



## NAŞR (I) B. AĦMAD (I) B. ESMĀ'IL

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**NAŞR (I) B. AĦMAD (I) B. ESMĀ'IL**, Amir-e Sa'īd "The Fortunate Amir," a title he was given after his death, ruler of the Samanid dynasty (q.v.) in Transoxiana and Khorasan between 301/914 and 331/943. The reign of his father AĦmad (295-301/907-14), called Amir-e Šahid "the Martyr Amir," was brought to a quick and sudden end when he was murdered by his own *golāms*; some sources say that these slave troops had been dissatisfied at the pious AĦmad's dependence on the ulema, and his changing the official language in the *divāns* from Persian to Arabic (Naršaki, pp. 110-11; tr. Frye, pp. 94-5; Barthold, *Turkestan*3, p. 240; Frye, "The Sāmānids," p. 141).

Naşr succeeded his father on 11 Jomādā II 301/12 January 914 when he was just eight years old. At the outset, governance was in the hands of highly competent individuals, namely the vizier Abu 'Abd-Allāh Moĥammad b. AĦmad Jayhāni, who was famed as a scholar and geographer as well as an administrator, and the commander-in-chief of the army, Ħamuya b. 'Ali. Nevertheless, the succession of a child led inevitably to a series of revolts by discontented Samanid princes and ambitious military commanders. The new Amir's great-uncle Eşĥāq b. Esmā'il emerged from his imprisonment under Amir AĦmad to rebel immediately in Samarqand, asserting his own claim to the throne and minting coins in his own name (Naršaki, tr. p. 155, n. 325); together with his sons Elyās and Maņşur and attracted considerable support from the populace of Samarqand. According to Naršaki (pp. 111-12; tr. p. 95)



and Ebn al-Aṭir (VIII, p. 80), Ḥamuya b. 'Ali had to lead two expeditions to Samarqand (according to Gardizi there was only one expedition, ed. Nazim, p. 26, ed. Ḥabibi, pp. 150-51) before Eshāq was finally captured and taken to Bukhara. His son Maṣur, who had in the previous reign led a Samanid army into Sistān, also led a rebellion, this time in Khorasanian towns, most notably in Nišāpur. He died before Naşr's troops could dislodge him, but the revolt in Khorasan was continued by Maṣur's commander Ḥosayn b. 'Ali Marvazi, and the outbreak was not suppressed until 305/918 (Narşaki, p. 112; tr. p. 95 and p. 155, n. 326; Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, pp. 87-9). Eshāq's other son Elyās had fled to Farġāna after the end of the Samarqand revolt, and eventually himself rebelled there in 310/922. This was easily suppressed by an army sent from Bukhara under Abu 'Amr Moḥammad b. Asad. Elyās tried unsuccessfully to continue his resistance from Šāš with the aid of the governor for the Samanids there, Abu'l-Faẓl b. Abi Yusof. He fled to Kāšġar under the protection of the local *dehqān* (petty landowner) who had the Turkish name of Toġan-tegin (an Uyghur magnate?), but eventually returned to Bukhara under a guarantee of *amān*, or immunity from punishment, from his cousin Naşr (Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, p. 96; Barthold, *Turkestan3*, p. 241).

By the time Naşr was approaching manhood, the Samanid lands finally became peaceful, with the celebrated Abu'l-Faẓl Moḥammad b. 'Obayd-Allāh Bal'ami (q.v.) assuming the vizierate in around 310/922. According to Narşaki (p. 112; tr. p. 95), the Friday sermon (*koṭba*) was given in Naşr's name not only in the Samanid heartlands but also in Fārs, Kermān, Ṭabarestān, Gorgān and 'Erāq [-e 'Ajam] (i.e. Ray and northern Persia; see below). This peace was interrupted in around 318/930 by a further rebellion, this time led by Amir Naşr's own brothers, three of whom, Yaḥyā, Ebrāhim and Maṣur, he had prudently imprisoned in the citadel of Bukhara. With the help of a baker and seditious elements, consisting, according to Ebn al-Aṭir, of Deylamites, 'Alids and *'ayyārs*, who were led by the aforementioned Ḥosayn b. 'Ali Marvazi, the three brothers escaped from captivity, seized the city and proclaimed Yaḥyā as Amir. The vizier Bal'ami managed to sow dissension among the rebels, and with the support of loyal troops, Naşr's authority eventually prevailed (Gardizi, ed. Nazim, p. 26; ed. Ḥabibi, p. 150; Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, pp. 208-11). The province of Khorasan was now entrusted to the local magnate of Čaġāniyān, the Moḥtājīd Abu Bakr Moḥammad, and after him, his son Abu 'Ali, thus beginning the ascendancy of the Čaġānis in Khorasan for the subsequent decades (Gardizi, ed. Nazim, p. 31; ed. Ḥabibi, p. 153; Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, p. 356; Barthold, *Turkestan3*, p. 242).



Naşr emerges from the sources as someone who lacked an incisive personality, and an anecdote in Bayhaqī (ed. Fayyāz, pp. 126-28) shows him as irascible, but he was well served by his commanders, who came from both the indigenous Iranian *dehqān* classes of Khorasan and Transoxiana, like the Čaġānis, and the ranks of the Turkish military slave institution in the Samanid army, like the Simjuris. Khorasan had been secured for the Samanids on the overthrow of 'Amr b. Layṭ in 287/900 and was held under a caliphal grant, hence subsequent Samanid efforts were now directed westwards, with the aims of securing Ray as the gateway to Jebāl and of exerting overlordship in the Caspian provinces. Already by 298/910-11, the commander Moġammad b. 'Ali Őo'luk had been installed in Ray as a Samanid vassal, and Amir AĦmad had made him governor of Ṭabarestān as well (Ebn Esfandiār, tr. Browne, p. 199; Miles, p. 135). Moġammad b. 'Ali tried unsuccessfully to dislodge the 'Alid Ḥasan b. 'Ali Oṭruš from Ṭabarestān in 302/914-15 (Ṭabari, III, p. 2292; tr. F. Rosenthal, pp. 204-05; Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, p. 86). Although there are no genuine Samanid coins extant from the Ray/al-Moġammadiya mint before 313-314/925-27, Moġammad b. 'Ali had certainly held the city intermittently for at least the previous ten years. On his death in 316/928, Ray was coveted by various Deylamite adventurers who succeeded in holding the city at times, such as [Asfār b. Őiruya](#) and Mākān b. Kāki, followed by Mardāvij b. Ziār and his brother Vošmgir, whose authority was however disputed by the growing power of the Buyid brothers. It was not until Abu 'Ali Čaġāni arrived in 329/940 with a powerful army that the allied forces of Mākān and Vošmgir were defeated, and the former was killed (Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, pp. 369-71; Miles, p. 151). Samanid coins re-appear from the Ray mint from 329/940-41 to Naşr's death two years later, although a new, more dangerous opponent of the Samanids was to emerge in northern Persia in the person of the Buyid Rokn-al-Dawla.

Samanid successes in the Caspian lands against the Zaydi Imams and various of the Jilite and Deylamite condottieri mentioned above were only intermittent. Amongst the latter, Asfār and Mākān functioned at times as governors for the Samanids in Ṭabarestān and Gorgān, in an endeavour to ward off Buyid pressure, and Mardāvij also at one point recognised Naşr's supremacy. The Zaydi 'Alids fell into internecine disarray after Oṭruš's death in 304/917 (Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, p. 105). The Imam Abu Ja'far Nāşer, grandson of Oṭruš, was eventually deported by Asfār to be imprisoned in Bukhara, but he escaped in the course of the 318/930 rebellion there. Eventually, Abu Ja'far retired under the Buyids of Ray, but Zaydi dominion in the Caspian provinces



had ended. Gorgān and Ṭabarestān were secured for Naşr by Abu 'Alī Čaġāni in 328/939-40, and after the Amir's death they were mostly controlled by the Ziyarids, descendants of Voşmgir, with the Buyids and Samanids disputing for overlordship there (Ebn Esfandiār, tr. Browne, pp. 218-19; Madelung, pp. 209-12).

The mention of 'Alid participation in the revolt at Bukhara in around 318/930 (see above) suggests that there may have been a significant presence of Shi'ites in the city; one would expect them to have belonged to the Ja'fari mainstream of Shi'ism, on the basis of the references to 'Alid family groupings and centers of influence in historico-biographical works, such as those of Ḥākem Nişāburi and Ebn al-Bayye' for Nişāpur, and Ebn Fondoq for Bayhaq. The later works of Ebn al-Nadim and Neẓām-al-Molk mention activity by Isma'ili radical Shi'ites towards the end of Naşr's reign, culminating in conversions at the court of the Amir himself. However, historical sources such as the works of Narşaki and Gardizi and the sources used by Ebn al-Aṭir for Khorasanian history, make no mention of this at all. According to a lengthy story in the first of these two sources, Fatimid *dā'is*, or propagandists, penetrated into Khorasan and Transoxiana and converted the commander Ḥosayn b. 'Alī Marvazi and Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Naḳşabi (or Nasafi) in Transoxiana. Naḳşabi converted high-level members of the court circle, culminating in his winning over the Amir himself to Isma'ilism. This alarmed the orthodox Sunni ulema who made common cause with the Amir's Turkish *ġolāms* (military slaves) against the heretics. Naşr's son Nuḥ frustrated a plot by the commanders to assassinate his father, but the latter agreed to abdicate in Nuḥ's favour and died shortly afterwards. A general massacre of the Isma'ilis and their converts, including their leader Naḳşabi, soon followed, with the consequence that henceforth Isma'ilism survived only underground in Khorasan and Transoxiana (Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 267-75; tr. H. Darke, pp. 212-18). In the much briefer account given by Ebn al-Nadim, the new convert Amir Naşr agrees at first to pay an indemnity to the Fatimid Caliph al-Qā'em as reparation for the killing of Ḥosayn b. 'Alī Marvazi, but on his sickbed he repents of his conversion and orders the slaughter of the Isma'ilis and their converts (p. 239; tr. Dodge, I, pp. 467-68; cf. Barthold, pp. 242-44; Stern, pp. 77-80). It is difficult to see the episode as the pure invention of anti-Fatimid Sunni sources, but the exact extent of the inroads made by an Isma'ili *da'wa* at this time remains unknown.

Naşr died of tuberculosis on 27 Rajab 331/6 April 943 at the age of thirty-eight (in lunar years), having withdrawn from public life at the onset of his illness to



spend the rest of his days in pious retreat. He was succeeded by his son Nuḥ (Ebn al-Aṭir, VIII, p. 401). Much of the political and military achievement of his reign must be attributed, as noted above, to his skilful commanders and competent viziers from the Bal'ami and Jayhāni families, whose long periods in office provided invaluable continuity. Bal'ami had handed the vizierate over to Abu 'Ali Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Jayhāni in 326/938, according to Ebn al-Aṭir (VIII, p. 378), but according to Gardizi (ed. Nazim, p. 32; ed. Ḥabibi, p. 154), this happened only on the death of the Amir.

Naşr's reign has been described by Frye as a golden age for the florescence of both Arabic and New Persian culture within his court circle, though the figures of his viziers were more prominent than the monarch himself ("The Sāmānids," pp. 142-42; idem, 1997, pp. 56ff.). Nevertheless, as shown by Ṭā'ālebi's sections on the writers of Khorasan and Transoxiana in his *Yatimat al-dahr*, there was a brilliant concourse of poets and literary men at the Bukharan court at this time. For a fuller consideration of the cultural history of the time, see SAMANIDS.

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