



## BĀBAK

**BĀBAK** (Mid. Pers.: Pābag), reformer of the Sasanian military and in charge of the department of the warriors (*Diwān al-moqātela*) during the reign of Ḳosrow I Anušervān in the 6th century CE. Ṭabari, who mentions him as a man of noble birth known for his magnanimous qualities and capability, records his full name as Bābak b. *ʿlbyrwʿn*, conjectured by Theodor Nöldeke as Bērawān (Ṭabari, I/2, pp. 963-64, tr., pp. 262-63; Nöldeke, p. 247; Dinavari, p. 74, tr., p. 100: Nahrawān). Moḥammad-Taḳī Bahār explained the name as Bābak son of Biru, considering Biru a collateral form of Viru, the name of Rāmin's brother in the romance of *Vis o Rāmin* (Bal'ami, p. 1047, n. 3; see, e.g. As'ad Gorgāni, p. 39, v. 17). Ahmad Tafazzoli suggested Behrovān (pp. 14 ff., 86).

Bābak is mentioned as one of the secretaries (*men al-kottāb*), but ultimately seems to have been a priest (*mowbed*), as suggested in the *Šāh-nāma* (Ṭabari, I/2, p. 963, tr., p. 262; *Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 101, v. 180; Rubin, p. 289). There are a number of seals belonging to priests with the name of Bābak (Gignoux, II, p. 53), but none has been identified with this personage so far.

Bābak was placed in charge of the Department of the Warriors (Mid. Pers. *Dīwān ī gund*; Ar. *Diwān al-jond* or *Diwān al-moqātela*; Dinavari, p. 74, tr., p. 100; Ṭabari, I/2, p. 963, tr., p. 262) by Ḳosrow I Anušervān (r. 531-79 CE) as part of his military reforms (see [ḲOSROW I ii Reforms](#)). Our sources state that he was to reform the cavalry and infantry forces, which were to be inspected to make sure that they had the proper uniform, equipment, and weapons. Kosrow I appears to have entrusted Bābak with the creation of his standing army, which was mainly drawn up from the nobles of various ranks (Rubin, p.



291). This is also clear from the equipment required for the cavalymen, which included “horse mail, mailed coat, breastplate, leg armor plates, sword, lance, shield, mace, girdle, battle axe or club, a bow case containing two bows with their strings, thirty arrows, and two plaited cords hanging down the back of the helmet” (Ṭabari, I/2, p. 964, tr., pp. 262-63; *Šāh-nāma*, VII, p. 103, v. 207, adds lasso (*kamand*); for lasso as an armament, see *Vidēvdād* 14.9; cf. [ARMY I. PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN](#)).

The cavalry was paraded before Bābak so that he would inspect them. This story is related with some differences by Ṭabari (I/2, pp. 963-65, tr., pp. 262-63), Bal’ami (pp. 1047-51), and Ferdowsi (*Šāh-nāma* VII, pp. 101-4). Troops, fully armed, would present themselves before Bābak for inspection, while he was sitting on a carpet leaning back upon cushions; but he would send them back and have them come the next day until “everyone,” meaning King Ḳosrow, would also present himself, properly dressed and fully armed; otherwise he would not be given his annual sum. The highest pay for the cavalry was 4,000 derhams, but the king would be given an extra derham for his military service. This story went to show that everyone was subject to the king’s law and reform, and that no one would be allowed to disobey Bābak’s command.

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