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ČĀKAR

ČĀKAR, personal soldier-retainer of the nobility in pre-Islamic Central Asia. The earliest attestations of the word are in Chinese and Arabic transcriptions from Sogdian, although the word itself does not appear in the extant corpus of Sogdian texts. The current Persian usage of the word ‘čākar’ as ‘servant’ or ‘apprentice’ does not seem to reflect the original Sogdian meaning, as in Sogdiana the čākars were the personal soldiers of the nobles and kings (detailed references in de la Vaissière, 2005a, 2006). In his description of Samarqand in 629, the Chinese monk Xuanzang wrote: “[The king] had a splendid army, the majority of his soldiers being čākar men. These were men of ardent valor, who looked on death as a going back to their kindred, and against whom no foe could stand” (Xuanzang, p. 94); while the *Jiu Tangshu* wrote that in Bukhara “Brave and strong men are enrolled to be čākars. Čākar means in Chinese ‘warrior’” (p. 3209). Even Sogdian generals in the Chinese empire had their own čākars (de la Vaissière, 2005b, 2006). In Ṭabari’s History, the word ‘čākars’ appears in the text as soon as the Arabic armies reach the Āmu Daryā in Sogdiana and in Tokharistan (II, 1082, 1155, 1159-60, 1331, 1445, 1542, 1604, 1609, 1631; III, 74...). These čākars were soldiers guarding their masters at all times in their daily and military life. But it seems that they were not reduced to a small group of close companions, or bodyguards: the Chinese texts emphasize their large number, while Ṭabari describes them engaged in quite menial activities. These considerations lead one to distinguish čākars from the usual *comitatus* or *warband* structure (Tacitus, *Germania*, XIII. 2-3, XIV.1), attested in Central Asia among the Southern neighbors of the Sogdians, the Hephtalites (q.v.; Procopius, I.iii.6-7; see also Beckwith, 1984; Golden, 2001,

and 2004). A Chinese description of the armies of the Sogdian general An Lushan in mid-8th century China might suggest that the link between a čākar and his master was that of adoption, as An Lushan is said to have adopted thousands of brave soldiers while another source describes hom with thousands of čākars. The čākars would be then a military and specifically Central Asian variant of the Sasanian institution of čakarīh (see ČAKAR), whose aim was to provide a family with sons (de la Vaissière, 2006).

These čākars must have appeared as very efficient warriors, for the Arabs soon adopted the institution (Ṭabari, II, 1528, 1695; III, 8) and it was well established at the Abbasid court at the end of the 8th century (Masʿudi, VIII, p. 298). There is a direct link between the pre-Islamic Sogdian čākars and the *šākeriya* section of the Abbasid army in the first half of the 9th century, although some historians have denied this (Kennedy, p. 203). Most of Maʾmun's troops were from Khorasan and Transoxiana and they brought with them this institution. In 814, Ṭāher used his personal šākeriya to capture Amin, Maʾmun's brother, in Baghdad Ṭabari, III, 928). While in Marw, Fażl b. Sahl, Maʾmun's vizier, created a guard of 4000 soldiers and čākars (al-Jahšiyari, fragments of the *Ketāb al-Wozaraʾ wa'l-kottāb*, p. 31).

The šākeriya became one of the four main components of the Abbasid army in Iraq, with the Jond, the Maḡāreba and the Turks. The members of the Šākeriya and of the Jond were paid more than the other soldiers, and as Jāḥeẓ puts is in his *Manāqeb al-tork*, "al-Šākeriya [and] al-Jond: the meaning of the two words are almost the same, and the fact and the function denoted by them are identical, namely loyalty to the Khalifs and the maintenance of authority" (p. 655). It seems that these čākars were mainly horsemen. They were strongly involved in the political turmoil of the Samarra period (Kennedy, pp. 200-3, Gordon, pp. 40-42). Their decline is parallel to the rise of the Turks and the last mention of a čākar regiment is dated 870. With this military decline, the word čākar lost its military background to retain only the idea of personal service.

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