



LAKHMIDS

LAKHMIDS, an Arab dynasty that ruled in central Iraq with their capital at [Ḥira](#) for roughly three centuries, from about 300 to 602 CE, generally but intermittently as the allies and clients of the Sasanian kings of Persia, with especially close links in the sixth century, when the Lakhmids were bulwarks of the Sasanian position in Iraq against Byzantium and its Arab allies in Syria, the Ghassanids. Together with rulers in South Arabia and the Ghassanids, the Lakhmid rulers are accorded in Arabic tradition the designation of kings (*moluk*).

The Laḵm were an ancient Arab tribe accounted in Arab legend as Yemeni in origin but found in historic times outside the Arabian peninsula in Iraq and Syria. The proto-Arabic inscription of Namāra in southern Syria of 328 CE describes the Lakhmid ruler Emro'-al-Qays b. 'Amr b. 'Adi, the second of his line, as "King of all the Arabs" (see Lammens and Shahid; Elisséeff, p. 945). In reality, the Lakhmid family had only recently come to prominence at the end of the third century, when 'Amr b. 'Adi made Ḥira his capital and attempted to extend his power across the Syrian desert and into northern Arabia, according to Arab tradition clashing with, amongst other local rulers, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. His son Emro'-al-Qays at first acted as governor for the Sasanians over the tribes of the Syrian desert and northern Arabia, but then moved westwards into Syria, became a Christian, and went over to the Byzantines. In general, however, the Lakhmids remained strongly pagan almost to their end, even though their seat at Ḥira was a major center for Nestorian Christian piety and learning in central Iraq, with its population famed as the devotees (*'ebād*)



and with its bishop, many churches, and monasteries (Bosworth, pp. 598-99).

Lakhmid history of the fourth century is poorly documented, but we have more information from Greek, Syriac, and Arabic sources about their kings in the fifth century. No'mān I, called al-A'war (The One-eyed) was reputedly the builder of two palaces near Ḥira, [Kawarnaq](#), built for his Sasanian suzerain (see Massignon), and Sadir, accounted by the Arabs among wonders of the world, whilst his son Monḍer I (said to have reigned for forty-four years, possibly 418-52) fought for the Persians against the Byzantines and also played a part in internal Sasanian political affairs. The Sasanian prince [Bahrām V Gōr](#) had been brought up at the court of Ḥira on the desert fringes of Iraq, and he gained the imperial throne at Ctesiphon in 420 with the help of the Lakhmid king against the Persian nobles who had killed his brother Šāpur. (The frequency of the names Monḍer and No'mān among the Lakhmid kings led Arabic historians often to call them the Manāḍera or Na'āmena.)

The Lakhmids built up a powerful military machine, used to support the Sasanian forces and to enforce Lakhmid control over the North Arabian tribes, whose component units are described in the Arab sources; they apparently included a Persian contingents called the Šahbā' and the Dawsar, and another unit of Persian mailed, heavy cavalrymen, the Wažā'e' (those set down in garrisons), who were assigned regular spells of duty at Ḥira (Shahid, 1984, p. 634; Bosworth, pp. 599-60).

The last century of Lakhmid rule, the sixth, is the best-documented and the most important period of Lakhmid history. Despite a short period of domination in Ḥira by the chief of the Arabian tribe of Kenda, Lakhmid power was re-asserted and events were dominated by the figure of Monḍer III b. No'mān II, who reigned for half a century (r. 503-54). The Sasanian emperor Kōsrow I Anōšīravān (r. 531-79) entrusted to him Arabia, where Persian authority was being established along the southern shores of the Persian Gulf and then, later in the century, in Yemen. The Lakhmids were thus in continuous contact with the Arab tribal chiefs as far as the Ḥejāz. The 3rd/9th-century Muslim geographer Ebn Kordāḍbeh mentions a tradition that the (Lakhmid?) warden of the desert fringes (*marzobān al-bādia*) collected tribute for the Persians in Medina, where a degree of Persian control seems to have been established (Ebn Kordāḍbeh, p. 128; Kister, pp. 146-48; Bosworth, pp. 600-601). The dynasty was much also involved in the warfare of the Sasanians with Byzantium and its Ghassanid allies. The extension of Persian cultural influence amongst the Lakhmids at this time is shown by the fact that one of



the kings bore the Arabized Persian name of Qābus (< Kāvus; r. 569-73). The last Lakhmid ruler was No'mān III b. Monḍer IV (r. 580-602), who became a Christian, the first of his line since the time of Emro'-al-Qays. He is especially well-known from the Arabic sources because of the eulogies addressed to him by numerous leading poets of the Arabs, who thronged his splendid court in Ḥira, including A'sā Maymun b. Qays, Nābeḡa Ḍobyāni, and 'Adi b. Zayd 'Ebādi. Latterly, however, No'mān fell foul of the Sasanian emperor Ḳosrow II Abarwēz/Parviz (r. 591-628, q.v), who had him killed in 602, thus ending the Lakhmid house, and Parviz soon afterwards extended direct Persian rule over Ḥira (Shahid, 1984, pp. 633-34). This proved a disastrous decision for the Sasanians, since the Lakhmid bulwark against pressure on Iraq from the Arab tribes within the peninsula was now removed; as early as 604 the Banu Bakr defeated a Persian force at **Ḍu Qār**, described by Ṭabari, (III, p. 1016; tr, pp. 338-39), as the direct consequence of Parviz's action against No'mān, and a harbinger of the much greater Persian disaster at Qādesiya (q.v.) some thirty years later.

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