KHURASAN
NEWLY DISCOVERED ARABIC DOCUMENTS FROM EARLY ABBASID KHURASAN

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Previous studies of Khurasan in the Abbasid period have been based on historical chronicles and literary writings. These are extant in abundance and have allowed scholars to reconstruct the political history in considerable detail. There is very little information from these sources, however, about day-to-day administration and the local affairs of ordinary people. This has been particularly regrettable, since political developments have often been attributed to social changes affecting the masses in the countryside without there being any first hand documentary evidence for the conditions of their everyday lives.

Until recently very little early Arabic documentary material has been discovered in the eastern Islamic world comparable to the Arabic papyri from Egypt. The only document available was an Arabic letter from Central Asia written in 100/718–179. This caused great excitement when it was discovered in 1933 in the ruins of a fortress on Mount Mugh situated in the valley of Zarafshan in Tajikistan (ancient Sogdiana). The document, which was published by I.Y. Krachkovski and V.A. Krachkovskaya (1934), is a letter written to the Arab governor of the region, al-Jarrāḥ ibn ‘Abdallāh.

The early Arabic documentary material from the eastern extremities of the Islamic world has now been dramatically increased by a newly discovered corpus of Arabic documents. These emanate from what appears to have been a private archive of a family resident in north-eastern Afghanistan in the early Abbasid period. They consist of thirty-two administrative and legal documents datable from 138/755 to 160/777. Like the document from Mount Mugh, these newly discovered documents are on parchment. With one exception, they were all written during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75). The majority (twenty-three documents) are official quittances for the receipt of taxes. The others include a document relating to a cadastral

1 Kennedy 1981: 214.