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A Review of the most Important Events during the Imamate of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.)

In 186/799, Imam Musa b. Ja'far (a.s.) was martyred.

In 184/800, Ahmad son of Harun al-Rashid known as Al-Sabti, who practiced asceticism in the world and was engaged in worship, passed away.

In 187/803, Fudhayl b. 'Ayadh, the ascetic mystic Sufi, died in Mecca. He was famous for his piety and worship. In his early years, Fudhayl was an infamous highway robber; he would prowl in the night for victims on the road from Abiward to Sarakhs.

Between these two cities was a small village in which lived a girl that Fudhayl was in love with. One night, out of desperation to be with her, Fudhayl climbed the wall of her home. As he was climbing over it, he heard a voice recite:

Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah's remembrance? (Qur'an: 57/16)

At that moment, Fudhayl answered, "O my Lord, the time has indeed come." He returned from where he came and sought refuge near a traveling party on the main road.

They were busy engaging in a serious discussion. Fudhayl heard one of them say, "Let us continue our journey now." Another answered, "No, not until the morning, for Fudhayl is lurking on the road somewhere out there, just waiting to rob us."

Having heard the entire conversation, Fudhayl thought to him, "I go around in the night to sin, while a group of Muslims remain here because they fear me. Indeed I feel that Allah has brought me here to them only so that I can reform my character. O Allah, I indeed repent to you..."¹

In 188/803, 'Ali b. Hamza, known as Kasa'i, who is renowned in science of syntax, philology, and reading

[the Qur'an] and Muhammad b. Hasan Shaybani, the Hanafite jurist, who accompanied Harun in his journey to Tus, both died in Rey, and Harun said about them: "We buried jurisprudence and Arabic [language] in Rey."

According to some traditions, the eulogist of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and their accomplished poet, Isma'il b. Muhammad, renowned as Sayyid Humayri died in the time of Harun al-Rashid.

However, it is implied from the *ahadith* and traditions that he passed away in the time of Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.). He made assiduous attempts in dissemination of the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) to the extent that no one among the companions of the Imams (a.s.) surpassed him in promulgation of Commander of the Faithful and the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.).

He said in Kunasa (a neighborhood of) Kufa: "Whoever relates a virtue of 'Ali (a.s.) for which I have not composed a poem, I will give him this horse with all the things on it. The transmitters of *hadith* related *hadith* and Sayyid recited his poems on the related subjects until a man related a virtue, about which Sayyid had not said any poems.

He fulfilled his promise, and then composed a poem for that virtue.

In the reign of Harun a large number of the Alawis and Talibis were killed as martyrs whose names and date of martyrdom were not registered due their great number, including Idris b. 'Abd Allah b. al-Hasan al-Muthanna who had a vast rule in Egypt and Africa and was cunningly poisoned by Harun.

Similarly, some *Sadat*² such as Yahya b. 'Abd Allah b. al-Hasan al-Muthanna and his son Muhammad b. Muthanna, and Husayn b. 'Abd Allah b. Isma'il, a descendent of Ja'far Tayyar, who was killed due to the wounds of scourge; or 'Abbas b. Muhammad, a descendent of Imam al-Sajjad (a.s.), who was clubbed to death by the cursed Harun who called him the son of an adulterous woman and he retorted that Harun's mother was indeed adulterous because she had been a slave girl with whom the slave dealers had adulterous liaison. Harun got furiously angry and clubbed him to death.³

All in all, a great number of Alawis were murdered during the rule of Harun and the story of Humayd b. Qahtaba and the killing of sixty of the *Sadat* in one night are recorded in history.⁴

In 189/804, the prosperity star of the Barmakids, who had been given the authority to run the state, began to die out, and they were wiped out by Harun, with their condemnatory story being recorded in history as a lesson for others.

Ma'mun carried out this plot so cunningly that Ja'far b. Yahya Barmaki who was Ma'mun's brother-in-law and very close and dear to him did not have the slightest idea of what would happen until the night that Harun ordered his agent to murder him.

When Harun's agent went to his house for executing the order, he (Ja'far) told him: "Ma'mun makes such jokes with me a lot." Finally, it was arranged for him to be taken to the back part of the Harun's tent

and to ask Harun's view again about his murder.

When he directly heard the order of his murder, he tied his own handkerchief over his eyes and was beheaded. Surprisingly enough, Harun told the agent who had beheaded Ja'far to summon such and such persons, and when they came in, he told them: "Behead the agent, as I cannot tolerate to see Ja'far's murderer."⁵

On Saturday 3 Jamadi II 193/24 March 809, Harun died in Tus. He ruled as a caliph for 23 years and a few months. He was four months past 44 years old when he died and was buried in the same place that the Holy Shrine of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) is located now, about which his holiness had frequently informed.

Sometimes he would say: "You will bury me with him in the same room."⁶ At other times he would say: "Tus city will fill the gap between us."⁷ Yet at other times he would say: "I and Harun would be like these two...", joining his middle and index fingers together.⁸

In this respect, Di'bil has some poems the gist of which is as follows: "There are two graves in Tus, one for the best of the people and the other for the worst of them; and this in itself is an admonitory lesson; neither that impure will benefit from that pure one, nor will this pure be harmed by this impure."⁹

On Thursday 15 Jamadi II 193/5 April 809, allegiance was secured for Muhammad Amin, Harun's son, who was his heir and was in Baghdad when his father died. His mother, Zubayda, daughter of Ja'far b. Abi Ja'far Mansur, was among the noble ladies of the Abbasids.

Her monuments, including the construction or the reconstruction of the city of Tabriz and some wells on the way to Mecca, are famous. She had one hundred female slaves who knew the Qur'an by heart. The sound of the Qur'an recitation was heard in her palace like the sound of the bees. She died in Baghdad in 216/831.

Qadhi Nur Allah has related in his *Majalis al-Mu'minin* that Zubayda was a devoted Shi'a, and when Harun found out about her staunch belief, he divorced her and sent her the bill of divorce. Zubayda wrote on the back of the bill: "I am thankful to God for the previous situation, and now that we are separated I am not regretful."¹⁰

Eighteen nights had passed since Muhammad Amin's rule when he decided to break his covenant and to dethrone Ma'mun who was introduced as his father's successor during the latter's reign and to make his son, Musa Natiq, the caliph. He consulted the viziers and commanders, but no one except 'Ali b. 'Isa b. Mahan deemed it advisable.

Amin proceeded to dethrone Ma'mun and sent a massive army under the command of 'Ali b. 'Isa to fight against Ma'mun in Khurasan. Ma'mun, in turn, dispatched four thousand troops under the commandment of Tahir b. Husayn to fight back and the two armies met in battle near Rey.

Being proud of the great number of his troops and having failed to act with foresightedness, the commander of Amin's army was defeated and killed by Ma'mun's troops. After this victory, Ma'mun deposed his brother Amin and dispatched Tahir b. al-Husayn to Baghdad along with Harthamat b. A'yan.

After fighting for a while and besiege of Baghdad, the people of Baghdad became exhausted and withdrew from Amin. Also, Tahir made dignitaries inclined towards Ma'mun by promising gold and silver to them, and they, in turn, dethroned Amin.

Then, Harthama granted safe-conduct to Amin and they met in a small boat; he did much honor to the latter but Tahir sent a group of agents to arrest Amin. They both jumped into the water and the boat got drowned. Harthama and Amin swam away and rescued themselves; however, Amin swam to a spot where Tahir's troops were stationed.

They arrested Amin and before he could meet Tahir, they killed him on the latter's order. This event took place on Saturday night, Muharram 25, 198/September 25, 813.

Amin was killed on Muharram 25, 198, at the age of 33. His caliphate lasted about five years and since he was constantly indulged in feasting and drinking, debauchery, and playing and diversion, and as for a time he was sieged by and engaged in war with Ma'mun's army, he made no objection to the children of Abu Talib (i.e., descendants of Imam 'Ali – a.s.) and therefore no accident befell them.

In 198/813, upon the killing of Amin, people of Baghdad swore allegiance to Ma'mun.

In the same year, Ma'mun dismissed his brother Qasim b. Rashid from heir apparenacy.

In 199/814, Abu al-Saraya Serri b. Mansur Shaybani, who was brave and skilful in battle, rebelled in Kufa and called people to swear allegiance to Muhammad b. Ibrahim (Ibn Tabataba) and all the Kufans swore allegiance to him.

Muhammad thrived in his role as a commander, frequently defeating the caliph's troops, until he died and the people swore allegiance to Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Zayd b. 'Ali b. al-Husayn and he sent his own governors around.

Eventually, Hasan b. Sahl (brother of Fadhl, Ma'mun's vizier) dispatched Harthama to fend him off. He left for Kufa with thirty thousand troops. A bloody war broke out between the armies of Harthama and Abu al-Saraya and Harthama's army was defeated. However, despite Abu al-Saraya's warning concerning the ambush by Harthama's troops while being chased, his troops were ambushed by five thousand troops of the latter's army and once again a battle broke out and Harthama, who had been captivated, was freed.

He deceitfully approached the Kufans by suggesting: "If you wish the rule to get out of the hands of the Abbasids, wait until Monday so that we may talk together; whoever is chosen, we will swear allegiance

to him.”

This trick worked and the Kufan army gave up the war, ignoring Abu al–Saraya who was repeatedly shouting: “This is a deceit and they are losing the war; our victory is near; go on fighting.” The Kufans did not take any actions.

Finally, he angrily quit the war and gave a lecture on Friday, calling all of them the killers of ‘Ali (a.s.) and deserters of Husayn (a.s.) and bitterly reproached them for their disloyalty. Although a group of them became zealous and wanted to take action, but he did not consent and left Kufa along with some others on Sunday night, Muharram 13th.

On the other hand, Kufa dignitaries asked Harthama for safe–conduct (*aman*) for the people and he granted it. When the situation calmed down, Harthama went to Baghdad and finally Abu al–Saraya surrendered with safe–conduct and was sent to Hasan b. Sahl, but he killed Abu al–Saraya for his brother’s murder, hanging his head on Western side and his body on the Eastern side of the city.

In 200/815, Ma’mun commanded to collect statistics of the Abbasid dynasty, whose number amounted to 33,000.

In the same year, the Abbasid Ma’mun dispatched his chief attendant, Raja b. Abi ahhak, to Medina to respectfully bring the Imam (a.s.) to Marv.

In 201/816, the heir apparenacy of Imam al–Ridha (a.s.) was celebrated in a great ceremony in which the dignitaries, nobles, *Sadat*, and scholars were gathered. First of all, Ma’mun ordered his son, ‘Abbas, to swear allegiance to his holiness; then, other people swore allegiance and he gave them many prizes and rewards and the orators and poets recited many lyric poems.

Ma’mun, then, ordered the Abbasids to take out the black garments they used to wear and put on green clothes, instead.

In 201/816, Hadhrat Fatima Ma’suma, daughter of Imam Musa b. Ja’far, set off from Medina to see her brother, Imam al–Ridha (a.s.) in Marv. She got sick in Sava and inquired how far it was to Qum.

She was told it was ten parasangs. She told her attendant to take her to Qum. More accurately, the Sa’d family came to her and asked her to go to Qum. Musa b. Khazraj, took her camel’s halter, led it into Qum, and lodged her in his house.

Her highness stayed in Qum for seventeen days and then passed away. She was buried where her mausoleum is now located in Qum. May Allah’s peace and blessing be upon her.

In 202/817, Fadhl b. Sahl (Ma’mun’s trainer, vizier, and commander of army and his energetic servant) was murdered in a bath–house in Sarakhs.

In the same year, Malik b. Anas, the chief of Maliki school, died and was buried in Baqi' cemetery in the mausoleum of the Prophet (S)'s wives. [11](#)

- [1.](#) See Tadhkirat al-Awliya, p. 79
- [2.](#) Plural of Sayyid: Descendants of the Prophet (S)
- [3.](#) For more information see Maqatil al-Talibiyin.
- [4.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 1, p. 88.
- [5.](#) Muruj al-Dhahab, 3/465.
- [6.](#) A'lam al-Hidaya, p. 36.
- [7.](#) Ibid, p. 36.
- [8.](#) Ibid.
- [9.](#) Tatimmat al-Muntaha, Khalifat-i Harun.
- [10.](#) Tatimmat al-Muntaha.
- [11.](#) The events during the Imamate of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) are adopted from Muhaddith al-Qummi's Tatimmat al-Muntaha.

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