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## The 'Abbāsīd Abnā' and Sāsānid Cavalrymen

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PATRICIA CRONE

In a recent publication of great interest M. Zakeri has reopened the question of the identity of the Abnā' who appear in the early 'Abbāsīd army.<sup>1</sup> Once assumed to be the physical descendants of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs,<sup>2</sup> or the 'Abbāsīds and their adoptive members and clients,<sup>3</sup> the *abnā' al-dawla/al-da'wa/al-shī'a* were shown by Ayalon in 1964 to be "in all probability, the descendants of the Khurāsānīs who brought the 'Abbāsīds to the throne".<sup>4</sup> This has been generally accepted. In Zakeri's opinion, however, the Abnā' were not "Sons of the Revolution", but rather sons of Sāsānid horsemen (*asbārān*): their ancestors had been members of the lower nobility that furnished the cavalry of the Sāsānid empire after Khusraw I's reforms. In Zakeri's opinion the revolutionary troops consisted primarily of such recruits, and so the conventional view is in one sense quite correct: the Abnā' did indeed end up as sons of revolutionaries. But the conventional view, according to him, obscures the fact that the Abnā' belonged to a distinct social group: it was by allying themselves with Sāsānid *asbārān* that the 'Abbāsīds came to power.

This thesis is not likely to gain acceptance as it stands, but it highlights some problems raised by Ayalon's interpretation and successfully casts doubt on current views of the 'Abbāsīd revolution, raising numerous minor questions on the way. It is thus worth going through the evidence yet again. Who were the Abnā' in ethnic and social terms, with what implications for the 'Abbāsīd revolution and its aftermath?

### The term Abnā'

Zakeri's identification of the Abnā' as descendants of the lower nobility of the Sāsānids rests first and foremost on the term Abnā' itself. Members of the Sāsānid gentry were known in Persian as *āzādān*, "free (men)", and so their descendants were called *abnā' al-ahrār*, "sons of

I should like to thank Amikam Elad, Chase Robinson and Luke Treadwell for most helpful criticism of earlier drafts of this article. The following abbreviations have been used: AA: see note 61. *Aghāni*: see note 68. BA: see note 66. BF: see note 61. *ELI*: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition. Tab.: see note 2. TB: see note 58. "Turk", C and L: see note 12. YB: see note 37. YT: see note 25.

<sup>1</sup> M. Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society* (Wiesbaden, 1995), esp. pp. 265ff.

<sup>2</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-nusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje and others (Leiden, 1879–1901) (hereafter Tab.), Glossarium, s.v. 'bny'.

<sup>3</sup> B. Lewis in *ELI*, s.v. "abnā'".

<sup>4</sup> D. Ayalon, "The military reforms of Caliph al-Mu'tasim. Their background and consequences", paper read in New Delhi 1964, published (after circulating as a stencilled pamphlet for thirty years) in his *Islam and the Abode of War* (Aldershot, 1994), p. 6. Ayalon's conclusion was anticipated by A. Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922), p. 151; English tr. (Patna, 1937), p. 155.

the free", in Arabic.<sup>5</sup> The soldiers despatched by Khusrāw I to conquer Yemen were Persians, and so their descendants in Yemen were called *abnā'* *al-furs/al-fārs*, "sons of Persians/Persia", or *al-Abnā'* for short.<sup>6</sup> The troops that raised the 'Abbāsīds to the throne were known as *ahl al-dawla*, and so (according to the conventional view) their descendants were called *abnā'* *al-dawla*, "sons of the revolution/new era/dynasty", or *al-Abnā'* for short. Zakeri tacitly assumes that in each case it is the term *abnā'* that carries the ethnic and social connotations, not the word with which it is in construct, and so the very term *Abnā'* comes to mean Persian gentry: "Whether in Yemen, Khurāsān, or Baghdad, they were similar in origin, social background, and attachment to the cavalry traditions of the Sāsānids. The titles *banawī*, *abnawī*, *abnā'*, etc. were used only when the Persian nobles and landlords were involved".<sup>7</sup>

But the tacit assumption is wrong, of course, as Zakeri would no doubt be the first to admit (he plainly is not lacking in scholarly competence); it is only because he does not make it explicit that he manages to retain it.<sup>8</sup> But if it is discarded, there is no reason why *abnā'* *al-aḥrār*, *abnā'* *al-furs* and *abnā'* *al-dawla* should be identified. The sheer fact that a man could in principle belong to all three categories obviously does not mean that he must in fact have done so. *Abnā'* simply means "descendants".

The descendants of the Sāsānid gentry were usually known in Arabic as *abnā'* *al-aḥrār*, rather than simply *aḥrār*, because the polity in which they had been *aḥrār* no longer existed: they were not gentry, but of gentry descent.<sup>9</sup> The Yemeni *abnā'* *al-furs* were similarly called "people of Persian descent" because, having been born and grown up in the Yemen (and often having Yemeni mothers), they were no longer real Persians. In the same vein a commander who joined a Basran expedition to India in the reign of al-Mahdī is characterized as *min abnā'* *ahl al-shām*: he was a Basran of Syrian origin.<sup>10</sup> When al-Mutawakkil is described as sitting with *abnā'* *al-atrāk* in 232/847, the reference is to soldiers of Turkish parentage born in Iraq.<sup>11</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ observes that the Khurāsānī *abnā'* *al-'arab wa'l-a'rāb* whose fathers settled in Farghāna look the same as the natives of Farghāna, that there is no difference between *abnā'* *al-nāzila* and *abnā'* *al-nābita/thābita*<sup>12</sup> and that people automatically assume the *abnā'* *al-a'rāb wa'l-a'rābiyyāt* to be 'ulūj *al-qrā'*.<sup>13</sup> here the reference

is to descendants of bedouin and other Arabs born in eastern Iran. All these people were *abnā'* of groups that either did not exist anymore or else existed somewhere else, precisely as are Englishmen or Americans of whom one says that they are of Norman, Huguenot, Mayflower (bygone) or German, Italian or Asian (somewhere else) descent. It obviously does not follow that the groups from which the *abnā'* in question hailed were identical.

The sources make it abundantly clear that the *Abnā'* of the 'Abbāsīds owed their name to their descent from the participants in the revolution. They call them *abnā'* *rijāl al-dawla*,<sup>14</sup> *baqiyyat rijāl al-da'wa*,<sup>15</sup> *abnā'* *ahl khurāsān*,<sup>16</sup> *abnā'* *khurāsān*,<sup>17</sup> *abnā'* *al-jund al-khurāsāniyya*,<sup>18</sup> all with reference to their physical descent from the revolutionaries, and *abnā'* *al-dawla*,<sup>19</sup> *abnā'* *al-da'wa*,<sup>20</sup> *abnā'* *al-shi'a*,<sup>21</sup> all with reference to descent of a more metaphorical kind.<sup>22</sup> For good measure they inform us that "their fathers are the ones who conducted the revolution".<sup>23</sup> There can have been no *Abnā'* in this sense before the *dawla* took place.

### The spread of the evidence

There cannot, in fact, have been *Abnā'* in this sense before about 780, a generation after the revolution, nor do references to them become common until the reign of al-Rashīd (786–809). By far the most common term for the 'Abbāsīd troops, whatever their generation, is *ahl khurāsān*.<sup>24</sup>

The *Abnā'* are first mentioned in al-Ya'qūbī's statement that 'Īsā b. 'Alī *wa-man ḥaḍara min al-abnā'* were reluctant to inform 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī of al-Manṣūr's accession (in 136/754). If the conventional explanation of the term is correct, its appearance here must be anachronistic.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly isolated. The next reference comes in 163/779f, when al-Mahdī summoned the *kuttāb abnā'* *al-da'wa* and told Yaḥyā b. Khālid b. Barmak that he had examined "the lists of the sons of my party (*abnā'* *shī'atī*) and the people of my revolution/dynasty (*ahl dawlatī*)"; Yaḥyā b. Khālid, whom he picked from these lists, was in fact a son of a participant in the revolution.<sup>26</sup> Al-Mahdī also equated the *ahl khurāsān* of his time with

<sup>14</sup> Jāḥiẓ, "Turk", C, 8.-3; L, 4.1 = 636.

<sup>15</sup> Jāḥiẓ, "Turk", C, 26.2; L, 15.2, 7 = 651.

<sup>16</sup> Below, notes 28, 53. This and the following expression may of course also refer to people of civilian Khurāsānī descent. Not all the Iraqi scholars described as *abnā'* *ahl khurāsān* necessarily descended from members of the Khurāsānī army (e.g. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1957–60), vii, pp. 340, 342 (twice), 349, 351–3 (thrice), 355, 490; but some clearly did (348, 350).

<sup>17</sup> Below, note 74; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Kitāb al-bayān wa'l-mughrib*, ed. G. S. Colin and E. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden, 1948–51), i, p. 90.11.

<sup>18</sup> Below, note 72.

<sup>19</sup> Below, notes 27, 29, 32, 33; Tab. iii, 1169.9.

<sup>20</sup> Below, notes 26, 58, 63, 74; Jāḥiẓ, "Turk", C, 8.-3, 77.2; L, 3 ult., 50.3 = 636, 689.

<sup>21</sup> Below, notes 26, 30, 68; Jāḥiẓ, "Turk", C, 26.2; L, 15.7 = 651.

<sup>22</sup> Pace Zakeri, p. 275, who sets up a contrast between metaphorical "sons of the revolution" and literal "sons of the revolutionaries".

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad b. Abi Ṭāhir Tayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdad* (hereafter Ibn Tayfūr), ed. H. Keller (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 143f; ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1949), p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Arazi and 'A. El'ad, "'L'Epitre a l'armée". *Al-Ma'mūn et la seconde da'wa*, *Studia Islamica*, LXVI–LXVII (1987–9), i, pp. 52ff.

<sup>25</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883) (hereafter YT), ii, p. 437.11; cf. p. 437.3 (*wa-man ḥaḍara min . . . al-quwwād*), accepted as historical by A. Elad, "Aspects of the transition from the Umayyad to the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, XIX (1995), p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Tab. iii, p. 498; cf. *Elz*, s.v. "Barāmika".

<sup>5</sup> Zakeri, pp. 191ff, 265ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Elz*, s.v. "Abnā'", cf. also the references in Zakeri, pp. 328f.

<sup>7</sup> Zakeri, p. 289. Note also his conviction that the subgroup of Tamīm known as the *Abnā'* must have been Iranian by origin (pp. 270ff).

<sup>8</sup> Its unspoken nature does generate tensions at times, cf. p. 275, where he says that the term *abnā'* *al-da'wa* means "sons of the revolution". If so, why should they have more in common with *abnā'* *al-aḥrār* than with, say, *abnā'* *al-muhājirūn*, *abnā'* *al-'arab* or *abnā'* *al-kuttāb*? One assumes he would invoke word-play (the *Abnā'* in the Persian sense were legitimated as *Abnā'* in the revolutionary sense), but he never confronts the question.

<sup>9</sup> Zakeri, p. 267, explains *abnā'* *al-aḥrār* is an Aramaicism meaning the same as *al-aḥrār* with reference to Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leiden, 1879), p. 235n. But Nöldeke's Aramaicism is *banū 'l-aḥrār*, and the frequency with which the gentry are called *al-aḥrār* in pre-Islamic contexts (e.g. Zakeri, pp. 267, 269n), *abnā'* *al-aḥrār* thereafter, suggests that the latter expression is idiomatic Arabic.

<sup>10</sup> Tab. iii, 460.9 (year 159).

<sup>11</sup> Tab. iii, 1368.15.

<sup>12</sup> al-Jāḥiẓ, "Manāqib al-turk", in his *Rasā'il*, (ed.) 'A.-S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1965), i, (hereafter C), pp. 63f; in his *Tria Opuscula*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden, 1903) (hereafter L), pp. 40f = C. T. H. Walker (tr.), "Jahiz of Basra to al-Fath ibn Khaqan on the 'Exploits of the Turks and the Army of the Khalifate in General'", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1915, p. 679.

<sup>13</sup> al-Jāḥiẓ, "Fakhr al-sūdān 'alā 'l-biḍān", in his *Rasā'il*, 'A.-S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1965), i, p. 220.7; in his *Tria Opuscula*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden, 1903), p. 82.12.

abnā' al-dawla/da'wa in his famous account of why he preferred freedmen to them (told *sub anno* 169/785); informed that the *ahl khurāsān* were likely to be alienated by this preference, he responded that freedmen did not wax proud and could be asked to do anything where another (i.e. a Khurāsānī) would invoke his status as "the son of your *dawla* and veteran in your *da'wa* and the son of a man who hurried to your cause (*man sabaqa ilā da'watika*)".<sup>27</sup>

Under Hārūn al-Rashīd the term is encountered with greater frequency. By his time there was a large number of *abnā' ahl khurāsān* in Madinat Abi 'l-'Abbās near al-Anbār.<sup>28</sup> In 189/804f the Khurāsānīs asked Hārūn to replace 'Alī b. 'Īsā with anyone from *kufātihi wa-anṣārīhi wa-abnā' dawlatīhi wa-quwwādīhi*;<sup>29</sup> in 192/807f a number of *abnā' al-shi'a* with Rāfi' b. Layth abandoned the latter in Khurāsān;<sup>30</sup> in 195/810f Hātīm b. Harthama recruited 1,000 Abnā' (in Baghdād) for service in Egypt;<sup>31</sup> and according to Ibn al-Nadīm, the jurist al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804) was harassed by a certain al-Rāwandī, who used to gather the *rāwandīyya abnā' al-dawla* in the mosque in which al-Shaybānī taught: al-Rāwandī would read his *kitāb al-dawla* to his followers and they would yell at al-Shaybānī's pupils when the latter tried to recite their master's works.<sup>32</sup> There are also a couple of other passages referring to Hārūn's reign.<sup>33</sup>

But as Ayalon observes, it is above all in connection with the fourth civil war (811–13) and its aftermath that the Abnā' are mentioned. They formed the backbone of al-Amīn's army and went into battle against Ṭāhir under 'Alī b. 'Īsā, 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd b. Qaḥṭaba and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwī; they famously came to blows with the Syrian soldiers, known as Zawāqil, that al-Amīn tried to recruit for his cause in 196/811f; and they (as well as the mob) were the defenders of Baghdād when Ṭāhir laid siege to it; al-Amīn died with a cry for a saviour from their ranks.<sup>34</sup> They remained prominent after his death and resumed the struggle against al-Ma'mūn when the latter stayed in Khurāsān, and above all in 201/817 when he designated 'Alī al-Riḍā as his heir apparent.<sup>35</sup> They also appear in two military *mufaḥharas* (by al-Jāhīz and Ibn Ṭayfūr) set at al-Ma'mūn's court.<sup>36</sup>

Thereafter the references begin to peter out again. It was friction between the Turks and the Abnā', the Ḥarbiyya troops and/or the Baghdādī masses that caused al-Mu'taṣim to move to Sāmarrā,<sup>37</sup> where such Abnā' as went with him appear to have been registered in

<sup>27</sup> Tab. iii, p. 531, reading *ibn* for *ayna* (twice) and *dawla* for *walī*, following MS C and the edition of M. A.-F. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1960–9), viii, p. 175 (where the retention of the second *ayna* must be a misprint). Compare al-Amīn's characterization of the Abnā' as *ahl al-sabaq ilā 'l-hudā* (Tab. iii, p. 931.7).

<sup>28</sup> al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, ed. V. Guirgass (Leiden, 1888), p. 386.

<sup>29</sup> Tab. iii, p. 703.15.

<sup>30</sup> Tab. iii, p. 732.15.

<sup>31</sup> al-Kindī, *The Governors and Judges of Egypt*, ed. R. Guest (London and Leiden, 1921), p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud (Tehran, 1971), p. 257.18, cf. p. 120. Ayalon mysteriously infers that al-Rāwandī's followers were called *abnā' al-dawla* after their leader's book ("Reforms", p. 33).

<sup>33</sup> A young man told Hārūn that he was *min a'qāb abnā' hādhihi l-dawla*, his origin being in Marw and his birthplace in Baghdād (Tab. iii, p. 672). Another young man *min al-abnā'* received money from the generous al-Faḍl b. Yahyā al-Barmakī (al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa'l-kutāb*, ed. M. al-Saqqā' and others (Cairo, 1938), p. 195.2). Two Abnāwīs rebelled in North Africa in Hārūn's reign (below, notes 60, 68).

<sup>34</sup> Ayalon, "Reforms", pp. 51ff, 12ff; G. Hoffmann, "Al-Amīn, al-Ma'mūn und der 'Pöbel' von Baghdād in den Jahren 812/13", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, CXXXIII (1993).

<sup>35</sup> Elz, s.v. "al-Ma'mūn", cf. also I. M. Lapidus, "The separation of state and religion in the development of early Islamic society", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, VI (1975).

<sup>36</sup> Above, notes 12, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Tab. iii, pp. 1179 (Ḥarbiyya), 1180f (Abnā'); al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb murūj al-dhahab*, ed. A. C. Barbier de Meynard

the *diwān al-jund wa'l-shākiriyya*.<sup>38</sup> Most of them probably remained in Baghdād, where they appear in 249/863f, clamouring for pay along with the Shākiriyya,<sup>39</sup> in whose company they are mentioned again in 251/865f.<sup>40</sup> In Sāmarrā they are mentioned in the aftermath of al-Mutawakkil's murder in 247/861,<sup>41</sup> again in the following year when they fought the Turks over the accession of al-Musta'in,<sup>42</sup> and finally under al-Muhtadī (255–5/869–70), who unsuccessfully tried to play them against the Turks.<sup>43</sup> There do not seem to be any references to their presence in the army thereafter.

The chronological spread of the evidence is thus a good deal more consistent with Ayalon's understanding of the word than with Zakeri's;<sup>44</sup> for had the Abnā' owed their name to their descent from Iranian gentry, one would have expected the term to appear with particular frequency in accounts of the revolution itself and the reigns of the first 'Abbāsīd caliphs, when memories of their ethnic and social origin would have been vivid; but with one exception, the attestations only begin in the generation after the revolution, when the memories would have begun to recede.

### Ethnic origin

If the Abnā' were descendants of the *ahl al-dawla*, as proposed by Ayalon, they were of mixed Arab and non-Arab origin. If they were descendants of the *ahrār*, as proposed by Zakeri, they were of Iranian origin by definition. The leaders of the 'Abbāsīd revolution included several men of Arab origin whose descendants remained prominent down to the reign of al-Ma'mūn, such as Qaḥṭaba b. Shabīb al-Ṭā'i, Khāzim b. Khuzayma al-Tamīmī, Musayyab b. Zuhayr al-Ḍabbī or Mālik b. al-Haytham al-Khuzā'i, and Zakeri's thesis highlights one striking fact: with one exception, no descendant of these men is explicitly identified as a Banawī or called an Abnāwī in the sources.<sup>45</sup> They are often described as Abnā' in the secondary literature, but this merely goes to show that modern scholars routinely extend the Banawī label to all offspring of the participants in the revolution.<sup>46</sup> The sources do not. In fact, al-Jāhīz positively withholds the label from one of them in his *Manāqib al-turk*.

In this work al-Jāhīz famously describes the caliphal army of his own time as consisting of Arabs, *mawālī*, Khurāsānīs, Abnā' and Turks and stages a boasting competition between

and A. J.-B. Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1861–77), vii, pp. 118f; ed. C. Pellat (Beirut, 1966–79), iv, par. 2801; al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. Goeje (Leiden, 1892) (hereafter YB), p. 256.8 (Baghdādī masses).

<sup>38</sup> For this *diwān*, see YB, p. 267.9; cf. also p. 262.10. The expression *al-jund wa'l-shākiriyya* seems to have been interchangeable with *al-abnā' wa'l-shākiriyya* (Tab. iii, p. 1510.3, 14).

<sup>39</sup> Tab. iii, p. 1510.14.

<sup>40</sup> Tab. iii, pp. 1579.1, 1582.9.

<sup>41</sup> Tab. iii, p. 1463.2.

<sup>42</sup> YT, p. 604.5.

<sup>43</sup> YT, ii, p. 618.5.

<sup>44</sup> A fact of which he is aware. He responds that it "explicitly [*sic*] conceals numerous references to the military contingents of *abnā'* under the Umayyads and particularly during the early stages of the 'Abbāsīd revolution in Khurāsān" (Zakeri, p. 274). But no such contingents are mentioned in the sources.

<sup>45</sup> The two *nisbas* are not interchangeable. The former is the singular of *al-abnā'* (or thus at least in Jāhīz) while the latter is part of a name.

<sup>46</sup> I did so myself in *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980). Elad even supplies the men with the *nisba* al-Abnāwī ("Transition", pp. 105, 123).

these groups, set in the time of al-Ma'mūn.<sup>47</sup> The five groups are not bounded units such as regiments, but rather overlapping categories, for the purpose of the treatise is to show that anyone can be classified as anything and that rivalry based on labels of this kind is therefore mistaken.<sup>48</sup> With the exception of the Turks, all the groups boast partly of their contribution to the revolution (i.e. as Khurāsānīs) and partly of features unique to themselves (i.e. as Arabs, *mawālī*, Khurāsānīs and Abnā', of whom only the last two are envisaged as soldiers).<sup>49</sup> One would thus expect a descendant of an Arab participant in the revolution to appear as an Arab, a Khurāsānī and a Banawī alike; but Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid al-Ṭūsī, whose father had been a prominent participant in the revolution, is explicitly identified as Arab and a Khurāsānī, not as a Banawī.<sup>50</sup> (So too is Sa'īd b. 'Uqba b. Salm al-Hunā'ī,<sup>51</sup> which may or may not be significant since we do not know whether his father participated in the Khurāsānī phase of the revolution.<sup>52</sup>) Al-Jāhīz's failure to identify Ḥumayd as a Banawī is not inadvertent, for he presents him as an actual enemy of the Abnā' in another epistle, saying that he was biased against them (*ta'aṣṣaba 'alā abnā' ahl khurāsān*).<sup>53</sup> When al-Ya'qūbī describes the Abnā' as attacking Zuhayr b. al-Musayyab al-Ḍabbī, he similarly excludes from their ranks a man who was a Banawī in Ayalon's sense of descendant of a participant in the revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Were Ḥumayd and Zuhayr excluded from Banawī status because they were Arabs? It does not seem likely. Al-Jāhīz presents the Khurāsānīs as ethnically mixed<sup>55</sup> and identifies the Abnā' as Khurāsānīs by origin,<sup>56</sup> so he hardly shared Zakeri's view that they were Iranians by definition. He lets the Banawī contrast his own title to merit with that of the *mawālā* and the Arab in one passage, and with that of the Arab and the Khurāsānī in another, and Zakeri takes this to mean that the Banawī was something other than an Arab, *mawālā* and Khurāsānī (meaning that he was a member of a pan-Iranian gentry);<sup>57</sup> but he would in that case have been a non-Muslim, and what the Banawī means is not that he is something other than an Arab, client or Khurāsānī, but rather that he is something in addition: his group has virtues which the others do not share.

Other sources make it clear that one could be an Arab and a Banawī alike. Aḥmad b.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. above, note 12; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton, 1980), ch. 5. The praise of the Turks was allegedly relayed to Ṭāhir, who died in 207/822 ("Turk", C, 56; L, 35 = 673).

<sup>48</sup> "If I have described things correctly, the Banawī is a Khurāsānī; and if the Khurāsānī is a *mawālā* and the *mawālā* is an Arab, then the Khurāsānī, Banawī, *mawālā* and Arab all come to a single class ... the Turks are Khurāsānīs and *mawālī* of the caliphs ... and (the merit of) the Turk redounds to the whole community ... If all the troops knew this, they would become forbearing, ill-feeling would vanish and rancour would die down" ("Turk", C, 34 (omits "the merit of"); L, 21 = 658; cf. also C, 9ff; L, 4ff, = 637). That the purpose is conciliatory is also argued by Lassner, *Shaping*, p. 136, who does however envisage the five groups as (semi-)imaginary regiments.

<sup>49</sup> The Arabs vaunt pre-Islamic characteristics of theirs such as illiterate memorization of poetry and fondness for boasting competitions adjudicated by *kāhīns*; the *mawālī* boast of their loyalty to their patrons (C, 21f, 23ff; L, 12, 13f = 647, 648f), i.e. neither claims military merit as a group distinct from the Khurāsānīs.

<sup>50</sup> "Turk", C, 56.2; L, 35.9 = 673; cf. Crone, *Slaves*, appendix V, no. 4.

<sup>51</sup> "Turk", C, 58.7; L, 36.18 = 674.

<sup>52</sup> He is first mentioned between 142 and 144 (Tab. iii, pp. 145f; cf. *Elz*, s.v. "Muhallabids" for the date).

<sup>53</sup> "Dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb", in his *Rasā'il*, ed. 'A.-S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1965), ii, p. 207.4.

<sup>54</sup> YT, ii, p. 547; cf. Crone, *Slaves*, appendix V, no. 17.

<sup>55</sup> The Arabs claim "most of the *naqībs*", the *mawālī* claim "the chief *naqībs*", and the Khurāsānīs claim all twelve of them ("Turk", C, 14.-2, 22.8, 24.-2; L, 8.9, 12.17, 14.11 = 642, 647, 650). Ayalon wrongly has the Arabs claim all of them ("Reforms", p. 5); and Zakeri wrongly has the Abnā' do so (pp. 275f).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. below, note 76; cf. also C, 31.-3; L., 19.7 = 656 (*fa'l-banawī khurāsānī min jihat al-wilāda*).

<sup>57</sup> "Turk", C, 26.5, 13; L, 15.10, 18 = 651f; Zakeri, p. 277.

Ḥanbal, a Sadūsī *min anfusihim*, was *min al-'arab* and *min abnā' al-da'wa*, we are told; his father, a Marwazī commander, moved from Marw to Baghdād shortly before Aḥmad's birth in 164/780f.<sup>58</sup> This is incompatible with Zakeri's thesis, but not with Ayalon's, for Aḥmad's grandfather and/or father may well have participated in the revolution. Of al-Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥurr al-'Āmirī, another scholar, we are told that he was *min abnā' ahl khurāsān* and that his father had joined the revolution at Nasā; he too was perhaps an Arab, though he could have been an 'Āmirī by *walā*.<sup>59</sup> Tammām b. Tamīm al-Tamīmī, who was governor of Tunis for Muḥammad b. Muqātil b. Ḥakīm al-'Akkī and rebelled in 183/799f, was a *rajul min al-abnā'* according to Khalifa,<sup>60</sup> and he certainly sounds like an Arab too, though again he could have been an adopted member rather than *min anfusihim*. When Ḥātim b. al-Ṣaqr and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab suggest to al-Amīn that he should escape with loyal Abnā', one assumes that both were Abnā' themselves, and though the former's antecedents are unknown, the latter was indeed a son of a well-known Arab participant in the revolution.<sup>61</sup> It is also implied that Muḥammad b. Muqātil al-'Akkī was a Banawī, for the Abnā' boast of their ties of fosterage with the caliphs, and Muḥammad was a *raḍī'* of al-Rashīd while his father was *min kibār ahl dawlatihī*.<sup>62</sup> But the only descendant of a renowned Arab *ṣāhib al-da'wa* to be explicitly identified as a member of the Abnā', or at least as their leader, is 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd b. Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā'ī, who was appointed to the command of 20,000 Abnā' in 196/811f and whom al-Amīn on that occasion described to the Abnā' as *ibn kabīr ṣāhib da'watikum wa-man 'alā yaday abihi kāna fakhrukum wa-bihi tammat tā'atukum*, "the son of the eminent leader of your mission and the person at whose father's hands you gained your glory and through whom you have perfected your obedience".<sup>63</sup> This clinches Ayalon's thesis at the expense of Zakeri's, but the dearth of explicit examples is nonetheless striking.

By contrast, the sources regularly identify Iranians as Abnā'. The very first individual to be singled out as one is Yaḥyā b. Khālīd b. Barmak, of a famous Iranian family bound by ties of fosterage to the caliphs. The descendants of Mu'ādh b. Muslim, a client of B. Dhuhl who was one of the *ahl al-dawla*, likewise had ties of fosterage with the caliphs, though they are never explicitly characterized as Abnā'.<sup>64</sup> The three leading families of Abnā' in the fourth civil war were all of Iranian origin: thus the family of 'Alī b. 'Īsā,<sup>65</sup> whose father was

<sup>58</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-imām Aḥmad b. al-Ḥanbal*, ed. M. A. al-Khānjī al-Kutubī (Cairo, 1931), pp. 31ff, esp. 15.8, 17.-4, 19.14; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931) (hereafter TB), iv, pp. 412ff, esp. pp. 413.11, 415.3, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Sa'd, v, p. 348; the *nisba* is given in Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Hyderabad, 1325-7), ii, p. 329, s.v.

<sup>60</sup> Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus, 1967-8), p. 748, in conjunction with YT, ii, p. 497; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, i, pp. 89ff. The men with whom he rebelled were also Abnā'.

<sup>61</sup> Tab. iii, p. 911; cf. Mas'ūdi, *Murūj*, vi, p. 475; ed. Pellat, iv, par. 2683, where the suggestion is made by *al-ṣa'ālik min aṣḥābihī wa-hum fityān al-abnā' wa 'l-jund*. Al-Aghlab b. Sālim was one of the seventy missionaries and a Tamīmī from Marwarrūdh (*Akhbār al-dawlat al-'abbāsiyya wa-fihī akhbār al-'Abbās*, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī and 'A. J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971) (hereafter AA), pp. 221; 335; al-Balādhuri, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866) (hereafter BF), p. 233.8; W. Caskel and G. Strenziok, *Ganharat an-nasab, das genealogische Werk des Hišām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden, 1966), Register, s.v.).

<sup>62</sup> "Turk", C, 28.11; L, 16.17 = 653; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, i, p. 89; cf. Crone, *Slaves*, appendix V, no. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Tab. iii, p. 840.6; 931.18; Crone, *Slaves*, appendix V, no. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. above, note 26; Crone, *Slaves*, appendix V, nos. 7, 13.

<sup>65</sup> 'Alī b. 'Īsā was *shaykh hādithī 'l-dawla* (Dīnawāri, p. 391) and the *shaykh* and *kabīr* of the Abnā' (Tab. iii, p. 931.14), of whom he commanded 50,000 for al-Amīn against Ṭāhir (below, note 160). The Abnā' also honoured al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. 'Īsā (Tab. iii, p. 846) and were outraged when 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī b. 'Īsā was flogged (Tab. iii, p. 1001.19). They and other members of the family held high office down to the reign of al-Ma'mūn,

a *mawla* of Khuzā'a and a missionary in the revolutionary movement;<sup>66</sup> the descendants of Abū Khālid, a participant in the revolution from Marwarrūdh;<sup>67</sup> and the sons of Jabala, whose ancestor may have been a cattle-driver from Herat.<sup>68</sup> The last two families are both graced with the *nisba* al-Abnāwī, which no Arab is known to have borne. Dāwūd b. 'Īsā al-Khurāsānī, a Banawī soldier,<sup>69</sup> was probably a son of 'Īsā b. Mūsā al-Khurāsānī, a participant in the revolution for whom no Arab *nisba* is recorded.<sup>70</sup> 'Awf b. 'Īsā b. Yanfaran b. Yart b. al-Shafardān al-Farghānī was also *min al-abnā'*.<sup>71</sup> The Sāmarrān poet Ju'ayfirān b. 'Alī b. Aṣfar b. al-Sarī b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Abnāwī was *min al-ajam*; his father was *min abnā' al-jund al-khurāsāniyya* in Baghdad according to some, though others said that he was a *dihqān* of Karkh.<sup>72</sup> The Rushayd al-Khuttalī whose traditionist grandson was reputed to be *min al-abnā'* was presumably also an Iranian,<sup>73</sup> and one would postulate the same of other Abnā'.<sup>74</sup>

and some of them eventually joined his side (Tab. iii, p. 882, 904; al-Azdī, *Ta'rikh al-Mawṣil*, ed. 'A. Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967), pp. 325, 328).

<sup>66</sup> AA, pp. 217, 220; al-Balādhuri, *Ansāb al-ashraf* (hereafter BA), iii, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 137-5, 169.2, on 'Īsā b. Māhān.

<sup>67</sup> Tab. ii, p. 2004.14; cf. YB, p. 247.19 (with al-Anbārī for al-Abnāwī). The name of Abū Khālid's father was al-Hunduwān (Tab. iii, p. 1002.4). His son Muḥammad b. Abī Khālid was the *shaykh* of the Abnā' in the Zawāqil affair, a loyal supporter of al-Amīn (Tab. iii, pp. 843, 848, 883) and the leader of the Abnā'/Ḥarbiyya after al-Amīn's death (Tab. iii, pp. 935, 998ff; YT, ii, pp. 532f, 547) together with his sons Hārūn, 'Abdūs and 'Īsā; 'Īsā inherited his leadership (Tab. iii, pp. 976, 978, 985, 1003f) and played a prominent role in the revolt against al-Ma'mūn (Tab. iii, pp. 1006f; Ibn Ṭayfūr, ed. Kawtharī, p. 79; ed. Kellier, pp. 141f). Al-Ma'mūn pardoned him (al-Ya'qūbī, *Mushākalat al-nās li-zamānihim*, ed. W. G. Millward (Beirut, 1962), p. 28 = *id.*, "The Adaptation of Men to their Time", tr. W. G. Millward, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXXXIV (1964), p. 341) and employed him against Bābak (M. J. de Goeje (ed.), *Kitāb al-uyūn wa'l-ḥadā'iq* (Leiden, 1871), p. 361; Azdī, *Mawṣil*, pp. 386-3, 387.10). Hārūn held a governorship in Arabia in 226/840f (Tab. iii, p. 1319). Contrary to what is sometimes stated, al-Ma'mūn's secretary Ahmad b. Abī Khālid does not seem to have been a member of this family.

<sup>68</sup> 'Abdawayh fought on the side of the Abnā' in Baghdad in 203 (Tab. iii, p. 1035.7) and reappears as 'Abdawayh b. Jabala *min al-abnā'* in Egypt, where he commanded the *shurṭa* for Ibn Ṭāhir in 211 and became governor himself in 215, moving on to Barqa with the Afshīn in 216 (Kindī, pp. 183, 189f). 'Abdawayh al-Abnāwī is said to have been a rebel in North Africa in 178/794f and to have come from Herat (Khalīfa, p. 748; cf. Tab. iii, p. 630 [al-Anbārī]); but the rebel is also said to have been 'Abdallāh b. al-Jārūd (e.g. YT, ii, p. 496; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, i, pp. 86ff; cf. Ibn al-Athīr, vi, p. 93, who identifies the two, as does Elad, "Transition", p. 99, note 47). In Barqa we later find Muḥammad b. 'Abdawayh b. Jabala as governor for al-Wāthiq (YT, ii, p. 586); he also governed Ḥimṣ for al-Mutawakkil (Tab. iii, p. 1421; YT, ii, p. 599). 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwī defeated a Khārijite for al-Rashīd in 185/801f (Tab. iii, p. 651) and fell against Ṭāhir as commander of 20,000 or 30,000 Abnā' (Tab. iii, pp. 826-32; cf. pp. 650, 773, 798, 804; Dīnawarī, p. 394). 'Alī b. Jabala al-Abnāwī, presumably yet another brother, was *min abnā' al-shī'a al-khurāsāniyya min ahl baghdād*. He was born in the Ḥarbiyya, but he was one-eyed and eventually lost his good eye as well, so he was a poet rather than a soldier (Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Cairo, 1927-74) (hereafter *Aghānī*), xx, p. 14). If 'Abdawayh was named after his grandfather, the latter will have been 'Abdawayh al-Jirdāmidh b. 'Abd al-Karīm, who used to drive sheep to Marw before becoming one of the "well known commanders" in the revolutionary army (Tab. ii, p. 1957.4.7) and who settled in Baghdad, where a street and a *qaṣr* were known after him (YB, p. 241.2; BF, p. 296.3; as a member of the *ahl al-dawla* he cannot be identical with his Abnāwī namesake, as suggested by Elad, "Transition", p. 99, note 47). BF describes him as an Azdī, clearly by *walā'*.

<sup>69</sup> Tab. iii, p. 845.

<sup>70</sup> He first appears under al-Manṣūr, who sent him to Armenia (Ibn A'tham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (Hyderabad, 1968-75), viii, pp. 233f). In 148/765 he was in North Africa, where Hāshim b. Ishtākhanj led a mutiny in North Africa that caused Muḥammad b. al-Ash'ath to be expelled and 'Īsā b. Mūsā to be elevated to the governorship (YT, ii, p. 464; Khalīfa, p. 680; Ibn 'Idhārī and al-Nuwayrī in H. R. Idrīs, "L'Occident musulman à l'avenement des Abbāsides d'après le chroniqueur Zirī de al-Raqīq", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 39, 1971, 283f). He fell at Āmid in 160 or 162 against the Khārijite 'Abd al-Salām al-Yashkurī (Khalīfa, p. 701; Tab. iii, p. 492.17). The identification was suggested to me by A. Elad.

<sup>71</sup> al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb* (Hyderabad, 1962-82), i, p. 10.9 (drawn to my attention by C. Robinson).

<sup>72</sup> *Aghānī*, xx, p. 188.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, iv, p. 163, s.v. "Sulaymān b. Dāwūd b. Rushayd".

<sup>74</sup> E.g. 'Alawayh al-A'war *min quwwād al-abnā'* who appears on campaign against Bābak in 220/835f (Tab. iii,

We have then a peculiar problem. The sources identify the Abnā' as the physical descendants of the participants in the revolution, and all the individuals described as Abnā' actually did or could descend from such participants; they include some Arabs. Yet with the exception of Qaḥṭaba's grandson, the descendants of the most prominent Arab participants are never characterized as Abnā', and one is explicitly excluded from their ranks. How is this to be explained?

The answer must lie in the fourth civil war. Most participants in the 'Abbāsīd revolution settled in Baghdād where their descendants supported al-Amīn in the conflict and continued to oppose al-Ma'mūn thereafter, with the result that the term Abnā' came to be synonymous with al-Amīn's Baghdādi adherents; sons of the revolutionaries who supported al-Ma'mūn ceased to count as Banawīs. The descendants of the best known *ahl al-dawla* mostly did support al-Ma'mūn, whether they were Arabs by descent (the majority) or non-Arabs (such as Yaḥyā b. Mu'ādh b. Muslim);<sup>75</sup> and so the only offspring of a famed participant in the revolution to be explicitly linked with the Abnā' is 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd b. Qaḥṭaba, who stayed in Baghdād to take a leading role in the war on al-Amīn's side.

This explanation makes effortless sense of al-Jāhīz. He lets the Abnā' define themselves as Baghdādis of Khurāsānī origin<sup>76</sup> and has them boast of the close relations with the caliph that their domicile entails,<sup>77</sup> though it was not in fact in Baghdād alone that they were found: other sources mention them in Khurāsān,<sup>78</sup> Ṭarsūs,<sup>79</sup> the Jazīra,<sup>80</sup> al-Anbār, Ṭabaristān<sup>81</sup> and North Africa.<sup>82</sup> It is their residence in the capital and implied political activities there that distinguish them from the Khurāsānīs in al-Jāhīz's scheme. He sees the Khurāsānīs as supporters of the first 'Abbāsīd revolution and al-Ma'mūn's second *da'wa* alike,<sup>83</sup> and this is why he describes Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd and Sa'īd b. 'Uqba as Arabs and Khurāsānīs, but not Banawīs, though the former certainly and the latter possibly descended from *ahl al-dawla*: both were supporters of al-Ma'mūn; it is in the context of their appearance at al-Ma'mūn's court that the description is given (by al-Ma'mūn himself in the case of Ḥumayd). This is also why he could present Ḥumayd as a positive enemy of the Abnā': Ḥumayd was biased against them, he explains, because they had opposed him in the days of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, al-Ma'mūn's governor of Iraq, under the leadership of

p. 1173); Ṣāliḥ b. 'Aṭīyya al-Adjam, another poet *min abnā' al-da'wa* (*Aghānī*, xx, p. 157.2); Kathīr b. Qādīra and Abū 'l-Fil, who appear along with Dāwūd b. Mūsā b. 'Īsā al-Khurāsānī as Banawī soldiers (Tab. iii, p. 845); Shu'ayb b. Ḥarb al-Madā'inī, a scholar who was *min abnā' khurāsān*, or *min afnā' al-nās*, his mother being *min al-abnā'* (TB, ix, p. 239, drawn to my attention by C. Robinson); and Ahmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, the author of *Kitāb Baghdād*, who was *min abnā' khurāsān min aulād al-dawla* and whose ancestor came from Marwarrūdh (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 163; TB, iv, p. 211).

<sup>75</sup> Arazī and El'ad, "l'Epitre", ii, pp. 33f; cf. above, note 64, for Mu'ādh.

<sup>76</sup> *Aṣḥī khurāsān . . . wa-far'ī baghdād . . . wa-hiya khurāsān al-'irāq . . . wa-lanā baghdād bi-asīhā* ("Turk", C, 25-4; 26.1, 2; 28.7; L, 15.2, 6, 8; 16.13 = 651, 653); cf. also Lassner, *Shaping*, p. 134.

<sup>77</sup> "Turk", C, 26, 28; L, 15ff = 651, 653; cf. also *abnā' rijāl al-dawla wa'l-mansūbīn ilā 'l-lā'a* (C, 8-3; L, 4.1 = 636f).

<sup>78</sup> Above, note 30.

<sup>79</sup> Tab. iii, p. 1140.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Sa'd, vii, p. 350 (s.v. 'Abd al-Jabbār b. 'Āṣim).

<sup>81</sup> Above, note 28; below, note 117.

<sup>82</sup> Above, notes 60, 68. The Muslim b. Naṣr al-A'war al-Anbārī who appears at Barqa in the time of al-Ma'mūn was presumably also an Abnāwī (YT, ii, p. 542). Those mentioned in Egypt had come from Baghdād (above, note 31).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Arazī and El'ad, "l'Epitre", i, pp. 29, 50. (Al-Jāhīz does not use this expression himself.)

Muḥammad b. Abī Khālīd and others.<sup>84</sup> Ibn Ṭayfūr also thinks of the Abnā' as the soldiers who opposed al-Ma'mūn (adding that they obeyed him in the end),<sup>85</sup> and al-Ya'qūbī tacitly adopts the same identification in the passage on how the Abnā' killed Zuhayr b. al-Musayyab al-Ḍabbī, for he says that they killed him in a clash after al-Ma'mūn's proclamation of al-Riḍā as her heir, to which they were violently opposed.<sup>86</sup> Like Ḥumayd, Zuhayr is distinguished from the Abnā' by his refusal to embrace the cause which had become emblematic of Banawī status.

Ayalon, in fact, took it for granted that the term Abnā' was largely synonymous with the Baghdādī supporters of al-Amīn; but he did so on the assumption that the descendants of the *ahl al-dawla* were largely confined to Baghdād, that for practical purposes the term Abnā' only appeared in the fourth civil war and that almost all descendants of the revolutionaries were to be found on al-Amīn's side.<sup>87</sup> Things were not so simple. But for all that, Ayalon's explanation holds up extremely well. The Abnā' were indeed the sons of the *ahl al-dawla*; it merely so happens that the fourth civil war caused the term to shrink, at least in some circles. The term came to be largely synonymous with members of the Ḥarbiyya,<sup>88</sup> i.e. the quarter of Ḥarb b. 'Abdallāh al-Balkhī al-Rāwandī,<sup>89</sup> whose inmates were notorious 'Abbāsīd loyalists. They were the people who preferred the (lost) *Kitāb al-dawla* of al-Rāwandī to al-Shaybānī's legal teaching and who were variously classified by the heresiographers as Rāwandīyya, Rizāmiyya and Hurayriyya (after a certain Abū Hurayra al-Rāwandī), all associated with extreme pro-'Abbāsīd beliefs.<sup>90</sup> It is not surprising that they were outraged by al-Ma'mūn's designation of an 'Alid as his successor.

The Ḥarbiyya was the largest *rabaḍ* of Baghdād and its inhabitants came from Marw, Balkh, Bukhārā, Khuttal, Isfīyāb, Ishtākhanj, Kābul and Khwārizm.<sup>91</sup> Most of them must have been ethnic Iranians. Because these people predominated in al-Amīn's army and the subsequent opposition to al-Ma'mūn, they so-to-speak hijacked the term *abnā' al-dawla*, and so a Banawī in the sources is almost always a non-Arab.

It must be added, though, that non-Arab Abnā' seem to have been more given to stressing their status as *abnā' al-dawla* than their Arab counterparts. Descendants of Arab *ahl al-dawla* had a prestigious identity apart from that bestowed on them by participation in the revolution: the poets would routinely laud them as chiefs of the Arabs and the like.<sup>92</sup> But men such as Abū Khālīd or Jabala were nobodies in Muslim society apart from their relationship with the 'Abbāsīd house. It is true that 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwī flattered the Abnā' as sons of kings,<sup>93</sup> and that al-Khwārizmī went so far as to define all of

them as sons of *dihqāns*.<sup>94</sup> showing that they liked to see themselves as Iranian aristocrats; but even elevated non-Arab ancestry failed to carry the same prestige as descent from an Arab tribe, for the tribes had defeated the kings and *dihqāns* to found the society in which the latter's descendants were now trying to establish themselves. Hence the non-Arab members of the 'Abbāsīd army would stress their identity as Abnā' and even call themselves Abnāwīs, thus coining a prestigious *nisba* for themselves that Ṭā'īs, Khuzā'īs, Tamīmīs or Ḍabbīs did not need.

In sum, the ethnic origin of the Abnā' in the technical sense of sons of the *ahl al-dawla* must have been as mixed as that of the *ahl al-dawla* themselves. But the non-Arabs among them were particularly given to harping on their Banawī identity, and when the fourth civil war removed the largely Arab leadership of the Abnā', they turned out to consist largely of non-Arabs underneath.

### An Arab revolution?

There must then have been a sizeable number of non-Arabs among the *ahl al-dawla*. This is a proposition that the secondary literature has long done its best to deny, but Zakeri is right that the tendency to belittle the role of Iranians in the revolution has gone too far.<sup>95</sup> It is also a source of inconsistency, for the literature generally continues to maintain that the aim of the revolution was equality between Arabs and *mawālī* even though it no longer wishes *mawālī* to have played a significant role in it, conjuring up a curious picture of Arabs kindly staging a revolution to grant equality to non-Arab Muslims who were too few to matter much, or too uninterested in the issue to participate, or too despised to be admitted to the equality-granting army. One may wish to reverse this picture, for "equality" is hardly the best word with which to summarize the aim of the revolutionaries whereas Iranians must in fact have participated on a major scale. Zakeri's book is not the only sign that the "revisionist" trend in the literature is coming to an end.<sup>96</sup> In an unpublished thesis of 1993 Saleh Said Agha also argues that the participants were mostly Iranians, basing himself on prosopographical evidence. Out of a total of 340 individuals known to have supported the Hāshimiyya in Khurāsān he finds a mere 68 to have been Arabs.<sup>97</sup> Collating his material with my own, and giving the Arabs rather than the Iranians the benefit of the doubt, I arrive at about 400 individuals (405 as things stand), of whom a generous third were

necessarily with reference to their Iranian ancestry; according to Ayalon, al-Amīn was in the habit of bestowing crowns and bracelets on soldiers who had distinguished themselves ("Reforms", p. 8n, without reference).

<sup>84</sup> al-Khwārizmī, *Maḡātib al-'ulūm*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden, 1895), p. 119. The passage could be about the Yemeni Abnā', but is conventionally taken to refer to the 'Abbāsīd variety, presumably because it gives the *nisba* as Banawī, otherwise only attested in al-Jāhīz (cf. above, note 45).

<sup>85</sup> Still, who are the scholars who supposedly adduce "dubious material where *ahl al-Shām*, *ahl al-Urdunn*, *ahl Filistin* [sic], etc., seem sometimes to denote the Arab forces stationed in these areas" (Zakeri, p. 279)? It is a well-known fact that Syrian troops were stationed in Khurāsān, but even the most ardent supporters of the Arab hypothesis stop short of claiming that the 'Abbāsīd revolution was conducted by Syrians!

<sup>86</sup> Daniel took issue with it almost twenty years ago: in his view, "No one group, racial or otherwise, dominated the *da'wa*" (E. L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1979), p. 36). See now also his "The 'Ahl al-Taḡādum' and the constituency of the Abbasid Revolution in the Merv oasis", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, VII (1996), with a helpful survey of the history of the 'Arabist'/'revisionist' thesis at p. 151n.

<sup>87</sup> S. S. Agha, "The agents and forces that toppled the Umayyad Caliphate", PhD, Toronto, 1993, p. 415. I am grateful to Aziz Al-Azmeh, Matthew Gordon and Chase Robinson for drawing my attention to this work.

<sup>84</sup> Above, note 53.

<sup>85</sup> Ed. Kawtharī, p. 80; ed. Keller, p. 144 (*wa-hum qāmū bi-ḥarb amīr al-mu'minīn*).

<sup>86</sup> Above, note 54.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. "Reforms", p. 7. The third assumption is tacit.

<sup>88</sup> Noted by Ayalon, "Reforms", pp. 7ff, 11, 31f; Lassner, *Shaping*, p. 134.

<sup>89</sup> YB, p. 248.14; Azdī, *Mawṣil*, pp. 194f, 201; TB, i, p. 85.15; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866-73), ii, p. 234, s.v. "Ḥarbiyya".

<sup>90</sup> Pseudo-Nāshī, par. 53, in J. van Ess (ed.), *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 35f; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-sh'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 29f, 42; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929-33), pp. 21ff.

<sup>91</sup> YB, p. 248.15-17.

<sup>92</sup> See the references in Elad, "Transition", p. 102, note 59.

<sup>93</sup> Tab. iii, p. 829.4. They were also praised as "wearers of bracelets and crowns" (Tab. iii, p. 824.15), but not

certainly or probably *abnā'* al-'*arab wa'l-a'rāb*, as al-Jāhīz would have called them (144 in all, of whom 70 were certainly of Arab descent in so far as certainly is possible); another generous third were certainly or probably non-Arabs (148 in all, of whom 91 are certain), while the rest (i.e. 113) have names too fragmentary and appear too rarely to be identified.<sup>98</sup> Even if we count the latter as Arabs, Iranians constituted a generous third of the named participants, the vast majority of whom were commanders; there will have been fewer men of Arab origin at the lower echelons. But Agha is undoubtedly right to count the unidentifiable men as non-Arabs, thus reducing the *abnā'* al-'*arab* to a third (by my reckoning) or a fifth (by his) of the total at the higher levels. After all, the revolutionary troops came from Marw, Marwarrūd, Balkh, Kish, Nasaf, Ṭālāqān, Ṣaghāniyān, Ṭukhārīstān, Khuttalān, Nasā, Herāt, Būshanj, Abīward, Sarakhs, Ṭūs and Nishapur according to al-Dīnawārī,<sup>99</sup> the soldiers settled by al-Manṣūr in Baghdād came from Marw, Marwarrūd, Balkh, Bukhārā, Sogdīa, Isfīyāb, Fāryāb, Ishtākhanj, Khuttal, Bādghāz, Farghāna, Khwārizm, Jurjān, Jīlān, Daylam, Rayy, Kirmān and Kābul (with a few from outside Iran as well) according to al-Ya'qūbī;<sup>100</sup> and one could hardly get an overwhelmingly Arab army together by recruiting in such places. The Arabs had never been more than a minority in Khurāsān, let alone in Iran at large, and since many of them fought against the revolutionaries, there would not have been enough of them to go around. Besides, the widespread fear among the Umayyads and their governors that the revolutionaries were recently converted or semi-converted Zoroastrians bent on the extermination of the Arabs and Islam alike makes no sense unless the majority of revolutionaries were Iranians.<sup>101</sup> It is true that the *abnā'* al-'*arab* among them were Iranianized; but Persian-speaking though they might be, men such as Sulaymān b. Kathīr al-Khuzā'ī or Qaḥṭaba b. Shabīb al-Ṭā'ī hardly lent themselves to presentation as enemies of the Arabs and Islam with any degree of plausibility.<sup>102</sup> Recruits such as Marzubān al-Fāryābī,<sup>103</sup> Turārkhudā, Abrāzkhudā, al-Ishtākhanj, Shabīb b. Wāj, Zuwāreh al-Bukhārī, Māhān al-Ṣāmghānī,<sup>104</sup> Sunbādh<sup>105</sup> or Hāshim b. Hakīm (better known as al-Muqanna')<sup>106</sup> were a different matter.

To the Umayyads (as to nineteenth-century Islamicists), the revolution was all too suggestive of an Iranian restorationist movement, and what is surprising is precisely that it was not. Its avowed aim was the restoration of the Prophet's polity under a member of his family, not of the Sāsānid empire.<sup>107</sup> The inner core of the movement, including the twelve *naqībs*, were people of Arab and Iranian descent whose membership of Muslim

<sup>98</sup> I hope to publish this material elsewhere.

<sup>99</sup> Dīnawārī, pp. 359f.

<sup>100</sup> YB, pp. 240ff.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Naṣr b. Sayyār's celebrated poems (Dīnawārī, p. 360; Ibn A'tham, viii, pp. 162f; Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, vi, p. 62; ed. Pellat, iv, (par. 2286), 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā's image to the revolutionaries in his *Rasā'il*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Amman, 1988), nos. 8, 38; the alleged order to kill all Arabs/speakers of Arabic in Khurāsān (Tab., ii, pp. 1937, 1974; iii, p. 25; Dīnawārī, p. 358; Azdī, p. 107.3), and the denial of charges of cat worship and the like in AA, p. 282.

<sup>102</sup> Similarly Agha, "Agents", p. 374.

<sup>103</sup> YB, p. 249.3, on the plot for himself and his troops in Baghdād. He was the father of Asad b. al-Marzubān, who also participated in the revolution (AA, pp. 345, 370; Tab., iii, p. 16; BA, iii, p. 139).

<sup>104</sup> Below, notes 141–5; YB, p. 249.2.

<sup>105</sup> On whose revolt after Abū Muslim's death, see BA, iii, pp. 246f.

<sup>106</sup> Both he and his father had participated in the revolution (Narskhakhī, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, ed. C. Schefer (Paris, 1892), p. 64 = *id.*, *The History of Bukhara*, tr. R. N. Frye (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 65f).

<sup>107</sup> Pace Zakeri, p. 280.

society in Khurāsān stretched back for two or three generations, such as Sulaymān b. Kathīr al-Khuzā'ī or al-'Alā' b. al-Ḥurayth b. Quṭba, a Khuzā'ī by *walā'*,<sup>108</sup> not recently arrived Arabs or freshly converted *dhimmīs*; and most of these long-standing members of local Muslim society probably came from the local Muslim army, in which Arabs and *mawālī* lived and fought together, though Arabs probably still predominated in it (thanks to fresh infusions from Iraq). But when the revolution began, a great many others joined in.<sup>109</sup> The late recruits included some crucial contingents of Arabs, notably al-Kirmānī's Yemenī faction<sup>110</sup> and the (at least partly Arab) former adherents of the Khārījite Shaybān.<sup>111</sup> But many more were Iranian, of whom there was after all a much greater reservoir. Some were local rulers and their *asbārān*, as Zakeri says; others were villagers (there being little else that they could have been). Either way, the late recruits were mostly first-generation Muslims or even freshly converted *dhimmīs* whose acceptance in the Hāshimite army constituted their entry into Muslim society, as is clear from their names. The Islamic aegis under which these disparate troops were held together was fragile. When Abū Muslim was murdered, his disbanded soldiers responded with the very rejection of Islam and its Arab carriers that the Umayyads and their governors had credited them with from the start;<sup>112</sup> and when the Rāwandīyya deified al-Manṣūr, they showed themselves to be same kind of semi-assimilated Iranians as those who had abounded in Abū Muslim's troops.<sup>113</sup> The after-effect of the revolution was a century of Iranian revolt, but the 'Abbāsīds survived, aided and abetted by the *ahl al-dawla* and *abnā'* al-*dawla*, a new elite that did not identify itself in terms of ethnicity at all.

Whatever their individual origins, collectively they were *abnā'* al-*dawla*, sons of the *ahl al-dawla*: it was their political role which singled them out from everybody else. Collectively, they were *abnā'* *khurāsān al-muwalladīn*, people of Khurāsānī descent born "here", i.e. in the capital, not ordinary Khurāsānīs, let alone ordinary Arabs or Iranians devoid of special ties with the 'Abbāsīd house.<sup>114</sup>

Elad seemingly disagrees: to him the *Abnā'* come across as Arabs. But he uses that word in both an ethnic and a high cultural sense; so the disagreement may be more apparent than real.<sup>115</sup> Arabs in the ethnic sense of the word were descendants of Arab tribes who lived cheek by jowl with a multiplicity of other ethnic, tribal and local groups and who usually spoke some regional version of vulgar Arabic, though some of them no longer spoke

<sup>108</sup> *EL*, s.v. "Sulaymān b. Kathīr"; AA, p. 219.3 and *passim*.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Agha, p. 419.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. M. Sharon, *Revolt. The Social and Military Aspects of the 'Abbāsīd Revolution* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 112ff.

<sup>111</sup> Their leader was 'Alī b. Ma'qīl al-Hanafī, credited with a following of 10,000 or 25,000 men (AA, pp. 295, 309f; Tab., ii, p. 2002.6).

<sup>112</sup> Thus Sunbādh, Muqanna' (above, notes 105–6) and Ishāq the Turk, cf. G. H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens* (Paris, 1938).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, iii (Berlin and New York, 1992), pp. 10ff.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn Ṭayfūr, ed. Kawtharī, p. 80; ed. Keller, p. 143. Ayalon takes *muwallad* to mean "of mixed descent" ("Reforms", p. 6; followed by Crone, *Slaves*, p. 66 and note 472 thereto). But the basic meaning of *muwallad* is "homeborn slave" (E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93), s.v.). The Hispanic Muslims were known as *muwallads* because they were non-Arabs born in Muslim society; and the *Abnā'* were clearly *muwallads* in the sense of Khurāsānīs born in Iraq (cf. Lassner, *Shaping*, p. 134).

<sup>115</sup> Elad, "Transition", pp. 101ff; cf. Arazi and El'ad, "L'Épître", i, p. 70, where the Ṭāhirīds are declared to be Arabs, although of indigenous (Iranian) origin; Elad, "Transition", pp. 91f, 119, where the 'Abbāsīd period as the apogee of Arabism (in Goitein's words) is explained as the superiority of Arab culture largely sustained by non-Arabs and where the Arab culture of the non-Arabs among the *Abnā'* is stressed.



Arabic at all; the Abnā' did include Arabs in this sense. But Arabs in the high cultural sense were members of an elite distinguished from all these diverse local groups by their use of the same classical Arabic language and their participation in the same uniform high culture regardless of where they hailed from originally; all the Abnā' were "Arabs" in this sense. This meaning is not familiar to the sources, however. They always use the word to mean ethnic Arabs and duly distinguish the Abnā' from them,<sup>116</sup> so we had better do the same. Collectively, the Abnā' were neither Arabs nor Iranians, but an elite creamed off from both.

Elad is however right that their orientation was Arabocentric. Although they were not Arabs, their sympathies were with *al-musawwida wa' l-'arab*, as Sarkhāstān observed.<sup>117</sup> The latter, a participant in al-Māzyār's revolt in Ṭabaristān in 224/838f, regarded 'Abbāsīd loyalty and philo-Arab sentiment as inseparable, and so they clearly were to the Abnā' themselves. Supporting the regime meant siding with the Arabs because the religion in the name of which the Muslim empire had been created still could not survive without allegiance to its original carriers. As a conquest elite the original carriers had ceased to exist. Most of the Arabs with whom Sarkhāstān expected the Abnā' to side were probably Arabized *mawālī*.<sup>118</sup> But the Arabs still supplied the caliphal dynasty, the high cultural language and an identity over and above that of the conquered peoples, and it was to these emblems of high-cultural unity that the Abnā' professed their allegiance. Hence they equated Arabs with right guidance and looked askance at al-Ma'mūn's freshly recruited Khurāsānīs, whom everyone perceived as 'ajam, that is unassimilated, half converted or unconverted Iranians (and who were of course rivals for their status too).<sup>119</sup> "O Abnā', O sons of kings and friends of swords, they are 'ajam", 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwī exclaimed to his troops when they were confronted with Ṭāhir's army.<sup>120</sup> Ṭāhir's 'ajam were raw Iranians, people who had failed to transcend their local origins by participation in the high culture, and this was the key difference between them and a Banawī of Iranian descent such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala himself. The Abnā' regarded the 'Abbāsīd caliphate as a bulwark against such people, who might otherwise absorb them and in whose ranks they no doubt included Sarkhāstān and al-Māzyār. It is for this reason that al-Ma'mūn's fondness for 'ajam and transfer of the caliphate to an 'Alid came across to them as a Zoroastrian plot. Muḥammad b. Abī Khālid, the Banawī *shaykh quwwād al-harbiyya* who expelled al-Ḥasan b. Sahl from Baghdād, told a grandson of al-Manṣūr's that "We are the

supporters of your dynasty (*anṣār dawlatikum*) and fear that this dynasty will pass away thanks to the Zoroastrian administration (*tadbīr al-majūs*) that goes on in it".<sup>121</sup> It was also a Banawī who greeted al-Ma'mūn as "Commander of the Zoroastrians" or "Commander of the infidels".<sup>122</sup>

Collectively, then, the Abnā' were characterized by an Arabocentric attitude. But they had not forgotten their individual origins, and Elad is right that the *abnā' al-'arab* among them were positively biased in favour of the tribes from which they hailed, as their fathers had been as well. When Khāzīm b. Khuzayma al-Tamīmī, a member of the *ahl al-dawla*, was appointed to an expedition against Oman in 134/751f, he supplemented the 700 troops he had received from Abū 'l-'Abbās with relatives, fellow-tribesmen, clients and people he trusted from his native Marwarrūdh, as well as Tamīmīs recruited in Basra.<sup>123</sup> When Mūsā b. Ka'b al-Tamīmī, another member of the *ahl al-dawla*, was sent to India in the same year, he recruited 3,000 Arabs and *mawālī* in Basra, plus 1,000 Tamīmīs there.<sup>124</sup> In 145/762 al-Musayyab b. Zuhayr al-Ḍabbī, yet another member of the *ahl al-dawla*, gave *amān* to his fellow-tribesman al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, the famous transmitter who had participated in Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdallāh's revolt.<sup>125</sup> When a Khawlānī/Yemenī rebel was captured in Mosul in 180/796f, he successfully appealed to the "Yamāniyya" in Hārūn's troops, including al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā'ī/Yemen and 'Abdallāh and Ḥamza, sons of the *naqīb* Mālik b. al-Haytham al-Khuzā'ī/Yemen; and the latter is known to have sent money to the Khuzā'a in Medina.<sup>126</sup> Non-Khurāsānī Arabs who rose to membership of the 'Abbāsīd elite who were as partial as their Khurāsānī counterparts.<sup>127</sup> Whether the Iranian members of the Abnā' displayed a comparable partiality for their native kin or tribes by *walā'* is less easy to say, though they too had networks (as is clear from Hārūn's use of al-Faḍl b. Yāhyā al-Barmakī in eastern Iran).<sup>128</sup> In view of the fact that 'aṣabiyya between Nizār and Yemen was extremely common outside the caliphal elite,<sup>129</sup> it is in any case amazing that the elite itself being engulfed by it; but as Elad notes, tribal rifts within the Khurāsānī army were avoided,<sup>130</sup> some tensions notwithstanding.<sup>131</sup> So too were rifts between Khurāsānī soldiers

<sup>121</sup> YT, ii, pp. 532f, 547.

<sup>122</sup> Crone, *Slaves*, note 604.

<sup>123</sup> Tab. iii, p. 78; cited in Elad, "Transition", p. 103, note 61.

<sup>124</sup> Tab. iii, p. 80; cited in Elad, "Transition", p. 103, note 61.

<sup>125</sup> Elad, "Transition", p. 102, note 59.

<sup>126</sup> Azdī, *Mawṣil*, p. 286; Tab. iii, p. 555; cited in Elad, "Transition", p. 103, notes 58, 62.

<sup>127</sup> The non-Khurāsānī "Yamāniyya" in al-Manṣūr's *ṣaḥāba* successfully intervened on behalf of a Syrian Kindī/Yemenī who had rebelled with 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī (Azdī, *Mawṣil*, pp. 178, 232f). 'Uqba b. Salm al-Hunā'ī/Azdī/Yemen killed numerous Rabi'a as governor of Bahrayn and Yamāma to make up for the Yemenis that Ma'n b. Zā'ida al-Shaybānī/Rabi'a had killed as governor of Yemen (YT, ii, p. 463; cf. above, note 52). When Hārūn came to Mosul, the Mosulis made sure to include Anṣārī scholars in their delegation to him, for Abū Yūsuf was with him and he was an Anṣārī responsive to fellow-tribesmen (Azdī, *Mawṣil*, pp. 284f).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Tab. iii, p. 631.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Crone, *Slaves*, p. 244, note 432; Elad, "Transition", p. 108 and note 90 thereto. There was plenty of it in Mosul too, and the Azdī/Yemenī author of *Ta'rīkh al-Mawṣil* credits al-Manṣūr himself with a declaration of pro-Yemenī sentiment so violent that he could hardly have retained non-Yemenis in his service if he had actually made it (Azdī, *Mawṣil*, pp. 219ff).

<sup>130</sup> Elad, "Transition", p. 105.

<sup>131</sup> The examples relate to *ahl al-dawla* rather than Abnā'. Al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā'ī/Yemen told the future al-Manṣūr that he could not kill Ibn Hubayra al-Fazārī/Muḍar without stirring up tribal enmity that would engulf al-Manṣūr's own 'askar; hence Khāzīm b. Khuzayma al-Tamīmī/Muḍar was sent to do the job (YT, ii, p. 424). Khāzīm b. Khuzayma al-Tamīmī's killing of Ḥārithis/Yemenis in 134 did have repercussions in the army (Tab. iii, p. 76f; cf. Elad, "Transition", p. 101, note 57). Abū Dāwūd was accused of 'aṣabiyya, explained as a preference for

<sup>116</sup> Cf. the following note.

<sup>117</sup> Tab. iii, p. 1278.17; cf. pp. 1273.16, 1274.16, where the Arabs and Abnā' are listed separately, and p. 1278.5, where the Abnā' are distinguished from the local population as *abnā' al-quwwād*.

<sup>118</sup> The same goes for the troops that Elad sees as "comprised exclusively of Arab tribes", cf. the fact that his first reference is to an army of 3,000 Basran Arabs and *mawālī* ("Transition", p. 107).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Tab. iii, p. 922.18, on the killers of al-Amīn (*qaum min al-'ajam*); Kindī, *Governors*, p. 184.1, on 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir's troops in Egypt (they were *quwwād al-'ajam min ahl khurāsān*); Tab. iii, p. 1142.7; Ibn Ṭayfūr, ed. Kawtharī, p. 144; ed. Keller, p. 266 (a Syrian held al-Ma'mūn to favour the 'ajam of Khurāsān); Azdī, *Mawṣil*, p. 334.11 (Naṣr b. Shabath was of the same opinion). Al-Ma'mūn entered Baghdad with 'ajam carrying bows and arrows (Ibn Ṭayfūr, ed. Kawtharī, p. 16; ed. Keller, p. 15). When al-Ma'mūn praised the 'ajam of Khurāsān, a commander in his presence responded that nobody was braver than *abnā' khurāsān al-muwalladīn*, i.e. the homeborn Khurāsānīs (cf. above, note 114). Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid also distinguished the Abnā' from the 'ajam (here possibly non-Muslims) of Khurāsān, cf. below, note 147.

<sup>120</sup> Tab. iii, p. 829.4; cf. Elad, "Transition", p. 105, note 68; Hoffmann, "Pöbel", p. 30, who both infer that the Abnā' saw themselves as Arabs. Note also that Ibn Ṭayfūr wrote a book on *faḍl al-'arab 'alā 'l-'ajam* (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 163f; above, note 74).

of Arab and non-Arab descent, though Arab prejudice against *mawālī* had by no means disappeared.<sup>132</sup> How the Arab Khurāsānīs maintained their Janus-face as fellow-tribesmen for one purpose and a supra-ethnic elite for another is not easy to say, but it testifies to the importance of the *dawla* in their identity. Had they seen themselves as ethnic Arabs, they would have feuded as much as their Umayyad predecessors.

### Social origin

Did the Iranian Abnā' descend from Sāsānīd cavalrymen? To a large extent the answer has to be negative. The fact that they liked to see themselves as sons of kings and *dihqāns* evidently does not mean that this is what they actually were.<sup>133</sup> Some were patently not.<sup>134</sup> The term Abnā' is not in itself a clue to social origins; and when al-Jāhīz lets the Abnā' boast that "We are foster-brothers of the caliphs and neighbours of viziers; we have been born in the courts of our kings and under the wings of our caliphs", they are not boasting of the past relationship with the Sāsānīd emperors, but of their current relationship with the 'Abbāsīd caliphs: kings is simply a synonym for caliphs here.<sup>135</sup>

Nonetheless, Zakeri has a point, provided that one does not take the word "Sāsānīd" too seriously. The Sāsānīd *asbārān/asāwira* that Zakeri has in mind were *dihqāns* and recruits of non-noble origin who had received allotments of land and/or cash payments in return for military service from Khusraw I (d. 579) onwards;<sup>136</sup> but he does not explain how they survived a century of unemployment. He is right that some did: *dihqāns* are often mentioned in Umayyad Khurāsān, and some of the *Asāwira* who had deserted to the Arabs during the conquests also appear in that province.<sup>137</sup> But it will above all have been the non-Muslim rulers who had *abnā' al-marāziba wa' l-asāwira* at their disposal,<sup>138</sup> and few of their horsemen will have been Sāsānīd in the sense of originating in Khusraw's reforms. In the context of the 'Abbāsīd revolution this is not important, however. The Hāshimīyya could no doubt have found Iranian cavalrymen in the retinues of local landlords and rulers who converted to Islam after the fashion of the Bukhārkhudā and Sāmānkhudā,<sup>139</sup> and they do seem to have done so on a larger scale than normally envisaged. Turārkhudā, one of the Khurāsānīs who rebelled with 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī in Syria in 137/754f, was *min abnā'*

Arabs (in general) and his own people (in particular) over other *ahl al-da'wa*, in Khurāsān in 135 (Tab. iii, p. 83). But in the story of how Qutham b. al-'Abbās stirred up tribal strife in al-Manṣūr's army, the Khurāsānīs remain distinct from Muḍar, Rabī'a and Yemen (Tab. iii, pp. 266f; Elad, "Transition", p. 102, note 57).

<sup>132</sup> Elad, "Transition", pp. 125ff.

<sup>133</sup> Everyone who could not pass for an Arab would present himself as a non-Arab of the most elevated kind, cf. the royal descent claimed by Bashshār b. Burd (*Aghānī*, iii, p. 135; cf. Zakeri, pp. 303f) and by local rulers in Iran (C. E. Bosworth, "The heritage of rulership in early Islamic Iran and the search for dynastic connections with the past", *Iran*, XI, 1973). Differently Zakeri, p. 289.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. the cattle-driver 'Abdawayh (above, note 68) or Khālid b. Barmak, who owed his presence in Muslim society to enslavement and whose previous status was in any case not that of an *asbār*, his father being the leader of a Buddhist monastery (cf. C. E. Bosworth, "Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Kirmānī and the rise of the Barmakids", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LVII (1994), esp. pp. 269n, 270-2).

<sup>135</sup> "Turk", C, 28 (with *nahnu* for *tahta*); L, 16 = 653; Zakeri, 277. Zakeri also claims that the 'Abbāsīds honoured their troops with the title *al-ahḥār*, but his examples refer to tenth-century soldiers who were described as *ahḥār* in the literal sense of free as opposed to *ghilmān* (p. 276 and note 858).

<sup>136</sup> Zakeri, pp. 52ff.

<sup>137</sup> Tab. ii, p. 1550.15; 1606.6 (years 112 and 119); cf. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Asāwera"; Zakeri, pp. 112ff.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Tab. ii, p. 1243.1, on the Sogdians in 93.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Narshakhi, pp. 8, 57 = pp. 10, 59.

*mulūk a'ājim khurāsān*, presumably from Turār in Isfiyāb.<sup>140</sup> The Abrāzkhudā who appears in a Khurāsānī army sent against a Khārījite in the Jazīra in 137/754f will have been the squire of Abrāz, a village near Nishapur.<sup>141</sup> A descendant of Šālih, *ṣāhib al-muṣallā*, claimed aristocratic descent for his ancestor, who was, he said, a recruit of Abū Muslim's, from Balkh *min awlād mulūk khurāsān* and who was associated with other *awlād mulūk khurāsān* in Baghdād, including a certain Kharsā and Shabīb b. Wāj,<sup>142</sup> a well-known participant in the revolution elsewhere identified as a Marwarrūdhī.<sup>143</sup> Al-Ishtākhanj, the father of Hāshim b. al-Ishtākhanj, was presumably the ruler of Ishtākhanj, the area north-west of Samarqand elsewhere known as Ishtikhān.<sup>144</sup> In any case, he and Zuwāreh al-Bukhārī/al-Kirmānī, who both supported the revolt of Jahwar b. (al-)Marār al-'Ijlī (another member of the *ahl al-dawla*, in western Iran in 138/755f, are described as *nukhab fursān al-'ajam*.<sup>145</sup> No doubt there were more of their kind.

### Later military role

Though the Hāshimīyya recruited Iranian cavalrymen, the descendants of the *ahl al-dawla* familiar to al-Jāhīz were not noted for their cavalry skills. Al-Jāhīz describes the Abnā' as infantry *par excellence*, in contrast to the Khurāsānīs (i.e. al-Ma'mūn's troops) and the Turks. His Abnā' boasts of the long lances they use as infantry and vaunt their ability to fight at the entrances to trenches, the heads of bridges, in streets and prisons, and to kill people in markets and alleys;<sup>146</sup> Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid tells al-Ma'mūn that the Abnā' use long lances comparable to those of the 'ajam at the entrances to trenches and defiles and notes that their ability to fight in such places, as well as in streets and prisons, is unrivalled. But Ḥumayd's compliment is barbed, for he adds that actually armies depend on cavalry: infantry is always inferior, especially as horsemen who dismount are better at fighting on foot than are infantrymen at fighting on horseback.<sup>147</sup> Al-Jāhīz does not deny that the Abnā' are horsemen too: he lets them boast of the short spears they use as cavalrymen,<sup>148</sup> and one passage incidentally refers to *fawāris min ahl khurāsān wa'l-abnā' wa-ghayrihim*.<sup>149</sup> But as he sees it, their merit lay in their versatility rather than in cavalry skills. They could fight on foot and on horseback, on land and by sea, by day and by night, in villages and in urban quarters.<sup>150</sup> They were equally good with the sword, lance and arrows, as Naṣr b. Shabāth

<sup>140</sup> Tab. iii, p. 356.8; cf. p. 93.7. For Turār, also known as Utrār and Utrār, see al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*,<sup>2</sup> ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1906), p. 263.1; Yāqūt, *Muḥjam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866-73), i, p. 310.

<sup>141</sup> BA, iii, p. 249.7; Yāqūt, *Buldān*, i, p. 90.

<sup>142</sup> TB, xi, p. 438.9. Compare F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895), p. 171 (Xaršāh(?)).

<sup>143</sup> Tab. iii, p. 492.19; cf. ii, p. 1960; BA, iii, pp. 139f (S. b. Rāḥ), 205-7; cf. Justi, p. 338.

<sup>144</sup> YB, p. 293.18; cf. p. 248.17; W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion* (London, 1968), p. 95; cf. Tab. ii, p. 1598.2.

<sup>145</sup> Tab. iii, p. 122; cf. note d and the *Addenda et Emendanda* thereto (*wa-ma'a Jahwar nukhab fursān al-'ajam [minhum?]* Zuwāreh wa 'l-Ishtākhanj); BA, iii, pp. 247f (Zubārah al-Bukhārī); YB, p. 245.4 (Rubāwah al-Kirmānī); Justi, pp. 337, 388 (Zuwāreh, from Uzwārak). For Hāshim b. al-Ishtākhanj, see note 70, and Jāhīz, "Turk", C, 19.6; L, 11.1 = 645, where the Khurāsānīs boast of him (not the Abnā', as Zakeri, p. 296, would have it).

<sup>146</sup> "Turk", C, 26ff; L, 15f = 651f.

<sup>147</sup> "Turk", C, 52ff; L, 33f = 671f.

<sup>148</sup> "Turk", C, 27 ult.; L, 16.7 = 652.

<sup>149</sup> "Turk", C, 62.4; L, 39.9 = 677.

<sup>150</sup> "Turk", C, 27f; L, 16 = 652.

al-'Uqaylī declares in the boasting competition in Ibn Ṭayfūr.<sup>151</sup> Naṣr b. Shabath and al-Jāhīz also agree that the Abnā' had a great capacity for endurance.<sup>152</sup> But it is the Khurāsānīs and the Turks who are the great horsemen in al-Jāhīz's tract, and it is the Khurāsānīs who are made to boast of their *shahriyya* steeds, elegant posture in the saddle and manufacture of stirrups, not the Abnā' as Zakeri would have it.<sup>153</sup>

Ayalon takes al-Jāhīz to say that "there was amongst the Abnā' a sizeable body of excellent infantrymen";<sup>154</sup> but al-Jāhīz describes all the Abnā' as infantrymen *par excellence*, not just a section of them. Lassner assumes al-Jāhīz's account to reflect the Abnā's performance in the siege of Baghdād,<sup>155</sup> and Zakeri takes this idea to extremes. According to him, al-Jāhīz describes the Abnā' as impoverished soldiers reduced to infantry, which "corresponds to their status in the time of al-Amīn when the majority of them were footsoldiers and went to battle without horses";<sup>156</sup> by this he means, apparently, that the Abnā' had merged with the Baghdādi plebs ("street vendors, naked ones, people from the prisons, riffraff, rabble, cutpurses and people of the market"),<sup>157</sup> who fought with unexpected fierceness in the siege of Baghdād and who were also Iranians in Zakeri's opinion: "It is rather amazing how closely al-Jāhīz's description of the *banawī* corresponds with the activity of the 'ayyārūn under the siege of Baghdād", he observes.<sup>158</sup> But this construction is impossible. The Abnā' did not go into battle without horses in the time of al-Amīn, who would have been extremely short of horsemen had that been the case, and they obviously were not identical with the Baghdādi rabble.<sup>159</sup> They supplied 50,000 (or 40,000) horsemen and infantrymen to fight under 'Alī b. Isā in 195/810f,<sup>160</sup> and 20,000 (or 30,000) men, including *fursān al-abnā'*, to fight under 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwī in the same year. When the latter fell, they elegized him as a *fāris*.<sup>161</sup> They likewise described Muḥammad b. Abī Khālīd as their *shaykh*, *kabīr* and *fāris*,<sup>162</sup> and in 201/816 the troops of 'Isā b. Muḥammad b. Abī Khālīd al-Abnāwī added up to 125,000 cavalrymen and footsoldiers.<sup>163</sup> Conversely, there were of course both cavalrymen and footsoldiers in Ṭāhir's army.<sup>164</sup> One could not fight a serious battle without both.

Al-Jāhīz's account of the Abnā's military skills probably does not reflect their performance in the siege, but rather their military role in al-Jāhīz's own day. For their superiority in combat at the entrances of trenches and defiles (*al-khanādiq wa'l-maḍāyiq*)

cannot have displayed itself in the capital,<sup>165</sup> and when they boast of their ability to fight in alleyways (*al-aziqqa*) and in/against prisons (*qitāl al-sujūn*), they add, "Ask the Khulaydiyya, Katfiyya, Bilāliyya and Khuraybiyya about that", obviously referring to their suppression of urban disturbances in Iraq, not to the siege of Baghdād.<sup>166</sup> (The Bilāliyya was a faction in Basra,<sup>167</sup> the other groups are unidentifiable.<sup>168</sup>) When they boast of how they can openly kill people in the markets and streets (*al-aswāq wa'l-ṭuruqāt*), they are once more referring to their role as urban policemen, not to their performance as defenders of the capital against Ṭāhir's troops. Nor would one expect al-Jāhīz to make them invoke that performance: it is not customary to boast of battles one has lost.

Al-Jāhīz presumably concentrates on their infantry skills because he wants his protagonists to display their unique abilities, and there was nothing unique about the Abnā' as horsemen in his view: he knew them as an urban police-force,<sup>169</sup> probably to be identified with the Baghdādi *shurṭa* over which the Ṭāhirids had hereditary command. He gives them as much credit as he can, but his sympathies are with Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Ḥamid, the Khurāsānī to whom all real soldiers were *fursān*. Ninth-century Muslims were every bit as infatuated with cavalry as were medieval Europeans,<sup>170</sup> though it was more often than not by getting off their horses that the cavalry managed to win. It was by dismounting to form a shield wall that the fathers of the Abnā' had defeated Marwān II in the decisive battle of the Zāb in 750.<sup>171</sup> But any horseman could dismount to fight on the ground whereas footsoldiers could not fight properly on horseback in Ḥumayd's opinion, which cannot be wholly true. It is however true that the versatility of the Abnā' was incompatible with their superior skills as horse archers which so impressed Ḥumayd in the Turks. To him as to al-Jāhīz, then, the Abnā' had been overtaken by history: they were splendid policemen, but not the stuff of which real armies were made.

Zakeri is thus right that al-Jāhīz depicts the Abnā' in a state of decline. The picture is based on al-Jāhīz's own time, however, not on the reign of al-Amīn, in which on the contrary they had reached their apogee. It was with their defeat in the fourth civil war that their reversal of fortune began. First they were reduced to a subsidiary role by al-Ma'mūn's new Khurāsānīs, and next they were demoted to mere policemen by al-Mu'taṣim's Turks, who destroyed what remained of their special relationship with the *dawla* by causing the caliph to leave Baghdād and who rapidly eclipsed the Khurāsānīs too. It was the inexorable rise of the Turks, resented by all the existing troops, that generated the tensions which al-Jāhīz set out to resolve with an epistle assuring everyone that there was nothing really to worry about.

<sup>151</sup> Ed. Kawtharī, p. 80; ed. Keller, p. 144.

<sup>152</sup> "Turk", C, 26f; L, 15 = 652; Ibn Ṭayfūr, ed. Kawtharī, p. 80; ed. Keller, p. 144.

<sup>153</sup> Zakeri, pp. 281, 288; cf. "Turk", C, 20; L, 11 = 646.

<sup>154</sup> "Reforms", p. 32.

<sup>155</sup> *Shaping*, p. 135; accepted by Hoffmann, "Pöbel", p. 36.

<sup>156</sup> Zakeri, p. 288.

<sup>157</sup> Tab. iii, p. 872 (Fishbein's translation).

<sup>158</sup> Zakeri, p. 287; cf. also pp. 285f, where the 'ayyārūn's costume, or rather lack thereof, is adduced in favour of their Iranian descent. (Generally speaking, every non-Arab is an Iranian *asbār* in this book.)

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Hoffmann, "Pöbel", pp. 35ff.

<sup>160</sup> Tab. iii, p. 817, where the troops number 50,000 and are described as *ahl baghdād*; cf. p. 824.15, where 'Alī b. 'Isā addresses them as *ma'shar al-abnā'*. He had 40,000 men according to YT, ii, p. 530; Azdi, *Mawsil*, p. 323.7, and 40,000 horsemen according to Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya* (Cairo, 1351–8), x, p. 226.15. Cf. above, note 65, for the family.

<sup>161</sup> Tab. iii, 827.1, 3; 832.9; Dīnawarī, p. 394 (for the figure 30,000). Cf. above, note 68, for the family.

<sup>162</sup> Tab. iii, 843.14, cf. p. 1007.16.

<sup>163</sup> Tab. iii, pp. 1007f. Cf. below, note 67, on the family.

<sup>164</sup> Tab. iii, p. 831.1, 14.

<sup>165</sup> The *maḍāyiq* could of course refer to cramped urban conditions, but the word means "defiles" in Azdi, *Mawsil*, p. 389–2 (Azerbaijan), and the *khanādiq* must be trenches dug around camps.

<sup>166</sup> "Turk", C, 27.6; L, 16.4 = 652.

<sup>167</sup> It was opposed to the Sa'diyya and is first mentioned in 255/868f, in connection with the pre-history of the Zanj revolt (Tab. iii, pp. 1745, 1747 and *passim*).

<sup>168</sup> Practically the same phrase recurs in the story of Khālīd b. Yazīd, the *mawlā* of the Muhallabids, in al-Jāhīz, *al-Bukhalā'*, ed. T. al-Ḥajiri (Cairo, 1958), p. 50: "Ask the Katfiyya, Khulaydiyya, Khuraybiyya, Bilāliyya . . . about me". But it is no more informative. For the name Khulaydiyya, see C. E. Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld* (Leiden, 1976), i, pp. 43n, 64n (drawn to my attention by A. Elad).

<sup>169</sup> Cf. his reference to the Bilāliyya, who may not have existed in al-Ma'mūn's time, but who certainly did in al-Jāhīz's days (above, notes 167–8).

<sup>170</sup> Cf. B. S. Bachrach in G. Parker (ed.), *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 90.

<sup>171</sup> Tab. iii, pp. 40, 42 (where the shield wall is stationary); Azdi, *Mawsil*, pp. 128f (where it advances towards the enemy). Compare C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 132f.