



## ḲORRAMIS IN BYZANTIUM

**ḲORRAMIS IN BYZANTIUM.** The term *Ḳorrami* refers to a member of the geographically extensive religious and political rebellious group which fought against the 'Abbasid caliphate (Madelung, pp. 63-64). The term was also used specifically for those Iranians who fought the 'Abbasid caliph Mo'taşem be'llāh (r. 833-41) and enrolled in the Byzantine army of the iconoclast emperor Theophilos I (r. 829-42). These Ḳorramis became important fighters on the eastern borders (*toğur*) of the Byzantine empire. Various Byzantine sources attest the Ḳorramis, yet the extant Greek evidence is scarce and often contradictory regarding their number, military functions, and political role. The Ḳorramis are an example of how a group of alien fighters was integrated into an ethnically diverse Greco-Orthodox society.

Between 816 and 838 **Bābak Ḳorrami** (d. 838) organized in Azarbaijan an armed resistance that drew on the Mazdakite tradition and sentiments, and spread in Iranian regions. Ḳorramis participated in the extensive rebellion that an otherwise obscure Naşr led in western Iran (Jebāl) (Michael the Syrian III, p. 88; Mas'udi VII, p. 136; cf. Rekaya, p. 47). But when the 'Abbasid army of Eşhāq b. Ebrāhim defeated the Ḳorramis in the Zagros mountains between 20 October and 17 November 833, Naşr along with some 14,000 soldiers (Symeon Magister, pp. 625-26; Georgios Monachos, p. 793; Theophanes Continuatus, p. 125; cf. Rekaya, p. 4) of Iranian (Persian and Kurdish) origin (Rekaya, pp. 46-47) crossed the Armenian highlands, entered the Byzantine *thema* (military district) of Armeniakon (Treadgold, 1988, p. 282), and obtained protection and shelter from Theophilos.



According to the Greek sources, the family of Naşr had belonged to the Iranian aristocracy (Theophanes Continuatus, pp. 111-12; Genesisos, p. 58). Naşr was baptized, and took the name Theophobos (*God-fearing*; Grabar and Manoussakas, fol. 53 fig. 55, p. 45). The emperor became his protector, appointing him patrician and marrying him to a sister of the empress Theodora. The Byzantine sources vaguely claim that Naşr's fighters also converted to Christianity, and an imperial decree allowed the Κορραμισ to marry local women (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 112; cf. Carras, p. 212). Presumably, their conversion was nominal, though their descendants embraced Christianity.

Theophilos enjoyed the loyalty of the Κορραμισ whom he put on regular military pay, probably including access to land tenure. Aside from their alleged hatred for the Arabs, these fighters strengthened numerically the Byzantine army by a sixth. The emperor organized them into a flexible military formation, the *Persian turma* (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 112), and placed them under the command of Naşr-Theophobos. In the summer of 837, Theophilos campaigned in northwest Mesopotamia with about 70,000 soldiers, among whom the *Persian turma* (Rekaya, p. 64; Rosser, p. 268) played a prominent role (Gignoux, 1986a, p. 340; Cereti, p. 160; Daryaee, pp. 71-72). After the sack of Sozopetra (Zabetra), the Byzantine army raided the region of Melitene, taking many prisoners and conquering the city Arsamosata. Theophilos then plundered southern Armenia so that Theodosiopolis and other cities paid tribute to avert further destruction. Having obtained the nominal submission of Melitene, the emperor and his army returned to Byzantium (Treadgold, 1988, p. 440, note 401).

In September 837, a second wave of about 16,000 Κορραμισ from Bābak's defeated army crossed into Byzantine territory. These fighters also converted to Christianity (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 124) and were incorporated into the *Persian turma* so that it now comprised around 30,000 experienced soldiers (Genesisos, p. 57; Theophanes Continuatus, p. 112). But despite this considerable reinforcement, on 21 July 838, Theophilos's army was defeated in the battle of Danzimon (Anzen) by a smaller 'Abbasid army of ca. 30,000 fighters under the command of the Iranian general Afşin Kaydar b. Qāwus (d. 841). The Greek sources report that many Κορραμισ deserted the emperor, fleeing first to Amastris at the Black Sea and then to Sinope in the *thema* of Armeniakon (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 136; Genesisos, pp. 60-61; cf. Rosser, pp. 268-69). Yet these sources are ambiguous as to whether Na şr-Theophobos



or the Greek officer and alleged double agent Manuel saved Theophilos's life on the battlefield (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 128; Genesios, p. 68). The Byzantine defeat facilitated Mo'taşem's conquest of Amorium in August 838 (Mas'udi IV, 358-59) and caused chaos in Byzantine Asia Minor.

The Greek sources argue that the Korrakis feared the emperor's retribution and thus proclaimed Naşr-Theophobos the new Byzantine emperor, though probably crowning him in Sinope according to a pre-Islamic Sasanian tradition (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 124; Genesios, p. 58). Naşr-Theophobos's role in the rebellion and his rationale are obscure (Rosser, p. 269; Treadgold, 1988, p. 301). For a year he stayed at Sinope, while the Korrakis controlled the *thema* of Armeniakon. According to the Greek sources, in the summer of 839, Naşr-Theophobos negotiated in secret with Theophilos and secured full amnesty for the Korrakis (Theophanes Continuatus, pp. 124-125; Genesios, pp. 40-41). Although the emperor reorganized the *Persian turma* dispersing units of 2,000 fighters to several districts (Rosser, p. 271; Treadgold, 1995, pp. 32, 69), he assigned the command of some units again to Naşr-Theophobos who in turn continued being a leading general of the emperor's army. While the breakup of the *Persian turma* brought more flexibility to the Byzantine military, it weakened the Korrakis' unity, and yet employed them successfully in the defense of the eastern Byzantine frontiers against 'Abbasid incursions. For decades the Korrakis were valued for this strategic importance, which in Greek sources was linked to their hatred for the 'Abbasids.

The Greek and Arabic sources provide conflicting information about the end of Naşr-Theophobos, though the richer Byzantine tradition seems more convincing. According to Islamic historiography, the Iranian convert died on the battlefield between 839 and 840 (Ṭabari, tr., XXXIII, p.120, note 334). The Greek sources report that the general aligned himself with the Iconophile opposition (Treadgold, 1988, p. 326) so that in 842 the dying emperor mustered nonetheless the energy to execute his general for treason (Symeon Magister, pp. 637, 646-47; Genesios, pp. 42, 43; Georgios Monachos, pp. 803, 810). In an illumination of the Skylitzes manuscript, Theophilos is lying on his deathbed, while receiving the head of Naşr-Theophobos (Joannes Scylitzes, fol. 62a, p. 276).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

### *Primary sources.*

J. Genesios, *Regum libri quattor*, ed. A. Lesmüller-Werner and J. Thurn, Berlin, 1978.

Georgios Monachos, “Vitae recentiorum imperatorum,” in Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1838 pp. 761-924.

Joannes Scylitzes, *Skylitzes matritensis: Reproducciones y miniaturas*, ed. S. Cirac Estopañán, Barcelona and Madrid, 1965.

Mas‘udi, *Moruj al-dahab wa-ma‘āden al-jawhar*, ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille, rev. Charles Pellat, 7 vols., Beirut, 1966-79.

Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, ed. and tr. J.-B. Chabot, 3 vols., Paris, 1899-1924; Syriac text with French translation. Leo Grammaticos, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1842.

Symeon Magister, “Chronographia,” in Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1838, pp. 603-670.

Moḥammad b. Jarir Ṭabari, *Ketāb ta’rik al-rosol wa’l-moluk*, tr. by various scholars as *The History of al-Ṭabari*, ed. E. Yar-Shater, Albany, NY, I-, 1985-.

Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1838.

### *Studies.*

B. Scarcia Amorretti, “Sects and Heresies,” *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 481-519.

L. Carras, “The Life of St. Athanasia of Aegina,” in Ann Moffat, ed., *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, Canberra, 1984, pp. 199-224.

C. G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Rome, 1995.



- J. C. Cheynet, "Théophile, Théophobe et les Perses" in S. Lampakes, ed., *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th-12th cent.)*, Athens, 1998, pp. 39-50.
- T. Daryaee, "A Historical Episode in the Zoroastrian Apocalyptic Tradition: The Romans, the Abbasids, and the Khorramdins," in T. Daryaee and M. Omidsalar, eds., *The Spirit of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of Ahmad Tafazzoli*, Costa Mesa, CA, 2004, pp. 64-76.
- H. Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen zwischen der Balkanhalbinsel und Kleinasien vom Ende des 6. bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 9 Jahrhunderts*, Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten 59, Berlin, 1993.
- P. Gignoux, "Nouveaux regards sur l'apocalyptique iranienne," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*, Paris, 1986a, pp. 334-46.
- Idem, "Sur l'existence d'un Bahman yasht avestique," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Tokyo) 32, 1986b, pp. 53-64.
- A. Grabar and M. Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, Venice, 1979.
- D. Letsios, "Theophilos and his 'Khurramite' Policy: Some Reconsiderations," *Graeco-Arabica* 9-10, 2004, pp. 249-71.
- W. Madelung, "Khurramiyya," *EI2* V, pp. 63-65.
- M. Rekaya, "Mise au point sur Théophobe et l'alliance de Bābek avec Théophile (233-234/839-840)," *Byzantion* 44, 1974, pp. 43-67.
- J. Rosser, "Theophilus' Khurramite Policy and Its Finale: The Revolt of Theophobus' Persian Troops in 838," *Byzantina* 6, 1974, pp. 265-71.
- G.-H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe au IIIe siècle de l'hégire*, Paris, 1938, pp. 187-280.
- W. T. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival: 780-842*, Stanford, 1988, pp. 282-83, 297-305, 312-25, 437.
- Idem, *Byzantium and its Army: 284 -1081*, Stanford, 1995, pp. 32, 69, 71, 100, 107, 125, 170, 174, 210.



A. Vasiliev, and others, *La dynastie d'Amorium (820-867)*, Byzance et les Arabes 1, Brussels, 1959.