



ŞĀḤEB EBN 'ABBĀD, ESMĀ'IL

ŞĀḤEB EBN 'ABBĀD, Esmā'īl Kāfi-al-Kofat (938-95), vizier and belletrist.

Ebn 'Abbād was born on 14 September 938 in the village of Ṭalaqānča located approximately 20 miles south of [Isfahan](#) (Ṭa'ālebi, III, p. 237; Tawḥīdi, pp. 126-27). His father, Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Abbād b. 'Abbās (d. 946), was a prominent local bureaucrat and intellectual, who authored works on Mu'tazili theology. Ebn 'Abbād served for some time as an administrator for the Buyid emir (Ar. [amir](#)), Rokn-al-Dawla (d. 976; see [BUYIDS](#)). Following the death of his father, Ebn 'Abbād became the protégé of the litterateur and philosopher, Abu'l-Faẓl b. al-'Amid (d. 970), who had succeeded 'Abbād's father as the vizier of Rokn-al-Dawla (Yāqut, II, p. 663).

In 958, Abu'l-Faẓl selected Ebn 'Abbād to escort the young Buyid prince Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla to [Baghdad](#) on the occasion of his marriage to the daughter of Mo'ezz-al-Dawla. During this trip Ebn 'Abbād was introduced to [Abu Mohammad Mohallabi](#) and important intellectual figures of his court in Baghdad. Ebn 'Abbād (Ruznāmaja, pp. 97-103, cf. Ṭa'ālebi, III, p. 115) wrote an account of his time in Baghdad for Ebn al-'Amid, in which he chronicled his interactions with well-known literary and intellectual figures, such the grammarian Abu Sa'id al-Sirāfi (d. 978), the Sufi Ebn Sam'un (d. 997), and the poet 'Ali b. Hārūn b. al-Munajjem (d. 963).

Ebn 'Abbād returned to Rayy in 958. In 966, Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla became the ruler of Isfahan and Abu'l-Faẓl appointed Ebn 'Abbād as his vizier. Prior to his own death in 970, Abu'l-Faẓl secured the succession of his son, Abu'l-Faḥḥ, as



vizier for the emir Rokn-al-Dawla. After the death of Rokn-al-Dawla in 976, Ebn 'Abbād was involved in a complex plot with the Buyid emirs Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla and 'Azod-al-Dawla (d. 983) to imprison and kill Abu'l-Faḥ (Tawḥidi, pp. 532-46).

Career as vizier. Ebn 'Abbād became vizier on behalf of Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla in 976 with the title "kāfi al-kofāt" (lit. the supremely competent). Ebn 'Abbād's rule coincided with a period of stability and expansion for the Buyid emirate in Western Iran. Under the direction of Ebn 'Abbād, Buyid forces defeated Qāvus b. Vošmgir (d. 1012), who was harboring the fugitive Buyid emir Faḡr-al-Dawla (d. 997), thereby causing the two men to flee to Samanid territory. Their counterattack later in the same year, assisted by Samanid forces led by the generals Abu'l-'Abbās Tāš and Fā'eḡ Kaşşa was successfully defeated (Ruḡrāvāri, pp. 17-18; Ebn al-Aṭir, IX, pp. 10-11).

Following the death of Moayyad-al-Dawla in 983, Ebn 'Abbād negotiated for the return of Faḡr-al-Dawla from exile and arranged for his installation as the new emir in Rayy, passing over a son of Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla. Although the historian reports that Ebn 'Abbād considered resigning his post to devote himself to "affairs of the Hereafter," he appears to have played an even more prominent role in the conduct of political affairs during the reign of Faḡr-al-Dawla than he had under his predecessor. Ruḡrāvāri (d. 1095) suggests that Ebn 'Abbād encouraged Faḡr-al-Dawla's abortive march on Baghdad in 989.

Ebn 'Abbād died on 30 March 995 in Rayy. The historian Helāl b. al-Moḡassen al-Şābi (d. 1056) reports that many mourned the vizier's death. His body was later transported to Isfahan where he was buried (Yāqut, II, p. 703).

Intellectual interests. Ebn 'Abbād was a polymathic scholar whose interests embraced a wide variety of different fields including Arabic poetry and its criticism, theology (kalām), law, lexicography, grammar, and medicine.

According to Ṭa'ālebi (d. 1037-38), Ebn 'Abbād's contemporary fame was based mainly upon his talents as a belletrist (Ṭa'ālebi, III, pp. 188-89). A large number of his letters (Ar. resāla, rasā'el) have been preserved in various collections. The most important of these is the Ketāb al-moḡtār min rasā'el kāfi al-kofāt Abu'l-Qāsem b. 'Abbād which contains 187 epistles mainly written during the period when Ebn 'Abbād served as the vizier of Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla. An earlier collection of letters, composed when the vizier was a scribe for Ebn al-'Amid, is al-Foşul al-adabiya wa'l-morāsalāt al-'Abbādiya. Numerous letters are



preserved in volumes III and IV of Ṭa‘ālebi’s *Yatimat al-dahr*. Ebn ‘Abbād’s correspondence sheds light on the diverse content of political (*solṭāniyāt*) and personal (*ekwāniyāt*) letters. Their style is marked by a frequent use of rhymed prose (Ar. *saj’*) and a distinctive predilection for rare linguistic usage (Ar. *ḡarib*) reflecting Ebn ‘Abbād’s interest in lexicography (see below).

Ebn ‘Abbād was also known as a tireless champion of Mu‘tazili rationalism of the Baṣran school. He often attempted to demonstrate that lexicographical, rhetorical, grammatical and literary knowledge was of utility in answering theological questions. His works of Mu‘tazili *kalām* appear to have been intended to serve mainly as introductions to school doctrine: *al-Ebāna ‘an maḏhab ahl al-‘adl bi-ḥojaj al-Qor‘ān wa’l-‘aql* (Treatise clarifying the tenets of the Mu‘tazila with proofs from the Quran and reason); *al-Tadkera fi osul al-ḵamsa* (Aide mémoire concerning the five principles); and *Resāla fi’l-hedaya wa’l-ḍalāla* (Letter concerning right guidance and error).

Although not himself a Shi‘ite, Ebn ‘Abbād composed verse that suggested his love for the family of the Prophet. During the course of his life, he met three Zaydi imams from the [Caspian Sea](#): *al-Mahdi le’Din Allāh* (d. 969), *al-Mo‘ayyad be’llāh* (d. 1020-21) and *al-Nāṭeq be’l-Ḥaqq* (d. 1032). In Rayy, Ebn ‘Abbād encouraged the visitation of the shrine of ‘Abd-al-‘Azim al-Ḥasani (d. before 868) a companion of the Twelver-Shi‘ite imams, Moḥammad al-Jawād (d. 835) and ‘Ali al-Hādi (d. 868) in a letter concerning this shrine. Ebn ‘Abbād’s adherence to Mu‘tazili principles, however, did put him at odds with the Twelver-Shi‘i traditionalist Ebn Bābawayh (d. 991) whom he allegedly banished from his court along with several other prominent ḥadīth scholars (Tawḥidi, p. 167).

Ebn ‘Abbād also had a profound interest in Arabic lexicography, authoring among other works, the comprehensive dictionary *al-Moḥiṭ fi’l-loḡa*. He also wrote several works on poetry, meter, and poetic criticism, most notably the *Resāla f’al-kašf ‘an masāwe’ al-Motanabbi* (Treatise revealing Motanabbi’s Faults) which is critical of Abu’l-Ṭayyeb al-Motanabbi (d. 965). The work played an important role in the ongoing debate concerning this famed poet’s merits during the 10th century and later.

Encouragement of letters. Ebn ‘Abbād played an important role in the encouragement of Arabic letters in Western Iran. Contemporary sources mention the names of approximately 200 jurists, scholars, *littérateurs*, poets and other intellectuals who sought his patronage. In Rayy, Ebn ‘Abbād



encouraged the construction of a library that was among the largest collections of books in the Islamic world at the time, holding somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 volumes. The library was partially destroyed in 1029 by the troops of the [Ghaznavids](#). His library was a great source of pride demonstrating his cultural sophistication. He famously boasted of his rejection of the invitation of the Samanid emir Nuḥ b. Maṣṣur (r. 977-97) to come manage his affairs in [Khorasan](#), stating that on account of the size of his personal library he would need 400 camels to transport its contents (Ta'ālebi, III, pp. 192-93). Ebn 'Abbād also founded libraries in Qom and Isfahan.

His court in Rayy attracted a great number of famed litterateurs, an impression of which can be gleaned from reading volume III of al-Ta'alebi's *Yatimat al-dahr*. The originator of the *maqāmāt* genre, Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamaḍāni (d. 1008) was one of its residents in 990, and must have benefited from the exposure to Ebn 'Abbād's known interest in the poetry of the Banu Sāsān and his love of rhymed prose. However, we owe the court's most elaborate and complex account to Abu Ḥayyān al-Tawḥidi who served there as a scribe from 978 to 980. His *Aḳlāq al-wazīrayn* (Morals of the two viziers), allegedly inspired by the vizier's ill-treatment of him, portrays Ebn 'Abbād as a vain, hypocritical, and immoral man who coveted praise and was jealous of the talented litterateurs at his court.

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