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ABNĀʾ

ABNĀʾ "sons" in Arabic, used as a term for the offspring of Persian soldiers and officials in the Yemen and of Arab mothers. These people were known thus in the lifetime of the Prophet (ca. 580-632 A.D.) and survived as a distinct ethnic and social group in the first century or so of Islam.

The Sasanians made Iraq an integral part of their empire, and Persians settled there in appreciable numbers (cf. M. G. Morony, "The Effects of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Iraq," *Iran* 14, 1976, pp. 41-59). Starting from this base, they had a long tradition of attempting to extend their influence along the southern shores of the Persian Gulf into the Arabian peninsula. Political control of the unruly Beduin tribes of Naǰd was necessary for the protection of the desert fringes of Iraq and the safe conduct of caravans from Iraq to the Ḥeǰāz cities and the Yemen; here on the fringes of lower and central Iraq, the Sasanians generally worked through their vassals, the Arab Lakhmid kings of Ḥīra. Further, it was necessary to control the coast of Baḥrayn and Oman, in order to protect from piracy ships bringing goods from India and the Far East to Obolla at the head of the Gulf and to prevent such cargoes being clandestinely landed along the Gulf shores, where the payment of custom dues might be evaded. Hence, Šāpūr II (309-79) led Persian troops into Yamāma (east central Arabia) in retaliation for Arab raids across the Gulf; and colonies of Persian officials and soldiers were subsequently planted along the coastlands, where their Zoroastrian faith and practices may have had some influence among the indigenous inhabitants. Oman was especially important strategically; hence there was a Persian garrison at the tip of the

Mosandam peninsula, commanding the narrow entrance to the Gulf from the Indian Ocean, and similar garrisons in the *baṭīna* or coastland of Oman at places like Ṣoḥār and Rostāq.

In the 6th century, however, the Sasanians made a determined attempt to extend their influence throughout Arabia as far as Ḥeǰāz in the west and the Yemen in the south. They seem to have endeavored to collect taxes in Medina through the intermediacy of the Jewish tribes there; and the Mazdakite doctrines espoused by King Kavād seemed to have awakened a response among certain individuals in Mecca, where *zendīq*s are found at the time of Moḥammad's rise.

The Yemen offered a particularly favorable field for Persian intervention at this time. Political fragmentation in what had always been a land of petty princelings and powerful local nobles below the Himyarite kings increased with the decline of the Himyarite monarchy; also, with the decline of the old South Arabian indigenous polytheism, sectarian conflicts arose between the local Monophysite Christian population and the partisans of Judaism. The religious clash between the Christians of Naǰrān and the Judaist king Yūsof Asʿar, called Ḏū Novās, led to massive intervention by the emperor of Ethiopia, the Christians' natural protector, in 525. For nearly half a century south Arabia became an Ethiopian protectorate under one Abraha and his son Masrūq, who retained power there despite intermittent pressure from the Lakhmids and their Persian suzerains. We know of diplomatic contacts between Arabia and Ḵosrow I from Abraha's lengthy inscription in South Arabian on the dam at Maʾreb in the Yemen. It is dated in the year 658 of the Sabean era (believed by recent scholarship to have started ca. 109 B.C., cf. J. Ryckmans, *La persecution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle*, Istanbul, 1956, yielding a date for the inscription of ca. 549 A.D.), and records the arrival of a delegation from the "King of Fārs" (see S. Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th century A.D.," *BSOAS* 16, 1954, p. 440).

The Ethiopian occupation of the Yemen continued until about 570, when a Yemeni national reaction was provoked against Masrūq b. Abraha. The leader of this patriotic movement was a scion of the Himyarite royal line, Abū Morra Sayf b. Ḏū Yazan. He first tried vainly to get help from the Byzantines and Lakhmids, but then began direct negotiations with Ḵosrow I. The king was reluctant to intervene in a region so distant from Persia, but in the end agreed to send a force of eight hundred cavalrymen, in one version men of good birth who had been consigned to prison but were now given a chance to redeem

themselves by achieving victory. The force sailed around the coasts of the Arabian peninsula; and, although two of the eight ships were wrecked, the rest landed in Hadramaut. Under their leader Vahrēz, they defeated and killed Masrūq and marched into the Yemeni capital of Ṣaṇʿāʾ. On the crest of a popular reaction against the Ethiopians, Sayf b. Ḏū Yazan was then installed there as ruler of the Yemen and tributary vassal to Persia. The exploits of Sayf b. Ḏū Yazan in later times became the nucleus of a popular Arabic romance, in which Sayf's troops are turned into a Muslim force and the Ethiopians are identified with the dark, pagan enemies of Islam (cf. R. Paret, *Sīrat Saif ibn Dhī Yazan, ein arabischer Volksroman*, Hanover, 1924; and idem, *EI*[1] IV, pp. 71-73). But when the protecting Persian garrison was withdrawn, a rising took place; and after a reign of some four years, Sayf was killed (probably at a date between 575 and 578). Vahrēz had to return with a force of 4,000 this time, conclusively vanquishing the Ethiopians in the Yemen and installing Sayf's son, Maʿdī Kareb as ruler. A Persian military force now remained in Yemen for over fifty years, with a Persian governor at Maʿdī Kareb's side. Ṭabarī records the names of the successive Persian governors: Vahrēz; his son Marzbān; the latter's son Bīnagār; the latter's son Ḵorra Ḵosra; then, unconnected with Vahrēz's line, Bāḏān or Bāḏām (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 945-58; Ebn al-Aṯīr, I, pp. 447-51; Masʿūdī, *Morūǰ* III, pp. 162-67; there is, however, some variation in the sources over these names).

The Persian garrison of soldiers and officials settled down in Ṣaṇʿāʾ and its vicinity and intermarried with the local Arab population, and it was the sons of these Persian fathers and Arab mothers, with their descendants, who became known as the Abnāʾ. We know almost nothing of the internal evolution of this Persian colony until the very last days of pre-Islamic Yemen, though contact with Persia, implied by the nomination of fresh governors by the kings and the presumed rotation or replacement of troops, must have been maintained. It would, for instance, be interesting to know whether the colony retained its Zoroastrian faith or whether it became assimilated to the indigenous South Arabian paganism or was even affected by the local Christianity. Certainly, Ṭabarī records that the governor Marzbān's son Ḵorra Ḵosra became culturally very arabized and assimilated to the local society; for that reason he was deprived of his governorship and Bāḏān appointed in his place. We also have mention here of unrest provoked in the mountains of Yemen by Persian financial exactions in the time of Marzbān (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1039-40). However, the virtual collapse of the Sasanian empire in Iraq in 628, when the Byzantine emperor Heraclius defeated Ḵosrow II's army and

threatened Ctesiphon, left the Persians in the Yemen increasingly isolated and with diminishing hopes of assistance and reinforcement from the homeland. By this time also, the Persians can have been little more than one of several local groups contending for mastery of the Yemen.

Toward the end of the Prophet Moḥammad's life, his horizons were widening; missions were being sent from Medina into the outlying parts of the peninsula, and it was inevitable that Muslim control would sooner or later be extended over south Arabia. Because they were now an isolated and vulnerable group, the Persians in Yemen were inclined to receive favorably diplomatic approaches from Moḥammad. The conversion of Bāḏān to Islam is recorded under the year 10/631, together with that of other leaders of the Abnāʾ, including Fīrūz Daylamī and the man who was later to become a great authority on pre-Islamic lore, the Abnāʾ member Vahb b. Monabbeh (Ṭabarī, I, p. 1763; Ebn al-Aṯīr, II, p. 304).

There now supervened the First Redda War in Yemen under a local chief of the ʿAns clan of the south Arabian tribe of Maḏḥeǰ named ʿAyhala b. Kaʿb, called al-Aswad "the swarthy or dark one" and Ḏu'l-Ḵemār "the veiled one." He led a rising of the Maḏḥeǰ during Moḥammad's last year or so of life; according to Arabic sources he claimed the powers of a prophet and soothsayer. It is not certain that his rising was directed specifically at the Persian presence in the Yemen; more likely it was an expression of local particularism and of personal ambition. Bāḏān died at this point, and his son Šahr succeeded to some at least of his power (11/632). However, Šahr was killed by Aswad, though the Persian garrison in Ṣaṇʿāʾ continued for a while to maintain itself.

Aswad was himself killed and supplanted by a local rival, Qays b. ʿAbd Yaḡūṯ b. Makšūḥ Morādī, who showed himself openly hostile to the Abnāʾ, urging their slaughter and the expulsion of their families from the Yemen. He killed the Abnāʾ leader Dādavayh, but Fīrūz Daylamī and another leader Jošnas (sc. Gošnasp) managed to escape to the mountains and take refuge with their allies, the Banū Ḵawlān. The Ḵawlān had in 10/631 sent envoys to Medina and had submitted to Moḥammad, the first Yemenī tribe to do so; and they seem to have remained substantially loyal to Abū Bakr during the Second Redda War in Yemen (see A. Grohmann and A. K. Irvine in *EI*^{2} IV, s.v. "Khawlān"). Meanwhile, Qays b. ʿAbd Yaḡūṯ allowed those Abnāʾ who had stayed neutral in the conflict to remain, but began to expel those involved with Fīrūz Daylamī either to Aden, where they were supposed to take ship for Persia, or else

across the Arabian peninsula by land to the Persian Gulf shores and Persia. Yet before this policy could be put into effect, Qays was defeated by Fīrūz and his allies of the Banū ʿOqayl b. Rabīʿa b. ʿĀmer and the Banū ʿAkk; he was subsequently to become one of the former Redda leaders employed in the overrunning of the fertile crescent during ʿOmar's caliphate. The Second Redda War was finally brought to an end in the Yemen when the Muslim general al-Mohāǰer b. Abū Omayya was sent to aid the Abnāʾ there (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1851-67, 1983-2000; Ebn al-Aṯīr, II, pp. 336-41, 374-78; Balāḏorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 105-07; tr. P. K. Hitti, New York, 1916, pp. 159-62).

The Abnāʾ continued to be distinguished as a separate group, at least genealogically, in the ensuing early Islamic period. As noted above, the historian and popular storyteller Vahb b. Monabbeh (d. 110/729 or 114/732, a *moʿammar* or one who lived excessively long) is said by some authorities to have been of Abnāʾ origin (see Ebn Ḵallekān [Beirut], VI, pp. 35-36, no. 772; tr. de Slane, III, pp. 671-73). So was the Successor (*tābeʿ*) and traditionist Abū ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Ṭāvūs b. Kaysān Ḥamdānī, a *mawlā* or client of the Banū Ḵawlān, d. 101/719-20 or 106/725 (ibid., II, pp. 509-11, no. 306; tr., I, pp. 642-44). Samʿānī, indeed, lists several scholars and traditionists who bore the *nesba* of Abnāvī and were clients, many of them also described as ʿ*ebād* "devotees, pietists," perhaps indicating that the monotheistic faith of south Arabia had affected the Abnāʾ community to some extent. Most of these scholars flourished within a century or so of the Prophet's death; but one of them, the Baghdad scholar Abū Wāʾel ʿAwf b. ʿĪsā Farḡānī, was an adherent of the Imam Šāfeʿī and must therefore have lived toward the early 3rd/9th century at least (Samʿānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], fols. 17b-18b; [Hyderabad] I, pp. 100-02). By this time, however, the Abnāʾ must long have disappeared and merged with the general population of Yemen. The Abnāʾ mentioned in the accounts of Arab tribal warfare in Khorasan during the Omayyad period (cf. J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 421, 423) were a group of the component clans of the Arab Banū Tamīm, apparently unconnected with the Abnāʾ of Yemen.

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