



AMĪR-AL-OMARĀ'

AMĪR-AL-OMARĀ', literally, “commander of commanders,” hence “supreme commander,” a military title found from the early 4th/10th century onwards, first in Iraq and then in the Iranian lands.

i. *The early period.*

ii. *Safavid usage.*

i. The Early Period

The appearance of the term dates from the period when the ‘Abbasid caliphs’ direct political and military power was becoming increasingly enfeebled and powerful military leaders were taking over de facto executive power in Iraq. According to the sources, the commander Hārūn b. Ġarīb is reported to have become *amīr-al-omarā'* in 316/928 at a time when his great rival, the Turkish slave commander Mo'nes Moẓaffar (d. 321/933) was only *amīr-al-joyūš* “commander of the forces”; this would be the first attestation of the title (see M. Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des H'amdānides de Jazira et de Syrie I*, Algiers and Paris, 1951, p. 360 and n. 220). Mo'nes, a commanding figure in the caliphates of Moqtader and Qāher, then seems himself to have acquired the title, possibly through the agency of the vizier Ebn al-Forāt. His successor as commander-in-chief and also as head of the treasury, ʿṬarīf Sobkarī, further held the title, according to Ebn al-Aʿīr. Then Moḥammad b. Rā'eq, governor of



Wāseṭ, was appointed *amīr-al-omarā'* by the caliph Rāzī in 324/936, followed by his lieutenant in the struggle against Abū 'Abdallāh Barīdī, Bečkem, who replaced Ebn Rā'eq at Baghdad in 326/938 (cf. D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat 'abbāsīde de 749 à 936 (132 à 324 de l'hégire)*, Damascus, 1959-60, II, pp. 430, 434, 476, 493; Ch. Defrémery, "Mémoire sur les émirs al-oméra," *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Ser. I, 2, 1852). In these years it appears that the title was as much an honorific designation as the mark of a specific office, for its holders under the 'Abbasids functioned not only as military commanders-in-chief, but to some extent also as viziers, with authority in the civil sphere. However, the stage was now set for the appropriation of the title by the incoming Daylamī Buyids, who from 334/945 onwards controlled the caliphs in Baghdad. In that year, Aḥmad b. Būya, subsequently Mo'ezz-al-dawla, took over power in the capital, and was appointed *amīr-al-omarā'* by the caliph Mostakfī. The office was thereafter held, in the first place, by the Buyid *amīr* controlling Baghdad, but its appearance only occasionally on Buyid coins shows that it was still more an honorific title than a definite charge. Mo'ezz-al-dawla nominated his son 'Ezz-al-dawla Baḳtīār as his heir in 344/955, and according to Ebn al-Jawzī, gave him the title *amīr-al-omarā'*. But the prestige of the title seems to have tempted other members of the Buyid family, with their amirates centered on Iran rather than on Iraq, to adopt it. It appears sporadically on coins of the *amīr* of Fārs, 'Emād-al-dawla, minted at his capital Shiraz in 336/947-48 and 337/948-49. Meskawayh states that on the eve of Mo'ezz-al-dawla's death, the caliph Moṭī' hailed the second Buyid brother, Rokn-al-dawla of Ray and Jebāl, as *amīr-al-omarā'* in his brother's place. The confusions of the historical texts show clearly that the title remained somewhat vague in its application and scope of duties. Later in the Buyid period, *amīrs* are found occasionally placing it on their coins, such as Maǰd-al-dawla Rostam of Ray (coin of 381/991). Bahā'-al-dawla's son in Fārs, Abū Maṣū' (d. 398/1008; his eldest son?), used it in 392/1002 in an inscription carved at Persepolis (*Répertoire chronologique d'inscriptions arabes* VI, pp. 42-43, no. 2087); even the Mokramids, local governors in Oman for the Buyids, used it on a coin of 421/1030 (see H. Busse, *Chalif und Grosskönig. Die Buyiden im Iraq (945-1055)*, Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1969, pp. 33-34, 91, 100, 174-75; M. Kabir, *The Buwayhid Dynasty of Baghdad (334/946-447/1055)*, Calcutta, 1964, p. 41).

These usages of the title in Iraq and western Iran sprang from the position of the Buyids in Baghdad as heirs to the functions there of the earlier *amīr-al-omarā'*s. When the title was subsequently used by other dynasties controlling



various parts of the Iranian and then Turkish worlds, either in the Arabic form or in the Persian one of *amīr-e amīrān*, it was normally a designation implying high military command but not necessarily the commandership-in-chief. It does not appear to have been used much by the Samanids or Ghaznavids in the East, and these dynasties designated their supreme military commanders as *hājeb-e bozorg*, etc. But an interesting exception occurs in the period of Samanid disintegration, when the ambitious Turkish commander Abū ‘Alī Sīmǰūrī in 381/991 seized control of Khorasan, gathered the local taxes for himself, and assumed unilaterally (i.e., without seeking the usual grant of such titles from the caliph or ruler) the honorifics *amīr-al-omarā*’ and *al-mo’ayyad men al-samā*’; probably Abū ‘Alī wished to assert his now dominant position in the state vis-à-vis the Samanids, just as the *amīr-al-omarā*’s in Iraq had done vis-à-vis the ‘Abbasids (see C. E. Bosworth, “The Titulature of the Early Ghaznavids,” *Oriens* 15, 1962, p. 215).

Amongst the Saljuqs and their successor dynasties, *amīr-al-omarā*’ was normally one of several titles applied to high military commanders (i.e., together with *sepahsālār*, *amīr-e sālār*, *moqaddam-al-‘askar*, etc.; see Ī. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı devleti teşkilâtına medhal*, Istanbul, 1941, p. 60). Only in one or two instances was it employed as a high honorific title awarded to a prince of the Saljuq dynasty. In the sultanates of Alp Arslan and Malekšāh, we find their kinsman ‘Otmān b. Čağrı Beg in 465/1073 appointed governor of Valvālīj and northern Afghanistan, with the title *amīr-al-omarā*’ (Bosworth, *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, pp. 90, 93); and in 490/ 1097 Berk-yaruq (Barkīāroq) had to contend with a rebellion in Khorasan led by his uncle Moḥammad b. Solaymān b. Čağrı Beg, who held the title of *amīr-e amīrān* (M. F. Sanaullah, *The Decline of the Saljūqid Empire*, Calcutta, 1938, pp. 100-01).

See also [Amīr](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.

(C. E. Bosworth)



ii. Safavid Usage

The term *amīr-al-omarā'* denoted the commander-in-chief of the *qizilbāš* tribal forces which formed the basis of Safavid military and political power; this person wielded considerable political authority and during the reign of Shah Esmā'īl I (907-30/1501-24) was the most powerful official in the state. The *qizilbāš* Turkman chiefs considered it no less than their due that they should fill the principal offices of state, and the first *amīr-al-omarā'* after the establishment of the Safavid state in 907/1501 was the *qizilbāš* chief Ḥosayn Khan Šāmlū, who also held the important office of *wakīl*. By 913-14/1508 Shah Esmā'īl had become sufficiently apprehensive of Šāmlū's power to dismiss him from the *wakālat*, and the following year (915/1509-10) he also dismissed him from the post of *amīr-al-omarā'*. The shah then appointed an officer of lowly rank to the latter post, an act which had the desired effect of reducing the power and influence of the office. As a corollary, the influence of the *qūrčībāšī*, or commander of the Turkman tribal cavalry, gradually increased, particularly after the first decade of the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (930-84/1524-76). At the beginning of his reign, Ṭahmāsb was dominated by a succession of *qizilbāš* amirs, who emphasized their preeminence by reverting to the practice of styling themselves *amīr-al-omarā'* as well as *wakīl*. When Ṭahmāsb succeeded in asserting his authority in 940/1533, the title *amīr-al-omarā'* fell into desuetude. Apart from a brief reference late in his reign, we hear no more of this office, which is not even listed among the appointments made by Shah 'Abbās I on his accession in 996/1588. The decline of the office of *amīr-al-omarā'*, and its eventual supersession by that of *qūrčībāšī*, was an indication of a radical shift in the balance of power within the Safavid state. Beginning during the second half of the reign of Ṭahmāsb, the influx of Caucasian elements and the formation of new regiments of *gōlāms* of Georgian, Armenian, and Circassian origin meant that the old Turkman tribal cavalry no longer constituted the greater part of the Safavid armed forces.

During the later Safavid period, when official policy had converted most provinces of the Safavid empire from *mamālek* provinces (governed by *qizilbāš* chiefs) to *tokāšša* status (administered by *gōlāms*), if one of the strategically important provinces such as Khorasan or Azarbaijan was threatened by foreign armies, it was the practice to appoint a *qizilbāš* chief with the title of *amīr-al-omarā'* to deal with the crisis on an ad hoc basis.

R. M. Savory, "The Principal Offices of the Safavid State during the Reign of Ismā'īl I (907-30/1501-24)," *BSOAS* 23, 1960, pp. 91-105.



Idem, “The Principal Offices of the Safawid State during the Reign of Ṭahmāsp I (930-84/1524-76),” *ibid.*, 24, 1961, pp. 65-85.

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K. M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1966, index, p. 155.

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