



## ABŪ NAŞR AĦMAD

**ABŪ NAŞR AĦMAD** B. ESMĀ'ĪL SĀMĀNĪ, called AMĪR-E ŞAHĪD (“the martyred amir”) because of his violent death, Samanid amir in Transoxania and Khorasan (295-301/907-14). Under his father, Esmā'īl b. AĦmad (the real founder of Samanid fortunes), he had been for a time governor of the recently conquered province of Gorgān (see below). Succeeding as amir, he became ruler of a considerable empire. This included not only the heartland of the original Samanid governorate in Soġd, but also the rich province of Khorasan; the latter passed definitely to the Samanids after the defeat and capture of the Saffarid adventurer 'Amr b. Layṭ near Balk in 288/901 and was to remain in their hands for virtually all of the 4th/10th century. AĦmad's first tasks were to ensure the stability of his rule in Transoxania and to secure the vital point of Ray in northern Persia. The 'Abbasid caliphs Moktafī and then Moqtader confirmed him in his rule; and after securing Bokhara, he went on to Ray. He then had to return eastward to Samarqand and seize his uncle Eshāq b. Manşūr, who coveted the throne and was to lead a rising in Samarqand early in the next reign, when the young amir Naşr b. AĦmad was still insecure. In 296/908-09 AĦmad was back at Ray (Gardīzī, ed. Nazim, p. 22; ed. Ḥabībī, p. 148; Ebn al-Aṭīr [Beirut], VIII, p. 7; G. C. Miles, *The Numismatic History of Rayy*, New York, 1938, pp. 133-35).

Having taken over Khorasan, the Samanids were now able to exert further pressure in Sīstān on the Saffarids, the successors of 'Amr b. Layṭ. In 298/910, Moqtader invested AĦmad formally with the governorship of Sīstān, instructing him to terminate the rule there of the Saffarid house. Taking



advantage of dissensions between the Saffarid princes Moḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Layṭ and his brother Mo‘addal, Aḥmad sent his general Ḥosayn b. ‘Alī Marvarrūdī and then came personally, advancing with an army from Herat to Bost. He met little opposition and captured Moḥammad b. ‘Alī, then invaded Sīstān itself. The capital Zarang was taken; Mo‘addal was deported to Bokhara, where he was given a pension; and in 299/911 a Samanid governor, the amir’s cousin Maṣṣūr b. Eshāq, was sent to Sīstān. Maṣṣūr’s financial exactions, plus discontent within the occupying Samanid army, soon led to an anti-Samanid rising in Zarang; and in 300/913 Maṣṣūr had to leave for Khorasan. A second Samanid occupation took place. Maṣṣūr was replaced by a Samanid slave commander, Sīmḡūr Dawātī; but shortly after Aḥmad’s death, when affairs at the Samanid court were temporarily plunged into anarchy, the people of Sīstān threw off the Samanid yoke and eventually restored there the rule of the Saffarids (Ṭabarī, III, p. 2287; Gardīzī, ed. Nazim, pp. 23-24; ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 148-49; *Tārīk-e Sīstān*, pp. 290-302; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VII, pp. 60-61, 69-70; cf. Bosworth, “The Ṭāhirids and Ṣaffārīds,” *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 123-24, 130-31).

The strategic importance of Ray for the Samanids was that it gave them a bastion against the ‘Alid ruler in Gorgān and Ṭabarestān. Esmā‘īl b. Aḥmad, as a strong Sunnite, had in 287/900 sent an expedition against them, killing the local ruler Moḥammad b. Zayd. Toward the end of Aḥmad’s reign (in 302/914-15, according to Ebn Meskawayh), a revolt of the people of these Caspian regions took place under the ‘Alid Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Oṭrūš, called al-Nāşer al-Kabīr. Aḥmad sent his governor at Ray, Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Şo‘lūk, with an army; but the latter was defeated. Before the amir could take further steps to reassert his authority in Gorgān and Ṭabarestān, he was murdered at Farabr in Jomādā I, 301/January, 914 after a reign of only six years and four months (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 2289, 2292; Narşakī [in bibliog.], ed., pp. 110-11, tr., p. 94; Ebn Meskawayh, *Tajāreb* I, p. 36; ‘Arīb, *Şela ta’rīk al-Ṭabarī*, Cairo, n.d., p. 25; Gardīzī, ed. Nazim, p. 24, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 149-50; Ebn Esfandīār, abridged tr. E. G. Browne, Leiden and London, 1905, pp. 199-200; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VIII, pp. 77-78, 81-82). Aḥmad’s assassination was at the hands of a group of his Turkish palace guards. According to Gardīzī, one Abu’l-Ḥasan Naşr the secretary was a prime mover in the plot; Mostawfī, however, says that these *ḡolāms* had become angry with Aḥmad’s frequenting of *‘olamā’*; hence they killed him out of jealousy (*Tārīk-e gozīda* [Tehran], pp. 378-79). The same source states that he had reintroduced the use of Arabic as the language of the government *dīvāns* in place of Persian, although this probably proved only a temporary



change. Apart from this love of learning and the company of scholars, plus his reputation for justice and equity and a passion for hunting (mentioned by Naršaḳī and Gardīzī), no very clear picture of the amir's personality emerges. His historical role was clearly to consolidate his father's conquests and achievements, so that the Samanid state survived intact the confusions and discords of the minority of his son and successor, Naṣr.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Naršaḳī, *Tārīḳ-e Bokhara*, ed. Modarres Rażawī, Tehran, 1319 Š./1940; tr. R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara*, Cambridge, Mass., 1954.

Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, p. 240.

R. N. Frye, "The Samanids," *Camb. Hist. Iran IV*, p. 141.