



ASĀWERA

ASĀWERA, Arabic broken plural form (the variant *asāwīrāt* also occurs in Ya'qūbī, p. 202) of a singular *oswār(ī)*, *eswār(ī)*, early recognized by Arab philologists as a loanword from Persian meaning “cavalryman,” equivalent to Ar. *fāres* (cf. Jawālīqī, *al-Mo'arrab*, ed. Aḥmad Moḥammad Šāker, repr. Tehran, 1966, pp. 20-21). The Iranian background of the word is ancient: Old Pers. *asabāra-*, Parthian *asbār* (in an ostrakon from Nisa/Nesā dated 72-71 B.C., cf. V. A. Livshits, *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 1979, pt. 4, pp. 99ff.), Pahlavi *aswār*, NPers. *sovār*, *savār*.

The term was apparently used in Sasanian times for the cavalrymen of the army, the mailed swordsmen and archers who formed the backbone of the forces (Ya'qūbī, loc. cit., Christensen, *Iran Sass*², p. 265). In the accounts of the Muslim conquest of Iran, this term is used specifically for the force of about 1,000 men sent by Yazdegerd III to defend Kūzestān. They came from Isfahan and the region between it and Kūzestān (Balāḡorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 359, 365-66, 372-74). They were cavalrymen of Iranian origin, who, together with non-Iranian ethnic groups of mercenaries like the Sayābeja and Zoṭṭ (qq.v.), allegedly went over to the Arab general Abū Mūsā Aš'arī's side and became Muslims, receiving allocations from the *dīvān* or stipends list (Balāḡorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 373-74; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2562ff.). These groups became established as allies of the Arab tribe of Tamīm in lower Iraq and the ports at the head of the Gulf such as Bašra and Obolla. They were exempt from taxes at first (Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, repr. Philadelphia, 1978, p. 171), and those at Bašra participated in the conquest of Fārs, Kermān, and Khorasan under 'Abdallāh b.



‘Āmer and his lieutenants (Balāḍorī, *op. cit.*, p. 374). Though probably not numerous, their communities in the *amṣār* of Baṣra and Kūfa persisted as distinct identities throughout early Islamic times. In 42/662 Mo‘āwīa resettled some of them at Antioch in Syria (Balāḍorī, *op. cit.*, p. 117), and, according to Ebn al-Faḳīh (p. 191, tr. Massé, *Abrégé du livre des pays*, p. 231), the governor Zīād b. Abīhi (d. 53/673) constructed at Baṣra a special mosque for them. During the second *fetna* the *asāwera* participated with Tamīm in killing the Azdī governor of Baṣra, Mas‘ūd b. ‘Amr (65/684), and then sided with Moṣ‘ab b. Zobayr. ‘Abdallāh b. Eṣfahānī, who had 400 *mamlūks* of his own, commanded the right wing of Moṣ‘ab’s army that defeated Moḳtār in 687. Later they joined the rebellious ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Aṣ‘aṭ (Balāḍorī, *Ansāb* IVb, pp. 107-08; *idem*, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 366, 374; Ṭabarī, II, p. 454). As a result, Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf disbanded them as a military unit, destroyed their homes, reduced their stipends, and deported some of them (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 117, 374). Afterwards they were forced to pay *zakāt* (Ya‘qūbī, II, p. 276). A canal (*nahr*) was dug by the *asāwera*, and in later times, *al-oswārī* is occasionally found as the *nesba* of scholars, doubtless descendants of this group, including Mūsā b. Sayyār Oswārī (fl. 3rd/9th) who explained the Qur’ān in both Arabic and Persian (Jāḥeẓ, *al-Bayān wa’l-tabayīn*, ed. Hārūn, Cairo, 1367/1948, I, p. 368) and a Mu‘tazilite theologian and adherent of Naẓẓām who gave his name to a sub-sect, the Oswārīya (Sam‘ānī [Hyderabad], I, pp. 247-51; there is a confusion here with a homonymous *nesba* from a village near Isfahan).

See also [Aswār](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also M. J. de Goeje, *Mémoire sur les migrations des Tsiganes à travers l’Asie*, Leiden, 1903, pp. 18, 80.

Ch. Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ġāḥiẓ*, Paris, 1953, pp. 22, 35, 40.