



## ĀL-E MĪKĀL

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**ĀL-E MĪKĀL**, the leading aristocratic family of western Khorasan from the 3rd/9th to the 5th/11th century; descended from the pre-Islamic nobility of the Samarkand region, it played an important political role. Nothing is known about the life of Mīkāl b. Abd-al-Wāḥed, the early 3rd/9th century family member from whom the name Mīkālī is derived. The three generations before ‘Abd-al-Wāḥed are similarly unknown, but it is likely that the family was located in Iraq during this period, having been brought there as prisoners of war after the Arabs defeated and killed an ancestor named Dīvāstī in his fortress in the Zarafšān valley in 104/722. From documents in Soghdian and Arabic discovered in 1933 in a ruined fortress on Mt. Mugh, 120 kilometers east of Samarkand, it is known that Dīvāstī (Soghdian Dīvāštīč) was entitled at different times “Soghdian king,” “ruler of Samarkand,” and “ruler of Panjikant.” The genealogy of his descendant Mīkāl further indicates that Dīvāstī had four kingly predecessors bearing the title *šūr* and was ultimately descended from the Sasanid emperor Bahrām Gōr. Although a letter in Arabic from the Mt. Mugh archive contains Muslim formulae and refers to Dīvāstī as the *mawlā* of the Arab governor of Khorasan, these phrases may be the additions of an Arabic speaking scribe rather than true indications of Dīvāstī’s religion and allegiance. Also uncertain in the letter is a reference to one Ṭorkūn, who could be a son of Dīvāstī (possibly the same son listed with the Arabic name Bakr as the great-great-grandfather of Mīkāl), a different ruler in the area (reading the name as a variant of the Turkic word for ruler *tarkān*), or even a title of Dīvāstī himself.



After a century and a half of eclipse, this noble family reappears in the historical record in the persons of sons of Mīkāl named Moḥammad and Šāh, who served as military commanders for the Taherid dynasty in Baghdad, Ray, and Nīšāpūr. Moḥammad appears to have resided in the latter city, and his son ‘Abdallāh (d. 308/920) is the individual from whom all thirty-three known later members of the family descend. Yet despite the family’s concentration in Nīšāpūr and Khorasan, ‘Abdallāh himself served as a high administrator under the Saffarid ‘Amr b. Layṭ in Sīstān, and then under his rebellious military commander Sabuk-eri, and finally, as governor of Ahvāz for the caliph Moqtader. The ability of members of the Mīkālī family to serve rulers of very different political and religious characters testifies to their elite status and exceptional talent; it was buttressed by the strong regional base the family built in Nīšāpūr. ‘Abdallāh’s son Abu’l-‘Abbās Esmā’īl II (died 362/973) served as head of the *dīwān al-rasā’el* for the Samanids, but he was also the first family member to serve as *ra’īs* of Nīšāpūr, a position of urban headship that remained in the family until the second quarter of the 5th/11th century.

Of the later members of the family, three are well known: 1. Ḥasanak (Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan, executed 432/1031) was the powerful vizier of Maḥmūd of Ġazna as well as *ra’īs* of Nīšāpūr. Ḥasanak’s fall resulted from his backing Maḥmūd’s son Moḥammad instead of the triumphant Mas’ūd as heir to their father’s throne. 2. K̄vāja ‘Alī (Abu’l-Qāsem b. ‘Abdallāh) became *ra’īs* in Ġazna, a position his son Abu’l-Moẓaffar (died 447/1055) also held, and performed important and delicate diplomatic and ceremonial missions for sultans Maḥmūd and Mas’ūd. 3. Abū ‘Abdallāh Ḥosayn b. ‘Alī was, like his kinsmen, an administrator in Ghaznavid service, but he successfully made the transition to Saljuq rule after being captured by Čaġrī Beg on the field of battle. Ebn al-Aṭīr lists him as the second vizier of Toġril Beg, although he could only have held that position for a short time. The role of the Mīkālīs seems to have diminished under the Saljuqs, perhaps due to the declining economic condition of Khorasan during that period. No family member can be traced past the 5th/11th century.

The Mīkālīs were prominent in many other fields of endeavor; family members received notable mention as scholars, poets, and benefactors of the arts and their community. Although the family seems to have suffered some internal division, particularly in the time of the vizier Ḥasanak, no other family in Nīšāpūr, and possibly Khorasan, could rival its aristocratic status; and the Mīkālīs seem not to have intermarried extensively with the ‘Alid and



'*olamā*' families that dominated the local politics of Khorasan in that period. Never ruling themselves, but ever willing to serve at the highest administrative level under any ruler, the Mikālīs symbolize the continuity of status of the old Iranian aristocracy despite centuries of invasion and recurrent dynastic change.

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