



ABU'L-ḤASAN ESFARĀ'ĪNĪ

ABU'L-ḤASAN 'ALĪ B. FAẒL B. AḤMAD **ESFARĀ'ĪNĪ**, first vizier for the Ghaznavid sultan Maḥmūd (r. 388-421/998-1030). He began his career as a secretary in Khorasan in the entourage of the ambitious Turkish general of the Samanids, 'Amīd-al-dawla Fā'eḡ Kāṣṣa, and was probably a native of the town of Esfarā'in in northwest Khorasan. When the bid for control of Khorasan by Fā'eḡ and Abu'l-Qāsem Sīmǰūrī was thwarted by the efforts of Sebūktigin and his son Maḥmūd, Esfarā'inī transferred to the service of Sebūktigin and then Maḥmūd. After Sebūktigin's death in 387/997, he was formally invested with the vizierate and supreme executive control, under the sultan, of the expanding Ghaznavid empire in Afghanistan and Khorasan. Esfarā'inī's chief task as vizier was to find money, from regular taxation and from extraordinary imposts, for the insatiable needs of the mighty war machine which the sultan had created. In this, Esfarā'inī was for a decade or so highly successful, on one occasion collecting an enormous sum for a military campaign in the space of two days. 'Otbī attributes to his exactions much agricultural distress in Khorasan, a situation aggravated by bad harvests and a disastrous famine in 401/1011. 'Otbī alleges that, after several years of exploitation, there was nothing left to be extracted, "since in Khorasan, after water had been thrown on her udders, not a trickle of milk could be obtained nor any trace of fat." A considerable sum was in the end collected in this year of 401/1010-11 at Herat. Even so, it was not still enough for Maḥmūd. Esfarā'inī refused to make up the deficiency out of his own pocket and voluntarily went to prison. He was subjected to *moṣādara* (q.v.) and his wealth confiscated, after he was charged with extortion; he was tortured savagely, and in 404/1013-14



he died under this maltreatment while the sultan was away in India campaigning at Nandana. Later sources also mention, as a factor in Esfarā'īnī's downfall, a dispute with the sultan over a handsome Turkish slave boy of the vizier's.

Esfarā'īnī was a capable administrator rather than a great scholar and master of epistolary style. Indeed, 'Otbī says that in his time, official correspondence was no longer conducted in Arabic, as in the Buyid and Samanid chanceries, but in Persian, because the vizier was “poorly endowed in the art of inditing correspondence, since he had never been trained properly in it early in life.” Consequently, “the bazaar of eloquence suffered loss, the exercise of excellence and fine style perished, the levels of incompetence and capability became equal, and the outstanding and the inferior came together on the same plane of confrontation.” His successor [Aḥmad b. Ḥasan Maymandī](#) in fact restored Arabic to its place of primacy in the Ghaznavid administration when he took over the vizierate in 405/1014-15. Esfarā'īnī's son Ḥajjāj is mentioned as being a good scholar and one of his daughters as an expert in Traditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also the later biographical works on viziers: Nāṣer-al-dīn Kermānī, *Nasā'em al-ashḥār*, ed. Ormavī, Tehran, 1338 Š./1959, pp. 39-40.

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Of the secondary sources, see: Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 287-88.



M. Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultān Maḥmūd of Ghazna*, Cambridge, 1931, p. 135.

Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 57-58, 71-72, 86-87.