



ĀL-E AFRĪĠ

ĀL-E AFRĪĠ (Afrighid dynasty), the name given by the Khwarazmian scholar Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī to the dynasty of rulers in his country, with the ancient title of *Ḳvārazmšāh*. According to him, the Afrighids ruled from 305 A.D. (year 616 of the Seleucid era), through the Arab conquests under Qotayba b. Moslem in 93/712, and up to their overthrow in 385/995 by the rising rival family of Ma'munids (see *Āl-e Ma'mūn*). The early political history of *Ḳvārazm* is obscure. Bīrūnī says that the land was first colonized 980 years before the time of Alexander the Great (sc. before the Seleucid era, hence in 1292 B.C.). The Iranian hero *Sīāvoš*, son of *Kay Kāvūs*, came to *Ḳvārazm*; and his son *Kay Ḳosrow* established a semi-legendary line of *Siyavushids*, who extended their power over the "Turks" of the surrounding steppes, and who presumably endured up to the appearance of the Afrighids (Bīrūnī, *Āṭār al-bāqīa*, pp. 35-36; *Chronology*, pp. 40-42). It has, however, been shown by the Soviet scholar V. A. Livshits, based on discrepancies and contradictions between Bīrūnī's sources or informants and the findings of the extensive Soviet archeological explorations in *Ḳvārazm*, that Bīrūnī was in reality not well informed about the history of *Ḳvārazm* before the Arab conquest. Bīrūnī's "era of Afrīġ" (used, he says, to the time of Qotayba's invasions) does not seem to have left any trace on the numerous inscribed objects found in *Ḳvārazm*. The dates of those few monarchs mentioned on Khwarazmian coins (over 1,000 of which have been recovered) and also mentioned by Bīrūnī in his list (see below) cannot be made to fit the "era of Afrīġ." If this era was actually in use, it must have been unofficial. The evidence of comparative coin-patterns seems indeed to indicate that, before the coming of the Afrighids, *Ḳvārazm* was within the political



sphere of the Arsacids. The official Khwarazmian era apparently began in the early years A.D. and was connected with K̄vārazm's achievement of freedom from Parthian control and the rise of a new, independent line of shahs. (See Livshits, "The Khwarezmian calendar and the eras of ancient Chorasmia," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 16, 1968, pp. 432-46).

Bīrūnī lists twenty-two members of the Afrighid dynasty, allegedly succeeding each other by father-son inheritance and reigning for a total span of 690 years, with an average reign of some thirty-one years. These can be arranged in a list as follows, with the readings of Sachau's edited Arabic text first, and then his version of the Iranian, pre-Islamic names: (1) *'frġ*, Āfrīġ. (2) *bġrh*, Baġra. (3) *skksk*, Saḡassak. (4) *'skjmwk* [I], Askaġamūk. (5) *'zkjw'r* [I], Azkājavār. (6) *skr* [I], Saḡr. (7) *s'wšš*, Sāvoš. (8) *k'mkry/k'nkry*, Kāmgrī. (9) *bwzk'r*, Būzkār. (10) *rtmwk*, Arṭamūk. (11) *skr* [II]. (12) *sbry*, Sabrī. (13) *'zkjw'r* [II]. (14) *'skjmwk* [II]. (15) *š'wšfr*, Šāvošfar[n]. (16) *trksb'th*, Torkasbāṭa. (17) 'Abdallāh. (18) Maṣšūr. (19) 'Erāq. (20) Moḡammad. (21) Aḡmad. (22) Abū 'Abdallāh Moḡammad, killed in 385/995. There is a high probability of scribal deformation of what would be to the copyist totally incomprehensible Iranian names in the case of nos. 1-16 (the two manuscripts which Sachau used for his edition date only from the 17th and 19th centuries and go back to a common original). The value of the royal names found on inscribed objects is accordingly of the highest value for comparative purposes. Unfortunately, the Khwarazmian coin-series sheds little light. There is an early break in the series of at least a century and a half; this may well point to an assertion of authority over K̄vārazm by the first Sasanians, Ardašīr or Šāpūr I, perhaps just before the rise of Afrighids in 305 A.D. as related by Bīrūnī. According to Livshits (op. cit., p. 443) there is nothing on the coins resembling Bīrūnī's *'fryġ*; it may accordingly be that our dubbing this first historical line of K̄vārazmšāhs as "Afrighs" is founded on an error, and such a name never existed. In general, few of the names on coins correspond to Bīrūnī's names; and a Qosrow on coins is not mentioned at all by Bīrūnī. However, there are one or two clear correspondences. The name of the shah in the time of the Prophet Moḡammad, Arṭamūk, is confirmed. The one at the time of Qotayba's invasions is given by Bīrūnī as Askaġamūk [II], son of Azkājavār [II]; the latter name does appear on a coin as Askatsvar (i.e., the earlier Askājavār I, son of Askaġamūk I). Askaġamūk II's son, Šāvošfar[n], seems also to appear on coins of the 8th century. He must be identical with the ruler of K̄vārazm, Šao-še-fien, mentioned in the annals of the Chinese T'ang dynasty as sending an embassy to the imperial court in 751 asking for help against the Arabs (i.e., at the time of the Arab general Zīād b. Šāleḡ's great



victory over the Chinese at Talas in Transoxiana; see E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, St. Petersburg, 1903, p. 145).

The first four centuries or so of the Afrighids' rule are especially dark. According to Bīrūnī (op. cit., p. 35; tr. p. 41), Afrīg built a great fortress called Fil or Fīr (the latter form that of Bīrūnī) on the edge of the capital Kāt or Kāt, a citadel which was undermined and swept away by changes in the flow of the Oxus in the 4th/10th century; only the vestiges of it could be seen by Bīrūnī in 384/994. Soviet archaeology has shown the existence at this time of large-scale agricultural exploitation of the lands of K̄vārazm lying along the Oxus banks and in the Aral Sea delta region, with large estates fortified against incursions of the steppe barbarians and a complex system of irrigation canals (see S. P. Tolstov, *Auf den Spuren der altchoresmischen Kultur*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 207ff.). Authentic information on political events derives from the Islamic sources after the beginning of the 2nd/8th century. Before this, there had only been sporadic and ineffectual Arab raids on the fringes of K̄vārazm from the directions of Khorasan and Transoxania. But in 93/712 the Arab governor of Khorasan, Qotayba b. Moslem Bāhelī, was able to intervene in internal Khwarazmian politics when the Afrighid shah was embroiled with his brother Korrazād in a civil war. Two Arab invasions led to the killing of the shah and to much destruction, though Bīrūnī's accusation that the Arabs massacred all Khwarazmian scholars who knew the ancient lore of the country must be an exaggeration. Once the Arabs withdrew, the shahs recovered power in K̄vārazm; the stipulated tribute lapsed, and shah and people continued to adhere to their ancestral faith, presumably Zoroastrianism. The shahs continued to join with the local Iranian princes and merchants of Soğd in resisting the Arabs, seeking to call in help from outside powers like the Turks and the Chinese.

It is not until the early 3rd/9th century, perhaps during the caliphate of Ma'mūn, that the shahs seem definitely to have become Muslim; the conversion of the masses of the people was doubtless much slower. It is now that we find a shah with the typical convert's name of 'Abdallāh, son of Torkasbāta. Even now, one can by no means trust Bīrūnī's list of rulers as being wholly accurate. Ebn al-Aṭīr (VIII, p. 415) records that in 332/943-44 a shah not listed by Bīrūnī, 'Abdallāh b. Aškām, rebelled against his suzerain, the Samanid Nūḥ b. Naṣr. It thus appears that, by the early 4th/10th century, the Samanids had brought the neighboring province of K̄vārazm into tributary status. Ebn Faḏlān, when traveling from the 'Abbasid court in Baghdad to



Bolġār in 309/921, went first to Bukhara to pay his respect to the amir before proceeding to K̄vārazm and crossing through the Ust Urt Desert to the Volga (A. Z. V. Togan, *Ibn Fadlāns Reisebericht*, AKM 24/3, Leipzig, 1939, sec. 4). Ebn Faẓlān records that he visited K̄vārazm in the reign of Shah Moḥammad b. ‘Erāq. (That king’s nephew, Abū Naṣr Maṣṣūr b. ‘Alī b. ‘Erāq, was to be Bīrūnī’s teacher and a celebrated scholar of K̄vārazm at the time of the Ma’munids; he was dignified with the honorific title Mawlā Amīr-al-mo’menīn; cf. Bīrūnī, *Ātār al-bāqīa*, intro., p. xxxvii, for Bīrūnī’s own *fehrest* or catalogue of his works.) Shah Moḥammad acknowledged to Ebn Faẓlān the superior rights of al-Amīr al-Ajall, sc. the Samanid ruler (Togan, op. cit., secs. 4-14). In fact, the shahs seem to have been little disturbed in K̄vārazm, except when they were injudicious enough to shelter Samanid rebels. As Samanid authority weakened towards the end of the 4th/10th century, the shahs were able to extend their authority across the Qara Qom Desert and over the frontier towns and outposts of northern Khorasan.

The end of the Afrighids came suddenly, and as the result of an internal convulsion and change in the balance of power within K̄vārazm. A rival family, the Ma’munids of Gorgānj (see Āl-e Ma’mūn), had been growing in power, owing to the commercial richness of Gorgānj, situated as it was at the terminus of trade routes across the steppes to south Russia. Hence in 385/995 the Ma’munids attacked and captured Kāt, killed the last Afrighid, Shah Abū ‘Abdallāh Moḥammad, and themselves assumed the historic title of K̄vārazmšāh.

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