

THE ZANJ REVOLT (869-883) IN THE ABBASID ERA

by

Suad Mustafā Muḥammad

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1 9 8 1

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED: Snad M Muhammad

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

William J. Wilson

William J. Wilson
Associate Professor of
Oriental Studies

10-XII-1981

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my profound thanks to the Faculty of the Department of Oriental Studies: Drs. L. Adamec, W. Royce, and W. Wilson for their guidance and support. But foremost must come Dr. William Wilson who has put his intimate knowledge over many problems of this thesis which he graciously accepted to supervise.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	v
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE ANNALS OF WAR	4
3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS UNDERLYING THE ZANJ REVOLUTION	25
The Detrimental Impact of the Turks	25
Feudalism	27
Slavery	29
The Qarmatian Revolt	30
4. THE LEADER OF THE ZANJ	31
5. THE CAMP-CITIES	35
6. CONCLUSION	38
APPENDIX: CONVERSION TABLE FOR HIJRI YEARS CITED IN THE TEXT	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter assesses the very few writings on the Zanj, and especially that of Mr. Nöldeke, and demonstrates them to be inadequate and biased. The second chapter deals exhaustively with the annals of war and follows the chronology of the development of the Zanj Revolt. New materials, which have not been hitherto utilized, fill the gaps in al-Ṭabarī's (d. 922) account, the only detailed study on the Zanj. The third chapter explores the causes which brought about that Revolt and finds them to be: the detrimental influences of the Turks, feudalism, slavery, and the Qarmatian Revolt, and thus concludes that these factors were socio-economic and that religious factors were not contributory to the Zanj Revolt. The fourth chapter attempts to put together the fragmentary information about the Zanj chief so as to give as complete and accurate a picture as possible about his motives and character. The investigation shows that he was an opportunist, imposter, and a power-seeking adventurer, not an idealist and morally-motivated leader. The fifth chapter, despite the inexplicable lack of information, tries to give an account of the four camp-cities which were established in the course of the war--their locations, functions, and organization. The last chapter aims at putting the Zanj Revolt in its proper perspective, showing that it was in the

first place a peasants' revolt with its roots in the Jordanian peasants' insurrection of 215.*

*See Appendix for conversion table for Hijrī years cited in the text, p. 42.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The year 254/869 witnessed the rise of the Zanj Rebellion, which lasted for fourteen years. In the opening lines of his brief introduction of the new material on the Zanj, A. Popovic rightly remarked: "La Revolt des esclaves du Bas ^CIrāq (869-83) tient une très grand place dans l'histoire politique, économique, et sociale du troisième siècle de l'Hègire, et son promoteur ^CAlī b. Muḥammad attire, à plus d'un titre, notre attention."¹ However, this revolt has been overlooked by most historians in the East and in the West alike. If any mention is made of it at all, it is usually very brief or inadvertent.² The only relatively detailed study of the Zanj insurrection is Nöldeke's; however, three shortcomings of his account should be noted. Firstly, his treatise is but an incomplete record of the historical events as related by al-Ṭabarī. Only the major battles are given some attention and many revealing facts are omitted. Secondly, Nöldeke does not make any attempt to explore the factors that led to the outburst of one of the bloodiest and most destructive rebellions in medieval Islam. Thirdly, he deals with this revolt

1. A. Popovic, "Quelques Renseignements Inédits Concernant Le Maître Des Zang, ^CAlī B. Muḥammad." *Arabica*, Brill, Vol. XII, 1965, p. 175.

2. Ph. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London, 1960), pp. 467-68.

from a very subjective point of view. A reader with a fair eye will notice that the author is prejudiced against the imperial forces (i.e., the Arabs). Every effort is made to label them with cowardice and treachery, whereas praise is poured on the Zanj. A few examples will show Nöldeke's biased treatment of the subject, and the absence of any balanced assessment. The terms heroism, manliness, and courage are applied to the Zanj in virtually all their combats against the imperial army,³ while the brilliant expeditions of the imperial army under the leadership of al-Muwaffaq and his son are not given the credit they deserved. On the other hand, anything that has a negative connotation which would besmirch the favorable image of the Zanj which he tried to project are left out. Al-Ṭabarī, which is the only source Nöldeke depended on, relates that the Zanj in many occasions fled the battle field.⁴ Many of them, especially in the later stages of the war, deserted their leader and joined the imperial army whereupon they were pardoned and rewarded. On this point Nöldeke has nothing to say. However, when the reverse occurred on only one occasion he commented, "Such things throw a strange light upon the discipline and loyalty of the imperial army."⁵ When the Zanj occupied Basra, they promised amnesty to everyone. The people

3. Th. Nöldeke, *Sketches From Eastern History*, Tr. J. S. Black (Beirut: Khayats, 1963), pp. 155, 158, 159, 170, 171.

4. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, Ed. Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1968), vol. 9, pp. 418, 434, 477, 496, 497.

5. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 163.

were induced to gather together at a certain place to be addressed by the Zanj chief.⁶ When they did, all roads were blocked and a brutal massacre took place. The lowest estimated number of the slain was 300,000. This savage act was too much for Nöldeke to accept, especially when compared to the pardon and even rewards granted by the imperial forces time and again to whomever asked for amnesty. Therefore Nöldeke suspects this incident and considers it mere allegation. Meanwhile he, curiously enough, accepts all al-Ṭabarī's other accounts. Nöldeke deliberately ignores the fact that what the Zanj did in Basra was their usual course of action in every city they took over. In every attack against the Zanj, he refers to the imperial forces as "assailants" or "enemies."⁷

The present study hopes to present a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the Zanj Revolt, to explore the motives that caused it, and to place it objectively in its proper perspective.

6. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 482.

7. Nöldeke, op. cit., pp. 163, 167, 168, 170, 171.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANNALS OF WAR

The year 254/869 marked the emergence of an ambitious, adventurous and power-seeking man, ^CAlī b. Muḥammad. He began in Hajar-- by giving himself out to be a descendant of ^CAlī and Fāṭima and gained quite a few followers. A few months later he was compelled to move to Baḥrain due to the violent resistance with which he and his supporters were met. In Baḥrain he was able to attract a considerable number of followers. In fact, all of his great lieutenants, upon whom he depended completely during the entire duration of his revolution, were from there: such men as Sulaymān b. Jāmi^C and Muḥammad b. al-Azraq al-Baḥrānī. But once more he was forced to leave Baḥrain. Apparently his authoritarianism diminished gradually the number of his supporters as well as his potential followers. Learning from his bitter experience in Baḥrain, he carefully recruited the Bedouin tribes off the skirts of Baḥrain one after the other.

Having not forgotten the disgrace of his expulsion from Baḥrain and his intention to be looked upon as a fearsome and respected power, he attacked Baḥrain, but he suffered a disastrous defeat and his army was completely shattered.⁸ These successive failures

8. al-Tabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 410-11; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* (Cairo: al-Halabi), vol. 7, p. 68.

turned his thoughts towards another approach--taking advantage of the anarchy prevailing in disturbed areas. Baṣra, the great commercial city, second only to Baghdad in importance, was suffering severely at that time from the protracted conflict of two parties: the Bilāliyya and Sa^cdiyya.⁹ ^cAlī's efforts to secure a footing in Baṣra came to no avail. The few followers he gained, together with some members of his family including his elder son, were thrown into prison, a fate which he narrowly escaped by flight to Baghdad.¹⁰ He spent the remainder of the year 254 A.H. in Baghdad and most of the following year. By the end of 255 he had gained a moderate number of supporters. In Ramaḍān 255 the governor of Baṣra, Muḥammad b. Rajā', was deposed and disturbances broke out anew. The leaders of the two parties mentioned above broke open the prison to free their men. ^cAlī's relatives siezed the opportunity and escaped. When the news reached him, ^cAlī decided to return to Baṣra. It was obvious to him that trying to capitalize on the anarchy prevailing in Baṣra had proven to be a misadventure, and therefore another means of approach should be sought. Utilizing the lowest strata of the population--the slaves and the freed-men--seemed most appropriate for the execution of his plans.

At no great distance from Baṣra there were extensive flats, traversed by ditches, where great numbers of black slaves, mostly from

9. Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 68.

10. al-Ṭabari, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 412; Arabica, op. cit., vol. XII, p. 178.

the east coast of Africa, the land of the Zanj, were employed by the land owners.¹¹ They worked at digging away the nitrous surface soil, so as to lay bare the fruitful ground underneath, and at the same time obtain the saltpetre that occurred in the upper stratum. The work was very hard and the supervision was extremely strict.¹²

Among these masses of slaves sprang up a strong feeling of bitterness against their masters, as well as a consciousness of their own strength. Recognizing these two facts, ^CAlī decided to arouse the Zanj against their masters and to set the Zanj's strength in motion. He began by assuming the guise of a business agent for the sons of the Caliph al-Wāthiq. This enabled him to establish broad and unlimited contacts with the slaves and their supervisors, seemingly to discuss business deals, but actually to preach his message. He pointed out to the Zanj how badly they were treated, and promised them, if they joined him, freedom, wealth and slaves.¹³ One band of the Zanj after another--a troop of fifty, a troop of five hundred, and so forth, answered the call. The supervisors tried fruitlessly to convince ^CAlī to return their slaves, promising him five dīnārs per person and amnesty.¹⁴ To prove to his followers his sincerity,

11. A. Amīn, *Zuḥr al-Islām* (Cairo, 1946), vol. 1, p. 70.

12. S. Zakār, *Tārīkh al-^CArab wa-al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), p. 308.

13. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., p. 412; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 68.

14. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, p. 418.

he solemnly rejected any kind of negotiation, and handed over those taskmasters to their former subordinates who beat them soundly.

Before encountering the imperial army, he had to win over the many villages on the Tigris and engage his zealous troops in a series of combats to gain experience in military techniques. In less than six weeks his army was able to take over many villages including Ruzayqiyya, al-Mu^Calla, Ja^Cfariyya, and Muḥammadiyya, to name only a few. Most of these villages were given up to plunder; women and children were made slaves, the heads of the slain were displayed, prisoners were remorselessly put to death. Of the booty taken in these encounters, the most important part consisted of arms and small ships.¹⁵

Once the power of the Zanj was greatly feared and their army well equipped and eager to fight, ^CAlī decided to make his first major move--to capture Baṣra. With three thousand men ^CAlī marched against the city. In the first encounter with the Baṣrans at Ja^Cfariyya, the Zanj achieved a quick and stunning victory; five hundred Baṣrans were killed and many drowned. However, for some reason the chief of the Zanj decided not to fall upon the city. His associates urged him to take advantage of the anarchy, defeat, and lack of leadership of the people of Baṣra. He not only refused the advice, but warned them against such action. His calculation perhaps was that his army would have to face the imperial forces which would be sent to free the city. The imperial army would be much greater in number and more experienced

15. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 415-20.

in fighting that kind of battle. In contrast, the Zanj army was very familiar with the nature of the ground on the fringes of Baṣra which was highly favorable for defense of a rising of this kind and would represent a serious disadvantage to the imperial army.

At that time the Euphrates in the lowest part of its course discharged itself into a region of lake and marsh, connected with the sea by a number of tidal channels. The most important of these waters was near Baṣra, which lay farther to the west than the much smaller modern city, Bussorah. That place and its immediate neighborhood was intersected by innumerable canals (more than 120,000, it is asserted). The chief arm of the Tigris was at that time the southward flowing, now called Shatt al-Ḥai, upon which stood the city of Wasit. Farther down, the stream must have turned towards the southeast. The present arm, whose main course is to south-east, was at that time dry, or had a very limited volume of water. The lowest part of the Tigris was connected with the stream on which Baṣra stood by numerous canals, some of them navigable to large sea-going ships. All these waters were reached by the tide. Floods and broken embankments had even by that time converted much arable land into marshes; while, on the other hand, by drainage and embanking, many pieces of land had been reclaimed.¹⁶

This is the topography with which the Zanj were utterly familiar and adapted to, and on its ground the imperial forces would be at a loss.

These thoughts must have been on the chief of the Zanj's mind when he rejected his associates' idea to seize Baṣra and even ordered them to abandon such an attempt. To them, the temptation to fall upon the city was too great to resist, and the reluctance of their leader was inexplicable. Therefore, five of his top leaders decided to attack the city. Anticipating the Zanj's attack, the people of Baṣra organized themselves and mobilized all their resources; the two

16. Nöldeke, op. cit., 148.

quarreling parties, Bilaliyya and Sa^Cdiyya, overcame their differences and stood together. The Zanj army was completely devastated and ^CAlī himself narrowly escaped death when he rushed to help his army.¹⁷ Before the Zanj could recover from the shattering defeat, the Baṣrans decided to press after them and follow in pursuit. Although this citizen-army had defended its home-land manfully, it was hardly prepared to take the offensive, and probably had no leader who could be matched with ^CAlī. The Zanj's scouts brought to their chief the news about the Baṣrans' preparations for attack. He quickly rallied his army, posted his followers in ambush on both sides of the Umm Ḥabīb river, and provided the Zanj's women with bricks. When the Baṣrans advanced by water, the Zanj fell upon their rear in fury and their women threw the bricks. Those who advanced by land were also ambushed. The citizen-army was absolutely defeated. Several thousands were killed or drowned including a considerable number of the ruling family, including even descendants of Sulaymān, the brother of the second caliph, al-Manṣūr. ^CAlī dared to load a ship with thousands of heads of the slain and send it to Baṣra. Once again his associates urged him to take the city, but he was more than ever convinced that these extensive flats traversed by ditches were very advantageous for his campaigns and that the involvement of the imperial forces was certainly imminent.¹⁸

17. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 431-33; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 69.

18. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 431-37; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, pp. 69-71.

Alī's calculations were correct, an imperial army under the leadership of Ju^Clān was sent to Baṣra. After waiting for six months for the Zanj to attack, Ju^Clān decided to take the offensive. Once more we see the Zanj's peculiar mode of fighting: approaching out of concealed side-channels, heavily overgrown with reeds, to fall unexpectedly upon the rear of the enemy and attack suddenly from both sides. This quick and easy victory over the imperial forces in their first encounter made the Zanj grow so bold that they seized upon a fleet of twenty-four vessels bound to Baṣra. There was great bloodshed in this incident; the loot was great, women and children were given over to slavery, and the survivors were brutally killed.¹⁹

Now power of the Zanj had been asserted, Alī was not satisfied by merely attacking and plundering small villages; he wanted to establish sovereignty. The flourishing city of Ubullā seemed a perfect prey. Its location on the Tigris near Baṣra made it possible for him to attack the city from three directions simultaneously--by ship from the Tigris and the Ma^Cqil canal, and by land. On the 25 of Rajab, 256, the city was conquered. And as usual, the slaughter was great, thousands were drowned, the city was put to the torch, and its governor Abd Allah b. Ḥumayd and his son were killed. The massacre of Ubullā was so terrifying that the people of Abbadān, a town on an island at the mouth of the Tigris, offered submission to the Zanj.

19. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 470-71; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 78.

As a price for the inhabitants' safety, they had to give up their slaves and arms which were distributed among the Zanj.

At the beginning of Ramaḍān, ^CAlī set forth eastward towards Ahwaz. All the villages en route fell prey to fire and sword whenever submission was not offered. On the 12th of Ramaḍān Ahwaz was captured without much struggle. Sa^Cīd b. Yaskīn, the governor of Ahwaz, wisely withdrew with his small garrison, while the townspeople ran away.²⁰

Thus in approximately one year the Zanj had relatively extensive region under their control and became the feared masters of the lower end of the Tigris. The disruption they caused to commerce was very alarming, and communication with Baghdad was interrupted. Many of the inhabitants of Baṣra, pressed by the fierce attacks of the Zanj, and terrified at the fate of Ubulla, deserted the city.²¹ However, the imperial forces made a succession of onslaughts which alleviated the Zanj's pressure on Baṣra and the surrounding villages and towns for a year or so, during which things began to flourish in this region anew.

Sa^Cīd b. al-Ḥājib, who replaced Ju^Clān, launched a series of successful attacks against the Zanj and inflicted serious losses on them. The imperial army managed to regain some territories and booty and to free the captured women. But Sa^Cīd underrated the Zanj, a mistake for which he dearly paid. His army was completely shattered

20. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 471-73; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 78.

21. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, p. 473.

in a massive night attack. He was recalled and Manṣūr b. Ja^Cfar was put in command. When Manṣūr's troops first encountered the Zanj, they simulated defeat, and retreated little by little to their camp, thus drawing the imperial army to an ambush. Manṣūr's defeat was disastrous; many were killed or drowned. The leader of the Zanj had five hundred heads exhibited in the camp of al-Baḥrānī, one of his generals.²²

In another front farther to the east, at Ahwaz, Shāhīn b. Baṣṭām and Ibn Sīmā, who were in charge of the imperial forces in that region, fought successfully against Ibn Abān whose army incurred heavy losses. But an unexpected night attack, approximately four hours after the Zanj's defeat, demolished the imperial forces. Many were killed, including Baṣṭām. While he was preparing for a decisive battle against Ibn Sīmā, Ibn Abān was called back by the chief of the Zanj to cut off Baṣra from communication with the Tigris, which had been reopened and secured by the imperial forces.

In Shawwāl, 257, three years after the Zanj insurrection, thousands of the Zanj were killed. The Zanj chief had to seek new recruits, not only to compensate for those killed, but also to meet the needs of defending his expanding sovereignty on the one hand and to face the pressing attacks of the imperial forces on the other. The Bedouins seemed to be a valuable addition to his army, not only with respect to numbers, but more notably for supplying him with a body of cavalry, which his army lacked. To the hungry sons of the desert,

22. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 476-79.

the prospect of plunder, especially of rich towns such as Baṣra, was too strong a temptation to resist.²³

On the 15th of Shawwāl, during the Friday prayer, Ibn Abān, one of the Zanj leaders surprised the town with his new division of Arab horsemen. The resistance with which he was met forced him to withdraw after setting fire to the city in many places. On Monday the Zanj attacked Baṣra from three directions. The relatively small garrison and the citizen-army, inadequately equipped, short in provisions, and outnumbered by the Zanj were easily defeated. The massacre which followed was brutal. Each Zanj leader assigned to a quarter of Baṣra promised its people amnesty if they came in person and paid homage to the chief. When they gathered to do so, fire and sword did their work. The lowest estimate places the number of slain at 300,000. The noblest women of the ^CAbbāsīd caliphs were sold, and thousands of women and children were taken as slaves; each member of the Zanj was given as many as ten slaves or more.

When an imperial army was hurriedly dispatched from the capital under the leadership of al-Muwallad, the Zanj decided to evacuate the city. The remains of the garrison and the survivors of the massacre of Baṣra joined the imperial army and took over Baṣra and Ubulā. For ten days war raged between the two parties and the imperial forces successfully pressed the Zanj. But when al-Muwallad

23. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, p. 482.

advanced beyond the boundaries of Baṣra, he was defeated in a night attack and thus was forced to retire to Baṣra.²⁴

The year 258 marked a shift in this conflict. By that year the struggle between the princes of the ruling house had come to an end. Although al-Mu^ctamid was proclaimed the new caliph, the real power was in the hands of his brother al-Muwaffaq.²⁵ The latter's intelligence and perseverance enabled him gradually to restore the power of the ^cAbbāsīd dynasty.

In Rabī^c al-Thānī, al-Muwaffaq and one of his best generals, Mufliḥ, advanced with a huge army, seen by al-Ṭabarī himself, towards Baṣra. The sudden death of Mufliḥ together with the spread of an epidemic threw the imperial army into anarchy and caused defeat. Al-Muwaffaq remained in the area keeping the Zanj under constant surveillance. His leaders in the eastern territories pressed the Zanj fiercely and tried to cut them off from their main forces. The Zanj suffered a series of serious defeats and one of their most prominent generals, al-Baḥrānī, was captured and executed. After al-Muwaffaq's army somewhat recovered from the severe disease, which left thousands dead, he retreated to Badḥward where he repaired his ships and equipment, rewarded his soldiers, and rested for a while. Al-Muwaffaq then advanced against the Zanj and through brilliant quick raids managed to inflict heavy losses and rescue captive women and children.

24. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 481-89.

25. H. I. Ḥasan, *al-Nuzum al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo, 1970), p. 70.

He then calculated that if he divided his troops and stationed them in different locations, the Zanj would be forced to do the same--not only to face the imperial troops, but also to avoid simultaneous attacks by these troops from different directions. He would then launch a massive attack on the chief of the Zanj and his troops. The defeat and killing of the chief would soon bring the Zanj revolt to an end.

But in this al-Muwaffaq was wrong. As soon as the imperial troops marched to their assigned posts, the chief of the Zanj utilized all the forces he had and attacked al-Muwaffaq, and to add to the latter's misfortunes, his camp took fire on a windy day and burned down completely. Thereupon al-Muwaffaq found it wiser to withdraw to Wāsiṭ and shortly after to return to Sāmarrā', leaving the command to al-Muwallad.²⁶ After the withdrawal of the imperial army from the real zone of the war, the Zanj chief sent on Rajab 6, 259, two of his best associates, Ibn Abān and Ibn Khalaf, with a huge army to Ahwaz. After some struggle they managed to take over the city for the second time, and as usual the sword and fire did their work.

More experienced and better equipped troops were sent by al-Mu^Ctamid under the leadership of Ibn Bughā. After five years of confrontation, the imperial army had become familiar with the Zanj strategy, their weaknesses, their strengths, and how they were to be reached. Ibn Bughā stationed a substantial force in Baṣra and set up a blockade in the Tigris to cut off the Zanj's supplies and communications. Huge forces headed by generals who had fought against the

26. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 491-500.

Zanj before pressed the Zanj on many fronts simultaneously. The Zanj suffered disastrous defeats and were driven out of Ahwaz. At a time when ultimate victory over the Zanj seemed in sight, the imperial army was compelled to withdraw to face another threatening uprising. Ya^Cqūb al-Ṣaffār had conquered for himself considerable territories in the East. He forced his way through Persia and Susiana and advanced towards the capital of the ^CAbbāsīd empire. Al-Muwaffaq recalled all the forces stationed in the East and completely defeated al-Ṣaffār.

The Zanj naturally seized the opportunity occasioned by the withdrawal of the imperial army and the preoccupation of al-Muwaffaq with al-Ṣaffār's war, not only to take over Ahwaz for the third time, but also to extend their sovereignty farther to the North where the Ṣaffārīds had made themselves masters of a part of that region. The Zanj and the Ṣaffārīds became allies to face effectively their mutual enemy, al-Muwaffaq. But the dispute and struggle for authority soon caused the alliance to come to an end. However, the continual threatening proximity of al-Ṣaffār, who could have suddenly attacked, kept al-Muwaffaq from deriving any substantial benefit from the dissolution of that treaty. The Zanj of course took advantage of this situation and attacked the imperial army in ^CAskar Makram. But the imperial army, familiar now with the tactics of the Zanj, laid an ambush and decisively defeated them.²⁷ In 264 the Zanj managed to conquer Wāsiṭ and other neighboring cities. But they were soon driven out, suffering heavy losses. In Susiana, Tikīn, the commander of the

27. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 516-30.

imperial forces in that region, fought the Zanj with perseverance and repeatedly defeated their best general, Ibn Abān.

By 265, al-Muwaffaq's position improved greatly. Al-Ṣaffār's death made it feasible for al-Muwaffaq to make peace with the former's successor. Al-Muwaffaq made considerable concessions to the Ṣaffārids in order to secure his left flank and rear during his expeditions against the Zanj. He began preparations for a decisive campaign against them. At this time, after eleven years of bitter failures and occasional successes, he learned that the Zanj could not be engaged in the same way as enemies on firm accessible land. His coming expeditions would have to be of a special character and would have to be executed with extreme and unwonted caution.

Al-Muwaffaq entrusted the task of expelling the Zanj from the northern regions near Wāsiṭ to his son, Abū al-^CAbbās, an ambitious and brave twenty-three-year-old man. In Rabī^C al-Thānī, 266, Abū al-^CAbbās advanced to Wāsiṭ with ten thousand warriors and ships of various types--large transport vessels, huge floating fortresses, and small attack ships. Turning the Zanj's favorite tactics upon them, he ambushed them and thousands of them were killed and drowned. Lieutenant Ibn Jāmi^C, the right hand man of the Zanj chief, summoned all the resources available to him in the northern territories. A sudden massive raid launched by considerable forces was intended to completely shatter the imperial army led by the inexperienced young prince. But the young prince justified the confidence reposed in him

by his father. He consistently defeated the Zanj and steadily forced them to retreat and give way.²⁸

In Šafar 267, almost a year after the brilliant victories of Abū al-^CAbbās, al-Muwaffaq himself joined his son with a huge army. The Zanj chief had dispatched an army under the command of al-Shā^Crānī to threaten the rear of Abū al-^CAbbās' troops before the appearance of al-Muwaffaq on the scene. But the young prince surprised al-Shā^Crānī by a sudden attack that compelled him to withdraw to the camp-city which the Zanj had built, al-Manī^Ca. The chief of the Zanj hurriedly dispatched an army to help al-Shā^Crānī. While Hārūn, the other son of al-Muwaffaq, steadily kept Ibn Abān under his eye, al-Muwaffaq and Abū al-^CAbbās marched towards al-Manī^Ca. Without much trouble the city was captured, leveled to the ground, and set to the torch. Most prisoners were put to death, all the black women were sent back to their former masters, and five thousand captive women and children were freed.²⁹ Al-Muwaffaq and his son had thus far destroyed substantial parts of the Zanj army, demolished two of their fortresses, and driven them out of the northern territories. Their next mission was to free the eastern regions from the Zanj, thus confining them in and around their area proper, al-Mukhtāra.

The upcoming expedition necessitated a new strategy. At every advance al-Muwaffaq carefully secured the rear of his troops

28. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 549-66.

29. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 566-58; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 113.

making it impossible for the Zanj to attack him from behind. This required much river-engineering, establishing and destroying bridges and dams. Extreme caution was taken to guard the troops against night attacks. A new policy was also instituted: the blacks who came over to al-Muwaffaq were pardoned, honored, and rewarded. This policy had great success. The more critical the situation of the Zanj chief became, the more his associates were ready to desert him. On Friday night, 26 Rabi^C al-Thānī, al-Muwaffaq and Abū al-^CAbbās advanced towards al-Manṣūra, the city of Sulaymān b. Jāmi^C. Anticipating Zanj ambushes outside the city walls, al-Muwaffaq let the vanguard of his army approach the city. When the Zanj fell upon them, the imperial army rushed to the battle field. All the Zanj soldiers were killed, including one of their top generals, al-Jubbā'ī. The following morning witnessed the total destruction of the city, the slaying of tens of thousands of the Zanj, and the liberation of ten thousand captive women and children. On the 29th, only two days after taking over al-Manṣūra, al-Muwaffaq and Abū al-^CAbbās marched towards Ahwaz to drive the Zanj out of the entire eastern region. This was accomplished without a blow, for the thirty thousand black soldiers had withdrawn upon the orders of their chief. Approximately one thousand blacks remained in the area and asked for amnesty. Not only were they pardoned and rewarded, but they also became active soldiers in the imperial army.³⁰

30. Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, pp. 114-15; al-Mas^Cūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab* (Cairo, 1346 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 446.

Now that the Zanj were confined to their territory proper, al-Muwaffaq summoned the army he had left behind in Baṣra under the leadership of his son Hārūn and all the garrisons stationed in the areas from which the Zanj had been cleared. Before attacking the city, al-Muwaffaq sent a message to the Zanj chief calling upon him and his associates to surrender and promising them pardon and rewards. The amnesty was also extended to the Bedouins. Bad as his position was, he did not accept the offer. The first attack on the city launched by Abū al-^CAbbās gave the Zanj a taste of what awaited them and convinced many of them that it was a serious blunder to turn down al-Muwaffaq's offer. Two leaders with their men and war equipment, including thirty vessels, went over to the imperial army. Many black soldiers followed their colleagues. Al-Muwaffaq arranged that the blacks in his army tempted those of his enemy over to his side. After each successful attack, al-Muwaffaq offered full pardon, money, and honor to the defeated Zanj. Efforts were made to make the deserters in the robes of honor conspicuous, so that the Zanj might be able to see them. In this way the best forces were drawn away from the chief of the Zanj. Their intimate acquaintance with their former army organization, equipment, the conditions in the city, and the defense lines and fortifications, played an important role in the fall of al-Mukhtāra.³¹

31. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 571-84; Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, pp. 115-16.

Al-Muwaffaq's main concern now was to cut off the Zanj's supplies and communications with the outer world. An imperial fleet in the Tigris made it impossible for the Zanj to send for or receive provisions. For the Bedouins, who were supplying the Zanj with food, al-Muwaffaq established two trade centers in Baṣra and his new camp-city, which he named after himself, al-Muwaffaqiyya. Before long the Zanj began to suffer from the scarcity of food. Henceforward, provisions could only be obtained by taking over the supply vessels destined for the imperial army. By no means was that an easy task. Al-Muwaffaq, anticipating and in fact forcing them to such attempts, was always ready for them, and in the numerous engagements that took place heavy losses were incurred.³²

On the 24th of Dhū al-Ḥijja, 267, Abū al-^CAbbās marched against al-Mukhtāra; although the Zanj hurled molten lead against the imperial forces as well as Greek fire, Abū al-^CAbbās succeeded in forcing his way into the city, and thousands of blacks were killed and drowned and the city put to fire. But that evening the tide left the vessels of the imperial forces high and dry on the sand. The Zanj, of course, took advantage of the situation and attacked the disabled ships. Al-Muwaffaq had to withdraw to the east side of the Tigris. It became supremely important to al-Muwaffaq to destroy the defensive works which the Zanj had erected since the siege and to clear away the obstacles which had been set up to prevent the imperial ships from entering the water-ways. During these operations, al-Muwaffaq

32. Ibid., op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 585-93.

was seriously injured, and consequently the expeditions were suspended. Meanwhile the Zanj were aided by an external event. The caliph al-Mu^Ctamid, left only with the honor and luxury of his exalted position while the reins of the government were actually held by his brother al-Muwaffaq, headed towards Egypt to take refuge with, and seek support of, Ibn Ṭūlūn, the governor of Egypt.³³ But he and his associates were intercepted by Ibn Kundaj, the governor of Bagh^hdad, and brought back to Sāmarrā'. Therefore, al-Muwaffaq was forced to abandon his camp-city, leaving his son Abū al-^CAbbās in charge, in order to face the disturbances in the capital of the empire and to consider the measures he should take against this potential enemy, Ibn Ṭūlūn.

The Zanj, naturally, took all the advantages which this opportunity could offer to repair and fortify all their defensive posts.

Al-Muwaffaq's extension of amnesty, forgiveness, and rewards to those who deserted the chief of the Zanj was proportioned with punitive actions against those who aided him. Al-Muwaffaq utilized the cessation of the war to press the Zanj sorely in another direction. He dispatched some of his best generals to punish severely not only the Bedouins who had been venturesome enough to supply the Zanj with food, but also the tribes who had assisted the Zanj in one way or another, even if they had ceased to offer such help. Thus all kinds of potential assistance that was likely to be extended secretly to the

33. Abū al-Fidā', *al-Mukhtaṣar* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 53; *al-Nuzum al-Islāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 70.

Zanj was barred.³⁴ Meanwhile, the desertion of the officers of the Zanj steadily increased; among them were two outstanding generals: Shibl and al-Shā^Crānī. The Zanj's situation must have been very desperate, for the chief's own son negotiated with al-Muwaffaq to go over to him.

In Shā^Cbān 269, al-Muwaffaq returned to his city-camp. A series of fierce attacks were launched against the Zanj in which the imperial army destroyed all the defensive works, burned all the stores of grain and food, set fire to the headquarters of the Zanj chief, and captured all his harem. The Zanj chief found it necessary, after the destruction of his defense lines, to move the center of his defense from the west to the east side of the main river, Abū al-Khaṣīb. In preparation for the mortal blow, al-Muwaffaq declared holy war against the Zanj. Thousands of volunteers rushed from all the corners of the Islamic empire. Among the volunteers was a considerable Egyptian army under the leadership of Lu'lu'. Al-Muwaffaq was extremely relieved by the latter's joining him, and as Nöldeke rightly remarked, "It would almost seem as if without the energy of Lu'lu' the mortal struggle of the Zanj might have been still further protracted."³⁵

On Tuesday, Dhū al-Hijja 10, 270, two thousand cavalry, fifty thousand foot soldiers, and a considerable number of ships carrying large masses of troops attacked the city of the Zanj from all directions. After a fierce struggle the city fell, the Zanj army was

34. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 603-08.

35. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 173.

completely shattered, Ibn Jāmi^C, the right-hand man of the Zanj chief, was captured, and ^CAlī himself fled. By Saturday the imperial army had complete control of the city and an Egyptian soldier brought the head of the Zanj chief to al-Muwaffaq.

The seven thousand blacks who survived the battle asked for and received pardon, and al-Muwaffaq issued a proclamation urging all who had deserted their home towns during the war should return. His call did not go unacknowledged; many people returned to Baṣra, Ubulla, and Wāsiṭ. Al-Muwaffaq stayed for some time in his city until everything was brought back to normal and life resumed its normal course.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS UNDERLYING THE ZANJ REVOLT

From the outset it should be stressed that the Zanj revolt had nothing to do with religion. The causes which gave rise to it were social, economic, and, to a certain extent, political.

The Detrimental Impact of the Turks

The establishment of the Abbasid dynasty depended heavily on the Persians. The illustrious Persian family, the Barmakids, founded for the first time in Islam the vizierate. By the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd they had become so powerful that he had to rid himself of them. Another Persian family, Banū Sahl, assumed during al-Ma'mūn's reign the same position as that of the Barmakids. Once again the Persian viziers represented a threat to the strong-willed caliph. Like his father, al-Ma'mūn got rid of his viziers. When al-Mu^Ctaṣīm succeeded his brother, he drifted away from the Persians and brought in new blood on which he totally relied--the Turks. His lack of confidence in the Persians³⁶ and his fear of their ambitions explain why he broke away from them.³⁷ Being half Turkish, on his mother's side, justifies his turning to the Turks. In the first few years of his

36. After the death of al-Mu'mūn, the Persian sided with his son al-^CAbbās against al-Mu^Ctaṣīm. See al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 8, p. 549.

37. al-Mas^Cudī, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 9.

sway he surrounded himself with seventy thousand Turks.³⁸ Admiring their bravery and physical strength he brought them women of their own race to join them in wedlock so that their offspring would inherit their qualities.³⁹ He entrusted most of the leading positions in the army as well as other important jobs to them and granted them huge estates. In a short time they became a very dominant power and treated the people of Baghdad arrogantly. The latter made a pressing entreaty combined with a serious ultimatum to al-Mu^Ctašim: "Either you and your soldiers leave Baghdad or we will war against you."⁴⁰ The situation did not improve even after moving the Turks to the new capital of the empire, Samarrā'. The Turks grew stronger and the caliphs became weaker than ever. The caliphs Mutawakkil and al-Musta^Cin tried in vain to move the capital back to Baghdad. Many of them were murdered or deposed by the Turks.⁴¹ The Turks, consolidating their power, controlled the state's financial resources, possessed extensive lands, and forced their slaves to farm them.

This situation aroused bitter opposition and strong resentment among the Arabs as early as al-Mu^Ctašim's time. A serious revolt broke out in Jordan, carried out by the peasants and led by Abū Ḥarb

38. To please al-Mu^Ctašim, al Jāḥiẓ wrote a treatise on the noble qualities of the Turks: *Manāqib al-Turk*. See the introduction of *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. A. Hārūn (Cairo: al-Khānġi, 1385 A.H.), p. 36.

39. Aḥmad Amīn, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 4-5.

40. Yāqūt, *Mu^Cjam al-Bulḏān* (Leiden, 1902), vol. 5, p. 14.

41. Ibn al-Aṡhir, op. cit., vol. 6, pp. 177-78.

al-Mubarqa^C. The army sent by al-Mu^Ctaṣim did not dare to confront the rebels. The leader of the imperial army, Rajā' b. Ayyūb, had to wait until the season of cultivation when most of the rebels were busy working on the land, leaving their leader with one thousand warriors.⁴² This peasant uprising--unnoticed by historians!--is of great significance; it was the taproot of the Zanj revolt. The striking similarities between the two rebellions and the impact of the former on the latter deserve careful examination.

Feudalism

In the Early Islamic, the Umayyad, and the early Abbasid eras, the distribution of land to the Arab conquerors was confined to the land which was abandoned by its owners or that which was not owned by any person.⁴³ Such lands, if not managed by the government, were either rented to farmers or granted to a person. In regard to the second arrangement, there were rigorous rules that governed it. Land grants were of two kinds, the first being *iqṭā'*^C of ownership, i.e., governmental grants of land to a person. Such land is uncultivated and the person is responsible for its development, otherwise the government takes it back from him. The second type is *iqṭā'*^C of profit, i.e., the person uses the land in any way he sees fit and pays one-tenth of its income to the government. If he dies, the land goes back to the government and his sons are not entitled to continue

42. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 116-18.

43. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Cairo, 1948), p. 58.

managing it.⁴⁴ The tax collectors were sometimes given small pieces of land for their monthly salary.

When the Turks dominated the state's affairs, they greatly increased the land tax and for the first time in Islam, the system of *al-Muqṭa*^c or *al-Multazim* came into being. It was the tax collectors' responsibility to bring a certain amount as taxes on the land they were in charge of. The amount of taxes imposed by *al-Multazim* on the peasants was of no concern of the government, much less the means, which were brutal, of collecting these taxes.⁴⁵ Not only were the tax collectors in charge of specific areas, but often times of a whole province. This system was exactly similar to that of medieval Europe.⁴⁶ Moreover, the peasant was tied to the land, he was owned by whoever owned the land; he could not be sold, or set free, and his offspring were slaves.⁴⁷

Iqṭā^c entailed injustice to, and represented a burden on, the small landowners due to the heavy taxes, as well as to the peasants and slaves who farmed the vast land owned mostly by the Turks--a situation against which small landowners and slaves reacted violently,

44. al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyya* (Cairo, 1946), pp. 141-42; George Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Brill, 1965), p. 361.

45. Maskawayeh, *Tajārib al-Umam* (Cairo, 1939), vol. 6, pp. 137-38; F. J. Surūr, *al-Hadāra al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-^cArabi, 1973), pp. 110-11.

46. H. I. Ibrāhīm, op. cit., p. 273.

47. I. Tarkhān, *al-Nuḥum al-Iqṭā*^c*diyya* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1968), p. 13.

the former by their ephemeral revolt in Jordan, and the latter by their bloody rebellion in ^cIrāq.

Slavery

With the expansion of the Islamic empire, the number of slaves increased. Although Islam did not ban slavery, it encouraged man to set free his slaves and equated such deed with repentance. The Prophet set up an example to his followers--he did not own a slave. Some of his companions, especially Abū Bakr, bought Muslim slaves from the Quraysh and set them free. In the subsequent decades thousands of slaves were captured in time of war or bought in time of peace. From all accounts, the slaves were treated fairly well up to the second era of the Abbasid dynasty. Most of them served in the palaces of the caliphs and the elites. Some of them, termed *ghilmān*, "were the recipients of special favors from their masters, and wore rich dresses, and attractive uniforms."⁴⁸ Some of them were highly esteemed by al-Ma'mūn and trusted on serious missions.⁴⁹ But when *iqṭā'*^c became popular, with the emergence of the Turks as a powerful class, the number of slaves increased immensely for the following reasons: (a) the Turks possessed huge estates, the cultivation of which required a great number of strong men--black slaves; (b) competition and intrigues between prominent Turkish figures forced them to surround themselves with slaves; and (c) it became customary for

48. Hitti, op. cit., p. 341.

49. Ibid., p. 343.

governors and generals to send presents including slaves to the caliphs.⁵⁰ On one occasion, al-Mutawakill received two hundred slaves from one of his generals. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā mentioned that the palace of al-Muqtadir housed eleven thousand Greek and Sudanese eunuchs.⁵¹ If such a number was housed in a single palace for simple domestic purposes, much higher figures may have been used in the capacities of cultivation and war.

The Qarmaṭian Revolt

Qarmaṭ found the sect named after him almost at the same time the Zanj rebellion broke out. Qarmaṭ called for a new community in which all men can enjoy tolerance and equality. Once again, the similarities here--broadly speaking of course--between the Qarmaṭian revolt and that of the Zanj are very striking, as they are between al-Mubarqa^c's rebellion and the Zanj's. Qarmaṭ himself was a *peasant* and the vast majority of his followers were "the so-called Nabataean peasant."⁵² The Qarmaṭians' advocacy kindled the Zanj's zest and heightened their hopes.

50. Ibn al-Athīr, op. cit., vol. 7, pp. 211-12.

51. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *al-Fakhrī* (Cairo, 1938), p. 352.

52. Hitti, op. cit., p. 444.

CHAPTER 4

THE LEADER OF THE ZANJ

°Alī gave himself out as a descendant of the Prophet's cousin, °Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He claimed his pedigree to be: °Alī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. °Alī b. °Isā b. Zayd b. °Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁵³ "The claim," says Nöldeke, "may have been just; the descendants of °Alī by that time were reckoned by thousands and were very far from being, all of them, persons of distinction. It is, of course, equally possible that his alleged descent was a mere invention."⁵⁴ Had Nöldeke examined objectively the material available to him, he would have come to the conclusion that this descent was nothing but mere invention. There are several overwhelming pieces of evidence attesting to °Alī's false allusion to the °Alids. First, we know from genealogy books that Zayd b. °Alī never had any sons.⁵⁵ Second, the leader of the Zanj never appealed, like all other °Alids, to the divine right of the house of °Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, nor did he make any attempt to found a Shi°ite sect. Third, the founder of the Qarmaṭians, an extreme Shi°ite sect, did not associate himself with the Zanj chief, however useful this

53. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 410; al-Mas°ūdī, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 439.

54. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 147.

55. Ibn Hazm, *Jamharat Ansāb al-°Arab*, ed. A. Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Ma°ārif, 1962), p. 45.

association might have been to the latter. Fourth, during the entire war the Zanj chief never spared the ^CAlids from execution nor their women from captivity.⁵⁶ He permitted the black slaves, Muslims and non-Muslims, to have as many as ten ^CAlid women.⁵⁷ Fifth, he caused ^CUthmān, ^CAlī, Mu^Cāwiyā, and ^CĀ'ishā to be cursed from every pulpit he laid his hand on.⁵⁸ This point is of singular importance. Together with other evidence, which will be mentioned below, it sheds light on the man and his dogma.

Cursing the aforementioned persons was a capital article of the extreme sect of the Khārijites, al-Azāriqa. Therefore, we are led to believe that the Zanj chief adopted the Khārijites' doctrine. The latter maintained that the first two caliphs were lawful, but rejected ^CUthmān and ^CAlī. They regarded, as also did the Zanj chief, every grave sin as idolatry, and their Muslim enemies, with their wives and families, as lawfully given over to sword and slavery.⁵⁹ It is very significant that ^CAlī b. Muḥammad's banner bore the text of the Qur'ān which was one of the chief watchwords of the Khārijites.⁶⁰ However, ^CAlī departed violently from the core of the Khārijite doctrine. They held that all men are equal and that only the best man should wield

56. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, pp. 417, 422; Arabica, op. cit., vol. XII, p- 179.

57. Ibn al-^CImād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 156.

58. Ibid., p. 156.

59. al-Mas^Cūdī, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 439.

60. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 413.

sovereignty even though he were an Abyssinian slave.⁶¹ ^CAlī promised his followers freedom, wealth and slaves.⁶² He was an adventurer who shrewdly utilized the anarchy prevailing in his time for his own purposes, clothing his endeavors in religious guise. He was not an ^CAlid. His real name was ^CAlī b. Muḥammad b. ^CAbd al-Raḥīm, a native of Warzanīn, a village in the Rayy region.⁶³ He was an imposter who claimed that the Lord had offered him prophethood, but he did not accept it.⁶⁴ However, the Lord blessed him with revelation, granted him power of premonition, and supported him with angels. The entire body of his followers was, as indicated earlier, from the most despised classes, completely ignorant, thousands of whom did not speak Arabic. He controlled these masses by claiming that all their thoughts were revealed to him.⁶⁵ Upon undertaking a risky course, he often told his associates that God had revealed to him that his soldiers would be victorious.⁶⁶ It would suffice to give here one example which may shed light on the nature of the Zanj chief and his relationship with his men. When Yahyā al-Baḥrānī, one of his best generals and among the handful of associates who believed in him when

61. Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., vol. 4, p. 1074.

62. al-Ṭabarī, vol. 9, p. 415.

63. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 410; al-Mas^Cūdī, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 439.

64. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 499.

65. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 412.

66. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 487.

he first declared himself, was killed in an expedition, the Zanj chief informed his followers that God spoke to him and said not to be sad, because al-Baḥrānī's death was only good. He was disloyal and greedy. In retrospect, the Zanj chief recalled an incident attesting to al-Baḥrānī's dishonesty. Among the proceeds of one of the raids there were two necklaces, a cheap one and a precious one. Al-Baḥrānī concealed the precious necklace and showed the cheap one to the chief and asked permission to keep it. The hidden necklace was materialized before the eyes of the chief. He ordered al-Baḥrānī to bring it. The latter brought the cheap one which the chief had allowed him to keep. God made every detail of the hidden necklace visible to the chief, who began to describe it to his stunned associate.⁶⁷

67. Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 498-99.

CHAPTER 5

THE CAMP-CITIES

During the fourteen-year war four new cities emerged on the vast battle field. Unfortunately, we have very little information about two of those four cities, al-Mukhtāra and al-Muwaffaqiyya--and practically nothing regarding the other two, al-Manşūra and al-Manī^Ca. We are really surprised by the absolute silence of the Arab geographers such as al-Bakrī and Yāqūt on these cities. Perhaps their ephemeral nature was a contributing factor in their oblivion. The three cities built by the Zanj were completely destroyed during the final stages of the war; the fourth one, built by al-Muwaffaq, was abandoned shortly after the end of the war. From the scattered bits of information we are able to glean, the following short account is all this treatise can present.

The first and major city was established by the Zanj and named al-Mukhtāra (the chosen city), after the first attack on Başra, 255 A.H. Because of the drastic change on the water courses in that area, the exact site of al-Mukhtāra will probably never be established. It lay not too far below Başra, abutted on the west bank of the Tigris, and was intersected by the canal Abū al-Khaşīb, the main course of which was from north-east to south-west.⁶⁸ Other canals surrounded

68. Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 256-57.

and traversed it, such as Abū Shākir, Kūr, al-Gharbī, al-Sufyānī, al-Qarīr, and al-Māsawān.⁶⁹ Palm huts were erected for the soldiers.⁷⁰ Homes for the chief and his generals were built, we may assume, of sun-dried bricks. Prisons for the captives, mosques, and storehouses for provisions were added in the course of time. From the considerable number of prisoners and black inhabitants (about 300,000), we can safely say that the size of al-Mukhtāra was very close to that of Baṣra.

For the necessities of life, the Zanj depended partly on local products, which were for the most part dates. Their main provisions must have been imported, because in the final months of the war, when the blockade was established, the scarcity of food was alarming.

The city was protected by natural watercourses and established dams, and was fortified by a formidable fence and a variety of defensive works.⁷¹ Unfortunately we do not have any knowledge about the organization and internal arrangement of this community.

We possess practically nothing regarding the other two cities established by the Zanj. Al-Manṣūra (the victorious), also known as the city of Sulaymān b. Jāmi^C, its founder, was built on a site

69. Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 656-57.

70. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 247.

71. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 596.

called Ṭahīthā, a two-day journey north of Baṣra. The city was protected by five trenches and a wall.⁷² The second city was established by Sulaymān b. Mūsā al-Sha^Crānī and named al-Manī^Ca (the impregnable). It was located in Sūq al-Khamīs at the end of the narrow course of the Brāṭīq river.⁷³

Facing al-Mukhtāra, on the east side of the Tigris, al-Muwaffaq built a city which he named after himself, al-Muwaffaqiyya. Unlike the three cities mentioned above, it was not for defensive purposes. Its establishment served to tighten the economic siege against the Zanj. The lively trade which grew up in the city attracted the Bedouin who supplied the Zanj with various kinds of food. The city was also the main station for the imperial forces and the point of departure in their raids against the Zanj. These two causes, underlying the building of the city were, ironically, also contributing factors to its desertion and ultimate decline. When the war came to an end, the fighting men left to their respective posts. The great trading city of Baṣra, which rose again to prosperity, proved too powerful a rival for al-Muwaffaqiyya.

72. Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 570-71, 573.

73. Ibid., vol. 9, p. 565.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) the revolt of the Zanj was motivated by social, economic, and to some extent, political factors; and that religious causes had no role to play. (2) It was mainly a peasant uprising in protest against ill-treatment and exploitation--the very same reasons that gave rise to the Jordanian peasants' revolt as well as to that of the Nabataeans. (3) The Turks' political and economic dominance of the state, possession of land and slaves, and abuse of authority were the immediate causes for all three rebellions. There is no record of any kind of any socially motivated revolt during the first ^CAbbāsīd era, from al-Saffāh (749 A.D.) to al-Ma'mūn (813).

Al-Mu^Ctaṣīm made a fatal mistake when he used the Turks. They became an actual menace in his own lifetime. It is reported that he had regretted using them.⁷⁴

In its initial phase the Zanj revolt gained the sympathy of the freed men and the Arabs as well because it called for the application of the principles of Islam--justice, tolerance, and equality. But it soon lost that support because it turned into a bloody revolt. The Zanj plundered all the cities they fought against--Baṣra, Uḥaylā,

74. al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., vol. 9, p. 122.

Wāṣit, etc.--massacring their men, capturing their women and children and carrying them into slavery. The brutal invasion of Baṣra typifies the Zanj's pattern. The lowest estimate places the number of people killed in this fourteen-year servile war at one and a half million,⁷⁵ and the highest at two million.⁷⁶ The Zanj siezed the fleet of vessels that carried goods to the cities located on the Tigris, and thus antagonized the owners of the ships and the residents to whom the loads of these ships were their necessities of life. The brutality, brigandage, and yearning for direct vengeance not only dissipated people's sympathy for the Zanj, but also turned them into a hostile enemy.

75. al-Suyūṭī, *Tarīkh al-Khulafā'* (Cairo, 1351), p. 242.

76. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, op. cit., p. 227.

APPENDIX

CONVERSION TABLE FOR HIJRĪ YEARS CITED IN THE TEXT

254	869
255	870
256	871
257	872
258	873
259	874
260	875
261	876
262	877
263	878
264	879
265	880
266	881
267	882
268	883
269	884
270	885
271	886

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amīn, Ahmad. *Zuhr al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1946).
- Ibn al-Athīr, Abū al-Hassan ^CAlī. *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (Cairo: al-Halabī, n.d.).
- Abū al-Fidā, Ismā^Cīl. *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar* (Cairo: al-Maṭba^Ca al-Husayniyya, n.d.).
- Hasan, Ibrāhīm. *Al-Nuzum al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1970).
- Ibn Ḥazm. *Jamharat Ansāb al-^CArab*, ed. A. Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^Carif, 1962).
- Hitti, Philip. *History of the Arabs* (London, 1960).
- Ibn al-^CImād, ^CAbd al-Hayy. *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d.).
- Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1978).
- Makdisi, George, ed. *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Brill, 1965). See the chapter, "Reflection on the iqtā^C," by A. S. Lampton.
- al-Mas^Cūdī, ^CAlī. *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma^Cādin al-Jawhar* (Cairo: al-Maṭba^Ca al-Husayniyya, 1346 A.H.).
- Maskawayh. *Tajārib al-Umam* (Cairo, 1955).
- al-Māwardī. *Al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyya* (Cairo, 1946).
- Nöldeke, Theodore. *Sketches from Eastern History* (Beirut: Khayats, 1963).
- Surūr, Muḥammad. *Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-^CArabi, 1973).
- al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja^Cfar. *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^Carif, 1968).
- Ibn Ṭabāṭabā. *Al-Fakhrī* (Cairo, 1938).

Tarkhān, Ibrāhīm. *Al-Nuzum al-Iqtā'īyya* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1968).

Yāqūt, Abū Abd Allah. *Mu'jam al-Bulḍān* (Leiden, 1902).

Abū Yūsuf. *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Cairo, 1948).

Zakār, Suhayl. *Al-Nuzum al-Iqtā'īyya fī al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ fī al-Uṣūr al-Wustā* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿarabi, 1968).

