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# Changing the Narrative through Mothers, Daughters, and Sons

*The House of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān between Regional Leadership and Claim to the Caliphate*

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## Abstract

This article offers a reassessment of the ties between the families of two half-brothers, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and ‘Abd al-Malik sons of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam. The first succeeded their father as caliph, while the second was governor of Egypt at the turn of the eighth century. The modern historiography has made much of ninth- and tenth-century narratives of opposition between the two. Those narratives are reassessed with a focus on how ties of kinship were used as a literary tool to build a distinctive memory of the Marwanid family. Even if moments of competition are recorded between the two, the families of those two men were instrumental to the success of the Marwanids as a caliphal family. The focus here is on marriage ties between their sons and daughters as well as on how the sons and their fathers participated in the same marriage patterns. The paper offers to shift our perspective by placing emphasis on family members that are usually not given proper attention: mothers, daughters, sisters and a wider pool of sons.

## Keywords

Marwanid – kinship – marriage – women – governorship – historiography

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## 1 Introduction

In 65/684–685, two Umayyad half-brothers are said to have been nominated as heir apparent (*walī al-‘ahd*) by their father Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam (r. 64–65/684–685), the first caliph of the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad clan.<sup>1</sup> When Marwān died in the same year, the eldest brother, ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705), succeeded his father and the second, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, was positioned as successor in the eventuality of his brother’s death. In the meantime, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had been appointed by his father as governor of Egypt (in office 65–86/685–705). In modern historiography, there are two common topics of study on the relationships between the two brothers. The first is the governorship of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in Egypt and how his rule over the province is sometimes understood to have been independent from his brother the caliph.<sup>2</sup> The second is, towards the end of his twenty yearlong caliphate, ‘Abd al-Malik’s attempted removal of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz from his position of heir apparent in favor of two of ‘Abd al-Malik’s sons, al-Walīd (r. 86–96/705–715) and Sulaymān (r. 96–99/715–717).<sup>3</sup> This struggle for succession would have been solved by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s timely death, only a few months before his brother’s. In this context, ties of kinship are presented as possible obstacles to the unity and stability of the Umayyad empire. The present research will offer a reassessment of those ties. It will become clear that focusing on the mothers and the daughters as much as on the sons of caliphs is essential for a proper reconstruction of alliances or oppositions. After an introduction on the political relationship

1 According to Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, this took place at the beginning of 65/August – September 684: *Ta’rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā’ al-‘Umarī (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1985), 257; Carl Wurtzel and Robert Hoyland, *Khalifa b. Khayyat’s History on the Umayyad Dynasty (660–750)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 119. On the nominations of the two brothers see: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Rusūl wa-l-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 12 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1970), 5:610; Chase F. Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 22–35; Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 118–119; Joshua Mabra, *Princely Authority in the Early Marwanid State: The Life of of ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Ibn Marwān* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), 10–11.

2 Championed by Mabra, *Princely Authority*. See also Weryho W. Barthold, “Caliph ‘Umar II and the Conflicting Reports on his Personality,” *Islamic Quarterly* 15 (1971): 69–95 (72); Sobhi Bouderbala, “Ḡund Miṣr: Étude de l’administration militaire dans l’Égypte des débuts de l’Islam 21/642–218/833” (PhD diss., Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2008), 136; Hugh Kennedy, “The Muslim Elite of Early Islamic Egypt,” in *Egypt and Empire: The Formation of Religious Identity after Rome*, ed. Elizabeth R. O’Connell (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 361–368 (365).

3 Petra M. Sijpesteijn, “An Early Umayyad Papyrus Invitation for the Ḥajj,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 73, no. 2 (2014): 179–190 (188–189). DOI: 10.1086/677240; Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 86–91.

between the two brothers, the article examines marriage ties between the two branches of the family and their place within wider Marwanid marriage strategies. The third part focuses on the role of the sons of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (al-Aṣḡbagh, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar) in the succession of ‘Abd al-Malik. In the last section, the position of al-Aṣḡbagh during the governorate of his father in Egypt is assessed. In this last case, studying ties of kinship shows how al-Aṣḡbagh is presented in the available sources as an extension of his father, while little can be said that is specific to him. Non-specialists of Islamic studies might find that the density of long names transliterated from Arabic makes for difficult reading. First-year undergraduate students have precisely the same complaint and, as I tell them, I cannot call them “Robert” and “Elizabeth.” As particularly relevant for the present topic, Islamicate names are most often composed of a given name and a patronymic separated by *bint* meaning “daughter of” or *ibn* meaning “son of”. This is repeated when more ancestors are recorded.<sup>4</sup> Familiarizing oneself with those names is one of the prerequisites for the discovery of fascinating field and a rich set of sources. Including all those women and men also allows us to write a proper history of the period, one that does not focus solely on a few charismatic men.

## 2 The Fathers: Provincial Autonomy and Cooperation in the Umayyad Empire

In a book published in 2017, Joshua Mabra made a convincing demonstration of the efforts ‘Abd al-‘Azīz deployed to build a local power base as governor of Egypt, notably through marriage ties, appointments in the provincial administration, and building projects.<sup>5</sup> On top of this, he argued that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz “ruled Egypt independently of his brother, the *amīr al-mu‘minīn* (commander of the faithful) in Syria,” because he prevented ‘Abd al-Malik from appointing a governor of Ifrīqiya in 76/695, rejected ‘Abd al-Malik’s Qur’an (*muṣḡhaf*), struck coins with his own name, did not send Egyptian taxes to Damascus, opposed the “language reform” of his brother, did not include the name of his brother in the papyrus protocols issued by the administration of Egypt, and kept numerous Christians in the provincial administration. Mabra concludes this overview by mentioning attempts at removing ‘Abd al-‘Azīz from the line of succession and the replacement of all of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s representatives in

4 On naming practices in the Islamic world, see Jacqueline Sublet, “La prosopographie arabe,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 5 (1970): 1236–1239. DOI: 10.3406/ahess.1970.422268.

5 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, chaps. 3, 6.

Egypt after his death.<sup>6</sup> I will not explore all of those points here, as I have done so elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Suffice to say that my understanding of the Umayyad empire is that it was successful when governors were largely autonomous, not independent, and when they built a local power base, similar to the one of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Governors could handle the fiscal and military administration of their province without approval or directions from the *amīr al-mu‘minīn*. Fiscal revenues were primarily spent in the provinces throughout the period, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s governorate was not singular in that respect.<sup>9</sup> Ties of loyalty were maintained through – among other things – mobility (governors visiting the caliph) and marriage ties, as will be evidenced in the following pages.

At the beginning of his caliphate, ‘Abd al-Malik actually competed with multiple brothers who held governorships throughout the empire. The establishment of Marwanid authority went hand in hand with the appointment of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam’s sons in the key provinces: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in Egypt, Bishr (d. 75/694) in Iraq, and Muḥammad (d. 101/719–720) in the “Umayyad North.”<sup>10</sup> The evolution of provincial coinage is an appropriate illustration of this competition between brothers.<sup>11</sup> As argued by Joshua Mabra, the development of

6 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, chap. 5.

7 Marie Legendre, “Lignées féminines et dynamiques Égypte-Syrie-Iraq au début de l’époque marwanide, Discussion critique autour de l’ouvrage de Joshua Mabra, *Princely authority in the early Marwānid state: The life of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān (d. 86/705)*, Piscataway, NJ, Gorgias Press,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 152 (2022), <https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/17544>. DOI: 10.4000/remmm.17544. On the so-called “language reform,” see Marie Legendre, “The Translation of the *Dīwān* and the Making of the Marwanid ‘Language Reform’: Secretarial Agency, Economic Incentives, and Regional Dynamics in the Umayyad State,” in *Navigating Language in the Early Islamic World, Multilingualism and Language Change in the First Centuries of Islam*, ed. Antoine Borrut, Manuela Ceballos, and Alison Vacca (Turnout: Brepols, in press).

8 Marie Legendre, “Aspects of Umayyad Administration,” in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham (London: Routledge, 2021), 133–157 (134–137). See also Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses, The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 40, which was the first work to demonstrate the importance of prosopography for the study of early Islam and that this contribution hopes to build on. However, she downplays the importance of kinship for understanding the Marwanid state and the appointment of governors in that period.

9 Chris Wickham, “Tributary Empires: Late Rome and the Arab Caliphate,” in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and C. A. Bayly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 205–213.

10 On Muḥammad and the Umayyad North see Alison Vacca, “The Umayyad North (or: How Umayyad was the Umayyad Caliphate?),” in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham (London: Routledge, 2021), 219–239.

11 As argued by Leone Pecorini Goodall, at the time Marwān appointed his two sons as heirs “recent caliphal history would not have left any contemporary observer to believe

the transitional and reformed coinage of ‘Abd al-Malik fits well in this context in which the caliph wanted to distinguish himself from his internal (brothers) and external (Byzantine) competitors. Mabra argues that the introduction of the “standing caliph” model in 74/693–694 on gold, silver, and bronze coins would have been in response to the “Orans” model of Bishr in Iraq that bore the governor’s name and, according to Luke Treadwell, those coins are representative of Bishr’s caliph ambitions.<sup>12</sup> However, if we agree that ‘Abd al-Malik had to compete with his brothers in a polycentric empire at the beginning of his caliphate, it is crucial to assess how long this competition would have lasted. His brother Bishr died in 75/694 so he did not remain a competitor for long.<sup>13</sup> His other brother, Muḥammad, was the son of an *umm walad* (a slave woman who gave a son to her master), meaning he was never a candidate for the caliphate. His main competitor in the long term was then ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, the second heir appointed by their father, as he remained governor of Egypt for more than a decade after Bishr’s death. After the reform of the coinage – meaning for the last eight years of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s governorship – Egypt received its yearly supply of epigraphic gold coins from Syria as there was no gold mint in the province until the beginning of the Abbasid period. In a world in which elites expected payments in gold and in which the whole fiscal system was based on the gold standard, the governor of Egypt could not have done without Syrian gold, and the province was thus not economically independent during

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the caliph would serve in that capacity for long”: “Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate: Succession Politics in the Marwanid and early Abbasid family (64–193/684–831)” (ongoing PhD diss., University of Edinburgh), chap. 2.

- 12 This coin-type is minted with a figure, called “orans,” of a man standing and lifting up his hands in front of him in a posture of prayer: Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 172–176. On this topic, see also Luke Treadwell, “The ‘Orans’ Drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān and the Figural Coinage of the Early Marwānid Period,” in *Bayt al-Maqdis*, ed. Jeremy Johns, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, 1999), 2:223–269. Bishr was not the only governor to place his name on his own coins, as ‘Abd al-‘Azīz did that in Greek and in an abbreviated form on the bronze coinage of Egypt, the so-called ABAZ type, Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 113–118. Muḥammad ibn Marwān also added his name to his coins: Lutz Ilisch, “Muhammad Drachms and their Relation to Umayyad Syria and Northern Mesopotamia,” *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, 193 (2003): 17–24. Even al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 95/714) did so when he became governor of Iraq after Bishr, see John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum*, 2 vols. (London: British Museum: 1941), 1:117–118. Eventually Mabra admits: “all images and all governor names would be struck from the coins, a process that began in 77/696 in Damascus, and spread to Iraq in 78/697–8.” *Princely Authority*, 115, n. 97.
- 13 Andrew Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads,” in *The Historian of Islam at Work: Essays in Honor of Hugh N. Kennedy*, ed. Maaïke van Berkel and Letizia Osti (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 33–34. Bishr was about 40 years old when he died.

the whole Umayyad period.<sup>14</sup> This means that if we assume that there was a confrontation of any kind between the Marwanid brothers, ‘Abd al-Malik clearly had the upper hand and he could have put ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in a difficult economic position.

The most visible moment of disagreement between the two brothers might then be when ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is said to have countered his brother’s appointment of a governor of Ifrīqiya in 76/695, though the available sources do not agree on this point. Khalifa ibn Khayyāt (d. 240/854) states that Ḥassān ibn al-Nu‘mān al-Ghassānī was appointed by ‘Abd al-Malik but that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz “did not let him take office” and sent out Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr al-Lakhmī in his stead. Ḥassān then returned to ‘Abd al-Malik who “ordered him to remain at home.”<sup>15</sup> Al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 284/897–898) does not mention any conflict between the brothers, he only points to a disagreement in the sources: that is, that in the year 77 AH, some say Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr al-Lakhmī was appointed by ‘Abd al-Malik while others say it was by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. He adds that previously ‘Abd al-Malik had appointed Ḥassān ibn al-Nu‘mān al-Ghassānī who served as governor until he died.<sup>16</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) makes no mention of this affair. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871) focuses more on clashes between Ḥassān and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz on one side and between Mūsā and ‘Abd al-Malik on the other than on the relation of the two brothers.<sup>17</sup> Al-Kindī (d. 350/969) does not mention ‘Abd al-Malik by name but writes that Ḥassān was sent from Syria to take charge of the Maghreb in 78/697–698 and that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz replaced him with Mūsā.<sup>18</sup> Other pre-modern authors stress the cooperation of the two brothers on Ifrīqiyān matters. For instance, Ibn Abī Dīnār al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) claimed that ‘Abd al-Malik requested that his brother sent one thousand Egyptians to Ḥassān ibn al-Nu‘mān to assist in the construction of the shipyard at Tunis.<sup>19</sup> In all, I concur with Hichem Djaït, who remains to this day one of only a few modern scholars to have worked on Umayyad North Africa, when he commented that ‘Abd al-Malik’s purported intervention on the appointment

14 This is also acknowledged by Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 112–113.

15 Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, 275–276, 300–301; Wurtzel and Hoyland, *Khalifa b. Khayyat’s History*, 139, 168.

16 Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, ed. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1883), 2:331; *The Works of Ibn Wāḍih al-Ya‘qūbī: An English Translation*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon, Chase F. Robinson, Everett K. Rowson, and Michael Fishbein, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3:981.

17 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-Akhhbāruhā*, ed. Charles Torrey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 203–204.

18 Al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa-Kitāb al-Quḍāt*, ed. Rhuvon Guest (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 52–53.

19 Ibn Abī Dīnār al-Qayrawānī, *al-Mu’nis fī Akhhbār Ifrīqiya wa-Tūnis*, ed. Muḥammad Shammām (Tunis: al-Maktaba al-‘Atīqa, 1967), 15; Bouderbala, “Ġund Miṣr,” 284.

of a North African governor was out of the ordinary as Ifrīqiyan territories were an extension of the province of Egypt. As such, he rejected the idea that the region was the theater of opposition between the Marwanid brothers.<sup>20</sup>

There are other notable references that suggest cooperation between the two brothers before and after the year 77 AH and the appointment of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr in North Africa. For instance, we read in al-Ṭabarī that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz travelled to Damascus – undoubtedly with a sizable army – to help his brother in crushing the uprising of ‘Amr ibn Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ al-Ashdaq in 69/688–689.<sup>21</sup> In the Egyptian papyri, there are a few hints of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s loyalty to the caliph. For instance, there is a labor contract for the vineyard of the caliph in the Fayyum dating to the governorate of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.<sup>22</sup> The caliph is not named in the document but, based on the date, it was ‘Abd al-Malik. As Mabra notes, this cannot be taken as indisputable evidence for caliphal control in Egypt, but it is necessary to emphasize that this is the earliest attestation of a caliphal estate (or estate named after the caliph) in the province. Only one other, dating to the time of al-Walīd or Sulaymān, is known for the Umayyad period.<sup>23</sup> In another document from Egypt, namely a tax-demand note for the sustenance of the caliph, Menas, pagarch of Heracleopolis (Ihnās), who is issuing the document, states that this tax for the benefit of ‘Abd al-Malik was ordered directly by the governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.<sup>24</sup>

Admittedly these are only a few documents and, overall, mentions of the *amīr al-mu‘minīn* are rare in Egyptian papyri, which is not surprising in an empire in which provinces were autonomous. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s governorship and his relationship with his brother, the caliph, do not appear strikingly different to previous or subsequent governors, nor to ‘Abd al-Malik’s relationship with his other brother and the governor of Iraq, Bishr ibn Marwān. The caliph retained economic control of Egypt especially after his coinage reform and moments of opposition or competition between ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd

20 Hichem Djaït, “La Wilāya d’Ifrīqiya au II<sup>e</sup>/VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Étude institutionnelle I,” *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967): 77–121 (82).

21 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 6:144–146. On this revolt and its problematic dating, see Abd al-Ameer Dixon, “The Umayyad Caliphate, 65–86/684–705, A Political Study” (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 1969), 224–230; Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680–692)* (Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1982), 166–169.

22 *CPR* VIII 82 = *SB* VI 9460 (Arsinoites, 699 or 700).

23 *PLond.* IV 1434, 33–34 (Aphrodito, 714–716) refers to the orchard of the caliph (πωμαρίου τοῦ Ἀμφαλαμουνιν).

24 *SPP* VIII 1082 = *SB* XXVI 16797 (Heracleopolites, 687/688 or 702/703); Nikolaos Gonis and Federico Morelli, “Two Entagia in Search of an Author,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 39 (2002): 21–25.



al-‘Azīz do not outweigh instances of cooperation. In the long term, marriage alliances and participation in the same marriage patterns are the most visible ties between the houses of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and ‘Abd al-Malik, which is what the following section will consider.

### 3 The Daughters and the Daughters-in-Law: Marriage Ties and Marriage Patterns in the Marwanid House

Marriages have been shown to shape Umayyad alliances and Umayyad rule in a variety of ways in the recent work of Asad Ahmed, Joshua Mabra, Majied Robinson, and Andrew Marsham among others.<sup>25</sup> Mabra argues that marriage ties with the tribe of Kalb were central to the establishment of Marwanid rule and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was ideally positioned in that alliance as the son of a prominent woman from that tribe, Laylā bint Zabbān ibn al-Aṣṣbagh al-Kalbī.<sup>26</sup> A focus on marriage alliances also reveals the close ties between the Banū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and the Banū ‘Abd al-Malik (*banū* means “sons of”). Two of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s daughters married ‘Abd al-Malik’s son, the future caliph al-Walīd; their names were Umm (al-)Banīn and Umm al-Ḥakam.<sup>27</sup> The latter, in turn, married two other sons of ‘Abd al-Malik: first Sulaymān, and later Hishām (r. 105–125/724–743).<sup>28</sup> In parallel, one of ‘Abd al-Malik’s daughters, Fāṭima, married one of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s sons, the future caliph ‘Umar (r. 99–101/717–720).<sup>29</sup>

25 Asad Ahmed, *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijāz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies* (Oxford: Linacre College, 2011); Majied Robinson, *Marriage in the Tribe of Muhammad: A Statistical Study of Early Arabic Genealogical Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), for the marriages of the Umayyads, see especially 140–147; Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads.”

26 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, chap. 2. On the marriage alliances between Kalb and the Marwanids, see the pioneering work of Nabia Abbott on Umayyad women: “Women and the State in Early Islam,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1942): 341–347. DOI: 10.1086/370650.

27 On Umm Banīn, see Abbott, “Women and the State,” 352–355.

28 Umm al-Ḥakam’s mother was Umm ‘Abdallāh bint ‘Aballāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, granddaughter of the conqueror and first governor of Egypt. Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, ed. Evariste Levi-Provencal (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1953), 168. The reinforcement of ties between the families of the two half-brothers, ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, as visible through this marriage is also stressed in Andrew Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads,” 18.

29 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Zirīklī, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fīkr, 1996), 8:219. On how Fāṭima was praised by poets as a daughter, granddaughter, sister, and wife of caliphs, see Al-Zubayrī ibn Bakkār, *al-Akhbār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt*, ed. Sāmī Makki al-‘Ānī (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1996), 76; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed.

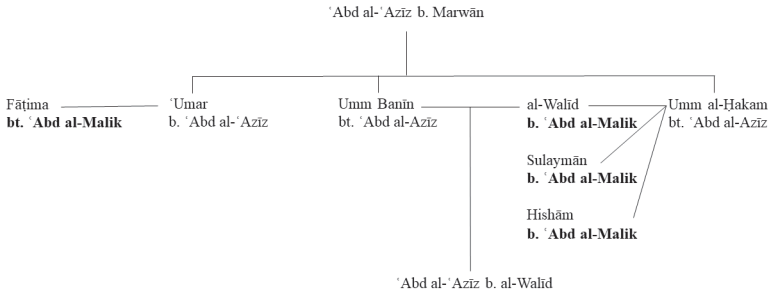


FIGURE 1 Marriage ties between the Banū 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Banū 'Abd al-Malik

In this polygamous context, caliphs, heirs, and their sons find themselves in multiple alliances at a time, but daughters do not, unless they become widows or get divorced. In general, Umayyad women married high status men closely allied to their family or they married within the family.<sup>30</sup> Four daughters of 'Abd al-'Azīz are attested in the available sources, but only two are known to have been married and both of them were married to sons of 'Abd al-Malik.<sup>31</sup> Umm al-Ḥakam's marriages are particularly interesting with her successive union to three sons of 'Abd al-Malik who all became caliphs, though I could not find evidence that she bore children to any of them.<sup>32</sup> Al-Walīd, Sulaymān, and Hishām were not just any sons, they were all sons of Arab women and Umm al-Ḥakam never married one of the *hajīn* sons of 'Abd al-Malik (*hajīns* are sons of slave women), which does not seem to have been a coincidence. It appears that marrying 'Abd al-'Azīz's daughters was the prerogative of the heirs or caliphs among the Banū 'Abd al-Malik. When Sulaymān died in 99/717 and Umm al-Ḥakam's brother, 'Umar, became caliph, it is notable that she was not married to Yazīd (r. 101–105/720–724) – who had been appointed as second heir by Sulaymān and who succeeded 'Umar when he died – but to Hishām who only became caliph after Yazīd. This might be a reflection of his caliphal

'Alī Shīrī, 80 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995–1997), 45:137. See also Abbott, "Women and the State," 356–357.

30 Marsham, "Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads," 17: "Few if any Islamic-era Umayyad women married outside the Quraysh."

31 Marsham, "Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads," 37: "He ['Abd al-'Azīz] is said to have had four wives, fathering seven sons and four daughters by them, as well as at least one son, al-Aṣṣbagh, by a concubine." Al-Aṣṣbagh notably bore the name of 'Abd al-'Azīz's maternal (and Kalbī) great grandfather.

32 Another woman, Umm Salama bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān, married the same men in the same succession. Abbott, "Women and the State," 366.

ambition at the time of Sulaymān's death.<sup>33</sup> Overall, Umm al-Ḥakam's string of marriages suggests a necessity to keep her married to a son of 'Abd al-Malik, supposedly until she died. It is also a testimony that marrying 'Abd al-'Azīz's daughters was not accessible to others.<sup>34</sup>

As for the daughters of 'Abd al-Malik, three are attested and only two are known to have married: 'Ā'isha and Fāṭima.<sup>35</sup> The latter, as mentioned before, married 'Umar, 'Abd al-'Azīz's son. If 'Abd al-Malik had only two daughters who allowed him to build alliances through marriage, the fact that he chose to give one of them to his brother's son is certainly meaningful. The other daughter, 'Ā'isha, married a prominent Sufyanid (the first ruling branch of the Umayyad clan), Khālīd ibn Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya, grandson and son of the first and second Sufyanid caliph and brother of the alleged third.<sup>36</sup> This alliance was part of a wider pattern of marriages between Marwanids and Sufyanids which had been initiated by Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, the father of 'Abd al-Malik and 'Abd al-'Azīz.<sup>37</sup> Marwān married Umm Khālīd Fākhita bint Abī Hāshim, the widow of the second Sufyanid caliph, Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya, and the mother of Khālīd and of his elder brother, Mu'āwiya ibn Yazīd (who is said to have succeeded their father and ruled for a few months).<sup>38</sup> With this alliance, Marwān countered Khālīd's claim to the caliphate after Mu'āwiya's death as he married their mother.<sup>39</sup> The marriage of 'Ā'isha, the daughter of 'Abd al-Malik, to Khālīd can

33 Hishām also married a widow of 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Walīd, who was a grandson of 'Abd al-'Azīz about whom more will be said later. Abbott, "Women and the State," 358–359.

34 The wider context is that of a shift to endogamy in the marriages of the Marwanids after 'Abd al-Malik, see Robinson, *Marriage*, 182–184.

35 There might be a bias in the sources here, as remarked on by Majied Robinson – al-Zubayrī in *Nasab Quraysh* records "2328 sons to 610 daughters" – in Robinson, *Marriage*, 74. For instance, a third daughter is mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, but she is not known to have been married. She is Umm Kulthūm, a full sister of Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, 6:420; Marsham, "Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads," 35. Umm Kulthūm and Yazīd's mother was 'Ātika bint Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. Her marriage to 'Abd al-Malik is an example of unions between the Marwanids and the line of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya, as discussed in this section. On 'Ātika, see Abbott, "Women and the State," 349–351.

36 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, 7:195. 'Ā'isha was a full sister of al-Walīd and Sulaymān, their mother was Wallāda bint al-'Abbās al-'Absī.

37 According to Marsham, "Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads," 37, 'Abd al-'Azīz's marriages with the Sufyanids and their allies most likely took place during the caliphate of Mu'āwiya.

38 On Umm Khālīd, see Abbott, "Women and the State," 343–346.

39 See Abbott, "Women and the State," 349 on perceptions of marrying the mothers of caliphs. This union allowed Marwān to take over the Sufyanid legacy, as argued by Henri Lammens, "L'avènement des Marwanides," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 12 (1927): 67. As Wilfred Madelung puts it, in marrying a woman who had been the wife and the mother of a caliph, "Marwān succeeded where Mu'āwiya (ibn Abī Sufyān) had failed."

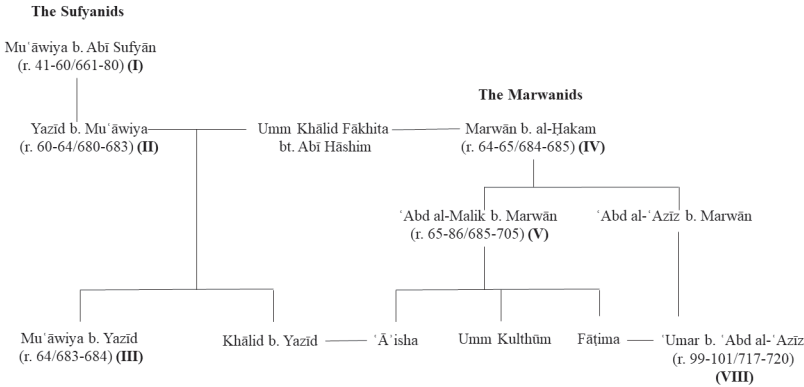


FIGURE 2 Marriages of the daughters of 'Abd al-Malik and their many ramifications (numbers in bold give the order of succession of Umayyad caliphs)

be seen as participating in the neutralization of Khālid's claim, though, as with most marriages, it is difficult to date it.

The Marwanid takeover of the Sufyanid legacy through marriage alliances did not end there. In a recent study, Abdulla Haidar has counted no less than sixteen marriages between the Sufyanids and the Marwanids recorded in *Nasab Quraysh* ("The Genealogy of Quraysh") of al-Zubayrī (d. 236/851).<sup>40</sup> Among those marriages, we mainly find Marwanid men marrying Sufyanid women and not the other way around. 'Abd al-Malik's daughter 'Ā'isha appears as the only exception, which strengthens the idea that this alliance was made early on. Over time, it might have been that marrying Marwanid women became out of reach for the Sufyanids. Interestingly, the marriages between Marwanid men and Sufyanid women only involved the Banū 'Abd al-Malik and the Banū 'Abd al-'Azīz. Among those marriages, we find the eldest son of 'Abd al-'Azīz, al-Aṣḡagh, who married two Sufyanid women.<sup>41</sup> According to *Nasab Quraysh*, they were daughter of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya, Umm Muḥammad

*The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 349. He refers here to an anecdote transmitted in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashraf* (5: 497) in which Nā'ila bint al-Farāfiṣa ibn al-Aḡwaṣ, the widow of the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān chose to pull out her front teeth so Mu'āwiya would stop trying to marry her. See also Abbott, "Women and the State," 341–342.

40 Abdulla Haidar, "Political Legitimacy in the Marwanid Era" (ongoing PhD diss., University of Edinburgh), chap. 3.

41 That al-Aṣḡagh was 'Abd al-'Azīz's eldest son is according to Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh Dimashq*, 9:170. He is listed second among the sons of 'Abd al-'Azīz given by Ibn Ḥazm. The caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz comes first in this list for obvious reasons. Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat Nasab al-'Arab*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), 105. 'Abd al-'Azīz's *kunya* was Abū al-Aṣḡagh if we trust al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 48.

and Umm Yazīd.<sup>42</sup> One of them is mentioned in a Greek papyrus from the early eighth-century documents of Aphrodito, which is an account of requisitions for the sustenance of officials attached to the governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. In this document, we find payments made for a certain “Mukhallis, *mawlā* of Kuthna, daughter of Yazīd and wife of al-Aṣḡagh, son of the governor.”<sup>43</sup> In all, al-Aṣḡagh’s marriages fit into a wider pattern of Marwanid marriages into the Sufyanid line, especially but not exclusively with the house of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya.

Another of al-Aṣḡagh’s marriages belongs to a wider Marwanid pattern: alliances with the Alids (descendants of the cousin of the Prophet, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib). According to multiple sources, al-Aṣḡagh ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz married the famous Sukayna bint al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, a marriage that was apparently short-lived and for which he paid a large marriage gift (*ṣadāq*).<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Sukayna is known to have previously declined a marriage proposal from ‘Abd al-Malik who also ordered al-Aṣḡagh to divorce her.<sup>45</sup> ‘Abd

42 Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 127–130; also in Ibn Habīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, ed. Ilse Lichtenstadter (Hayderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1942), 57; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 5:356.

43 *PLond.* IV 1447, 121: “Μωγαλλίς μαυλε(ύς) Χουθνα θυγ(άτηρ) Ίεζίδ γαμε(τή) Ἀλασβαγ υί(ού) τ(ού) συμβού(λου).” We cannot assert if this Kuthna was Umm Muḥammad or Umm Yazīd. Kuthna is a given name (*ism*) while names like Umm Muḥammad (meaning “mother of Muḥammad”) are *kunyas* formed with the name of the first born son of a woman.

44 The lengthiest account of this union is in the *Kitāb al-Murdifāt min Quraysh* of al-Madā‘inī or, as Ilkka Lindstedt has argued, the *Kitāb man Qutila ‘anhā Zawjuhā*: Ilkka Lindstedt, “Al-Madā‘inī: Kitāb al-Murdifāt min Quraysh or Kitāb Man Qutila ‘anhā Zawjuhā? (GAS I: 314),” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 20–21 (2014): 271–276. Al-Madā‘inī writes that Sukayna first married ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī who died, possibly at Kerbala. She then married Mūs‘ab ibn al-Zubayr (d. 72/691), al-Madā‘inī, “Kitāb al-Murdifāt min Quraysh,” in *Nawādir al-Makḥḥūṭāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), 1:64–65. See also, Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 8:475 and al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 59. In the list of sons of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz provided by Ibn Ḥazm, the author includes short notices about some of them, pointing to important information about those sons. What he found most notable about al-Aṣḡagh is precisely that he married Sukayna. Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat*, 105. Sukayna is remembered for her outspoken character and interest in poetry. Jean-Claude Vadet, “Une Personnalité Féminine du Hīgaz Au 1<sup>er</sup>/VII<sup>e</sup> Siècle Sukayna, Petite-Fille de ‘Alī,” *Arabica* 4/3 (1957): 261–287. DOI: 10.1163/157005857X00048. Abbott, “Women and the State,” 347–348.

45 According to al-Madā‘inī, Sukayna’s mother, al-Rabāb bint Irmu‘u al-Qays al-Kalbiyya, forbade her to marry ‘Abd al-Malik because of his role in the demise of Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr, as he was the son of her “sister.” Muṣ‘ab was the son of al-Rabāb bint Unayf, also known as al-Rabāb al-Kalbiyya (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 5:361). This conversation is presented as taking place after the death of Muṣ‘ab and before Sukayna’s marriage to ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥazām – her third husband – who was a nephew

al-Malik still managed to marry two other Alid women, a daughter of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and a daughter of Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, though both of them remain unnamed.<sup>46</sup> ‘Abd al-Malik’s son al-Walid married two Alid women, Zaynab (a daughter of two Alids who were themselves cousins, al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī and Fāṭima bint al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī) and Nafīsa bint Zayd ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī.<sup>47</sup> According to Asad Ahmed’s research, Nafīsa’s marriage to al-Walid is explained by the favorable position of her father, Zayd ibn al-Ḥasan, towards the Umayyads. Ahmed also explains this marriage by the fact that alliances with the Alids, notably through marriage with the branch of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, were part of the efforts of the early Marwanids to reconcile Ḥijāzī elites to their authority after the second *Fitna* (60–72/680–692), during which the Umayyads had lost control of that region.<sup>48</sup>

Altogether, evidence of marriages in the house of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and ‘Abd al-Malik show that those two branches were consciously tied together and that some of the members took part in the same external marriages with prominent members of the tribe of Quraysh, as illustrated here with the Sufyanids and the Alids. As the next section will show, focusing on those alliances allows

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of Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr through his full sister Ramla. Interestingly, Ramla bint al-Zubayr, who was widowed after the end of the second *Fitna*, also refused to marry ‘Abd al-Malik and married instead the above mentioned Khālid ibn Yazīd, ‘Abd al-Malik’s son-in-law, see Abbott, “Women and the State,” 347–348. Still according to al-Madā‘inī, al-Aṣḥbagh was Sukayna’s fourth husband and ‘Abd al-Malik would have commanded the divorce because al-Aṣḥbagh had paid too much bridal money to marry “their equal in nobility”: “Kitāb al-Murdifāt,” 65–66. Another anecdote of a Marwanid paying too much money for a marriage with an Alid women that was dissolved by a caliph involves Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (as groom) and his brother al-Walid (as caliph), see Abbott, “Women and the State,” 357. Al-Aṣḥbagh might have appeared as a more suitable candidate than his uncle because of the links of his father, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, with Kalb, which was also the tribe of Sukayna’s mother. Al-Madā‘inī overall lists six husbands for Sukayna, “Kitāb al-Murdifāt,” 64–69. Her last three marriages were all ended through the intercession of an Umayyad caliph. Ahmed, *Religious Elite*, 70 n. 318, see also 116 n. 615, 168. For another take on the order of her successive husbands see al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 59, who says that al-Aṣḥbagh had Sukayna brought to him in Egypt.

- 46 Ibn Ḥazm, *Rasā’il*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiya li-l-Dirasāt wa-l-Nashr, 1980–1981), 2:65, 108. Also noted in Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, 70.
- 47 Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads,” 38. For Nafīsa, see Ahmed, *Religious Elite*, 147–148; al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 31–33, 77–79, 133. For Zaynab: al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 51; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat*, 41–42.
- 48 Ahmed, *Religious Elite*, 152–153, 191. Abbott also mentions a grandniece of ‘Alī married to ‘Abd al-Malik: Abbott, “Women and the State,” 349. Majied Robinson remarks that none of those marriages between Alids and Umayyads seem to have produced children: *Marriage*, 182–183.

for a proper understanding of narratives about the events following the death of ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.

#### 4 The Sons, their Mothers and their Cousins: The Eighth-Century Abū Bakr and ‘Umar

As mentioned above, one of the most common topics of discussion in the modern historiography is the attempt ‘Abd al-Malik made to replace his brother ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in the line of succession to the caliphate. This argument is based on ninth- and tenth-century narratives starting with al-Ya‘qūbī. The ninth-century author included a report suggesting that the disagreement between ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz about the succession may have been solved by the latter being poisoned. To be clear, al-Ya‘qūbī copies three different versions of the attempt at removing ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in favor of the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Walīd and Sulaymān. In the first version, the removal takes place through the intercession of ‘Āmir ibn Sharāḥīl al-Sha‘bī. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is said to have accepted leaving his place in the line of succession following a discussion with ‘Āmir. Al-Ya‘qūbī then adds that: “Some say that ‘Abd al-Malik never removed ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, but that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died while ‘Abd al-Malik was considering doing so.” Finally, the third version is rather short: “It is also said that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was given a poisoned drink.”<sup>49</sup> In that sense, in al-Ya‘qūbī’s text, two reports out of three present the removal of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz from the line of succession as an uncontentious matter.<sup>50</sup> The third version is found in no other text.

Turning to al-Ṭabarī, he transmits reports on the authority of al-Wāqidi (d. 207/822) and al-Madā‘inī (d. 228/843) on the attempts ‘Abd al-Malik made to remove his brother from the line of succession.<sup>51</sup> According to the former, ‘Abd al-Malik wanted to remove his brother, but ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died from natural causes before the elder brother had taken any action. According to al-Madā‘inī, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, ‘Abd al-Malik’s governor of Iraq (in office 76–95/695–714), prompted the caliph to replace ‘Abd al-‘Azīz by al-Walīd. Al-Ḥajjāj sent ‘Imrān

49 Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2:334–335; *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya‘qūbī*, 3:985.

50 For the first one, Leone Pecorini Goodall has shown that this *khbar* is similar to another one in the *Ta’rīkh* about Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik’s attempt at removing his half-brother Hishām in favor of Yazīd’s son al-Walīd. He argues that those reports concern key moments of Marwanid succession when the caliphate was transferred to a later generation (between ‘Abd al-Malik and his sons, then between his sons and his grandsons): “Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate,” chap. 2.

51 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 6:412–417; Martin Hinds, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* vol. 23, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), 108–115.

ibn ʿIṣām al-ʿAnazī, who delivered a poem in front of the caliph, which suggests that some of the Iraqī were wary of the sons of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.<sup>52</sup> Al-Madāʿinī adds that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz refused to be removed. A letter exchange between the brothers is paraphrased in which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz says that he sees in his son Abū Bakr (d. 96/714–715) what ʿAbd al-Malik sees in al-Walīd, meaning an heir to the caliphate. The exchange ends with ʿAbd al-Malik resolving himself to let God decide on the succession. When the news of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz’s death eventually reaches the caliph, it is said that one of ʿAbd al-Malik’s secretaries, a certain Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Anṣārī, suggested to the caliph that he should appoint al-Walīd and Sulaymān as heirs. It is unlikely that this episode is historical. The caliph probably did not need a secretary to spell out that his two eldest sons by free women were the obvious choice.

Finally, al-Kindī also recounts the attempt ʿAbd al-Malik made to remove his brother. He paraphrases a letter exchange between the two in which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz would have mentioned his son al-Aṣḡagh as a worthy candidate.<sup>53</sup> In all, available reports on the removal of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz indicate that even if ʿAbd al-Malik or the Iraqīs wanted ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to be removed, this led to no concrete measure until ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz died nor did this have any immediate consequences. At the same time, there are reasons to think that ʿAbd al-Malik prepared his sons al-Walīd and Sulaymān for the caliphate.<sup>54</sup> If ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was anywhere close to ʿAbd al-Malik’s age when he died (about sixty), it would be hard to believe that no-one had thought of a younger successor.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, attempts at removing the second heir was not something only ʿAbd al-Malik attempted, as al-Walīd tried the same with his brother Sulaymān.<sup>56</sup>

52 Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 6:413–414; Hinds, *Zenith of the Marwānid House*, 110: “If you prefer your brother for [the caliphate], we, by your grandfather, are not able to level any accusation against that. But we are on our guard lest, through his sons, the sons by different mothers, we be given poison to drink.” If we accept that this Iraqī delegation to ʿAbd al-Malik took place, this would have been before the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath (c. 80–4/699–704), as ʿImrān is said to have participated in the revolt and he was executed by al-Ḥajjāj because of that, see Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, *Taʾrīkh*, 282–283; Wurtzel and Hoyland, *Khalifa b. Khayyat’s History*, 148. On the date of the revolt, see Michael Bates and Mehdy Shaddel, “Note on a Peculiar Arab-Sasanian Coinage of Ibn Al-Ashʿath,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32/3 (2022): 1–2. DOI: 10.1017/S1356186321000778.

53 Al-Kindī, *Wūlat*, 54.

54 As explained in Marsham, *Rituals*, 118–125 and Pecorini Goodall, “Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate,” chap. 2.

55 ʿAbd al-Malik was sixty-three when he died according to Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, *Taʾrīkh*, 293; Wurtzel and Hoyland, *Khalifa b. Khayyat’s History*, 160.

56 Pecorini Goodall, “Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate,” chap. 2.



As for al-Aṣḅagh, the eldest son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz takes center stage in some narratives about the events leading to his father’s death. This is especially the case in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (hereafter “HP”) where it is said that he wanted to succeed his father as governor of Egypt. However, al-Aṣḅagh died after a string of events starting with a visit to the monastery of Ḥulwān where he spat on an image of the Virgin Mary and promised he would purge all Christians from Egypt. This episode is followed by a dream in which Christ appeared to him, he was then “seized by a violent fever” and died shortly after.<sup>57</sup> According to al-Kindī, al-Aṣḅagh died in *Rabī‘a al-thānī* 86/April 705, while ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died twenty days later in *Jumāda al-awwal* 86/May 705.<sup>58</sup>

Some modern historians have made much of the above reports and, following HP, the death of al-Aṣḅagh is seen as part of ‘Abd al-Malik’s plan to remove his brother and his sons from the line of succession.<sup>59</sup> However, this line of argument inflates the position of al-Aṣḅagh in the line of succession and overlooks the most important fact: namely that al-Aṣḅagh’s mother was an Umm walad and not a free woman, at least according to al-Balādhurī.<sup>60</sup> In 86/705, it is unlikely that al-Aṣḅagh would have been considered a potential candidate for the caliphate as, at this time and before, caliphs were always sons of free women.<sup>61</sup> It is only with the next generation (that of the grandsons of ‘Abd

57 Christian Friedrich Seybold, *Alexandrinische Patriarchengeschichte von S. Marcus bis Michael I*, 61–767 [A.D.] (Hamburg: L. Gräfe, 1912) [hereafter HP (Primitive)], 134–135; *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: Agathon to Michael I*, ed./trans. Basil Thomas Alfred Evetts, *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910) [hereafter HP (Vulgate)], 52–53.

58 Al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 43. Chronographies place the death of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz between 702 and 705, though 705 is most commonly accepted, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 118 n. 23. According to fragments on the authority of al-Layth ibn Sa‘d (d. 175/791): ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died on Thursday night, seven nights remaining of the month of Rabī‘ I; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died on Monday night, 12(/13?) nights passed of Jumāda I – meaning of the year 86.” Edward Zychowicz-Coghill, *The First Arabic Annals. Fragments of Umayyad History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 94. That this information is preserved in al-Layth’s *Ta‘rīkh* indicates that already in the second part of the eighth century, the Egyptian tradition recorded the two deaths together. Ibn Ḥazm agrees that they died twenty days apart (*Jamharat*, 105), while for HP it was forty days (HP (Primitive), 135; HP (Vulgate), 53–54.

59 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 88–95; Barthold, “Caliph ‘Umar II,” 73; Kennedy, “Muslim Elite,” 365.

60 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, 8:234; also in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta‘rīkh Dimashq*, 9169. For other instances of sources suggesting sons of Umm walad were acceptable candidates for the caliphate before the third *Fitna*, see an example from Ibn Sa‘d on the succession of Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik mentioned in Tobias Mayer, “New considerations on the Nomination of ‘Umar II by Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik,” in *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, ed. Fred Donner (London: Ashgate, 2016), 85.

61 On how al-Aṣḅagh is said to have predicted the accession of his half-brother to the caliphate as “Ashajj banī Umayya,” see Antoine Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir: L’espace Syrien*

al-Malik) that we find sons of slave women ascending to the caliphate.<sup>62</sup> The other son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz mentioned above, Abū Bakr, indeed had the right genealogical pedigree. He is presented as the eldest son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Umm ‘Āṣim, a granddaughter of the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644).<sup>63</sup> However, the better candidate proved to be his full brother ‘Umar who eventually became caliph.

Interestingly, there is no talk of ‘Umar being put forward as an heir to his father’s claim to the caliphate in the reports from about the mid-80s AH. Naming practices in the family of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz also appear somewhat unusual. It is puzzling that Abū Bakr, the first-born son to his mother, did not inherit the name (*ism*) of his maternal grandfather ‘Āṣim, as was common – the name was given to another son – nor did he inherit the name of his prestigious maternal great grandfather ‘Umar.<sup>64</sup> It seems too convenient that the second son who eventually became the pious caliph of the year 100 AH received this legacy: the same *ism* as ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, arguably his most prestigious ancestor.<sup>65</sup> However, this might be another testimony to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s caliphal ambitions, as he gave to his two eldest son by a free woman the name of the two first caliphs: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–634) and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.<sup>66</sup>

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was born in 61/680–681 or 63/682–683, meaning he was approaching his mid-twenties in 86/705 when his father died.<sup>67</sup> Several details distinguish him from his elder brothers. While al-Aṣḡagh is mentioned in accounts of his father’s governorate in Egypt and also appears in the papyrological material, ‘Umar is notably absent in both kind of sources. It is likely

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*sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (v. 72–193/692–809) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 291–292.

- 62 Robinson, *Marriage*, 180–181; Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), chap. 5; Pecorini Goodall, “Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate,” chap. 4.
- 63 Her full name was Umm ‘Āṣim bint ‘Āṣim ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 168, 361.
- 64 On this topic, see Leone Pecorini Goodall, “Ibn ‘Ā’isha: Matrilineal Kinship, Naming Practices, and the Poetics of Marwanid Matrilineality,” *Medieval Encounters* 29 (2023): 502–521 (511–517). For lists of the sons of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh Dimashq*, 9:170; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat*, 105.
- 65 On the making of the saintly figure of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir*, chap. 6.
- 66 In the panegyric poems delivered to them, the Marwanids are presented as followers of the *sunna* of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar: Haidar, “Political Legitimacy,” chap. 3.
- 67 Barthold, “Caliph ‘Umar II,” 71; Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads,” 37 and 41. “Umar was probably less than a decade younger than his paternal cousins al-Walīd and Sulaymān, and about a decade older than Yazīd and Hishām. He would have come of age in about 695, when his father was both established as governor in Egypt and the widely-recognised heir apparent to his uncle ‘Abd al-Malik.”

that Abū Bakr was also with his father as he is said to have married Umm Sahl bint Maslama ibn Mukhallad, the daughter of the most prominent governor of Egypt in the Sufyanid period (in office 47–62/668–681).<sup>68</sup> If we believe the first biographer of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, namely ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 214/829), ‘Umar spent his early years and especially the period of his education in Medina and not in Egypt with his father.<sup>69</sup> This might have been the very reason why ‘Umar was favored over Abū Bakr by his uncle and especially his cousins after the death of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: Abū Bakr might have been deemed too close to his father if he spent most of his life prior to 86/705 in Egypt while ‘Umar was in Medina. ‘Umar might have been more easily brought into the networks of the Banū ‘Abd al-Malik. That would explain why Fāṭima bint ‘Abd al-Malik was married to him and not to Abū Bakr, the eldest son and, if we believe al-Ṭabarī, the preferred heir of his father. Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870) copies a report indicating that the union between ‘Umar and Fāṭima took place precisely at the time of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s death.<sup>70</sup> It is interesting that ‘Abd al-Malik happened to have an unmarried daughter available for a political marriage at that time, as noted above he did not have many daughters that we know of. We have no reason to believe that Fāṭima was divorced or widowed. She was still in her childbearing year as, according to *Nasab Quraysh*, she gave two sons to ‘Umar, whose names were Ya‘qūb and Ishāq.<sup>71</sup> Some of the unions between the Banū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Banū ‘Abd al-Malik, however, took place well before 705 if we believe, with Joshua Mabra, that a reference to Umm Banīn bint ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in Zubayrid poetry is an indication that she had married al-Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik before the end of the *Fitna*.<sup>72</sup> This would

68 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 100.

69 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sīrat ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘alā mā Rawāhu Mālik wa-Ashābuhu*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Ubayd (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1954), 20–21. On ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s connections to Medina and to the *‘ulama* of that city, see Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir*, 309–310.

70 Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *al-Akhbār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt*, 76; also found in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 45:37.

71 Al-Zubayr, *Nasab Quraysh*, 165. It could be that Fāṭima was actually quite young. Her mother was Umm al-Mughīra bint al-Mughīra ibn Khālid ibn al-‘Āṣī ibn Hishām ibn al-Mughīra (from the Banū Makhzūm), see al-Zubayr, *Nasab Quraysh*, 165. ‘Abd al-Malik married into that branch of Quraysh around the time of his accession as shown in Pecorini Goodall “Ibn ‘Ā’isha,” 506–507. He married ‘Ā’isha bint Hishām ibn Ismā‘īl ibn Hishām ibn al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra al-Makhzūmī, a union that produced the future caliph Hishām. The later was about fourteen years old in 705 and we can assume, if those two marriages took place at the same time, that Fāṭima was about the same age.

72 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 88 n. 15.

mean that marriages between the two Marwanid lines remained relevant for more than fifteen years.

If we follow Andrew Marsham, the marriage between ‘Umar and Fāṭima may have helped to make ‘Umar comply with the succession of al-Walīd and Sulaymān after the death of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz – though, again, there is no reference to ‘Umar in accounts of the removal of his father in the 80s AH.<sup>73</sup> If there ever was a necessity to appease the “loss” of the second son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Umm ‘Āṣim after the accession of al-Walīd, it was certainly successful. In addition to this marriage, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was offered the governorship of Medina around 86–87/705–706 and remained in this position until 93/712 or 94/713 (6–8 years).<sup>74</sup> According to Andrew Marsham, the fact that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz led the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) as governor of Medina in 87/706 and 92/711, would be an indication that he had a claim to the succession.<sup>75</sup> Indeed ‘Umar was given opportunities similar to those of the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik (governorship, *ḥajj* leadership), something that al-Aṣḥab or more importantly Abū Bakr lacked entirely. In other words, Abū Bakr was not given the same prospects as his full brother, and ‘Umar became the most prominent member of the house of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz after their father’s death.<sup>76</sup> The reason for that is easy to find: the key difference between ‘Umar and Abū Bakr was ‘Umar’s marriage to Fāṭima bint ‘Abd al-Malik.

To reiterate, the (numerous) sons of ‘Abd al-Malik are known to have had only two brother-in-law: the Sufyanid Khālīd ibn Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Our evidence points to the fact that ‘Umar especially was perceived as nothing short of a brother to ‘Abd al-Malik’s son. The passage mentioned above from al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār’s work puts it precisely in those terms: “Abd al-Malik sent for him (‘Umar) at the time of the death of his father to blend him with his sons and gave him precedence over several of them; and he married him to his daughter Fāṭima.”<sup>77</sup> The eighth-century Armenian *vita* of Vahan Got’nec’i (martyred in 737) phrases this similarly when Vahan addresses the caliph Hishām: “Where is the universal authority of your father or the tyranny

73 Marsham, *Rituals*, 131 n. 41.

74 Barthold, “Caliph ‘Umar II,” 74–76.

75 Marsham, *Rituals*, 125.

76 Barthold, “Caliph ‘Umar II,” 74–76. He also had the right connections through his marriages, in addition to his union to one of the daughters of ‘Abd al-Malik, he had two other attested marriages “with two daughters of tribal leaders, Lamīs bint ‘Alī of the Banū al-Ḥārith ibn Ka‘b and Umm Shu‘ayb, or Umm ‘Uthmān, bint [Sa‘īd, or Shu‘ayb, ibn] Zabbān. The latter was his maternal cousin from the Banū Kalb. He had seven known children by these wives, and seven by concubines.” Marsham, “Kinship, Dynasty and the Umayyads,” 41.

77 Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *al-Akhbār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt*, 76; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh Dimashq*, 45:137.

of your four brothers? Did they not in fact turn to shadow for you in a moment, just as you will be changed in the same way?"<sup>78</sup> The four brothers in question who succeeded Hishām's father 'Abd al-Malik are al-Walīd, Sulaymān, 'Umar and Yazīd, meaning three sons of 'Abd al-Malik and one son of 'Abd al-'Azīz.

In 96/715, al-Walīd died and was succeeded by his brother Sulaymān who died shortly after in 99/717. As remarked above, al-Walīd is said to have tried to remove his brother as second heir in favor of his son 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Walīd (d. 110/728–729).<sup>79</sup> The latter was a product of the above-mentioned marriage between al-Walīd and Umm Banīn bint 'Abd al-'Azīz. As first born son of his mother, he bore the same *ism* as his prestigious maternal grandfather (see above fig. 1).<sup>80</sup> It is also said that when Sulaymān died without a male heir, the choice of a successor was then between 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn al-Walīd (again) and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, meaning between a son and a grandson of 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān.<sup>81</sup> After 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz's short caliphate, the office went back to the Banū 'Abd al-Malik with Yazīd (r. 101–105/720–724) and Hishām (r. 105–125/724–743). Al-Ya'qūbī's taste for poison narratives with reference to the family of 'Abd al-'Azīz is visible again in accounts of 'Umar's death. He includes a report claiming that 'Umar was poisoned by members of his family or even possibly his sons. This follows a quote attributed to 'Umar in which he would have favored heirs who were not members of the Banū Umayya.<sup>82</sup> This time al-Ya'qūbī is not the only one recording information of this type, as Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn 'Asākir agree that 'Umar was poisoned together

78 *Patmout'īwn ew vkayabanowt'īwn Vahanay Golt'naywoy (History and Martyrology of Vahan of Golt'n)* in *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, 13 vols., ed. Geworg Tēr-Vardanean (Ant'īlias, Lebanon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2007), 6:887–888. The sentences quoted here are from the forthcoming translation of this work prepared by Alasdair Grant, Tim Greenwood, Kieran Hagan, Leone Pecorini Goodall and Lewis Read. I would like to thank Leone Pecorini Goodall for sharing this with me. See also his "Sons and Daughters of the Caliphate," chap. 2.

79 Marsham, *Rituals*, 114, 120 (on Umm Banīn's support of her son's claim), 124, 125 (on 'Umar's leadership of the *hajj*).

80 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 29 n. 57; Marsham, *Rituals*, 120. See also Pecorini Goodall "Ibn 'Ā'isha," 511–517.

81 Reinhard Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion. Eine Studie zum Umayyadenkalifen Sulaiman b. 'Abdalmalik und seinem Bild in den Quellen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), 213–240. Eisener explains the appointment of 'Umar mainly through seniority and experience, and Fāṭima does not appear in his account. He also rejects the idea that Sulaymān appointed 'Umar himself which is contested in Tobias Mayer, "New considerations," stressing 'Umar's inheritance of the claim of his father 'Abd al-'Azīz. See also Marsham, *Rituals*, 114, 121–122.

82 Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2:369–370, *The Works of Ibn Wādīh al-Ya'qūbī*, 3:1023. See also Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir*, 319.

with Abū Bakr. It is said in those two sources that ‘Umar wanted his elder full brother to succeed him as caliph, but they were poisoned and died together.<sup>83</sup> Abū Bakr resurfaces here as the ultimate improbable heir, one without marital connections to past caliphs and without experience of empire (*ḥajj* leadership or governorship). He did not retain any position in Egypt after the death of his father as the governorship went to another son of ‘Abd al-Malik, ‘Abd Allāh (in office 85–90/705–709).<sup>84</sup> It is also implausible that Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were poisoned together as they died five years apart: Abū Bakr in *Rajab* of 96 (September–October 714) and ‘Umar in *Rajab* of 101 (January–February 720).<sup>85</sup>

Overall, for a few authors, narratives about the death of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān and his sons had to include poison. However, those narratives are either inconsistent in dating those deaths or they appear alongside other contradictory accounts. For some sources, Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was the heir of his father and of his brother ‘Umar. The available narratives about Abū Bakr are however strikingly scarce and he does not appear as a convincing heir to any of the two.<sup>86</sup> Even the Egyptian sources have more to say about his wife Umm Sahl and his daughter Asmā than about him.<sup>87</sup> Al-Aṣḡagh was never considered as a potential heir either, despite what Egyptian sources say, as he was the son of an Umm walad and not of a free-born woman. Ultimately, the marriage ties between the Banū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and the Banū ‘Abd al-Malik, the appointment of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as governor of Medina and the place of the Banū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in reports about the succession of al-Walīd and Sulaymān show that the ties between the two branches of the Marwanid family were a central tenant of Marwanid success and of the establishment of the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik as caliphs. The sons of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz did not fall into oblivion. As we turn one last time to al-Aṣḡagh, he takes a singular place in the memory of early Marwanid rule in Egypt.

83 Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat*, 105; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh Dimashq*, 66:40.

84 Al-Kindī, *Wūlat*, 58–59.

85 Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh Dimashq*, 45:262–274; 66:40.

86 At least one panegyric ode addressed to Abū Bakr is preserved by the poet Kuthayyir ‘Azza (d. 106/725), *Dīwān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1971), 194–198. I would like to thank Abdulla Haidar for pointing this out to me. Reinhard Eisener sees some of this material about Abū Bakr as later acknowledgments of his seniority: *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion*, 236.

87 That is in Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 100, 118 (see below). Al-Kindī only mentions his death date, *Wūlat*, 66. The available fragments from the *ta’rikhs* of al-Layth ibn Sa’d (d. 175/791) and Ibn Yūnus’ (d. 347/958) have nothing to say about him. His biography in Ibn ‘Asākir is succinct: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh Dimashq*, 66:38–40.

## 5 Father and Son, a Case Study: Al-Aṣḅagh's Role in Egypt

Al-Aṣḅagh is the most prominent son of 'Abd al-'Azīz in accounts of his father's governorship in Egypt. However, as shown by Joshua Mabra, Islamic narrative sources only give him a limited role in the administration of the province. According to al-Kindī, al-Aṣḅagh was appointed over Alexandria in 74/693–694 and then replaced by Janāb ibn Murthid al-Ru'aynī.<sup>88</sup> It is not said exactly when this replacement took place, but his appointment did not go beyond 75/694–695. In this year, as al-Kindī continues, 'Abd al-'Azīz went to visit his brother in Damascus, though the reason for that delegation is not explicit. As was usual practice, the governor left his *ṣāhib al-shurṭa* Ziyād ibn Ḥunāṭa al-Tujībī to act as governor in his absence, but Ziyād died while 'Abd al-'Azīz was away, so al-Aṣḅagh took his place.<sup>89</sup> This means that al-Aṣḅagh acted as governor of Egypt for less than a year and only because his father's initial appointee had died; he was thus only a second choice as interim governor. Al-Aṣḅagh's role in time of necessity (the unlikely event that the governor's appointee would die in his absence) can be compared with another moment in which a member of the Marwanid family stepped into office. When 'Abd al-'Azīz died in 86/705, another one of his brothers, 'Umar ibn Marwān (d. 115/733–734), acted as interim governor until the next, 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Malik, reached the province.<sup>90</sup> Nothing more is known about this 'Umar and we are given a sense that members of the ruling family were present in the province.<sup>91</sup> Without a formal role, they could step in at times of need as to avoid governorships being left vacant and falling into the wrong hands.

Al-Aṣḅagh is never mentioned in the published papyrological record in any administrative position. As noted before, the *mawlā* of one of his wives appears

88 Al-Kindī, *Wūlat*, 51.

89 Al-Kindī holds this from al-Layth ibn Sa'd's *Ta'rikh*. "In the year 75 (694–695): 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān went out to Syria; Khabbāb ibn Marthad went down to Alexandria; Ziyād ibn Ḥunāṭa died and al-Aṣḅagh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz was made governor [of Egypt]"; Zychowicz-Coghill, *First Arabic Annals*, 92. See also Matthieu Tillier, "Représenter la province auprès du pouvoir impérial: Les délégations (*wuḥūd*) égyptiennes aux trois premiers siècles de l'Islam," *Arabica* 67 (2020), 125–199 (134). DOI: 10.1163/15700585-12341565. Another delegation of 'Abd al-'Azīz to his brother took place in 67/686–687 (p. 166).

90 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 237, see also Ibn Yūnus, *Ta'rikh Ibn Yūnus al-Miṣrī*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Fathī 'Abd al-Fattāḥ, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 2:157. Al-Kindī claims that 'Abd al-'Azīz appointed his other brother, Muḥammad, as his successor, though it is well known that Muḥammad was governor of the North, *Wūlat*, 55. Mabra argues that we should read 'Umar's name instead, *Princely Authority*, 44.

91 For 'Umar's presence in the province see Federico Morelli, "P. Vindob. G 42920 e la φιλολογία di 'Umar b. Marwān," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121 (1998), 219–221.

in a Greek papyrus and, though this document is fragmentary, nothing is preserved about al-Aṣḅagh himself. Another Greek document refers to a “*mawlā* of Aṣḅagh” in a list of abandoned lands, but this does not tell us much about him either if this “Aṣḅagh” was really the son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.<sup>92</sup> The memory of the landed domains of the children of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, including al-Aṣḅagh, is apparent in one Arabic papyrus dated to 307/919–920. This papyrus, a writing exercise, is a copy of a letter possibly addressed to a tax official. The text mentions the revenues of *munyat* al-Aṣḅagh<sup>93</sup> and *munyat* Umm Sahl, which together amounted to 566 dinars.<sup>94</sup> The second domain bears the name of al-Aṣḅagh’s sister in law Umm Sahl bint Maslama ibn Mukhallad, the wife of Abū Bakr.<sup>95</sup> This document resonates with other information about al-Aṣḅagh and his access to properties in and around Fuṣṭāṭ. Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam says he bought a plot of land (*qaṭī’a*) from an alleged *mawlā* of the prophet and he also owned a number of houses (*dār*).<sup>96</sup> Another brother, Sahl ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, inherited a house and a bathhouse in Fuṣṭāṭ from his mother Umm ‘Abd Allāh bint ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ.<sup>97</sup> In that sense, the Marwanids present in the province hogged some of the best urban and landed properties in and around the provincial capital and as such seem to have been more visible as property owners than as administrators.

In all, if we trust the Islamic narratives, al-Aṣḅagh’s administrative roles were always short-lived and they do not add up with the information found in *HP* that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz placed him in charge of the whole province, specifically for the collection of revenues.<sup>98</sup> The remaining paragraphs in this section will attempt to understand why *HP* makes such claim. In the Islamic narratives, the

92 *CPR* XXII 34, 6 (eighth century).

93 Also mentioned in Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 137–138; Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 53.

94 *P.Vind.Arab.* III 17 recto b, 8 (Lower Egypt, 307/919–920).

95 According to Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 51, it was Abū Bakr who came to possess the agricultural estate of Maslama through his marriage to the latter’s daughter. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, Maslama died without a male heir and his daughters had inherited his wealth. *Futūḥ*, 100. As part of Abū Bakr’s wealth and inheritance we find the Qur’an that his father ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had commissioned and that eventually became known as the Qur’an of Asmā’ (bint Abū Bakr) after she bought it as part of her own inheritance, see Mathieu Tillier, “Recension de François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l’islam: le codex Parisino-petropolitanus* *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 13/2 (2011): 112–114. DOI: 10.3366/jqs.2011.0022; Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 118.

96 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 103–4, 112, 137.

97 Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, 112. Sahl was the full brother of Umm al-Ḥakam, see n. 28 above. He is also the sender of a papyrus about the departure for the *ḥajj* as ordered by the *amūr al-mu’minūn*. Petra M. Sijpesteijn, “Early Umayyad Papyrus,” 179–190.

98 Neither Ibn ‘Asākir nor Ibn Yūnus mention anything of an administrative career for al-Aṣḅagh.



person who is said to have been in charge of fiscal administration until the end of the governorate of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was Athanasius bar Gümōyē, something that *HP* was also aware of, as the text regularly praises the character of the orthodox administrator and his support of successive patriarchs.<sup>99</sup> Despite that, al-Aṣḡagh is said to have made a census of the monks of Egypt and prohibited the recruitment of any new ones. He requested a poll tax payment from them and forced a few members of the Christian elite to convert.<sup>100</sup> *HP*'s aim, as a patriarchal history, was not to provide a careful record of early Islamic administration, and several scholars have already addressed the particularities of the passages concerned with the governorate of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Mabra has noted that the accounts of al-Aṣḡagh in *HP* are odd and chronologically out of place.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, they appear at the beginning of the life of Alexander II (in office 705–730). Accounts about the infamous administrative measures are packed there with the abovementioned passage about al-Aṣḡagh's and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's death in the first half of 86/705.<sup>102</sup> Mabra argues that “*HP* is likely inflating al-Aṣḡagh's power to facilitate the negative depiction of him. While *HP* describes ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as a ‘lover of Christians,’ it calls his son al-Aṣḡagh, ‘a hater of Christians, a shedder of blood, a wicked man,’” though Mabra struggles to explain why the two are presented in such different light.<sup>103</sup> Phil Booth recently built on that by outlining the discursive strategies used in *HP* that downplay several measures taken by the governor. For instance, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz disregarded the chosen candidate of the bishops for the patriarchate at the time of the election of Isaac (in office 686–689 or 689–692).<sup>104</sup> The governor then detained an assembly of bishops in Ḥulwān, the city newly founded by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, for the better part of three years (c. 697–700).<sup>105</sup> He commanded the destruction of crosses and the place-

99 *HP (Primitive)* 113, 122, 135; *HP (Vulgate)* 12, 48–49, 54. See also Legendre, “The Translation of the *Dīwān*,” section 1.4, 2, 4.2 and 5.

100 *HP (Primitive)* 133–134; *HP (Vulgate)*, 50–51.

101 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 156.

102 See above n. 58, al-Aṣḡagh is said to have died in April of 705.

103 Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 152, “Why al-Aṣḡagh is demonized and his father is praised is unclear.”

104 Philip Booth, “Images of Emperors and Emirs in Early Islamic Egypt,” in *The Good Christian Ruler in the First Millennium*, ed. Philip Michael Forness, Alexandra Hasse-Ungeheuer, and Hartmut Leppin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 410–420 (on this episode, 412); *HP (Primitive)* 120; *HP (Vulgate)*, 22–24. The two takes on the dates of office of the patriarchs are from Evetts in his edition of *HP (Vulgate)* and Adolf Jülicher, “Die Liste der alexandrinischen Patriarchen im 6. und 7. Jahrhundert,” in *Festgabe von Fachgenossen und Freunden Karl Müller zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag dargebracht* (Tübingen: Verlag von J.D.B Mohr, 1922), 7–23.

105 *HP (Primitive)* 126–127; *HP (Vulgate)*, 34–36; Booth, “Images of Emperors,” 415.

ment of anti-trinitarian statements on the doors of churches, and he forbade the liturgies as a reaction to Byzantine politics.<sup>106</sup> The most striking passage is the presentation of a curious hiatus during which the patriarchal seat was left vacant between Simon I (in office 689–701 or 693–700) and Alexander II (in office 704 or 705–730), a hiatus that remains unexplained. *HP* only says that “the Church has been left in solitude for three years” – or actually four years – but curiously the text does not elaborate on the reasons for what appears to have been an unusual and vexing situation.<sup>107</sup> One possible explanation for that hiatus is that this was a decision of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz that *HP* refrains from commenting upon. Despite all this, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is never presented as cruel or greedy as is common for early Islamic governors, with the other exception of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ (in office 20–25/641–646 and 38–43/649–664).<sup>108</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is generally depicted as supporting the appointment of orthodox (meaning Severan) patriarchs and as developing good relations with them during his governorate. When the governor is presented as acting against the interests of orthodox patriarchs it is always at the instigation of Chalcedonians or other opponents of the Severans.<sup>109</sup> As argued by Booth, the message of *HP* is that the Severan Church overall flourished with the support of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. The text minimizes some of the measures taken by the governor to stress that this relationship was instrumental in the consolidation of the Church.<sup>110</sup>

Coming back to al-Aṣḡagh, cruelty and greediness were his shadow if we trust *HP*, as the one who would spit on icons, force Christians to convert, and

106 *HP (Primitive)* 122, 126; *HP (Vulgate)* 25, 35; Booth, “Images of Emperors,” 418. Maged S.A. Mikhail also notes, “even an incident in which he (‘Abd al-‘Azīz) imprisoned the Coptic patriarch and demolished crosses is shrugged off as nothing more than a misunderstanding.” *From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt: Religion, Identity and Politics after the Arab Conquest* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 41.

107 *HP (Primitive)* 132–133; *HP (Vulgate)* 48–49; Booth, “Images of Emperors,” 418.

108 Those two passages (about ‘Amr and about ‘Abd al-‘Azīz) should indeed be put in parallel as Booth does. They reveal distinctive strategies used in *HP* to present foundational moments for the establishment of the Severan Church: the end of the so-called “persecution” of Heraclius and Cyrus with the conquest and the consolidation of the Church under ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. This explains why ‘Amr and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz are presented in a positive light in contrast to all other early Islamic rulers mentioned in the text. On ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ in *HP*, see Booth, “Images of Emperors,” 410–411; *HP (Primitive)* 99–101; *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: Peter I to Benjamin I*, ed. and trans. Basil Thomas Alfred Evetts, *Patrologia Orientalis* 1 (1904), 495–497.

109 *HP (Primitive)* 116–118, 127–129; *HP (Vulgate)* 12–17, 37–42.

110 Booth, “Images of Emperors,” 416–420; see also Phil Booth, “Debating the Faith in Early Islamic Egypt,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70, no. 4 (2019): 691–707 (702–707). DOI: 10.1017/S0022046919000617.

tax monks.<sup>111</sup> Based on the above, we can agree with Booth that in crafting a distinctive portrait of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *HP* minimizes some of the measures taken by the governor but the text also uses ties of kinship to transfer other measures to his son, as to keep a generally positive memory of the governor. Overall, none of the available evidence points to al-Aṣḡagh as ever having a substantial administrative role in the Egyptian province beyond a few months in 74–75/693–694. His representation in *HP* is also in line with that of his paternal cousin, ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, the successor of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as governor of Egypt.<sup>112</sup> ‘Abdallāh is presented as tempted by Satan and as a great lover of money; he would relish eating food drenched in human blood.<sup>113</sup> The text also uses the common *topos* that he would even tax the dead.<sup>114</sup> This representation of al-Aṣḡagh and ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Malik as greedy administrators and haters of Christians is the last aspect in which similarities between the Banū ‘Abd al-Malik and the Banū ‘Abd al-‘Azīz are visible: in the memory of Marwanid rule in Egypt according to *HP*.<sup>115</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

This article has shown the many ways in which studying ties of kinship sheds light on our understanding of power dynamics, real or imagined, within the Marwanid family. The available sources are unsure of a lot of things: death dates, appointments as heir, and poisoning, but they all show that narratives of feud between brothers or between cousins made for a good story, then and now. However, turning away from anecdotes and focusing on genealogical data and roles in the maintenance of the empire reveals that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz,

111 Wadād al-Qāḏī, “Population Census and Land Surveys under the Umayyads (41–132/661–750),” *Der Islam* 83 (2008): 341–416 (381–382), following this description, refers to al-Aṣḡagh as the “evil son of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.”

112 Also noted in Mabra, *Princely Authority*, 152.

113 That is, in opposition to the character of the orthodox patriarchs. For instance, John 111 (in office 677–686 or 681–689) says it is a command of God that he should not save or gain money “for it is the root of all evil.” *HP (Primitive)* 117; *HP (Vulgate)* 14.

114 *HP (Primitive)*, 135–136; *HP (Vulgate)*, 54–66. On taxing the dead, see Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 180–209.

115 *HP* can also be added to the list of sources recording skirmishes between brothers as it says that ‘Abd al-Malik would have reprimanded ‘Abd al-‘Azīz for not dealing properly with issues concerning Christians from India (more likely Ethiopia). *HP (Primitive)* 127–129; *HP (Vulgate)* 37–42; Mikhail, *From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt*, 199.

‘Abd al-Malik and their sons had the same project for the ruling family. If there were moments of competition and disagreement between them, they never proved to be at the expense of that project. ‘Abd al-Malik and his sons also clearly had the upper hand. The above discussion has stressed that in order to understand Umayyad succession politics, focusing on mothers and daughters is essential and that only this allows for the proper identification of candidates to the caliphate in the Marwanid period. Those marriage alliances cemented allegiances and shaped dynamics of cooperation and opposition within the ruling family. Finally, ties of kinship were also used as a tool to shape the image of individual family member such as ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and his son al-Aṣḡagh in *HP*. In the historical record, the house of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s claim to leadership faded at the same time as that of the house of ‘Abd al-Malik. Two of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s sons had swift careers of governors in the context of the third *Fitna*: ‘Abd Allāh in Iraq and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz in Medina (both in 126/743–744).<sup>116</sup> In the last year of Umayyad rule in Egypt (132/749), another grandson of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, ‘Amr ibn Suhayl, led a short-lived revolt in the tumultuous region of al-Ḥawf al-Sharqī (eastern delta).<sup>117</sup>

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116 Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, 388–390, 394–397, 403, 431; Wurtzel and Hoyland, *Khalifa b. Khayyat’s History*, 263–265, 270–273, 278–279, 308.

117 Al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 94.

The abbreviations for editions of papyri follow the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>) and *The (Cumulative) Arabic Papyrology Bibliography of Editions and Research* (<http://www.naher-osten.lmu.de/apb>).