



BANŪ SĀJ

BANŪ SĀJ, more correctly Āl Abi'l-Sāj, a family named after its ancestor Abu'l-Sāj which served the 'Abbasid caliphate from the reign of al-Ma'mūn or al-Mo'taşem and later ruled Azarbaijan (279-317/892-929). It originated from two neighboring villages, Jankākaṭ and Sūydak, in Ošrūsana (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 506) and was probably, as suggested by V. Minorsky (*Studies in Caucasian History*, London, 1953, p. 111) on the basis of the name of the founder, of Sogdian, rather than Turkish, origin.

1. Abu'l-Sāj Dīvdād b. Dīvdast Ošrūsānī was evidently enlisted by Afšīn, prince of Ošrūsana, in the army which he raised for the caliph al-Ma'mūn. He is first mentioned in the reign of al-Mo'taşem as a prominent commander in Afšīn's army besieging the Ḳorramī rebel Bābak in Baḡd in 222/837. He delivered Bābak, after the latter was surrendered by the Armenians, to Afšīn in Barzand on 10 Šawwāl/15 September. In 224/839 al-Mo'taşem sent him with an army to Lārez and Donbāvand in the war against Māzyār. Probably still in the same year, or early in 225/840, Afšīn, according to Ya'qūbī (*Tārīḳ* II, p. 583), dispatched him with a strong army to Azarbaijan, ostensibly to subdue Mankjūr, Afšīn's seditious lieutenant there. Afšīn was accused, however, of having encouraged Mankjūr, his cousin, to revolt and to have sent Abu'l-Sāj to aid him. Al-Mo'taşem now sent the Turk Boḡā Kabīr who seized Mankjūr. If the accusation was sound, Abu'l-Sāj seems to have escaped punishment. In 242/856, according to Ṭabarī (III, p. 1436), or in 244/859, according to others, the caliph al-Motawakkel put him in charge of the road from Baghdad to Mecca. It was probably at this time that he seized the rebel Hasanid



Moḥammad b. Šāleḥ and destroyed his base at Sawayqa, a village near Medina belonging to the ‘Alids (Yāqūt, *Boldān* III, p. 198). About 249/863, under al-Mosta‘īn, he was sent to northern Syria to subdue a revolt among the Tanūḳ in the region of Qennasrīn. He was recalled from Arabia to Baghdad in 251/865 and robes of honor were bestowed on him by al-Mosta‘īn, whose position now was threatened by a revolt of Turkish commanders in Samarra in favor of al-Mo‘tazz. Moḥammad b. ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher who was still loyal to al-Mosta‘īn sent Abu’l-Sāj to defend Madā’en. He inflicted two defeats on the Turks at Jarjarāyā but could not prevent their penetrating into Madā’en. In Moḥarram, 252/February, 866, after Mo‘tazz had been recognized as caliph by Ebn Ṭāher and al-Mosta‘īn, he returned to Baghdad and was appointed by Ebn Ṭāher to govern the regions of the Sawād irrigated by the Euphrates. He proceeded to Qaṣr Ebn Hobayra and then to Kūfa after his lieutenant had arrested a rebel ‘Alid there. Still in the same year he was again put in charge of the road to Mecca, and the rebel Hasanid Moḥammad b. Yūsof fled before him from the Hejaz to Yamāma where he founded the reign of the Banu’l-Oḳayẓer. In 254/868 Abu’l-Sāj was appointed governor of Dīār Moẓar, Qennasrīn, and ‘Awāšem. In 261/875 he was put in charge of Ahvāz and the war against the Zanj rebels. When his brother-in-law ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān was, however, defeated and killed by the Zanj near Dūlāb, Abu’l-Sāj retreated to ‘Askar Mokram and the Zanj entered Ahvāz. Soon thereafter he was dismissed from the government of Ahvāz, but remained in the province. A report of the *Tārīḳ-eSistān* (p. 230, with the emendation of the editor) that Ya‘qūb b. Layṭ Ṣaffār deposited with him the treasures captured in the castle of Ebn Wāṣel in Fārs in Šawwāl, 261/July, 875 (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1889) seems unreliable. According to Ṭabarī (III, p. 1891) Abu’l-Sāj received Moḥammad b. Zaydūya, a deserter from Ya‘qūb’s army, in Ahvāz later in this year. He joined Ya‘qūb, however, as the latter passed through ‘Askar Mokram, and was well received and honored by him. He appears to have been present at the defeat of Ya‘qūb at Dayr al-‘Āqūl in Rajab, 262/April, 876, and afterward criticized Ya‘qūb’s conduct of the war (Ebn Kallekān, ed. ‘Abbās, VI, p. 415). Al-Mowaffaq, brother and coregent of the caliph al-Mo‘tamed, confiscated his estates and property after the battle. Upon Ya‘qūb’s death in 265/879, Abu’l-Sāj joined his brother and successor ‘Amr. When the latter made peace with the caliph, Abu’l-Sāj took leave from him in Fārs to go to Baghdad. On his way he died in Gondēšāpūr in Rabī’ II, 266/November-December, 879.

2. Abū ‘Obayd-Allāh Moḥammad b. Abi’l-Sāj. After the death of Abu’l-Sāj, ‘Amr b. Layṭ gave his son Moḥammad charge of the Holy Cities in the Hejaz and of



the Baghdad-Mecca road. Moḥammad entered Mecca after expelling Abu'l-Moḡīra Maḳzūmī, an ally of the Zanj, on 8 Du'l-ḥejja 266/2 July 880. During the next three years he secured the Baghdad-Mecca road, defeating Haysam 'Ejl, chief of the Banū 'Ejl, who controlled the region of Kūfa (Šawwāl, 267/May, 881), killing Moḥammad b. 'Alī Yaškori near Wāseṭ (268/881-82) and capturing a convoy of money and weapons of Maḳzūmī near Ṭā'ef (269/882-83). In Jomādā II, 269/December, 882-January, 883, he was given by Hārūn b. Mowaffaq, the later caliph al-Mo'tazed, control of Anbār, the Baghdad-Euphrates road, and Raḥbat Ṭawq. On 29 Šawwāl 269/11 May 883 he entered Raḥbat Ṭawq after expelling Aḥmad b. Mālek b. Ṭawq and then proceeded to Qarqīsīā driving off Ebn Šafwān 'Oqaylī. When Mowaffaq, after the death of Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn in 270/884, decided to take the offensive against the latter's son Ḳomārawayh, Moḥammad jointly with Ebn Kondāj, governor of Mosul (Mawšel), took Aleppo (Ḥalab) in 271/884, and al-Mowaffaq appointed Moḥammad governor of it. He stayed there and refused to join the campaign of Hārūn b. Mowaffaq against Ḳomārawayh, since Hārūn had offended him by accusing him of cowardice. After Hārūn withdrew from Syria, Moḥammad quarreled with Ebn Kondāj and in 273/875-76 recognized the suzerainty of Ḳomārawayh as the latter started a counteroffensive to regain Syria. He sent his son Divdād to Ḳomārawayh as a hostage for his loyalty and repeatedly defeated Ebn Kondāj seizing all of Jazīra and Mosul. In 274/887, however, he broke with Ḳomārawayh causing havoc in northern Syria. The latter defeated him at Ṭanīa near Damascus and then, though generously releasing his son Divdād, drove him out of Syria as far as Mosul. Ebn Kondāj now allied himself with Ḳomārawayh and took the offensive against Moḥammad. The latter initially won a surprise victory near Mosul and pursued Ebn Kondāj to Raqqa. While he gained the backing of al-Mowaffaq, Ebn Kondāj in Syria was aided by Ḳomārawayh. After a defeat by Ebn Kondāj near Raqqa, Moḥammad fled first to Mosul and in Rabī' I, 276/September, 889, joined Mowaffaq in Baghdad and accompanied him on his campaign to Jabal, Karaj, and Isfahan, from which he returned to Baghdad in Šafar, 278/May, 891.

Ebn al-Aṭīr's report (VII, p. 436) that Moḥammad was appointed by Mowaffaq governor of Azarbaijan in 276/889 is almost certainly mistaken since he neither took up his position nor sent a deputy there at this time. It has been commonly accepted, however, by historians of Armenia who are inclined to date the coronation of Sempad (Sanbāt) I, Bagratid king of Armenia, in 891 (see Thopdschian, p. 166 n. 2). As governor of Azarbaijan Moḥammad claimed suzerainty over part of Armenia and sent Sempad a crown and presents in the



name of the caliph. This event must evidently be dated not before 279/892. According to Ebn Zāfer (p. 34) Moḥammad was appointed governor of Azarbaijan by al-Moʿtamed in 279/892. He left Baghdad after marrying his daughter to Badr, the *ḡolām* of al-Moʿtazed, most likely after al-Moʿtazed's succession to the caliphate and his appointment of Badr as police chief in Rajab, 279/October, 892 (the daughter was transferred to Badr only in 280/893; Masʿūdī, *Morūj* VIII, p. 144). In Rabīʿ I, 380/May, 893, he took Marāḡa, overcoming fierce resistance by ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ḥasan, chief of the Hamdān in the province. He confiscated ʿAbd-Allāh's property and put him to death. Though he chose Marāḡa as his capital, he later resided mostly in Bardaʿa. After an invasion of Georgia and Albania by Sempad in 895, he occupied Naḡjavān (Nakhichevan) and Dabīl (Dvin) but suffered a defeat and made peace with the king. He began acting more and more independently toward the caliphal government. It was perhaps at this time that he assumed the traditional title of the kings of Osrūšana, Afšīn, which appears on a coin minted in Bardaʿa in 285/898. His assumption of the title may well be related to the overthrow of the last Afšīn of Osrūšana by the Samanids in 280/893. In 285/898 he submitted again to the caliph al-Moʿtazed, was formally invested by him with the rule of Azarbaijan and Armenia, and sent his son Abuʿl-Mosāfer Faṭḥ as a hostage to Baghdad. At the same time he resumed his offensive against Armenia, penetrating to Kars (Qārṣ) and capturing the wife of Sempad. He established his son Dīvdād in Dabīl and then invaded Vaspurakan, forcing its ruler, the Arcrunid Sargis Ašot, to submission. Next he occupied Tiflis. In 287/900 his loyalty to the caliph came again under doubt as his eunuch commander Waṣīf ostensibly revolted and invaded Toḡūr. Informed that Waṣīf was in fact acting in concert with his master who was plotting to bring Dīār Mozar under his sway, al-Moʿtazed was forced to lead a campaign against Waṣīf and captured him. Moḥammad carried out a further invasion of Vaspurakan and was preparing for a new campaign against Sempad when he died in Bardaʿa during an epidemic in Rabīʿ I, 288/March, 901 (Ebn Kallekān, Beirut, II, p. 250).

3. Dīvdād b. Moḥammad b. Abiʿl-Sāj. He was put on the throne by the army after his father's death but was overthrown by his uncle Yūsof a few months later. Refusing his uncle's offer to stay with him he arrived in Baghdad in Ramažān, 288/October, 901. Nothing is known about his further life.

4. Abuʿl-Qāsem Yūsof b. Abiʿl-Sāj, born in 250/864. He is first mentioned in 271/885 as governor of Mecca, when he attacked and chained the official



leader of the pilgrims, a *golām* of the governor of Medina. He was himself seized by some soldiers aided by the pilgrims and carried off to Baghdad. In 280/893 he captured a group of Kharijites in the region of Mosul and sent them to Baghdad. In 282/895 he was sent from Baghdad to Şaymara to participate in a campaign. He used the occasion, however, to escape to his brother Moḥammad in Azarbaijan and on the way seized some money belonging to the caliphal government. He seems to have stayed in Azarbaijan until, after Moḥammad's death, he seized the reign from his nephew. During his reign he moved the capital to Ardabīl and razed the walls of Marāḡa. King Sempad sought to escape the Sajid overlordship by entering into immediate vassalage to the caliph al-Moktafi. As he refused a summons of Yūsof, the latter invaded Armenia. In 290/903 a settlement was reached as Sempad accepted a crown from Yūsof, thus acknowledging his overlordship. Yūsof had never gained recognition by al-Moktafi, and in 295/908 an army was sent from Baghdad against him. Only after al-Moqtader's succession to the caliphate was an agreement negotiated, and in 296/909 Yūsof was invested with the government of Azarbaijan and Armenia. The vizier Ebn al-Forāt was evidently instrumental in the settlement, and Yūsof considered him thereafter as his protector at the caliphal court and had him regularly named on his own coinage. The minor principalities of Transcaucasia were evidently also put under his overlordship. In 296/908 he brought Tiflis under his control, and about this time also came to Darband (Bāb), capital of the Hāšemī dynasty, and, on the instruction of Ebn al-Forāt, rebuilt the walls of the town (Helāl, pp. 217-18; Minorsky's dating of the visit [1958, p. 70] cannot be correct). Soon thereafter Yūsof resumed his war against King Sempad, who had been encouraged by the caliph to arm against him. He found an ally in Gagik, the prince of Vaspurakan. In lengthy campaigns he first captured and poisoned the king's son Mushel and later seized the king himself. After holding him a prisoner for a year, he tortured and beheaded him (about 301/914) in sight of the fortress of Erenjak, hoping to demoralize its garrison. The unprecedented brutality of Yūsof's treatment of the Armenians in this war is noted by Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 343) who mentions that the people of Baghdad refused to buy Armenian slaves knowing that they were *ahl demma*. Yūsof initially also maintained a hostile attitude toward Sempad's son and successor Ašot II (Ašūd), but after Gagik refused to cooperate further with him and Ašot gained general backing in Armenia he recognized him (about 304/917). His attention was at this time turning to a new conflict with the caliph al-Moqtader. After the dismissal of his protector Ebn al-Forāt from the vizierate in 299/912, he had begun to withhold part of his annual tribute to the caliphate. In 303/915-16



he imprisoned an envoy of the caliph but later released him and sent him back with presents and money. When Ebn al-Forāt was reappointed vizier in 304/917, Yūsuf seized Zanjān, Abhar, Qazvīn, and Ray from the Samanid governor Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Ṣo‘lūk, who had usurped the governorship, and claimed that the previous vizier, ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā, had invested him with the governorship. Most sources suggest that Yūsuf’s claim was entirely false and that he was hoping that Ebn al-Forāt would be able to protect him. According to ‘Arīb (p. 67), however, ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā admitted that he had ordered Yūsuf to fight Ṣo‘lūk with the caliph’s approval, though without appointing him governor. Al-Moqtader was, in any case, thoroughly incensed and rejected all overtures from Yūsuf. The latter defeated an army sent against him near Ray. In 305/919 Mo’nes, the ‘Abbasid commander-in-chief, marched against him, and he withdrew to Azarbaijan. Mo’nes pursued him and was defeated in a first battle. Yūsuf generously did not press his advantage to capture him. About this time ‘Abd al-Malek b. Hāšem b. Sorāqa, the Hāšemī ruler of Darband, who had been overthrown by his nephew, sought refuge with Yūsuf. The latter confirmed him in his governorship and gave him an army, which restored him to power. In Ṣafar, 307/July, 919, Mo’nes routed and captured Yūsuf near Ardabīl together with his nephew, probably Abu’l-Mosāfer Faṭḥ. He was carried to Baghdad and imprisoned by al-Moqtader for three years. In Moḥarram, 310/May, 922, he was released on the intercession of Mo’nes and invested with the governorship of Ray, Qazvīn, Abhar, Zanjān, and Azarbaijan. He first proceeded to Azarbaijan, which had remained under the control of his *golām* Sobok. Toward the end of 311/March, 924, he defeated and killed Aḥmad b. ‘Alī, the brother of Ṣo‘lūk, who was in control of Jebāl, between Abhar and Zanjān and entered Ray. In 313/925 he left for Hamadān where he stayed five months and then returned to Ray and Azarbaijan. In 314/926 he was, against his objections, called to Iraq to take charge of the war with the Qarmaṭīs and came with his army to Wāseṭ. A year later he was heavily defeated by the Qarmaṭī leader Abū Ṭāher Jannābī near Kūfa on 9 Ṣawwāl 315/8 December 927. He was captured and, during an abortive attempt by caliphal troops to free him, killed by two brothers of Abū Ṭāher in Du’l-qa’da, 315/January, 928. His troops were integrated into the caliphal army and became known as the Sājīya.

5. Abu’l-Mosāfer Faṭḥ b. Moḥammad b. Abi’l-Sāj. He was appointed governor of Azarbaijan by al-Moqtader in Du’l-ḥejja, 315/February, 928, and was murdered by a *golām* of his in Ardabīl in Ṣa’bān, 517/September-October, 929. According to another account he was besieged in Marāḡa by mutinous troops and killed



by them. A son of his, Abu'l-Faraj, became a commander in the caliphal army and a companion of Amīr al-Omarā' Ebn Rā'eq.

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