Published: January 1, 2000
Last Updated: February 5, 2014

SAFFARIDS

SAFFARIDS, a dynasty of medieval Islamic eastern Iran which ruled from 247/861 to 393/1003. From a base in their home province of Sistān, the first Saffarids built up a vast if transient military empire which at one point stretched from the borders of Afghanistan and India in the east to Fārs, Ahvāz and the fringes of Iraq in the west, at one point invading Iraq and threatening Baghdad. Even after the fall of the second Saffarid Amir, ʿAmr b. Layṯ, his immediate successors retained control of all southern Persia, i.e., Kermān, Fārs and Ahvāz. It was only after the toppling from power by the Samanids of this first line of Saffarids (who may be distinguished as the Laythids, the descendants of Yaʿqub's and ʿAmr's father Layṯ) that the political authority of the subsequent and second line (who may be termed the Khalafids, from the grandfather of the restored Amir Abu Jaʿfar Aḥmad, Ḵalaf) was reduced to the Sistān and Bost regions of southern Afghanistan.

The significance of the Saffarids. The first Saffarids, Yaʿqub and ʿAmr b. Layṯ, have a significance in Islamic history disproportionate to the mere forty years or so of their power. Their rise marks the first significant breach in the territorial integrity of the ʿAbbasid universal caliphate (if we except the appearance of the Idrisid *šarif*s of Morocco in the remote west). The Tahirid governors in Khorasan arose from the official and military entourage of the caliphs, were congenial to the Sunni orthodox *ʿolamāʾ*, and followed the prevailing administrative ethos in that they fully acknowledged their subordinate status as governors wielding a power which had been delegated to them by the caliphs; in practice, they enjoyed autonomy, but were always

deferential to their suzerains and regularly forward tribute to the capital. A similar status can be imputed to Yaʿqub's and ʿAmr's contemporary in Egypt and Syria, the Turkish commander of the caliph, Aḥmad b. Tulun. The first two Saffarids, however, attained power with no advantages of birth or official connections but solely by the sword. Because of the long-established strains of heterodoxy in Sistān and Khorasan. especially of Kharijism (see below), they were accused of sympathizing with these strains by the ʿAbbasid official and religious classes, even though Yaʿqub and ʿAmr rose out of groups expressly formed to uphold Sunni orthodoxy and combat Kharijism. Above all, they were plebeians, and Yaʿqub in particular openly proclaimed his mistrust of and contempt for the ʿAbbasids and their representatives, according to the *Tārik̲-e Sistān*, pp. 267-68, tr. p. 213, Yaʿqub "used often to say that the ʿAbbasids had based their rule on treachery and trickery – 'Don't you see what they did to Abu Salama, Abu Moslem, the Barmakid family and Faẓl b. Sahl, despite everything which these men had done on the dynasty's behalf? Let no-one ever trust them!'"

Hence the standard historical sources for the Saffarids, Arabic and then Persian also, are unfavorable to the Saffarids as being a disturbing force in the fabric of Sunni authority and society and as being little better than brigands, with the exception of Masʿudi, whose Shiʿite views led him to appraise Yaʿqub's military prowess more sympathetically (see *Moruj* VIII, pp. 46-55), and some of Ebn Ḵallekān's sources. Fortunately, the anonymous local history, the *Tārik̲-e Sistān*, compiled substantially in the mid-5th/11th century, hence only two generations after the demise of the Saffarids, supplies a corrective, for the author's local patriotism leads him to delineate with obvious pride the achievements of Yaʿqub and ʿAmr in rearing such a mighty imperial structure by force of arms, as military leaders of great talent who, for a while, made the peripheral and rather obscure province of Sistān the center of a mighty empire (see Meisami, *Persian Historiography*, 109-40ʿ Bosworth, "Sistan and its Local Histories," 34-39).

The two Saffarid lines. Sistān began to slip away from ʿAbbasid authority from the end of the 8th century onwards, when Khorasan was racked by the prolonged Kharijite rebellion of Ḥamza b. Āḏarak or ʿAbd-Allāh (d. 213/828), himself a native of Sistān, which successive caliphs were unable to quell. Resentment against the financial exactions of the caliphs and their agents likewise grew in Sistān, with Kharijites active in the Sistān countryside and in eastern Afghanistan. ʿAbbasid authority was maintained in Zarang by the

governors there of the Tahirids, but their power hardly extended beyond the capital. In this atmosphere, the upholders of political orthodoxy and the Sunna coalesced into vigilante bands against the Kharijites, called *motatawweʿa* "voluntary fighters for the faith," a term which seems to have been largely coterminous with that of the urban elements known as *ʿayyār*s (Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs*, pp. 87-107ʿ idem, "The Tahirids and Saffarids,", pp. 108-09)ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 67-71).

Yaʿqub and his several brothers, of whom notably ʿAmr and ʿAli, the sons of Layṯ, arose from these bands. They were local men, and Yaʿqub had followed the humble trade of coppersmith (*ṣaffār*, whence the dynasty's name, *ruygar*) but now adopted the profession of arms. Yaʿqub rose in the entourages of the *ʿayyār* chiefs of the Sistān and Bost regions, Ṣāleḥ b. Nazr or Naṣr and then of Derham b. Nazr or Naṣr, who opposed the official governor in Zarang. Ebrāhim b. Hozayn was driven out, and ʿAbbasid power dispelled from the capital for over fifty years. In the internal powers struggles of *ʿayyār* leaders, Yaʿqub emerged the victor, and was hailed as Amir by the army of Sistān in 247/861 (Barthold, "Zur Geschichte der Saffāriden," pp. 176-85ʿ idem, *Turkestan*[3], pp. 215-16ʿ Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs*, pp. 112-18ʿ idem, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," p. 109ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 71-75).

His first care was to secure the lands to the east of Sistān and Bost, what is now eastern Afghanistan. He pursued and killed Sāleh b. Nazr, and he defeated the local ruler in Roḵḵaj and Zamindāvar, the Zunbil (whose personal name is unknown) (250-51/865), and then mounted major raids in 255-56/869-70 or shortly afterwards through Zābolestān, the region of Ghazna, as far as Kabul on the first occasion, and again to Kabul on the second occasion and thence to Bāmiān and Balkh, attacking there the local rulers of Toḵārestān, the Abu Dawudids or Banijurids. Although the Zunbils exercised power for some time to come, and remained a barrier to the penetration of Islam through their lands, it is likely that Yaʿqub's campaigns here paved the way for the subsequent islamization of the Indian borderlandsʿ the raids certainly procured for him much booty in the form of slaves and of idols and other temple treasures (Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs*, pp. 119-21ʿ idem, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 109-12ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 76, 83-108).

The rewards from such raids were limited and sporadic. Much more alluring for Yaʿqub was the steady growth of tax yield of such rich provinces north and west of Sistān as Khorasan and Kermān (the latter an administrative

dependency of the Tahirids), and Fārs and Ahvāz (held by caliphal governors). Yaʿqub killed the leader of the Kharijites of northern Sistān, ʿAmmār b. Yāser, in 251/865, secured the lands directly north of Sistān, and subsequently operated in the regions of Bādgis and Gar□estān, also strongholds of militant Kharijites, subduing local bands by a mixture of force *majeure* and conciliation, the latter measures including the incorporation of these sectarians into his own forces, within which they formed a separate unitʿ he was thereby able to supplement the limited manpower available from Sistān. He now struck directly at the Tahirids, first occupying Herat (253/867) and then taking over their capital Nišāpur. The newly-appointed Tahirid governor, Moḥammad b. Ṭāher b. ʿAbd-Allāh, was seriously embarrassed by an anti-caliphal Shiʿite *daʿwa* proclaimed by the Hasanid Imam Ḥosayn b. Zayd in Gorgān, Ṭabarestān and Ruyān. Negotiations over the release of members of the Tahirid family and their partisans brought Yaʿqub for the first time into direct contact with the ʿAbbasids over their release. Moḥammad b. Ṭāher had made no headway against the Zaydi Imam, and Yaʿqub was able to claim a certain justification for his intervention at Nišāpur in 259/873, though his own pursuit of Ḥosayn b. Zayd in the Caspian coastlands had no lasting result either (Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 102-03, 114-16ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 77-83, 108-35).

His expansion into southern Persia, lured by the financial richness of Fārs and Ahvāz, had more eventual success, and Kermān and Fārs proved some of the most lasting of Saffarid conquests; Fārs became a prolific mint of the Saffarids, with a long series of dirhams extending more than thirty years from 264/877-78, mainly from Shiraz (□*irāz*/*Madinat Fārs*) and other centers (Vasmer, "Über die Münzen der Saffāriden und ihrer Gegner in Fārs und Khurāsān," pp. 134-36, 155-58). Yaʿqub invaded Kermān (actually a dependency of the Tahirids) in 255/869, but the distractions of expeditions to the Indian borderlands and to Khorasan delayed his return thither till 261/875, when Yaʿqub appeared in Fārs and defeated the local magnate Moḥammad b. Wāṣel. He then turned to Rāmhormoz and Ahvāz, from there threatening Lower Iraq and raising the specter, in caliphal circles, of a Saffarid alliance with the Zanj rebels there, although it does not seem that any formal agreement on a united anti-caliphal front was ever made with the Zanj leader. Yaʿqub pushed on to Wasit, only to be decisively defeated by the Regent Mowaffaq at Dayr al-ʿāqul to the southeast of Baghdad (262/876). The Saffarid threat to Baghdad was lifted, but Yaʿqub remained firmly in control of Fārs and Ahvāz, dying of natural causes at Jondišābur (see GONDĒŠĀPUR) three

years later, whilst the Zanj remained undefeated in Lower Iraq (Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids,", pp. 112-16ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 135-68. See, for a more detailed account of Yaʿqub's career, YAʿQUB B. LAYṮ and the further sources given there).

His brother ʿAmr, variously described as having been a mule-hirer (*mokāri*) and a stone mason (*bannāʾ*), succeeding to Yaʿqub's power after intriguing against and setting aside the only other remaining son of Layṯ, ʿAli, who had in fact been Yaʿqub's choice for his successor. The example of Yaʿqub meant that ʿAmr had to impose his own personality as a war leader of equal caliber, and had to recover lands lost to Saffarid control through Yaʿqub's preoccupations in the west during the latter part of his life. At the outset, unsure of his position, ʿAmr perpetuated the fiction, expressed in the grants of provinces to Yaʿqub when the ʿAbbasids were hard pressed by circumstances, that the Saffarids were deputies for the caliph, and ʿAmr received from Moʿtamed a vast array of provinces in return for annual tribute of a million dirhams, and the offices of *ṣāḥeb-al-šorṭa* or commander of the guard in Baghdad and Samarra (which ʿAmr exercised through a deputy, ʿObayd-Allāh b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṭāher, who was hostile to his kinsman Moḥammad b. Tāher), and *amir-al-hajj* or leader of the Pilgrimage (also exercised through a deputy); such an agreement was convenient for the ʿAbbasids, still embroiled with the Zanj rebels (Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 116-17; idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 181-89).

In general, ʿAmr followed a more conciliatory policy than his brother had done, and with some measure of official approval thus secured, was able to concentrate on regaining the lost territories. ʿAmr's control over Fārs and Kermān was fairly continuous throughout his reign, as attested by his coins from the local mints (Vasmer, *op. cit*., pp. 140-45), but the recovery of the lost territories proved a lengthy process. On the evidence of the cessation of minting of Saffarid coins at Panjšir, Yaʿqub had lost control of northeastern Afghanistan by his later years, and ʿAmr was only able briefly to re-impose Saffarid control there towards the very end of his reign. Khorasan had been likewise lost to Yaʿqub soon after his move westwards, and had been taken over by a former commander of the Saffarids, Aḥmad Ḵojestāni, who now had the ambition of carving out a principality for himself as the Saffarids had done in Sistān. A Tahirid, Moḥammad's brother Ḥosayn, appeared briefly in Khorasan (Moḥammad, escaping in the confusion after Yaʿqub's defeat in Iraq, remained at Baghdad in a more secure post and declined to risk returning to

Khorasan), but could make no headway. Other contenders included Rāfeʿ b. Ḥrṯama, a former soldier of the Tahirids who had gone over to Yaʿqub but was now pursuing his own interests in Khorasan; the three brothers of the arkab family, also former commanders in Yaʿqub's army, and a former slave commander Abu Ṭalha. A complex series of struggles for control of Khorasan now ensued, during which, as the virtual absence of Saffarid coins minted in Khorasan shows, Saffarid authority hardly ever prevailed there. Ḵojestāni was killed in 268/882, and Saffarid authority was momentarily reimposed at Nišāpur and even in Isfahan, but fresh contenders for power now arose in Khorasan ʿAmr himself came under pressure from caliphal forces once Mowaffaq had mastered the Zanj (270/883). He was denounced and publicly cursed as a rebel throughout the caliphal lands, and in 272/885 suffered a severe defeat in Fārs, being driven back temporarily to the borders of Sistān itself. But because of threats to the caliphate from the Tulunids and the Byzantines in Syria. Mowaffaq was forced to make peace with ʿAmr. The latter's governorships were restored, together with the *šorṭa* of Baghdad, which once more was exercised for him b. ʿObayd-Allāh b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Tāher; but it took him until 283/896 to defeat and dislodge the most serious of his opponents in Khorasan, Rāfeʿ b. Harṯama, who was subsequently killed in Ḵʷārazm, and at last to restore Saffarid rule in Khorasan (Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 117-20; idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 209-12, 217-25).

This was the apogee of his power, and the caliph had to re-invest him with all the territories which he held at that time, now with the addition of Ray. However, not content with all these lands, ʿAmr's unbounded ambition led him into a clash with the Samanids. In 285/898 ʿAmr secured from the caliph Moʿtažed yet a further grant, this time of Transoxania. This could only be wrested from the Samanids by force, so ʿAmr prepared for war with Esmāʿil b. Aḥmad. He tried to turn the flank of the Samanids by sending an army to Ḵʷārazm, but this had to turn back when a Samanid force threatened to block its path. He did secure the adhesion to his standard of various minor potentates of the upper Oxus lands, but Esmāʿil massed his troops, crossed the Oxus and in 287/900 defeated ʿAmr's army outside Balkh, capturing the Saffarid Amir and overturning Saffarid power in a single day; this dramatic reversal of ʿAmr's fortunes gave rise to many folkloric details about the events surrounding the battle. Though Esmāʿil was technically in rebellion against the caliph's representative ʿAmr, Moʿtažed cannot have been displeased at ʿAmr's downfall. The latter was sent into captivity at Baghdad and killed there

in 289/902, either at the very end of Moʿtažed's reign or on the first day of the new caliph, Moktafi's, reign (Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," p. 121; idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 225-32, 234-35. See, for a more detailed account of ʿAmr's career, ʿAMR B. LAYS (and sources cited there).

The two brothers Yaʿqub and ʿAmr were energetic and skilful commanders, who personally led simple and frugal lives; Yaʿqub is said to have slept on an old saddle cloth and to have eaten coarse food, the staples of Sagzi diet: barley bread, rice, leeks, onions, asafetida and fish (Barthold, *Turkestan*[3], pp. 218-19ʿ Bosworth, "The Armies of the Saffarids," pp. 536-37). They had in the Saffarid army a powerful military machine, of whose smooth running they were always solicitous. The original core of the army came from the *ʿayyār* bands, whilst former Kharijites from northern Sistān and Bād@gis were at an early date incorporated by Yaʿqub into his army as a special unit, the *jayš-al-šorāt*. Successful generals always attracted mercenary troops, eager for plunder, from far and wide, so that the Saffarid army speedily became, like those of contemporary powers such as the ʿAbbasid caliphate, multi-ethnic. A group of Arabs is mentioned under Yaʿqub and ʿAmr, as also an Indian contingentʿ the leader of this group, an Indian stemming from Yaʿqub's army, played a significant role in the confused events in Sistān of the interval between the "first" and "second" lines of Amirs (see below). Also following a contemporary trend of military organization in the eastern Islamic world was the Saffarids' use of slave troops. We know that the "lands of unbelief" on the fringes of India provided considerable numbers of slave captives, and the commander Sebük-eri, who governed Fārs and aspired to the role of king-maker in the years after ʿAmr's downfall, had been captured in eastern Afghanistan by Yaʿqub in the course of one of his expeditions against the Zunbil. Such slaves as these, and possibly also Turkish ones ultimately from the Inner Asian steppes, were used as cavalrymen and as a personal guard for the Amirs, corresponding to the "palace ghulams" of Samanid and Ghaznavid military usage. Yaʿqub is said to have had a special interest in the upbringing and training of young slaves; when Nišāpur was captured from the Tahirids, the Amir fitted out his ghulams with rich clothing and gold and silver weapons taken from the treasuries there, and used them to impress the populace (Bosworth, op. cit., pp. 536-52).

Yaʿqub managed to leave behind at his death a treasury of four million dinars and fifty million dirhams, and ʿAmr is said to have had a system of three treasuries to provide for all eventualities. In particular, ʿAmr is praised in certain sources for the efficiency of his administrative system, which included the gathering of intelligence through a network of agents and spies, and the tightness of his financial controls and accounting procedures (Gardizi, p. 143-44; Barthold, *Turkestan*[3], pp. 218, 221-22; Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 236-37). Both Yaʿqub and ʿAmr were solicitous of the welfare and battle effectiveness of their troops. They were careful that regular pay was given out, at special reviews (*ʿarz*), when weapons, mounts and equipment, from those of the Amir himself downwards, were inspected. Ebn Ḵallekān's source Sallāmi gives a detailed description of these sessions, and compares ʿAmr's army reviews explicitly with those held by the Sasanid emperor Ḵosrow Anušervān (Gardizi, p. 143; *Wafayāt*, VI, pp. 421-22, tr. IV, 322-23ʿ Barthold, op. cit., p. 221; Bosworth, "The Armies of the Saffarids," pp. 549-51).

The Saffarid empire by no means collapsed totally when ʿAmr was defeated and captured, although Khorasan immediately passed into the possession of

the Samanids, and was to remain theirs for almost a century. Explicit information is lacking, but there was almost certainly a resurgence of power for such indigenous non-Muslim dynasties of the Afghan-Indian fringes, such as the Kābol-šāhs and the Zunbils or their epigone. ʿAmr was succeeded in Zarang by his grandson Ṭāher b. Moḥammad b. ʿAmr, who ruled in effect jointly with his brother Yaʿqub, but there was a faction within Sistān which favored the claims of Layṯ's son ʿAli, the brother of Yaʿqub and ʿAmr, who had been sidelined by ʿAmr when he seized power. But effective power in the amirate was no longer exercised by the two Saffarids themselves but by the Turkish slave commander Sebük-eri, who came to promote his own independent interests. Meanwhile, Saffarid authority continued to be exercised over Kermān, and an expedition was sent into Fārs to re-establish rule there (288/901) and possibly another one in the next year, with Sebük-eri remaining in Fārs as governor for the Saffarids there, in whose name coins continued to be minted and for whom taxation was collected and forwarded to Zarang (*Tārik̲-e Sistān*, pp. 257-60, 273-5, tr. pp. 203-07, 217-20; Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," p. 122; idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 243-49). It even seems, on the evidence of Ṭāher's name appearing as suzerain on local coins, that local Arab rulers in Oman recognized Saffarid overlordship; it is possible, though tangible evidence is lacking, that this acknowledgement went back to ʿAmr's later years (Vasmer, "Zur Geschichte und Münzkunde von ʿOmān im X. Jahrhundert," pp. 275, 277).

The sources stigmatize Ṭāher and Yaʿqub as pleasure-lovers who emptied the treasury on building palaces and gardens and on other luxuries, so that their grip on public affairs weakened and the power of Sebük-eri rose *pari passu*. By 292/905, the latter had ceased to forward the revenues collected in Kermān and Fārs to Zarang, although he continued to mint coins at Shiraz in Ṭāher's name. Layṯ b. ʿAli b. Layṯ acquired increased military backing in Sistān for his claims, whilst Ṭāher's authority ebbed away. In 296/909 Layṯ was hailed as Amir by the army of Sistān. The deposed Ṭāher and Yaʿqub fled, hoping for Sebük-eri's support and protection, but the latter pursued his own interests entirely, seized the two Saffarids and sent them to Baghdad, where they henceforth resided in honored status at the caliphal court. Layṯ now had to face Sebük-eri. He led an expedition into Fārs to secure that province from the commander, but was defeated by Sebük-eri, captured and likewise sent into captivity at Baghdad (297/910). Back in Sistān, Layṯ's brother Moḥammad assumed power in Zarang, but had to face claims from a further brother, Moʿaddal, who managed to seize control in Zarang (298/911). In the previous

year, the caliph Moqtader had made a grant of Sistān to the Samanid Amir Aḥmad b. Esmāʿil. The latter now came with an army to Bost, and ejected and captured Moḥammad, whilst his Aḥmad's general Ḥosayn b. ʿAli Marvarruḏi deposed Moʿaddal in Zarang. This first Samanid occupation accordingly marks the end of the "first line" of Saffarids (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 276-94, tr. pp. 220-38ʿ Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids, pp. 122-24ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 249-66).

A period of confusion in Sistān now followed, with a succession of *ʿayyār* leaders and local warlords jostling for power and reacting against the unpopular Samanid governor Manṣur b. Eshāq. On one occasion, a certain Moḥammad b. Hormoz, called Mawlā Sandali, a former mawlā of Moḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Layṯ, raised briefly to power as his puppet a great-grandson of ʿAmr b. Layṯ, thereby provoking a second Samanid invasion of Sistān in 299/912 and subsequent occupation under the governorship of Simjur Davāti (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 297-310, tr. 240-52ʿ Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids,", pp. 130-31ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 267-82). Eventually, the *ʿayyār* leaders threw off Samanid suzerainty and raised to power a collateral member of the Saffarid family, Abu Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. Moḥammad b. Ḵalaf, who was connected through his mother Bānu, daughter of Moḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Layṯ, with the "first line" of Laythids, and his long reign of some forty years (311-52/923-62) inaugurates the "second line" or Khalafids. Abu Jaʿfar's dominions were much truncated. Fārs had reverted to caliphal governors, but the new Amir asserted his authority in Bost, where Turkish ghulam officers from the following of the former Samanid commander Qarategin had established themselves, and on one occasion Aḥmad sent an army into Kermān to collect taxation (317/929)ʿ both Fārs and Kermān were, however, shortly to pass permanently under Buyid control. The middle years of Abu Jaʿfar's reign were regarded as golden ones for Sistān. It does not seem that Abu Jaʿfar ever forwarded tribute to Bukhara, and the Samanids seem to have regarded him as a sovereign of equal status to themselvesʿ concerning Rudaki's celebrated ode addressed to the Amir, see below. Alone of the sources, the *Tāriḵ-e Sistān* records a raid mounted by the Amir which reached as far as Ray (pp. 315-16, tr. pp. 257-58). The last years of Abu Jaʿfar's reign were characterized by a growth within Sistān of unrest and factionalism (*taʿaṣṣob*) and by the increased influence of the commander-in-chief, Abu'l-Fath, culminating in the Amir's murder by his own ghulams in 352/963 (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 310-27, tr. pp. 252-68ʿ Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 130-31ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 267-82).

He was succeeded by his son Ḵalaf, the last and most noted of the line (for his role as a scholar and patron of learning, see below, 3.). During the opening years of his reign, Ḵalaf was absent from Sistān for a prolonged period of study and pilgrimage, so that his royal power was shared with a kinsman, Abu'l-Ḥosayn Ṭāher b. Moḥammad. When Ḵalaf returned in 358/969, he had difficulty in resuming his power from Ṭāher and then, after Ṭāher's death, from the latter's son Ḥosayn, who at times enjoyed support from the Samanids and actually brought in a Samanid army in 369/979. Only with Ḥosayn's death in 373/983 did Ḵalaf become complete master in his own house, but after then his position was becoming threatened by the rising power of the Ghaznavid Sebüktegin, who had already taken over Bost and had been on one occasion invited to intervene in Sistān by Ḥosayn. Also, to the north of Sistān, Sebüktegin and his son Maḥmud were consolidating their position in Khorasan during the 380s/990s. Ḵalaf's own erratic and tyrannical behavior, which included putting to death his own son Tāher, alienated popular support within Sistān. Feelings grew in favor of the Ghaznavids, so that Maḥmud was in 393/1003 able to march into Sistān, defeat the Amir and carry him off to the Ghaznavid lands, where he later died in captivity. Sistān now became a province of the Ghaznavid empire, and the once-mighty Saffarid house was extinguished (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 327-54, tr. pp. 268-89ʿ Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 132-35ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 301-39. For a more detailed account of Ḵalaf's reign, see ḴALAF B. AḤMAD and the further sources given there).

Cultural life under the Saffarids. Their military careers, filled with eventfulness, left Yaʿqub and ʿAmr little opportunity – if they had had the inclination anyway – to cultivate the arts of peace. But all wielders of power in mediaeval Islam willy-nilly attracted to themselves followings of poets and littérateurs who eulogized their masters; virtues and exploits, and the early Saffarids were no exception to this process. Yaʿqub's early success against the Kharijite bands of northern Afghanistan and his overthrow of the Tahirids seem to have prompted poets to compose panegyrics on him (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, p. 209, tr. pp. 166-67), but these were in Arabic, which the Amir could not understand. Therefore, continues the local history, Yaʿqub's chief secretary, Moḥammad b. Wāṣef, began writing verses in the vernacular, i.e., New Persian, lauding his master's subjugation of the Kharijites and his campaigns against the Zunbil (pp. 209-10, tr. p. 167ʿ Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 176-77). However, this source's assertion that Moḥammad b. Wāṣef was the first poet to compose verse in New Persian is less sustainable, since the idea of vernacular

poetry in meters based on the Arabic *ʿaruz* system seems to have been generally in the air in the mid-3rd/8th century; accordingly, it seems difficult to accord the early Saffarids a place in the revival of New Persian literature comparable to the roles of e.g. the Samanids, the Caspian dynasties and the Buyids (Lazard, *Les premiers poètes persans*, I, pp. 10ff., 18). Of historical interest is a consideration of the early Saffarids' eulogists as the expressers of a certain sense of Persian proto-nationalism. Connected with Saffarid expansion westwards into the caliphal lands is the Arabic poem of a secretary of the ʿAbbasids, Abu Eshāq Ebrāhim b. Mamšāḏ, who at some point went over to Yaʿqub when the latter was being borne on the crest of military successes in Persia. The poem was carefully analyzed by S.M. Stern, who noted its assertion of Yaʿqub's illustrious origins in Persian legendary history times, and its anti-Arab message and call to Yaʿqub to revive the ancient glories of the Persians. The skeptical Amir cannot have swallowed all this, but the poem is indicative of the appeal of such nations at this time (see Stern, "Yaʿqub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," pp. 535-55ʿ Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran," pp. 59-60ʿ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 177-80). Moḥammad b. Wāṣef remained active in ʿAmr's court circle, and wrote a poem celebrating the Amir's final crushing of Rāfeʿ b. Harṯama in 283/896 (Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, p. 239).

By the middle decades of the 4th/10th century, the New Persian literary renaissance was in full sway. Though now more circumscribed in their political power, the Amirs of the "second line" had a flourishing court culture whose fame reached far outside Sistān. Rudaki recited at the Samanid court in Bokhara a splendid Persian ode eulogizing Abu Jaʿfar Aḥmad as the descendant of Rostam-e Zāl, for which the Amir rewarded him lavishly (*Tārik̲-e Sistān*, pp. 316-24, tr. pp. 258-64ʿ Ross, "a Qasida by Rudaki," pp. 213-37ʿ Bosworth, *op. cit*., pp. 289-91). The traveler and littérateur Abu Dolaf Ḵazraji apparently visited the court in Zarang from Bukharaʿ he praises the Amir's generosity and the fine products of the *ṭerāz* or state manufactory for luxury textiles. Abu Jaʿfar Aḥmad's court circle indeed marks him out as a cultivated and enlightened patron, especially interested in the philosophical sciences, and a leading figure at his court was the great philosopher and logician Abu Solaymān Moḥammad Manṭeqi Sejestāni (d. *ca*. 375/985). Clearly, this sophisticated ruler had in two or three generations moved a long way from the rough-living and untutored sons of Layṯ, so that the Sistān of his time was no longer a cultural backwater but an important component of eastern Islamic cultural life. These new achievements in the intellectual field were continued

with equal vigor by his son and successor Ḵalaf, who achieved an international reputation within the Islamic world as a maecenas and as an encourager of learning and literature. Among his eulogists were the poet and stylist Abu'l-Fatḥ Bosti, and the poet and stylist, famed as the originator of the *maqāma* genre, Badiʿ-al-Zamān Hamadāni, who may have visited Ḵalaf's court and who certainly dedicated to him a *maqāma*, the *Ḵalafīya* one. A selection of *hadith*s made by Ḵalaf himself survives in a Cairo ms. (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 217). But above all, his fame came from the huge, 100-volume Qorʾān commentary which he commissioned from a team of scholars (unfortunately not named). Copies of it are subsequently mentioned as being in libraries at Nišāpur and Isfahan, but not surprisingly, given its immense size, discouraging its being copied, it failed to survive the disorders in Persia of the later 6th/12th century and the devastation of the Mongols and disappeared from existence (Bosworth, *op. cit*., pp. 352-57).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources.

Ebn-al-Aṯir (Beirut), VII-IX. Ebn Ḵallekān, ed. ʿAbbās, VI, pp. 402-32, tr. de Slane, IV, pp. 301-35.

Gardizi, ed. Ḥabibi, pp. 138-45, 164, 166, 170, 175, 177.

Masʿudi, *Moruj* VIII. Ṭabari, III. *Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 189-354, tr. pp. 150-289.

Yaʿqubi, *Taʾriḵ*, II.

Studies.

W. Barthold, "Zur Geschichte der Saffāriden," in *Orientalistische Studien zu Theordor Nöldeke gewidmet*, ed. C. Bezold, Giessen 1906, I, pp. 171-91.

Idem, *Turkestan*[3], pp. 215-22, 224-25.

C.E. Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs, from the Islamic Conquest to the Rise of the Saffarids (30-250/651-864),* Rome, 1968.

Idem, "The Armies of the Saffarids," *BSOAS*, 31, 1968, pp. 534-54.

Idem, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," in *Camb. Hist. Iran,* IV, pp. 106-35.

Idem, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran," *Iran*, 11, 1973, pp. 51-62.

Idem, *The History of the Saffarids and the Maliks of Nimruz*, Costa Mesa and New York, 1975.

Idem, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, Edinburgh, 1996, pp. 172-73 no. 84.

Idem, "Sistan and its Local Histories," *Iranian Studies*, 33, 2000, pp. 31-43.

G. Lazard, *Les premiers poètes persans (IX^e^-X^e^ siècles). Fragments rassemblés, édités et traduits*, Tehran and Paris, 1964.

J.S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh, 1999, pp. 47-140.

M. Nāzim, *The Life and Times of Sultān Maḥmud of Ghazna,* Cambridge, 1931, pp. 67-70, 186-89.

Th. Nöldeke, "Yakúb the Coppersmith and his Dynasty," in *Sketches from Eastern History*, London and Edinburgh, 1892, pp. 176-206.

Sir E. Denison Ross, "A Qasida by Rudaki," *JRAS*, 1926, pp. 213-37.

Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 69-81, 111-12.

S.M. Stern, "Yaʿqub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment," in *Iran and Islam, in Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky,* ed. C.E. Bosworth, Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 535-55.

R. Vasmer, "Zur Geschichte und Münzkunde von ʿOmān im X. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschr. für Numismatik*, 37, 1927, pp. 274-87.

Idem, "Über die Münzen der Saffāriden und ihrer Gegner in Fārs und Hurāsān,", *Numismatische Zeitschr*., N.S. 63, 1930, pp. 131-62.

Originally published June 18, 2010.