



BĀBAK ƘORRAMI

BĀBAK ƘORRAMĪ (d. Şafar, 223/January, 838), leader of the Ƙorramdīnī or Ƙorramī uprising in Azarbaijan in the early 3rd/9th century which engaged the forces of the caliph for twenty years before it was crushed in 222/837.

The fullest account of Bābak's career comes from a lost *Akbār Bābak* by Wāqed b. 'Amr Tamīmī, which is quoted in the *Fehrest* of Ebn al-Nadīm (ed. Flügel, pp. 406-07) and was probably used by Maqdesī (*Bad'* VI, pp. 114-18; see Sadighi, p. 234). Other accounts are less detailed and show variations.

The name Bābak is found in all the sources, but Mas'ūdī also says that "Bābak's name was Ḥasan" (*Morūj* VII, p. 130, ed. Pellat, IV, sec. 2814). The statements about his parentage and background are unclear and inconsistent, sometimes fantastic and incredible. His father's name is variously given as Merdas/Merdās (Sam'ānī, ed. Margoliouth, fol. 56a); 'Abd-Allāh, a native of Madā'en (*Fehrest*, p. 406); Maṭar, a vagabond (*men al-ša'ālīk*; Ṭabarī, III, p. 1232); and 'Āmer b. Aḥad from the Sawād region who had gone to Ardabīl (Abu'l-Ma'ālī, chap. 5). According to Wāqed, however, 'Abd-Allāh, Bābak's father, was a cooking-oil vendor who had left his home town Madā'en for the Azarbaijan frontier zone and settled in the village of Belālābād in the Maymaḍ district. His mother, according to Faṣīḥ (I, p. 283), was a one-eyed woman named Māhrū from a village in a district belonging to Azarbaijan. On the one hand the stories about 'Abd-Allāh and Maṭar may imply that Bābak's father had an illicit relationship with this woman, but on the other hand Dīnavarī (p. 397) asserts: "What seems to us to be true and proven is that Bābak was a son of Moṭahhar, the son of Abū Moslem's daughter Fāṭema, and that the Fāṭemiya



group of the Korramīs took their name from this Fāṭema, not from Fāṭema the daughter of God’s Prophet.” In Mas’ūdī’s *Morūj* (ed. Pellat, IV, p. 144, sec. 2398) Bābak is described simply as one of the Fāṭemīya group of the Korramīs.

In most of these accounts, other than Dīnavarī’s, a note of sarcasm and hostility can be perceived. Our information about Bābak and his revolt comes almost entirely from adversaries. Merdās is the name of Žaḥḥāk’s father in Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma*, probably meaning “man-eater” (*mard-ās*; see R. Roth, “Die Sage von Dschemschid,” *ZDMG* 4, 1850, pp. 417-33, esp. p. 423), however, this view was rejected by Nöldeke, who considered Merdās to be the same as Arabic Merdās (see Zereklī and Deḥḳodā, s.v. Merdās); its attribution to Bābak may be a disguised reference to his and his henchmen’s readiness to kill their enemies (Zarrīnkūb, 1355, p. 237). The coupling of his mother’s name Māhrū “Belle” with the description “one-eyed” also looks like a sneer. There is no means of knowing whether the kinship with Abū Moslem, considered probable by Dīnavarī, was a fact or a pretense designed by Bābak (as by other rebel leaders) to gain support among people who cherished Abū Moslem’s memory (Ġ.-Ĥ. Yūsofi, *Abū Moslem, sardār-e Korāsān*, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 175-78, 165f.), or whether it was subsequently invented to argue a link between Abū Moslem’s and Bābak’s revolts or to explain the Korramī veneration for Abū Moslem (cf. Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 359, 367-68). Dīnavarī’s mention of a Korramī group named Fāṭemīya after Abū Moslem’s daughter and of Bābak’s membership of it is repeated in *Ta’rīk Baġdād* (X, p. 207; see also Madelung, pp. 63-64, 65; Amoretti, pp. 503ff.).

According to Wāqed, Bābak’s father, after the birth of Bābak, died from wounds suffered in a fight during a journey to the Sabalān district. His widow then earned her living as a wet-nurse for other people’s infants, while Bābak worked as a cowherd until he was twelve years old. We are told that one afternoon his mother saw Bābak asleep under a tree, stark naked and with blood at the root of every hair on his head and chest; but when he woke and stood up, she saw no trace of blood and said, “I know that my son has a great task ahead” (*Fehrest*, p. 406; Maqdesī, *Bad’* VI, pp. 114f.; ‘Awfī, pt. 1, chap. 5). Wāqed adds that Bābak in his youth worked as a groom and servant for Šebl b. Monaqqī (Motannā ?) at the village of Sarāt (Sarāb ?) and learned to play the *tanbūr* (drum or mandolin). This must be the source of the statement by Abu’l-Ma’ālī (chap. 5, p. 299) that Bābak used to play the *tanbūr* and sing songs for the people while working as a fruit vendor in the village. When he had grown up he went to Tabrīz, where he spent two years in the service of **Mohammad**



b. *Rawwād Azdī* before returning at the age of eighteen to his home at Belālābād.

Wāqed's account of what happened next is, in summary, as follows. Two rich men named Jāvīdān b. Šahrak (or Sahrak) and Abū 'Emrān were then living in the highland around the mountain of Baḏḏ and contending for the leadership of the highland's Ḳorramī inhabitants. Jāvīdān, when stuck in the snow on his way back from Zanjān to Baḏḏ, had to seek shelter at Belālābād and happened to go into the house of Bābak's mother. Being poor, she could only light a fire for him, while Bābak looked after the guest's servants and horses and brought water for them. Jāvīdān then sent Bābak to buy food, wine, and fodder. When Bābak came back and spoke to Jāvīdān, he impressed Jāvīdān with his shrewdness despite his lack of fluency of speech. Jāvīdān therefore asked the woman for permission to take her son away to manage his farms and properties, and offered to send her fifty dirhams a month from Bābak's salary. The woman accepted and let Bābak go. It must have been then that he joined the Ḳorramīs.

In the *Fehrest* and elsewhere, Jāvīdān b. Šahrak is said to have been Bābak's teacher. From 192/807-08 until 201/816-17 he led a Ḳorramī group named Jāvīdanī after him (Ya'qūbī, *Boldān*, p. 272; Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, pp. 321-22; Ebn al-Aṭīr, repr., VI, p. 328; Ebn al-'Ebrī (Bar Hebraeus), p. 139; Ebn Ḳaldūn, events of 201/817; Faṣīḥ, I, p. 270; see also G. Flügel, p. 539 nn. 2, 3, and Sadighi, pp. 107ff.).

Sometime after Bābak's entry into Jāvīdān's service, the rival chieftain Abū 'Emrān sallied forth from his mountain stronghold against Jāvīdān and was defeated and killed, but Jāvīdān died three days after the battle from a wound. Some of the writers allege that Jāvīdān's wife was already enamored of Bābak, who is said to have been a handsome lad with a good voice (Abu'l-Ma'ālī, chap. 5, p. 300). This allegation may have its root in the marriage of the two after Jāvīdān's death (see Sadighi, p. 244). The woman told Bābak of her husband's death and added that she was going to announce it to the community the next day, when she would also claim Bābak as Jāvīdān's successor, who would restore the religion of Mazdak and lead the community to triumph and prosperity. On the following day Bābak appeared before Jāvīdān's assembled warriors and followers. When they asked why Jāvīdān had not summoned them before uttering his last testament, she answered that since they lived in scattered places, sending out the message would have spread the news, which in turn might have compromised their security. After securing their obedience



to Jāvīdān’s instructions, she said that according to Jāvīdān’s last testament the night before, his soul would upon his death enter Bābak’s body and fuse with his soul (the Ƙorramīs believed in the transmigration of souls, see Ƙorramdīnān), and that anyone contesting this testament should be excommunicated. All those present acknowledged Jāvīdān’s mandate to the young man, and at the woman’s request they bound themselves by a ritual oath to give the same allegiance to Bābak’s soul as they had given to Jāvīdān’s soul. Then Jāvīdān’s widow married Bābak in a simple ceremony in the presence of all (*Fehrest*, pp. 406-07; on the role of this woman and the position of women in Bābak’s revolt in general, see Amoretti, pp. 517-18, 508). Abū’l-Ma’ālī (chap. 5, p. 300) alleges that the woman poisoned Jāvīdān, while Ṭabarī (III, p. 1192) and Ebn al-Aṭīr (VI, p. 459) state that Jāvīdān had a son (Ebn Jāvīdān) whom the Muslims had captured and later released; Sadighi (pp. 244-45) wonders why this son was not chosen to succeed Jāvīdān. Wāqed and Ṭabarī depict Bābak as low-born, but Bābak’s reply to his son’s letter after his escape, and the words of his brother ‘Abd-Allāh to Ebn Šarvīn Ṭabarī, the officer appointed to take him to Baghdad (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1221, 1223), suggest that they were of noble family (Sadighi, pp. 239-41).

Bābak must have absorbed ideas and beliefs current among the Ƙorramīs after his entry into Jāvīdān’s service and adherence to the sect. The epithet Ƙorramī or Ƙorramdīn given to Bābak in the sources denotes membership of this sect. The name has been explained as referring to Ƙorrama, the wife of Mazdak (*Sīāsat-nāma*, p. 319; *Mojmal al-tāwārīk*, p. 354) or to a village named Ƙorram near Ardabīl (surmise of Naṣr quoted by Yāqūt, *Mo’jam* II, p. 362), but these attributions are questionable. Other writers take *korram* to be the adjective normally meaning “verdant” or “joyous” and interpret it as “permissive” or “libertine.” Ƙorramdīn appears to be a compound analogous to *dorostdīn* (orthodox) and *Behdīn* (“Zoroastrian”; see Sadighi, p. 195; Nafīsī, p. 21; Madelung, p. 63), and since joy was one of the forces governing the world in the Mazdakite religion (see Yarshater, pp. 1005-06), the name Ƙorramdīn appears to confirm the assertion in several sources that the sect was an offshoot of Mazdakism (Mas’ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 322; *Fehrest*, pp. 405-06; *Sīāsat-nāma*, p. 319; *Mojmal*, pp. 353-54; Abū’l-Ma’ālī, chap. 5, p. 300; see also Sadighi, pp. 187f., 197; Yarshater, pp. 1003-04; and Nafīsī, p. 21). Many modern scholars regard them as “neo-Mazdakites” (e.g., Madelung, p. 64; Amoretti, p. 503; Yarshater, p. 1011; Zarrīnkūb, 1343 Š./1964, p. 544). Under Bābak’s leadership the Ƙorramīs, who are described as having been before Bābak’s time peaceful farmers, refraining from killing or harming other people (Maqdesī, *Bad’* IV, pp.



30-31; *Fehrest*, p. 406; 'Awfī, pt. 1, chap. 5), changed into militants eager to fight and kill, to seize or destroy villages, and to raid caravans (Dīnavarī, p. 397; Ṭabarī, s.a. 220/835; Abu'l-Ma'ālī, chap. 5). Bābak incited his followers to hate the Arabs and rise in rebellion against the caliphal regime. The reports state that Bābak called men to arms, seized castles and strong points, and ordered his warriors to kill people and destroy villages, thereby barring roads to his enemies and spreading fear. Gradually a large multitude joined him. There had long been groups of Ḳorramīs scattered in Isfahan, Azarbaijan, Ray, Hamadān, Armenia, Gorgān, and elsewhere, and there had been some earlier Ḳorramī revolts, e.g., in Gorgān jointly with Red Banner (Sork-alamān) Bāṭenīs in the caliph Maḥdī's reign in 162/778-79, when 'Amr b. 'Alā', the governor of Ṭabarestān, was ordered to repulse them, and at Isfahan, Ray, Hamadān, and elsewhere in Hārūn al-Rašīd's realm, when 'Abd-Allāh b. Mālek and Abū Dolaf 'Ejlī put them down on the caliph's behalf (*Sīāsāt-nāma*, pp. 359-60; *Faṣīḥ*, I, pp. 230-31; cf. Madelung, p. 64; Amoretti, pp. 504-05); but none had the scale and duration of Bābak's revolt, which pinned down caliphal armies for twenty years. After his emergence, the Ḳorramī movement was centered in Azarbaijan and reinforced with volunteers from elsewhere, probably including descendants of Abū Moslem's supporters and other enemies of the 'Abbasid caliphate. The figures given for the strength of Bābak's army, such as 100,000 men (Abu'l-Ma'ālī), 200,000 (Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 323), or innumerable (*Tabṣerat al-'awāmm*, p. 184; Baḡdādī, p. 267) are doubtless highly exaggerated but at least indicate that it was large.

In most of the sources the start of Bābak's revolt is placed in the year 201/816-17 in al-Ma'mūn's reign, when the Ḳorramīs began to infiltrate neighboring districts and create insecurity in Azarbaijan. On or before that date, according to some sources, Ḥātem b. Harṭama, the governor of Armenia, learned that his father Harṭama b. A'yan had, despite loyal service to al-Ma'mūn, been flogged and imprisoned on the caliph's order and been killed in prison at the behest of the minister Faḏl b. Sahl (Ṭabarī, II, p. 1026). Ḥātem b. Harṭama therefore planned to rebel and wrote letters to local commanders urging them to defy al-Ma'mūn, but at this juncture he died. One of those to whom he wrote was Bābak (or probably Jāvīdān), who was greatly encouraged thereby (Ebn Qotayba, p. 198; Ya'qūbī, II, p. 563; Sadighi, p. 238 n. 3).

Al-Ma'mūn at first paid scant attention to Bābak's revolt, evidently because he was living in distant Khorasan and preoccupied with matters such as the designation of his successor, the actions of Faḏl b. Sahl, and the backlash at



Baghdad. Thus contemporary circumstances as well as popular dislike of Arab rule favored Bābak and his followers.

In 204/819-20 al-Ma'mūn moved to Iraq, and after dealing with the dissidents at Baghdad, he sent Yaḥyā b. Mo'ād to subdue Bābak's revolt. This general fought Bābak in several battles but without success. Thereafter al-Ma'mūn showed more concern and regularly dispatched well-armed forces to Azarbaijan. In 205/820-21 'Īsā b. Moḥammad b. Abī Kāled was appointed governor of Armenia and Azarbaijan with responsibility for operations against Bābak, but his force was caught and smashed by Bābak's men in a narrow defile. 'Īsā either ran for his life or was killed by Bābak (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1072). In 209/824-25 al-Ma'mūn chose Zorayq b. 'Alī b. Şadaqa (Şadaqa b. 'Alī in Ṭabarī, 'Alī b. Şadaqa known as Zorayq according to Ebn al-Aṭīr) to govern Armenia and Azarbaijan and organize the war, and put Aḥmad b. Jonayd Eskāfi in command of an expedition against Bābak. Aḥmad b. Jonayd was taken prisoner by Bābak while Zorayq failed to prosecute the war, and al-Ma'mūn then put Ebrāhīm b. Layṭ b. Faẓl in charge. In 212/827-28 the caliph sent a force under Moḥammad b. Ḥomayd Ṭūsī to punish Zorayq, who had rebelled, and to subdue Bābak. This general succeeded after some delay in capturing Zorayq and dispersing his group of rebels and then, having obtained reinforcements and made thorough preparations, set out against Bābak. In the contest between them, which, went on for six months, Moḥammad b. Ḥomayd won several victories, but in the last battle in 214/829 his troops, who in compliance with his strategy had advanced three parasangs into the mountains, were attacked in a steep pass by Bābak's men, who rushed down from an ambush higher up; the troops then fled, leaving behind only Moḥammad b. Ḥomayd and some officers, who were all killed. The death of this general prompted poetic laments such as a *qaṣīda* by Abū Tammām, two verses from which are quoted in Dīnavarī (p. 398). From the statements of Ṭabarī (s.a. 214/829), Ya'qūbī, and others it appears that al-Ma'mūn then either appointed 'Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher to the governorship of Jebāl, Armenia, and Azarbaijan, or gave him the choice between this and the governorship of Khorasan. He in fact chose or was ordered to go to Khorasan (Sadighi, pp. 248-49) but according to one account (*Sīāsāt-nāma*, p. 361) he first sent a force against Bābak, who took refuge in a castle. The caliph appointed 'Alī b. Hešām, the governor of Jebāl, Qom, Isfahan, and Azarbaijan, with the responsibility to lead the operations against Bābak; allegedly he oppressed the inhabitants, killing men and confiscating properties, and even planned to kill al-Ma'mūn's emissary 'Ojayf b. 'Anbasa and then to join Bābak; but he was arrested by



‘Ojayf and delivered to al-Ma’mūn, who ordered his execution in 217/832 (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1108f.). Al-Ma’mūn then entrusted the governorship of Jebāl and conduct of operations against the Ḳorramīs to Ṭāher b. Ebrāhīm. For the time being, however, the caliph’s campaign against the Byzantines precluded large-scale action against the Ḳorramī rebels, who gained further ground. Al-Ma’mūn died on the campaign in 218/833. His moves against Bābak had failed, but his concern with the problem is revealed in his testamentary advice to his successor al-Mo’taşem in which al-Ma’mūn exhorts him not to spare any effort or resources to crush Bābak’s revolt (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1138).

The persistence of Bābak’s revolt and the failure of the caliphal generals and expeditionary forces to quell it had various reasons. His stronghold Baḍḍ was situated in impenetrable mountains with intricate defiles and passes, where, according to Baḷ’amī (see Kāmbakš Fard, *Barrasīhā-ye tārikī* 1/4, Dey, 1345 Š./November-December, 1966-67, pp. 9-10), a handful of men could stop thousands of advancing troops. Severe winter weather and heavy rain and snowfalls made operation against Baḍḍ impossible in winter. Often Bābak used his positional advantage to surprise the enemy and kill large numbers of them. While Baḷ’amī and others describe Bābak’s following as made up of local farmers and poor people, several writers call them “thieves, heretics, and profligates” (‘Awfī, pt. 1, chap. 5). It can be inferred that Bābak won wide support among peasants and poor villagers of the Azarbaijan highlands who hoped for a better future through the revolt’s success (Amoretti, pp. 507-08), but it is not improbable that some joined for expediency or out of fear.

The Iranian Archaeology Department has identified the site with ruins (called Qaḷ’a-ye Jomhūr, probably after the surrounding Jomhūr mountains) in the present district of Ahar, located 50 km from Ahar town on a height above the left bank of a tributary of the Qarasū 3 km southwest of the village of Kalībar (Report of the Department’s mission in the summer of 1345 Š./1966). Aḥmad Kasrawī’s researches had already pointed to the site near Kalībar (*Šahrīārān-e gomnām*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, p. 149). The remains consisting of fortifications and a large building rest on a mountaintop 2,300-2,600 m above sea level, surrounded on all sides by ravines 400-600 m deep. The only access is by a very narrow track through gorges, up steep slopes, and across patches of dense forest. The final approach to the castle’s gate is through a corridor-like defile wide enough for only one man to walk at a time. Old siege engines could not be brought up here. To reach the large building from the castle’s walls one had to climb about 100 m higher up by a narrow path passable only



by one man at a time along the ridge, which is surrounded by a forested ravine 400 feet deep (see Kāmbakš Fard, “Qaḷ’ā-ye Jomhūr ya Dež-e Baḍḍ,” *Honar o mardom* 50, Āḍar, 1345 Š./November-December, 1966, pp. 2-6; *Barrasīhā-ye tārikī* 1/4, pp. 3-18 and plates 2, 4, 5, 9, 11; Torbatī Ṭabāṭabā’ī, pp. 466-71; Flügel, p. 539 n. 1; Nafīsī, pp. 37-39; Abū Dolaf Mes’ar b. Mohalhel Kāzrajī, *al-Resāla al-tānīa*, ed. V. Minorsky, Cairo, 1955, p. 6; for further details see [Baḍḍ](#)).

Bābak’s hand was greatly strengthened by his possession of this inaccessible mountain stronghold, to which the Arabic poet Boḥtorī, amongst others, refers in verses quoted by Yāqūt (I, p. 361). Baḍḍ was not Bābak’s only castle, however, as there are mentions of several others, some of which can be identified with surviving ruins (Nafīsī, pp. 69-71; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, pp. 472-75). At that time there were Kōrramīs scattered in many regions besides Azarbaijan, reportedly in Ṭabarestān, Khorasan, Balk, Isfahan, Kāšān, Qom, Ray, Karaj, Hamadān, Lorestān, Kūzestān, Bašra, and Armenia (Nafīsī, pp. 32-33). According to the *Fehrest* (pp. 405-06) and Mas’ūdī (*Tanbīh*, p. 322), Bābak’s sway at the height of his career extended “southward to near Ardabīl and Marand, eastward to the Caspian Sea and the Šamākī district and Šervān, northward to the Mūqān (Moğān) steppe and the Aras river bank, westward to the districts of Jolfā, Naḳjavān, and Marand” (see Nafīsī, p. 36 and map).

The Kōrramī danger was thus a matter of a grave concern to al-Mo’taşem on his accession to the caliphate in Rajab, 218/August, 833, and all the more so when later in the same year a large number of men from Jebāl, Hamadān, and Isfahan went over to the Kōrramī and encamped near Hamadān. To deal with them al-Mo’taşem sent a force under Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm b. Moš’ab, who was also made governor of Jebāl. In the subsequent battle near Hamadān several thousand (60,000 in Ṭabarī and Ebn al-Aṭīr) Kōrramīs were killed, but a large number escaped to Byzantine territory, whence they came back later to resume their fight (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1165; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, p. 441; *Sīāsat-nāma*, pp. 362-63). In Jomādā I, 219/May, 834 many Kōrramī prisoners were brought by Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm to Baghdad (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1166; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, p. 444). Bābak’s revolt, however, was still in full swing, and the slaughter of so many Kōrramīs seems to have strengthened his men’s will to fight. In 220/835 al-Mo’taşem placed [Ḥaydar b. Kāvūs Afšīn](#), a senior general and a son of the vassal prince of Osrūšana, in command of an expedition to destroy Bābak. According to most of the sources, al-Mo’taşem not only made Afšīn governor of Azarbaijan and seconded high-ranking officers to serve under him, but also



ordered exceptionally large salaries, expense allowances, and rations for him; Afšīn was to receive 10,000 dirhams per day spent on horseback and 5,000 dirhams per day not so spent. For rapid transmission of messages, the caliph ordered that a swift horse with a rider should be stationed at every parasang-pillar between Sāmarrā and the Ḥolwān (now Pā-ye Ṭāq) pass and beyond Ḥolwān as far as Azarbaijan watchmen should be posted on hills with the task of uttering a loud shout on the approach of a courier so that the rider at the nearby station might get ready to take the leather pouch (*karīṭa*) and carry it to the next station; in this way the pouches were carried from Afšīn's camp to Sāmarrā in four days or less (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1229).

Before Afšīn's departure, al-Mo'taşem had sent Abū Sa'īd Moḥammad b. Yūsuf Marvazī to Ardabīl with instructions to rebuild the forts between Zanjān and Ardabīl which Bābak had demolished and to make the roads safe by posting guards. Abū Sa'īd Moḥammad set about these tasks. A band of mounted Ḳorramī led by a certain Mo'āwīa broke into one sector, intending to surprise Abū Sa'īd Moḥammad with a night attack, but Abū Sa'īd Moḥammad and his soldiers got word and blocked Mo'āwīa's way; in the ensuing fight some Ḳorramīs were killed, others were captured, and the skulls and the prisoners were sent to Baghdad. Ṭabarī (III, p. 1171; cf. Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, p. 447) records this as Bābak's first defeat. A later incident also boded ill for Bābak. Previously Moḥammad b. Bo'ayṭ, the lord of a strong castle named Qaḷ'a-ye Šāhī, had been well-disposed to Bābak and willing to accommodate his men when they came to the neighborhood; but when Bābak sent a company under a captain named 'Eşma, Moḥammad b. Bo'ayṭ first made them drunk, then threw 'Eşma into chains and enticed the men one by one into the castle and killed most of them, only a few being able to escape. 'Eşma was sent to al-Mo'taşem, who before jailing him obtained useful information from him about Bābak's territory and tactics and about tracks in the area (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1172; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, pp. 447-48).

On arriving in Azarbaijan, Afšīn camped at a place on the Ardabīl road called Barzand at a distance of 15 parasangs from Ardabīl (Eşṭakrī, p. 192; Moqaddasī, pp. 378, 381; Yāqūt, I, p. 382; *Nozhat al-qolūb*, pp. 90, 182). He repaired the forts between Barzand and Ardabīl and made traffic possible by providing road guards, caravan escorts, and halting places. He also spent a month at Ardabīl gathering knowledge of the topography and tracks from informants and spies. If he caught any of Bābak's spies, he pardoned them and paid them to spy for him at twice the rate that Bābak had paid. One such



intelligence report was that Bābak knew that al-Mo'taşem had sent Boġā the Elder (a senior general) with a large sum of money for the pay and expenses of the troops and was planning a raid to seize this money. Afšīn used this information to lure Bābak into a full engagement, in which many of Bābak's comrades were killed. Bābak himself got away to the Mūqān plain and thence to Baḏḏ (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1174-78; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, pp. 449-51).

When Bābak came under attack from Afšīn's army, he is said to have written a letter to the Byzantine emperor Theophilus (r. 829-42), begging him to lead an expedition into Azarbaijan; but Theophilus's march into caliphal territory with a force including fugitive Korramīs did not take place until after the capture and execution of Bābak in 223/838; the authenticity of Bābak's letter is open to question (Sadighi, p. 257 n. 3). Details of numerous engagements between Bābak's men and Afšīn's troops before the fall of Baḏḏ are given by Ṭabarī and Ebn al-Aṭīr (s.a. 220/835-222/837) and recapitulated by Nafīsī (pp. 97-117). Also mentioned are various precautions which Afšīn took at this time, such as trench-digging, patrolling, hiring local highlanders as spies, and sending detachments to strategic points. Whenever he needed money or supplies, he informed al-Mo'taşem by means of swift couriers and soon got what he wanted. The caliph regularly sent him instructions on tactics and precautions, and gave him every encouragement. On one occasion al-Mo'taşem dispatched Ja'far Dīnār known as Ḳayyāt (the Tailor), who had been a senior general in al-Ma'mūn's reign, and Aytāk the Turk, a slave-soldier who superintended the caliphal kitchen, with reinforcements and money for Afšīn and also several ass-loads of iron spikes to be strewn around the camp as a precaution against night raids. When Bābak heard of the arrival of Ja'far and Aytāk, he is said to have informed Theophilus, "Mo'taşem has no one else left, so he has sent his tailor and his cook to fight me" (Sadighi, p. 257). Bābak and his men remained in control of the highland and with their ambushes and surprise attacks, often frustrated Afšīn's plans. They repeatedly captured supplies which Afšīn had ordered from Marāġa and Šervān. Afšīn's tactics were to lure Bābak's men away from their mountain fastnesses and engage them in the open and to foil their ambushes by efficient reconnaissance. But his officers, eager to bring the matter to a head, complained of his inaction and even accused him of conniving with Bābak. More encounters took place with heavy losses to both sides and finally Afšīn reached the mountain facing the gate of Baḏḏ and camped there, only a mile away. Bābak, losing hope, came out to meet him and requested a safe-conduct from the caliph. According to Ya'qūbī (*Ta'rik* II, pp. 578f.), Afšīn refused, but when Afšīn demanded hostages, Bābak offered his



son or others of his followers and asked Afšīn to restrain the troops from attacking. By then, however, fierce fighting with the castle's defenders had started, and in the end Afšīn's troops scaled the walls of Baḍḍ and hoisted their flags. Afšīn entered the castle and had it demolished after it had been plundered (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1233-34; Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp. 93, 160). Many of Bābak's men scattered in the mountains and escaped. Bābak, together with some members of his family and a few of his warriors, slipped away by mountain tracks, heading for Armenia. Baḍḍ fell on 9 Ramaẓān 222/15 August 837.

Afšīn, who had already dispatched a request to the caliph for a safe-conduct for Bābak, learned from spies that Bābak and his party were hiding in a forest-covered valley on the Azarbaijan-Armenian border, and he proceeded to blockade the area. When the caliph's safe-conduct arrived, Afšīn commissioned two Ḳorramīs to carry it to Bābak together with a letter from Bābak's son, who had been taken prisoner. Bābak rejected the document without opening it, and after sending the messengers away fled to Armenia with four or five male and female members of his family and one bodyguard. All except Bābak and his brother 'Abd-Allāh and the guard were captured. Being close to starvation, Bābak sent the guard to a village to get food. The local ruler, Sahl b. Sonbāṭ (on whom see Nafīsī, pp. 135, 138, 175-76) was informed and received Bābak hospitably. Bābak, however, took the precaution of sending his brother 'Abd-Allāh to 'Īsā b. Yūsof b. Eṣṭefānūs (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1223-24). Afšīn had already sent letters to the district promising a large reward for the capture of Bābak, and Sahl b. Sonbāṭ informed Afšīn of Bābak's presence. After verifying this, Afšīn sent a large force under Abū Sa'īd Moḥammad b. Yūsof to capture Bābak. He was arrested after going out at Sahl b. Sonbāṭ's suggestion to hunt (after being put in irons by Sahl b. Sonbāṭ according to Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 2807) and then taken to Afšīn's camp at Barzand on 10 Šawwāl 222/15 September 837. Many stories about Bābak's escape and adventures have come down (see Sadighi, p. 265 n. 3). According to Ṭabarī, he wore a white cloak at the hunting ground, and this has been taken as possibly symbolic of either purity and light or opposition to the 'Abbasids whose flag was black (Sadighi, p. 264 n. 4). Afšīn also found out where Bābak's brother 'Abd-Allāh had escaped and wrote to 'Īsā b. Yūsof b. Eṣṭefānūs, who handed him over. Afšīn reported his success (by pigeon post according to Mas'ūdī's *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 2809) to al-Mo'taṣem, who in reply ordered him to bring the captives forthwith to Sāmarrā. Allegations that Afšīn deceived Bābak with conciliatory messages and feigned friendship (Nafīsī, pp.



66, 68; Zarrīnkūb, 1355, pp. 247-48; *Dā'erat al-ma'āref-e fārsī*, s.v. *Bābak*) appear to derive from rumors that Afšīn was already in secret contact with anti-ʿAbbasid leaders such as Bābak and the ruler of Ṭabarestān, Māzyār b. Qāren, and perhaps also with the Byzantine emperor Theophilus. Another conjecture is that Afšīn sacrificed Bābak because he was afraid of being supplanted as commander of the anti-Ḳorramī expedition by his Taherid rivals (Nafīsī, p. 68).

Large numbers of men, women, and children from Bābak's side fell into Afšīn's hands, figures from 1,300 to 7,600 being mentioned (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1233). He released the men and returned the women and children to those shown to be their husbands, fathers, or guardians. Then he set out with Bābak and Bābak's brother and some Ḳorramī prisoners for al-Mo'taşem's capital Sāmarrā. (On the question why Afšīn remained in Azarbaijan for almost four months after the capture of Bābak, see Sadighi, p. 268.) They arrived on Thursday, or Wednesday night, 3 Şafar 223/4 January 838. Al-Wāteq, the heir to the throne, and other relatives of al-Mo'taşem as well as senior dignitaries went out at the caliph's command to meet Afšīn. Bayhaqī (2nd ed., pp. 168-69) tells how the minister Ḥasan b. Sahl, like several dignitaries, was reluctant to dismount and salute Afšīn but dared not disobey the caliph's command. Afšīn camped at Maṭīra (or at Qāṭūl five parasangs from Sāmarrā), and it is related that first the *qāzī* Aḥmad b. Abī Do'ād, then al-Mo'taşem himself went to the camp secretly in their impatience for a glimpse of Bābak (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1229-30; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 2809), a story which, if true, shows what a relief Bābak's fall had been for the caliphal government. To give the populace an exemplary lesson, a parade was held in the following week, most probably on Monday, 6 Şafar 223/7 January 838, in which Bābak, clad in an embroidered cloak and capped with a miter, was made to ride on an elephant which had been given to al-Ma'mūn by an Indian king, while his brother, 'Abd-Allāh, also specially clad and capped, was mounted on a camel. Two verses of Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Malek Zayyāt about this elephant are quoted by Ṭabarī (see Sadighi, p. 266 n. 2). The whole length of the street to the Bāb al-ʿĀmma was lined on both sides with cavalymen and foot soldiers and huge numbers of people. Then al-Mo'taşem ordered the executioner to proceed. First Bābak's hands and feet were cut off, then at the caliph's command his mangled body was strung on a gibbet in the outskirts of Sāmarrā. According to some sources his head was later sent around for display in other cities and in Khorasan. Bābak was hanged in the same place that afterwards Māzyār b. Qāren, the rebel prince of Ṭabarestān, and Yāṭas Rūmī, the patricius of Amorium who had died in prison, were hanged; this is the subject of a poem by Abū Tammām



quoted in Mas'ūdī's *Morūj* (ed. Pellat, sec. 2821). Bābak's brother 'Abd-Allāh was sent to Baghdad, where he was similarly executed and gibbeted by Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm Moṣ'abī. According to some authors (e.g., Neẓām-al-Molk, *Sīāsat-nāma*, pp. 365-66), when one of Bābak's hands had been cut off, he made his face red by smearing blood on it with his other hand, and when al-Mo'taṣem asked why, he answered that it was because loss of blood causes pallor and he did not want anyone to suppose that he was pale with fear (Sadighi, pp. 267-68). The poet 'Aṭṭār, however, attributes this gesture to the crucified mystic Ḥosayn b. Manṣūr Ḥallāj (*Manteq al-ṭayr*, ed. M. J. Maškūr, Tabrīz, 1336 Š./1957, pp. 156-57). A different story about Bābak's words to al-Mo'taṣem appears in 'Awfī's *Jawāme' al-ḥekāyāt* (pt. 1, chap. 5). Bābak's brother 'Abd-Allāh, according to Ṭabarī, met his death with similar calm assurance (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1231).

The cruelty of these killings as well as the enormous favor that al-Mo'taṣem lavished upon Afšīn (daily dispatch of horses and robes of honor on his way back from Barzand, gifts of a crown and jeweled insignia, 20,000 dirhams for himself and his troops, etc., *ibid.*, pp. 1230, 1232, 1233) and others illustrate the importance which the caliph and his advisers placed on the suppression of Bābak's revolt. Among the court poets who lauded the victory of Afšīn and received rewards from al-Mo'taṣem were Eshāq b. Kalaf (quoted in Dīnavarī, p. 399) and Abū Tammām Ṭā'ī, whose poem likened Afšīn to Ferēdūn and Bābak to Žaḥḥāk (Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 93). According to Mas'ūdī (*Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 2815) al-Mo'taṣem gave Otroja, the daughter of a high-ranking Turkish officer named Ašnās, in marriage to Afšīn's son Ḥasan and laid on a splendid wedding party. Ḥasan b. Sonbāt was rewarded by the caliph with a gift of 100,000 dirhams, a jeweled belt, and the crown of a patricius, and his son Mo'āwīa also received 100,000 dirhams. Neẓām-al-Molk (*Sīāsat-nāma*, p. 366) reckons the defeats of Bābak, Māzyār, and the Byzantines to be three great victories for Islam won in al-Mo'taṣem's reign.

The number of Bābak's men taken prisoner is given as 3,309, and the number of his captured male and female relatives as 30 or more. Various figures, said to have been obtained from an executioner or executioners whom Bābak had employed, are given for those whose death he ordered in the course of his long revolt; the figure of 255,000 or more in most of the sources (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1233; Maqdesī, VI, p. 114; Sadighi, p. 271) is obviously an exaggeration, no doubt intended to impute cruelty and bloodthirstiness to Bābak. All the accounts of Bābak are biased, some begin with curses on him (e.g. Sayyed Mortazā, p. 184;



Mostawfī, *Tārīk-egozīda*, p. 316). Eṣṭakrī (p. 203) and Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 266) state that Korramīs recited the Qurʾān in mosques, but authors such as Baġdādī (p. 269) describe this as a ruse to conceal disbelief under the pretense of being Muslim. Korramī libertinism has probably also been exaggerated (Madelung, p. 65); for example, the public appearance of Bābak and Jāvīdān’s widow at their wedding does not mean that they were unmindful of marriage obligations (see Sadighi, p. 214), and none of the allegations of libertinism made against Bābak and his followers can be taken as certain or trustworthy. All considered, it may be said that Bābak’s motives and actions were anti-caliphal, anti-Arab, and to that extent anti-Muslim (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1226; Sadighi, pp. 265, 275; Amoretti, p. 509). The numerous revolts in the two or three centuries after the Arab conquest point to widespread discontent among the Iranian elements from whom the leaders, including Bābak, drew their support, and perhaps also to a desire to return to the past. Bābak’s aims, however, were clearly not shared by the Iranian princes and nobles like Afšīn (except Māzyār), being incompatible with their ambition to regain power and wealth (Zarrīnkūb, 1355, p. 232). Most of them, including Afšīn who was one of their number, supported the caliph’s action against Bābak. Modern scholars such as Sadighi (p. 229) and G. E. von Grunebaum (*Medieval Islam*, Chicago, 1961, p. 205) regard Bābak’s revolt as a politico-religious movement, and Nafīsī, J. Homā’ī (in *Mehr* 3, p. 159), and D. Şafā have laid stress on its nationalistic aspect. Bābak’s boldness, shrewdness, and efficiency in the military leadership of the long struggle, and the trust placed in him by his supporters are certainly remarkable (on his personality and ideas, see Sadighi, pp. 268-72). Ṭabarī states that none of the Korramīs dared obey Afšīn’s order to take the caliph’s safe-conduct to Bābak and that when Afšīn’s emissaries reached him, he said in an angry message to his son, “Perhaps I shall survive, perhaps not. I have been known as the commander. Wherever I am present or am mentioned, I am the king.” The words show that he was a man of far-reaching ambition and enterprise. In his conversation with Sahl b. Sonbāt about the need to send away his brother ‘Abd-Allāh, he said, according to Ṭabarī, “It is not right that my brother and I should stay in one place. One of us may be caught and the other may survive. I do not know what will happen. We have no successor to carry on our movement.” The fact that Bābak sent his brother away when he himself took refuge with Sahl b. Sonbāt implies Bābak’s hope for the continuation of the movement. Ṭabarī also states that Afšīn, when about to leave Azarbaijan, asked Bābak whether he would like anything before their departure, and Bābak replied that he would like to see his own town again. He was sent to Badḡ with some guards on a moonlight night and



allowed to walk around the town. This gives proof of his great love for his homeland. In the same context Ṭabarī has a story that Afšīn granted a request from Bābak to spare him from surveillance by the appointed guard-officer, because this officer “was slippery-handed and slept beside him and stank unbearably.” The statements of Ṭabarī (III, pp. 1177, 1205) and Ebn al-Aṭīr (s.a. 220/835 and 222/837) about Ḳorramī merry-making and wine drinking even in wartime confirm one of the sect’s reputed characteristics (see Amoretti, p. 517), but their tales of Bābak’s promiscuity and abduction of pretty Armenian girls seem inconsistent with another statement of Ṭabarī (III, p. 1227) that the women wept when they saw Bābak captive in Afšīn’s camp.

The excitement over the fighting and the defeat of Bābak is echoed in contemporary Arabic literature, e.g., a verse description of Bābak on the gibbet quoted by Rāḡeb Eṣfahānī (*Moḥāẓarāt al-odabā’*, Beirut, 1961, III, p. 199), poems by Abū Moḥammad Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm Mawṣelī (155/172-235/850) in praise of Eshāq b. Ebrāhīm Moṣ‘abī (see Ḥoṣrī Qayrawānī, *Zahr al-ādāb*, Cairo, III, pp. 13-14), the odes in Abū Tammām’s *dīvān*, also his invectives against Afšīn after the latter’s fall, and praises for Moḥammad b. Ḥomayd Ṭūsī and his campaign against Bābak in the *dīvān* of Boḥtorī (see also Nafīsī, pp. 158-60).

Armenia was close to Bābak’s territory and had contacts with him but occasionally suffered from his raids. The mentions of his doings in Armenian chronicles have been assembled by Nafīsī (pp. 135-41).

Bābak’s defeat hit the Ḳorramīs hard but did not destroy them. Descendants of his followers evidently continued to live at Baḡd, as Abū Dolaf b. Mes‘ar b. Mohalhel saw them there in the mid-4th/10th century. Further Ḳorramī stirrings are reported: in the reign of al-Mo‘taṣem’s successor al-Wāṭeq and as late as 300/912-13 (*Sīāsāt-nāma*, pp. 366-67); in 321/933 and again in 360/970 in the reigns of the Buyid amirs ‘Emād-al-Dawla and ‘Azod-al-Dawla and as late as the mid-6th/12th century (Margoliouth and Amedroz, *Eclipse II*, p. 299; Sam‘ānī, s.v. *Bābakī*; Bondārī in Houtsma, *Recueil*, p. 124); and even in the Mongol period. Many of the old writers, particularly those of Sunnite persuasion, assert that Ḳorramīs influenced and infiltrated the Qarmaṭī and Esmā‘īlī movements, and some modern scholars take the same view while others are more cautious (Madelung, p. 65; B. Lewis, *The Origins of Ismailism*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 96-97). The suspicion probably gained credence because the three movements shared a common hostility to the ‘Abbasids and may have occasionally collaborated.



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