



AḤRĀR

AḤRĀR (BANU'L-AḤRĀR), in Arabic literally “the free ones,” a name applied by the Arabs at the time of the Islamic conquests to their Persian foes in Iraq and Iran. In a poem by the Prophet’s older contemporary, Omayya b. Abi'l-Ṣalt al-Ṭaqafī, concerning the Persian conquest of Yemen from the Ethiopians, the author speaks of the Himyarite prince Sayf b. Ḍī Yazan as coming with a force of Banu'l-Aḥrār, Persian troops sent by Ḳosraw Anōšīrvān (Ebn Hešām, *Sīrat Rasūlallāh*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1859-60, I, p. 45; Ṭabarī, I, p. 956). We find the equivalent Aramaic phrase *benai ḥērē*; and Josephus describes the Parthians as *eleutherioi* “free, noble-minded men.” The expression thus forms a semantic parallel to Persian *āzādagān*, literally “noble ones:” the Arabs, despite their suspicion and dislike of the institution of monarchy, which had flourished in Persia, saw in the landed aristocracy making up the cavalry arm of the Sasanian forces the epitome of nobility. The abridgement of Ebn al-Faqīh Hamadānī’s geographical work (p. 317; tr. H. Massé, *Abrégé du livre des pays*, Damascus, 1973, pp. 376-77) explains that, in ancient times, the people of Fārs were noted for their riches and power. They made others captive, but never allowed themselves to be captured, and were served by others, but never served; hence the Arabs called them “the free ones” (*aḥrār*, sing. *ḥorr*). However, with the advent of Islam, the Persians lost their eminent position, so that, of their post-Islamic epigoni, only Ebn al-Moqaffa’ and Faḏl b. Sahl were considered worthy of mention. The term must have dropped out of use after Ebn al-Faqīh’s time, since Abū ‘Abdallāh Ḳvārazmī does not include it in his section on technical terms relating to the history of Persia (*Mafātīḥ al-‘olūm*, ed. G. Van Vloten, Leiden, 1895, pp. 114-18).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 235.

Dehḵodā.