



# MAS'UDI V. THE HISTORY OF IRAN IN ISLAMIC TIMES

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During the caliphate of Walid I (r. 86-96/705-15), the governor of Iraq, Ḥajjāj b. Yusof, appointed one of his rustic bedouin uncles to the governorship of Isfahan, where taxes were two years in arrears. When the Isfahanis complained that previous governors had oppressed them, the bedouin agreed to give them eight months to collect the money. When they failed to pay on time, he began to execute the guarantors they had named. Seeing this, the Isfahanis paid their taxes (*Moruj* III, secs. 2146-47).

In late 125/742-43 or early 126/743-44, during the reign of Walid b. Yazid (r. 125-26/743-44), the Alid Yaḥyā b. Zayd led an uprising in Khorasan, where the people “resented the oppression and mistreatment that had afflicted everyone.” Yaḥyā was defeated and killed in Arḡuna and his body displayed in Juzajān. Every boy born in Khorasan that year was named either Yaḥyā or Zayd. The corpse remained in place until taken down by [Abu Moslem](#), the leader of the ‘Abbasid revolution (*Moruj* IV, sec 2237).

The ‘Abbasid revolution began in Khorasan, where Abu Moslem worked to undermine the authority of the Umayyad governor, Naṣr b. Sayyār, who warned the caliph Marwān of the threat to “the Arabs and to Islam.” The pro-‘Abbasid party was called the Rāwandīya. Its adherents believed that the



prophet's uncle 'Abbās had inherited the imamate, though some sectarians believed that Abu Moslem himself was the true imam. The first town to adopt the black standards of the Abbasids was Nishapur. The movement spread through Khorasan and from there to Fars. Naṣr fled to Ray and then to Sāva, near Hamadan, where he died (*Moruj* IV, secs. 2279, 2284, 2286, 2291).

After the second 'Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣur (r. 136-58/754-75), executed Abu Moslem, the believers in his imamate rose in Khorasan under the leadership of a man named Sonfād (Sonbād). These sectarians, called Ḳorramiya, Moslemiya, or Baṭeniya, believed either that Abu Moslem was alive and would return, or that the imamate had passed to his daughter Faṭema. Sonfād captured Ray and Qumes before being defeated in battle by the caliph's forces between Ray and Hamadan. Bābak Ḳhorrami, who would later rise against the caliph al-Ma'mun, belonged to the sect. In Mas'udi's time, adherents were still to be found in Khorasan, Ray, Isfahan, Azarbaijan, and several other places (*Moruj* IV, secs. 2398-400).

In 145/762, al-Manṣur founded a new capital at Baghdad. The name derives from *bāg* "garden" referring to a monastery garden on the site, or from the name of a pre-Zoroastrian idol worshipped on the site (*Tanbih*, p. 360).

When the caliph al-Amin (r. 19398/809-13) decided to remove his brother Ma'mun from the succession, he sent an army commanded by 'Ali b. 'Isā b. Māhān toward Khorasan. Ma'mun's Khorasani forces, commanded by Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, routed the caliph's army at Ray after a valiant charge by the cavalrymen of Ḳ'ārazm ([Chorasmia](#)). Ṭāher's horsemen are described as equipped with spears or lances, Tibetan shields, coats of mail, lamellar armor (*jawāvšen*), vambraces (to protect the forearms), and horse-armor. Ṭāher and his allies advanced to Baghdad. After a long and destructive siege, the Khorasanis prevailed. The caliph al-Amin was captured and later killed by a group of non-Arabs (*qawm men al-'ajam*), one of whom cried out in Persian (*ṣāḥ bi al-fāresiya*) during the fight (*Moruj* IV, secs. 2626-27, 2657, 2676).

In 200/815, the caliph al-Ma'mun announced that he had examined all the eligible members of the Alid and 'Abbasid families and found no one worthier of the caliphate than the Alid 'Ali b. Musā al-Rezā. He ordered Rezā brought to Marv and proclaimed heir apparent. He also married his daughter to Rezā's son, struck coins in his name, and substituted green for black in court dresses and banners. When the scandalized 'Abbasids of Baghdad nominated a counter-caliph, al-Ma'mun left Marv for Iraq. In Saraḳs, the vizier Faḏl b. Sahl



was murdered, possibly at the caliph's behest; and in Ṭus, the heir apparent Rezā died, either from a surfeit of grapes or by poison (*Moruj IV*, secs. 2695-96, 2746-47).

Ma'mun reportedly ordered the arrest of "ten *zendiqs* from Basra who followed the teachings of Māni and the creed of light and darkness." With them was a party-crasher (*ṭofayli*) who had joined the group believing that they were going to a banquet. The Manicheans explained that they would be asked to renounce their creed by spitting on an image of Māni and slaughtering a pheasant (*tadroj*). When the party reached Baghdad, the Manicheans refused to accept Islam and were executed (*Moruj IV*, secs. 2705-707).

In 204/819-20, the district of Baḡd(ayn) in Azarbaijan came under the leadership of Bābak Korrāmi, who took over the followers of Jāvidān b. Šahrak (*Moruj IV*, sec. 2749). After causing great destruction and defeating the armies sent against them, Bābak's forces were eventually routed by the caliph's commander Afšin. Bābak, who considered himself a king, behaved haughtily toward an Armenian *patricius* (*beṭriq*), Sahl b. Sonbāt, at whose estate he had taken refuge. Sahl then turned him over to Afšin. Bābak and his brother were conveyed to Samarra (Sāmarrā') with great pomp and splendor, then tortured and executed (*Moruj IV*, secs. 2806-14).

In 219/834, the Kufan Alid Moḥammad b. Qāsem, threatened by the caliph al-Mo'taṣem, fled to Khorasan. Marv, Saraḡs, Ṭālaqān, and Nasā rallied around his claim to the imamate. He was eventually captured and imprisoned in Samarra. Some claim he was poisoned there, while others say that a group of his followers disguised themselves as gardeners and smuggled him out of prison. Sectarians in Kufa, Ṭabarestān, Daylam, and parts of Khorasan regarded him as the last imam and the *mahdi* (*Moruj IV*, secs. 2799-800).

In 225/839-40, Māzyār b. Qāren b. Bandār Hormos (Bondār Hormoz), who had rebelled in the mountains of Ṭabarestān, was captured and sent to Samarra. There he blamed the commander Afšin for leading him astray with "a dualist, Magian creed they had agreed upon between them." This allegation was confirmed by a scribe named Sābur. Māzyār was flogged to death and his corpse exposed on a cross next to that of Bābak. Afšin died in prison and a number of "idols" found in his possession were burned (*Moruj IV*, secs. 2819-22).



In 262/876, Ya'qub b. Layṭ invaded Iraq but was routed by the caliph al-Mo'tamed. Mas'udi's now-lost *Aḵbār al-zamān* contained an account of his early career. He was a coppersmith (*ṣaffār*) from Sejestān, who joined the army of Derham b. Naṣr and then led his own forces into Zābolestān, Herat, Balkh, Nishapur, and Ṭabarestān. The account resumes in the *Moruj*, which describes the Ṣaffārid army's unusually high standards of discipline and obedience. When ordered to break camp, his troops would rush to obey, to the point that one soldier even pulled the fodder from his camel's mouth, saying to the beast in Persian: "The Caliph commands all beasts to stop grazing" (*Amir al-mo'menin dawāb-rā az tar boridand*.) Ya'qub himself spent most of the time either training boys to fight or sitting alone in his tent, which contained nothing but a haircloth mat, a shield to recline on, and a banner he used as a pillow. He died in Jondišābur and was succeeded by his brother 'Amr (*Moruj* V, secs. 3158-76; *Tanbih*, pp. 367-368).

In 317/929, Ḥasan b. Qāsem Ḥasani Dā'i, with the help of the Daylami warrior Mākān b. Kāki, seized control of Ray, Qazvin, Zanjān, Qom, and Abhar. The revolt was put down by *Asfār b. Širuya*, a pagan or possibly an apostate, who "wanted to put a crown on his head and set up a throne of gold for himself in Ray." After defeating an army sent by the caliph al-Moqtader, he seized the fortress of Qazvin (originally Kašvin), which had been built by the Persians as a defense against the Daylamis. Many of the Daylamis and Jilis had converted to Islam at the hands of the Alid 'Ali Oṭruš, but most now reverted to paganism. Asfār was eventually overthrown by one of his commanders, Mardāvij, who sacked the towns of *Hamadan* and *Dinavar* and massacred their inhabitants. Mardāvij settled in Isfahan, where, according to some members of his entourage, a new kingdom and a new religion would be founded. After "inquiring about the crowns and accoutrements of the Persians and having models of them constructed for him" (sec. 3600), he chose a crown similar to that of Anušervān. In 323/935, he was assassinated by members of his Turkish guard (*Moruj* V, secs. 3577-601).

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