



ABŪ NAŞR MOŞKĀN

ABŪ NAŞR MANŞŪR B. MOŞKĀN, head of the Ghaznavid chancery under Maḥmūd and Mas'ūd from 401/1011-12 till his death in 431/1039-40. The name Manşūr appears only in Ṭa'ālebī's *Tatemmat al-yatīma* (ed. 'A. Eqbāl, Tehran, 1353/1934-35, vol. 2, p. 62) and his *Kāşş al-kāşş* (Beirut, 1966, p. 222). Both place and year of his birth are unknown, and the *nesbas* al-Zūzanī al-Ḳvāfī, mentioned in *Moǰmal-e faşīḥī* (ed. M. Farroḳ, Mašhad, 1341 Š./1962, vol. 2, pp. 141-42) are missing in other sources. The oldest and richest source, *Tārīḳ-e Bayhaqī* by Abu'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī (2nd ed.), who for at least nineteen years was Abū Naşr's closest associate in office, always calls him simply Abū Naşr-e Moşkān.

Knowledge of Abū Naşr's activities during his twenty years under Sultan Maḥmūd is scanty and derives from a few fragments of Bayhaqī's lost volumes preserved by later historians (collected by S. Nafīsī in *Dār pīrāmūn-e tārīḳ-e Bayhaqī*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1342 Š./1963). However, the picture gained of his personality and character in this period is in perfect harmony with that gained from the ample details provided by Bayhaqī concerning the second period. During his entire career Abū Naşr appears to have enjoyed the highest esteem, trust, and support of his royal patrons, whom he served not only as an eloquent chief secretary in both Arabic and Persian, but also as a wise and even intimate counselor. He was honest, far-sighted, courageous, and in full command of the court's tacit rules and requirements and aware of its hidden intrigues and pitfalls. The extant stories from Sultan Maḥmūd's period depict him as a figure with qualities in no way different from those described by



Bayhaqī for the later years. In one of these accounts Maḥmūd is found intimately revealing to Abū Naşr his desire to marry Ayāz’s sister and seeking his advice (introduction to ‘Awfī, *Jawāme’ al-ḥekāyāt*, GMS, Leiden, 1929, no. 1488). According to *Moǧmal-e faṣṭḥī* (vol. 2, p. 142), in 419/1029 Maḥmūd offered him the post of vizier, which he refused. When Maḥmūd was taxing the inhabitants of Balḵ to maintain his garden, Abū Naşr expressed his disapproval and caused him to stop (Barthold, *Turkestan*², pp. 288-89). He also informed Maḥmūd of his misgivings at the king’s appointing Moḥammad as his successor (*Ṭabaqāt-e Nāşerī*, ed. ‘A. Ḥ. Ḥabībī, Kabul, 1342 Š./1963, vol. 1, pp. 232-33; Bayhaqī, p. 222). When Mas’ūd ascended the throne, Abū Naşr mistrusted the newcomers and was reluctant to continue his work, but he was strongly supported by the ruler, who insisted on benefiting from his experience and capability (Bayhaqī, pp. 73-74). His advice, always given in unison with that of the grand vizier Maymandī, many times changed the course of events or saved Mas’ūd from embarrassment (e.g., the plot to assassinate Altontāš K̄‘ārazmšāh, Bayhaqī, pp. 402-21). On the whole he was dissatisfied with Mas’ūd’s ways and policies. While absolutely loyal to the sovereign, he appears to have been unwilling to tolerate any abuse of his office and personal integrity. On one occasion he upbraided an officer who merely carried out Mas’ūd’s order and killed a former governor (Bayhaqī, pp. 560-613). Bayhaqī, utterly glorifying his master, shows Abū Naşr to have been opposed—and to have warned against—all events which ended with trouble and defeat for Mas’ūd. He criticized Mas’ūd’s handling of the problem of the Turkmen hordes penetrating into Khorasan; and near the end of his life, he saw the coming disaster and was deeply depressed (Bayhaqī, pp. 785-86). Shortly before Abū Naşr’s death, Mas’ūd was misled into ordering everyone to deliver his horses and camels to the army. Enraged by the order, Abū Naşr sent a harshly worded letter to the ruler, and Bayhaqī remarks that “he had never acted with such disrespect.” Informed of the amir’s reaction, he expressed his disappointment in words almost shocking: “I knew it; that is what I had expected. May he who serves kings drop dead, but he will be shown no loyalty, no respect, and no mercy” (Bayhaqī, pp. 791-93). Mas’ūd, however, did not cease to show him reverence and mourned his death, which occurred shortly thereafter. Bayhaqī, who directly quotes Abū Naşr page after page, had in his possession a book called *Maqāmāt-e Abū Naşr-e Moşkān*, apparently a collection of all accounts coming from/or related to his master. Bayhaqī has preserved several of Abū Naşr’s official letters in both languages. Praise and admiration for his eloquence comes also from authorities like Ṭa‘ālebī, who cites several of his Arabic verses and a number of pithy phrases



culled from his letters (*Tatemmat al-yatīma*, vol. 2, pp. 62-65) and Ebn al-Aṭīr (the year 431). He was buried in Ġazna; *Moǰmal*'s report that his grave is near Zūzān in a farm called Moškīn, is baseless. On his family, no sources offer any information except *Moǰmal*, which names his son Abu'l-Faṭḥ and several related descendants during the next four centuries (Nafīsī, *Dār pīrāmūn tāriḳ-e Bayhaqī*, vol. 2, pp. 1000-02). His nephew Teqat-al-molk Ṭāher served Mas'ūd b. Ebrāhīm (492-508/1099-1115) as minister and was praised by the poets Mas'ūd-e Sa'd, Sanā'ī, Rūnī, and Moḳtārī (see *Dīvān-e Mas'ūd-e Sa'd-e Salmān*, ed. R. Yāsami, Tehran, 1318 Š./1939, p. lx, and the *dīvāns* of the others).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Dehḳodā. Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, index. M. R. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative, a Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography*, Columbus, Ohio, 1980 (an analysis of Bayhaqī), index.