



KHORASAN VI. HISTORY IN THE TAHERID AND SAMANID PERIODS

In the Taherid and Samanid periods, Khorasan became virtually synonymous with the Mašreq or “Islamic East,” stretching from Ray far into Central Asia. It enjoyed a burgeoning economy built on agriculture and trade, and it participated in a brilliant efflorescence of Islamic scholarship while simultaneously constructing a distinct Perso-Islamic, and laying the foundations for a subsequent Turko-Persian, culture throughout the region. As the author of the 4th/10th-century geographical treatise *Ḥodud al-‘ālam* put it (tr., p. 102), Khorasan was “a vast country with much wealth and abundant amenities,” as well as a salubrious climate, healthy people, its own king (*padšāy*), and a frontier protected by march lords (*moluk-e aṭrāf*). The anonymous Persian author’s near contemporary, the Arab geographer Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Moqaddasi, who visited the region, likewise praised Khorasan in this period for its climate and its natural resources as well as the strength, piety, virtue, wisdom, and industry of its people (p. 294).

THE TAHERIDS

The Taherids, based initially in Pušang/Bušanj (see [FUŠANJ](#)), came to prominence during the period of the *da‘wa* in Khorasan and faithfully served the ‘Abbasid cause there for some fifty years, before founding their own



autonomous and hereditary provincial dynasty. An ancestor of the family, likely of Iranian ethnicity, had reputedly accompanied one of the Arab armies invading Khorasan, converted to Islam, and become a client (*mawlā*) of the tribe of ʔozāʔa (on the conflicting traditions about this, see Kaabi, 1983, I, pp. 62-64). Abu Manṣur Ṭalḥa b. Zorayq (or Rozayq) b. Asad is well-attested as a *naqib* ‘chief’ of the *daʕwa* organization; living at that time in a village near Marv, he later held an administrative or military office in Herat (sources given in Agha, pp. 372-73, no. 351). His brother, Moṣʔab, was a lower-ranking member of the organization and was later an official in nearby Buṣanj, where he was succeeded by his son Ḥosayn b. Moṣʔab (a notable in the time of Hārūn al-Raṣīd and enemy of ʔAli b. ʔIsā b. Māhān).

Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, later known by the honorific title *Ḍuʔl-Yaminayn* (“The Ambidextrous”) because of his military prowess, rose to prominence during the wars with Rafīʔ b. Layṭ and the civil wars between al-Amin and al-Maʔmun (q.v.), defeating ʔAli b. ʔIsā b. Māhān, participating in the siege of Baghdad, and engineering the death of the defeated al-Amin (on these events, see KHORASAN v.). He shrewdly bided his time during the administration of Ḥasan b. Sahl, building up a power base and a fortune in Iraq. When al-Maʔmun was returning to Baghdad in Ṣafar 204/August 819, he was accompanied by Ṭāher from Nahrawān to Roṣāfa, and Ṭāher was given authority over the Jazira, all of Baghdad, and the Sawād and made commander of the security force (*ṣāḥeb al-ṣorṭa*), a position members of the family would hold for almost a century, acquiring further fame and riches in the capital. By this time, Ṭāher had turned sharply against Ḥasan b. Sahl and his policies, and it was Ṭāher who was said to have persuaded al-Maʔmun to abandon the wearing of green garments and return to the traditional ʔAbbasid black (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1037-38).

Al-Maʔmun appointed Ṭāher governor of Khorasan, “from the City of Peace to the most distant districts of the East,” in late *Ḍuʔl-Qaʔda* 205/May 821 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1043). Ṭāher had barely had time to make some administrative appointments (Ebn Abi Ṭāher Ṭayfur, pp. 58-60; *Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 177) before he died unexpectedly in his sleep at the age of 48 in 208/822. There are wildly different explanations for why Ṭāher was made governor of Khorasan, as well as conspiracy theories about his untimely demise. In both cases, the issue hinges on whether Ṭāher and al-Maʔmun were still on good terms or whether there had been a rift between them. The official rationale for the appointment seems to have been that there were disturbances in Khorasan that the acting



governor, Ġassān b. ‘Abbād, could not handle; moreover, Ġassān was a paternal cousin of Fażl b. Sahl and an appointee of Ḥasan b. Sahl, so his removal was needed as part of the post-Sahlid house-cleaning (Ṭabari, III, 1043). However, there are also claims that Ṭāher tricked al-Ma’mun into making the appointment with the help of his friend, the vizier Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled Aḥwal, since he had learned that the caliph resented him because of his involvement in killing al-Amin and was being encouraged by al-Amin’s mother to seek revenge (Ṭabari, III, p. 1042; Mas‘udi, VI, pp. 485-87). It is also possible that al-Ma’mun was anxious to get an overly powerful general away from Baghdad, and Ṭāher was reluctant to go: He was certainly in no hurry to leave for Khorasan, taking about a year to prepare, but that may have been to make the arrangements for his son ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher (q.v.) to take over his interests in Baghdad and the Jazira. As for his death, his son and uncles indicated it was after a high fever, and Ṭāher had a premonition of it as his last words were *dar marg niz mardī wāyaḍ* ‘one must be manly even in the face of death’ (Ṭabari, III, p. 1063). However, it was also noted that he died shortly after failing or “forgetting” to mention the caliph’s name in his Friday sermon, which was an indication of independence from the caliphate in Baghdad. Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled had vouched to al-Ma’mun for Ṭāher’s behavior and had made arrangements to eliminate him should he act otherwise (Ṭabari, III, p. 1064; Ebn al-Aṭir, VI, pp. 381-83). It is also a fact that Ṭāher had begun to omit al-Ma’mun’s name from coins struck at his mints (Bosworth, 1975, p. 95).

Yet no such suspicions perturbed relations of the caliph with other members of the family either in Iraq or Khorasan. Both al-Ma’mun and Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled agreed that the obvious choice as Ṭāher’s successor should be his son Ṭalḥa, just as Ṭāher is said to have wanted (Gardizi, p. 135). This may have been in the expectation that Ṭalḥa’s older brother in Iraq, ‘Abd-Allāh, would keep him in line. It is equally likely that it was a considered decision that the goal of stability in Khorasan while al-Ma’mun dealt with manifold problems developing in the West would be in the interest of all and best met by keeping a Taherid as governor. Any threat the young Talḥa might have posed was further diminished by returning Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled to Khorasan to assist in another offensive into Ošrusana (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1065-66; Ebn al-Aṭir, VI, p. 382). Talḥa’s tenure was mostly occupied in dealing with the continuing threat from the Kharijites and Ḥamza b. Āḍarak (q.v.). Both Talḥa and Ḥamza died in 213/828.



Table 1
THE TAHERIDS OF KHORASAN

Dates	Governor
205-7/821-22	Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn Du'l-Yaminayn
207-13/822-28	Ṭalḥa b. Ṭāher
213-30/828-45	ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṭāher
230-48/845-62	Ṭāher (II) b. ʿAbd-Allāh
248-59/862-73	Moḥammad b. Ṭāher (II)

Source: C. E. Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties*, Islamic Surveys 5, Edinburgh, 1967, p. 99.

Table 1 THE TAHERIDS OF KHORASAN

The third Taherid governor, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṭāher, ruled for seventeen years (213-30/828-45). Marv ceased to be the administrative capital of Khorasan, and the Taherids established themselves at Nishapur, which experienced a period of prosperity and florescence under them and their successors, the Samanids (Barthold, 1984, pp. 96-98). ʿAbd-Allāh was himself highly cultured and a lover of literature and of music and singing, and he gathered around himself a distinguished circle of Arabic poets and litterateurs, with such visiting luminaries as the poet Abu Tammām and the genealogist and historian Zobayr b. Bakkār (see Bosworth, 1969, pp. 58-67). He assembled a team of experts who compiled a *Ketāb al-qoni* as an authoritative guide to the law and practice of irrigation and water rights; the Ghaznavid historian ʿAbd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi (q.v) states that this was still in use in Khorasan during his own time, that is, two centuries later (Gardizi, p. 137; cf. Barthold, p. 213). Whereas Khorasan had been a distant province of the caliphate in earlier times, its importance being primarily military and strategic (Herzfeld, pp. 119-20), its agricultural prosperity now increased. According to Yaʿqubi (*Boldān*, p. 308), the land-tax (*karāj*) of Khorasan amounted to 40 million dirhams a year under the Taherids. It benefited from the commercial transit traffic bringing the products of Transoxiana and the Inner Asian steppes to the caliphal



heartlands. Leather products, weapons, honey, furs, and various luxury items were imported, and a *spécialité du pays* is mentioned for the Nishapur district, namely *noql* or edible earth, praised by the great physician Moḥammad b. Zakariyā Rāzi (d. ca. 313/925) and so prized that it was exported as far as Egypt and the Maghrib (Ta'ālebi, pp. 131-32). Above all, there was the transit trade across Khorasan in Turkish slaves from the steppes from the early 3rd/9th century, increasingly becoming a component of the caliphal and other armies in the central and eastern Islamic lands. Slaves normally formed a substantial part of the annual tribute forwarded to Samarra and Baghdad by the Taherids and then as presents by their successors the Samanids (see Barthold, pp. 235-38, on all this traffic in imports in Samanid times, this information being substantially valid for the preceding Taherid period; see also Bosworth, 1975; la Vaissière, 2005, pp. 291-302).

As governors in Khorasan, the Taherids were strong upholders of Sunni orthodoxy against various heterodox and sectarian movements and outbreaks of religio-social protest, which were racking Khorasan and Transoxiana at this time. They campaigned against the veteran Kharijite Ḥamza b. Āḍarak in Khorasan and against Māzyār b. Qāren in the Caspian provinces and the Zaydi Shi'ite Hasanids there. It is not therefore surprising that the sources regard with great favor the orthodox and obedient Taherids as servants of the caliphs when they were at the height of their power (Bosworth, 1975, pp. 105-6). They also preserved a certain independence of action but always regarded themselves as faithful servants of the caliphs, acknowledging the 'Abbasids in the sermons and on coins. All in all, the 'Abbasid-Taherid relationship was a symbiotic partnership and “the most successful solution the Abbasids ever found to the problem of governing the province” (Kennedy, p. 166).

Taherid power in Khorasan seems to have loosened with later governors of the line. There may have been a certain feeling in Sunni orthodox circles that the later Taherids were failing to cope with threats from the Kharijites and the 'Alids of the Caspian provinces, a feeling that facilitated the overthrowing of the Taherids in Khorasan by the Saffarid Ya'qub b. Layṭ (q.v.), who in 259/873 captured Nishapur from Moḥammad b. Ṭāher II (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 219-23; Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, pp. 261-64; Bosworth, 1994, pp. 109-21; Tor, pp. 118-22, 134-53). Ya'qub then became embroiled in ventures in the Caspian provinces and then in western Persia and Iraq, and speedily lost control of Khorasan (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 223 ff.; Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, pp. 268-69, 276-77, 290-92; Bosworth, 1994,



pp. 123-26). For some two decades, the province was a battleground for contending military leaders, some, such as **Aḥmad Ƙojestāni** (q.v.), claiming to represent the former Taherid interest there (Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, pp. 296-97); others merely seeking their own aggrandizement, until in 283/896 Ya‘qub’s brother and successor ‘Amr established his control over the province. This restored Saffarid power in Khorasan was, however, short-lived. In 287/900, the Samanid Amir **Esmā‘il b. Aḥmad** (q.v.) defeated ‘Amr in battle, so that the province then entered upon a century of Samanid domination, as an integral part of their empire centered on the Transoxianan cities of Bukhara and Samarqand (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 234-35, 254-56; Naršaḳi, pp. 119-25; Ṭabari, III, pp. 2194-95; Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, pp. 500-503; Bosworth, 1994, pp. 217-35).

THE SAMANIDS

The eponym of the Samanids was Sāmān-ḳodā, usually understood as meaning the landlord (*dehqān*, q.v.) of the town of Sāmān. Sāmān has been claimed to have been located near Samarqand, Termed, or Balk. Naršaḳi, for example, indicates that Sāmān-ḳoda hailed from Balk and built the village or estate of Sāmān there (Naršaḳi, tr., p. 59), but Menhāj-e Serāj Juzjāni (I, p. 201) identifies him as the chief (*ra‘īs*) of the district of Sāmān near Samarqand. The question is of some interest in terms of the ethnic origins of the Samanids. The later Samanids claimed, and probably believed, they were descended from **Bahrām Čōbin** (q.v.) and the Parthian Mihranid family (an idea accepted even by the usually sceptical Biruni, p. 39, tr., p. 48; see also Bosworth, 1973, pp. 58-59). Samarqand and the Zarafšān basin suggest a Sogdian background or even Turkish ancestry, while Balk and Ṭoḳarestān raise the possibility of Iranian, Hephthalite or other connections (Kamoliddin, pp. 79-114, has argued for a Buddhist-Manichean background and descent from the *yabḡu* Jabbā Khan; Togan, p. 283; see also Treadwell, 1991, pp. 64-71).

Another factor that speaks strongly in favor of a connection to Balk, is the widely reported account of Sāmān-ḳodā’s friendship with the Omayyad governor Asad b. ‘Abd-Allāh Qaṣri (d. 120/737-38). According to Naršaḳi (tr., p. 59), Sāmān-ḳodā fled, for unspecified reasons, from Balk to Marv, where Asad treated him honorably and returned him to Balk. Sāmān converted to Islam at the hands of Asad and named his son after him. Naršaḳi’s account is certainly plausible, since Asad is known to have held the governorship of Khorasan on two occasions (106-9/724-28 and 117-20/735-37), and, in both cases, he campaigned extensively in areas around Balk; Asad also died in Balk (Daniel, 2009).



The grandsons of Sāmān-koḍā—Nuḥ, Aḥmad, Yaḥyā, and Elyās—joined the forces of Harṭama b. A‘yan after he was sent by Hārūn al-Rašīd to put down the rebellion of Rafī‘ b. Layṭ. They were subsequently instrumental in arranging a negotiated end to the conflict. Their assistance had been specially requested by al-Ma‘mun, and he was so pleased with the results that, as caliph, he instructed his governor in Khorasan, Ġassān b. ‘Abbād, in 202/817 or 204/819, to reward them with districts to govern. Nuḥ was given Samarqand; Elyās, Herat; Yaḥyā, Šāš (Čáč); and Aḥmad, Farġāna (Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, p. 279; Gardizi, p. 146; Juzjāni, I, p. 203; Mirḳvānd, pp. 1-2). Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn confirmed the appointments when he became governor of Khorasan, and sent a robe of honor to Nuḥ (Manini, I, p. 348) and the offices continued to be held during the governorships of Ṭalḥa and ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher. Ṭalḥa even visited Samarqand in 212/827-28 (Treadwell, p. 78).

The family of Abu‘l-Faẓl Elyās b. Asad appears to have acted more often as Taherid officers than as administrators of Herat. Ṭalḥa b. Ṭāher sent Elyās to Sistān in Šafar 208/July 823 to fight the Kharijites, but he was there only until Jomādā I 208/October 823. He is named, somewhat surprisingly, as a governor of Alexandria under ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher in 212/827 (Kendī, p. 184). During the governorship of ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher in Khorasan, Elyās and some cadet members of the Samanid family were again sent to Sistān, ca. 216/831 and then again between 222/837 and 225/840 (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 177-78, 182-83, 187-89). Elyās died in Herat in 241/855 (Sam‘āni, VII, p. 26). His son Ebrāhim was the commander (*sepahsālār*) of the Taherid army fighting the Saffarid Ya‘qub b. Layṭ. He was defeated and pushed out of Herat and Bušanĵ in 253/867; he advised Moḥammad b. Ṭāher that Ya‘qub could not be defeated and recommended a policy of appeasement; and, after the fall of Nishapur in 259/873, he went with other army officers to seek clemency from the victorious Ya‘qub. He was given a robe of honor and sent to Sistān, so with that the Herat branch of the Samanids came to an end (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 208, 225).

It was in Transoxiana that the Samanids flourished greatly, helped latterly by the confused state of post-Taherid Khorasan under a succession of ambitious military leaders culminating in ‘Amr b. Layṭ (q.v.).

In 225/840, Nuḥ b. Asad assisted ‘Abd-Allāh in arresting the son of Afšīn (q.v.; a former ruler of Ošrusana, q.v., in the service of the caliph al-Mo‘taṣem, then out of favor and on trial for treason; see Ṭabari, III, p. 1307). Nuḥ also sent an expedition against the town of Asfijāb (q.v.) in the middle Syr Darya valley and built defenses there against marauders from the Turkish steppes (Balāḍori, p.



422; Sam'āni, VII, p. 26; Ebn al-Atīr, VI, p. 509). Asfijāb remained as a separate, dependent province of what became the Samanid empire, with its local Turkish ruler still enjoying a freedom, unique in the Samanid lands, from tax liabilities (Ebn Ḥawqal, II, p. 510; tr. Kramers, II, p. 488). After the death of Nuḥ b. Asad in 227/841-42, the governor of Khorasan 'Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher (q.v.) appointed the remaining two brothers in Transoxiana, Yaḥyā and Aḥmad, over Samarqand and Sogdiana; on the death of the former in 241/855, Šāš reverted to Aḥmad also. Aḥmad thus emerged as the commanding figure in the family, and all subsequent rulers of the dynasty descended from him. Yaḥyā had not apparently struck even a local copper coinage at Samarqand, whereas *folus* of Aḥmad begin there in 244/858-59. Aḥmad's son Naṣr (I) (r. 250-79/864-92) extended his power from his capital Samarqand westwards to Bukhara, which was later, under Naṣr's brother Esmā'il b. Aḥmad (q.v.), to become the permanent capital of the Samanids. The 'Abbasid caliph al-Mo'tamed (r. 256-79/870-92) formally invested Naṣr with the governorship of Transoxiana in 261/875 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1889), in opposition to the claims of the Saffarid Ya'qub b. Layṭ who was at that point striking at the heartland of the caliphate in central Iraq. It was only around this time that direct caliphal interest in Transoxiana could no longer be sustained. The caliph al-Mo'taṣem (r. 218-27/833-42) had, with some reluctance, contributed two million dirhams toward the digging of an irrigation canal in the province of Šāš (Ṭabari, III, p. 1326), and, up to the time of Naṣr b. Aḥmad, the 'Abbasids still drew revenue from their crown demesnes in Transoxiana (see Barthold, pp. 95, 99, 212). Naṣr had begun to mint dirhams of a mixed 'Abbasid-Samanid type from the 240s/860s onwards, and then at the formal accession of Esmā'il b. Aḥmad (279/892), the regular minting of Samanid dirhams and dinars began, with acknowledgement of the 'Abbasids as suzerains (Miles, p. 374).

Naṣr sent his brother Esmā'il to take over Bukhara from a certain Ḥosayn b. Moḥammad Kawāreji (or K'vārazmi?), apparently an adherent of the Saffarids, and in summer 260/874 Esmā'il entered the city and delivered the Friday sermon (*koṭba*) for Naṣr instead of for Ya'qub b. Layṭ. The brothers quarreled, however, leading to a military conflict that ended in the capture of Naṣr by Esmā'il (autumn 275/888); Esmā'il wisely retained his brother as the official ruler in Samarqand until Naṣr's death in 279/892, while himself remaining at Bukhara and eventually making it his capital (Naršāki, pp. 94-101; tr. pp. 79-86; Barthold, pp. 222-23).

Naṣr had appointed Esmā'il as his heir, so that the latter succeeded



unchallenged as amir of Transoxiana and Farḡāna. Esmā'il (I)'s reign (279-95/892-907) marks the formal constituting of the Samanid state as a powerful force in the Islamic east, especially as his victory over the Saffarid 'Amr b. Layṭ in 287/900, though technically an act of rebellion against the caliph's appointee over Khorasan and Transoxiana, in practice brought him recognition by al-Mo'tāzēd (r. 279-89/892-902) and what must have been approbation as governor of both those provinces (Ṭabari, III, p. 2195). This was essentially a confirmation of the fact that the 'Abbasids, their direct authority now confined to Iraq and western Persia, could no longer exert any power over the east. Even so, right to the end, the Samanids usually paid due respect to the caliphs, placing their names in the *koṭba* and on the coinage (*sekka*), and claiming for themselves no higher title than that of amir; presents were sent to Baghdad, although there is no evidence that any taxation or tribute was ever forwarded. Hence, Amir Esmā'il may be regarded as the real founder of the Samanid state and certainly as the ablest of his dynasty. The historical and literary sources praise him as such, and speak of his wisdom and just rule, awarding him the honorific titles of *amir-e ādel* 'The Just Amir' and *amir-e mā*

ī 'The Late Amir'. He may also now consciously have endeavoured to raise himself, as amir now of a united principality, to a level above the families of nobles and landowners, from which class his own family had earlier risen. They probably still regarded the Samanids as socially not much more than *primi inter pares*. According to Naršaki (p. 96; tr. Frye, p. 82), when Esmā'il was still the theoretical subordinate of his brother Naṣr, he had already taken steps to reduce the power of the Bukharan leaders (*mehtarān*) because they had not sufficiently shown him the respect (*haybat*) due to a ruler.

The amirate was at this time young and vigorous, and under Esmā'il its borders expanded in all directions and the northern frontier defended against the pressure of the nomads. In 280/893, Esmā'il led a major expedition that captured Talas (Ṭarāz) from the Qarluq Turks (possibly led by Oḡulčak Kadīr Khan, son of the Ilak-khan Bilge Kūl Kadīr Khan; Golden, p. 352-57), capturing a great booty of slaves and beasts. He extended Samanid suzerainty over the Afšin, local rulers of Ošrusana, south of the middle Syr Darya; over the Khwarazmshahs (see [CHORASMIA ii](#)); and, as coins seem to indicate, over petty princes of the upper Oxus lands such as the Abu Dāwudids or Banijurids (on them, see Bosworth, 1996, p. 174) of Kottal and Toḡārestān, and the Farigunids of Guzgān (see [ĀL-E FARIĠUN](#)). Expansion westwards into the Caspian provinces and northern Persia was a special concern of Esmā'il, who



in 288/901 personally led armies into [Gorgān](#) (q.v.) and Ṭabarestān against the ‘Alid Moḥammad b. Zayd, restored the supremacy of the Sunna there, and compensated those who had suffered losses under the Zaydis (Madelung, 1975, p. 208). Samanid authority was likewise extended over Ray, with the caliph al-Moktafi (r. 289-95/902-8) at the beginning of 290/902 investing Esmā‘il as governor of Ray and Qazvin (Ṭabari, III, pp. 2220-21; Miles, 1938, pp. 132-33), the westernmost outposts of Samanid power, although these regions soon slipped away from Samanid hands. Esmā‘il died in 295/907 (see also [ESMĀ‘IL B. AḤMAD B. ASAD SĀMĀNI](#)).

Esmā‘il was succeeded by his son Aḥmad (II) (r. 295-301/907-14). Despite the brevity of his reign, he nevertheless managed to bring Sistān temporarily under Samanid rule. After the defeat of ‘Amr, various short-reigned Saffarid princes held power in Sistān and southern Persia, but Aḥmad then intervened there, dispatching two expeditions in 298/911 and 300/912-13 under the amir’s cousin, [Abu Ṣāleḥ Maṣṣur b. Eshāq b. Aḥmad](#) (q.v.), who functioned ineffectively as governor in Sistān for a while (see [SAFFARIDS](#)). More pressing for Ahmad were measures to retrieve the position in the west. In Ray, a Samanid governor, Moḥammad b. ‘Ali Ṣo‘luk, was probably in place by 298/910-11, and he remained there into the succeeding reign of Naṣr b. Aḥmad (Miles, 1938, pp. 135-36). In the Caspian provinces, however, the Zaydi Ḥasan b. ‘Ali Oṭruš made firm his authority in Deylam (see Deylamites) and [Gilān](#) (q.v.) and then extended eastwards into Ṭabarestān, which was under his control by Amir Aḥmad’s death (Madelung, 1975, pp. 208-9); measures against him could only be undertaken in the next reign. Aḥmad’s reign was cut short when his military slaves (*ḡolāms*) assassinated him at Farabr near Bukhara in 301/914, allegedly because he was showing excessive favor to the ulema and other religious dignitaries and because he attempted to restore Arabic as the language of the divans; obviously, Persian had by then established itself as the working language of these government departments (see [Naršaḳi](#), pp. 110-11; tr. pp. 94-95; [Gardizi](#), pp. 148-50; [Barthold](#), p. 240). Aḥmad’s murder earned him the posthumous title of *amir-e-šahid* ‘The Martyred Amir.’ As noted above, his father had already become known as “The Just, or, the Late Amir,” and this practice of giving honorifics (*laqabs*) after death was to become general amongst the Samanids, though some of the amirs also acquired regnal titles in their own lifetimes and used them on coinage, such as Nuḥ (I) b. Naṣr’s one of *al-malek al-mo’ayyad* ‘The [Divinely] Supported King’, and Nuḥ (II) b. Maṣṣur (I)’s one of *al-malek al-manṣur* ‘The Victorious King’ (see [Bosworth](#), 1962, pp. 214-15).



The long reign which followed, that of Naṣr (II) b. Aḥmad (II), called *amir-e sa'id* 'The Fortunate Amir' (301-31/914-43), in many ways marks the zenith of Samanid power and glory, although the amir himself was no charismatic war leader or outstanding administrator. But he was fortunate to be served by highly competent officials, often from families with long traditions of service in the bureaucracy, who were appointed at least in part because of the medieval Islamic belief that such competence was a hereditary trait of such families. Hence, Naṣr was fortunate in having capable viziers such as Abu 'Abd-Allāh Jayhāni and his son Abu 'Ali Moḥammad, and [Abu'l-Faḥl Bal'ami](#) (q.v.), all famed as much for their own scholarship and patronage of learned and literary men as for their administrative skills. Thus, the first Jayhāni was vizier ca. 302-10/914-22 but was also the author of a geography, a *Ketāb al-masālek wa'l-mamālek*, which Moqaddasi (pp. 3-4) praises for its topographical and astronomical information, amongst much else; he saw a manuscript of it, in seven volumes, in the library of the Buyid Amir 'Aḏod-al-Dawla (q.v., r. 338-72/949-83), but it is now known only from citations. Jayhāni apparently incorporated information personally gathered on his travels plus that gained from merchants and travelers to the land of the Turks and to India (Barthold, pp. 12-13).



Figure 1. The Samanid Realm: Core territories (blue border); areas under local rulers, contested, or tributary (yellow border). After R. N. Frye, ed., Cambridge



History of Iran IV, Cambridge, 1975, p. 139. (Map background data from US National Park Service World Physical Map.)

The young amir faced a series of revolts on his accession, which only the skills of his vizier Jayhāni and military commanders such as Ḥamuya b. ‘Ali enabled him to survive. These revolts were raised by discontented members of the Samanid family who felt that their adulthood gave them a greater claim to the throne than that of the eight-year-old boy. Thus, Naṣr’s great-uncle Eshāq b. Aḥmad came out immediately at Samarqand, aided by his two sons Elyās and Maṣūr. The latter, the ex-governor of Sistān, raised his standard at Nishapur, and after his death there, the revolt was carried on by one of his military commanders; Elyās fled to Farḡāna after the suppression of the Samarqand outbreak and thence to Šāš and the Turks. Several years passed during which Naṣr’s authority was unchallenged, but ca. 317/929 there was a further serious rebellion, this time in the capital Bukhara, involving three of Naṣr’s own brothers (Gardizi, pp. 152-53); the suppression of this marks the opening of the ascendancy in Khorasan during the middle decades of the 4th/10th century of the Moḥtāj or Čāḡāni family, to whose head, Abu ‘Ali Aḥmad, the amir entrusted the governorship of western Khorasan (see [ĀL-E MOḤTAJ](#)).

Through all these vicissitudes, a vigorous external Samanid policy was carried on. This involved, amongst other things, attempting to extend Samanid power into the rich and strategically important region of northern Persia with its main city, Ray. Moḥammad b. ‘Ali Ṣo‘luk held Ray as a Samanid vassal intermittently till his death in 316/928, but thereafter the Samanid hold was increasingly challenged by various Deylami and Jili soldiers of fortune such as Asfār b. Širuya, Mākān b. Kāki and the Ziarid brothers Mardāvij and Vošmgir, all of whom at times held the city of Ray until 329/940, when Abu ‘Ali Čāḡāni was sent with a strong force that defeated the allied forces of Mākān and Vošmgir. Samanid coins were then once again issued from the Ray/Moḥammadiya mint, but not for long. The strongest and most lasting of the Deylami adventurers, the three Buyid brothers, were now consolidating their power in western and central Persia (see [BUYIDS](#)). Rokn-al-Dawla Ḥasan b. Buya (r. 335-66/947-77) had definitively taken over Ray, making it the center of what became the northern Buyid amirate of Ray and Jebāl. Only sporadically thereafter did the Samanids control Ray.

Thus, the rise of the Buyids meant that the Samanids were in the long run unable to retain Ray and northern Persia. Their successes in the Caspian



provinces were also intermittent, for the region became a battleground for various Deylami contenders, including the Buyids, the Zaydi Shi'ite Imams, and the Samanids themselves. Abu 'Ali Čāgāni secured those provinces for Amir Naşr, forcing Voşmgir to become the Samanids' vassal. The latter in fact gave military aid to Voşmgir against the Buyids, and control over the region oscillated between the various parties involved, punctuated by a general peace in 344/955 between Rokn-al-Dawla and the Samanid 'Abd-al-Malek (I) b. Nuḥ (I), which did not however last. Voşmgir was once more driven out by the Buyids, and, after his death in 356/967, there was a division in the Ziarid family between his sons, with the Samanids at the outset favoring Qābus and the Buyids favouring [Abu Mañşur Bisotun b. Voşmgir](#) (q.v.; r. 356-67/967-78), who married 'Azod-al-Dawla's daughter. Qābus eventually succeeded as ruler in the Caspian provinces on his brother's death, but offended the powerful 'Azod-al-Dawla two years later, in 369/980, and fled to a seventeen-year exile in Samanid Khorasan. Samanid forces under the generals Tāš and [Fā'eq](#) (q.v.) were sent with the aim of restoring Qābus to his domains but were defeated. The Samanid amirate was by now in increasing internal difficulties, and henceforth the amirs could not exert any influence beyond western Khorasan (Madelung, pp. 211-15; Busse, p. 290).

The closing years of the reign of Naşr b. Aḥmad saw efforts by Isma'ili agents (who apparently worked independently of the Fatimid movement in the lands further west) to spread their *da'wa* (see [DĀ'Ī](#)). Evidence for this radical Shi'ite movement rests on sources that are non-historical (Ebn al-Nadim's *Fehrest* [q.v.], Ta'ālebi's *Ādāb al-muluk*, and Neẓām-al-Molk's *Siyāsat-nāma*), but everything points to the historicity of Isma'ilism as a significant current of thought, philosophical rather than messianic in nature, in Samanid Khorasan and Transoxiana. The Isma'ili *d ā' is* or propagandists made converts at the highest levels of Samanid court society, culminating in their securing the adhesion of the amir himself, and recruited adherents amongst others of the elite such as army commanders, *dehqāns*, divan secretaries, and urban headmen. This provoked a reaction among the Sunni ulema and their allies, the Turkish commanders of the army. The details are confused, but there was certainly a general massacre of the Ismailis and their adherents in Khorasan and Transoxiana. If the amir was not forced to abdicate in favour of his son Nuḥ (I), he did apparently live out the rest of his life as a secluded ascetic and invalid, dying in 331/943, possibly still as an Isma'ili sympathizer. It is clear that much of the achievement of his reign can be laid at the door of Naşr's viziers and military commanders rather than at that of the amir himself



(Naršaḳi, pp. 111-12; tr. 95-96; Gardizi, pp. 150-54; Barthold, pp. 240-44; Stern, pp. 77-80; Frye, 1975, pp. 141-42; 1997, pp. 52-56; Daftary, pp. 120-23; Crone and Treadwell, pp. 37-48, 52-56, 61-67; see also for more details, [NAṢR \[I\] B. AHMAD \[I\] B. ESMĀ'IL](#)).

Naṣr's reign in many ways marks the apogee of Samanid power and splendor. As already noted, Naṣr and other Samanid rulers enjoyed over a long period the services of notable viziers, several of them from families with traditions of vizieral service such as the Jayhānis, Bal'amis and 'Otbis; many of these made their mark as much in the academic and literary world as in the realm of administration and military leadership. Under their direction, what must have been a corps of skilled secretaries (Ar. *kottāb*, Per. *dabirān*; see Dabir ii.) and officials raised the bureaucracy in Bukhara to a high level of specialized functioning and complex administrative techniques. Naršaḳi, the historian of Bukhara, enumerates ten divans (see [DIVĀN ii.](#)) of the Samanid central administration housed in what he calls the *sarāy-e 'ommāl*, "officials' building," near the portal of the ruler's palace and the government headquarters complex built by the Amir in the Rigestān of Bukhara. All this could not have evolved *ex nihilo* but must have been based on the 'Abbasid divans in Baghdad, mediated through the example of the Taherid ones in Nishapur. The Samanid official Abu 'Abd-Allāh K̄vārazmi has a chapter on *ketāba*, or chancery practice, in his encyclopaedia of the sciences, *Mafātiḥ al-'olum* (ca. 977), that deals with administrative and financial techniques, documents, registers, methods of correspondence, etc., that clearly stemmed largely from 'Abbasid models, but it also includes specific references to practices specific to the eastern Iranian lands, such as that of the *divān al-mā'*, or office concerned with the maintenance of the irrigation systems and the division of waters in the Marv oasis in Khorasan and the valley of the Zarāfšān river in Sogd (see [IRRIGATION](#)); and the section on weights and measures used by government surveyors and taxation assessors refers in part to practice in the Samanid provinces of Khorasan and Tok̄ārestān on the upper Oxus and to the adjacent province, theoretically subject to the Samanids, of Khwarazm (see Bosworth 1969a, pp. 115, 147-54).

It was this bureaucracy, and its subordinate organs in the provinces, that collected taxes from the rich agricultural oases of Sogdiana, Farḡāna, and Khorasan, together with customs duties and transit duties (*mokus*) levied on trade entering the Islamic lands from Inner Asia and beyond, a trade that had been in existence since pre-Islamic times and in which the Sogdians of



Transoxiana had played a leading role. These last comprised luxury goods, such as furs, Chinese silks, and even Chinese porcelain, but above all, Turkish slaves, Transoxiana being one of the principal entry points for this traffic. The geographers describe how dues were levied on slave imports at the Oxus crossings. Authors such as *Ebn Ḥawqal* (q.v.) and Moqaddasi, who travelled within the Samanid lands in the third quarter of the 10th century CE, lavish praise on the amirs as just and enlightened rulers, in whose lands taxation was light, with provisions and everything for ease of life plentiful and at hand (see Barthold, pp. 234-40; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 27-33; Negmatov, pp. 84-85). This direct taxation was supplemented by the tribute and presents that the amirs, in their heyday, were able to require as overlords from local rulers in such regions as the upper Oxus lands and northern parts of modern Afghanistan such as the princes of Čāgāniān, Kottal, Gowzgān (*Jowzjān*, q.v.), and *Garčestān* (q.v.); the regions such as the middle Syr Darya basin, including from the *dehqāns* of *Ošrusana* (q.v.) and Ilāq; and the ancient kingdom of Khwarazm (see Chorasmia). In all these cases, the Samanid amirs preferred to leave these local structures of power in place rather than to incorporate them within what would have become an extended, and hence unwieldy, empire.

The power and authority of the amirs rested, of course, on the armed forces at their disposal, needed both to maintain the ruler in power against other members of the Samanid family who coveted the throne and to guard the northern frontiers against pressure from the Turks in the outer steppe and to carry out the amirs' "forward policy" in the Caspian coastlands region and northern Persia. The first troops of the Samanids stemmed from the free Iranian population of Transoxiana, the

dehqān

(q.v.) class. At the time when the Samanids, themselves probably *dehqāns*, were first emerging as governors in Transoxiana and the upper Oxus region, this class of landowners was also providing high-level commanders for the 'Abbasid armies in the central lands of the caliphate, seen in the careers of the *Afšin* (q.v.) Kaydar from the ruling family in Ošrusana and of various members of the Sajid family from this same period. The *dehqāns* of the Samanid lands functioned as commanders for the amirs' armies and brought with them levies of their local tenantry and peasantry to swell the rank-and-file.

There was an ever-present need to maintain forces along the lengthy frontiers of the amirate against the Turks, not only from the obvious motive of state



security but also because waging war (*jehād* or *ġazā*) against non-Muslims was a religious duty for Muslims in such regions. Hence, there was a stimulus for the formation of bands of *ghazis* or volunteer fighters for the faith who manned the *rebāṭs* or frontier posts in provinces such as Asfijāb and other districts along the Syr Darya valley. The *rebāṭs* of Asfijāb, numbered, according to Moqaddasi (p. 273), 1,700; they were manned substantially by volunteers from Naḵṣab, Bukhara, and Samarqand (Barthold, pp. 175-76; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 31-32). The degree of state control of such enthusiasts probably varied; contingents of volunteers from Bukhara, under their own commander and with their own banners, are mentioned as parading alongside regular troops (Bosworth, 1969b, pp. 20-21). Such warriors must have been usually self-financed and have borne their own weapons and equipment unless helped by funds from such pious endowments as the *rebāṭs*; and a similar lack of central control must have been the case with the bands of *'ayyār* s (q.v.) mentioned as elements in the urban societies of Bukhara and Samarqand (Bosworth, 1969b, p. 21; Paul, pp. 14-20).

Neither of these two elements, the troops raised and led by local landowners, the *dehqāns*, and the religiously-motivated volunteers, owed any direct, unbreakable loyalty to the Samanid state as such, and the latter were in any case only of use against pagans outside the Abode of Islam, and their usefulness and their activities seem to have decreased as the Turks of the steppes gradually accepted Islam (Paul, pp. 23-24). Troops from these sources were, however, supplemented by Turkish slave soldiers (*ġelmān*, *mamālek*) from an early date, certainly from the time of Esmā'il b. Aḥmad onwards, since the Turk Simjur Davāti, founder of a line destined to play a leading role in later Samanid military and public affairs (see [SIMJURIDS](#)), is described as his *mawlā* (here in the sense of slave; see *Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 293; tr. Gold, p. 237). These could be purchased from slave markets on the fringes of the outer steppes or captured in raids, such as that of Esmā'il to Talas (see above). We know that Sebüktegin, subsequently the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty, purchased in the first place by the Samanid general [Alptigin](#) (q.v.) for his personal following, came from Barskān on the shores of the Issiq Kōl, in the region of Semirečye, now within the Kyrgyz Republic. Over the course of time, the amirs came to depend increasingly on these Turkish troops. From the higher ranks of these were recruited important offices of state and court such as the *amir-e ḥaras*, commander of the police and internal security guard (see Barthold, pp. 227-28 [who, however, attached too much importance to the romanticized and embroidered account of the training of Turkish *ġolāms* in



Neẓām-al-Molk's *Siyāsat-nāma*]; Bosworth, 1969b, pp. 9-11; Frye, 1975, pp. 149-51; [BARDA AND BARDA-DĀRI iii.](#)).

However, at the side of those soldiers who were undoubtedly of servile origin, the amirs were from an early date served also by personal retainers who are variously called in the sources *mawālī* or *čākarān* (see [ČĀKAR](#)) and who were apparently free vassals. The exact significance of the terminology here is uncertain, but it may be that the status of *čākar* had its roots in pre-Islamic Iranian and Turkish Central Asia (as maintained by Beckwith, pp. 32-40). Esmā'il b. Aḥmad seems to have been especially concerned to build up around himself a body of reliable guards and retainers, as part of the policy of elevating himself above the landowning classes of Transoxiana from which his family had sprung and of reducing dependence on the provincial magnates (see Paul, pp. 27-30; la Vaissère, 2005b).

It was the leading army commanders who filled some of the most important offices in the Samanid state after that of the amir himself and his vizier, such as the command-in-chief (*sepahsālāri*) of the army and the governorship of the rich province of Khorasan. In the halcyon years of the amirate, the army of Khorasan was used for expansion westward into northern Persia and southward into Sistān. In the later decades of the 10th century CE, holders of this governorship, whether from native Iranian local potentates and landowners like the Čāgānis and [Abu Maṣṣūr b. 'Abd-al-Razzāq](#) (q.v.), or from the Turkish slave soldiery such as the Simjuri, Tāš, Alptigin, and Fā'eq, increasingly used their power and resources to further their own ambitions, to interfere in the workings of the central administration, and to make and unmake amirs. A precedent for this last had been set as early as 301/914 when Aḥmad (II) b. Esmā'il had been murdered by his own *gōlāms*; by the later part of the 10th century CE, a governor of Khorasan such as Abu 'Ali Moḥammad Simjuri arrogated to himself the style, titulature, and powers of an independent sovereign.

Whereas volunteers tended to live off the land and were lured on by the prospects of plunder, and locally raised Iranian troops could disperse after a campaign back to their estates and villages, the cost of maintaining a standing, professional army, whether of free retainers or of Turkish *gōlāms*, was formidable. These last had to be paid with cash allowances every quarter (*bistgāni*, q.v.), and were liable to become mutinous or to refuse to go out on campaign if these payments fell into arrears. The commitment of paying the army had to be a first charge on the revenues collected from the



Samanid lands, but in the course of the 4th/10th century, the state became increasingly unable to find enough money for this. External conquests no longer brought in fresh revenue so that the amirs resorted to the expedients of levying new and unusual taxes (Barthold, pp. 339, 246-47), whilst the leading army commanders quarreled over the allocation of provincial governorships, from which they could raise taxation to pay their troops; the result was almost continuous crisis in the Samanid state from the mid-10th century onwards (Paul, pp. 30-32).

Barthold noted that, with the reign of Nuḥ (I) b. Naṣr (II), posthumously called *amir-e ḥamid* ‘The Praiseworthy Amir’ (r. 331-43/943-54), there were distinct signs of the weakening of the dynasty. With the anti-Isma‘ili reaction and exaltation of the orthodox Sunni ulema, the vizierate passed to a religious scholar (*faqih*), Abu‘l-Faḥl Moḥammad Solami, more noted for his piety than his administrative talents. The army had to be used to quell a revolt against Samanid overlordship in Khwarazm and against the Turks on the northern borders, but when the people of Nishapur complained of the governor Abu ‘Ali Čāḡāni’s oppression in Khorasan, and Nuḥ tried to replace him with the Turkish general Ebrāhim b. Simjur, there was a financial crisis when the army refused to move until it received its pay arrears, compelling the administration to increase taxation. Even so, the army would not march, and Abu ‘Ali was able temporarily to place on the throne in Bukhara a Samanid prince and uncle of Amir Nuḥ, Ebrāhim b. Aḥmad (II). Although Nuḥ retrieved his position, Abu ‘Ali was still powerful and had the backing of the local princes of his native upper Oxus region, so that peace had to be made, with Abu ‘Ali recovering his governorship, only to lose it when the amir felt strong enough to revoke his appointment (Naršaḳi, pp. 113-15; tr. pp. 97-98; Gardizi, pp. 154-59; Barthold, pp. 246-49; Frye, 1975, p. 151).

On Nuḥ’s death, his eldest son ‘Abd-al-Malek (I), called *amir-e rašid* “The Rightly-Guided Amir” (r. 343-50/954-61), succeeded. He confirmed the deposition of Abu ‘Ali and appointed Moḥammad b. ‘Ozayr as his vizier. Despite securing help from the Buyids, Abu ‘Ali was unable to maintain himself in Khorasan, and died of plague in 344/955. A succession of governors in Khorasan ensued, until the commander Alptigin achieved this post in 350/961, placing his own nominee, Abu ‘Ali Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Bal‘ami (see [AMIRAK BAL‘AMI](#)), in the vizierate. The great military leaders were clearly now getting the upper hand in the state, and this was to be the pattern for the remaining four decades or so of Samanid rule (Naršaḳi, p. 115; tr. p. 98;



Gardizi, pp. 159-60; Barthold, pp. 249-50). It also seems that, on the evidence of Neẓām-al-Molk, toward the end of ‘Abd-al-Malek’s reign, there was a recrudescence of Isma‘ili activity, or possibly Ƙorrami (q.v.) disturbances, in such provincial regions of the Samanid empire as the upper Oxus lands and Farġāna (Crone and Treadwell, pp. 48-50).

The country fell into chaos when ‘Abd-al-Malek died in 961 in an accident. Naršaķi (p. 115, tr. p. 98) says that “the army became turbulent and rebelled; everyone coveted the kingdom, and civil strife appeared.” Alptigin and Bal‘ami tried to place ‘Abd-al-Malek’s young son Naṣr on the throne, doubtless seeing in him a willing tool for their own interests, but their putsch failed, and the late amir’s next brother was placed on the throne as Maṣur (I) b. Nuḥ (I) (r. 350-65/961-76), called *amir-e sadid* ‘The Upright Amir.’ Alptigin was in disgrace and forced to withdraw to Ghazna, but his son and successor, Abu Eshāq Ebrāhim, could only retain his position there against the returning, dispossessed, former local ruler by seeking help from Bukhara in 354/965, after which the line of Turkish commanders in Ghazna continued to acknowledge the Samanid amirs as their suzerain and to place their names on the coinage almost till the final demise of the Samanid dynasty. From his base in Khorasan, the Samanid governor Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim b. Simjur was able to support the Ziarid ruler Vošmgir against threats from Rokn-al-Dawla in 356/967, and when Vošmgir died, his son Bisotun was compelled to pay tribute to Bukhara. The effective policies of the Samanid governors in Nishapur led to a peace agreement with the Buyids in 361/971-72 by the terms of which, Rokn-al-Dawla agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Samanid amirs, but four years later, Maṣur died, and it is unclear how long the Buyids had continued to pay these substantial sums (Naršaķi, pp. 115-16; tr. pp. 98-99; Gardizi, pp. 161-64; Barthold, pp. 250-52; see for a more detailed consideration of this reign, [MANSUR \[I\] B. NUḤ \[I\]](#)).

The reign of Nuḥ (II) b. Maṣur (I), who was called *amir-e rażi* ‘The Well-Pleasing Amir’, was the last substantial one for a Samanid amir (365-87/976-97). It witnessed the disintegration of the amirate under the double pressure of the Samanids’ own ambitious commanders internally, and the advent of the Turkish Qara-khanids (see [ILAK-KHANIDS](#)) from outside the empire. With, yet again, only a youth on the throne, executive power was at the outset in the hands of a vizier, Abu’l-Ḥosayn ‘Abd-Allāh ‘Otbi (see [‘OTBI](#)), whose authority was, however, contested by the amir’s Turkish military commanders. ‘Otbi was successful in removing Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim



Simjuri from the governorship of Khorasan in favor of his own nominee, Tāš. The peace treaty with Rokn-al-Dawla lapsed at some unspecified point, hence war was resumed against the Buyids, now headed by the formidable ‘Azod-al-Dawla; but it went badly for the Samanids, with ‘Otbi being murdered shortly afterwards with the connivance of Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim b. Simjuri and Fā’eq Kāṣṣa (q.v.). The ensuing years witnessed a power struggle between the Simjuris, Fā’eq, **Begtuzun** (q.v.) and other ambitious generals. The territory controlled by Nuḥ shrank, and, inevitably, the tax basis with which he hoped to pay his troops.

Thus, at least in the territories across the Oxus, there was a growing power vacuum, and within this there appeared in 382/992 a new factor, that of the Qara-khanids, a Turkish steppe confederation nomadizing beyond the Syr Darya whose nucleus was probably made up of the Qarluq tribe. Abu ‘Ali Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Simjuri intrigued with Buḡrā Khan Hārūn to partition the Samanid dominions, the Khan to have Transoxiana and Abu ‘Ali to have Khorasan. Nuḥ was driven from his capital Bukhara by the Turks, but given a respite by the khan’s illness and death. Now faced with a coalition of Abu ‘Ali and Fā’eq, Nuḥ could only call upon Sebüktegin and his son Maḥmud, who defeated the rebel commanders. When a fresh Qara-khanid incursion took place in 386/996, the amir’s impotence was such that Sebüktegin and Maḥmud ended by making an agreement with the new Qara-khanid leader, Arslan Ilig Naṣr, that would have left Nuḥ with the Zarafšān valley only, with all the Syr Darya basin ceded to the Qara-khanids; shortly after this, in 387/997, Nuḥ died (Naršaḳi, p. 117, tr. pp. 99-100; Manini, I, pp. 163-255; Gardizi, pp. 167-69; Barthold, pp. 252-54, 257-64; Frye, 1975, pp. 156-58; see also **NUḤ (II) B. MANŞUR (I)**).

The remaining, short-reigned amirs could only struggle hopelessly against the approaching demise of their dynasty. Nuḥ’s son Maṣṣur (II) (r. 387-89/997-99) followed his father. Much of the power in his shrunken realm was exercised by Fā’eq, and it was Fā’eq and Begtuzun who deposed Maṣṣur after two years, raising to the throne his younger brother ‘Abd-al-Malek (II) (r. 389-90/999-1000). Maḥmud b. Sebüktegin was now ruling Khorasan as its independent ruler, and when Fā’eq died, the Arslan Ilig Naṣr occupied Bukhara unopposed, carried off ‘Abd-al-Malek and other Samanid princes, and thus ended the Samanid dynasty. The later amirs had failed to retain the support of their subjects, and an appeal to the state-salaried *kaṭibs* or preachers in Bukhara to rouse the populace for resistance, when the Qara-



khanids appeared for a second time, fell on deaf ears (see Bosworth, 1963, p. 34). The former amir's brother Esmā'il, called *al-montaşer* 'The Victorious', succeeded in escaping from Qara-khanid captivity and over the five years 390-95/1000-1005 attempted a revanche and the restoration of his house, procuring the help of the Oghuz Turks, achieving some victories and even reoccupying Bukhara at one point; but in the end he was overwhelmed by Arslan Ilig Naşr's superior forces, and amid what seems to have been a general apathy of the subject population, the rule of the Samanids came to its definitive end (Gardizi, pp. 171-73; Manini, I, pp. 268-347; Barthold, pp. 264-70; Nazim, pp. 42-47; Frye, 1975, pp. 157-60; see also [MANŞUR \(II\) B. NUĖ \(II\)](#)).

Throughout the Samanid period, Khorasan enjoyed a great cultural and intellectual efflorescence, building on foundations laid in the Taherid period. It continued to be a great center for orthodox Sunni legal and Quranic studies; four of the six compilers of the canonical collections of Hadith, either stemmed from or had connections with the eastern Islamic lands (Mottahedeh, pp. 66-70). The theological pietistic Sunni movement, the [Karrāmiya](#) (q.v.) was initiated in Khorasan with its intellectual center at Nishapur; several towns, such as Nishapur and Bayhaq, had within them Shi'ite communities, with important families of Sayyeds; and Khorasanian ascetics and mystics (e.g., Abu Sa'id Abi'l-Ḳayr, [Bāyazid Beşāmi](#), qq.v.) played significant roles in the development of Sufism (Madelung, 1988, pp. 39-46; Chabbi). The desire to perpetuate the fame and learning of notable scholars and theologians was a strong factor in the genre of local histories, which flourished in Khorasan from this time onwards, seen in those known to have been composed in centers such as Nishapur, Bayhaq, Herat, and Balk, several of which are extant or whose material is contained in later works (Barthold, pp. 13 ff.; Browne, I, pp. 416 ff; Şafā, passim; Pourshariati; and the special issue of *Iranian Studies*, 32/1-2, 2000, devoted to local historiography of the mediaeval period). Virtually all this scholarship was written in Arabic; several local histories were later translated into Persian. There is a large representation of Khorasanian poets and stylists writing in Arabic from the Samanid and early Ghaznavid periods in *Yatimat al-dahr*, the literary-biographical anthology by the Nishapuri author Abu Manşur Ṭa'ālebi (d. 426/1038), and in its continuations by 'Ali b. Ḥasan Bākarzi (q.v.; likewise from the Nishapur region, d. 467/1074) and 'Emād-al-Din Moḥammad Kāteb Eşfahāni (q.v.; d. 597/1201).

Samanid Khorasan also played a significant role in the rise of New Persian language and literature, a reflection of the Samanids' patronage of the pioneer



poets in New Persian, *Daqiqi* (q.v.) and Rudaki, at their court and that court's part in the commissioning of epitomized translations of Ṭabari's *Ta'riḵ* and *Tafsir* (Lazard; Daniel, 2008; Peacock). Above all, the origins of Ferdowsi's version of the national epic, the *Šāh-nāma*, lie in Khorasan, where in 346/947 the local governor of Ṭus, the *dehqān*

Abu Manṣur Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Razzāq (q.v.; d. 350/961), commissioned translations of the Pahlavi text of the royal epic, *Xwadāy-nāmag*, into New Persian (Browne, I, pp. 445 ff.; Minorsky, pp. 159-79; Rypka, pp. 133 ff.; Šafā, I, pp. 206-7, 163-76, 610-20).

Descendants of the Samanid house continued to reside in the Zarafšān basin and to enjoy respect for their ancient name, but a decisive break in the history of Central Asia had been made. Henceforth, regions north of the Oxus which had for millennia been bastions of Indo-Iranian population and language, and ruled by monarchs from this ethnic and linguistic background, were to pass under the control of an alien power from the steppes, that of the Inner Asian Turks. The process of Turkification may have begun on the fringes of Transoxiana and of Khwarazm with the influx during Samanid times of Turkish auxiliaries along the frontiers, but it then speeded up so that (whilst New Persian has remained a language of culture in Central Asia almost up to the present day, and in the cities at least is still used by many speakers as a second or third language after Turkish and Russian) only reduced areas of monoglot Iranian speakers now survive, most notably in the modern Republic of Tajikistan and in pockets of the upper Zarafšān valley in Uzbekistan.

See also SAMANIDS, [TAHERIDS](#).

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