



## The role of the Barmakian in the rise of Islamic civilization

Rouhlamin "Moahid"<sup>1</sup>, and Ahmad Wali Alemi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty members of the Department of General History, Kabul University, 2025

### Corresponding Authors\*

Rouhlamin "Moahid"

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**Abstract:** Islamic civilization passes on the achievements and legacy of pre-Islamic civilizations to future generations. During this transfer, dynasties such as the Barmakian played a role, but their contribution in the second and early third centuries AH is not properly explained and presented; Therefore, the present research aims to determine the contribution of the Barmakian in the advancement of Islamic civilization.

The Barmakian, with their ancient inherited culture from the time of Abu Muslim, were influential in the politics of Khorasan, the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate, the transfer of civilization and culture to the Islamic society, the establishment of cultural institutions, the cultivation of science, and most importantly in the rise of Islamic civilization.

The Barmakian were one of the most influential families in the Abbasid caliphate, who entered the caliphate from the beginning because of their wisdom and good judgment. The greatest period of development of science, knowledge and Islamic civilization in the Abbasid caliphate was the period of Harun al-Rashid, which was mostly done by the education of the Barmakian and was caused by the Barmaki dynasty; They helped shape and consolidate Islamic civilization in its golden age by making wise policies, supporting science and culture, and economic development. The general public loved and supported them and were affected and saddened by the fall of that honorable family.

**Keywords:** Barmakian, Share, Abbasids, Harun al-Rashid, Rise of Civilization, Caliphs, Islam.

## Introduction

The Barmakian were originally Afghan families, and their lineage goes back to the builders of the Nawbahar Temple in Balkh. He gained great power and influence in the Abbasid caliphate through his wisdom, merit and wealth.

The existence of the role of the Barmakian in the rise of Islamic civilization had two special characteristics: first, they ruled for a longer period of time than their predecessors and contemporaries, such as Abu Muslim Khorasani; And second, the political transformation of the family was accompanied by planning. The transformation began with a normal role in the Abbasid movement and entered another stage by accepting some government positions and then infiltrated the Abbasid dynasty; That is, this transformation began with a simple influence, but

gradually the sun of luck of this family set and the ground was provided for their fall. Their greater power and wealth gradually aroused the sense of competition and jealousy of the Arab elders and caused them to be hostile to the Barmakian and their efforts to the caliph. As a result, Harun al-Rashid considered the Barmakian as a real threat to his rule. Although the Barmakian were pardoned during the caliphate of Ma'mun, they did not regain their former power and greatness.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is library-based and efforts have been made to use authoritative domestic and foreign sources in its richness.

### **The role of the Barmakian in the rise of Islamic civilization**

#### **Background**

The Barmakian were a very old dynasty of Balkh who, at the beginning of the rise of Islam, often practiced Mazdaism and fire worship along with Buddhism (10:84).

The history of the Barmakian of Balkh is divided into two separate parts, the first includes the ancient period of Balkh and the second includes the Islamic era, which covers the main point of our discussion. Before Islam, the Barmakian were in charge of the Sadant or the curtain of Nawbahar (a famous fireplace in Balkh). But after the conquest of Balkh by the Muslims, during the reign of Abdul Malik Umayyad in the late first century AH, they converted to Islam and came to the court of the Umayyad caliphs. This power and influence increased during the Abbasid caliphate. One of the most important men of the Barmak dynasty was Khalid Barmaki, who used his influence and wealth to help the Abbasid dynasty and Safah, and his sons became the most important officials of the caliphate. His eldest son, Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki, who first became Harun al-Rashid's teacher and later his minister, was considered the only ruler for nearly seventeen years, because during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, the main power and rule was in the hands of Yahya Barmaki and Harun al-Rashid's mother, Khizran. Yahya Barmaki's two sons, Fazl and Ja'far, succeeded their father as ministers and the best and most important court positions were allocated to the Barmakian and played a very effective role in the development of Islamic civilization (7:21).

In general, during the reign of Sulaiman ibn Abdul Malik Umayyad and Abul Abbas Safah, the first Abbasid caliph, we see the name of the Barmakian more or less in the pages of history until they became the source of great works during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid and their influence and power reached their peak. Their story became a great tragedy and an instructive story (4:25-31).

#### **The word Barmak**

The Balkhi Barmakian or sons of Barmak were derived from the Sanskrit word paramaka and bramaka in Arabic (4: 56). But usually, Barmak is a modified form of the Sanskrit word (Pārāh Mākeh) or (Pārāmaka) meaning chief (4:52).

Whoever became the guardian of Nawbahar was called Barmaka (Barmak) until this position ended with Khalid ibn Barmak. And also, about the name of Barmak is sometimes considered a duty and sometimes the name of a person is recognized (4: 55).

### **Outstanding services of Barmakian personalities in the rise of Islamic civilization**

#### **Khaled Barmaki**

Khalid ibn Barmak (the ancestor of the Barmakian dynasty) was a virtuous, generous, far-sighted and awake-hearted man (2: 490). In 129 AH (746 AD), Khalid and his brothers joined Abu Muslim Khorasani, who was working for the Abbasids, and used his influence and wealth to help the Abbasid dynasty and Safah. Khalid's fame and social records depend entirely on the history of the Abbasid dynasty, because it was, he who made sacrifices for the establishment of the Abbasids on the throne of the Islamic caliphate, performed outstanding services, and it was his sons who laid the foundation of such a great government because of their merit and expertise (4: 105).

Safah approached him and made him his trustee, but he was not proud to approach the Caliph and remained committed to his sincerity and humility.

Khalid died in 163 AH (780 AD). The Mahdi, the Caliph of the Muslims, sent him a burial and equipment, and Harun al-Rashid read the funeral prayer for Khalid Barmaki (7: 54).

### **Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki**

He was born in 119 AH (737 AD) during the reign of Yazid and was appointed to the government of Azerbaijan and then to Armenia in 158 AH (775 AD). Subsequently, on behalf of the Abbasid Caliph Mahdi, he was the tutor of his son Harun al-Rashid for five years and gained great influence and strongly defended the right of the crown prince of Harun al-Rashid (7:57).

With the death of Hadi, Harun al-Rashid became the caliphate and in 178 AH (794 AD) Rashid entrusted all his affairs to Yahya and appointed him to the ministry (1: 5261).

Yahya was famous for his knowledge, literature, grace, forgiveness and decency. He was twelve years old when the Abbasid state was established and grew up in the shadow of this state and was noticed by Mansur, who sent him to the province of Azerbaijan in 158 AH (775 AD). The Mahdi made him his son Harun's secretary and servant, and in those wars that Harun had with Eastern Rome, Yahya was always with him. At that time, when Harun was the governor of the Maghreb on behalf of his father, Yahya was his clerk and performed difficult tasks easily. Because Hadi wanted to remove Harun from the crown prince, Yahya prevented him from doing so for a long time. He chose and entrusted the work of the government and appointed his four sons Ja'far, Fazl, Muhammad and Musa to great tasks (2: 491).

During the time of Yahya's ministry, the House of Wisdom was founded, whose companions were the most famous thinkers of this period, such as Ali ibn Haytham, Ali ibn Mansur, Sakak and Hisham ibn Hakam, the latter of whom was one of Yahya's special interviewers and conducted his discussions on the word (4:107).

He was also the breeder of statesmen who continued the Barmakian tradition in the caliphate, including Fadl ibn Sahl, in fact the entire Sahl dynasty, which was Zoroastrian at the time, was supported by Yahya and became Muslim through him (4: 108).

The city of Baghdad expanded and prospered during the reign of Harun, and large palaces were built there, and trade goods reached it from every road. Aaron intended to connect the Mediterranean to the Red Sea in the area of Farma (a city in Egypt). Yahya al-Barmaki said that he feared that the Romans would enter the Red Sea and their influence would advance to the Hijaz, which would be to the detriment of the holy religion of Islam, and finally Harun refused to do so (2: 495).

Yahya Barmaki worked hard and managed the affairs of the state with great effort and did not refuse to endure any suffering. In order to eliminate shortcomings and collect taxes properly, he

managed and led the construction of buildings in the center of the caliphate and the Islamic Empire as a whole in a special order (7: 59-60). He finally died in 190 AH (808 AD) (7: 79).

### **Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki**

Fazl Barmaki was born in 148 AH (765 AD), seven days before the birth of Harun al-Rashid. He ate the milk of Fazl's mother and the cotton of Harun al-Rashid's mother also milked Fazl and Fazl and Harun were each other's foster brothers (7: 81).

During Yahya's ministry, Fazl was the head of the court shrine on behalf of Harun and the teacher and educator of Harun's son Mohammad, who later became the caliph as Amin. Zubaida, Amin's mother, repeatedly told Fazl that Muhammad was his son and his caliphate was his caliphate. Fazl was the most generous person among the Barmakian, in a year he gave ten million dirhams to the people who came to see him and built a mosque in the city of Bukhara and was the first to install lamps in mosques on the nights of Ramadan (4: 108-109). In 178 AH (795 AD), Fazl went to the province of Khorasan. He behaved well and built mosques and shrines there (1: 5261).

In order to spread Islam and the caliphate to the eastern lands, Fazl sent Ibrahim ibn Gabriel ibn Bakhtishu, the commander of his guards, to conquer Kabul. Another important action of Fazl is that during his reign, Kabulistan and Bamiyan were also annexed to the central government of Khorasan and the Abbasid state. The city of Kabul was opened in the time of Uthman ibn Affan by a man named Abdul Rahman ibn Samra, but now it is closed again so that there is no way except for merchants, but it was conquered by the grace of this city. In 179 AH (796 AD), Fazl was summoned to Baghdad by Harun. When he arrived in Baghdad, he was warmly welcomed and succeeded his father Yahya in the ministry (4:108-110).

Fazl has moral and personality characteristics that distinguish him from other Barmakian, including his most famous characteristic is generosity and forgiveness. Three years after his father's death, in Muharram 193 AH (809 AD), Fazl first suffered from a kind of paralysis and died after a temporary recovery at the age of 45, five months before the death of Harun al-Rashid in Raqqa (a city on the banks of the Euphrates) (4:109-110).

### **The role of Fazl Barmaki in Islamic charities**

In 177 AH (793 AD), Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki Balkhi came to the Emirate of Khorasan. This Balkhi man who was interested in Khorasan, his homeland, built buildings in this land. He spent a lot of money in Bukhara to repair the Great Mosque. He built a mosque instead, removed the oppression in Khorasan, and built mosques, ponds and bridges. Another of Fazl's unforgettable contributions to the spread of Islamic civilization is that he developed the paper industry of Khorasan, one of whose centers was in Samarkand. When he returned to Baghdad from Khorasan, he took this precious industry there until he built factories for the paper industry in Baghdad.

### **Ja'far ibn Yahya Barmaki**

Ja'far was born in Medina in 150 AH (767 AD) (7: 97). He was a writer and statesman, the youngest son of Yahya, and was known for his eloquence, intelligence and patience. Ja'far's eloquence in speech and writing was as famous as his brother Fazl's generosity (4: 111).

In 176 AH (792 AD), Harun al-Rashid appointed Ja'far as the governor of Egypt. And in 180 AH (797 AD) when the difference occurred in Syria and its work increased, Rashid Ja'far was appointed as the governor of Syria. When he reached Syria, he brought reforms between them

and the fire subsided and saved the Islamic country from the separatism that caused the fall of the government. (6: 117) And Ja'far succeeded 'Isa ibn 'Aki in Syria and returned and honored him (1: 5270-5273) and in the same year (180 AH according to 797 AD) he gave the province of Khorasan and then entrusted it to the army (32: 39).

Ja'far al-Barmaki had a secret relationship with Abbasa, Rashid's sister, and Harun wanted to keep both present because of his attachment to his sister and Ja'far's company. But Harun did not want this marriage to lead to other relationships, but Ja'far and Abbas had two children who were kept secretly in Mecca. When Harun found out, he killed Ja'far in 187 AH (803 AD) at the age of thirty-seven. Industry and trade had a great influence and disappeared (2: 772).

### **Musa ibn Yahya Barmaki**

Musa Barmaki was the bravest of all the sons of Yahya. He was a complete man and an experienced commander. Harun al-Rashid gave him the governorship of Syria in 176 AH (792 AD), but Ali ibn Isa, the governor of Khorasan, complained to Harun and accused him of sedition in Syria. The presence of the capital survived the suspicion of Harun intensified and summoned him and imprisoned him in Kufa, eventually released through the mediation of his mother and father's guarantee and was dismissed (2: 494).

### **Muhammad ibn Yahya**

Muhammad was a wise, far-sighted person who was not proud of his position, glory, power, or wealth (7: 147). He was a noble and ambitious man. He was the viceroy of Sindh for a while and then came to the government of that land.

### **The role of the Barmakian in the Abbasid state**

Internal decline and uprisings of the people of the conquered countries provided the ground for the fall of the Umayyad state and after the people of Afghanistan under the leadership of Abu Muslim Khorasani rolled up the scroll of the Umayyad Empire, the Abbasid state emerged. 1258 AD) for five centuries at the head of the Islamic caliphate, but the Abbasid state was no longer an Arab state but an inter-Islamic state in which the political influence of the men of Afghanistan (Khorasan), Iran, Transoxiana, Turks and other Muslim nations had a great influence, especially Afghan men such as Abu Muslim Khorasani gained political power for the Abbasid and Balkh dynasties. Sarkhsi participated in the administration of that great Islamic state for many years. But in terms of civilization and culture, the Abbasid era is a brilliant period in the history of Islam and a prominent page in the history of the world. The Abbasid government and the Barmaki men loved the old culture of the world and respected the scholars of every nation and religion - except political opponents. In politics, the Abbasid administration was moderate towards the Umayyad state, sharing non-Arab (foreign) men in the administration of the state, both in the capital and in the occupied states, and did not treat the nations subject to the Umayyad state harshly, which led to the advancement of Islamic and world civilization (3:67).

The Abbasid caliphate is generally divided into two parts, each of which has many differences. The first period, called the Golden Age of the Abbasids, lasted from the beginning of the Abbasid state in 132 AH (750 AD) to the death of Ma'mun in 218 AH (833 AD). During this period, the Abbasid state reached its peak of greatness and the civilization we are discussing was established during that period. But the second period, which is considered the day of decline and decline, begins with the caliphate of Mu'tasim 218 AH (833 AD) and ends with the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols. During this period, the wealth of Islam decreased and the Islamic state weakened (and finally the internal decline and uprisings of the people of the conquered countries

sowed the seeds of the extinction of the Abbasid state, which was dealt the last blow by the Mughal invasion (3:67) and its era ended (2398:2).

### **The rise of the Barmakian during the reign of Harun al-Rashid**

In 170 AH (786 AD), the most powerful Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, ascended the Islamic caliphate. He appointed Yahya, son of Khalid Barmaki, as minister in Baghdad. In 177 AH (793 AD), Harun al-Rashid sent Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki to Afghanistan (Khorasan) (3:82). He did not allow the people to rise up, and this led to the advancement of the Islamic state and civilization (3: 82).

In the first seventeen years of the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, almost all the affairs of the caliphate were in the hands of Yahya and his sons and relatives, who were able to acquire immense wealth and property. Harun al-Rashid had entrusted the education of his children to Yahya's sons because of his absolute trust in Barmakia. Ma'mun was placed under the supervision of Ja'far and Amin was entrusted to Fazl. Harun al-Rashid initially entrusted his ministry to Fazl, but due to Ja'far's interest and Yahya's mediation, he entrusted him with the position. Yahya and his sons were like burning stars, the owners of all kinds of knowledge and talent gathered around the Barmakian in groups, and the Barmakian received them with great freedom and generosity. The time of the Barmakis, as a result of their worthy statesmanship, was the best period of glory, prosperity, security, peace and comfort, agriculture flourished and industry grew and developed to the utmost. During the reign of Harun al-Rashid Abbasi, a scientific institute called the House of Wisdom was established in Baghdad and hundreds of mathematicians, doctors, astronomers and writers from all over the great Abbasid country were attracted to this scientific institute, and made such valuable services to the world civilization and culture that its effect remains to this day; The House of Hikma was a large library whose books were obtained by the caliphs in the conquests of Asia Minor, Ankara and Amuriyah (a city in Roman territory) and the Barmakian had a strong hand in its establishment (4: 65-66).

### **Social Situation of Afghanistan (Khorasan) during the Arab Invasion**

As Afghanistan (Khorasan) accepted Islam and the Arabic language, it donated mathematics, astronomy, essay, philosophy and medicine of India to the Arabs and participated effectively in the overall Islamic civilization, so that it presented famous men to Islamic civilization in religious sciences such as commentary, hadith, jurisprudence and Sufism and mysticism. Also, in the field of politics of Afghanistan (Khorasan) by the Barmaki and Sahl dynasties in the Arab administration influence, the Barmaki Balkhi family descends from Barmak ibn Jamasb (Jamasa), one of these was Khalid ibn Barmak who was appointed by Asad, the Arab governor of Khorasan in 108 AH (72 AD). Abu Muslim sent this man as one of the officers of his army to conquer Baghdad and he was removed from the post of Baghdad by the Caliph Saif after Abu Salma, but after the death of Abu Muslim he was deposed and died in 163 AH (780 AD) in Baghdad. The son of this man, Yahya Barmaki, was a wise man whom Harun al-Rashid called his father and made him a minister. After Yahya, his sons also settled in the court of Baghdad. Ja'far ibn Yahya became Harun's minister and his brother Fazl became the governor of Afghanistan (Khorasan). The dynasty ruled the entire Baghdad caliphate for seventeen years, translated books from Pahlavi and Hindi, and supported science and technology. Musa, Yusuf and Muhammad ibn Jahm were translators belonging to this family. The Barmakis built a school for Arab orphans, but the court elements were jealous of their administrative authority, lifestyle, luxury and extravagance because the family had accumulated more property and consumed more than other nobles in the shadow of the ministry, which aroused the jealousy and competition of

others. The caliph was also pleased with their immense giving to the people and the people's hope for them and the praise poems of the Arab poets about them, who were praised more than any other caliph (3: 85-86). Finally, the court of the caliphate was afraid of their great influence, because the Khorasanian always revolted for independence, so Harun al-Rashid massacred this great family, which had taken over the authority of the entire Abbasid state, in 187 AH (803 AD) (803 AD) 146). Instead, another family of Barmaki compatriots, the Sarkhsi family, remained in the Abbasid state. Fazl and Hassan were the sons of Sahl and had the Zoroastrian religion (3: 85-86). Fazl translated a book from Pahlavi into Arabic and presented it to Yahya Barmaki. As a result, Yahya was very surprised by his rhetoric and eloquence in translation. This book increased the motivations of Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki to persuade Fazl to convert to Islam so that Fazl ibn Sahl's conversion to Islam would lead to his influence in the court of Ma'mun's caliphate. He conquered Baghdad by Tahir Fushanji and gave it to his brother Hassan (3: 85-86).

### **Factors of the decline of the Barmakian dynasty**

The reason for the fall of the Barmakian was that Ja'far al-Barmaki had a secret relationship with Abbas, Rashid's sister. The son had come to be kept secret in Mecca and when Harun al-Rashid found out, in 187 AH (803 AD) he ordered the killing of Ja'far and many of his relatives and assistants. Yahya and Fazl were also imprisoned and after several years of torture and humiliation they died and all their property was confiscated. The fall of the Barmakian in the whole east of the earth produced a great reflection and for many years the worthiness and wisdom of Khalid, the intelligence and foresight of Yahya, the generosity and nobility of the grace and power of the pen, the eloquence of Ja'far, the glory of the value of Muhammad and the courage and power of Moses remained in the memory of the people (2-39).

And thus, the days of this dynasty, which had a great influence on the advancement of Islamic civilization in the fields of science, literature, agriculture, industry and trade, disappeared. Another factor in the fall of the Barmakian began when Ja'far Barmaki released a man named Yahya ibn Abdullah al-Alawi who had revolted in Ray and Tabriz without the permission of Harun al-Rashid. He moved and destroyed them. Fadl ibn Rabi, who wanted to become a minister, tried the hardest and these efforts or the words of the Chinese eventually affected the heart of the caliph (2: 767).

In short, the fall of the Barmakian was due to various reasons that Harun al-Rashid was forced not only to reduce the influence of this dynasty but also to destroy them and erase their traces (2: 771).

Although during the caliphate of Ma'mun, the Barmakian were again patronized by him, they did not regain their former power and greatness (7:22).

### **Research Findings**

Some of the findings of this research show that the Barmakian, as advisors and ministers of the Abbasid caliphs, had a great influence on the politics and administration of the Islamic government. They used their influence to help stabilize and develop the Abbasid state. They also played a major role in the development of science and culture, translating Greek texts and other cultures into Arabic, which led to the transfer of various knowledge and cultures to the Islamic world. The dynasty respected the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Islamic Empire and helped create an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence between different groups. These findings indicate the profound influence of the role of the Barmakian in the rise of Islamic civilization.

### **Controversy**

The controversial issue of this research is the politics of the Barmakis and their excessive influence in the Abbasid court, which has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, some believe that the Barmakian were able to play a key role in improving the Abbasid administrative and political system because of their managerial skills and knowledge. They established efficient institutions such as the Treasury of Wisdom, which had a positive impact on the stability and development of the Islamic caliphate (4:66).

Negative view: Some believe that the Barmakis used their influence in the Abbasid court to gain too much power and weaken the authority of the caliph. This excessive influence, especially in the valley of Harun al-Rashid, caused the caliph to be jealous and distrustful of them and eventually led to their fall.

Another controversial issue of this research is in relation to minorities and non-Muslim communities, where the positive view is that the Barmakis, because of their diverse cultural roots, were able to contribute to positive interaction with non-Muslim communities, including Zoroastrians, and promote a kind of cultural coexistence. But the negative view is that some believe that the Barmakian' relations with non-Muslim communities questioned their complete loyalty to Islam and the Abbasid caliphate.

In general, the role of the Barmakian in the rise of Islamic civilization is commendable because of their widespread influence on various political, cultural and scientific aspects, but how their influence and management remain a matter of discussion and different interpretations. These differences of opinion show the historical complexity and importance of the dynasty in the golden age of the Abbasids.

## Conclusion

The Barmakian dynasty of Balkh converted to Islam in the late first century AH for political reasons and was an effective factor in the development of Islamic civilization and the Abbasid state. This dynasty held the most important centers of power in the Abbasid caliphate.

The Barmakian, as Abbasid ministers, especially during the reign of the most powerful Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, played a key role in the management and administration of the state and also played an important role in the advancement of Islamic civilization; They played a prominent and pioneering role in promoting science and literature, encouraging and respecting scholars and scientists, publishing and developing culture and knowledge, transferring Indian scientific and cultural works through Afghanistan to the Arab world, and also playing a pioneering role in translating non-Arabic works into Arabic.

This family did not hesitate to endure any suffering and hardship with great effort and their era was the best era of development of Islamic sciences and knowledge.

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