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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CITY OF SAMARRA FOR THE ABBASID  
CALIPHATE DURING THE REIGN OF AL-MU'TASIM.**

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**ANNOTATION.**

The article provides information about the significance of the city of Samarra and discusses issues of the Samarra period, its importance in the life of the caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty during the reign of Caliph al-Mu'tasim, the reasons for the founding of the city by the Caliph of Samarra, which served as the residence of the caliphs and the capital of the empire for almost half a century. The relationship of Turkic soldiers from Central Asia and their commanders with the caliphs, the influence on the political life of the caliphate, which subsequently led to "anarchy".

**Keywords**

Samarra, Al-Mamun, Al-Mutasim, Abbasids, Turks, garrison, Mamluks, Al-Mutawakkil, Central Asia.

Samarra - the ancient city was of great importance for the Abbasid rulers. This city is best known in the political history of Islam for being the home of the Turks: the Turkic army corps recruited by al-Mu'tasim (833-842). In many medieval historical written sources, the army of Samarra is simplistically viewed as consisting only of Turks, but in reality everything was much more complicated.

Having become caliph and taking the name Al-Mu'tasim, Abu Ishag Muhammad (833-842) began with profound changes in the Muslim state. These changes were associated with an attempt to strengthen the position of the dynasty. To solve this problem, the caliph needed new figures and new ways. Therefore, he decided to found a new capital and be guided by a renewed ideology. Al-Mu'tasim chose a large plot of land on the banks of the Tigris north of Baghdad and began to build a new city - Samarra, which from 836 to 892 served as the residence of the caliphs and the capital of the empire [14.122-p.;2.261-p. ]. For the construction of the city, by order of the caliph, the best architects and builders, as well as the necessary materials, were brought from all over the caliphate. For example, marble was brought from Egypt and Anatolia. Construction was continued by Al-Mu'tasim's successor Al-Mutawakkil (847-861). In Samarra, palaces were built for the caliph



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and his family, members of the court and heads of administration, barracks and a large mosque[13. 167-p.].

Al-Mu'tasim was one of the youngest sons of Harun al-Rashid; he was not even mentioned by his father in his political will and did not participate in his carefully developed measures. When the struggle for the throne began between his brothers Al-Amin and Al-Mamun, Al-Mu'tasim was 15 and living in Baghdad. During the civil war, he sided with his uncle Ibrahim ibn Mahdi in his opposition to Al-Mamun and that caliph's advisors, the Sahlids. From 814-815 he began to buy Turkic slaves in order to train them in military affairs. Such outstanding personalities in the art of war as Itah and Ashnas were in his service from 817-818 [10. 88-89,93- p.].

Al-Mu'tasim also established connections with the Samanid family, who controlled the Samarkand zone, and they sent him Turkic slaves [1. 267-b.]. The personal army that he was able to create towards the end of his reign Al-Mamun, although not very numerous, was well trained, disciplined and had real strength. This meant that Al-Mu'tasim was the only member of the Abbasid clan who had military support, and Al-Mamun often turned to him for help. When Abdallah ibn Tahir was appointed governor of Khurasan in 828 after the death of his father Tahir, Al-Mu'tasim had no strong opponents left in Syria and Egypt, and he managed to become one of the most powerful men in the Caliphate. He had military force at his disposal, complemented by his personal qualities. Perhaps this prompted prefer Caliph Al-Mamun to his own son Abbas Al-Mutasim and declare him his successor [10.86-87-c.].

It should be noted that in the last years of Al-Mamun's reign, the number of Turks recruited from Central Asia in the army rapidly grew. They were subordinate to Al-Mu'tasim. Such later famous military leaders of the caliphate army as Afshin, Buga al-Kabir, Ashnas and Inak began to enjoy great authority among the soldiers and in the state during this period. They were rewarded with land plots, which brought them income to support themselves and their retinue [14.130-p.]. It can be concluded that influence in the military organization of the Caliphate passed to the Turks. When appointing an heir, the opinion of the Turks was also taken into account. Moreover, they also took into account the more than positive relations and trusting understanding between them and Al-Mutasim. After all, it was Al-Mu'tasim who was entrusted with the formation of a new guard, which was replenished with experienced horsemen and archers. They acted mainly under him and in those provinces where he ruled as governor. Under his direct patronage, such Turkic commanders as Afshin and Ashnas emerged.

It is clear that the force that supported him in the army was the Turks. Having become caliph, Al-Mu'tasim immediately appointed Turks to almost all command



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posts in the army and other important positions in the state, and, relying on them, carried out his innovations. Al-Mu'tasim believed that the army would be more reliable if it was staffed with foreign mercenaries and slaves, rather than free residents involved in local conflicts. The Caliph singled them out in the army and issued a number of decrees confirming the material and other privileges of the Turks. Moreover, having moved to the new capital of the Caliphate - Samarra, Al-Mutasim established Turkic warriors loyal to him there, which became a manifestation of goodwill towards them [14. 118-119-p.].

On the other hand, Al-Mamun's change in the established order of succession to the throne in favor of Al-Mu'tasim convinces us that, indeed, the role, influence and importance of the Turkic ethnic group in the Arab Caliphate was growing. The Turks gradually and consistently climbed not only the military and political hierarchical ladder of this Muslim state, but each time their organizing and decisive role became more and more clearly evident.

At the same time, there is no doubt that Abbas ibn Mamun himself played a significant role in the appointment of his uncle as heir and his election as caliph. However, sources indicate that after Al-Mu'tasim was declared head of state, part of the army did not agree with this and declared herself as a supporter of Abbas. Then the latter publicly swore allegiance to his uncle and called on his supporters to follow his example. If we take into account al-Tabari's message that Al-Mamun, before his death, gave his son instructions to carry out a number of military operations, then Abbas undoubtedly had under his command a significant army consisting only of Arabs. Therefore, he would hardly have obeyed the new caliph if not for the strict control of Al-Mu'tasim himself and his supporters. Of course, the presence of influential Turks, primarily in the army, also played a role. At the time of Al-Mamun's death, Al-Mu'tasim and Abbas were with him. Part of the army immediately swore allegiance to Al-Mu'tasim and recognized him as caliph [12. 2-p.]. They were probably, first of all, Mawali, that is, Turks. At the same time, the proclamation of Al-Mu'tasim as caliph caused serious unrest among the military, and these were most likely the Arabs. This conclusion suggests itself from the fact that the pro-Arab group that supported Abbas openly declared its desire to see him on the throne. Realizing the complexity of the situation, Al-Mu'tasim called his nephew for negotiations. Abbas was faced with the need to recognize the new caliph, who relied on a large majority in the army consisting of Turks, and swore allegiance to him. Therefore, the Arab part of the army also submitted to Al-Mu'tasim [12.1-2-p.]. Despite this, the new caliph could not count on the support of the Arabs in his army, and postponed the campaign launched by Al-Mamun. He chose to immediately return to Baghdad to prevent possible protests by Abbas's supporters in Iraq. In July 833, Al-Mu'tasim arrived in the capital and accepted the



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regalia of power due to the caliph. As a result, thanks to his quick actions, the neutralization of Abbas, and the support of the Turkic military leaders, the new caliph established himself on the throne.

Then noticeable changes began. Thus, many privileged groups in society have lost their status. As soon as Al-Mu'tasim took the throne, he struck off the names of many Arab families from the government's support list, which meant that they would no longer receive salaries for their previous services. The example of Egypt is instructive here, where noble Arab families lost their rights, and Turkic mercenaries, on the contrary, were the only ones who were now given salaries from the treasury.

Thus, Al-Mu'tasim made it clear to society that all Muslims have the right to income from the conquered territories. One of his decrees helped solve another problem - to centralize the flow of taxes into the state treasury. Previously, taxes, as a rule, remained where they were collected, the most striking example of this is Khorasan, now the situation in the fiscus has changed.

The gaining of power by Al-Mu'tasim with the support of the Turks marked the beginning of a new period in the Arab Caliphate. The time of Arab and Persian influence on state affairs has passed, the era of the Turkic ethnic group has arrived. Although government positions were still controlled by the old elite, the army was completely under the control of the Turks. And the army was the most organized, disciplined, mobile and obedient force. It was she who allowed the Turks to prevail in the Caliphate and gradually brought them to the highest and most responsible positions in the state. The new caliph, for his part, did not forget the services rendered to him by the Turkic entourage, and continued the policy of attracting the Turks to his service. As a result, the Turks began to consistently occupy all significant positions vertically and horizontally in the Arab Caliphate, that is, in the center and in the provinces, not only along the military line, but also in the civil line. Over time, they could be found both in the army and among officials of various ranks of the first Muslim state in history. However, much more important and significant was the niche occupied by the Turks in the palace of the caliph, in the central political apparatus, and in the leadership of the army.

Thus, having become close to Al-Mamun during the life of his caliph brother, the Turks now began to acquire more and more weight and influence, increase in numbers and appear more and more noticeably on the political and military scene. This conclusion relates, first of all, to the role that the Turkic guard began to play. In general, the number of Turks in public service - military and civilian - has increased significantly. Many of them reached very high positions. There is information that Al-Mutasim had about seventy thousand Turkic ghulams. Many even received the title of emirs. Caliph Al-Mu'tasim believed that he had found



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such faithful servants in the person of the Turkic ghulams. At the political and economic level, the growth of the Turkic army reflected the general economic boom in the Caliphate, providing the caliphs and local rulers with the means to acquire and pay for professional standing armies.

It can be assumed that the reign of Al-Mu'tasim became a turning point in the history of the Arab Caliphate. Let us note that even before he became caliph, during the period of his Egyptian governorship, Al-Mutasim created Turkic military detachments which included warriors from Fergana, Sogd and Ustrshona. Having become caliph and receiving complete freedom of action, he began to widely attract Turks into his service. Al-Masudi reports on this matter: "Al-Mutasim loved to collect Turks and bought them for his troops. So he gathered four thousand people. He dressed them in silk clothes, belted with gold-embroidered belts. The Turks differed in this form from other warriors. So in a short time he created a large army from the Turks [2.260-c.]. He crowned Al-Afshin with a crown of gold, decorated with precious stones and a crown in which there were no jewels except a red yacht and a green emerald, braided with gold. Al-Afshin married Utruja bint Ashnas, and a wedding was arranged that exceeded the measure of splendor and beauty" [2.266-p.]. Ibn Tagriberdi also writes that from 835 al-Mutasim, without hiding, began to collect the Turks, sent people to Samarkand, Fergana and other places for this, paid the Turks a good salary, dressing them in silk, spent a lot of effort to increase their numbers, and brought it to 8 thousand, and according to another report to 18 thousand. The medieval geographer Ibn Haukal says: "Turkic warriors from Transoxiana were brought to the Abbasid Caliphate to form a regular personal guard. They were superior to all other groups in the army. Representatives of noble families who arrived with them were appointed commanders to the Turks; these same Turkic emirs ruled the caliph's court and the postal department. The Turks' ability in warfare, loyalty to the oath and power became the main reasons for attracting the Caliph as a main component of the guard. The Turks turned into the most privileged class of the army of the Abbasid Caliphate" [9.89-90-p.]. Young Turkic warriors (gulams) were brought up at the court in special schools, then enlisted in the army of the caliph. Al-Mu'tasim could fully rely on such a new mercenary army. He believed, not without reason, that the army would be more reliable if it was staffed with foreign mercenaries, rather than free residents involved in local social and religious conflicts and problems [9.89-c.]. Various sources provide a fairly accurate picture of the events of Al-Mu'tasim's time. A consistent and targeted policy was pursued to attract Turks into the ranks of the Caliphate army both during the reign of Al-Mamun and his successor. Later, under the successors of Al-Mugasim, this tradition would be stopped, and an attempt would be made to free himself from Turkic influence. For this purpose, after Al-



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Mugasim, they began to create military formations from representatives of other ethnic groups. However, starting from the reign of Al-Mugawakkil (847 - 851), clashes between the Turks and caliphs took such forms that from now on the Abbasids lost the ability to regulate the process. If we list the military leaders, they are from among those who appeared on the political arena under Al-Mamun and Al-Mutasim, that is, they are from the Turks. This is reliable, for Ibn Haukal's information dates from the end of the reign of Al-Mamun to the time of Al-Mu'tasim inclusive. Not limiting himself to attracting warriors from the Turkic regions, Al-Mu'tasim also brought closer to himself those Turks who already lived in Iraq, and even in Baghdad. Among these were Ashnas, Vasif, Inak [14. 130-p.]. The military formations of the Turks were commanded by representatives of the Turkic aristocratic families close to the throne of the Caliph by al-Mutasim. Having received significant land grants from him, they were under special protection and were appointed commanders of formations of warriors from their regions. According to sources, representatives of other ethnic groups were not appointed commanders of the Turks. Under Al-Mutasim, the Turkic ethnic group already firmly occupied its niche in the military-political system of the Arab state, and structurally. The influence of the Turks became so tangible and real that they were recorded in numbers that may not have actually existed, but it was assumed, given their presence in all parts of the system, both military and political. The sources make a lot and often mention of the Turks and Central Asians in various structures of the Caliphate, especially under Al-Mutasim, which means that this was the way it was in the realities of its time. The strengthening of Turkic influence in the army and in general in the Caliphate, the preference given to them over other ethnic groups, the personal patronage of Caliph Al-Mutasim - all this became the cause of discontent in Arab society.

The Turks turned into a serious force that actively interfered in the life of the capital of the Caliphate - Baghdad. So, they turned this city into their military base and conducted exercises here. The people of Baghdad were concerned about this turn of events, but in the city itself they could not openly express and demonstrate their discontent. However, the city elders spoke quite harshly about the "unworthy" behavior of his Turkic guards to the Caliph" [2. 260-c.]. For all these reasons, there were often cases of murder of Turks in the vicinity of Baghdad. Al-Mu'tasim was concerned that the residents of the capital might rebel, and then armed clashes would begin between the Baghdadis and his personal Turkic guard. Equally significant was the fact that the traditional old Arab elite had less and less space in the structures of the Caliphate, primarily in Baghdad itself and the central provinces. It was increasingly and more energetically pressed by non-Arabs, mainly Turks, and this worsened relations between them and the old elite. Perhaps



these were the main reasons for Al-Mu'tasim's founding of a new capital and departure from troubled Baghdad. On the other hand, the decision of the Caliph became a statement of the further strengthening of the influence and weight of the Turkic element in the Caliphate. As a consequence of this change of guidelines by Caliph Al-Mu'tasim: the old Arab elite has served its purpose, now the focus is on the Turkic one. And Al-Mu'tasim's decision to move the capital is a milestone from which a new stage in the history of the Caliphate began, this is a new time reference in the position of the Turks in the military-political structure of the state in the period we are studying. Briefly speaking, a qualitatively new milestone has arrived, significant in many aspects, in the relationship between the Arab and Turkic elements of the first Muslim state. Although it was created exclusively by the Arabs, its further fate, like the creators themselves, was tightly connected with the Turks.

And this turn took place in the fate of the Caliphate and the Arabs themselves under Al-Mutasim, who already in the second year of his reign decided to move the capital. The Abbasid caliphs generally had a weakness for building new residences that would symbolize their power.

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