



## SAFFARIDS

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**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, ‘Amr b. Layṭ, 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 Ya‘qub’s and ‘Amr’s father Layṭ) that the political authority of the subsequent and second line (who may be termed the Khalafids, from the grandfather of the restored Amir Abu Ja‘far Aḥmad, K̲alaf) was reduced to the Sistān and Bost regions of southern Afghanistan.

*The significance of the Saffarids.* The first Saffarids, **Ya‘qub** and **‘Amr b. Layṭ**, 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 ‘Abbasid universal caliphate (if we except the appearance of the Idrisid *šarifs* 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 *‘olamā*, 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 Ya‘qub’s and ‘Amr’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 ‘Abbasid official and religious classes, even though Ya‘qub and ‘Amr rose out of groups expressly formed to uphold Sunni orthodoxy and combat Kharijism. Above all, they were plebeians, and Ya‘qub in particular openly proclaimed his mistrust of and contempt for the ‘Abbasids and their representatives, according to the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 267-68, tr. p. 213, Ya‘qub “used often to say that the ‘Abbasids had based their rule on treachery and trickery – ‘Don’t you see what they did to Abu Salama, Abu Moslem, the Barmakid family and Faḏl 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 Mas‘udi, whose Shi‘ite views led him to appraise Ya‘qub’s military prowess more sympathetically (see *Moruj* VIII, pp. 46-55), and some of Ebn Ḳallekān’s sources. Fortunately, the anonymous local history, the *Tāriḳ-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 Ya‘qub and ‘Amr 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*, 109-40; Bosworth, “Sistan and its Local Histories,” 34-39).

*The two Saffarid lines.* Sistān began to slip away from ‘Abbasid authority from the end of the 8th century onwards, when Khorasan was racked by the prolonged Kharijite rebellion of Ḥamza b. Āḍarak or ‘Abd-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. ‘Abbasid 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 *motatawwe'a* “voluntary fighters for the faith,” a term which seems to have been largely coterminous with that of the urban elements known as *'ayyārs* (Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs*, pp. 87-107' idem, “The Tahirids and Saffarids,” pp. 108-09' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 67-71).

Ya'qub and his several brothers, of whom notably 'Amr and 'Ali, the sons of Layt, arose from these bands. They were local men, and Ya'qub had followed the humble trade of coppersmith (*ṣaffār*, whence the dynasty's name, *ruygar*) but now adopted the profession of arms. Ya'qub rose in the entourages of the *'ayyār* 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 'Abbasid power dispelled from the capital for over fifty years. In the internal powers struggles of *'ayyār* leaders, Ya'qub emerged the victor, and was hailed as Amir by the army of Sistān in 247/861 (Barthold, “Zur Geschichte der Saffāriden,” pp. 176-85' idem, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 215-16' Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs*, pp. 112-18' idem, “The Tahirids and Saffarids,” p. 109' 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 Ṣāleḥ b. Nazr, and he defeated the local ruler in Roḳḳaj 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 Toḳārestān, 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 Ya'qub's campaigns here paved the way for the subsequent islamization of the Indian borderlands' 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. 119-21' idem, “The Tahirids and Saffarids,” pp. 109-12' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 76, 83-108).

The rewards from such raids were limited and sporadic. Much more alluring for Ya'qub 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). Ya‘qub killed the leader of the Kharijites of northern Sistān, ‘Ammār b. Yāser, in 251/865, secured the lands directly north of Sistān, and subsequently operated in the regions of Bādgis and Garġestān, 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 unit‘ 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. ‘Abd-Allāh, was seriously embarrassed by an anti-caliphal Shi‘ite *da‘wa* 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 Ya‘qub for the first time into direct contact with the ‘Abbasids over their release. Moḥammad b. Ṭāher had made no headway against the Zaydi Imam, and Ya‘qub 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, 114-16‘ 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). Ya‘qub 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 Ya‘qub appeared in Fārs and defeated the local magnate Moḥammad b. Wāšel. 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. Ya‘qub pushed on to Wasit, only to be decisively defeated by the Regent Mowaffaq at [Dayr al-‘āqul](#) to the southeast of Baghdad (262/876). The Saffarid threat to Baghdad was lifted, but Ya‘qub 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. 112-16; idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 135-68. See, for a more detailed account of Ya‘qub’s career, [YA‘QUB B. LAYṬ](#) and the further sources given there).

His brother ‘Amr, variously described as having been a mule-hirer (*mokāri*) and a stone mason (*bannā*), succeeding to Ya‘qub’s power after intriguing against and setting aside the only other remaining son of Layṭ, ‘Ali, who had in fact been Ya‘qub’s choice for his successor. The example of Ya‘qub meant that ‘Amr had to impose his own personality as a war leader of equal caliber, and had to recover lands lost to Saffarid control through Ya‘qub’s preoccupations in the west during the latter part of his life. At the outset, unsure of his position, ‘Amr perpetuated the fiction, expressed in the grants of provinces to Ya‘qub when the ‘Abbasids were hard pressed by circumstances, that the Saffarids were deputies for the caliph, and ‘Amr received from Mo‘tamed a vast array of provinces in return for annual tribute of a million dirhams, and the offices of *ṣāḥeb-al-ṣorṭa* or commander of the guard in Baghdad and Samarra (which ‘Amr exercised through a deputy, ‘Obayd-Allāh b. ‘Abd-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 ‘Abbasids, 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, ‘Amr 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. ‘Amr’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, Ya‘qub had lost control of northeastern Afghanistan by his later years, and ‘Amr was only able briefly to re-impose Saffarid control there towards the very end of his reign. Khorasan had been likewise lost to Ya‘qub soon after his move westwards, and had been taken over by a former commander of the Saffarids, [Aḥmad Kojestāni](#), 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 Ya‘qub’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 Rāfe' b. Ḥṛṭama, a former soldier of the Tahirids who had gone over to Ya'qub but was now pursuing his own interests in Khorasan; the three brothers of the Ḍarkab family, also former commanders in Ya'qub'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. Kōjestāni 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. 'Amr 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 'Amr. The latter's governorships were restored, together with the *šorṭa* of Baghdad, which once more was exercised for him b. 'Obayd-Allāh b. 'Abd-Allāh b. Tāher; but it took him until 283/896 to defeat and dislodge the most serious of his opponents in Khorasan, Rāfe' b. Harṭama, who was subsequently killed in K̄wārazm, 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, 'Amr's unbounded ambition led him into a clash with the Samanids. In 285/898 'Amr secured from the caliph Mo'tazed yet a further grant, this time of Transoxania. This could only be wrested from the Samanids by force, so 'Amr prepared for war with Esmā'il b. Aḥmad. He tried to turn the flank of the Samanids by sending an army to K̄wārazm, but this had to turn back when a Samanid force threatened to block its path. He did secure the adherence to his standard of various minor potentates of the upper Oxus lands, but Esmā'il massed his troops, crossed the Oxus and in 287/900 defeated 'Amr's army outside Balkh, capturing the Saffarid Amir and overturning Saffarid power in a single day; this dramatic reversal of 'Amr's fortunes gave rise to many folkloric details about the events surrounding the battle. Though Esmā'il was technically in rebellion against the caliph's representative 'Amr, Mo'tazed cannot have been displeased at 'Amr's downfall. The latter was sent into captivity at Baghdad and killed there



in 289/902, either at the very end of Moʿtazed’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 ‘Amr’s career, ‘AMR B. LAYS (and sources cited there).

The two brothers Yaʿqub and ‘Amr 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*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 218-19; 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 ‘*ayyār*’ 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 *jaysʿ-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 ‘Abbasid caliphate, multi-ethnic. A group of Arabs is mentioned under Yaʿqub and ‘Amr, as also an Indian contingent’ 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 ‘Amr’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 ‘Amr is said to have had a system of three treasuries to provide for all eventualities. In particular, ‘Amr 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*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 218, 221-22; Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 236-37). Both Yaʿqub and ‘Amr were solicitous of the welfare and battle effectiveness of their troops. They were careful that regular pay was given out, at special reviews (*arz*), when weapons, mounts and equipment, from those of the Amir himself downwards, were inspected. Ebn Kallekān’s source Sallāmi gives a detailed description of these sessions, and compares ‘Amr’s army reviews explicitly with those held by the Sasanid emperor Kōsrow Anušervān (Gardizi, p. 143; *Wafayāt*, VI, pp. 421-22, tr. IV, 322-23; Barthold, op. cit., p. 221; Bosworth, “The Armies of the Saffarids,” pp. 549-51).

The Saffarid empire by no means collapsed totally when ‘Amr 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. ‘Amr was succeeded in Zarang by his grandson Ṭāher b. Moḥammad b. ‘Amr, who ruled in effect jointly with his brother Ya‘qub, but there was a faction within Sistān which favored the claims of Layṭ’s son ‘Ali, the brother of Ya‘qub and ‘Amr, who had been sidelined by ‘Amr 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 (*Tāriḳ-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 ‘Amr’s later years (Vasmer, “Zur Geschichte und Münzkunde von ‘Omān im X. Jahrhundert,” pp. 275, 277).

The sources stigmatize Ṭāher and Ya‘qub 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. Layṭ b. ‘Ali b. Layṭ acquired increased military backing in Sistān for his claims, whilst Ṭāher’s authority ebbed away. In 296/909 Layṭ was hailed as Amir by the army of Sistān. The deposed Ṭāher and Ya‘qub 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. Layṭ 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, Layṭ’s brother Moḥammad assumed power in Zarang, but had to face claims from a further brother, Mo‘addal, 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. Esmā'īl. The latter now came with an army to Bost, and ejected and captured Moḥammad, whilst his Aḥmad's general Ḥosayn b. 'Alī Marvarruḍī deposed Mo'addal in Zarang. This first Samanid occupation accordingly marks the end of the "first line" of Saffarids (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 276-94, tr. pp. 220-38' Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids, pp. 122-24' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 249-66).

A period of confusion in Sistān now followed, with a succession of 'ayyār leaders and local warlords jostling for power and reacting against the unpopular Samanid governor Maṣṣūr b. Eshāq. On one occasion, a certain Moḥammad b. Hormoz, called Mawlā Sandali, a former mawlā of Moḥammad b. 'Amr b. Layṭ, raised briefly to power as his puppet a great-grandson of 'Amr b. Layṭ, thereby provoking a second Samanid invasion of Sistān in 299/912 and subsequent occupation under the governorship of Simjur Davāti (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 297-310, tr. 240-52' Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 130-31' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 267-82). Eventually, the 'ayyār leaders threw off Samanid suzerainty and raised to power a collateral member of the Saffarid family, Abu Ja'far Aḥmad b. Moḥammad b. Ḳalaf, who was connected through his mother Bānu, daughter of Moḥammad b. 'Amr b. Layṭ, 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 Ja'far'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)' both Fārs and Kermān were, however, shortly to pass permanently under Buyid control. The middle years of Abu Ja'far's reign were regarded as golden ones for Sistān. It does not seem that Abu Ja'far ever forwarded tribute to Bukhara, and the Samanids seem to have regarded him as a sovereign of equal status to themselves' concerning Rudaki's celebrated ode addressed to the Amir, see below. Alone of the sources, the *Tāriḳ-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 Ja'far's reign were characterized by a growth within Sistān of unrest and factionalism (*ta'aṣṣob*) 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 (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 310-27, tr. pp. 252-68' Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 130-31' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 267-82).



He was succeeded by his son Ƙalaf, 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, Ƙalaf 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 Ƙalaf 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 Ƙalaf 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. Ƙalaf's own erratic and tyrannical behavior, which included putting to death his own son Ṭāher, 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 (*Tārik-e Sistān*, pp. 327-54, tr. pp. 268-89' Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Saffarids," pp. 132-35' idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 301-39. For a more detailed account of Ƙalaf's reign, see [ƘALAF B. AḤMAD](#) and the further sources given there).

*Cultural life under the Saffarids.* Their military careers, filled with eventfulness, left Ya'qub and 'Amr 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. Ya'qub'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 (*Tārik-e Sistān*, p. 209, tr. pp. 166-67), but these were in Arabic, which the Amir could not understand. Therefore, continues the local history, Ya'qub'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. 167' 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 *‘aruz* 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 ‘Abbasids, Abu Eshāq Ebrāhīm b. Mamsād, who at some point went over to Ya‘qub 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 Ya‘qub’s illustrious origins in Persian legendary history times, and its anti-Arab message and call to Ya‘qub 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, “Ya‘qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment,” pp. 535-55’ Bosworth, “The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran,” pp. 59-60’ idem, *The History of the Saffarids*, pp. 177-80). Moḥammad b. Wāṣef remained active in ‘Amr’s court circle, and wrote a poem celebrating the Amir’s final crushing of Rāfe’ b. Hartama 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 Ja‘far Aḥmad as the descendant of Rostam-e Zāl, for which the Amir rewarded him lavishly (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 316-24, tr. pp. 258-64’ Ross, “a Qasida by Rudaki,” pp. 213-37’ Bosworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-91). The traveler and littérateur Abu Dolaf Ḳazraji apparently visited the court in Zarang from Bukhara’ he praises the Amir’s generosity and the fine products of the *ṭerāz* or state manufactory for luxury textiles. Abu Ja‘far 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 Layt, 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 Ḳalaf, 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-Faḥ Bostī, and the poet and stylist, famed as the originator of the *maqāma* genre, Badi' al-Zamān Hamadāni, who may have visited Ḳalaf's court and who certainly dedicated to him a *maqāma*, the *Ḳalafīya* one. A selection of *hadiths* made by Ḳalaf himself survives in a Cairo ms. (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 217). But above all, his fame came from the huge, 100-volume Qor'ān 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).

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