



ABŪ DOLAF ʿEJLĪ

ABŪ DOLAF AL-QĀSEM B. ʿĪSĀ B. EDRĪS B. MAʿQEL AL-ʿEJLĪ, Arab military chieftain, author, poet, governor, and boon companion for several ʿAbbasid caliphs, and most important member of the ʿEjlī dynasty of western Iran, flourished in the early 3rd/9th century. Though genealogists disagree over his exact pedigree, he was a member of the Arab tribe of Banū ʿEjl, whose original home was in the vicinity of Ḥīra on the desert fringes of southern Iraq. He was born into a family that already had close connections with the ʿAbbasid regime; some say that his great-uncle, ʿĪsā b. Maʿqel, had raised the ʿAbbasid propagandist Abū Moslem (Ebn Kallekān, II, p. 502; Ebn al-Aṭīr, V, p. 191), but others claim that Abū Dolaf's father had come from Kūfa to the Isfahan region as a brigand, implying that the family's connections with the ruling dynasty began only when he mended his ways and settled in the town of Karaḡ, between Isfahan and Hamadān, in the reign of the caliph Maḥdī (158-69/775-85; Samʿānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], fols. 477b-78a).

Nothing is known of Abū Dolaf's birth or early life, but his talents were sufficient to persuade the caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809) to appoint him governor of Jebāl province while still a young man (Marzobānī, p. 334). He appears to have promised Hārūn al-Rašīd that he would restore the prosperity of this region, including that of the family lands around Karaḡ, which had been ravaged by Iranian nomads ("Kurds") and Arab beduins (Ebn Ṭayfūr, *Ketāb Baḡdād*, Leipzig, 1908, p. 254). It may have been at this time that he succeeded in capturing a notorious brigand, Qarqūr, who had plagued the area around Karaḡ (*Aḡānī* XVIII, p. 104).



Upon the death of Hārūn al-Rašīd and the outbreak of the civil war between his sons Amīn and Ma'mūn, Abū Dolaf cast his lot with the former. At Amīn's request he and his followers joined the army sent out under 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Māhān; but Ma'mūn's army, commanded by Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, managed to destroy Amīn's force (Jomādā II, 195/March, 811), killing 'Alī b. 'Īsā in the process (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 798-803; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, p. 165). After the defeat, Abū Dolaf withdrew to Karaĵ and henceforth assumed neutrality in the struggle between Amīn and Ma'mūn; he refused to repudiate his oath of allegiance to the former as long as Amīn was alive, even when Ṭāher wrote him requesting that he take the *bay'a* to Ma'mūn. It was only after Amīn's death in 198/813 that Abū Dolaf made his way with some trepidation to Ma'mūn, who had summoned him from Ray; there the new caliph pardoned him and reappointed him over the Jebāl province (Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, pp. 291-92; Ebn Kaldūn, *Ketāb al-'ebar*, Būlāq, 1867, III, p. 255; Ebn 'Abd Rabbeh, *al-'Eqd al-farīd* II, pp. 37-38).

Abū Dolaf thereafter became one of Ma'mūn's boon companions and a frequent guest at the caliph's court, where his education and skills as a poet and musician stood him in good stead (*Aġānī* XVIII, p. 44; *'Eqd* II, pp. 32-33; Mas'ūdī, *Morūĵ* III, pp. 418-19). Although still governor of Jebāl province, he spent his summers in the mountains and his winters in Iraq, presumably near the caliphal court in Baghdad (Mas'ūdī, *Morūĵ* II, pp. 38-39). Despite this, his governorship of Jebāl province appears to have been very effective, for he was able to repel attacks on the town of Qazvīn by Daylamite tribesmen. These turbulent mountaineers he brought under control, destroying their fortresses and keeping pressure on them until they agreed either to embrace Islam or to pay the *ĵezya*. For this service, Ma'mūn extended his governorship to include not only Isfahan, but Qazvīn as well (Abu'l-Qāsem 'Abd-al-Karīm al-Rāfe'ī, *Ketāb al-tadwīn fī dekr ahl al-'elm be Qazvīn*, MS Koġuslar 1007, Istanbul, fol. 284a).

After the death of Ma'mūn, Abū Dolaf enjoyed the favor of the caliph Mo'taşem (218-27/833-42) and of the prince (later caliph) Wāteq, and was counted among their boon companions (*Aġānī* VII, p. 155; Ebn Kallekān, I, p. 63). He served as a commander under Mo'taşem's general Afšīn during the difficult campaigns against Bābak at Baġd in northern Azarbaijan (222/836-37); there he directed a corps of volunteer troops, many of whom had come from Basra—a command which for Abū Dolaf's tribal background may have made him especially suitable (Ṭabarī III, pp. 1197-1228; Ebn al-Aṭīr VI, p. 330). His troops were not,



it seems, part of the regular army troops of the caliph's *ḵond* (Ṭabarī III, p. 1209). For a time he may have been Mo'taşem's governor in Damascus (Ebn al-'Emād, *Şadarāt al-dahab*, Cairo, 1931, II, p. 57; cf. Yāqūt s.v. Tadmor). Later Afşīn's jealousy caused him to hatch a plot against Abū Dolaf's life, which was only foiled by the alertness of the chief judge Ebn Abī Do'ād; the incident reveals the esteem in which he was held by both the judge and the caliph, who rewarded him after the episode (Ebn Kallekān I, p. 63). Little more can be ascertained about his official career. He seems to have made pilgrimage to Mecca at least once (*Ta'rīk Baġdād* XII, p. 416), and died, according to most authorities, in Baghdad in 225/839-40.

Abū Dolaf's reputation was only in part due to his political career; he was perhaps more famous for his personal characteristics and literary attainments than for his official life. That he was a man of steadfast loyalties can be inferred from his behavior in the struggle between Amīn and Ma'mūn, and from his later faithful service to Ma'mūn and Mo'taşem. He is portrayed in some sources as an ardent Shi'ite (Ebn al-'Emād, *ibid.*; Ebn Kaṭīr, X, p. 294), and many of the poets whom he patronized were Shi'ites. On the other hand, he seems to have been sympathetic to Mu'tazilites—not a surprising trait in one with such close ties to the caliphs Ma'mūn and Mo'taşem. The Basrian grammarian and theologian Qoṭrob, who definitely adhered to the Mu'tazilite doctrine, is said to have had contact with Abū Dolaf and to have been charged with educating one of his sons (Yāqūt, *Odabā'* VI, p. 105); and Abū Dolaf's Mu'tazilite orientation may have been responsible for the decisive action taken on his behalf by the judge Ebn Abī Do'ād, himself a staunch advocate of the doctrine (cf. D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat abbaside* I, Damascus, 1959, p. 259). Abū Dolaf was renowned as a paragon of generosity and bravery, and also celebrated as an outstanding singer, poet, and patron of poetry (e.g., Şūlī, *Akbār Abī Tammām*, ed. 'Asāker et al., Beirut, n.d., pp. 121-24; *Fehrest*, p. 116; *Ta'rīk Baġdād* XII, pp. 418-20; Ebn 'Abd Rabbeh, I, pp. 175, 180, 213-14). Poets flocked to him hoping to benefit from his munificence; at his court there reportedly gathered all the litterateurs of the Banū 'Ejl (Ebn Ṭayfūr, p. 248; Azdī, *Ta'rīk al-Mawşel*, Cairo, 1967, p. 392). His own literary production was considerable. Ebn al-Nadīm attributes to him *dīvān* of one hundred folios of poetry, as well as several books, among which are named treatises on falconry, hunting, weapons, and a "mirror for princes" (*Fehrest*, pp. 116, 164, 315). Of his works nothing has survived save some fragments of poetry, which treat mainly romantic and martial themes.



Abū Dolaf was noteworthy for his patronage of building. Most of his efforts in this respect were centered on the family fief at Karaġ, which he developed greatly, and it is doubtless for this reason that the town became known as Karaġ-e Abū Dolaf to distinguish it from other towns bearing the name Karaġ (Ebn Ƙallekān, II, p. 504; Rāfe‘ī, fol. 284a; Yāqūt, s.v. “Karaġ;” Ya‘qūbī, *Boldān*, pp. 272-73). He also paid for the construction of at least one way-station on the caravan route from Baghdad to the Ḥeġġāz, much used by pilgrims. It appears to have been about thirty miles from Samīrā’, but sources disagree on its name and exact location (ibid., p. 176; Ebn Ƙordāqbeh, p. 186). The so-called mosque of Abū Dolaf near Samarrā’, however, was built by the caliph Motawakkel some years after Abū Dolaf’s death and appears to have no historical connection with him (Herzfeld, p. 140; Creswell, II, pp. 278f.).

Although not a major literary figure or a key actor in the international political arena, Abū Dolaf was the best-known representative of an influential Arab family that played an active part in the political and cultural life of northwestern Iran for many generations. His brother, Ma‘qel b. ‘Īsā, also served as a military commander of the ‘Abbasids, and he is said to have written some poetry (*Aġānī* XVIII, pp. 194f.; VII, p. 158; *Fehrest*, p. 164). His direct descendents, the Dolafids, continued to play a role in the politics of the Jebāl region for another fifty years from their center at Karaġ, and other branches of Banū ‘Ejl were prominent in the political and cultural life of Qazvīn (see [Dolafids](#)).

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