



ABĪVARD

ABĪVARD, a town in medieval Iran situated in northern **Khorasan**, in the northern foothills of the Hazār Masjed range where these mountains slope down in the Qara Qum desert. It is important historically as part of the protective chain of frontier defense posts established by the ancient Iranian kings against the irruption of barbarians from the steppes of Inner Asia. Its site (now called Kohna Abīvard) lies within the Turkmenistan SSR; its extensive ruins, marked by various kurgans or settlement mounds, is some 8 km west of Kahka station on the Ashkhabad-Merv section of the Trans-Caspian railway. The whole of this district, including Nesā and Saraḡs, is known by the Turkish name of Ätāk, “the foothills.”

Only a few of the medieval Islamic geographers mention Abīvard. Moqaddasī (pp. 321, 333-34), placing it at two days’ journey from Nesā, comments favorably that its provisions were cheaper and its market brisker than at Nesā. The *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam* (tr. Minorsky, p. 103) remarks on its extensive cultivation and salubrious climate, and also on the warlike character of its inhabitants, understandable in a frontier town. Yāqūt, however, adverts to the bad water supply and the unhealthiness of the place (Beirut, I, pp. 86-87). Abīvard came within the administrative district of **Kābarān/Kāvarān** (“the western land,” as opposed to **Khorasan**, “the eastern land”?), whose *chef-lieu* was Mahana or Mayhana, home in the 5th/11th century of the famous Sufi shaikh **Abū Sa‘īd b. Abu’l-Ḳayr Mayhanī**. The whole of this foothills region facing the desert was sprinkled with defensive *rebāṭs* in early Islamic times. Six *farsaḡs* from Abīvard was the *rebāṭ* of Kūfan, built in the 3rd/9th century by the governor of



Khorasan, ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher; this had four gates and its own mosque within the walls.

A legend recounted by Yāqūt says that the town was named after Kay Kāvus’s feudatory, Bāvard b. Gūdarz, to whom the place was granted. Its history certainly goes back to Parthian times, and it seems to be identifiable with the town of Apauartikē mentioned by Isidore of Charax at the beginning of the Christian era. In Sasanian times there was a significant Christian community in the town, for present at the Nestorian Church’s synod under Catholicos Joseph in 553 was a bishop for Abīvard and the nearby fortress town of Šahr-e Firūz built by the king Pērōz against the Turks of the Qara Qum steppes (see Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 61, 73).

At the time of the Arab conquests, we hear of a *marzbān* or *kanārī* of Nīšāpūr, Ṭūs, Nesā, and Abīvard. The Arab leader ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Āmer b. Korayz appeared at Abīvard in 31/651-52, and its chief (*‘azīm*) promised to pay a tribute of 400,000 dirhams (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 404-05; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2884, 2887). The town and district no doubt continued under the general administration of the local magnate or *dehqān*, although there was an Arab garrison within Abīvard; Qotayba b. Moslem had to assemble troops at Marv from Abīvard and other places for his expedition in the winter of 90/708-09 against the Hephthalite ruler Tarkān Nizak in Ṭoḳārestān. In ‘Abbasid times, Abīvard continued to fall within the governorship of Khorasan and the East; during Hārūn al-Rašīd’s caliphate, for instance, we hear of a revolt there of one Abu’l-Ḳašīb against the governor ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā b. Māhān (Ya‘qūbī, *Boldān*, p. 278; tr. Wiet, p. 83). After the fall of the Taherids and the expulsion from Khorasan of the early Saffarids, Abīvard passed to the Samanid rulers of Transoxania and Khorasan. One of the last Samanid amirs, Nūḥ II b. Maṣṣūr, granted the town to the Afrighid Ḳvārazmšāh of Kaṭ in return for aid given against the Turkish Qarakhanid occupiers of Bokhara in 382/992; but Abū ‘Alī Sīmḵūrī, governor of Khorasan, refused to relinquish it. In 394/1004 Nūḥ’s son Ebrāhīm al-Montaṣer, the last of the dynasty, endeavored to make a stand at Abīvard with help from the Oḡuz Turks, but was defeated by a Khwarazmian force (Barthold, 1968, p. 270). With the fall of the Samanids, the defenses of northeastern Iran against pressure from the steppe nomads began to crumble. In the reign of Maḥmūd of Ġazna, shortly after 416/1025, the sultan was compelled to admit 4,000 Turkmen families to pasture grounds in the Saraḳs, Abīvard, and Farāva districts; but already by 418/1027 the people of Nesā and Abīvard were complaining to the sultan of the Turkmens’ violence (M. Nazim,



The Life and Times of Sultān Maḥmūd of Ghazna, Cambridge, 1931, pp. 63-64). In this way there began the process of turkicization, both ethnic and linguistic, of these desert fringes.

In the period when the Il-khanid state of the Mongols in Iran began to break up, Abīvard passed under the control of the Mongol Čun Ġurbānī chiefs under Arġūn Shah and his successors, who built up a confederation based on Ṭūs, Marv, and the other oasis towns of these steppe fringes (see Barthold, 1962, 130). In Safavid times, the Ätāk district was under Uzbek control; but in the 18th century it became the starting point for the meteoric rise of Nāder Shah Afšar, who was a native of the region. In 1732 Nāder exiled the leaders and a considerable number of families of the northern Zagros tribe of Zand to Abīvard and Darra-gaz. Here they remained for the next fifteen years, together with others of Nāder's tribal exiles, to repulse or absorb Turkmen raids on the Ätāk (Nāmī, *Tārīk-e Ġitīgošā*, ed. Sa'īd Nafīsī, Tehran, 1317 Š./1938, pp. 4-5). Economically, Abīvard and the whole of Ätāk suffered considerably from the Perso-Turkmen warfare and raiding. Not until after 1885, when the Perso-Russian frontier was delimited and Ätāk incorporated into Russian Central Asia, did a measure of agricultural prosperity belatedly return to the district.

In medieval times, Abīvard produced a certain number of scholars and literary men; Sam'ānī lists various *foqahā'* and traditionists (Hyderabad, I, pp. 107-08; II, pp. 68-70; s.vv. al-Abīvardī and al-Bāvardī). Especially notable in the literary sphere were the blind poet of the Samanid period, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Žarīr (Ṭa'ālebī, *Yatīma* [Cairo] IV, pp. 90-91), and the poet in Arabic of the Saljuq period, Abu'l-Moẓaffar Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Mo'āwī Kūfanī **Abīvardī** (d. 507/1113). The latter was also author of a history of Abīvard, now lost (see Brockelmann, *GAL* I², pp. 293-94; S. I, p. 447). Another figure of interest, but of whom unfortunately nothing is known, is Abū Hāšem Bāvardī, mentioned as one of the greatest masters of archery in the technical literature on this topic (see Latham and Paterson, 1970, 39).

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See also: Le Strange, *Lands*, pp. 394-95.



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