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**Mahdī with Black Banners: A close look at the *Akhbār al-‘Abbās* from the
Perspective of Mahdī Belief**

*Siyah Sancaklı Mehdī: Mehdī İnancı Perspektifinden Ahbârü'l-Abbâs'a Yakından
Bakış*

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Mahdī with Black Banners: A close look at the *Akhhbār al-‘Abbās* from the Perspective of Mahdī Belief

Abstract: The Mahdī belief had reappeared during the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution as a provocative force for the masses not long after its spread in Islamic society. For this reason, in many studies on the revolution, how and in what way this belief was utilized have been discussed. The ‘Abbāsīds exploited expectation of saviour, which was identified as the Mahdī belief, to legitimize themselves in the caliphate even after the revolution succeeded. Thus, in the *Akhhbār al-‘Abbās*, which is considered the semi-official history of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, there are many riwāyas emphasizing that the ‘Abbāsīds are the expected saviours. *Akhhbār al-‘Abbās* is an anonymous manuscript which provides essential information about the revolution and therefore probably had been written by someone close to the ‘Abbāsīd family. After the publication by ‘Abd al-Aziz Dūrī and A. J. al-Muttalibī in 1971, the manuscript became known as *Akhhbār al-‘Abbās*, and *Akhhbār* in short. There are many riwāyas in this source which emphasize that the ‘Abbāsīds are the expected saviours. These riwāyas are mostly presented with narratives about the appearance of black banners. Although the riwāyas in the manuscript have been discussed to shed light on various aspects of the revolution in the studies which investigate or reference this source, there is no study emphasizing that there is a direct relationship between these riwāyas and Mahdī belief. Moreover, the riwāyas in the source have not been examined in detail. There are two topics which need to be focused on when reviewing the literature. Of these two, the more important is the *Akhhbār*. Studies on this newly discovered source have been about the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution and, recently, on the historiographical value and authenticity of the source. The other focus of these studies is the Mahdī belief and its importance for the revolution, which has been studied for more than a century. Gerlof Van Vloten’s book can be regarded as the primary work to reveal some important challenges for the Mahdī belief and its effect on the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution. However, Van Vloten did not refer to *Akhhbār* because the manuscript had not been discovered yet when he published his study at the end of the 19th century. This article was written to discuss the influence of the Mahdī (saviour or deliverer) belief in the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution through riwāyas on black banners. It points out the riwāyas of the black banners in the *Akhhbār* by associating them with the Mahdī belief. For this reason, the title “Mahdī with Black Banners” was chosen for this article. Modern historians believe that this belief had become widespread in the Islamic society gradually and thus was influential in the ‘Abbāsīd movement; however, the available sources were not enough to support this claim sufficiently. In this study, firstly the Mahdī belief will be explained. Then the importance of Mahdī belief during the ‘Abbāsīd movement will be discussed. And finally, the riwāyas related to this belief in the *Akhhbār* will be examined in more detail compared to the similar studies. In conclusion, the article argues that despite the minority of the direct riwāyas on the Mahdī belief, there are many riwāyas in *Akhhbār* about the black banners. Thus, it can be said that the ‘Abbāsīds took advantage of Mahdī belief for the success of the revolution and to gain legitimacy afterwards. However, this belief was not only Mahdī but Mahdī with a black banner.

Keywords: Islamic History, ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, Mahdī Belief, Black Banners, *Akhhbār al-‘Abbās*.

Siyah Sancaklı Mehdî: Mehdî İnancı Perspektifinden Ahbârû'l-Abbâs'a Yakından Bakış

Öz: Mehdî inancı, İslam toplumunda yayılışından kısa bir süre sonra, kitleleri harekete geçiren bir motivasyon olarak Abbâsî İhtilâli sırasında yeniden ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu sebeple, ihtilâli ele alan birçok çalışmada halkta yaygınlık kazanan bu inançtan nasıl ve ne şekilde istifade edildiği incelenmiştir. Abbâsîler, Mehdî inancı olarak ifade edilen beklenen kurtarıcı inancından, ihtilâl başarıya ulaştıktan sonra da hilafette kendilerine meşruiyet sağlama amacı ile istifade etmişlerdir. Böylece *Ahbârû'l-Abbâs* adlı, Abbâsîlerin ihtilâle sonuçlanan mücadelelerinin yarı resmi tarihi olarak sayılan kaynağa da Abbâsîlerin beklenen kurtarıcılar olduğunu

vurgulayan birçok rivâyet yer almıştır. *Ahbâru'l-Abbâs*, Abbâsî İhtilâli hakkında önemli bilgiler sunan ve bu nedenle muhtemelen Abbâsî ailesine yakın biri tarafından yazılmış olduğu tahmin edilen anonim bir el yazmasıdır. Abdülaziz ed-Dûrî ve Abdülcebbâr el-Muttalibî tarafından 1971'de yayımlandıktan sonra, *Ahbâru'l-Abbâs* veya kısaca *Ahbâr* olarak tanınmıştır. Bu kaynakta Abbâsîlerin beklenen kurtarıcılar olduğunu vurgulayan birçok rivâyet vardır ancak bu rivâyetler daha çok siyah sancakların ortaya çıkışı ile ilgili anlatımlarla sunulmuştur. Şimdiye kadar eser hakkında veya eserden istifade edilerek yapılan çalışmalarda, rivâyetler çoğunlukla ihtilâlin bilinmeyen yönlerine ışık tutacak şekilde ele alınmıştır, fakat bu rivâyetler ile Mehdî inancı arasında doğrudan bir ilişki olduğunu vurgulayan bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Böylece kaynaktaki rivâyetlerin Mehdî inancı açısından ayrıntılı olarak incelenmediği söylenebilir. Çalışmamızla ilgili literatür bakımından üzerinde durulması gereken iki temel konu vardır. Bunlar arasında da en önemlisi şüphesiz ki *Ahbâr*'dir. Modern dönemde yeni bulunmuş bu kaynak üzerine olan çalışmalar çoğunlukla Abbâsî İhtilâli'ni ele alan çalışmalardır. Son zamanlarda kaynağın tarihyazımı açısından değeri veya sahilliği hakkında da bazı çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Literatürdeki diğer ilgili çalışmalar ise bir asrı aşkın süredir üzerinde detaylı şekilde inceleme yapılan Mehdî inancı ve bunun ihtilâl için önemine odaklanan araştırmalardır. Bu noktada, Gerlof Van Vloten'in kitabı, Mehdî inancına yönelik bazı önemli noktalara değinen ve bunun Abbâsî İhtilâli üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koyan birincil eser olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bununla birlikte Van Vloten, el yazması onun çalışmasını kaleme aldığı dönemde (19. yüzyılın sonunda) henüz keşfedilmediği için *Ahbâr*'a hiç atıfta bulunmamıştır. Bu makale Abbâsî İhtilâli'nde Mehdî (kurtarıcı) inancının siyah sancaklar hakkındaki rivâyetler aracılığıyla oluşturulan etkisini tartışmak amacıyla yazılmıştır. *Ahbâr*'daki ilgili rivâyetleri Mehdî inancıyla ilişkilendirerek ortaya koymaktadır. Bu nedenle bu makale için "Siyah Sancaklı Mehdî" başlığı seçilmiştir. Modern tarihçiler, bu inancın İslam toplumunda giderek yaygınlaştığına ve dolayısıyla Abbâsî hareketinde etkili olduğuna inanmaktadırlar; ancak *Ahbâr*'dan önce ulaşılan kaynaklar bu iddiayı desteklemek için yeterli değildir. Çalışmada öncelikle Mehdî inancı ele alınacak, daha sonra beklenen kurtarıcı inancının Hicrî 2. yüzyıldaki önemi ve Abbâsî İhtilâli ile ilişkisi tartışılacak, son olarak da Mehdî inancının Abbâsî İhtilâli'ndeki etkinliğinin kaynağına nasıl yansıdığı incelenecektir. Bu makale, *Ahbâru'l-Abbâs* adlı kaynakta, Mehdî inancına doğrudan işaret eden rivâyetlerin azınlığına karşın, siyah sancakların ele alındığı rivâyetlerin fazla olduğunu savunmaktadır. Böylece Abbâsîlerin Mehdî inancından ihtilâlin başarıya ulaşması ve ardından meşrûiyeti sağlamada istifade ettikleri söylenebilir. Ancak bu inanç yalnızca Mehdî inancı değil, bilhassa siyah sancaklı Mehdî inancıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam Tarihi, Abbâsî İhtilâli, Mehdî İnancı, Siyah Sancaklar, *Ahbâru'l-Abbâs*.

Introduction

This article was written to discuss the influence of the Mahdî (saviour or deliverer) belief in the 'Abbâsîd Revolution through riwâyas on black banners. Modern historians believe that this belief had become widespread in the Islamic society gradually and thus was influential in the 'Abbâsîd movement; however, the available sources were not enough to support this claim sufficiently. A manuscript, which was discovered after 1950, revealed that the Mahdî belief and the discourses, symbols, and names in this belief were leading factors during the revolution. This was an anonymous manuscript which provides essential information about the revolution and therefore probably had been written by someone close to the 'Abbâsîd family. After the publication by 'Abd al-Aziz Dûrî and A. J. al-Muttalibî, the manuscript became known as *Akhhbâr al-'Abbâs*, and *Akhhbâr* in short. There are many riwâyas in this source which emphasize that the 'Abbâsîds are the expected saviours. These riwâyas are mostly narratives about the appearance of black banners. Although the riwâyas in the manuscript have been discussed to shed light on various aspects of the revolution, there is no study

emphasizing that there is a direct relationship between these riwāyas and Mahdī belief. This study aims to contribute to filling this gap.

For this paper, there are two topics which need to focus upon when reviewing the literature. Of these two, the more important is the *Akhhbār*: Studies on this newly discovered source have been about the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution and, recently, on the historiographical value and authenticity of the source.¹ The other focus of these studies is the Mahdī belief and its importance for the revolution, which has been studied for more than a century. Gerlof Van Vloten’s book² can be regarded as the primary work to reveal some important challenges for the Mahdī belief and its effect on the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution. Van Vloten did not refer to *Akhhbār* because the manuscript had not been discovered yet when he published his study at the end of the 19th century. After its discovery in the 1950s, *Akhhbār* has become the most significant source for the ‘Abbāsīd ideology both before and after the revolution. In his Ph.D. thesis,³ Farouk Omar and in the two important books, Moshe Sharon⁴, included the expressions from *Akhhbār* extensively. In his book,⁵ Jacob Lassner and Elton Daniel in his article⁶ also deal with the *Akhhbār* in particular; however, these studies focus on its historiographical importance rather than its importance for understanding Mahdī belief. This inquiry aims to further these discussions specifically on the narrations to reveal the significance of *Akhhbār* in understanding Mahdī belief in ‘Abbāsīd movement.

To make this argument clear, in the first part of the paper, the basis of the Mahdī belief and its emergence in Islam will be explained. In the second part, the echoes of the Mahdī belief in the 2nd century after Hijra will be discussed. The main focus in this section is the black banners. Although they have a symbolic value, the black banners, which appeared in some of the rebellions against the caliphate in this period, will be discussed by referring to the historians’ views on the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution. The third and last part is on the effectiveness of the Mahdī belief in the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution and its narration in the *Akhhbār* by including important riwāyas. Because of the limits of the study, similar riwāyas in other books about Mahdī belief or black banners will not be discussed here. For this reason, the subject will focus on the relevant riwāyas by including the narrations in *Akhhbār*. The aim of the paper is to portray the Mahdī belief during the early years of Islamic history, as well as in the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, by emphasizing the importance of black banners.

1. The Mahdī Belief in Islam

The concept of Masīh or Mahdī is generally defined as the saviour who is expected to come before the end of the world. While the Masīh is the name of the expected saviour in Judaism and Christianity, Mahdī, on the other hand, has become more common in Islam. It is also stated that the name Mahdī is the Arabic translation of Masīh.⁷ Modern researchers have

¹ Elton Daniel, “The Anonymous ‘History of the Abbasid Family’ and its Place in Islamic Historiography”. *Middle East Studies* 14 (1982), 419-434; Öznur Özdemir - Şule Yüksel Uysal, “Abbāsī İktidarının Meşruiyet Aracı Olarak *Ahbârü’l-Abbās* ve İslâm Tarihçiliği Açısından Değeri”, *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 21/1 (2021), 293-322.

² Gerlof Van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe, le chiitisme et les croyances messianiques sous le khalifat des Omayyades*, (Amsterdam: J. Müller, 1894).

³ Farouk Omar, *The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, 132/750-170/786* (London: University of London SOAS, Ph.D. Thesis, 1967).

⁴ Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the ‘Abbasid State: The Incubation of a Revolt* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 1983); Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East II: Revolt: The Social and Military Aspects of the ‘Abbasid Revolution* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 1990).

⁵ Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁶ Daniel, “The Anonymous”, 419 ff.

⁷ Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Mehdî”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2003), 28/372; Jacques Waardenburg, “Mesih”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2004), 29/306; Ethem Ruhi Fiğlalı, “Mesih ve Mehdî İnanç Üzerine”, *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 25/1 (1982), 179-214.

named this belief 'saviour/deliverer' instead of the Mahdî or the Messiah since his name varies in the sources. Because this belief has roots in the societies before Islam, it is necessary to examine how it expanded in the first Islamic society briefly.

There are certain stages for the spread of the saviour belief in Islamic society. For example, after the death of 'Ali b. Abî Tâlib (d. 40/661), 'Abdallâh b. Saba⁸ declared that "Ali b. Abî Tâlib did not die and will return to save the people before the end of the world". Some scholars in the following centuries, such as Nawbahtî (d. 310/922) and 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Bagh-dâdî (d. 429/1038), asserted that the main reason for this claim should be the wish to spread the Jesus belief in Islamic society.⁹ It is possible that Mahdî belief originated from Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism. Frye believes that the "Mahdî-messiah idea was deeply rooted in Zoroastrianism, and the history of Iran throughout the ages has revealed the receptivity of the people for a deliverer".¹⁰

There are also those who believe that this belief is a doctrine that developed gradually among the people.¹¹ Lewis, claims that the books on *jafir* and *malâhim*¹² are as common in Islam as in Christianity, therefore they have a direct effect on political events, the behaviours of the people and the rulers, and on historians.¹³ Lewis's concept of Mahdî, "as a political leader over time [who] has become a messianic religious saviour", also has importance. He states that Mukhtâr al-Thaqafî was the first to use the belief for his revolt. Lewis said that despite the failure of this rebellion, the belief in 'Ali b. Abî Tâlib's son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafîyyah's return to provide justice, spread after his death in 81/700.¹⁴ On the other hand, Zaman stated that during the 'Abbâsîd movement, many apocalyptic beliefs and ideas were used to support the revolution; new ones were produced and, as a result, a millenarian atmosphere was created.¹⁵ Cahen also says that there is a widespread Masîh or Mahdî idea in eastern countries, and points out that these thoughts prepared suitable ground for the revolution.¹⁶

In his study on the messianic titles used by the 'Abbâsîd caliphs, Lewis emphasized the Messihî beliefs of Yemenî tribes was a positive factor in their support to the 'Abbâsîd Revolution. He also draws attention to the Messihî character of the Mukhtâr's rebellion and his Yemenî adherents.¹⁷ The rebellion of Ḥârith b. Surayj has been likened to the 'Abbâsîd movement in terms of its messianic aspects as well. Van Vloten asserts that Ḥârith was a "saviour

⁸ 'Abdallâh b. Saba, who is portrayed as the forerunner of Shi'ism, was a Jew who became a Muslim during the caliphate of Uthmân (644-656). It is said that he publicly declared that Muhammad was the expected messiah, but after the death of Muhammad, he transferred his devotion to the 'Ali and declared that he was the messiah. See also Steven M. Wasserstrom, "'Abd Allâh ibn Saba", *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Accessed 31 December 2020).

⁹ For detailed information see Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnanıcının İslam Akaidine Giriş Serüveni", *Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnanıcı*, ed. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz (İstanbul: Kuramer, 2017), 178.

¹⁰ Richard N. Frye, "The Role of Abu Muslim in the 'Abbâsîd Revolt", *The Muslim World* 37/1 (1947), 29.

¹¹ Bernard Lewis, "On the Revolutions in Early Islam", *Studia Islamica*, (1970), 15-16; William F. Tucker, *Mahdîs and Millenarians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12-27.

¹² Prognosticative texts.

¹³ Bernard Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First 'Abbâsîd Caliphs", *Dr. Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi: Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume Committee [available at Maktaba Jamia], 1968), 17.

¹⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 74-75; Tucker, *Mahdîs and Millenarians*, 32; Roberto Marín Guzmán, *Popular Dimensions of the 'Abbâsîd Revolution* (Cambridge: Passeggiata, 1990), 63.

¹⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Routinization of Revolutionary Charisma: Notes on the 'Abbâsîd Caliphs al-Manşûr and al-Mahdî", *Islamic Studies* 29/3 (1990), 251.

¹⁶ Claude Cahen, *İslamiyet* (Ankara: Bilgi, 2000), 57.

¹⁷ Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First 'Abbâsîd Caliphs", 17.

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of the oppressed people, in the role of Masīh".¹⁸ On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the Umayyads put forward a Mahdī figure named Sufyānī in parallel with this belief.¹⁹ Wellhausen says that Sufyānī Abū Muḥammad was the Masīh and Syrians had political hopes for him.²⁰ Lewis, on the other hand, claims that the Umayyad family brought out Sufyānī as a Messihī figure who competed with the ‘Alid supporters.²¹ The fact they revealed a messianic figure and developed a legend of the Sufyānī shows that the Umayyads also took action to meet the people's expectations.

On the other hand, the inclusion of the Mahdī idea in Islamic literature has caused this belief to be passed down from generation to generation. Regarding this inclusion, Yavuz says that an important narration can be found in the *al-Fiqh al-akhbār*, which is attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 153/767).²² Although, in another early source, Ma‘mar b. Rashīd's (d. 153/770) *Al-Cāmi*, it is narrated that a saviour will come before the doomsday and peace will be established among people, Yavuz claims that the riwāyah in this book could not be attributed to the Prophet; it is more likely the words of Abū Hurayra.²³ As for the hadith literature, while Bukhari, Muslim and Malik ibn Anas did not include any riwāyah about Mahdī in their books, there is a riwāyah in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *Musnad*: Jesus will descend from heaven as a sign of the *qiyamah* (day of judgement) and will be the ruler (Mahdī).²⁴ Ibn Khaldūn (d. 732/1332) criticizes all the riwāyas on Mahdī and regards them as fabrications although he did not express this view explicitly. In *Muqaddimah*, he includes the related riwāyas until his time and outlines the Mahdī belief for the reader.²⁵

Among modern studies, for detailed information about the Messianic beliefs of the people in early Islam, Yücesoy's *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam* is important. Here, Yücesoy states that there were many messianic movements before the ‘Abbāsīd revolution, and that the ‘Abbāsīds were born from one of these movements: the Kaysāniyya. He points out that the narrations about the ‘Abbāsīds herald for the destruction of the Umayyads and the beginning of a new period of justice.²⁶ The way the messianic beliefs of the people were exploited during the ‘Abbāsīd movement was explained briefly and systematically by Utku in a book chapter. Utku states here that the Umayyad period created an environment that would strengthen the saviour belief because of the rulers' adverse policies towards the *ahl al-bayt* and the emergence of tribal asabiyyah. Another important point that she underlines is the relationship between the ‘Abbāsīd movement and the ‘Alid uprisings. She believes that the Hāshimiyya movement, which constitutes the fundamental support of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, was based on a concept, not a person as a saviour idea. She also finds interesting the influence of Mahdī belief on a political movement.²⁷ In addition, she points out that after the ‘Abbāsīds seized power, they continued to propagate through the saviour belief and that they invented hadiths claiming that the Mahdī would be from the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty.²⁸

¹⁸ Gerlof Van Vloten, *Emevî Devrinde Arab Hâkimiyeti: Şîâ ve Mesîh Akîdeleri Üzerine Araştırmalar*, trans. Mehmed Said Hatiboğlu (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayinevi, 1986), 40.

¹⁹ See. Shaddel, Mehdy. "The Sufyānī in Early Islamic Kerygma: An Enquiry into His Origins and Early Development" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27 (2017), 403-343.

²⁰ Julius Wellhausen, *Arap Devleti ve Sukutu* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayinevi, 1963), 293.

²¹ Bernard Lewis, "‘Abbāsīds", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, (Leiden: Brill, 1960).

²² Yavuz, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnançının İslam Akaidine Giriş Serüveni", 181.

²³ Yavuz, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnançının İslam Akaidine Giriş Serüveni", 183.

²⁴ Yavuz, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnançının İslam Akaidine Giriş Serüveni", 184-185.

²⁵ İbn Haldun, *Mukaddime I*, trans. Süleyman Uludağ (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2015), 571-578.

²⁶ Hayrettin Yücesoy, *Ortaçağ İslam'ında Mesihçi İnançlar ve İmparatorluk Siyaseti* (İstanbul: Klasik, 2016), 48-49.

²⁷ Nihal Şahin Utku, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnançının Siyasî-Dinî İdeoloji Olarak Ortaya Çıkışı", *Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnanç*, ed. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz (İstanbul: KURAMER, 2017), 75.

²⁸ Şahin Utku, "Beklenen Kurtarıcı İnançının Siyasî-Dinî İdeoloji Olarak Ortaya Çıkışı", 67-68.

As a result, it is possible to say that Mahdî belief emerged after 'Alî's death by the means of similar beliefs from other religions and was adopted during the Umayyad period, especially among the supporters of 'Alî's son and formed the Shi'ite groups of the next period. The belief was used by Mukhtar al-Thaqafî, who is regarded as the pioneer figure of the 'Abbâsîd Revolution. The Kaysâniyya group, who expected Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafîyyah to be the caliph, had a strong Mahdî belief. The Mahdî belief adopted among the extreme Shi'ites (Galiyya) soon became widespread as the Shi'ite belief in later periods. Waiting for the Mahdî to emerge from the Prophet's family (especially the 'Alid branch) to establish justice in the world and believing in his arrival has been one of the main beliefs of the Shi'a sect. It was believed that in almost all Shi'ite sects that the Mahdî would return to society after his (temporary) disappearance. Thus, although some imams could not fulfil what was expected from them during their lifetime, it was believed that they would fulfil these duties in their second coming.²⁹ The opposition to the Umayyads after 'Alî's death, and then martyrdom of Ḥusayn, turned into an expectation of a person who would save the people from the tyrants. The 'Abbâsîds seem to have benefited from this belief effectively. And, after achieving their goals, they used it not against the Umayyads but the 'Alids to establish their legitimacy. On the other hand, this belief became widespread among the followers of 'Alî, who could no longer reach their goals for the caliphate. Now it is necessary to turn to the Mahdî belief in the 'Abbâsîd movement and the black banners which is the main subject of this article.

2. Mahdî's Black Banner for the Muslims of 2nd/8th Century

Two important symbolic elements emerged during the 'Abbâsîd propaganda, which were related to the Mahdî belief. One of them was the black banner and the other was the wooden weapon. There are various interpretations by historians for these two elements and their symbolic importance for the revolutionary army. However, there are very few riwâyah about wooden weapons³⁰ compared to the black banners. Thus, the 'Abbâsîd Revolution has been represented mostly by black banners.

The symbolism of a banner (*liwā'*, *rāya* or *'alam* in Arabic) was known and used before Islam. In the war, Quraysh used a white cloth that Kusayy had attached to a lance. After the conversion to Islam, the army used a banner in the wars and the person to whom the banner given had been regarded the leader of the army. Thus, a pre-Islamic tradition, was adopted and used by the Islamic army. Then the banner became a symbol of unity, a motivation for the soldiers and even a symbol to define the army.³¹ The 'Abbâsîds also preferred to use banners as a symbol of the revolutionary army; the revolutionary army coming from Khurāsān under the Abū Muslim's leadership on the way of Syria, was carrying "black" banners.

After Van Vloten published the *Recherches sur la Domination Arabe le Chiitisme et les Croyances Messianiques Sous le Khalifat des Omayyades* (1894), historians have started to examine the messianic beliefs related to the 'Abbâsîd Revolution. These beliefs were widespread in the last period of the Umayyads and also widely used in the 'Abbâsîd movement. Van Vloten's most important claim is that "a new variant of the Masîh beliefs was raised in

²⁹ Mustafa Öz, "Mehdîlik", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2003), 28/384-386.

³⁰ See Patricia Crone, "The Significance of Wooden Weapons in Al-Mukhtar's Revolt and the 'Abbâsîd Revolution", *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 174-187.

³¹ İlhan Şahin, "Sancak", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009) 36/97-99; J. David-Weill, "'Alam", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 1960); see also Khalil Athamina, "The Black Banners and the Socio-Political Significance of Flags and Slogans in Medieval Islam" *Arabica* 3 (1989), 307-326.

this period as the saviour who is coming from the East with the black flag to defeat the Umayyads”.³² However, due to the limited access to sources, it was not understood how and in what way these beliefs affected the 2nd-century Muslim society. Since the 1950s, the propaganda tools and Mahdī beliefs have attracted more attention due to the increase in access to primary sources written after the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution and the reinterpretation of the available resources with interdisciplinary points of view. Sharon chose the title *Black Banners* for his books, which he published in 1983 and 1990 successively. Many modern historians like Sharon have paid more attention to these symbols than in previous periods. In this way, the Van Vloten’s main claims in understanding the apocalyptic and messianic beliefs that were effective in the second century of Islam have been included in many other modern studies.³³

After Sharon’s first book, Athamina has published a paper on the black banners. In his study, it seems that he wants to understand the place and meaning of the black banners in medieval Islam via the uprisings against the Umayyads. He gives special attention to understanding the importance of black banners in the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, but his study does not reveal the relationship between the Mahdī belief and the ‘Abbāsīds’ benefit from the use of black as symbol and motivation for the revolutionary army. Thus, his study cannot be regarded as a particular study for the black banner-revolution relationship. Furthermore, because black banners were also used in the uprisings before the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, he has concluded that it was not a new propaganda tool.³⁴ But what was the difference between the banners of the ‘Abbāsīds than those used in other wars? How, and in what way, is a banner associated with apocalyptic expectations? Now, it is necessary to take a look at why the ‘Abbāsīds chose the colour black. The issue of choosing the black will be evaluated primarily through the comments of the prominent historians, and then on the *riwāyas* in *Akhbār* in particular in the third chapter.

Van Vloten evaluates the possible causes for the ‘Abbāsīds’ decision on the colour black. On the one hand, they could have used this colour to contrast against the white colour of the Umayyads. On the other hand, they used the black colour because it represented the mourning for the martyrs. However, he asserts that the ‘Abbāsīds more likely adopted the black colour after the revolution. Furthermore, he dismisses the reason for the use of black to represent mourning because, he claims, that black is used for mourning only in clothing. He adds that Hārith b. Surayj, Kharijī Bahlūl and Abū Ḥamza -who used black banners like the ‘Abbāsīds- had no reason to mourn. According to Van Vloten, there is a relationship between black flags and the fight against impiety and injustice, and this relationship was established due to the black colour of the Prophet’s flag, as the sources support this view.³⁵ In the same way, according to Guzmán, “the black banners against the Umayyads’ white banners became a messianic symbol of the revival of justice and the abolition of persecution”.³⁶

Here the researcher has to face the following questions: Did the Umayyads actually adopt the colour white? Did the ‘Abbāsīds choose the black merely to contrast against the Umayyads? On the Umayyads’ adoption of the colour white, Athamina claims that if this idea was accepted because of a tradition about the white dress used by Walid b. Yazid, this *riwāyah* is not enough to generalise this tendency for all the Umayyads.³⁷ In other respects, the Umayyads’ adoption of white banners and the political and symbolic attachment to white like the ‘Abbāsīds’ black, can also be traced by investigating the character of uprisings in Syria after

³² Van Vloten, *Emevî Devrinde Arab Hâkimiyeti*, 75–76.

³³ Claude Cahen, “Points de Vue Sur La Révolution ‘Abbāsīde”, *Revue Historique* 3 (1976), 85–104; Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Elton L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under ‘Abbāsīd Rule, 747–820* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1979); Saleh Said Agha, *The Revolution Which Toppled Umayyads: Neither Arabs Nor ‘Abbāsīd* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*.

³⁴ Athamina, “The Black Banners and the Socio-Political Significance”, 315–316.

³⁵ Van Vloten, *Emevî Devrinde Arab Hâkimiyeti*, 75–76.

³⁶ Guzmán, *Popular Dimensions of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution*, 86.

³⁷ Athamina, “The Black Banners and the Socio-Political Significance”, 311.

the revolution. In his study *White Banners*, which focuses upon Syria during the 'Abbâsîd period through different classes (such as *ashrâf*, peasants, and bandits), Cobb concludes that the resurrection of the Umayyad spirit in the opposition movements in Syria did not have the character of white banners versus black banners.³⁸ If the 'Abbâsîds did not choose the colour black to contrast against the Umayyads, even the Umayyads' adoption of the colour white is controversial, other reasons should be investigated. Thus, the remaining possibilities are that black was chosen to mourn the persecution of 'Alids, or to sanctify their revolution with the Mahdî belief.

As for the choice of black because it is the colour of mourning, we need to refer to Athamina's views. He states that the 'Abbâsîd movement has two stages. According to him, the subject of mourning may be correct when accepting the testament received from 'Alî's son in the first stage. But in the second stage, because of the 'Abbâsîds actions directly through 'Abbâs; thus, the Prophet's family relationship with black and the Messianic side of the movement can be regarded.³⁹ Many other historians have tried to understand the choice of the colour black and what is intended with the banners by interpreting the information given by early sources. Lassner says that the 'Abbâsîds preference for the colour was deliberate in order to add a religious aspect to their movement.⁴⁰ Van Vloten had also pointed out that a verse was written on the black banners used by the 'Abbâsîds: "*Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed*".⁴¹ Daniel supports Van Vloten in this claim and adds that two big black banners were used at the beginning of the revolution; one of them was called 'shadow' and the other 'cloud'.⁴² Lewis states that in this period, the black banners were also used as symbols of the apocalypse and were used in religious uprisings against the Umayyads. He says that its use by Abû Muslim was an appeal to messianic expectations.⁴³ On the other hand, Wellhausen asserts that Abû Muslim borrowed the black from Hârith b. Surayj because they were very popular amongst the mawâlî. He supports his theory with the comment that "the 'Abbâsîd revolution was conducted by Iranian mawâlî".

The Mahdî belief propaganda carried out during the revolution continued after the 'Abbâsîds took power. The most important evidence for this are the *laqabs* (nicknames) used by the 'Abbâsîd caliphs after the revolution. There are a high number of studies drawing attention to the sacred aspect of these *laqabs*, but, as they are outside of the scope of this article, it will be sufficient to give only their names.⁴⁴ It should also be pointed out that these historians agree that the 'Abbâsîd caliphs' purpose for this choice was to legitimize their caliphate.⁴⁵ Now, this article will turn to *Akhhâr* to investigate the relationship between black banners and Mahdî belief.

³⁸ Paul M Cobb, *White Banners: Contention in 'Abbâsîd Syria, 750-880* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), passim.

³⁹ Athamina, "The Black Banners and the Socio-Political Significance", 315-316.

⁴⁰ Jacob Lassner, "The 'Abbâsîd Dawla: An Essay on the Concept of Revolution in Early Islam", *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. Frank Clover - R. Stephen Humphreys, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 265.

⁴¹ Van Vloten, *Emevî Devrinde Arab Hâkimiyeti*, 77. Cf. *Quran.com* (Accessed 19 April 2021), Surah al-Hajj, 22/39.

⁴² Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under 'Abbâsîd Rule, 747-820*, 25.

⁴³ Lewis, "'Abbâsîds".

⁴⁴ Zaman, "Routinization of Revolutionary Charisma: Notes on the 'Abbâsîd Caliphs al-Manşûr and al-Mahdî"; Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First 'Abbâsîd Caliphs"; Abdulaziz Dûrî, "Abbâsî Propagandası Sürecinde ve Abbâsîler'in ilk Asrında Mehdî Tasavvuru", trans. Bahauddin Varol, *İSTEM* 2/3 (2004), 219-231.

⁴⁵ Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First 'Abbâsîd Caliphs"; Jere L. Bacharach, "Laqab for a Future Caliph: The Case of the 'Abbâsîd al-Mahdî" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113/2 (1993), 271-274; Michael L. Bates, "Khurasani Revolutionaries and Al-Mahdî's Title", *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam* (February 2003), 279-317.

3. Mahdī and the Black Banners in *Akhbār al-‘Abbās*

Since the discovery of the manuscript in the 1950s by Professor Ḥusayn Amin in the library of the Abū Hanīfa Madrasa in Baghdad and its publication by ‘Abd al-Aziz Dūrī and A. J. al-Muttalibī in 1971, *Akhbār al-‘Abbās* became very popular among historians who want to understand various aspects of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution. This manuscript is called as *Akhbār al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyyah* and is known as *Akhbār al-‘Abbās* or *Akhbār* in short. The title of the manuscript should include the term *dawla* according to Dūrī because he believes that “the *dawla* here does not indicate a political formation, on the contrary, the author of the book chose this word to indicate *da‘wa* (call, invitation)”.⁴⁶ The emphasis on these words, *da‘wa* and *dawla*, is very apparent in the source. For this reason, it must be said that the ‘Abbāsīd movement was not a simple movement that emerged suddenly and triumphed over the Umayyads, but rather an organized structure with all its concepts, symbols and discourses from the beginning. Historians also thought that the primary intention of the ‘Abbāsīds was to benefit from the sacred connotation of words in order to legitimize their actions during the clandestine period of their movements. They have asserted that these words have a messianic aspect and the ‘Abbāsīds used them to meet the Mahdī belief of the people.⁴⁷ Thus, every detail that has messianic connotations in the *Akhbār* (which is considered as the semi-official history of the ‘Abbāsīds) is essential.

First, it is necessary to look at the prophetic riwāyas to better understand the atmosphere which was created by ‘Abbāsīds for Mahdī belief. According to a riwāyah in the *Akhbār*, Ibn ‘Abbās says:

“It was said that there were twelve caliphs in this *ummah* [...] what a foolish word is that. After these twelve, there are three more caliphs from us. These are Saffāh, Mansūr and Mahdī. [Then] they will deliver the caliphate to Dajjal.”⁴⁸

A similar riwāyah, based on an event experienced by ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abbās, says as follows:

“‘Alī b. ‘Abdallāh visited the Caliph with his grandchildren Abū al-‘Abbās and Abū Ja‘far for a need and also requested from Caliph to give advice for the children during his visit. He gave advice and ‘Alī b. ‘Abdallāh thanked him. When ‘Alī turned his back, the Caliph said to his friends, ‘That man became old and started to say senilely that the caliphate will pass on to his children.’ When ‘Alī heard this word, he turned to him and said, ‘I swear that this will happen and these two will have the caliphate’.”⁴⁹

It should be said that the Mahdī belief in the *Akhbār* did not emerge directly from the word Mahdī, but rather with riwāyas about the future. Such riwāyas are generally concentrated on the existence of a testament called the yellow page and, the important expression here, “black banners that will rise from the east”. Because of these riwāyas, the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution became famous with the black banners. And the riwāyas about the saviour army which was believed to come from the Khurāsān are regarded by historians to contain messianic connotations. It is understood that these riwāyas became famous among the people during the establishment of the revolutionary army, therefore the ‘Abbāsīds were able to reach and convince the people in a short time. In the *Akhbār*, a tradition (hadith) was reported from Muḥammad b. ‘Alī without an *isnad* part: “Join them when you see the black flags coming from Khurāsān, even if you are crawling over snow.” Again without an *isnad* part, another tradition from ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās is narrated: “If a man with a black flag comes out from the East in the year 130, be sure that this movement will triumph.”⁵⁰ Considering the Islamic sources, it can be said that there are many narrations in the sources about black banners that will emerge

⁴⁶ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, critical ed. Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dūrī - ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut: Dār al-Talī‘ah, 1971), 9.

⁴⁷ Marius Canard, “Da‘wa”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Bearman (Brill, 1960); Franz Rosental, “Dawlah”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman (Brill, 1960).

⁴⁸ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, 29.

⁴⁹ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, 140.

⁵⁰ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, 199.

from the Khurāsān region or the east. While some of the narrations include claims that the "Mahdî will be among those who have these banners" and recommends "to join them even by crawling on snow".⁵¹ On the other hand, some of them include information that the "beginning of this day is strife, the middle is boredom, and the end is deviance", and it is sometimes advised "not to be join to them".⁵² As for their authenticity: Ibn al-Jawzi claims that these hadiths are fabricated.⁵³ But still he mentions in his work that wearing black and wearing a turban were the clothes of the 'Abbāsids.⁵⁴

Now, it would be useful to explain the yellow page or yellow scroll (*al-Sahīfah al-Safrā* in Arabic) narration presented by *Akhbār* with a direct connection with the black banners from the east. This riwāyah has been included in most of the studies on the 'Abbāsīd Revolution.⁵⁵ The part in *Akhbār* is as follows:

"After 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's death, his son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah came to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and said, "You inherited from my father without me. Although my ancestry is not connected to the Prophet from my mother side, but we have the same father. I swear of course that you have the right/superiority over me. But give me something valuable too. Because you know my dad's love for me". Ḥasan said to Ḥusayn: "He is our brother and our father's son, so give him something from father's knowledge".

After this, the narrator adds,

"Ḥusayn gave him the yellow page which includes the information about black flags/banners from Khurāsān. When and how this event [the event of the group with black banners from Khurāsān] will take place, when it will come out of Khurāsān, what are its signs, who will assist them, the names of the people and further were written on this page. Until his death, Muḥammad b. 'Alī owned this page. Before he died, he gave it to his son Abū Hāshim, and he protected the page until his death. He was in Humayma with Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās when he was on his deathbed. Before he passed away, he gave the page to him and bequeathed him. Then Muḥammad b. 'Alī gave it to his son Ibrāhīm who will be their (the group against Umayyads) leader, masters, and elders."⁵⁶

Another narration in the same chapter of the book is about prophecy of Abū Hāshim on 'Abbāsids.

One day, Muḥammad b. 'Alī ('Abbāsīd) asked Abū Hāshim when his four-year-old son Ibrahim b. Muḥammad was playing near to them: "O my uncle's son! Is there any share of Hāshimid banners for us; sons of 'Abbās?" Abū Hāshim answered: "This [right to power / caliphate] is only for you, for the one from ahl al-Muḥammad." Muḥammad b. 'Alī said, "How can this be real, my brother?". Abū Hāshim said: "Do you see that child?" [referring to Ibrahim] "He is the owner of the duty. When he seizes and owns that, they [the sons of the Umayyads] will doubt, fight, and kill him. Then you will have two sons: 'Abdallāh and Ubaydallāh. The caliphate will be theirs and will pass from generation to generation."⁵⁷

This bequest riwāyah is known as the *waṣīyyah* of Abū Hāshim to Muḥammad b. 'Alī. Sharon asserts that "the reports of the *waṣīyyah* were created in response to the need which the 'Abbāsids felt in the course of their struggle against the 'Alids" and also for "divine approval upon the 'Abbāsīd rule". According to him, the legend of the yellow scroll that was

⁵¹ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, thk. Shuayb Arnaūd (Beirut: Muasasat al-Risalah, 2001), 37/70; al-Hakim Al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahīḥayn fi'l-Hadith* (Cairo: Dāru'l-Haramayn, 1417), 4/631.

⁵² Ibn al-Jawzi Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī, *Kitāb Al-Mawḍū'āt*, critical ed. Abd al-rahman Muhammad Uthman (Madina: Al-Maktabah al-salafiyah, 1966), 3/35-39; Abu al Ḥasan Nur al-din Ali Ibn Arraq, *Tanzīh Al-Sharī'a al-Marfu'a 'an al-Akhbār al-Shanī'a al-Mawḍū'a*, critical ed. Abd al-Vahhab Abd al-Latif - Abdallah Muhammad Siddiq (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, no date), 2/11-12.

⁵³ Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī, *Kitāb Al-Mawḍū'āt*, 39.

⁵⁴ Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī, *Kitāb Al-Mawḍū'āt*, 34-39.

⁵⁵ See. Farouk Omar, "Abbāsīlerin Siyasi Emellerinin Tarihi Kökleri", trans. Cem Zorlu, *Selçuk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13 (2002), 193-210.

⁵⁶ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, 184-185.

⁵⁷ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, 185.

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recounted in great detail in *Akhbār al-‘Abbās*, was fabricated.⁵⁸ It should be noted that Sharon mentions the black banners, after which he named both of his books, less in his first book and more in his second book. He discussed it in the chapter “Yellow Scroll and Black Banners” as follows: “The importance attached by the ‘Abbāsids to justifying the black colour of both garments and banners is attested to by the existence of a large body of traditions dealing with this issue”. And he claims that “the ‘Abbāsids succeeded in their efforts to associate the black banners with the Prophet.”⁵⁹

The riwāyas in question can be found in the chapter “Black’s mention/importance” in the *Akhbār*. But, first of all, it should be noted that the narrations in this part are given without a proper isnad part. For example, “it is reported that Abū Hāshim was told from someone called Abū ‘Abdallāh” was used for the isnad. Abū ‘Abdallāh said, “In your time, the appearance of black banners will approach”. Another narration was given by Ibrahim: “When you reach the year 130, it will be clear that you are on right way, and then it [your movement] will continue to grow.” He continues: “Your *da‘wa* will appear in all towns”. Here, his definition of the movement as *da‘wa* should be noted. He continues by describing the importance and use of the colour black: “Black is our dress and is the colour of those who help us, there is dignity in it, and that black colour is the soldier with whom God supports us”. The words of Ibrahim to explain and support his claim are also included here. He states that “the colour of the banner of the Messenger of Allah was black, and the colour of ‘Alī’s banner was also black”. Undoubtedly, the aim was to influence the audience with the sunnah of Prophet Muḥammad and Caliph ‘Alī. Generally, the entire *ummaḥ*, and specifically the followers of ‘Alī were targeted to join them. After that, Ibrahim said, “You also prefer black, what you wear should be black”. As for the movement, he also said, “Your slogan should be Ya Muḥammad, Ya Mansūr”. In another riwāya that begins “He said”, it is expressed that “Abū Hāshim was advised to go to Khūrasān and told him to order the group there to wear black clothes and prepare black banners until the time of their appearance”. It was also reported that Abū Salama was sent to Khūrasān with three black banners and ordered to send one to the representer in Merv, one to the representer in Jurjan and one to the representer in Transoxiana. It is stated that the first person to reach Khūrasān with black banners was Abū Salama.⁶⁰

In “Black’s mention/importance” chapter in the source, the riwāyas about the appearance of the black banners are included first, and then it is reminded that Muḥammad (saw) and ‘Alī’s banners were black to reveal the reasons of the banners of the imams were black. In addition, a poem which had been told during the Battle of Şifīn is included because black banners were used in this war. The couplet given here means “the black banner waves for those in the shadow of it / it will come forward surely if it had been said to come forward”. Considering the importance of poetry in the Arab tradition we can say that the narration is strengthened by this couplet. Besides, it can be said that there is an implication that black banners have been used against the Umayyads since Mu‘āwiya’s and ‘Alī’s armies met in the Battle of Şifīn.⁶¹

After that, an example about Prophet David is given and it is stated that his dress was black when he won a victory against *Jalut* (Goliath). Of course, it should not be ignored that the Umayyads were placed in the position of *Jalut*. After that, the subject is linked to the fact that the colour of the Hāshimid is black. The ‘Abbāsīd family tried to connect themselves to Prophet Muḥammad and sons of ‘Alī by referring to their common ancestor Hāshim. For this reason, the relationship of ‘Abd al-Muttalib with the colour black and the adoption of the black colour by the Hāshimids is explained in detail. According to the riwāyah, ‘Abd al-Muttalib found two gazelles covered in gold during his work to re-find the Zamzam water, which was a closed well and had been forgotten. The Quraysh said that gazelles should be the property

⁵⁸ Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*, 139.

⁵⁹ Sharon, *Black Banners from the East II*, 83.

⁶⁰ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, 245 ff.

⁶¹ *Akhbār Al-Dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya*, 245–246.

of Quraysh since 'Abd al-Muttalib did not have any grown-up son. But 'Abd al-Muttalib objected: "they should be mine because I found them". Arrows were drawn after the advice of an oracle woman as a referee for this disagreement. Since 'Abd al-Muttalib's arrow was black in this draw, then the colour of his sons became black.⁶²

In the following narration, again, Abū Hāshim is mentioned. One day, he came to the people with a black banner. Omar b. Shabib narrated this riwāyah and said, "At first, we did not like this black banner and asked what he intended with it". Thereupon, Abū Hāshim said, "The invitation of Banu Hāshim is exalted, they will be saints as long as they wear black". He said that after the Battle of Uḥud, because of the defeat of the Islamic army, the Ansar wore black dresses as a sign of mourning. Gabriel revealed himself to the Prophet and said, "Now is not the time to wear black, the people will wear black later". Then Gabriel was asked about the black banners, and he said: "In the hearts of those who have black banners, faith is stronger than iron". Later, the following narration is given: "Just because the family of the Prophet faced many misfortunes, their party (Shī'a) would not be blamed to wear black until they got their revenge".⁶³ Van Vloten's comment on mourning should be remembered: he says adopting black by 'Abbāsids was not due to mourning.⁶⁴ However, it is clearly stated here that black colour is worn for the reason of mourning and it is stated that those who choose black for themselves (as banner and dress) will not be blamed until they take revenge. On the other hand, each riwāyah on the colour black has a sacred aspect and demonstrates the 'Abbāsīd desire to legitimate themselves as the expected ones for the *ummah*.

Conclusion

Since its spread in Islamic society, the concept of the Mahdī has been a harbour for people who think that their rights have been usurped. And, arguably, it can be seen that the 'Abbāsids took advantage of this belief which had become widespread before the revolution against the Umayyads. In most of the works written about the 'Abbāsīd Revolution, historians have asserted that both the Mahdī belief and the riwāyas about black banners were used by the 'Abbāsids. Van Vloten is regarded as the first to indicate Mahdī belief in the modern period with his work *Research on Arab Domination, Shi'ism and Messianic Beliefs Under the Umayyad Caliphate* (original in French). The messianic beliefs he points out have been discussed in many works, both in a broad sense (e.g. Yücesoy and Yavuz's books in Turkish) and in the context of the 'Abbāsīd Revolution (e.g. by Sharon and Athmania in English). Thus, these modern interpretations have reached a great number of new researchers. However, the subject has not been discussed through the riwāyas in the *Akḥbār*. This book is considered as the semi-official history of the 'Abbāsids because of the information given on the family and the revolution. This article was written to reveal more about the riwāyas of the black banners in the *Akḥbār* by associating them with the Mahdī belief. For this reason, the title "Mahdī with Black Banners" was chosen for this article. Despite the sparsity of the riwāyas about the Mahdī, there are many riwāyas in *Akḥbār* in which black banners appear as a sign of salvation. It can be said that the dominant discourse the 'Abbāsids used for the success of the revolution and then to gain legitimacy was the "Mahdī with the black banner". Again, it can be concluded, that some of the narrations in *Akḥbār* were from those which were already widespread among the people. And some of the riwāyas were fabricated or changed to gain legitimacy after the 'Abbāsids took power. Thus, before, during and after the revolution an apocalyptic, prophetic and thaumaturgical atmosphere was created and the Mahdī belief of the people was manipulated to further 'Abbāsīd desires.

⁶² *Akḥbār Al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, 246.

⁶³ *Akḥbār Al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, 247.

⁶⁴ Van Vloten, *Emevî Devrinde Arab Hâkimiyeti*, 75-76.

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