



ESMĀ'ĪL, B. AḤMAD B. ASAD SĀMĀNĪ, ABŪ EBRĀHĪM

ESMĀ'ĪL, b. Aḥmad b. Asad SĀMĀNĪ, ABŪ EBRĀHĪM (b. 234/849, d. Šafar 295/November 907), the first member of the Samanid dynasty to rule over all Transoxania and Farḡāna. He served almost two decades (260-79/874-92) as governor of Bukhara (q.v. ii) on behalf of his brother Našr, 'Abbasid governor of Transoxania, who resided at Samarqand. In Khorasan and Transoxania this period was one of strife among various adventurers seeking power following the fall of the Taherid governors of Nīšāpūr. The disturbances did not end until the Saffarid 'Amr b. Layṭ (q.v.) finally established himself in the region in 283/896. As governor Esmā'īl had to fend off attacks on Bukhara by Khwarazmian forces under one Ḥosayn b. Ṭāher Ṭā'ī. In addition, he twice failed to send the 500,000 dirhams stipulated as annual tribute to Našr, and his alliance with Rāfe' b. Harṭama, one of the contenders for power in Khorasan, forced him to defend Bukhara against two attacks by Našr (in 272/885 and 275/888).

When Našr died in Jomādā I 279/August 892 Esmā'īl became ruler of all Transoxania and transferred the capital to Bukhara, thenceforth the center of the Samanid amirate; he was officially recognized as governor of Transoxania by the caliph al-Mo'tazed (279-89/892-902) in Baghdad. In 280/893 he led an expedition north into the steppes, capturing Ṭarāz (modern Dzambul in the Kazakhstan Republic), taking an immense booty of animals and Turkish slaves, and converting a Nestorian Christian church into a mosque. He also



extended Samanid suzerainty over the Afšīns (q.v.), the local Iranian dynasty of Ošrūsana in the middle Jaxartes (Syr Darya) valley. He acquired his greatest renown in contemporary eyes, however, from the defeat and capture of 'Amr b. Layṭ in a battle near Balk, probably in Rabī' I 287/March 900.

'Amr, after defeating and killing the rebel Rāfe' b. Harṭama in 283/896, had received from al-Mo'tazed a grant of Ray and the whole of eastern Persia and Transoxania, which entailed deposing Esmā'īl as governor. He therefore invaded the upper Oxus (Amu Darya) provinces but was decisively defeated by Esmā'īl. The 'Abbasids at Baghdad were thus relieved of pressure from the aggressive Saffarids, and the caliph formally appointed Esmā'īl governor of Khorasan, Sīstān, Ray, Ṭabarestān, and Isfahan, in addition to his Transoxanian provinces. Subsequent Samanid amirs were, however, able to retain permanent control only of Khorasan and Transoxania. Although he still officially recognized the caliphs' overlordship in the Friday sermon (*koṭba*) and on his coinage (*sekka*), Esmā'īl was able to take advantage of his distance from Iraq and his new prestige to function as an independent sovereign. There is no evidence that he ever forwarded regular tribute or taxation to Baghdad.

The last years of Esmā'īl's life were spent combating the Zaydī Shi'ite imams in the Caspian provinces, extending Samanid power westward across northern Persia, and repelling a Turkish invasion from the steppes (291/904). The Shi'ite Moḥammad b. Zayd b. Moḥammad of Ṭabarestān had sought to take advantage of Esmā'īl's preoccupation with 'Amr b. Layṭ to invade Khorasan but had been killed in Gorgān in 287/900. Once firmly in control of the eastern lands, Esmā'īl launched an offensive against Ṭabarestān and the rest of northern Persia and by 287/900 held territory as far west as Ray and Qazvīn, though again his successors were not able to hold on to these areas against the resurgent Deylamites (q.v. ii) and Kurds. When Esmā'īl died he was succeeded by his son Aḥmad (295-301/907-14). A tomb in Bukhara has been identified as that of Esmā'īl (Schroeder, pp. 946-49; see BUKHARA v), though it seems to belong to the later Samanid period (Blair, pp. 25-29).

Esmā'īl left a reputation for justice and piety and for serving the caliph and his interests faithfully, a reputation preserved in later historical and *adab* literature. He is often referred to in sources as Amīr-e Māzī and Amīr-e 'Ādel. He may be considered the greatest of the Samanids, for none of his successors was of his caliber.

See also SAMANIDS.



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