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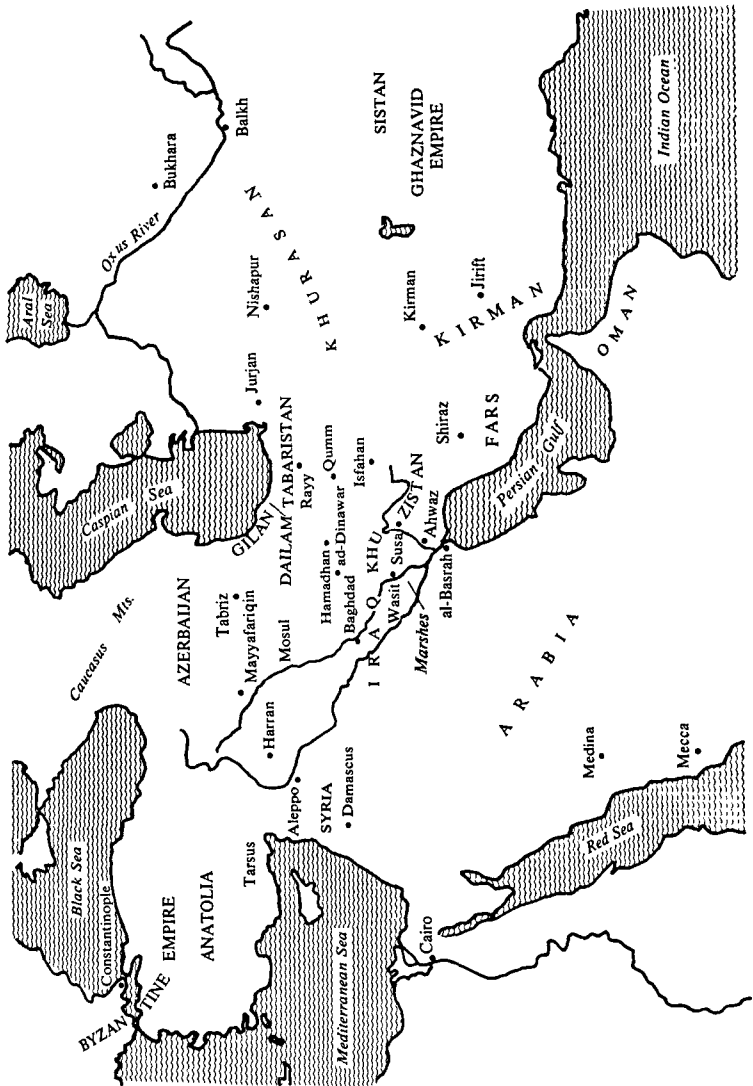
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Introduction

This book describes some of the manners that gave shape to the political life of a society that flourished a thousand years ago in the Near East. American readers will recall that de Tocqueville considered manners (*moeurs*), which he defined as “the sum of the moral and intellectual dispositions of men in society,” to be the most important influence in maintaining American political institutions—more important than laws or physical circumstances. This “sum” is a figure too perfect for any observer of a contemporary society to obtain, even the brilliant de Tocqueville. It must remain still less obtainable for a society as long vanished as the society that is the subject of this book. Yet I feel confident that the manners discussed in this book were indeed important for the political life of that vanished society, important enough to be a significant part of the more nearly perfect sums that will be calculated by future historians.¹

My first interest has been the manners of individuals rather than the manners of groups. I have tried to describe the ways in which the individuals in this society formed commitments to each other, and to suggest how the manners of these individuals can account for the shape of political life in this society as a whole. Individuals, not unexpectedly, formed such commitments in roughly similar ways for generation after generation; and it is this similarity, after all, that enables us to give general descriptions of their manners.

If the way in which commitments were formed remained roughly the same, the associations that were formed by these commitments seldom lasted more than a generation. The continuity in the way in which individual commitments were

formed and the discontinuity of the associations formed through such commitments may, at first, appear puzzling. Some of the associations of Western life, such as the feudal manor and the craft guild, were so stable that social historians of premodern Western societies often begin with a description of these units, and from them build a composite picture of the social structure of the societies in which they existed. Social historians of the premodern Islamic Near East have followed this example, and have tried to identify fundamental social units in the societies they study. These historians have tried to define either the primary "networks" or, in the phrase of one excellent social historian, the "basic units" or building blocks of which these societies were composed.²

A few of the more stable associations of local life discussed in later chapters do in some ways resemble the basic units of premodern Western society. Yet in other ways they are strikingly different from their supposed counterparts in Western history. Most of these Near Eastern associations lacked formal internal structure, unless such structure was imposed by a central government. Their leaders were spokesmen, not directors. Entry into such groups was seldom marked by any formal observance, or datable from any specific moment. Men belonged to such groups because they identified themselves and others as belonging to certain accepted categories such as "merchant" or "scholar"; and, in general, they rallied to such groups only when the categories with which they identified were threatened. Even neighborhood factions, in which some historians have hoped to find the basic units of these societies, were only rarely a focus for positive loyalties, the means for sustained and predictable local cooperation. In most cases they were a focus for negative loyalties, a means for local defense. One can hardly say that men participated in society through their membership in such groups.

If, as will be argued below, men of the Buyid period did not participate in society primarily through their membership in basic building blocks, each of which could carry the al-

legiances of its members, how did the fears and inclinations of men work together to create the amazingly resilient social order of this period, a social order that not only survived the initial ignorance and violence of its conquerors, but succeeded in transforming those conquerors into participants? For, without guilds, church, gentry of official rank, caste, and the myriad other well-defined divisions and groups familiar from the study of other cultures, this society managed both to reproduce its forms from generation to generation, and to export these forms to new groups of people in lands farther to the east. It cannot even be said to owe its resilience to the stability of kin groups; for, among the settled people of this society, kinship seems to be a very unpredictable element in cooperation, and does not provide the model for cooperation among nonkin.

This book, in an attempt to answer the above question, makes the manners of individuals its central concern. Even if there had been formal and stable groups in this society comparable to the feudal manor and the medieval European trade guild, there would be a strong argument for describing the moral attitudes and customs that governed the entry and participation of individual men in such groups. Social networks are only knit together, and social building blocks are themselves only built, by the fears and inclinations of the individuals who form them. No society can hope to coerce all the people all the time; before the industrial revolution no extensive society could hope to coerce most of the people most of the time. Between coercion and chance lie the associations that are to some extent chosen. To understand these associations we should at the very least give an account of the moral world in terms of which men explained their choices.

It is, of course, possible to exaggerate the differences between the society considered in this book and other societies. For example, a good part of the second chapter is devoted to describing the importance of *ni'mah* or "benefit" in creating formal ties of obligation between men who lived in the Buyid

period. *Ni'mah* is no stranger to us. Dr. Johnson in 1766 explained to Boswell that in courting great men, "you must not give a shilling's worth of court for sixpence worth of good. But if you can get a shilling's worth of good for sixpence worth of court, you are a fool if you do not pay court." But even this analysis of the mechanics of benefit sounds more appropriate to a Western than to a Middle Eastern context; for the ties are less formal and are seen more strictly in terms of turning a "profit." Furthermore, a few self-perpetuating groups comparable to the building blocks of Western history did exist in Buyid society. Already in the Buyid period there were forerunners of the mystical brotherhoods that would later become a significant feature of Near Eastern societies; and some of these early brotherhoods were well defined in membership and structure. Yet, in the Buyid period, these brotherhoods were still uncommon and had few analogues in the society around them. There is only a difference of emphasis and of style; but this difference is very evident, and forms part of the fascination of this subject for social historians.

Buyid society was characterized by the formality of certain ties between individuals, and the informality of ties within groups that are not composites of ties between individuals. The moral world in which such ties could sustain a resilient and self-renewing social order are described below in terms of loyalty, obligation, and leadership. The second and third chapters consider the forms of loyalty and obligation which, in the moral world as understood by the men of the Buyid period, made this resilient social order possible. The second chapter discusses acquired loyalties, forms of obligation that men acquired by deliberate acts and not through the ascription of those men to a category. Such acquired loyalties formed associations that were not intended to outlive the people who participated in them; and, in fact, acquired loyalties in the great majority of cases died with the people who acquired them. The third chapter discusses loyalties of category, loyalties that men felt they owed each other because of

their common participation in categories that existed before they were born and would exist after they died. This chapter also considers the varieties and functions of leadership in such categories. The last chapter deals with a different sort of leader, the king; and suggests why kings, although standing largely outside the categories discussed earlier, may have been necessary to the social order as a whole. The remainder of the present chapter attempts to give an idea of the historical context in which the examples of later chapters should be understood.

ROUGHLY TWO YEARS before his death in 11/632, the Prophet Muḥammad made his last pilgrimage to Mecca. On this occasion he gave a moving (and often quoted) address to his followers, in the course of which he said, according to one source, "God has given two safeguards to the world: His Book [the Koran] and the *sunnah* [that is, example] of His Prophet [Muḥammad]." According to another source, Muḥammad said: "God has given two safeguards to the world: His Book and the family of His Prophet." Taken together, these two statements contain all the basic ingredients of Muḥammad's legacy for the future political life of his community: the Koran, the family of Muḥammad, and the example of Muḥammad. Yet the correct mix of these ingredients remained a subject of active (and sometimes bitter) disagreement among Muslims. Disputes over their relative importance reflected the variety of political positions among Muslims that developed in the three hundred years between the death of Muḥammad and the rise of the Buyid dynasty.³

Even before he led a political community, it had been clear to Muḥammad that the moral vision of Islam had political implications. Islam was a religion in which public life was very much a collective responsibility of the community, and the Koran provided regulations according to which the community should discharge the responsibility. When, for the last twelve years of his life, Muḥammad was the actual leader of a

caliphate, they would replace the 'Abbāsīd caliph with an 'Alid.

After many rapid changes of fortune among the leaders of these Dailamīs, three brothers emerged as their leaders. They were rough soldiers, the sons of a fisherman, Būyah, who gave his name to their dynasty. After the two elder brothers had conquered most of western Iran in the 320s and 330s A.H., the youngest brother conquered Iraq and took possession of the 'Abbāsīd caliph himself in 334/945. The Buyids preserved the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, as they had every reason to do. The majority of their subjects were non-Shī'īs, and respected the 'Abbāsīd caliphate as an institution (while being indifferent to which 'Abbāsīd held the office). The 'Abbāsīd caliph obligingly granted the Buyids titles like Mu'izz ad-Daulah, "Strengtheners of the ['Abbāsīd] Dynasty," and diplomas authorizing the Buyids to rule in the name of the 'Abbāsīds. In any case, the Buyids were Shī'īs of a very vague cast, and felt no specific obligation to hand the caliphate over to any 'Alid. They also realized that, had they done so, they would have created someone whom they could not treat with the cynicism that governed their treatment of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, whom the earlier Buyids deposed at will.

The three Buyid brothers maintained three courts: one in Baghdad, one in Rayy (near modern Tehran), and one in Shiraz in southwestern Iran. For forty years the separate kingdoms of Buyid rulers cooperated. Then this family system broke down, and the remainder of Buyid dynastic history is a sad story of recurrent quarrels between the different Buyid kingdoms. The Buyids were further weakened by the internal division in their armies; for, like the 'Abbāsīds before them, they bought Turkish slave boys and raised them to be the elite cavalry of their army. The bad feeling between the Dailamīs and the Turkish slave soldiers allowed the Buyids to play these elements off against each other, however, and no rebellion in any of their armies ever succeeded in permanently replacing a Buyid by a member of another family. External

powers capable of displacing the Buyids eventually appeared. Maḥmūd of Ghaznah, a staunch Sunnī and the conqueror of northern India for Islam, put an end to the Buyid kingdom of Rayy in 420/1022, and the Saljūqs conquered the Buyid kingdoms of Iraq and Fars in the 440s/1050s.¹⁴

The comparative weakness of the Buyids and their somewhat makeshift attempts to validate their rule by use of caliphal diplomas, claims of descent from the pre-Islamic Iranian kings, and the like, have in the end deprived this period of the share of attention that it deserves. The very weakness and makeshift character of government encouraged experimentation in administration, and some of the fruits of this experimentation, like the *iqṭā'*, were imitated by governments for centuries afterwards. We have also argued that the decentralization of government encouraged intellectual life. But most importantly, from the point of view of the social historian, the weakness of government threw society back on its own resources. Society proved able to generate self-renewing patterns of loyalty and of leadership, while accepting and even expecting a different role to be played by government. These patterns of loyalty and leadership are the subject of the following chapters.

Acquired Loyalties

In the Near East of the tenth and eleventh centuries, deliberately acquired obligations created the positive and predictable loyalties that shaped society. Such loyalties were not "positive" because they were good, or "predictable" because men always lived up to them. Acquired loyalties were "positive" in that they were used as a basis for cooperation even when group self-interest was not threatened. And they were "predictable" because, thanks to their somewhat formal nature, men who accepted them knew in considerable detail just what commitments such loyalties were believed to imply.

These acquired loyalties are best seen in times of stress, when men were trying to make effective their demands on others by explicitly referring to the validity of such loyalties. The rebellion of the caliphal army in 317/929 provided such a moment. In a letter written by the caliph al-Muqtadir in these circumstances to his troops, we have a striking and unusually clear example of the explicit evocation of the basic varieties of such loyalties and obligations. The caliph, faced with deposition, presented his troops with a statement of the most important motives that, in his opinion, ought to impel them to support his rule. In the first section of the letter, the caliph tries to placate the troops; then he says, "most of your benefits (singular: *ni'mah*) are from me, but it would not be my way to reproach you with any favor that I have conferred, and that I regarded at the time—and still regard—as small compared with your merits; rather, it suits me to fertilize and increase them . . . [and] I long to bring you to the utmost limit of your aspirations. . . . I claim from you that oath of allegiance (*bai'ah*) which you have affirmed time after time. Whoever

has sworn allegiance to me has sworn allegiance to God, so that whosoever violates that oath, violates the covenant with God (*'ahd Allāh*). I also claim gratitude for benefits and favors you enjoy, benefits and gifts from me that I hope you will acknowledge and consider binding."¹

Even though the troops had strong grievances against the caliph al-Muqtadir, the rebellion collapsed, largely because al-Mu'nis, the leading general to whom the letter was addressed, disappointed the rebels, who had expected his open support. There is no reason to believe that the letter changed his mind. Yet the arguments used in the letter are characteristic of all discussions of loyalty in this period. We have every reason to think that al-Muqtadir wrote in the belief that if *any* arguments could change the mind of al-Mu'nis and his troops, they would be arguments of the kind quoted above.

The two bases of loyalty mentioned in the letter of al-Muqtadir are oath and benefit. The first part of this chapter discusses oath-bound loyalties in general, and their relations to the covenant between man and God that forms a fundamental feature of Islamic belief. Then several specific categories of oath are described, such as oaths between caliphs and emirs. The following section of this chapter deals with the vow, a close cousin of the oath. Vows are "personal" in the sense that they are an oath between a person and God. But since others could be the beneficiaries of vows, they were frequently used to express a formal commitment to others.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with benefit, or *ni'mah*, as it is called in the above letter and in many other contexts. The formal ties created by giving and accepting benefit are a persistent, if disregarded, subject in the literature of this period; and patronage, particularly of the variety called *iṣṭinā'*, is an outgrowth of the idea of formal exchange of benefit. A more elusive extension of the formal ties of exchanged benefit can be seen in the loyalty of men who rose together. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the general character of acquired loyalties, and the distinction be-

tween them and the loyalties based on category, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Oaths

Not only in the caliph's letter, but in the great majority of discussions of political loyalty, oaths are regarded as the explicit and formal vehicle by which one man committed himself to another. There were other equally formal vehicles, and many vehicles less formal and less explicit. Since, however, oaths are the best attested of all these vehicles, it is appropriate that this discussion of acquired loyalties begin with oaths. Oaths are also a vehicle of commitment that appear prominently in the formal discussions of morality written in this period. And, to some extent, men regarded oaths as prototypes of other forms of commitment. They did so in part because, as I try to show in later sections of this chapter, oaths were typical of all of these vehicles of commitment.

The *bai'ah* mentioned in the letter was an oath of allegiance taken in God's name between the caliph and any Muslim. Quite naturally, in his letter the caliph al-Muqtadir sought to bring home forcibly to the rebels that to break such an oath was to perjure oneself before God. Yet for men of the fourth/tenth century, al-Muqtadir's reference to covenants—and even to ties of gratitude—had a less obvious but profoundly important point of reference in the compactual relations that existed between man and God. In the Koran, a whole series of covenants between man and his Creator, starting with the primal covenant of Adam, stand as the archetype and the ultimate guarantee for all solemn and weighty undertakings between one man and another. The Koran directly addressed the perennial religious questions of the origin of man's responsibility to God; and it is of great significance that, in the Koran, the proof of man's responsibility is a solemn covenant between man and God made at the beginning of time.

In a sense, man is depicted as having full moral responsibil-

ity only because of this covenant. All men were brought forth *in posse*: "And when your Lord drew the descendants of Adam from the loins of the sons of Adam, and called on them to bear witness: 'Am I not your Lord?' They answered, 'Yes, truly; we bear witness to this.' [We called on them to bear witness] lest you should say, on the day of Resurrection, 'We have been unmindful (*ghāfilīn*) of this,' or lest you should say: 'Our ancestors before us have given partners [to God]. We are their descendants after them; will you then destroy us for what was done by upholders of falsehood?' " (7:171-172/172-173). According to these verses, it is no excuse for a man to claim that he is "unmindful" (whether this means, as some commentators believe, that men pretend they have forgotten, or—as others believe—that men pretend never to have been told of this covenant). It is not even an excuse that a man is born to parents who have turned from God, and who might therefore be held responsible for the heedlessness of their children. All future men were in some sense present at this primal compact, and they have individually "borne witness" and thereby entered into an agreement with God that makes them responsible to God. Some Muslim thinkers have said that God could hold men responsible even if there had been no compact, and that this compact merely confirmed a responsibility inherent in man's situation. For our purposes, it is only important to notice that the Islamic tradition considered this solemn primal covenant between man and God to be a powerful argument for the fundamental moral responsibility of every human being.

The force of this argument came from—and was borne out by—the respect with which the Islamic tradition in its early centuries regarded oaths, compacts, and covenants. In the time of the Buyids, formal oaths were the most prominent feature of all discussions about duties and obligations that could be enforced without coercion. Undoubtedly, oaths carried only a comparatively small part of the weight of that sense of obligation and loyalty which held society together;

but because oaths were formal statements of obligation, they make explicit some of the presuppositions that underlay other forms of social obligation. And because oaths were universally acceptable, other forms of social obligation were to some extent adapted to the pattern of oaths.

The Islamic tradition did not give such a central position to oaths on the basis of a single passage in the Koran. It did so because the system of oaths was well suited to contemporary Near Eastern society, and because the Koran and the example of Muḥammad offered many precedents in which oaths had precisely this central importance. In the following paragraphs I discuss a few of these Koranic passages, and attempt to show their central importance to the moral view that the Koran prescribes for mankind.

As we have seen above, in the Koranic view man accepted moral responsibility in a kind of oath, a primal compact with God. Three verses before describing this compact, the Koran mentions a more restricted kind of oath which, nevertheless, remained a classical point of reference: God's covenant with Israel. The ancient Israelites thought that everything would be forgiven them; yet, says the Koran, "Was not the covenant (*mīthāq*) of the Book taken from them, that they would not ascribe to God anything but the truth?" (7:168/169). One reason that this covenant is mentioned a few verses before the primal compact is that the word here used for covenant, *mīthāq*, also means the confirmation of the compactual agreement between man and God which every believer makes: "Those who violate the compact with God (*ahd Al-lāh*), after its confirmation (*mīthāq*), and who cut the ties which God has ordered to be joined, and do evil in the earth, those will truly lose" (2:25/27; compare 13:25). The more restricted covenant of God and Israel, and by extension any oath-bound agreement, can be seen as confirmations or ratifications of the fundamental oath by which men accepted moral responsibility. As the caliph al-Muqtadir said to the rebels, "Whoever has sworn allegiance to me has sworn allegiance to

God; so that whoever violates that oath, violates the compact with God (*'ahd Allāh*)."

The degree to which violators "will truly lose" is described in many passages in the Koran. For example, in one such passage the Koran says, "He who fulfills his compact (*'ahd*) and is righteous [will be rewarded], for God loves the righteous. Those, however, who sell the compact with God (*'ahd Allāh*) and their oaths (singular: *yamīn*) for [what must in exchange be] a paltry price, they have no portion in the Hereafter; nor will God speak to them, and theirs will be a painful torment" (3:70-71/76-77). The Koran repeatedly emphasizes the severity with which such perjurers will be punished.

In another Koranic passage, the sanctity of oaths and importance of gratitude to one's benefactor are linked together in much the same way as in the caliph's letter. This passage seems to refer both to the so-called "constitution of Medina," an oath-bound agreement that was the foundation of Muḥammad's authority when he moved to Medina and established a state, and to the primal compact between man and God: "Be mindful of the favor (*ni'mah*) of God to you, and His covenant (*mīthāq*), which He confirmed (*wāthaqa*) with you when you said 'We hear and obey.' Be righteous before God; God knows the secrets of your hearts" (5:8/11).

God, therefore, is "our Lord" to whose moral law we owe obedience through a primal compact. This compact overshadows any later oaths we take; we cannot, for example, in any valid sense, swear to commit a sin. We cannot do so, moreover, because God is a party to all valid oaths. Sometimes an oath "by Muḥammad" or "by the Koran" is recognized as valid, but only because an oath by the vehicle or concrete form of God's revelation recognizes both the Lordship of God and the original covenant to obey the moral law, which the Islamic revelation brings in its most perfect form. God is an active and not just a passive witness to a valid oath; for, when we swear by God, we are in effect invoking God's curse if we do not live up to the oath. This reasoning seems to

have been accepted by the great majority of Muslims both in the time of the Buyids and in the centuries immediately before and after the Buyids. The very widespread use of the oath in this period to create or confirm obligations shows that it was a line of reasoning that men took very much to heart.²

The seriousness of oaths is shown most dramatically by the shock and horror with which the medieval Islamic historians discuss those occasions when men openly perjured themselves. Every age knows hardy villains who boldly, and sometimes successfully, disregard its central moral principles. The reaction to such men, however, tells us something about the strength with which other men claimed to support these principles. Twenty pages of any chronicle (Buyid, medieval European, or of any people or time) will offer a variety of acts that might offend a tender conscience. Yet few of the acts described in the chronicles of our period could so arouse the moral outrage of the Near Eastern chroniclers as could acts of perjury.

The drama of such an act to contemporaries is well represented by the accounts of Tūzūn's arrest of the caliph in 333/944, shortly before the Buyids occupied Baghdad. Tūzūn was the most successful of the several generals who, for ten years before the Buyids took Baghdad, controlled the caliph's affairs, much as the Buyids would subsequently control them. The caliph in whose name he served was al-Muttaqī; and al-Muttaqī, in violation of agreements with Tūzūn, had run away from Tūzūn's control in Baghdad and openly flirted with independent dynasties that ruled nearby kingdoms: the Ḥamdānids of Mosul and the Ikhshīdids of Egypt. The caliph had thereby shown his desire to break permanently with Tūzūn, and to replace him with a new mayor of the palace or *amīr al-'umarā*. Nonetheless, when intermediaries obtained from Tūzūn the most solemn oaths of good conduct toward al-Muttaqī, witnessed before judges, notaries, the leading members of the 'Alid and 'Abbāsīd families, and clerks, all of whom gave their attestation to this effect, al-Muttaqī started

back toward Baghdad; and on the way, an envoy of Tūzūn renewed the oaths. On 28 Šafar 333, Tūzūn met al-Muttaqī north of Baghdad and kissed the ground before al-Muttaqī, then kissed his hand and leg. After this, he arrested and blinded him. As the fourth/tenth century history of Mis-kawaih tells us, “the world trembled with shock (*irtajjat*).”³

A more circumstantial account in an eleventh-century chronicle describes even more vividly the extreme seriousness of this act of perjury to contemporaries. This version of al-Muttaqī’s arrest may be based on the account of a court chamberlain of the time of Tūzūn; in any case it reflects the kind of emotions that perjury could evoke. According to this account, when someone first suggested to Tūzūn that he arrest al-Muttaqī, he said, “how could I do such a thing when he has made an agreement (*āqada*) with us, and I have had all the people of the court (*nās*) testify to my compliance, and this matter is well known in other regions?” The advisor said to Tūzūn: “Master, these ‘Abbāsids are men with little fidelity.” Then, according to this account, Tūzūn and the future al-Mustakfī, Tūzūn’s candidate to replace al-Muttaqī, exchanged oaths (*yataḥālafūna*) in secret before the arrest. Clearly, Tūzūn still believed in the utility of oaths, even if he was about to break an oath publicly.

“When,” the chronicle continues, “in this manner Tūzūn blinded al-Muttaqī and betrayed him, broke his oath to him (*ḥanitha aimānahū*), and violated the covenants (*uhūd*) which he had taken before God to support and obey him, [this act] deeply troubled men both high and low, and they thought it a momentous event. Everyone who has believed and had faith in His promise and warning [knew] that God—He is powerful and glorious—would grant him no respite or enjoyment of life hereafter.” The chronicle then quotes from a source clearly identified as a contemporary of Tūzūn: “When Tūzūn betrayed and blinded al-Muttaqī, he bitterly regretted what he had done. He sat on one of the boxes [in his tent] and asked for wine to drink; and when the wine came, he had a stroke.

He fell from the top of the box to the ground stricken, and remained in this state for the rest of his life; [that is] from the time he did this act until he died. His sight went before he died. This is God's way with such people." The theologian Ibn al-Jauzī in his later chronicle mentions that Tūzūn died in 334, "not a year having passed since his foul (*qabīh*) act and his disregard of the oaths he had taken."⁴

The seriousness of oaths is confirmed by other men's efforts to avoid oaths that they knew they might have to repudiate. Few men wanted to risk the infamy (and, perhaps, the distress of conscience) experienced by perjurers like Tūzūn. When the Buyid Sharaf ad-Daulah was advancing on Iraq in 375 to free his full brother from his half brother Ṣamṣām ad-Daulah, cities fell into Sharaf ad-Daulah's hands without a struggle. Ṣamṣām ad-Daulah was soon willing to meet all of the demands of Sharaf ad-Daulah, and swore to this effect before intermediaries. They returned to the advancing army, and found that the lack of resistance had changed Sharaf ad-Daulah's mind: he had decided to take Baghdad as well as gain his brother's release, and so "did not swear to his [half] brother." Similarly, the great conqueror of northern India, Maḥmūd of Ghaznah (d. 421/1030), is supposed to have asked his son Mas'ūd to swear that he would not fight Muḥammad, his brother, after the death of their father Maḥmūd. Mas'ūd said, "I will do so as soon as our master [Maḥmūd] swears that I am not his son." "How could that be?" asked Maḥmūd. "Because," said Mas'ūd, "if I were his son, I would have a claim (*ḥaqq*) to Khurāsān and to the wealth [which has been assigned to Muḥammad]." After a long dispute, Maḥmūd said, "swear to me that you will never marry with the Dailam," and to this [less confining oath] Mas'ūd agreed.⁵

The system of oaths was so universally accepted and so essential to many forms of political action that no leader could afford to disregard it for long. The Buyid ruler Bahā' ad-Daulah (d. 403/1012), known to have broken his oath on

several occasions, was a man with no morals but with some practical sense. It is not surprising, therefore, to see him in the following anecdote bow to the general expectations of society and pretend to treat with great seriousness the oaths that others imposed on him. Abū 'Alī b. Ismā'il, the talented minister of Bahā' ad-Daulah whom that king had disgraced, escaped from prison in 392/1002 and then, after a while on the run, wanted to return to the capital city of Shiraz in safety. He therefore sent an emissary to ask that Bahā' ad-Daulah grant him a guarantee of safety attested by a leading 'Alid, Abū Aḥmad al-Mūsawī. Bahā' ad-Daulah agreed, though he requested that the document not be "exhaustive." The emissary, however, turned up with a long written oath (*yamīn*), and Bahā' ad-Daulah immediately noticed that it was, in fact, intended to be exhaustive. He started to read it out loud, then stopped in the middle to ask a question. The emissary kissed the ground before the king and asked his gracious favor in reading straight through from the beginning again without interruption. Bahā' ad-Daulah was angry but did reread the document without interruption, and at the end of the document, he wrote: "I have sworn to this oath (*yamīn*) and undertake to observe its stipulations."⁶

This story illustrates the seriousness with which people of this period took even the oath of a comparatively immoral ruler like Bahā' ad-Daulah. Abū 'Alī's emissary doubtless knew that the king was treacherous, but still thought it worth risking the king's anger to make sure that the oath was technically sound because read without interruption. He also knew the seriousness with which Abū Aḥmad al-Mūsawī would take the oath, and that Bahā' ad-Daulah might be restrained from treachery by fear of future embarrassment before this revered leader of the family of 'Alī. It was precisely the grave importance of oaths to such prestigious men that allowed the oath to remain a central form of political action, in spite of dishonorable kings like Bahā' ad-Daulah.

When Muḥammad b. 'Umar, a rich and highly political,

but less revered, descendant of 'Alī returned in 388 from the "Marsh" in southern Iraq, where he had sought refuge during a period of disfavor, he secured his safety by getting an oath (*yamīn*) in Bahā' ad-Daulah's own handwriting, and had the ruler of the Marsh, Muhadhdhib ad-Daulah, write at the end of the document, "Good faith toward the *sharīf* [Muḥammad b. 'Umar] is bound up with good faith to me, and treachery to him. If he should deviate from the compacts [here] undertaken (*al-'uhūd al-ma'khūdhah*), then Bahā' ad-Daulah has no further claim on me (*lā 'ahda li Bahā' ad-Daulah fī 'unqī*) or my allegiance." Even men who did not fear God had reason to fear an attestation like this.⁷

The Bai'ah or Oath of Allegiance

If some men foreswore themselves, or avoided oaths, or feared only oaths laced with fearful threats, most men seem to have shown their unambiguous respect for oaths by honoring them. One form of oath we have briefly described is the *bai'ah*, the oath of allegiance that the caliph al-Muqtadir refers to in his letter to his army. The *bai'ah* was used to swear allegiance to kings as well as caliphs; it was an oath notorious for the completeness of its sanctions; and so we sometimes read of a personal oath taken "with the oaths of the *bai'ah*" (*bi-aimān al-bai'ah*).⁸ In its usual sense, however, the *bai'ah* was the oath of allegiance, and was not confused with other oaths. For example, the officers who killed al-Muqtadir chose the future al-Qāhir to be his successor; "and when they had made sure of him by oaths and compacts (*al-aimān wa'l-'uhūd*) they took the oath of allegiance (*al-mubāya'ah*) to him"—eloquent testimony, by the way, that there existed no better method of making sure of men than the formal oath.⁹

The *bai'ah* had become by tradition distinct from a mere private compact. From the time of the *bai'ah* rendered to the first caliph at the death of Muḥammad, the *bai'ah* was a voluntary offering of allegiance to a ruler. Later theory, bowing to

almost universal later practice, made the *bai'ah* to the caliph more a public recognition of an established rule, a sort of "homage." It was claimed that a dangerous interruption to the sequence of caliphs would be avoided if the *bai'ah* were given by a few men immediately around the dead caliph to an heir apparent. The rest of the Muslim community therefore swore the *bai'ah* as an oath of public acceptance of the succession by this heir apparent. Yet it was hard to argue that such a justification could be extended to the swearing of *bai'ahs* to emirs, who often owed their rule to conquest, and created a confusion as bad as any interregnum by their military ambitions. The first time any person took such an oath to a ruler or pretender, therefore, his *bai'ah* to the emir was usually considered to be something more than homage to an established succession.¹⁰

To receive the *bai'ah* continued to be a sign that one claimed military authority, and not just "deputized" rule—within, of course, the system by which the caliph authorized emirs to assume such authority. In the period in which the caliph gave independent authority to the *amīr al-'umarā'* in his capital of Baghdad, the vizier Ibn Shīrẓād tried, during a brief vacuum of power after the death of Tūzūn in 324/935, to establish himself as the equivalent of an emir. He was already head of the civil administration, but he published and tried to make effective his new claim by taking the *bai'ah* from the entire army in Baghdad by himself. He had been "vizier" before the event, but the title of vizier did not in practice convey any claim to an independent military following; to take the *bai'ah* to oneself clearly did make such a claim. The semi-independent dynasties of the 'Abbāsīd period had, of course, already imported the *bai'ah* from the political world of the caliphate to the world of kingship. The Sāmānids, for example, took the *bai'ah* not only to themselves, but even to their heirs apparent, as the caliphs had done.

The Buyids continued this practice, and considered the *bai'ah* as a powerful means to ensure the loyalty of their active

supporters. When 'Aḍud ad-Daulah died, his attendants hid his death, and told his son Sharaf ad-Daulah that he had been appointed heir apparent (*walī 'ahd*), while his brother was to be deputy ruler of Fārs; then letters to this effect were written in 'Aḍud ad-Daulah's name to all regions, and with each letter was a copy of an oath (*yamīn*) of the *bai'ah* to be taken by commanders, officers, and their men. Only after such preparation did the attendants and Sharaf ad-Daulah announce 'Aḍud ad-Daulah's death.¹¹

New dynasties in some circumstances took the *bai'ah* from a town. To do so meant, of course, to take the *bai'ah* from leading men and volunteer soldiers of the town, since there were no municipalities that could swear on behalf of their members. Generally, however, the *bai'ah* was taken from the *awliyā'*, those actually employed as agents of the dynasty: the high officials and, above all, the soldiers. The *bai'ah* conveyed a real commitment, and soldiers gave the *bai'ah* only with deliberation. Officers might signal their intention to cast off allegiance and seek independent military authority by suddenly taking the *bai'ah* to themselves, as did Mardāwīj when he lured the army from loyalty to Asfār. If, however, a commander intended, as was far more often the case, to enter the service of a new monarchy, he openly took the *bai'ah* from his soldiers in order to commit the soldiers individually to his new policy. Thus, when Ibn Muḥtāj in exile in Buyid territory decided in 334 to support a fellow exile, the Sāmānid pretender Ibrāhīm, he took the *bai'ah* to Ibrāhīm from his fellow soldiers in exile, even though Ibrāhīm had not yet joined him.

Since the *bai'ah* conveyed a real obligation, soldiers were not willing to concede it cheaply. In the time of the 'Abbāsids, the army usually demanded from the caliph "the customary payment for the oath of allegiance" or *rasm al-bai'ah* in exchange for the formal oath, and the troops took the same toll for their first oath of allegiance to any Buyid king. Without a satisfactory payment, the troops would sometimes refuse even a temporary and informal commitment. For exam-

ple, when Jalāl ad-Daulah died in 435/1043, his son al-Malik al-‘Azīz was nearby in Wāsiṭ, but was unable to satisfy the Baghdad garrison as to what would be paid for their *bai‘ah*; he was therefore unable to occupy Baghdad, and unable to consolidate his position against a richer Buyid, Abū Kālījār, to whom the troops eventually offered their loyalty.¹²

It is not surprising, therefore, that oaths were a necessary part of political conspiracies. Oaths were, of course, essential to any plot because the sanctions of the oath were the only device for ensuring loyalty when all other sanctions belonged to the established government. But oaths were also the basic means of expressing political loyalty, and it was natural that men should swear an oath to their future leader which would be renewed with the public *bai‘ah* when the plot succeeded. In a typical conspiracy of this sort, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Yūsuf, disgusted with his joint vizierate with Ibn Barmūyah to Ṣamṣām ad-Daulah, plotted in 375 with a leading general to have Abū Maṣṣūr (the future Bahā’ ad-Daulah) rule Iraq as the deputy of his brother, Sharaf ad-Daulah, in place of Ṣamṣām ad-Daulah. To get the conspiracy under way, the leading general obtained from his soldiers “the assurances of oaths” (*mawāthiq al-aimān*) to support his policy. This conspiracy failed, though only when the general and his followers were defeated. In a more successful conspiracy, the vizier Ibn ‘Abbād arranged during Mu‘ayyid ad-Daulah’s illness for the succession of Fakhr ad-Daulah, in spite of the contrary instructions in the will and testament of Mu‘ayyid ad-Daulah. In this case, the vizier sent some of his “reliable men” (*thiqāt*) to get Fakhr ad-Daulah’s oath (*yamīm*) of fidelity to the compact (*‘ahd*) that regulated the new succession.¹³

Even when the ruler was not chosen in secret, and the soldiers, as the sources often say, gathered openly “to choose an emir,” that choice was most probably confirmed in every case by some form of oath. We read, for example, that when, in the middle of the tenth century, a provincial Sāmānid army in Ghaznah found themselves without a leader, they gathered

and compared their options, and at first disagreed. Eventually they agreed to put Sabuktakīn in charge of themselves, and "swore to him (*ḥalafū lahū*)." By this act they inaugurated the Ghaznavid dynasty, which would last over two hundred years.¹⁴

Oath between Caliphs and Emirs

Of the oaths between men who already held some established authority, none are better documented than the complex chain of oaths that bound the Buyid emir and the 'Abbāsīd caliph together. Relations between the first Buyid emir of Baghdad, Mu'izz ad-Daulah, and the 'Abbāsīds, were at first clouded with suspicion. When Mu'izz ad-Daulah arrived in Baghdad he took the *bai'ah* to al-Mustakfī in the caliph's presence, and swore "with the most solemn of oaths" (*bi-aghlaḥ al-aimān*) to him; the caliph in return swore (*ḥalafa*) to 'Alī b. Būyah (the eldest Buyid) and his two brothers, and a document containing their oaths was attested.

It may seem strange that Mu'izz ad-Daulah does not receive the opprobrium that covers the name of Tūzūn, since he deposed al-Mustakfī a few months later. But it was widely known that Mu'izz ad-Daulah believed that al-Mustakfī was plotting against Buyid rule and therefore felt released from his oath. Al-Mustakfī, moreover, had come to the caliphate by participating in Tūzūn's crime against al-Muttaqī, proving himself to be, like the other 'Abbāsīds, "a man of little fidelity." In any case, successful treachery to a caliph always carried a built-in pardon; the next caliph always obliged by publicly blessing the act that had brought him to the throne. Even so, in 355 Mu'izz ad-Daulah, who was still on principle suspicious of any 'Abbāsīd, decided to make even more sure of (*tawaththaqa*) his candidate, al-Mutī' lillāh. He took the caliph into custody, and made him swear great oaths not to separate himself from the Buyid emir, or to side with his enemies, or to harbor evil designs; only then was al-Mutī' let go. Ob-

viously, whatever he had done to al-Mustakfi, Mu'izz ad-Daulah still believed in oaths.¹⁵

From this time on, caliphs and Buyid emirs regularly exchanged mighty oaths of sincere good faith and good intentions, both at accessions and at bestowals of patents of investiture. They also exchanged such oaths at threatening moments, when the caliph and emir felt obliged to reassure each other, as when Musharrif ad-Daulah found out that the caliph suspected (without cause) that the Buyid emir intended to depose him in 415/1024. It was in the reign of Musharrif ad-Daulah's successor, the long-suffering Jalāl ad-Daulah (416-435), that we find the most fulsome and florid oaths sworn between caliph and emir. The caliph by now had regained a certain amount of authority, yet neither caliph nor emir could live without the support of the other. As happened so often in the Buyid period when there was dependence and suspicion between near equals, a complex set of oaths was employed to give form to, and make enforceable, the appropriate kinds of obligation. The caliph al-Qādir recognized the weight of these obligations, and probably also recognized that although the caliph had become almost as powerful as the Buyid emir who ruled alongside him in Baghdad, it was too soon for the caliph to try to exercise independent military authority in defiance of the neighboring Buyid kingdoms.

When in 418/1027 the Turkish soldiers went to the caliphal palace in Baghdad and offered the caliph their direct allegiance, the caliph, therefore, did not accept. The caliph's answer was that "you are the children of our regime (*abnā' daulatīnā*) . . . [and] you have entered a formal agreement (*'aqadtum 'aqdan*) with Abu Kālījar which it would be improper to dissolve (*ḥall*) casually. The Buyids have compacts (*'uhūd*) incumbent on us (*fī riqābinā*), which it is not permissible [for us] to disregard." The caliph probably refused their offer both for genuine reasons of conscience, and also because he was reluctant to become part of a political game in which he had more to lose than gain. Nevertheless, he did quietly

strengthen his position by reminding the soldiers that they might some day be solely devoted to the caliph's interests like the first 'Abbāsīd army, the original *abnā'* *ad-daulah*, and by offering to write on their behalf to Abū Kālījār, which reaffirmed the impression that the caliph was an honest broker in a world of unscrupulous men.¹⁶

After Abū Kālījār's repeated hesitations, Jalāl ad-Daulah finally came to Baghdad, where he tried continually and never quite succeeded in evoking an effective loyalty in this same group of Turkish soldiers. The soldiers had turned to the caliph more than once; for this and other reasons, in those periods in which he had the upper hand, Jalāl ad-Daulah made the caliph swear elaborate and exhaustive statements of fidelity. In 423/1031, Jalāl ad-Daulah and the caliph al-Qā'im exchanged oaths, and we are fortunate enough to have the text of most of the caliph's oath: "al-Qā'im bi Amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, has sworn and said: 'by God . . . and by the claim (*haqq*) [owed to] his messenger Muḥammad . . . I will most certainly continue in [my] loyalty of intention (*ikhlāṣ an-niyah*) and sincerity of friendship (*aṣ-ṣafā*) to Rukn ad-Dīn Jalāl ad-Daulah Abū Ṭahir b. Bahā' ad-Daulah Abū Naṣr, and will most certainly comply with the requirements (*shurūṭ*) of support and fidelity, without failing in anything which might be beneficial to his situation and might preserve his condition; and that I will most certainly be vigilant as he would desire in protecting him in his person and whatever is associated with it, and I will do so for the *wazīr al-wuzarā'* Abū al-Qāsim [b. Mākūlā] and his retinue; and I will do so in maintaining him in his station (*rutbah*). A compact before God (*'ahd Allāh*) toward him in this manner is [hereby] imposed on me, as well as His covenant (*mīthāq*) and whatever [covenants] He has assumed to His Angels who are drawn near to Him, and to His Prophets, whom He has sent as Messengers. God is a witness. . . .'" Here, as in several other cases, the oath derives some of its force by directly stating that it was part of the universal system of covenants between

God, men, and the angels that maintained the moral order of the universe.¹⁷

It is also significant that, in the anarchic world of late Buyid Iraq, the number of participants named in oaths was growing, along with the chain of people tied by oaths. But Jalāl ad-Daulah found that, much as he needed such oaths, their entanglements could even deprive him of what little authority he had left. In 420, when Jalāl ad-Daulah arrested his vizier 'Amīd ad-Daulah, the caliph and the Turkish soldiers refused to condone this act on the basis of oaths they themselves had sworn, and that Jalāl ad-Daulah had sworn, to the vizier; the vizier was therefore restored to office. The caliph was even faithful to his oaths to the last Buyid, al-Malik ar-Raḥīm, and sent his agent to Ṭughril Beg before he entered Baghdad to have the Saljūq conqueror swear to both the caliph and ar-Raḥīm. The caliph need not have included the Buyid, whose resources to resist the Saljūq were laughable; and Ṭughril, who wanted to pose as champion of the caliph's interest against the Buyids, had no reason to admire the caliph's fidelity to this ancient alliance. In any case Ṭughril, like the other early Ghuzz leaders, respected the caliph's position, but had scant respect for oaths; after entering Baghdad he arrested ar-Raḥīm, apparently without any qualms.¹⁸

Oaths between the Emir and His Officials

These vast conjurations that appear at the end of the Buyid period are only the culmination of the long-standing practice whereby members of the administration made sure of each others' loyalty and avoided the effects of an unrestrained competition. Very occasionally, when viziers were unusually powerful, emirs and viziers exchanged vows, as did Jalāl ad-Daulah. Fakhr ad-Daulah, as related above, exchanged oaths with his vizier when Ibn 'Abbād brought him to the throne. 'Izz ad-Daulah, who ruled in the early Buyid period, had no similar reason to become formally beholden to his vi-

zier. Nevertheless, through his incompetence 'Izz ad-Daulah was obliged to exchange oaths with several of his officials, since they feared what he might do, yet recognized how much they in turn depended on him. In 360, his vizier ash-Shīrāzī asked for and got "an inviolable oath" (*yamīn ghamūs*) with all the oaths of the *bai'ah* sworn before army officers, judges, and other leading men, that 'Izz ad-Daulah would never again appoint a certain rival of the vizier to any post unless this official came out of concealment within a month. In 362, 'Izz ad-Daulah and his commander-in-chief swore a "binding oath" (*yamīn mu'akkadah*) to be friends. After 'Izz ad-Daulah was restored to power his vizier Ibn Baqīyah, who was much the more strong-minded of the two, exchanged oaths of good will with the king in 364.¹⁹

Although we hear more about oaths that involved the king himself, we have evidence that oaths were a major feature of life in other levels of the administration. Officials who had quarreled with each other made the sincerity of their reconciliation clear by exchanging oaths; and such oaths were even more frequently exchanged when an official arranged for the release of a general or another official who might harbor a grudge against the administration that had imprisoned him. Oaths between officials without quarrels, who nonetheless wanted to rely on each other's help through the future windings of public life, were probably just as common, although they are far less often attested. We know that when two officials, al-Ḥasan b. Hārūn and al-Muhallabī, were among the strongest candidates to succeed aṣ-Ṣaimarī as vizier in 339, they swore (*tahālafā*) that they would help each other no matter which of them might get the job; and, as far as we know, they lived up to these oaths. Similar oaths must have cemented together the inner cores of the powerful factions of officials from the time of the 'Abbāsids through the Buyid period, and after. The officials had no reason to reveal such agreements and every reason to hide them from the king, who preferred to pretend that he could elevate or disgrace an official without

dragging along the secret allies of that official. It is not surprising, then, that these oaths are almost never mentioned in the sources.²⁰

Factions in the army may also have thrived on secret oaths. We do know that soldiers were often involved in public ceremonies in which very large numbers of officers (and, possibly, soldiers of all ranks) swore friendship to each other. One such conjuration took place at the end of the 'Abbāsīd period, when the Sājī regiment in 332 feared that their commander would be arrested by the caliph; their officers met with the leaders of the Hujarī regiment, who were the potential ally of the caliph, and the officers of the two regiments swore (*taḥālafa*) to act in common, "after which [the officers] took an oath from the rest of both regiments to do the same." Presumably, other extensive conjurations among soldiers followed the same patterns; they were still, basically, oaths between individuals, but were taken between a large number of individuals to ensure that they could count on each other's help. 'Izz ad-Daulah made the personal nature of these extensive oaths apparent when he used them to end hostilities between his Turkish and Dailamī soldiers in 360; he arranged marriage alliances between the two parties, and had the soldiers from each party involved in each alliance swear to officers of the other party. Similarly, when fighting started between Turks and Dailamīs in 379, and Bahā' ad-Daulah joined the Turks as the stronger side, both parties saw that they had more to lose than gain in such fighting. They agreed to make peace, and "they swore oaths to one another." Such oaths, as we have seen, could be sworn during an interregnum, and could—as in the case of the Ghaznavids—become the first formal agreement from which a new dynasty might grow.²¹

Oaths extended even further down the hierarchy of government, and were used in some instances to ensure the compliance of local leaders. When 'Aḍud ad-Daulah's soldiers marched from Jirift in Kirmān to the Persian Gulf, they

passed through areas that had hardly ever seen an army of Muslims. The people of the conquered area offered their submission and agreed to adopt Islam, and they gave oaths to this effect. Not long after, however, the Bālūs (Baluchee) of the area, the most courageous "and most pagan (*kāfir*)" of the local tribes, threw off their submission, "and violated the compacts (*uhūd*) which they had undertaken." When they did so, 'Aḍud ad-Daulah became convinced that there was no means to reform them. At this point he personally undertook a more systematic reduction of the Baluchees, and transported the survivors to a new area.

Populations better integrated into the political system of this period took their oaths more seriously, and thereby showed themselves to be more "civilized" than faithless pagans like the Baluchees. When Hibat Allāh, a Ḥamdānid prince, killed an important officer of his uncle, Saif ad-Daulah, he fled to the town of Ḥarrān in Mesopotamia. He falsely told the townspeople that Saif ad-Daulah was dead, and asked them to swear to fight with him against those who might fight him, and to make peace with whomever he made peace. They swore (*ḥalafū*) to do so with the reservation in their oath (*yamīn*) that they would not fight Saif ad-Daulah, since they did not wholly believe the prince's story. In spite of their doubts, they stuck by their oath at great risk, and locked out an officer of Saif ad-Daulah who came to their gates. Subsequently, when Hibat Allāh realized that they would soon hear that his uncle was still alive, he fled and left the townspeople to their fate. They suffered a heavy fine for their generosity and their fidelity to this oath.²²

Oaths of Treaty

Oaths of treaty constituted another category of formal oath that played an extremely prominent role in the political style of this period. If two rulers did not swear oaths to each other, there was no treaty between two kingdoms, only a state of

“nonbelligerency.” To some extent, of course, by their oaths of loyalty to the caliph who gave them patents (*‘uhūd*) for their provinces, rulers of this period were limited to these territories and not supposed to attack a neighbor who held an equally valid patent. While the ‘Abbāsids still exercised some independent military power, this argument was used by semi-independent rulers in their quarrels. But even in this period, the ‘Abbāsid caliph was not above granting patents for the same province simultaneously to two rulers; and after the ‘Abbāsids lost military power, everyone recognized that such patents were simply acknowledgments of the fact of conquest (or of the intentions of the Buyid emir of Baghdad).

Oaths of treaty were sometimes between equals, and sometimes they implied suzerainty. They were almost always publicly witnessed by such important dignitaries as the caliph, the *qāḍīs*, witness-notaries, and notables. In this way both parties to a treaty had full assurance that their remote neighbor had actually sworn to the agreement. Moreover, both parties recognized that the shame of public exposure as a perjurer added considerable strength to the treaty-oath.

The importance of public witnessing to treaty-oaths is shown by the instruction given by the ever-astute ‘Aḍud ad-Daulah to the three judges whom he sent as envoys to the Sāmānids in 371. He told them that if they succeeded in making peace with the Sāmānid general in Nishāpūr, they should then go to Bukhārā, the Sāmānid capital, and conclude the agreement with a deposition (*maḥḍar*) from the *qāḍīs*, witness-notaries, leading courtiers, officers, *ghāzīs* (volunteer fighters against non-Muslim governments), and great men of the region witnessing that the Sāmānid ruler had actually agreed to the peace. When such agreements were prepared, apparently two copies of them were made, each of which concluded with the oath by one of the rulers, contingent on the taking of a similar oath by the other ruler.²³

All the oaths described above were between real persons. They were, moreover, between real persons present in this

world (including, of course, God). None of these oaths was sworn, for example, between two men on behalf of their descendants; and none of them was between a man and an artificial person like a municipality or clan or school. When people expected a city to be carried along by the oaths of its notables, it was not because those notables could legally obligate their followers by their oaths, but because these notables could deliver the cooperation of their followers, who were bound to them by other loyalties. The oaths that the notables took were not oaths to the "state"—no such artificial person existed with whom one might exchange oaths. Even the first generation of men, the sons of Adam, in the primal oath that was the example and guarantee that overshadowed all later oaths, could not swear on behalf of all his descendants to recognize God's eternal sovereignty; all future men had to be brought forth in the form of seed so that they could individually swear.

The Vow

The vow is, by its nature, a close kin to the oath. Oaths, as we have seen, were almost the only manner in which Muslims of this period formally accepted new obligations to each other; and in the eyes of the law, most formal obligations were newly contracted by each individual, and not transferred to him by virtue of inheritance, or some status not wilfully acquired by that individual. The vow had a related function. The vow follows the style of the oath, except that it is unilateral swearing by one man to God, instead of a swearing between two men with God as a witness. We have abundant evidence of the importance of oaths to political action, but somewhat less evidence for the vow. This is not surprising, since a vow, by its nature, is a more private affair.

What evidence we have does show that the vow must have been an extremely common manner of stating an obligation, and was perhaps even more important than the formal oath.

Certainly the "private" vow, in which the pledge to act in a certain way does not importantly affect anyone except the taker of the vow, still forms a basic part of the spiritual life of very many people in the Near East. Such "private" vows cannot directly affect social and political life, and so are not directly relevant to this book. Nevertheless, we can gauge the seriousness with which men regarded public vows, which had the added sanction of shame, by the seriousness with which they regarded vows to which God alone was the witness, and for which a sense of guilt was the only sanction.

There are many examples of this sort of "private" vow. One occurs in a story told by the ex-vizier al-Khaṣībī; and since al-Khaṣībī paints himself in such a bad light, the story may well be true. Ibn Muqlah, on becoming vizier in 322, exiled al-Khaṣībī and Sulaimān b. al-Ḥaṣan to Oman; on the way, when he almost drowned in a storm, al-Khaṣībī repented of his sins and vowed to God never to pay back those who had done him harm, with the exception of Ibn Muqlah. " 'If I am given power over [Ibn Muqlah, he said] I will repay him for this night and what has happened to me in it, and go to the utmost extremities in mistreating him.' Sulaimān said, 'in circumstances like these, when face to face with death, you talk in this manner?' 'I was not,' said al-Khaṣībī, 'going to deceive my Lord.' " God saved al-Khaṣībī, and—good to his vow—he seems not to have taken revenge on his enemies when he again received high office. But al-Khaṣībī had shrewdly saved himself the satisfaction of mistreating Ibn Muqlah, whom he cheerfully handed over to a torturer.²⁴

The "public" vow was useful not only as a spiritual tool, but also as a political instrument; it was the most solemn way that one man could unilaterally assure another that he was in earnest. Like the oath, but probably even more commonly than the oath, it was strengthened by the offer to give up things vitally important to the swearer if he did not fulfill the vow. When in 328 Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Barīdī wanted the envoy to the *amīr al-umarā*, Bajkam, to return to Baghdad, and to

assure Bajkam that he had no reason to be suspicious of the Barīdis, who controlled al-Baṣrah, Abū 'Abd Allāh said to the envoy: " 'Give me your hand.' I [the envoy] held it out and he put it on his ear and said: 'Take me to the slave traders and sell me [if I let you down]; but just take care of this matter for me and don't ask how.' " The envoy knew that Abū 'Abd Allāh's limitless ambitions made him a fountain of lies. All the same, he was impressed with the seriousness of Abū 'Abd Allāh's vow to be sold as a slave (with a ring in his ear, the mark of servitude) if he were not in this instance sincere. The envoy kissed Abū 'Abd Allāh's hand and agreed.

Such vows were so serious that men often organized elaborate forms of symbolic action so that the maker of a vow could carry out the letter if not the spirit of his vow. For example, when the Kurdish Ḥasanwaihid ruler, Badr, assigned to his son Hilāl a district too insignificant for Hilāl's dignity, Hilāl vowed to conquer the more important neighboring district of Shahrazūr, which was ruled by a close and obedient friend of Badr. Badr wrote instructing Hilāl to leave Shahrazūr alone; but Hilāl replied, " 'I have sworn not to stop in this matter and not to turn back until I have entered his city.' So Badr said, 'go to his city with a few men and I will order him to open the gate and you will enter and be freed (*tabarra'a*) from your oath (*yamīn*).' " Hilāl, incidentally, refused to settle for this symbolic resolution of his vow; instead, in about 401, he conquered Shahrazūr.²⁵

Vows and oaths are usually treated together in works of Islamic law; the *amān*, or guarantee of safe conduct, is, however, often treated in chapters on the ethics of war. The *amān* is essentially akin to the vow, because it is a unilateral swearing before God to adhere to some future course of action. Consequently the *amān*, the oath, and the vow very often overlapped in actual practice. When, in 392/1002, Abū 'Alī Ismā'il, as discussed above, asked for an *amān* from Bahā' ad-Daulah, the king, after he had read it through, wrote on it, "I have sworn (*ḥalaftu*) to this oath (*yamīn*) and undertake to

observe it with fidelity (*wafā'*).” Rebellious military officials, disgraced officials, and even tributary kings often requested and received *amāns*; and they usually acted as if they could give full trust to these guarantees. Such guarantees were, of all formally sworn oaths and vows, the most tempting to break, since reasons of state argued so strongly for disarming a rebel by any means, even by perjury. When al-Manṣūr, the second 'Abbāsīd caliph, offered an *amān* to the 'Alid Muḥammad an-Nafs az-Zakīyah, who had started a militarily weak (if morally threatening) rebellion in the Ḥijāz in 145, Muḥammad replied “which of [your] *amāns* are you offering us [the 'Alids], that of Ibn Hubairah, or your uncle 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī, or of Abū Muslim?” Each of these important men had received an *amān* from al-Manṣūr or from his brother, and each one had been betrayed; in the short run, the 'Abbāsīds had prospered through their bad faith.²⁶

Vows had a more basic political function than just indicating the earnest seriousness of the swearer, or his intention to guarantee someone's safety; but to understand this function, we must describe the larger importance of *nīyah*, intention, in contemporary Islamic ethics. Oaths, *amāns*, and vows respecting future conduct toward others very often included a declaration of good *nīyah* or intention; and “intention” was one of the bridges that joined oath-bound loyalties to other loyalties in Buyid society. There is a famous *ḥadīth* that states, “works are really according to intention”; that is, that the value of a man's works will be reckoned by God only according to what a man intended, and not according to what a man actually did. This concept of *nīyah* forms a central axis around which all Islamic discussions of morality revolve, both in this period and in most other periods. When Rukn ad-Daulah's vizier Abū 'l-Faḍl b. al-'Amīd said that Rukn ad-Daulah had defeated the Khurasanian *ghāzīs* in 355 because of “his good intention (*ḥusn nīyatihi*) and the prayers of his subjects (*ra'īyah*) on his behalf, and Almighty God's concern for men,” the vizier was speaking both of the good “intention” made explicit

in certain of the king's vows, and of the intention implicit in his many cognate acts of solicitude for his subjects. This "good intention" was understood to cause God to support his rule. It was assumed that if the consequence of the king's good intention was both the support of God and the gratitude of his subjects, this good intention would so inspire his subjects that they would pray to God on the king's behalf.²⁷

Sovereignty and the Vow

It could be said that in some respects both a ruler and his dynasty believed themselves to hold their position through a special compact, resembling a vow, which the ruler and the dynasty had contracted with God. This compact did not amount to a "social contract," of course, since the subject population were not parties to the compact. Subjects were, nevertheless, the beneficiaries of the compact; and it was therefore in the interest of the dynasty to encourage the population to believe that the compact was still in force, and was still acting to the advantage of its beneficiaries. A striking example of this kind of compact is offered by the story that Abū 'l-Faḍl b. al-'Amīd himself told to explain the unexpected success of Rukn ad-Daulah when heavily pressed by the Sāmānid army near Isfahan in 340. Rukn ad-Daulah, short of supplies and outnumbered, told his vizier, Ibn al-'Amīd, that he wanted to flee. " 'A week ago,' Ibn al-'Amīd replied, 'you were respected by kings throughout the Islamic world; now you only rule a small encampment. There is no refuge' " he continued, " 'except in God Almighty. So purify your intention toward Him (*ukhluṣṣ nīyatāka lahū*), and make a resolution (*i'qīd 'azīmataka*) privately between yourself and Him, the sincerity and earnestness of which He may know; and determine henceforth to do good to the Muslim community and to all mankind. Make vows to Him (*'āhiduhū*), which you will perform and fulfill, to do good works (*al-a'māl aṣ-ṣāliḥah*), and to show kindness (*iḥsān*) to all those over whom you may

come to rule; for all human expedients are exhausted.' He smiled [related Ibn al-'Amīd], and said to me, 'Abu 'l-Faḍl [Ibn al-'Amīd], I had resorted to those expedients before you spoke. I have already made my intention correct (*ṣidq an-nīyah*) and formed vows appropriate for such a case.' " Later that night, Rukn ad-Daulah summoned Ibn al-'Amīd, and said that in a dream, " 'I seemed to be on my horse Fīrūz and our enemy had fled; and you were riding at my side and reminding me of God's favor (*ni'mah*) in this matter, and how a victory had come that we had not expected. We were talking of this and of similar things until my eye reached through the dust of the cavalcade to the ground and I saw the glint of a signet (*khātam*) on the ground where it had fallen from its owner into the dirt. I said to my *rikābī*, "*ghulām*, bring me that signet." He bent and raised it to me, and it proved to be a *khātam* of turquoise (*fīrūzaj*). I took it and put it on my index finger and considered myself blessed through it (*tabarraktu bihī*).' " Since *fīrūz* meant "victory" and *fīrūzaj* meant "victorious" in Persian, Rukn ad-Daulah took their appearance in his dream to be an omen. At dawn the next day the king and his followers found that the Sāmānid army, unable to endure hunger with the fortitude of the Dailamīs, had given up and deserted their camp; and when they rode into their camp, Rukn ad-Daulah, according to Ibn al-'Amīd's story, found a signet of turquoise (*fīrūzaj*).²⁸

The night before this unexpected victory, the vizier may actually have said, "better to die on a throne than in a stable," or, "the Sāmānids are more desperate than we; tomorrow, when they have fled, let us represent the victory as God's work." It is even possible that the vizier said the words he quoted himself as saying. For us, all that matters is that Ibn al-'Amīd thought it worth telling a story that represented God as saving the rule of Rukn ad-Daulah because the ruler had formed an "intention" that was "correct" for a king, and because the king had made the appropriate vows. As we have seen, Ibn al-'Amīd also told people that Rukn ad-Daulah had

defeated the Khurasanian *ghāzīs* because of his “goodness of intention, and the prayers of his subjects on his behalf, and Almighty God’s concern for men.” The vizier was clearly trying to establish for his employer an image consonant with the social style and the self-interest of his subjects—the image of a king confirmed in his rule by a compact with God.

Exactly because such vows and the support or sanction that God gave them were so well understood, we know of many rulers and dynasties who were represented as ruling in the shadow of the divine grace that such compacts granted to them. The caliph ar-Rāḍī (ruled 322/329/940–944) told his courtiers that when the soldiers of the previous caliph, al-Qāhir, who meant him great harm, were searching the house in which he was hiding, “ ‘I made a compact before God [that is, obligated myself before God (*‘āhadtu Allāh*)] that if he saved me from the hand of al-Qāhir, I would refrain from many sinful things; and that I would, if invested with the caliphate, grant amnesty to those who went into hiding, release the estates of those disgraced, and give pious endowments for the support of the Ṭālibids [the clan of ‘Alī]. I had hardly finished my vow (*nadhīr*) when the people [searching for me] left.’”²⁹ He fulfilled his vows on acceding to the throne. In a larger sense, when Abū ‘l-‘Abbās said in the inaugural speech of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty in 149, “you have the guarantee of God (*dhimmah Allāh*), of his Prophet, and of al-‘Abbās that we will govern you in accord with what God has revealed . . . and will behave toward both high and low among you according to the example of the Messenger of God,” he was stating the original compact under which his dynasty would claim to rule; for *dhimmah Allāh*, like *‘ahd Allāh*, is one of the basic forms of stating a pledge to God.³⁰

It is important to realize how often public works were represented as fulfillments of vows, and therefore served to confirm that the basic contractual relation of the ruler and God was in force and was working, as God wished, to benefit the subjects of such a ruler. The great vizier ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā was the

exemplar in the late 'Abbāsīd period of the tradition of ethical administration as scrupulous custodianship. When the Buyid Mu'izz ad-Daulah conquered Iraq, 'Alī, although an old man, came to pay his respects. He said to the young king, " 'one of the matters most worthy of receiving the attention of the emir and of priority in his regard is the repair of these breaches [in the irrigation canals of central Iraq], which are the root of the ruin and devastation of the Sawād.' Mu'izz ad-Daulah said, 'I take a vow to God (*nadhartu li-llāh*) in the presence of those here that I will give nothing precedence over this matter, even if I must spend all I possess on it.' "

His subjects knew that Mu'izz ad-Daulah was sincere in his vow, and his efforts to fulfill this vow evoked the kind of nonmilitary loyalty that helped the Buyid regime consolidate its rule. When Mu'izz ad-Daulah reentered Baghdad after defeating the rebellious Dailamī general Rūzbahān in 345/957, "the people gathered on the banks and invoked blessings (*dā'ū*) on him, and curses on Rūzbahān. For indeed the populace (*āmmah*) were attached to the reign (*muḥibbīn li-ayyām*) of Mu'izz ad-Daulah because of what he had done to repair the breach of the Nahr Rūfīl and that of Bādūriyā. For he had himself gone out to repair this breach and himself carried earth in the bosom of his cloak, to set an example to his whole army. . . . When he had repaired the breaches, Baghdad became prosperous, fine bread being sold at twenty *raṭls* the *dirham*. Hence the populace were attached to his reign and loved him." No doubt, for such benefits they would have loved him without any vow. It is significant, however, to find that here, as in so many other places, at an important psychological moment in his regime, the ruler signals his intentions toward his subjects by publicly forming a covenant with God. 'Alī b. 'Īsā, as a "grand old man" of the previous regime, had taught the young king a political as well as a moral lesson.³¹

The "dream of sovereignty" as a form of the compactual basis for rule is closely similar to the vow. Such dreams are a common theme in Near Eastern literature, but little attention

has been paid to the compact between the ruler and God that these dreams imply. It is not surprising that the dream is used to express a compact of sovereignty, since dreams were commonly taken as omens that predicted political events. For example, the Buyid king 'Aḍud ad-Daulah told his courtiers that his mother, when she was pregnant with him, saw the revered 'Alī in a dream and asked 'Alī to pray to God for her. 'Alī promised her a son, whose brilliant future he predicted, with suspiciously accurate detail; and 'Alī also predicted the future of his grandsons descended through 'Aḍud ad-Daulah. It cost the great king nothing to tell such a story, which may have had a kernel of truth; in fact, a similar story was apparently told by the first three Buyids about a dream of their father, Būyah. Doubtless all these stories confirmed that the achievements of the Buyids were divinely ordained, and that they were men of destiny.

The dream of sovereignty is found in its full form in the history of the Ṭāhirids, the dynasty that ruled Khurasan from 205/820 to 259/872. In a dream, Ṭāhir, the founder of the dynasty, had been promised worldly greatness if he protected the Prophet's descendants. Then, when Ṭāhir's grandson killed the 'Alid Yaḥyā b. 'Umar in 250, the Prophet Muḥammad told the grandson in a dream that "you have violated your oath (*nakathtum*)"; and, of course, this grandson was the last king of his line. The story may well have been fabricated by descendants of 'Alī; but none of its traits seemed improbable to its audience. A story told on more certain authority concerns the dream that the future caliph al-Qādir had when he was a refugee in the Marsh. He claimed that he dreamed that 'Alī helped him cross a body of water, then told him that sovereignty would come to him, and instructed him to treat the 'Alids and their partisans well. Al-Qādir (ruled 381/991-422/1030), according to his own account, acceded to the caliphate almost immediately after this event. Other dynasties and rulers probably used such dreams to express the

divine compact that had conferred rule upon them, or so they wished their subjects to believe. Unfortunately, we only rarely hear a full account of the conditions, if any, joined by God to the promises of sovereignty that are given in such dreams.³²

All of these vows and vow-like promises share certain general characteristics. They are all, like oaths, compacts involving two persons, God and a man. While God is merely the divine witness to an oath, He is one of the two principal parties in the making and accepting of a vow. Since God has no need for the benefits that men can exchange by oaths, the principal object of vows is some form of conduct by the human party to the vow. The human party may form a vow that involves only himself. But vows often include a resolution to act toward certain groups of people, or toward every one in the future, in a certain fashion: one may vow, for example, to treat one's subjects with justice and generosity, or the like. Oaths between two humans do at times contain such clauses concerning other parties, but the treatment of third parties is usually incidental to the main purpose of the oath.

In the case of vows, the treatment of third parties is very often the main purpose of the vow, since God, the owner of the world and of the day of judgment, can hardly be said to need the promise of good treatment from men who contract a vow with Him. Vows, therefore, come closest to formal open-ended commitments to groups of people, even to people one has not yet met, and even to those unborn. In the absence of artificial or juridical persons like the corporation and the municipality to which, in contemporary law, one can undertake certain obligations, the vow was as near as anyone came in the Buyid Near East to undertaking a personal and formal commitment to a group. There is still a very great distance between the vow and our contemporary understanding of such a personal and formal commitment. Almost no group

in the Buyid period could be committed *de jure* by the oaths or vows of its leaders, since capacity, the legal right to contract, still remained individual; and the vow was a form of unilateral contract between God and a single man. Western societies are familiar not only with commitments by individuals to groups, but also by groups to an individual and by groups to each other. The vow cannot admit these other categories; and, in fact, in the Near Eastern context of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, commitments of these varieties were virtually all informal.

Gratitude for Benefit

We have seen how some form of loyalty was inspired in the subject population when the ruler was believed to carry out good works in fulfillment of his vow. In consequence, his subjects invoked God's blessings on the ruler, and offered cooperation with the processes of government. Yet even when a king or caliph performed good works to the benefit of his subordinates outside of the context of a vow, these good works were understood to carry some kind of obligation. It is this obligation to which al-Muqtadir referred when he said in his letter to his rebellious troops, "I claim gratitude for benefits and favors; you enjoy benefits and gifts from me which I hope you will acknowledge and consider binding." The ties created by "benefit" were obviously not contracted in the ceremonious fashion in which men made oaths; these ties could, nevertheless, be formal and were often considered binding.

Again, the moral relation that was created by benefit had been prefigured by the relation between man and God as Muslims understood it to be described in the Koran. In the Koran, benefits that God has granted to men, for which men are repeatedly urged to be "grateful," extend from the very substances of life and the beauty of creation to the blessing of revelation and the Koran itself. Collectively, these benefits are

beyond counting (16:18), yet God holds men accountable for the acceptance or rejection of any specific benefit; speaking of the signs of the truth of revelation, the Koran says, "if any one, after God's benefit (*ni'mah*) has come to him, substitutes [something else], God is strict in punishment" (2:211).

The Koran repeatedly emphasizes that the Believer is "thankful" (*shākir*) for these countless benefits; and that gratitude is one of the basic spiritual qualities that accompanies true belief. Man should be like Abraham, who was "a model," "showing gratitude for His benefits (*shākiran li-an'umihī*)" (16:121). The opposite of *shukr an-ni'mah*, "gratitude for benefit," with its implications of the appreciation and recognition of God's lordship and generosity with a responsive heart, is *kufṛ an-ni'mah*, "ingratitude for benefit," with its implication of rejection, resistance, and denial. Hence, of course, the disbeliever is called in the Koran, and in the Islamic tradition in general, *al-kāfir*, the "ingrate." Speaking of the ancient Israelites, the Koran says, "And remember, your Lord caused it to be proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will add more [benefits]; but if you show ingratitude, my punishment is terrible indeed' " (14:7).

It is not surprising, therefore, that when subjects received any sort of bounty from their ruler, he should describe the loyalty and obligation created as *shukr an-ni'mah*, "gratitude for benefit." For those immediately associated with the regime, the benefits were so obvious that the ruler regarded his *ni'mah* as tying them to a very self-evident obligation. Correspondingly, ambitious men asked for open benefit if they wished to be associated with the regime. The venomous and ill-tempered Abū Haiyān at-Tauḥīdī, who spent much of his life wandering from court to court hoping to be benefited in the extravagant fashion that he felt he deserved, expressed this idea very succinctly when he said, "the exclusion of an aspirant by a leader (*ra'īs*) is like the ingratitude of a follower for a benefit (*ni'mah*)."³⁴

The obligations imposed by *ni'mah* were so openly ac-

knownedged that we find rulers and subjects continually involved in a calculus of their mutual liability. 'Aḍud ad-Daulah said that if troops were paid a day before their pay was actually due, "the difference (*al-faḍl*) weighs on them in our favor." But if paid late, they would complain to the paymaster and "the gratitude arising from generosity (*al-minnah*) is lost," and the government, 'Aḍud ad-Daulah concluded, thereby loses far more than it could profit from delay. A letter written to congratulate the Ḥamdānid Abū Taghlib for his victory over his brothers in 360/971 tells us that his expedition has returned "with the people's gratitude (*shukr ar-ra'iyah*) and their blessings . . . [since] God has realized the thoughts (*ẓunūn*) of his friends and subjects (*ahl tā'atihī*) concerning him, and has confirmed . . . the suppositions of his servants, and of the slaves of his benefits (*'abīd ni'amihī*)."

If the loyalty of the general population is described in terms of the collective *ni'mah* received by the population, the far more direct loyalty of servants of the government to the ruler is often described in terms of the specific benefits these servants enjoy. In 315, at the end of the Abbasid period, when 'Alī b. 'Īsā was interrogating the ex-vizier al-Khaṣībī on his handling of the government's finances, 'Alī explained that he did not dispute the right of officials to become wealthy through legal salaries assigned to them. "How [he said], shall we challenge you in this respect when we, like all clerks (*kuttāb*) of the Commander of the Faithful, have our livelihood only through his bounty (*ni'mah*) and beneficence (*iḥsān*), and possess estates we have earned in his service and the service of his ancestor?"³⁵

The obligation imposed by God's *ni'mah* found its nearest analogy in the *ni'mah* of the king to his subject; but the obligations that existed between near equals and even the obligations of superiors to inferiors are also often described in terms of *ni'mah*. The Ḥamdānid Nāṣir ad-Daulah had let his sons attack Baghdad in 346, while the Buyids were challenged by the

rebellion of one of their officers, Rūzbahān. After his forces defeated both the attacking Ḥamdānids and the rebel Rūzbahān, the Buyid king Mu‘izz ad-Daulah wrote Nāṣir ad-Daulah to remind him that Nāṣir ad-Daulah should have controlled his sons, and that he owed his Buyid neighbor better treatment. After all, Mu‘izz ad-Daulah had restored Nāṣir ad-Daulah when Takīn ash-Shīrẓādī had rebelled against the Ḥamdānids; and, said Mu‘izz ad-Daulah, “I thought that you [Nāṣir ad-Daulah] would recognize my claim for this benefit (*ḥaqq ḥādhihī an-ni‘mah*), and that, as a result, your soul would move you to repay it (*al-mujāzāt*).” Instead, said Mu‘izz ad-Daulah, he had been greeted with “betrayal” (*ghadr*). Nāṣir ad-Daulah in his answer acknowledged that Mu‘izz ad-Daulah was right to reprove him, and said his sons had acted on their own initiative.³⁶

In one remarkable conversation, we even hear the possible beneficiary of a political plot tell his chief supporter that the expected benefit would oblige him, the beneficiary, as deeply as would an oath sworn to the supporter. During the final illness of the caliph al-Muktafī (d. 289/902), the vizier al-‘Abbās considered possible candidates for the succession in the ‘Abbāsīd family. For this purpose he secretly interviewed Muḥammad, the son of the former caliph al-Mu‘tamīd: “ ‘[The vizier said to him,] what will I get if I hand this government over to you?’ Muḥammad, son of al-Mu‘tamīd, said to him, ‘You will get the reward, esteem, and favored position that you deserve.’ Al-‘Abbās said to him, ‘I want you to swear to me that you will not abandon me in either of two situations: if you wish my services, I will advise you sincerely and exert every effort in obedience to your wishes and in collecting money for you, as I have done for others; and if you favor someone else, then treat me with honor and preserve me, not laying a hand on my person or wealth, nor on any one of my dependents.’ Muḥammad, son of al-Mu‘tamīd, who had a good mind and excellent principles, said, ‘If you

do not hand this authority to me, I will not have the means to reward you justly and appropriately; [otherwise] how could I [fail to do so] when you have been the cause and means [of my access] to such [authority]?" Al-'Abbās again asked him to swear, and he said, " 'If I do not fulfill what you desire without an oath, I will not fulfill it with an oath.' " The judge Muḥammad [who was probably the only other person present] said to al-'Abbās, 'Be pleased with this much from him—it is better than an oath.' " The implication is that for a truly honorable man, acknowledgment of *ni'mah* is as sacred as the tie of an oath; by extension, of course, we see that the oath seemed a safer way to guarantee a specific course of conduct in the future. Muḥammad b. al-Mu'tamid, incidentally, never became caliph.³⁷

The reverse of this explicit identification of loyalty and gratitude was, of course, the association of ingratitude and disloyalty. As the Koranic analogy implied, ingratitude was morally reprehensible between man and man, as well as between man and God. Men were sincerely troubled to think that they might be considered "ingrates." When the caliphal general Yāqūt was in southern Iraq in the 320s, he hesitated to fight a hostile army because, he said, "it will be thought that I was ungrateful to my benefactor (*kafartu ni'mata maulāya*), and so people will curse me." Eventually this hesitation cost Yāqūt his life. Doubtless Yāqūt feared not only what his contemporaries would think of him, but also the disgrace to his name after his death. When the severed head of Abū 'l-Haijā' b. Ḥamdān, the ancestor of the Ḥamdānids, was paraded through Baghdad in 317 (after the collapse of the rebellion in favor of the caliph al-Qāhir), it was accompanied by a crier who called out, "this is the recompense of one who rebels against his master and is ungrateful for his benefits." The opinion of one's contemporaries and post-mortem disgrace were not, however, the only sanctions against ingratitude; God, it was said, would even seal the fate of a dynasty for its

ingratitude. When the last of the semi-independent Sīmǰūrīd governors of Khurasan was defeated in 385/995, it was “the end of the importance of the house of Sīmǰūr, as a retribution for their ingratitude to the kindness of their master (*jazā’an li-kufrān iḥsān maulāhum*).”³⁸

Since one acknowledged ties by accepting *ni’mah*, a man could cast off ties, and in particular could cast off his allegiance, by claiming that no *ni’mah* had been given by the other party. Men even extended this argument to their relations with God; and in spite of the horrifying blasphemy of disclaiming God’s bounty, at least two authors of the fourth/tenth century ask why a man owes anything to God if he gets almost nothing in return. An author living in Bukhārā in the early tenth century writes, “as a pauper I do not pray to God; to Him pray the powerful and wealthy. . . . Of course Nūḥ [the Sāmānid ruler] prays, since the East bends before his power; but why should I pray? Where is my power, my house, my horse, my bridle, my fine belt? . . . Were I to pray when my right hand does not possess an inch of earth, I would be a hypocrite. Yes, if God creates prosperity for me, then I will not stop praying as long as lightning flashes in the heavens; but the prayer of one in evil condition is a fraud.”³⁹

Ni’mah, then, like the oath, was a means to establish important new ties in society; and like the oath, it remained largely concerned with ties between individuals. A vizier, according to the Buyid official and historian Miskawaih, should beware lest the soldiers attribute what they receive to him “rather than to their master and the [real] author of their benefits (*walī ni’amihim*),” since the king will resent their forming gratitude to anyone but himself. No abstract gratitude to the state is imaginable. Some forms of *ni’mah*, like public works, resembled the vow in that they were transactions between a single man and an abstractly defined category of men; but those men were presumed to be grateful individually, and “to invoke God’s blessing” on the donor rather than to be grate-

ful in any corporate fashion. They were in many ways like those who benefited from a vow.

Nevertheless, *ni'mah* differed from the oath and the vow in that benefaction and gratitude were less definable commitments, and commitments that could be retracted; in contrast, an oath or vow was a clear commitment that could be retracted only in extraordinary circumstances. The commercial analogy fitted the continuing barter of *ni'mah* and gratitude, while it was appropriate only for the final and irrevocable "sale" that took place at the origin of a course of action dependent on an oath or vow. This commercial analogy was therefore frequently and self-consciously used; but it was an analogy appropriate to a commerce of long-standing patterns of trade, in which, for all the calculus of benefit, neither seller nor customer wanted a final "reckoning" of accounts between them, since such a reckoning would sever the bonds of loyalty that the exchange had created.

Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Zaid al-Munajjim, long employed as tax collector for Wāsiṭ under the Buyid Mu'izz ad-Daulah, used to be praised for establishing pious endowments in his district, for repairing the local irrigation system, and for giving alms to the appropriate people. Privately, al-Munajjim said that he did these things for God; but, he added, if he had done them for appearances, that would be good too, and why shouldn't the local population keep up appearances (*riyā'an*) by a matching hypocritical pretense that they believed in the high-minded motives of the benefactor? Nowadays, he complained, if a man is munificent (*jawād*) they say he is "making commerce with his munificence" (*mutājirun bi-jūdihi*) and consider him a miser. We can discount the claim in this anecdote that men were so much more pious in a period before al-Munajjim's governorship; al-Munajjim wants the exchange of gratitude and benefit to continue, since he believes men should continue to praise him to his face, and he only hopes they will practice similar hypocrisy behind his back.⁴⁰

Royal Generosity and Ties of Benefit

To establish a loyalty based on such an open-ended barter in benefits and gratitude took time, especially when several benefactors were competing for the loyalty of the same beneficiaries. Contemporary observers clearly understood that the Buyids—and their competitors—were struggling to establish these ties with their troops, and that the consolidation of their power was a direct reflection of their success in doing so. The series of events by which the Buyids came to control their fellow countrymen, the Dailamīs, show their gradual success in establishing these ties. When the Shī'ī Dailamīs invaded the Iranian plateau, they entered regions in which the majority of the population in some sense or other recognized the 'Abbāsīd claim, a claim in which most of the Dailamīs had never believed. Even the traditional "kings" of the Dailamīs, who had once exercised relatively weak and localized authority over them, had been cast aside. No traditional source of authority seemed capable of restraining them, and in the first instance, before they adopted the views of the other inhabitants of western Iran and Iraq, the obligation of *ni'mah* proved to be the most powerful means to persuade the Dailamīs to adhere to any fixed loyalty.

The rulers of the early fourth/tenth century who accepted Dailamī mercenaries into their armies recognized the urgency of creating such ties even if they were, at first, a very fragile basis for loyalty. In order to frighten the caliph and extort money from him, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Barīdī sent him a message when he occupied Baghdad in 329/941 that the Dailamī soldiers of fortune in the army of the Barīdīs "do not recognize the *bai'ah* [to the 'Abbāsīds], and no acts of generosity from you have laid them under any obligation (*lā minan laka fi riqābihim*).” The Dailamīs at this period were not greatly restrained by short-lived ties of *ni'mah*; they were ready to bolt from one leader to another in search of enormous and im-

mediate grants of money. Al-Barīdī was not the only political leader who feared them; the Dailamī leaders themselves faced this problem. When Mardāwīj, for example, revolted against the freebooting Dailamī general Asfār b. Shīrawaih, the latter decided to give up the struggle, in spite of his considerable prestige among the Dailamīs, because he found he had too little money to lure back his troops.

The only resource open to these condottieri was an unstinting generosity and a frank avowal that self-interest argued for cooperation in plundering these new conquests, so that all—leaders and simple soldiers—might have a larger share. The independent Turkish general Tūzūn, after he defeated the Ḥamdānid Saif ad-Daulah in 332/943, distributed some of the stores captured in the battle, then gathered his men and said, "I am one of you, and it is your interest that I want." In this manner some leaders could buy time and nurture the sense of obligation that such benefaction might create; then, gradually, other arguments could be advanced to give leadership a dimension of royalty.

As we have seen, in western Iran and in Iraq, the Buyids eventually outstripped all other leaders in this effort; but the Ziyārīds had already begun to succeed in this respect when the Buyids started their career, and their dynasty outlasted the Buyids. As the fortunes of the Ziyārīd Mardāwīj improved, Dailamīs came to him from all sides because of his "generosity" to his army. The young sons of the fisherman Būyah, who were then officers in the service of Mākān, felt the attraction of Mardāwīj's success. When Mākān was defeated, 'Alī b. Būyah and his brother al-Ḥasan asked his permission to join Mardāwīj, adding with winning candor, "if you become powerful again, we will return to you." Permission was granted, and the Ziyārīd immediately assigned the small town and district of al-Karaj in western Iran to 'Alī.

From this point on, all sources emphasize the role of generosity in 'Alī's success. "The cause of the rise of 'Alī b. Būyah," says Miskawaih, "and of his attaining what he did,

was the great generosity (*samāḥah*) in his temperament, and his patience (*sa'ah aṣ-ṣadr*).” For over a decade, ‘Alī gave away everything he got; he understood the soldiers’ game of the mid-tenth century as few other leaders did, and ended as its most successful player. After he defeated the caliphal army under Yāqūt in 322, ‘Alī was “generous” to the prisoners, and gave them the choice of staying with him or joining Yāqūt; naturally, most of them chose to stay. For the first generation of Buyid leaders there was no other policy; as Miskawaih points out, al-Ḥasan b. Būyah (Rukn ad-Daulah) “was the leader of the [Dailamīs] only by virtue of his great generosity (*samāḥah*) and his indulgence (*musāmahah*) in matters that [a genuine] ruler does not tolerate from those he rules.” Yet, in the long run, these first Buyids also knew when to circumscribe their liberality, so that their generosity did not become an automatic and therefore worthless trait.⁴¹

The Buyids were also fortunate in their opponents. ‘Abbāsīd pretenders had always offered the central ‘Abbāsīd army generous rewards for support against the ruling member of the ‘Abbāsīd family, and the army of Baghdad had consequently become the most cynical and frankly mercenary army of the early fourth century. When Mu’nis was advancing on Baghdad in 320, the caliph’s chief commander told his master that “the soldiers only fight for money; if it is produced, fighting will be unnecessary, for most of Mu’nis’ men will desert.” The caliph, however, was bankrupt, and was duly overthrown and replaced by a caliph chosen by Mu’nis. At least an ‘Abbāsīd, if not obeyed, would be replaced by another powerless ‘Abbāsīd; but many other opponents of the Buyids were not as fortunate as the ‘Abbāsīds, and lacked the awe of kingship created by a rule of even two generations. For example, when the first Barīdī ruler was killed in 332, he was succeeded by his brother and murderer Abū al-Ḥusain. But Abū al-Ḥusain did not give lavishly to the troops in a spirit of camaraderie, as his brother had done; instead, he treated the Turks and Dailamīs with haughty contempt. From this point

on, the unexpected good fortune of this family of former clerks disappeared, and they were progressively deserted by their troops until their power disappeared about ten years later.⁴²

Patronage

Gradually, the Buyids were able to transform their control of their army so that it was no longer based purely on transient moods of gratitude from the soldiers who received their largesse. The Buyids were able to establish a more permanent loyalty partly because soldiers became enmeshed in the calculus of *ni'mah*, partly because the Dailamīs came to believe that their own good fortune was tied to the success of the Buyids, and partly because the Buyids ruled long enough to foster a generation of soldiers who regarded themselves as the special protégés of the Buyids, for whom these kings were almost foster parents. The foster-parent relation was one of the most important ways in which new ties were established. This relation is described in the various forms of the word *ṣana'a*, which in its simplest sense means "to make," but also means "to do a kindness," "to tend well," and "to nourish, rear."

Moses, the classic foundling of fortune, is told by God in the Koran that when his mother put him in the Nile, "I cast [the garment of] loveableness from me over you, and did so that you might be reared (*tuṣna'a*) in my sight" (20:39/40). Moses therefore grew up with the education and experience that God had desired for him, at which point God said to him, "*Wa-ṣṭana'tu-ka li-nafsī*" (20:41/43), which Muslim commentators understood to mean, "I have chosen you for myself [to establish my proof and to serve as my spokesman]," or, "I have reared you for myself [for a special task]."

The form of the verb used in the last quotation, *iṣṭana'a* (infinitive *iṣṭinā'*), appears frequently in the texts of the fourth and fifth centuries in the sense "to foster someone's career."

Iştinā' is a surprisingly formal and serious relationship; a man expected from his protégé (*muştana'* or *şanī'* or *sanī'ah*) not an easy gratitude and affection, but a lifelong commitment of sizable dimensions. To say "he is my *şanī'ah*" meant "he is the person I have reared, educated, and trained well," and the obligation to such a patron was like the obligation to a parent, except that it was neither inherited nor transferable by legacy. It was, moreover, an obligation that could be made between men more nearly equal in age than father and son. It was an ideal way for political men to make formal ties out of the *ni'mah* that they bestowed on a few chosen subordinates.⁴³

The most dangerous and unstable element in the state was the army; and the Buyids turned to *iştinā'* to control and make stable the loyalties that they could command at first only by lavish and necessarily short-lived displays of generosity. The Buyids were not the first Islamic regime to make extensive use of *iştinā'*. The 'Abbāsids had rebuilt their army by combining slavery and *iştinā'* in a powerful new institution. This institution survived and became a central feature of most Near Eastern empires right up to the nineteenth century; since it is one of the best documented forms of *iştinā'*, it offers a convenient point to begin a discussion of loyalty acquired through patronage.

The 'Abbāsids had originally built their empire with an army from the large northeastern Iranian province of Khurasan. But the disgrace of the Khurasanian officials of the Barmakid family, and the antagonism of the civil war against al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, destroyed the trust between Baghdad and Khurasan that had given the Khurasanians a reason to be actively loyal. Speaking on behalf of eastern Iranians, one poet who supported the Şaffārid rebellion against the 'Abbāsids wrote, "our fathers gave you your sovereignty, but you showed no gratitude for our benefaction." When this poem was written, very few of their subjects seem to have felt that they had reason to stand up and fight for the 'Abbāsids; the hopes raised by the 'Abbāsīd revolution had long since

disappeared, and it was clear that no category of the 'Abbāsids' subjects or province of their empire felt they owed military support for the doubtful benefits that they could bestow. The 'Abbāsids reached beyond the borders of their state, and by purchase or gift acquired Turkish slave boys, *ghilmān* (singular *ghulām*), who were brought up as if they were foster children of the caliph.⁴⁴

The Turkish "slave" soldier and his patron were bound together by the tie of *walā'* or clientship, as well as *iṣṭinā'*, though patrons in the fourth and fifth centuries seem to have very frequently reminded these soldiers of their obligations in terms of *iṣṭinā'*, and very seldom in terms of *walā'*. The military *ghulām* owed his training, his equipment, and above all his privileged place in society to the care and interest of his patron, who usually acted as the foster parent of the *ghulām* from adolescence. This training included continual efforts to inculcate obedience and gratitude to his patron. The gratitude of the *ghulām* for these benefits was strengthened by the general ethic of *ni'mah* and of filial duty. Even the teachings of Islamic law on the duty of the freed man to his former master supported this relationship, and scrupulous men did not set these teachings aside with indifference. When Yāqūt, the great *ghulām* commander referred to above, found that a lesser man had gained control of the caliph ar-Rāḍī in 324, and had, in the caliph's name, arrested Yāqūt's sons, this commander sought the opinions of the jurists (*fuqahā'*), who told him that they did not regard it as lawful for him to rebel against his master. Yāqūt, for this and other reasons, remained in Hamletic indecision in southern Iraq until he was destroyed.

The legal ties, however, were less important than the enduring ties of affection that often developed between a master and his *ghulām*, especially when the *ghulām* became an important military figure whom the law could not easily call to account. In 329, Bajkam, the Turkish *amīr al-umarā'*, heard that the patron who had raised and trained him, the fierce condottiere Mākān b. Kākī, had died. Bajkam had risen far higher in

the world than Mākān, whom he had left years ago; nonetheless, he was deeply affected by news of Mākān's death, and sat to receive condolences. "He was my master (*maulāyā*)," said Bajkam, "I have never seen a cavalier (*fāris*) like him."

When, as we have related above, in the reign of ar-Rādī the prominent general Yāqūt was squandering his resources in southern Iraq because of his reluctance to rebel against the caliph, who was then controlled by an *amīr al-umarā'* who had arrested Yāqūt's sons, one of Yāqūt's lieutenants decided to take the initiative. The lieutenant took three thousand of Yāqūt's troops and marched against the Barīdis in al-Ahwāz so that Yāqūt might at least have a province to rule, after which he could either compromise with the *amīr al-umarā'* or go to Baghdad and himself become *amīr al-umarā'*. A messenger from Yāqūt overtook the lieutenant and foolishly dissuaded him from continuing his march. In his conversation with the messenger, the lieutenant graphically described his debt to Yāqūt. "I will not rebel against my master [Yāqūt]," he said, "for he bought me, raised me, and showed me favor (*iṣṭana'a-nī*)." ⁴⁵

According to the Islamic lawbooks, a patronage of clients was inheritable or transferable; but the more important personal tie of the *ghulām* to his foster parent was, by its nature, impossible to pass on. The *ghulām* sometimes extended his feelings of loyalty to his patron's children, whom he might have known since childhood; further extension of the tie between *ghulām* and patron was usually a formal working arrangement in which personal loyalty could only be created by a whole set of new acts of generosity to the *ghulām*: in effect, by a concerted effort of *iṣṭinā'* or patronage. After the defeat and death of the Buyid ruler of Iraq, 'Izz ad-Daulah, his family took refuge with Alftakīn in Damascus; for even though Alftakīn had led an unsuccessful rebellion against 'Izz ad-Daulah, he had originally been the client (*maulā*) of Mu'izz ad-Daulah, the father of 'Izz ad-Daulah. Alftakīn, hearing that the family of his patron was coming, "lived up to his

duty by them" (*qaḍā huqūqahum*). Together, they fought against al-'Azīz, who had determined to bring southern Syria permanently under Fatimid control. Al-'Azīz won, but was so impressed with his captured opponent that he purchased (presumably, from the family of 'Izz ad-Daulah) the right to be Alftakīn's patron (*ishtarā walā'ahū*), and Alftakīn became "like a slave" to al-'Azīz. Here, the transference of loyalty was accomplished by the marked favor of al-'Azīz, which soon made Alftakīn a major figure in the Fatimid state.⁴⁶

In most cases, people expected the *ghulām* to have his strongest loyalty to his original patron. Since this patron might be the subject or even the *ghulām* of a king, the state was supported by a many-tiered loyalty that needed frequent adjustment. The landlords of Fārs had *ghulāms* (as very likely did large landholders elsewhere); and 'Alī b. Būyah had to fight some of them when he first entered Shiraz in 320/932. An argument appointing the tax-farmer Ḥāmid b. al-'Abbās as vizier in 306 was that he possessed four hundred personal *ghulāms*, each of whom possessed his own *ghulāms*. Ḥāmid's subsequent arrival in Baghdad, accompanied by the trumpet blasts of his personal army, caused a great sensation. Most often, however, we hear of the *ghulāms* who belonged to important *ghulām* commanders in government service. Mu'nis, when he quarreled with the caliph al-Qāhir in 320, left Baghdad accompanied by about two thousand *ghulāms*, including many blacks. This practice continued throughout the Būyid period; for example, in 363 the leading Turkish commander of the Buyid 'Izz ad-Daulah had four hundred "*mamlūk ghulāms*."⁴⁷

Such regiments, founded on the patronage of a leading commander, lasted a generation or two after their founder's death. It is common in the later 'Abbāsīd and Buyid periods to read of a group of soldiers named after their original but deceased patron, as, for example, we read of the Mu'nisiyah in 323/935, several years after the death of Mu'nis. If a *ghulām* died before his patron, the patron inherited his wealth and fol-

lowers; in 332/944, for example, the Turkish *amīr al-umarā'* Tūzūn inherited from his *ghulām* commander Yanāl not only a considerable fortune, but also the *ghulāms* who belonged to Yanāl. In most cases, however, the patron was older and died first; and the subsequent transfer of the allegiance of the *ghulāms* was a sensitive matter. When Ya'nīs al-Muwaffaqī (originally a *ghulām* of the 'Abbāsīd al-Muwaffaq, as his name indicates), an excellent officer of the palace guard, died in 311, the caliph's chamberlain advised the caliph to have the heir apparent gather all of the soldiers, servants, and retinue of Ya'nīs and say to them: "I now have Ya'nīs's position with you and over you. Increasing magnanimity will be shown to you, and careful examination will be given to your circumstances." Instead, however, the caliph allowed himself to be persuaded by the vizier, Ibn al-Fūrāt, to plunder the dead man's estate. By failing to create an honorable transfer of the loyalties of the *ghulāms* from their former commander to a new commander, the caliph drove one more nail into the coffin of 'Abbāsīd rule. In general, *ghulām* regiments, insofar as they preserved a separate identity without a formal transfer, eventually regrouped around one of their outstanding officers of the next generation, and were soon called after their new patron-commander.⁴⁸

The *ghulām* was in general supposed to conduct his dealings with the ruler through his patron; to do otherwise would be to reject the primacy of his tie to that patron. Mu'nīs, for example, had bought the clientship of a talented Turkish soldier, Shafī', after that soldier had been freed by the caliph al-Mu'taḍīd. A decade or so later Mu'nīs attached Shafī' to the service of the caliph al-Muqtadir, and Mu'nīs soon grew furious with his "client" when Shafī' failed to support the policy of Mu'nīs inside the government. The final straw, however, came in the reign of al-Qāhir, successor to al-Muqtadir. Under this caliph, Shafī' was in disfavor, but did not ask his legal patron, Mu'nīs, to intervene with the new caliph for a guarantee of safety (*amān*); instead, Shafī' turned to al-

Kalwadhānī, the deputy vizier. Al-Mu'nis, in a rage, had Shafi' (who was by now a prominent general) brought and sold at auction in his presence; as a patron, Mu'nis had every right to do so. Al-Kalwadhānī bought Shafi' on behalf of the caliph for 70,000 *dinars*, and freed him. Eventually, Shafi' and Mu'nis were reconciled.⁴⁹

Essential to the survival of each ruler was the corps of *ghulāms* whose training he had himself fostered, and who shared the strong affection that *ghulāms* usually felt only for patrons who had sustained their careers in this manner. These were the "king's men" in a very special way, and no one else was supposed to tamper with their affection for the king or call them to account; and outside parties seldom did so unless they intended conspiracy or open revolution. For example, when Abū 'Alī b. Ismā'il's *ghulāms* were playing polo in Shiraz with the *ghulāms* of the Buyid king, Bahā' ad-Daulah, one of the brawls considered common to the game arose between the two sides. The vizier, Abū 'Alī, withdrew to his palace, refused to receive anyone from the other side, and sent a message suggesting that certain *ghulāms* on the other side be handed over to him. The king was angry at being addressed on the subject of his *ghulāms*, and even angrier at the suggestion that they be handed over. No one could call the king's men to account until he had shown the king that it was to the advantage of the regime. Abū 'Alī's mistake was considered one of the important reasons for his downfall.⁵⁰

Ghulāms, as we have seen, could serve at many levels of government, and might be obliged by the death of their patron or by circumstances to have mixed loyalties. The attachment of *ghulāms* who had been acquired as children or young adolescents to their first master was, however, usually an emotional and direct loyalty that a generous master could count on. This is why they could become, in this special sense, "the king's men." On several occasions the deeply felt loyalties of the *ghulāms* were all that saved a Buyid ruler from

defeat and death. The Dailamī general Rūzbahān led most of the army of Iraq into rebellion against Mu‘izz ad-Daulah in 345/957; and in the final battle, when the Buyid king seemed near defeat, he addressed the *ghulāms* of his palace, those whom he had himself acquired and whose careers he had fostered: “My children, I have raised you as though you were my sons—now show me your worth.” In fact, their final desperate charge carried all before it and crushed the rebellion. Similarly, in 419, when the Buyid Jalāl ad-Daulah was besieged in his palace by the older *ghulāms* and was on the verge of leaving Baghdad, “the young *ghulāms*” (*aṣaḡhir al-ghilmān*), who must have been the *ghulāms* whom he had raised himself, rallied to his cause and made it possible for him to stay.

So strong was the tie of foster parenthood and patronage that even *ghulāms* in open rebellion were loath to press home an advantage over their former master. In 363, ‘Izz ad-Daulah was in southern Iraq nearly defenseless in the face of the rebellion of his army under Sabuktakīn. Every time a Turkish soldier of the rebellious army would approach him in the thicket where he and a few followers were making a last stand, ‘Izz ad-Daulah would remind the soldier of the “benefit” (*ni‘mah*) he had received, and of God who, presumably, frowned on such ingratitude, and that the soldier was the “protégé” (*ṣanī‘ah*) of himself and of his father; affected by his speech, the soldier would leave him.⁵¹

Iṣṭinā‘, or continued patronage, covered a wide variety of relations; and the relation of the freed *ghulam* to his master was only one form of *iṣṭinā‘*. Ibn Khaldūn, the great Arab social thinker of the fourteenth century, describes the similarity of all *iṣṭinā‘* in his *Muqaddimah*: “When people of group feeling (*‘asabiyah*) take as followers (*iṣṭan‘a*) people of another descent; or when they take slaves and clients (*mawālī*) into servitude and enter into close contact with them, as we have said, the clients and followers (*muṣṭana‘ūn*) share in the group feeling of their masters and take it on as if it were their own

group feeling." Sustained patronage was, therefore, an important means of creating new ties on all levels of life; and, undoubtedly, if we had more information on the lowest levels of life, we would see it at work in the relations of landlords to peasants and of grocers to sweepers.

Its importance to the cohesion and structure of the bureaucracy is, however, very well attested in our sources. The Christian clerk 'Īsā b. al-Ḥasan b. Abrūnā, who was private secretary to the Buyid vizier al-Muhallabī, was beaten after the vizier's death when he refused to reveal his patron's hidden wealth. His torturers then threatened him with death, and he said, "God be praised. Shall I be Ibn Abrūnā, the doctor and phlebotomist plying his trade on the street for a [measly fee] of one and a half *dāniqs*, whom the vizier Abū Muḥammad took and patronized (*iṣṭana'ni*), and made his private secretary, and who has become known as one in his service—and [yet] inform people of a treasure he has stored up for his son? By God, I would indeed not do so even if I were to perish." Ibn Faṣānjas and al-'Abbās b. al-Ḥasan ash-Shīrāzī, the officials who had succeeded al-Muhallabī, thought so well of him for his loyalty to a deceased patron, that they freed him; and Ibn Abrūnā advanced in their service.⁵²

Most professional government clerks, especially those who mastered the official styles of handwriting and composition, started as apprentice clerks at a comparatively young age, and were paid their salaries by the head of the department or section, who was apparently free to choose whichever young men he wanted as copyists and trainees. These heads of department or section were, therefore, in later life acknowledged by these trainees to be their original patrons, and this tie and the obligations it carried are frequently mentioned. Ibn al-Furāt, for example, rose to be the most powerful vizier of the late 'Abbāsīd period, the model of the civilian minister who totally dominated the government. Yet he never forgot that Ibn Bisṭām had been his "chief" (*ra'īs*) at some early state

in his career, and Ibn al-Furāt always acted toward him with great deference; for, he said, "one's obligation to his superior is not forgotten, and one's debt to him is not discharged." The histories sometimes note the calculated rudeness necessary to overlook such ties of patronage among bureaucrats. When in 333 the vizier Ibn Shīrẓād began to fine prominent men arbitrarily in a desperate attempt to keep the government solvent, he included on the list of victims 'Alī b. 'Īsā, who "had fostered" (*iṣṭāna'a*) Ibn Shīrẓād's career. 'Alī b. 'Īsā came to visit him; Ibn Shīrẓād, covered with embarrassment, refused to see him.⁵³

A corollary of the important role of *iṣṭinā'* among the clerks was that a man who failed to "foster" protégés thereby failed to create the supporters (or even factions) necessary to monitor and manipulate the bureaucracy effectively when he achieved a position of authority. A man who did not give sustained patronage had, in fact, less chance of ending his career of governmental service alive. In 233/847, one of the former attendants of the ex-vizier Ibn az-Zayyāt said to his former master, as he was being tortured to death, "it was with a view to this or something like it that we used to urge you to act with kindness, to lay people under obligation by showing generosity (*imtinān*), and by doing favors (*ṣanā'i'*) while powerful so that you might reap the benefit when in need."⁵⁴

In the Buyid period, sustained patronage or *iṣṭinā'* in the full sense seems to have been extended only by clerks to clerks and by soldiers to soldiers. The caliph was both a civilian and a soldier, and could claim that his civilian protégés were his "men," as were his *ghulāms*; but even in the 'Abbāsīd period, this claim is seldom heard. In the post-'Abbāsīd period, when the king was clearly a soldier, insofar as *iṣṭinā'* could cross the lines between the civil and military branches of the government, clerks do not seem to have become the protégés of rulers. In fact, had the ruler fostered the career of protégé clerks in the same way as the head of a department fostered the

career of his apprentice clerk, he would have felt embarrassed to disgrace his ministers—an embarrassment no effective ruler would want. The clerks owed their resilience and survival to this distinction. The clerks could not throw their influence around as easily as the officers and generals who were so closely identified with their patron, the king. Yet the clerks, by not becoming “the king’s men,” were better able than the soldiers both to survive changes of dynasty and to enter the service of new masters.

There are some cases of *iştinā'* patronage between adult men who were roughly equal in station or influence. Ibn Abi 's-Sāj, for example, fostered the Kurdish leader Daisam, who afterwards became ruler of Azerbaijan. The most elaborate example of a formal cultivation of *iştinā'* between grown men appears in the relations of the Turkish *amīr al-umarā'* Bajkam and the caliph ar-Rāḍī. The caliph disliked Ibn Rā'iq, his first mayor of the palace, and secretly encouraged Bajkam to come to Baghdad and replace him as *amīr al-umarā'*. The caliph sent Bajkam his testament (*waṣīyah*) that he would be constantly faithful to Bajkam if Bajkam took over his affairs, while telling Bajkam that “it is incumbent on you to be faithful to the one who has fostered you (*iştana'aka*) and been kind to you.” Bajkam agreed to come, and accepted his role as the (pseudo) protégé of the caliph, even though the caliph was now powerless, and could give Bajkam nothing except honors. The caliph was grateful; he told his intimates that whereas Ibn Rā'iq would say, “I created you (*šana'tuka*),” or “I put you on the throne,” . . . on the contrary [in Bajkam’s case] we took the step of making him a protégé (*iştinā'*). If one of his subordinates acted wrongfully, we [said the caliph] found that [Bajkam] would be content with execution and the most severe punishments [for the wrongdoer]. . . . So I am pleased with him. . . . [Still, the caliph concluded,] it would be better if I had all the power, as those before me used to have; but destiny has not granted this to me.” In a sense, these

counterfeit forms of *iṣṭinā'* pay tribute to the basic form of *iṣṭinā'* that exists between superior and inferior. In many situations, when men wanted to portray their sustained affection for one another as something more than the result of an oath, they imitated a style of patronage whose effectiveness was to be seen all around them in society.⁵⁵

The benefits of *iṣṭinā'* for a protégé encouraged wide-scale imitation of the vocabulary of *iṣṭinā'* by men who hoped by this means to curry favor with others. The vocabulary was initiated not only by men like Bajkam and the caliph, who wanted to give an honorable and recognizable name to their mutual respect, but also by men who had very casual and temporary ties. Bajkam himself, before he took Baghdad and found a patron worthy of his continued display of feigned humility, had tried to deceive a high secretary of Ibn Rā'iq and to win his confidence by saying, "I am your *ṣanī'ah* and the *ṣanī'ah* of [Ibn Rā'iq] and the seedling [planted] by the two of you."

Iṣṭinā' even became a common word for favor, including the favor shown by a king to a courtier. After 'Aḍud ad-Daulah arrested the rich and powerful Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-'Alawī in 369, he "showed favor" (*iṣṭana'a*) to his brother, who was doubtless supposed to give the king advice and support in the same way as Muḥammad had done. In 322, when the head of the Baghdad police found it impossible to control the famous robber chieftain Ibn Ḥamdī, the police tried to come to some agreement with him by showing him favor (*iṣṭinā'*); fostering a criminal's career was a long way from the tie of master and apprentice clerk.

The most degenerate word of this family was *muṣāna'ah*, a relative of the words *iṣṭinā'* and *ṣanī'ah*. It meant, in its simplest sense, "acting with favor toward a particular person," but was also a common word for bribe. These uses do not imply that the tie of the semiformal *iṣṭinā'* was weak or weakening; by their flattery, they show its importance.⁵⁶

The Loyalty of Men Who Rose Together

Akin to the sustained patronage of *iştinā'*, and derived in like manner from the ethic of *ni'mah*, was the loyalty to those who shared one's rise. Like *iştinā'*, this loyalty was often (though not exclusively) a tie between superior and inferior; and like *iştinā'*, it was an acquired tie that was often explained as approximating the inborn ties of common ancestry. Like *iştinā'*, however, it was strongly influenced by the belief in *daulah*, the "turn of good fortune" that was given by God to an individual, to a family, and even to a people.

This loyalty to those who shared one's rise is nowhere seen more vividly than in the ties between the rough soldiers who founded new states and their secretaries. 'Alī b. Būyah 'Imād ad-Daulah felt that he received the blessing of fortune (*tabarraka*) through his first secretary, Abū Sa'd Isrā'il, and greatly favored him even after he founded a kingdom and had taken more technically competent men into royal service. When one of these more competent secretaries persistently attacked Abū Sa'd, the king said to him, "You so-and-so, this man was my companion when I was of humble station. Now I have achieved the position you see, and I cannot tell whether it is my good fortune (*daulatī*) or his that has brought me here. His position cannot be shaken; so beware of applying to me again on this matter." Similarly, when a high official urged Ibn Rā'iq to dismiss his chief secretary in 325, he replied, "I have no intention of dismissing al-Ḥusain b. 'Alī [an-Naubakhtī], whose advice to me has been sincere, and through whom I have the blessing of good fortune (*tabarrukī bihī*)." When an-Naubakhtī was ill and Ibn Rā'iq was tricked into believing that he would die, the emir appointed another official in his place. Then, realizing he had been deceived, Ibn Rā'iq considered reappointing an-Naubakhtī because of "his blessing for my turn of good fortune" (*barakatuhū 'alā daulatī*).⁵⁷

The ties of men who shared their rise probably existed on

many levels of life; and doubtless these ties reinforced the ties of men who, for example, left their village and went to Shiraz or Rayy, where at first their only friends were men from the same village. Ties of shared rise may have even helped to cement together the factions of clerks (or even the mixed civilian-military factions) in government that had been assembled in the first place for very different reasons. Once such a faction achieved a turn of good fortune, it had a metaphysical as well as strategic reason to hope that, if its composition remained stable, it might achieve good fortune again. But even shared experience of growing up, of having "seen life through together," which creates bonds in any culture, was said to create an explicit tie between two men. When a secretary under the Buyid vizier al-Muhallabī suddenly and tragically died, the vizier said he would attach the orphan son of the dead secretary to his own son of the same age; that way, he explained, "they will learn together and grow together, and [the orphaned child] will have a claim (*ḥaqq*) on him."⁵⁸

The Character of Acquired Loyalties

All the ties described in this chapter were openly discussed and frequently invoked when men hoped to make effective demands on others. All of these ties were openly engaged, often with a ceremonial or semiformal undertaking between the two parties who claimed to accept these ties. Only the tie of clientship, which in this period meant the tie of the freed slave to his former master, could in turn be passed on legally to one's children. There are a few instances in which a former slave, or a protégé (*muṣṭana'*), actually felt some obligation to the children of his patron. For example, the vizier Ibn al-Furāt agreed that al-Muqtadir would be an acceptable choice as the successor of the caliph al-Muktafi, because al-Muqtadir was the son of an earlier caliph, al-Mu'taḍid, and "most of those we see around are protégés (*ṣanā'i'*) of al-Mu'taḍid." But it is

doubtful that this sense of obligation would have been felt for the grandchildren of any patron. In most cases acquired ties died with the men who acquired them.⁵⁹

All these ties are alike in that they are individual ties (again, with the possible exception of the freed slave who had some sort of attachment to the family of his former master). Men fostered the career of chosen individuals, not of predetermined groups. Behind all these acquired ties we see the individualistic presupposition that a man can accept or offer an obligation only on his own behalf, and not on behalf of a group. Spokesmen existed, of course; but, as we shall see in the next chapter, they were obliged to get the personal agreement of those for whom they spoke. As the Koran repeatedly says, "no man bears the burden of another."

Yet these ties also work within certain presuppositions about the categories and capacities of men. None of the ties we have discussed is in itself based on a tie of category: it is not stated that, for example, all men born in Isfahan owe obedience to the family of a certain lord because of oaths or any sort of contract engaged upon by their ancestors. Nevertheless, the presumptions of the likely capacities of different categories of men were always present; these acquired ties were not made at random, but they were repeatedly engaged upon by similar groups of men, generation after generation. It is to these less personal, less formal and usually inherited ties of category that we turn in the next chapter.

*Justice, Kingship, and
the Shape of Society*

A widespread modern tradition assumes that a yearning for independence lies within the heart of every man, and that this yearning is either rightfully restrained by a duty to the commonweal, or wrongfully restrained by oppression. Men of the Buyid period assumed that a yearning for independence threatened the rights of every man and, if not held back by authority, would encourage men to oppress each other. The difference between these two traditions reflects their different understanding of the threat of oppression that would face society if the sense of obligation between men broke down. Men of the Buyid period believed that a general sense of mutual obligation would be maintained if loyalties to the multiple categories to which they belonged were maintained. If, however, loyalty to one category overwhelmed their other feelings of obligation, then the interest which created that loyalty would feed itself at the expense of the rest of society, which would be oppressed. Only a loyalty not obligated to any of these categories would be free from identification with these categories, and would, therefore, be likely to maintain impartiality in dealing with these categories. This role of arbiter, distant from the society for which it arbitrated, known to live largely for its own interest and not for any particular interest in society, was the role of the king. The king who fulfilled this role and saw that each interest got its due, but no more than its due, was "just."

This conception of kingship and justice explains why, in many situations in which modern historians might expect

Near Eastern communities of this period to yearn to be free, they instead yearned to be ruled. When Alftakīn was defeated by 'Aḍud ad-Daulah, he proceeded to Damascus, where the Fāṭimid governor had just been driven out. The *aḥdāth* had gained control of the city, and "the *a'yān* could exercise no authority in relation to them, nor could government command their obedience." When, therefore, Alftakīn drew near the city, the nobles (*ashrāf*) and elders (*shuyūkh*) went to him and asked him to stay with them, rule their city, and "relieve them from the harm done by the *aḥdāth*." Alftakīn "took their oath to obey and help him; and he swore to protect them from being harmed either by himself or by any other." He uprooted "the destructive elements" and drove off the bedouins; and "all the people were in awe of his authority (*hābahū*)" and "gladly obeyed him."¹

In this period, few communities had the opportunities of Damascus, which lay in a no man's land between kingdoms and had an unusually aggressive group of *aḥdāth*, to seek independence. By adopting Alftakīn, the people of Damascus did not gain any obvious advantage against their outside attackers, since Alftakīn was not accompanied by a sizable troop of soldiers, and even acknowledged that he was dependent on the "lives and fortunes" of the Damascenes. By adopting Alftakīn, therefore, they were not exculpating themselves in the eyes of their attackers for their opposition to conquest, nor were they seeking an army of defenders. Instead, they were putting at the head of their society a stranger without whom their society could not function.

Not many communities ruled by the Buyids had similar opportunities to choose between rule generated from within their communities, and an outsider who would be chosen or accepted as king. When they did face such choices, they followed the example of the Damascenes. In 381, for example, letters came to Baghdad from the people of ar-Raḥbah and ar-Raqqah requesting that the Buyid government send some-

one to whom the inhabitants could deliver their territories in northern Iraq, which—owing to the confusion of changing regimes in that region—were temporarily without government. It was, in fact, automatically assumed that a town did not have a system of rule that could fill the vacuum left by a departing ruler. If, therefore, a town remained without an outside ruler even for a short period, it was the subject of surprised comment.

When the forces of Mardāwīj evacuated Isfahan in exchange for recognition of the Ziyārīds by the caliph, Miskawaih notes, the town remained for seventeen days “rulerless, deprived of an administrator (*shāghirah khālīyah min mudabbir*)” until the appointee of the caliph arrived. The term *shāghir*, used in this last phrase by Miskawaih, is a technical term for just such an empty, defenseless town. While all the dictionaries emphasize that such a town was exposed to outside attack, being “destitute of anyone to protect it,” the definition of *arḍ shāghirah*, “an empty land” by Fīrūzābādī (d. A.H. 816) shows that such a town was “exposed” partly because it lacked administration to pull it together from within. “An exposed land,” he writes in his *Qāmūs*, is “a land having no one remaining in it to defend it and to manage its affairs with prudence, precaution, or sound judgment.”²

The role of the king in preventing partisan interests from solidifying or congealing to the detriment and oppression of others is explained indirectly by Miskawaih in his description of the results of the vizier Ibn Baqīyah’s injustice (*ẓulm*) and maladministration, and of the neglect of all government business by his employer, ‘Izz ad-Daulah. Things reached such a point, he writes, that “respect for authority (*haibah*) was lost, and the ‘āmmah cast off restraint and attacked each other. Various undisciplined passions (*ahwā’*) and hostile designs came into the open, and murder became common. . . . Supplies of wealth were cut off and the distant provinces were ruined along with the capital. In every village there appeared a *ra’īs*

from the place, who took control over it, and they quarreled with each other. The ruler (*sulṭān*) came away empty-handed, the *ra'iyah* were ruined, dwellings became desolate, food supplies failed, and the army fell into mutinous disorder." *Haibah*, the "awe of authority" which 'Izz ad-Daulah failed to inspire, was—it should be remembered—precisely what Alftakīn did inspire in the Damascenes.³

The king's justice, therefore, consisted in keeping the overlapping and various interest groups in society from congealing as separate and exclusive units. Since society accepted a system of relational hierarchy that calibrated rank differently according to the group with which one was being considered; it was difficult for interest groups based on rank to congeal along lines of *ṭabaqah*. An important part of the king's role, therefore, was to keep people in their place, as 'Aḍud ad-Daulah explicitly said. The king thereby preserved a system that had as many ranks as it had people, and as many ranking systems as it had groups.

The king, however, did not keep them in their places by virtue of his position at the top of the social hierarchy. Rather, he did so as an outsider, the man who was above categories and their associated hierarchies. Because the army was the only category in which the king participated (and he did so at several removes, since his title was based only in part on his military leadership), the army had to consist of men who were, like the king, detached from special interests and not identified with the categories present in the population. Armies recruited from the settled population of the Near East of this period are rare, and of very minor importance. With outsiders at his command, the king had the coercive instrument that allowed him to be the just arbiter that society wanted him to be. The king might not, in fact, turn out to be just in his use of coercive power. But most men of the Buyid period would have agreed with Macaulay that if he were unjust, "so strong is the interest of a ruler to protect his subjects against

all depredations and outrages except his own, so clear and simple are the means by which this end is to be effected, that men are probably better off under the worst governments in the world than they would be in a state of anarchy."⁴

The categories of Buyid society, as we have described them, were such that they were not likely to produce even "the worst government"; left to themselves, they would produce anarchy. Only an outsider, separating himself from the interests of society, could be expected to find it self-evidently in his own interest not to favor some party so strongly that it would be allowed to destroy or permanently override other parties. As long as the interests of his subjects were not convergent, but overlapped, he had in these competing interests a powerful means to manipulate his subjects and to prevent the anarchy which would leave his kingdom too barren to be worth plundering.

The earlier definitions of *ẓulm*, a term which modern scholars usually translate as oppression, also show that men in the Buyid period did not believe themselves to be faced with a choice between "freedom" and "oppression." *Zulm*, according to most of the early Arabic dictionaries, means "putting a thing in a place not its own"; hence, "acting in whatsoever way one pleases in the disposing of the property of another"; and also, "transgressing the proper limit." The opposite of *ẓulm* was, therefore, putting and keeping things in their proper place, preventing men from impinging on each other, and, especially, on each other's property. The two most common words for justice, *'adl* and *inṣāf*, both etymologically and in actual use, have the sense of "balancing," so that no excess or falling short destroys equilibrium. The government in the Buyid period was often an "oppressor" in the sense that it transgressed the proper limits, took the property of its subjects, and harmed them. But only the government was in a position to maintain an equilibrium that existing categories, if set free to drift, would be likely to destroy. Better, men felt,

to endure the limited oppression of the king (for which they felt no moral responsibility) as long as the king's presence restrained men from oppressing each other without limit.⁵

In the 'Abbāsīd period, government had hoped to pose as something more than a bitter necessity. The 'Abbāsīds had come to power in the middle of the second/eighth century as the leaders of an eschatological movement. Their party or *shī'ah* was an expression of *al-firqah an-nājiyah*, "the group of the saved," which according to common belief would rally to true Islamic rule at the end of time. This role also opened to their subjects the possibility of becoming closely identified with the government by joining "the group of the saved." Soon, however, it was apparent that the 'Abbāsīds were not figures of messianic purity, and that many of their subjects had never been remotely willing to accept the 'Abbāsīds as such. The 'Abbāsīds no longer claimed that they could save their subjects in a direct way, but they did claim a large role in guiding Islamic society to save itself. They attempted by patronage and by decree to guide the development of Islamic law and theology; and they attempted to make obedience to the 'Abbāsīds an integral part of Islamic belief.

Even if their subjects did not accept this last claim, in the first century of 'Abbāsīd rule the community of duties and obligations shared by Muslims coincided with the community of political power. The caliphate, which encouraged the increasing definition of these rights and obligations, could claim an established place in the fabric that they created. This close but temporary fit, a near identity between moral and political community, was helped by the comparative smallness of the Islamic community at the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd period. Muslims were a minority and, by virtue of their greater association with the caliphate, a sort of ruling class. Since ties were largely between individuals and not between strongly defined groups, this ruling class was still small enough and had enough common interest of privilege to maintain its unity in association with the state.

The centrifugal forces that are present in any empire, the stubborn and unpleasant realities of 'Abbāsīd rule, and the expansion of the Muslim community then made it apparent that the identity of moral and political community would not continue. Through conversion and assimilation, the Muslim community had ceased to be a ruling class. Muslims felt pulled by the many horizontal and vertical ties of identity that have been described in previous chapters. The 'Abbāsīd caliph, moreover, seemed to be maintaining power in the interest of the 'Abbāsīd caliph and of no one else. As 'Abbāsīd rule foundered and collapsed, one central strand, which claimed to be the controlling strand, was removed from the fabric of the moral community of duties and obligations that united Muslims. Part of the task of post-'Abbāsīd society was the redefinition of the Islamic moral community in a way that would account for the new circumstances. New governments, after all, could not claim validation as an integral part of this moral community, and did not, in their geographical extent, coincide with this community.

The Buyid government, which was the heir to 'Abbāsīd rule at its very center, adopted a decentralized system of rule, and this decentralization influenced the manner in which the community of moral obligation and the government redefined their relations. Decentralization was to a certain extent imposed on the Buyids by their military and financial weakness, which in turn encouraged the rapid evolution among the Buyids of administrative practices that would later be imitated in other parts of the Islamic world. The government abdicated a large proportion of its financial rights by assigning them to its servants as *iqṭā'āt* (government revenue rights, the collection and retention of which were assigned to people designated by the government). Tribes were increasingly allowed to control autonomous areas, and were paid *khifārah* ("protection money"), supposedly in exchange for their obedience, but often, in practice, to restrain them from despoiling the settled subjects of the government. An indivis-

ible office of government, the caliphate, was maintained to validate the actual government by kings who considered their kingdoms and titles infinitely divisible. The southern Iraqi marsh and the tribal regions became areas of refuge, and the caliph's precincts became sanctuary from arrest by the king.

Administration became less hierarchical, and redundancies of function appeared at all levels of administration, from dual vizierates to the administration of local mints. In a decentralized government, it was desirable to have alternate wires to pull in case any wire (as so easily and frequently happened) disappeared. The middle and lower posts in the administration had taken advantage of the decentralized style of Buyid administration to create special relations with the tribes, the *iqṭā'*-holders, local leaders, and the like. These special ties made the hierarchical principle in government even weaker.

As the task of each administrative post became less defined and the chain of command more diffuse, the world of administrative status became more decentralized. Titles like *ra'īs* and vizier were the permanent possessions of men who had attained these distinctions, and the status increasingly resided in the man, and could not be withdrawn by the government. Simultaneously, throughout society there was an increasing tendency to consider ability to be hereditary, and to assign posts on this basis. Status, therefore, was less and less in the government's gift, and insofar as men acquired status, it was less and less in the power of the government to take away such acquired status.

If the administration had become less centralized and less hierarchical, central government did not wither into a mere ornament at the top of society, or a remote tyranny imposed on society against its will. Men not only went out to seek a king when they were "exposed" by the absence of a king, but kings could coerce their subjects and, especially, their armies, by threatening to leave them. In the late Buyid period, the Turkish garrison in Baghdad wanted the weak Buyid king Jalāl ad-Daulah to come to Baghdad because the city and its

region were being destroyed by the "ambitions" of the *'ām-mah* and the Kurds and the Arabs, "and they did not have a government to bring agreement among them (*sulṭān yajma'ū kalimatahum*)." Jalāl ad-Daulah, however, was finally so disheartened by his inability to control the Turks, or even to feed his own horses, that in 422 he sent away all his attendants and locked the gates of his palace. As a result, a disorder (*fitnah*) broke out in which the army fought the *'ayyārūn*. Abū Kālījār, a powerful relative of Jalāl ad-Daulah, did not hurry to Baghdad to replace him, even though the two Buyids were opponents; for, as he plainly said, he believed that the ever-growing weakness of the Turks would increase their need for him. The Turks did, eventually, come to support Jalāl ad-Daulah; they had no answer to his argument that, left without a king, they could not produce their own king, or maintain balance in society.⁶

The king maintained the balance, kept loyalties overlapping, and prevented interests from congealing, partly by the wide range of personal loyalties he acquired in the manner described in Chapter II. The principal day-to-day concern of the king, however, was his military power, which gave him coercive power over his subjects. It is surprising how seldom this coercive power was actually used; but its very presence, and the constant threat to use it, was essential to the maintenance of the generally accepted social order.

The ties between central and local governments were to some extent determined by the way in which they presented themselves (and the way in which they were perceived)—both as kingly patron and as punitive outsider. Each of these two faces of central government was, in fact, adapted to the other, and was in a way dependent on the other to have its appropriate effect. Local communities had learned how to become fastened and unfastened to different rulers with a speed suited to their uncertain situations. Nevertheless, they and the rulers, understood the dependency between local government and central rule, and that the "whole" composed of local and

central government was, if not greater, at least different from the sum of its parts. The threat of coercive power helped to create the shape of the whole even when coercive power was not used. For many groups, the *ra'īs*, as we have seen, was not a government appointee; but the need for *ru'asā'*—and, more generally, the need for the self-consciously defined category of *a'yān*—was conditioned by the threat of coercion. On the one hand, men were encouraged to arbitrate quarrels without resort to royal judgment, and to accept the results of such arbitration, because they wanted to bring in the coercive arbitration of the government only as a last resort. On the other hand, both the central government and the local community recognized the advantage of settling quarrels through the ties of personal patronage that the *a'yān* created by cultivating both those below themselves, in the local community, and those above themselves, in the royal court. The association of the ruler with the coercive power of an alien army, was—as we have seen—stronger in the Buyid period than in the 'Ab-bāsīd period, so that clerks, for example, were less identified with the regime and to that extent pushed down into society as another category.

This salutary “awe” or “dread,” which surrounded kingly authority by virtue of its threat of coercion, was often called *haibah*. It was the *haibah* of the Ḥasanwaihīd king, Badr, which, as we have seen, prevented the factions from “overstepping the bounds” (*tajāwuz al-ḥadd*) in his lifetime. In 306, when the caliph hesitated to accept Ḥāmid b. al-'Abbās as vizier, since he had little training in the technical skills of the office, the caliph was persuaded to accept Ḥāmid because of, among other things, “the awe (*haibah*) of Ḥāmid felt by the financial governors.” In contrast, in 416, when the *'ayyārīn* went to horrible excesses in their abuse of Baghdādīs, and the government could not restrain them, we are told that the *haibah* of the government was destroyed.⁷

The presence of kings, however necessary, had to be explained in terms of the general values of Islamic society in the

Buyid period. Kingship, after all, had been a morally repugnant feature of the old order that Islam had replaced. Islam, in the view of the overwhelming majority of its adherents, was meant not to create kingdoms but to bring into existence a divinely appointed polity, based on a divine law, which would last until the Day of Judgment. The word for king in Arabic, *mālik*, was associated with the verb *malaka*, "to possess," and any man who pretended to "possess" the world or a portion of it was plainly a usurper. God alone, as the Koran repeatedly says, is "the King, the Truth" and has *mulk*, "possession of [or sovereignty over] the Heavens and the earth," just as he is "Possessor (*mālik*) of the Day of Judgment." God loans this sovereignty to men, yet the title of permanent possession remains with God; as the Koran says, "Say, oh God, Possessor of sovereignty (*mālik al-mulk*), you give sovereignty to whomever you choose and take it from whomever you choose" (3:26). True caliphs were not kings but stewards, who administered their trust in full knowledge that they possessed nothing; for the world, and the judgment of their conduct in it, belonged exclusively to God.

Caliphs, of course, had been in practice indistinguishable from kings; but their claims, which were based on this argument against monarchy, could not be transferred to the Buyids and their contemporaries. The presence of these new rulers seems, from the start, to have been explained in terms of *daulah*, the divinely granted turn in power, an idea that fitted comfortably with the Koranic verse quoted above. The 'Abbāsids had claimed that their *daulah* was synonymous with the *daulah* of Islam and that authority would remain with them until the second coming.

Events had proved this claim false and had opened the way for a more flexible interpretation of *daulah*; and, from the very beginning, men seem to have explained the rule of the Buyids as a new *daulah*. Officially, the Buyids still pretended to be living in the *daulah* of the 'Abbāsids, and therefore accepted titles like Mu'izz ad-Daulah, "Strengtheners of the Abbasid *daulah*,"

and 'Imād ad-Daulah, "Prop of the Abbasid *daulah*." Unofficially, however, men recognized that the turn of the Abbasid *daulah* as a locus of independent authority had ended. Al-Muhallabī, the highly educated vizier of the early Buyids of Iraq, said, "I will be the first memorable man in the *daulah* of the Dailamis since I escaped becoming the last memorable man in the *daulah* of the 'Abbāsids." However closely the caliphate was associated with the central symbols of Islam, circumstances had proved that actual rule would be less closely associated with them. Al-Muqtadir, one of the last 'Abbāsīd caliphs to really rule as well as reign, used the Prophet's staff and cloak, and every potent symbol at his disposal in his test of power with his general, Mu'nis. When al-Muqtadir's head was brought to Mu'nis, one of the clerks present quoted a poem that said, "When fate fixes its talons, all amulets are thrown away as useless."⁸

A century later it was widely accepted that there would be continual new grants of sovereignty, and that—as became the common metaphor—the shirt of kingship would be forcibly removed from one man or dynasty and given to another in accord with some deeper divine wisdom. Al-Muqtadir had said, "I will do as [the third caliph] 'Uthmān b. 'Affān did; I will not hand over a right that God has entrusted to me nor will I divest myself of a shirt (*qamiṣ*) in which God has clothed me." But a century later, al-Baihaqī, the vizier of Mas'ūd of Ghaznah (d. 432/1040) explains the sovereignty of his Ghaznavid masters by saying, "If any defamer or jealous person says that this great house has come from humble or unknown origin, the answer is that God, since the creation of Adam, has decreed that kingship be transferred from one religious polity (*ummat*) to another and from one group to another. The greatest testimony to what I am saying is the words of the Creator: 'Say, O God, possessor of sovereignty, you give sovereignty to whomever you choose and take it from whomever you choose (3:26).' So it should be realized that God's removal of the shirt of kingship from one group and

his placing it on another group is in that sense divine wisdom and for the commonweal of mankind, [wisdom] which surpasses human understanding. . . . [God knows] that in such and such a spot a man will appear through whom men will obtain happiness and good fortune." When Mas'ūd wrote the Saljūq Ṭughril Beg a menacing letter shortly before suffering a crushing defeat at the hands of the Saljūqs, Ṭughril turned the argument against the Ghaznavids by the same verse (3:26) from the Koran.⁹

The new understanding of *daulah* not only explained the new monarchies, it also redistributed the moral responsibility associated with government. The Dailamīs had had a rich experience in obeying and betraying petty kings and counter-caliphs by the time they conquered western Iran and Iraq. The Buyids were Shī'īs, but kept their Shī'ism undefined and adaptable to the expediencies of their political lives. They did not claim, as the 'Abbāsids did, that they came to their subjects with some moral truth to teach; they did not pretend, as modern democratic leaders do, that they hoped to learn any moral truth that their constituents might want to teach. True, even in their heyday, the 'Abbāsids were regarded with indifference or even hostility by many of their subjects. But the 'Abbāsids argued that salvation could come through obedience to the truly Islamic society that they were trying to build. The Buyids, at most, were men given a *daulah* for reasons best known to God. The Buyids could pose only as protectors of the attempts that society made to save itself. The full titles of the later Buyids reflect this changed position of the ruler; after the standard title with *ad-daulah*, virtually all the later Buyids had titles that called them protectors of the *ummah*, the *millah* (Islamic community) and of *dīn*, religion itself. The government was the work of a small minority who had been granted a *daulah*. They had to be outsiders and had to be a minority in order to function. They therefore could not pose as an instrument of salvation for their subjects, and could not in this way invite their subjects to identify with

their rule. At most, they could claim to protect the community in which their subjects might realize their moral and religious values.

This redistribution of responsibility freed the population of certain moral responsibilities toward the state, and, similarly, freed the state of certain moral responsibilities toward its subjects. Ar-Rūdhrāwarī, commenting on uncanonical taxes imposed by 'Aḍud ad-Daulah, quotes a well-known *ḥadīth* that "whoever institutes a good practice (*sunnah*) shall have the reward thereof and of all who act thereby unto the day of resurrection; and whoever institutes a bad practice shall have the guilt thereof and the guilt of all who act according to it thereafter unto the day of resurrection." Correspondingly, ar-Rūdhrāwarī is shocked that 'Aḍud ad-Daulah should have disgraced Ibrāhīm aṣ-Ṣābī, the head of 'Izz ad-Daulah's chancery, for having written a letter on behalf of 'Izz ad-Daulah with phrases offensive to 'Aḍud ad-Daulah. "Suppose," says ar-Rūdhrāwarī, "'Aḍud ad-Daulah had ordered him to do what Bakhtiyar ['Izz ad-Daulah] had ordered; when under his power, would aṣ-Ṣābī had been able to resist?"

Most Buyid rulers were more understanding than 'Aḍud ad-Daulah. Jalāl ad-Daulah clearly wanted the title *malik al-mulūk*, "king of kings," even though Muḥammad in a widely accepted *ḥadīth* had called it "the worst of names in my sight." The caliph asked the jurists if such a title were permissible, and the only important jurist to dissent was al-Māwardī. The first time Jalāl ad-Daulah saw al-Māwardī after his dissent, he said, "everyone knows you are the greatest of the jurists (*fuqahā'*) in wealth and prestige (*jāh*) and in my favor. You have opposed the others in opposing what I desired; but you have done so only because of your lack of partiality and adherence to right."¹⁰

One corollary of the new understanding of *ad-daulah* and the lessened moral responsibility of society for government, and of government for society, was that men felt that the evil

consequences of their political ambitions that did not institute established practices fell only on themselves. For scrupulous men, this was an inducement to set political ambition aside. For less scrupulous men, it was an encouragement to take political initiatives. At the very end of the fourth century, an adventurer named Abū Rakhwah almost succeeded in overthrowing the Fāṭimids. When he was finally captured, he wrote to the Fāṭimid caliph, "I have done wrong, but I have thereby oppressed no one except myself and my misconduct has brought me perdition." Accordingly, men often refused to carry out the orders of a dead king (whose authority was, in any case, highly personal), since the moral responsibility could no longer be placed on the king. The governor of Sīrāf, for example, who was ordered by Sharaf ad-Daulah to blind the imprisoned Buyid pretender, Ṣamṣām ad-Daulah, heard that Sharaf ad-Daulah had died. He therefore refused to carry out the operation, since "the authority for this has ceased with the death of Sharaf ad-Daulah."¹¹

The lessened moral responsibility between king and subjects also freed the king to practice without embarrassment a kind of law that society hoped to have him practice; and that was, in fact, essential to his position as an arbiter above category. The fourth-century poet al-Babbaghā said in a poem to the Ḥamdānid Saif ad-Daulah, "He whom justice has not improved, because of his extreme unruliness, when he does wrong, oppression (*ẓulm*) will improve." Rough justice had been practiced by caliphs as well as kings; but society felt less moral responsibility for kings, and only hoped for certain functional benefits from their presence. One of these benefits, as we have said, was to prevent any specific interest from monopolizing the attention of those who shared that interest. The king, therefore, was in a sense encouraged to disregard "right" as defined by the divine law, and to apply probabilistic and commonweal solutions. Typically, when Shī'īs and Sunnīs fought in Baghdad, the king ordered one member of

each faction to be drowned in the Tigris. Such exemplary punishment was essential to the *haibah* of the king and to the enforcement of compromise.¹²

By disengaging itself from government and the moral burdens of government, and at the same time giving enormous power to governments, Islamic society of the Buyid period freed itself to maintain a community of duties and obligations in levels of life below the government. Ibn al-Athīr explains that even though Qābūs lost his kingdom in helping the Buyid king Fakhr ad-Daulah, Fakhr ad-Daulah on becoming king did not give Jurjān back to the homeless Qābūs because, as the proverb says, "kingship is bereft of ties (*al-mulk 'aqīm*)." Men expected kings to be above category and to put reasons of state ahead even of important acquired loyalties like *ni'mah*. Among themselves, however, the structure of obligation remained intact, and served functions that a decentralized government was not interested in or capable of serving. The government, by its remote threat and its ties of personal patronage, encouraged local communities to maintain the structure of obligation and of *riyāṣah* that we have examined.¹³

Yet even beyond the local community, an "international" community of credit and of law was maintained. A moral community of highly personal and yet endlessly overlapping loyalties had been evolved, which took over many of the functions of government. It was as members of this community that so many people clung to the fiction of a universal Islamic caliphate. In the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, this community had learned how to define its relations with actual governments so that it might withstand repeated changes of central government. This community understood its constraints and possibilities so well, in fact, that it has never entirely disappeared.

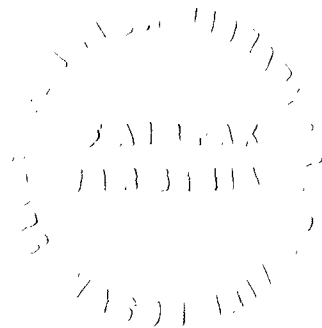
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*Loyalty and Leadership in an
Early Islamic Society*



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