

of setting off his text from that of Ibn al-Dāya: the stress, in this reading, falls on *hādhā*, so, effectively, "this book of mine." It would be a reminder of his method and, presumably, he would have us think, superior product.[22]

A further wrinkle concerns the identity of the informants named by Ibn al-Dāya. Most of these persons were, to us, obscure members of Ibn Ṭūlūn's personal circle, household, and administration to whom Ibn al-Dāya presumably had access in his capacity as a Ṭūlūnid official. A trio of issues arises here. There is, first of all, our inability to identify these persons beyond what the occasional passing comment says of their relationship to the *amīr* and thus their role in his regime.[23] Second, there is little way in which to identify the manner in which Ibn al-Dāya and/or al-Balawī tapped information from these persons. Finally, we cannot be sure whether and how often al-Balawī himself dealt with these same individuals (if, indeed, there is anything to their presence in the texts).[24] So, for example, in the case of the succession event, both texts cite Nasīm *al-khādim* as, apparently, their main source. We know little about Nasīm apart from his single and, one can assume, assigned name (an apparent indication that he was a Ṭūlūnid freedman) and a series of brief references that imply long service in the governor's household.[25] If, in fact, al-Balawī produced a longer and more elaborate account of the ceremony, is this because he too spoke with Nasīm? It remains unclear.

That, in comparing the two accounts of the succession event, we are on tentative ground becomes clear in reading the opening passage of the *Sīra*. In a long comment, al-Balawī criticizes Ibn al-Dāya's approach to the writing of history, specifically his account of Ṭūlūnid rule. He promises (to an unnamed and thus unidentifiable patron[26]) to provide a tighter and more systematic account. His method, if we keep with his statement, was to rework the earlier text. The result was a set of self-contained "reports" (*qiṣaṣ* or *akhbār*) of varying length, many though apparently not all derived from

[22] Bonner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad," 590–91.

[23] On staffing the middle ranks of Ibn Ṭūlūn's regime, so to speak, see Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124, citing al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 130, on Ibn Ṭūlūn's "chief interrogator"; Petra M. Sijpesteijn, "Profit Following Responsibility. A Leaf from the Records of a Third/Ninth Century Tax-Collecting Agent," *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 31 (2001), 93–98, on Badr al-Kabīr, a prominent tax official; and Tillier, "Prisons," 237–39. Extant documents, many yet to be studied in full, name a series of individuals in different (mostly fiscal and security) offices.

[24] In this case, it would be a matter of al-Balawī checking in with his predecessor's informants. Such a scenario, of course, turns on al-Balawī's dates, which remain uncertain.

[25] Al-Balawī cites Nasīm thirty-one times in the *Sīra*.

[26] Kurd ʿAlī largely passes over the question (*Sīra*, 6–7, 11); Shayyal, "Al-Balawī," suggests "a statesman or a man of letters of the Ikhshīdid period."

Ibn al-Dāya, joined to often longer, interlocking narrative sections. The result is a coherent account of Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure in office; the *Sīra* holds together fairly well as a text and, I argue later, compelling study in power.

Addressing his ostensible patron, and, again, in reference to Ibn al-Dāya's text, al-Balawī opens as follows:

> As you say, this is not how others (*al-nās*, so, perhaps, "those in the know") have compiled chronicles or how scholars have narrated past events. You seek an exhaustive and careful approach, in which a first event should precede that which came next, and a subsequent event should follow that which preceded it. I have addressed your directives in carrying out the task as you stipulated. I have left out nothing about the Ṭūlūnids that deserves to be properly narrated, serves to instruct (*wa-bihi yataʾaddab*), or is deemed pleasing. I have organized this book into sections, being careful not to include in each section material that belongs elsewhere.[27]

The task, as al-Balawī defines it, was to provide a thorough, instructive, and congenial text. Here I consider but one section of the *Sīra* (the succession event) in treating what I see as a balancing act by al-Balawī of the first and second of the three aims: his chronicle of Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure ("what deserves to be narrated"), on the one hand, his effort to draw out its significance ("what serves to instruct"), on the other.

A first step is to contrast his account with what we have from Ibn al-Dāya. The two accounts diverge sharply, at least in the form that we have them today. The passage from Ibn al-Dāya stands alone, which is to say that it has very little to do with the material that precedes and follows. This may be a function of Ibn Saʿīd's handling of the text, but, as indicated earlier, there is no obvious reason to see that he abridged it as modern scholars have alleged. By contrast, al-Balawī's version, though a coherent report on its own, works even better when one reads the longer encompassing narrative in which it is set. Ibn al-Dāya's version, in contrast with al-Balawī's elaborate narrative, is also succinct and straightforward. In form and structure, then, it acts as a conventional independent "report" (*khabar*). But, more important still, the two versions part ways in their emphasis.

Here a brief word of context is in order. It has to do with the two brothers, al-ʿAbbās and Abū al-Jaysh Khumarāwayh, the first of whom had very likely been groomed for office by his father. Several years before the succession event, however, he had risen against his father, an event the sources describe as short-lived and hapless. It was upon al-ʿAbbās's defeat and arrest that Ibn

[27] al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 32. Also see the translation by Frantz, "Saving and Investment," 15–16.

Ṭūlūn had replaced him as heir with Abū al-Jaysh.[28] The governor had held off, however, on doing away with his wayward son (whether by exile or execution) and, indeed, it appears, held out hope of his rehabilitation.[29]

Ibn al-Dāya's version of the succession ceremony speaks directly to the aborted rebellion by having it (the ceremony) turn on al-ʿAbbās's final humiliation and punishment. It has him saunter into court as, he believes, his deceased father's inevitable successor. But instead (and to his consternation), Ṭūlūnid courtiers force him to swear allegiance to his younger brother then drag him off, his fate sealed.[30] If there is a moral to be drawn from Ibn al-Dāya's report, it likely has to do with just deserts.[31]

Al-Balawī, writing the *Sīra*, aims higher, this in keeping with his promise to the unnamed patron to not simply narrate but draw out the lessons of Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure. Thus, a further and significant difference emerges between the two texts. Ibn al-Dāya sets his version immediately after the death of Ibn Ṭūlūn and, so, as just noted, has Khumārawayh ushered into office by his father's courtiers. By contrast, al-Balawī, in an intervention that says much of his ambitions for the *Sīra*, has Ibn Ṭūlūn, though gravely ill, preside over the proceedings. And lest the point be missed, in his description of the governor's final moments, so following the succession account, al-Balawī lauds Ibn Ṭūlūn's mental acuity even at the moment of his physical collapse. "His mind remained as sharp as ever, as this, his final testament (*waṣīya*), bears out."[32]

The effort to burnish the governor's image for the ages, so to speak, seems obvious. Al-Balawī uses the succession event to pose a universal question with which any self-respecting power broker would need to contend: how best (in this case at that most delicate of moments, the transfer of office) to effect the political alchemy of drawing moral and ideological commitment from material incentive? Ibn Ṭūlūn was asking much of his military and civilian supporters. He had brought them along to his point, and had

[28] On the revolt, about which al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 244–71, offers a considerably longer account than Ibn al-Dāya (Ibn Saʿīd, 118–23), see Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 96–97, and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 67–76.

[29] Al-Balawī, *Sīra,* 342, at the close of his account of the succession, includes a *khabar* in which Ibn Ṭūlūn counsels al-ʿAbbās to support his brother and warns him of the considerable animosity that he faced at court. I have seen no such passage in either of Ibn al-Dāya's books.

[30] Ibn Saʿīd, *Mughrib*, 131 and al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt,* 233, imply al-ʿAbbās's subsequent murder. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1413/1992), 3:62, has Abū al-Jaysh order the execution immediately, as does al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:100.

[31] For a possible literary context in which to situate Ibn al-Dāya's story, see Schippers, "Tales."

[32] *Wa-yanḥallu jismuhu illā an ʿaqlahu thābit lam yatakhayyir min-hu shayʾ wa-l-dalīl ʿalā dhalika waṣīyatuhu hādhihi*: al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 343.

been generous in his compensation, much as he says in the later part of his discourse to the assembled audience. But would it suffice to assure their support once he was gone?

The Succession Ceremony: Reading al-Balawī's *Sīra*

The Two Opening Akhbār

There are several parts to al-Balawī's account.[33] It begins with two distinct if overlapping *akhbār* that work to frame the main event. I read this as an effort by al-Balawī to integrate free-standing elements into a more coherent narrative. The first of the two "reports" has an ailing Ibn Ṭūlūn, ever attendant to his army's needs, direct a top official, Ibn Muhājir, to pay the troops a full year's salary in concert with the swearing of the oath of loyalty (*bayʿa*) to his son.[34] Ibn Muhājir discounts the order as evidence of the governor's faltering cognition. Ibn Ṭūlūn, ever alert, insists. Ibn Muhājir proceeds to distribute the money (*māl*) to the infantry units (*rijāl*), specifically. The specificity of the order, if this reading is correct, is left unexplained, but, to a contemporary reader, an explanation would likely have been unnecessary.[35] A short lesson by Ibn Ṭūlūn to his reluctant treasurer follows. "It was for just such a moment that I set aside this revenue (*jamaʿtu al-amwāl*). I wish to show the troops (*jaysh*) that they would be provided in a manner that those who would take up arms and confront them could not. This way their hands and hearts are emboldened." The passage sums things up nicely: one was to join material gain ("hands") to emotional and moral inducement ("hearts") and, in the process, counter the inducements offered by his opponents. There was no need to name al-Muwaffaq (Ibn Ṭūlūn's bête noire) nor his minions in Iraq and Syria.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's payment to the troops on the eve of a politically charged event was hardly an innovative step. Here one might consider a related text, one produced decades earlier at the court of the Ṭāhirids, the governing house of early Abbasid Baghdad and Khurasan. Termed an "epistle," it is

[33] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 336–43.

[34] *Fa-lammā ishtaddat ʿillatuhu taqaddama ilā Ibn Muhājir fī iṭlāq rizqⁱⁿ sannatⁱⁿ li-l-jaysh fī bayʿat Abī al-Jaysh baʿdahu* (al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 336).

[35] The structure and composition of the Ṭūlūnid military is difficult to assess in detail. But, on this reference, one view is that Ibn Ṭūlūn, having been raised in a Samarran military household, understood well enough the wisdom of satisfying the rank and file. On divisions in the Samarran armies and, specifically, an uprising by the Turkic-Central Asian troops in 256/869–70, see this author's *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 124–29 and 143–44.

typically held up as an early model (of one type) of "advice" literature.[36] Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, addressing his son ʿAbdallāh, newly appointed as governor "of Diyār Rabiʿa and the lands extending through Syria to the borders of Egypt," reminds him to provide adequate support to his troops, advice, in sum, very much in the same vein as that offered by Ibn Ṭūlūn to his son.[37] But, issued in 206/821, thus, again, much earlier than al-Balawī's *Sīra*, the epistle was of a very different Abbasid moment. The context of Ibn Ṭūlūn's admonition to Ibn Muhājir was specific.[38]

The sense that the governor was preoccupied with securing support from his military is borne out in the description of the succession event itself. If Ṭāhir's comment to his son takes up only a small part of the epistle, in other words, in al-Balawī's account the concern, clearly pressing, is front and center. This would follow given Ibn Ṭūlūn's project of new-style state-building and the fierce opposition emanating from Samarra and Baghdad. Indeed, al-Muwaffaq, drawing on his close ties to the Abbasid central command, sought at least once to oust Ibn Ṭūlūn by force, an abortive effort as it turned out.[39] More consequential still had been the betrayal of Luʾluʾ, a long-time Ṭūlūnid client (and, like Nasīm, a freedman) in 268/882. Charged by Ibn Ṭūlūn to govern his Syrian provinces, Luʾluʾ opted, for reasons left obscure, to switch allegiance to al-Muwaffaq, this in the context of the Zanj war in southern Iraq. The betrayal had badly shaken the Ṭūlūnid house.[40] Al-Ṭabarī has Luʾluʾ in command of a formidable army that, with the betrayal, was now lost to Ibn Ṭūlūn.[41] In sum, the governor, addressing Ibn Muhājir (and, soon, Abū al-Jaysh himself) had every reason to nurture relations with his local military command.

The corrosive effect of betrayal arises implicitly in the second of al-Balawī's introductory *akhbār*. The report describes a final exchange between the dying governor and his long-time companion Aḥmad b. Muḥammad

[36] For an excellent translation and detailed commentary, see Clifford E. Bosworth, "An Early Arabic Mirror for Princes: Ṭāhir Dhū l-Yamīnain's Epistle to His Son ʿAbdāllah (206/821)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970), 25–41. Marlow, "Advice and Advice Literature," says of the text: "Ṭāhir's testament [*waṣīya*] offers an extensive and comprehensive model of rulership to which those in authority should aspire."

[37] "Early Arabic Mirror," 26 (appointment), 36 (payment).

[38] On contextualizing works of "advice" literature, see Louise Marlow, "Surveying Recent Literature on the Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes Genre," *History Compass* 7 (2009), 529–30.

[39] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 85–87.

[40] See Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 96, 100–101, 102 and Hassan, *Tulunides*, 72, 77–81, 90, 94, 123. I am preparing a separate study of al-Balawī's detailed treatment of the betrayal and its fallout (*Sīra*, 272–88, 305–309).

[41] *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960–1969), 9:2028–29, 2080–81.

al-Wāsiṭī. The latter was a natural choice for a heart-to-heart prior to the ceremony of succession. Their relationship dated to well before Ibn Ṭūlūn's appointment to Egypt, and, over the years, the *amīr* had relied on al-Wāsiṭī to carry out all manner of sensitive tasks.[42]

The encounter, in al-Balawī's description, is emotionally taut.[43] The *amīr*, at one point, reminds al-Wāsiṭī of their long attachment: "I have been better to you than I have my son and favored you over all others."[44] Al-Wāsiṭī, overcome, assures the governor of his abiding commitment. The text, of course, has set things up: al-Balawī, citing Nasīm as his informant, goes on to remind us of al-Wāsiṭī's subsequent abandonment of Abū al-Jaysh and the Ṭūlūnid house, this shortly after Ibn Ṭūlūn's death. Al-Balawī adds that the wayward client went on to die as a fugitive, shunned and in disgrace.[45] It reads in similar fashion to his account of Luʾluʾ's fate.[46] One can read such comments as conventional, that is, standard fare on the vagaries of master–client relations (and the certain fate of the unfaithful servant).[47] But one has here a specific context, the struggle by Ibn Ṭūlūn to secure declarations of faith in his political project even, and perhaps especially, on the part of persons already invested in that same project. Loyalties, once secured, had now to be nurtured.

The Main Event

The two exchanges, with Ibn Muhājir (on supplying the army) and the emotionally charged tête-à-tête with al-Wāsiṭī (an effort to secure the support of a leading courtier), serve as entry to al-Balawī's account of the succession event. Citing, as witnesses, Nasīm *al-khādim* and the ambiguous *muʾallif hādhā al-kitāb*, al-Balawī leaves off reference to its venue. One is left to choose, it seems, either Ibn Ṭūlūn's *qaṣr* in al-Qaṭāʾiʿ, his administrative center, or the impressive new mosque that remains in place today. The *amīr* used both sites, often in conjunction with one another, in projecting a public presence.[48]

[42] The references in the *Sīra* are many (index: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī).

[43] For a useful introduction to emotion as an approach to Arabic/Islamic sources, see Julia Bray, "Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions: The Case of Slavery," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017), 143–47.

[44] Or "I favored you over the boy (i.e. Abū al-Jaysh) and all others" (*faḍaltuka ʿalā al-walad wa-kull ahad*^{in}) (al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 337).

[45] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 337–38.

[46] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 305–309.

[47] For useful discussion, see Noëmie Lucas's chapter in this same volume.

[48] See this author's "Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Qaṭāʾiʿ and the Legacy of Samarra," in *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie*, Band 4, eds. Julia Gonnella *et al.* (Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2014), 63–77, esp. 68–69.

The text, making clear that the event was both public and highly charged, begins with a list of elite attendees. Led by Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī, Muḥammad b. Abbā (a top bureaucrat) and Ṭabārī[49] (a prominent commander), the assembly included Ibn Ṭūlūn's closest advisors (*wujūh khāṣṣatihi*), his officers (*quwwādihi*), principal officials (*wujūh dawlatihi*), and his main secretaries (*kuttābihi*). Unclear is whether each designation is to be read as a bounded category. More likely is that the list of worthies is intended to underscore the somber weight of the event: on hand were all persons with a stake in the future of the Ṭūlūnid *dawla*. The only elite sector not represented, it seems, was the (proto-Sunni) Islamic religious establishment. The attendees in place, Ibn Ṭūlūn brings Abū al-Jaysh forward: the governor would dispense his advice publicly. Again, a key feature of the account, compared with that of Ibn al-Dāya, is the (commanding) presence of the *amīr*, this despite his deteriorating physical condition. He opens on a practical note with a set of stern instructions to his son regarding the provision of support to the caliph, al-Muʿtamid (r. 256/870–279/892). Here, the effort to coax moral and emotional commitment from material inducement is plain. At issue were annual payments of one hundred thousand dinars intended for the caliph himself and, specifically, to defend the terms of the *bayʿa* sworn to al-Muʿtamid by Ibn Ṭūlūn and the army.[50] The hard number cannot be checked: one takes it as reference to the scale of the sums involved.

At play is Ibn Ṭūlūn's determination to champion the caliph and his office. A full discussion falls outside the bounds of the present paper; suffice it here to say that Ibn Ṭūlūn's project was never one of outright independence.[51] It was a matter, on the one hand, of adopting a posture of deference to the Abbasid house and the prestige that accrued in doing so, and, on the other, of providing the caliph with the means by which to withstand the pressures placed upon him and his office. The text neither names al-Muwaffaq nor points directly to his efforts at securing primacy over the caliphate, but, to any reader of the full *Sīra*, the inferences must have been clear.[52] Al-Balawī does not explain, in any case, his reason for leaving out specific references

[49] The rendering of ostensibly Turkic names in early Abbasid texts raises questions not simply of how they (the names) were read or misread, as the case may be, by urban authors writing in Arabic, but also of how best to situate the Samarran commanders and their troops in relation to contemporary Middle Eastern society. For one discussion, see this author's "The Samarran Turkish Community in the *Taʾrīkh* of al-Ṭabarī," in *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2008), 237–62.

[50] See, for context, Treadwell, "Numismatic Evidence," esp. 25–27.

[51] See Gordon, "Deference."

[52] As suggested earlier, the confrontation with al-Muwaffaq, on the part of both the caliph and Ibn Ṭūlūn, is a leitmotif of the *Sīra*, with the regent serving as a useful foil.

of this kind. My suggestion, again, is that, in opting for a certain ambiguity, he sought to have his text take on a more universal thrust.

In describing Ibn Ṭūlūn's comment to Abū al-Jaysh regarding support for the caliph, al-Balawī (or his source) has him use the same phrase three times, albeit with slight variations. Abū al-Jaysh (so his father would have it) was to continue the payments as a buttress against "the misdeed [or sin of] violating the oath of allegiance (*al-ḥinth fī yamīn al-bayʿa*)."[53] The third instance of the phrase has a slight twist: Abū al-Jaysh, in seeing to the payments, would assure not only the security of the caliph and thus position himself in the right but also model a proper stance for the military. By emboldening the troops against their detractors, he (and they) would offer solace to the beleaguered caliph. The charge in question (the violation of the *bayʿa* and, thus, the menace posed to the caliphal office) was one that Ibn Ṭūlūn had levelled at al-Muwaffaq some months earlier at the so-called "Damascus Assembly." The event, which involved an effort by Ibn Ṭūlūn to rally elite support for his position regarding the caliphate and issue a formal condemnation of al-Muwaffaq, was the last direct confrontation between the two men.[54]

At work, to make the point again, was Ibn Ṭūlūn's effort to bend the prestigious weight of the caliph's office to his purposes. This section of the text ends, however, with a small comment, ostensibly on al-Balawī's part, in which he cites Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Kān, a prominent Ṭūlūnid official. Abū al-Jaysh, the comment goes, continued the payments until the appointment of a new vizier in Samarra, Ismāʿīl b. Bulbul, and the signing of an accord with al-Muwaffaq. The short note, in other words, refers to an episode in Khumārawayh's tenure, so an episode of later Ṭūlūnid history.[55] It evinces the care with which al-Balawī composed his account. The note (further proof that he knew his Ṭūlūnid history) is set apart from the main text. This is to suggest again that al-Balawī looked to frame it, the main account, in more universal terms regarding the just exercise of authority. His topic is Ibn Ṭūlūn's succession, but his effort is to frame it as an appropriate exercise of *riyāsa*.

The text returns to Nasīm's account. It has Ibn Ṭūlūn, having advised his son regarding the payments to al-Muʿtamid, turn once more to his officers

[53] An echo of Q 56:46. On the use of *yamīn* in different settings, see Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 28, 41, 54 and 239.

[54] Bonner's "Ibn Ṭūlūn's Jihad" is a full and rewarding discussion of the Assembly.

[55] See Ulrich Haarmann, "Khumārawayh," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill).

and troops (*wujūh quwwādihi wa-ghilmānihi*). The passage continues with the dominant theme, linking reminders of material support with a call for personal commitment. It has the *amīr* insist that, for them, he had set things in order: "All that you require I have provided with this regime" (*qad waṭaʾtu la-kum al-mihād bi-hādhihī al-dawla*). And now, he would ask in return, first, that they set aside their divisions and mutual mistrust, and, second, resist the inducements offered them by *ahl al-ʿIrāq*. The passage concludes with a reminder of how much turned on the presence of Ibn Ṭūlūn's own person: "No one will lead you as I have … be mindful of the companionship and close guidance I have devoted to you all." His audience, as a body, weeps.[56]

The governor then turns back to Abū al-Jaysh, partly on familiar ground. Ibn Ṭūlūn, speaking of all he had provided his son by way of wisdom and instruction (*lan tajid abad*^{an} *anṣaḥ la-ka minnī*), had also bequeathed to him sufficient wealth (*dakhl baladika*) to meet the requirements of his military and elite supporters. And now it falls to him, Abū al-Jaysh, to counter the (ill-)advice of their opponents.[57] At issue, of course, are their Abbasid detractors and their slander, a sure source, were it heeded, of ruin and collapse (*iḍmiḥlāl wa-zawāl*). No need for further explanation: it meant facing down al-Muwaffaq and his allies. But the text sounds a new note as well concerning leadership style. Ibn Ṭūlūn conveys it in a two-part phrase, difficult to translate, that strikes a distinctly paternal (and autocratic) note much in keeping with the tone of the entire discourse. Abū al-Jaysh, he says, is to extend benevolence (*līn al-jānib*) to his subjects and thus assure a sense of security on their part. He bequeaths to his son, in effect, the *raʾīya*, or "subject populace" of Egypt: "Act on their behalf, and you win them over. They will rush to demonstrate their loyalty and hasten to carry out your every bidding."[58]

An extended passage in Ṭāhir's b. al-Ḥusayn's epistle sounds the same note, one found in many other works of Middle Eastern advice literature as well. "The people in your realm are only called 'your flock' (*raʾiyyatuka*) because you [ʿAbdallāh b. Ṭāhir] are their shepherd (*rāʾīhim*) and their overseer."[59] But, again, one wants to be attentive, in reading al-Balawī, to the specifics of Ṭūlūnid affairs. Although the *Sīra* represents Ibn Ṭūlūn in

[56] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 339.

[57] On the potent term *naṣīḥa*, or "counsel, advice, direction," which reoccurs further in the same passage ("turn a deaf ear to those whose counsel would only bring ruin to your realm"), see the repeated references in Marlow, *Counsel for Kings* (index).

[58] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 339.

[59] Bosworth, "Mirror," 37–38.

very positive fashion overall, it does voice throughout a certain anxiety, as Kurd ʿAlī points out in his editor's introduction, that the governor wielded too heavy a hand. Thus, for example, it includes a reference (cited almost invariably by later biographers of Ibn Ṭūlūn, most of whom likely relied on Ibn al-Dāya and/or al-Balawī) to the "18,000 prisoners" executed on the governor's watch.[60] The succession text echoes the same warning. It has Ibn Ṭūlūn acknowledge having been reluctant to extend that same benevolence to his subjects, but adds, as if to justify his grim record, that he had done so to provide his heir with the opportunity to do him one better in "capturing [his people's] hearts."[61]

Up to this point, then, the governor's *waṣīya*, or "testament," to his son reads as one would expect. Ibn Ṭūlūn counsels Abū al-Jaysh on the main challenges: relations with the military, civilian notables, and the Ṭūlūnid household; proper conduct toward the office and person of the caliph; and the antagonism of their Iraqi imperial detractors. But, again, the account is layered. Al-Balawī provides a close narrative of the events in question, addressing in the process issues particular to the Ṭūlūnid case (e.g. the confrontation with al-Muwaffaq). But one can easily read the succession account as an effort, using a more universal register, to have Ibn Ṭūlūn's advice resonate beyond the specific occurrence of Khumārawayh's assumption of office.

There is, in sum, a back-and-forth effect to the account. Al-Balawī does not lose sight of his subject (the acquisition of office by Abū al-Jaysh), and one could certainly argue that he has performed a valuable service by recounting an event about which we would otherwise know little. As stated earlier, however, the historicity of the event cannot be checked; the details of the two introductory *akhbar*, like the main narrative itself, stand in limbo so to speak. But nor should one lose sight of al-Balawī's determination to demonstrate his grasp of Ṭūlūnid history. This is particularly apparent in the final section of the succession account.

It has Ibn Ṭūlūn refer to what might be called four principal "revenue streams," that is, the sources of wealth on which Abū al-Jaysh was to rely in carrying through his father's advice and thus sustaining the family's hold on Egypt. One turns here, ostensibly, to Ṭūlūnid fiscal matters. The references in question are at once striking and difficult to interpret, which might

[60] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 27 (Kurd ʿAlī). On the same reference in later sources, see e.g. Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughya*, 8:829 and al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā,* 1:425. For a thorough discussion, see Tillier, "Prisons."

[61] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 339.

explain why modern scholarship has largely passed them over.[62] The entire passage, in any case, defies ready translation. On hand, for example, are the terms used in the account for the various categories of revenue: in what sense, if ever, are they technical terms? So, for example, there is *ḥāṣil*, typically defined as "result, product, yield," but which might be rendered here as "treasury." And what is the relationship of (the) *ḥāṣil* to the other "revenue streams"? The passage seems to indicate that the four "streams" or sources of wealth made up "my (Ibn Ṭūlūn's) income or treasury" (*wa-fī ḥāṣilī*).[63]

The four sources of wealth, and, thus, support for the Ṭūlūnid *dawla*, are as follows:

1. The "trust" or fund (*wadīʿa*) administered by Khayr *al-khādim*. The passage refers several times to this fund, calling it *al-māl al-makhzūn ʿinda Khayr al-khādim*,[64] or *al-wadīʿa allatī ʿinda Khayr al-khādim*. It has Ibn Ṭūlūn make much of the fund, for example, as "the treasure of your realm" (*dhakhīrat li-mamlakitika*) and, later in the text, he insists, in no uncertain terms, that it is not to be divided up upon his death. That is, Abū al-Jaysh is to keep it intact and close at hand, and thus draw on it only as a last resort.[65] The text is very specific: the fund contained 1000 *badra*s, or, as Kurd ʿAlī defines the term, a sum of ten thousand dirhams. Using one ratio, the full figure was perhaps in the neighborhood of 450,000 dinars.[66] (Here, as elsewhere, the actual numbers are probably best read as measures of scale than actual.)
2. A further sum in the amount of 1,750,000 dinars. The text stipulates, first, that this second fund was *separate* (*ghayr*) from the *wadīʿa*, and, second, that it was to be used specifically to pay the army (*li-ʿaṭāʾ jayshika*). Again, the text is read here as saying that the *ḥāṣil* contained the other funds. Unlike for the next two "streams," however, there is no apparent reference to the source of this second fund.

[62] It does not appear that either of the two modern historians to whom one can turn for guidance on the Ṭūlūnid economy has taken up this passage: Gladys Frantz-Murphy, "Saving and Investment," and see her *Arabic Agricultural Leases and Tax Receipts from Egypt (148–427 AH/765–1035 AD)* (Vienna: Verlag Brüder Hollinek, 2001), and Kosei Morimoto, *The Fiscal Administration of Egypt in the Early Islamic Period* (Kyoto: Dohosha Publisher, 1981). I know of no references in the documentary record to any of the four "revenue streams," at least not in the manner of al-Balawī, but a more systematic assessment of Ṭūlūnid-era documents, this particularly in light of the publication in recent years of newly edited papyrus texts, is clearly in order.

[63] Al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 340, line 15.

[64] Al-Balawī, *Sīra,* 340, lines 3 and 11, and a further reference on 341, line 6.

[65] See the phrasing on p. 340, lines 4–6. I take issue with Kurd ʿAlī's edit, specifically his interpolation (*fa-tashtarikū*) which, to my reading, does not make sense.

[66] See Kennedy, "Decline," 12, n. 11, citing al-Jashshiyārī, for the ratio of dirhams to dinars as 22:1.

3. The yield of the annual land tax (*māddat al-kharāj*). Gladys Frantz-Murphy, in a brief discussion, indicates that from the mid-second/eighth century, the term *kharāj*, as used in the documentary record, referred to "taxes assessed in money, which could be paid in cash or in crops."[67] I take it that al-Balawī (or his source) is using it in this fashion as well. The text adds, presumably to contrast its use with that of the *wadīʿa*, that the particular fund was available to Abū al-Jaysh to use as he saw fit: it was "public wealth" (*mā tamlakahu al-dawla*).
4. The income from Ibn Ṭūlūn's own land holdings (*wa-alladhī amlakahu anā khāṣṣat*^{an} *min dakhl iqṭāʿī wa-ibtiyāʿī*). The sum specified is 250,000 dinars. The meaning of *ibtiyāʿī* is unclear. Were these lands that the governor purchased or acquired for his own benefit? And is part of the point, perhaps, that he *purchased* these lands so to make clear that the income from this one fund was, legally speaking, above board (i.e. that he had acquired the properties in licit fashion)?

The text, however, puts the stress on another point. Referring to the fund as contained in Ibn Ṭūlūn's own "treasury" (*bayt mālī*), it makes clear that it was separate from the *wadīʿa*, or "trust," in that, while the *wadīʿa* was to remain untouched except in cases of dire emergency, this money was to be used specifically for the Ṭūlūnid household. Abū al-Jaysh, in other words, was to use it as often and actively as possible. And the text is specific: he was to do so in order to shore up divisions within the ruling house. Again, as implied earlier in reference to Ibn Ṭūlūn's son (al-ʿAbbās) and, more so perhaps, his client-turned-traitor (Luʾluʾ), the Ṭūlūnid household was an unwieldy and fractious entity: the winning of hearts had to begin at home, and, for this purpose, Abū al-Jaysh was to make generous use of the fund.

A full discussion of this last section of the succession account would set it in the context of Ṭūlūnid economic history. Suffice it here to repeat the point that al-Balawī made every effort to display his command of Ṭūlūnid history. But the effort was, in equal measure, one of laying the groundwork to a particular understanding of Ibn Ṭūlūn's approach to office. So, briefly,

[67] *Agricultural Leases*, 141–42. On the introduction of the term *kharāj*, as an Abbasid-era innovation, see Frantz-Murphy, "The Economics of State Formation in Early Islamic Egypt," in *From Al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Muslim World*, eds. Petra M. Sijpesteijn *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 101–14, esp. 110–12 and Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 177–78 and 190–93. The reference, on the part of both historians, to "Persian officials" is, to my mind, akin to the use of "Turk" in medieval sources and thus problematic. Is it, in fact, a proper ethnonym? These men, after all, were cosmopolitan members of an imperial court, and many were the offspring of mixed unions of elite fathers and concubine mothers of varied ethnic origins.

I suggest that, in weaving together the many references, al-Balawī has the *amīr* not simply in command of the details of his fiscal affairs (a task he might well have left to Ibn Muhājir and others of his civilian administration) but is clear-minded in directing his heir as to their proper management. Al-Balawī, in sum, delves into the intricacies of Ibn Ṭūlūn's tenure to draw out the example of sound judgement and sage decision-making.

The description of the succession ceremony concludes with a last appeal on Ibn Ṭūlūn's part to his offspring and household: they were not to ignore the threat posed by their Abbasid detractors (*mā fī nufūs ahl al-ʿIrāq ʿalaykum*). The *amīr* ends on a plaintive (or defiant?) note: "I know full well how they view what I have done (*fa-innī aʿraf dhanbī la-hum*) – to God I appeal for your protection!" The weeping that followed shook the very building itself.[68]

Conclusion

Three concerns underlie al-Balawī's account of the succession ceremony. Each concern can be understood in relation to a single problem: the assurance that individuals and key circles would retain their ties to the Ṭūlūnid polity once its founder was gone. It was a matter of inducement: emotional, material, and ideological.

The first of the three concerns was the integrity of the Ṭūlūnid household. Were the ties that bound our governor to his elite following (his "household" of family members, commanders, clients, and advisors) properly defined and thus durable? Was Ibn Ṭūlūn assured, in other words, that they would survive his death and thus provide his heir with the backing he would need to govern in his own right? The question goes to the extent to which his contemporaries signed on to his project of fashioning a near-independent polity in Egypt and, thus, in part, redefining relations with the Abbasid center. Betrayal by al-ʿAbbās (his son), Luʾluʾ (his client), and al-Wasiṭī (his long-time advisor) begs the question. All were individuals once closely aligned to the Ṭūlūnid household, and on whom the *amīr* had relied in advancing his political ambitions and to whom he had directed all manner of favor. Each of these men owed their careers to enrollment in the Ṭūlūnid house, and yet each opted to step away when opportunity arose.

No less a concern was the management of Egypt's wealth, what I have described as the "revenue streams" of the Ṭūlūnid state. The text has the *amīr* worry about the proper use of each fund. As with the passage regarding

[68] al-Balawī, *Sīra*, 341, line 14.

al-Wāsiṭī (on the question of loyalty), the text may be simply engaging in foreshadowing. Abū al-Jaysh would demonstrate a taste for lavish spending over his twelve-year tenure; the Egyptian historiographical tradition knows him well for this reason.[69] This, then, provides the "logic" of reading Ibn Ṭūlūn's weary insistence that his son should not waste, through such spending, all he was to bequeath to him. But I suggest reading what is a difficult passage as an effort by al-Balawī to draw out what he, and his sources, understood as Ibn Ṭūlūn's singular achievements in managing Egypt's economy and, in this case, especially, of providing his successor with the means by which to advance his own standing once in office, and, thus, sustain the *amīr*'s ambitious project.

And, finally, there is the matter of countering al-Muwaffaq and his allies at the imperial center. It was a political confrontation: a long-standing competition with al-Muwaffaq over access to the caliph's office and the prestige to which it gave rise. For both men, and especially Ibn Ṭūlūn, it was a matter of legitimation. It bears stressing that the Ṭūlūnid project, upon the *amīr*'s death, remained a work in progress: Ibn Ṭūlūn left his son a dynamic and, thus, indeterminate political and ideological project. At several moments in the succession ceremony, al-Balawī has the audience burst into tears. An easy device to be sure, but, here, it has a point: an emotional and moral glue was needed to hold things together, meaning that efforts on the part of the Ṭūlūnid house to rely solely on material incentives would only go so far.

The argument, then, is that al-Balawī would have his readers consider the moment of succession in twofold manner. We are to engage the drama of Ṭūlūnid history on its own terms: faced with the opportunity afforded him by a waning of Abbasid authority in Samarra, Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, having successfully pursued autonomous control of Egypt, proposed to transfer it to his son, thus setting in place a dynastic polity. The details of the succession event are as al-Balawī presents them to us: compelling, even plausible, but beyond our ability to check. But, perhaps, we are on more solid footing in framing matters as I have proposed here, as a set of "concerns." They take on, I suggest, credibility if one considers the proximity to that same drama on the part of Ibn al-Dāya (al-Balawī's chief source) as well as al-Balawī's determination to narrate it in full. But the point is that we are also to take the measure of Ibn Ṭūlūn as office-holder. This is to read the *Sīra* as a work of illustration. In this case, it is a matter of al-Balawī, at a sufficient distance from the Ṭūlūnid court and its history to do so, holding up the *amīr*'s tenure for scrutiny.

[69] As suggested by Bianquis, "Autonomous Egypt," 106, and Haarmann, "Khumārawayh."

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