



SARBEDĀRS

SARBEDĀRS (lit. “Head givers”), a religious movement in northern Khorāsān and eastern Māzandarān that led to the establishment of a dynasty of local rulers based in Sabzevār in the district of [Bayhaq](#), northeastern Iran. “Sarbedār” is the name given to the leaders and adherents of the small independent state. It subsisted during the half century between the death of the [Il-Khanid Abu Sa‘id](#) in 1326 and Tamerlane’s conquest of Iran in the 1380s.

SOURCES

There is not enough evidence to bring into sharp focus every aspect of the political and social history of the Sarbedār state. The major narrative sources all date from at least half a century after the events they describe, and as such they report late and varied traditions (Smith, pp. 25-49). [Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru](#) (“Majmu‘a,” pp. 15-29) gives two different versions of the history of the Sarbedārs, which do not agree with the shorter one found in his *Zobdat al-tawāriḵ* (pp. 16-18). Moreover, [Dawlatšāh](#) (pp. 277-88) transmits a third version, which varies from those given by Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru. In his *Reḥla*, [Ebn Baṭṭuṭa](#) (tr. Gibb, III, pp. 574-77) includes a brief section on the Sarbedārs as part of his account of events in Khorāsān in the wake of Abu Sa‘id’s demise. The *Tāriḵ-e Ruyān* by [Āmoli](#), which was completed in 1362, was reused a century later by Ẓahir-al-Din Mar‘aši in his *Tāriḵ-e Ṭabarestān o Ruyān o Māzandarān* (Melville, p. 64). The sequel or *deyl* to Moḥammad Šabānkāra’i’s *Majma‘ al-ansāb*, which was compiled in 1381 by Ġiāt-al-Din Faryumadi, a secretary at the court of the local ruler of Māzandarān, also covers the advent of the Sarbedārs.



When dealing with the Sarbedārs, Mir-Ḳvānd (V, pp. 600-625) relied on Ḥāfez-e Abru as well as on a lost history titled the *Tāriḳ-e Sarbedārān*, in which the rise to power of the Sarbedārs is narrated from a distinctly Shi'ite viewpoint. The history of the Sarbedārs as recounted by Ḳvāndmir (III, pp. 356-66) draws in large part from the work of his maternal grandfather Mir-Ḳvānd. References to Sarbedārs in poetical works of Amir Faḳr-al-Din Maḥmud Faryumadi, also known as [Ebn Yamin](#), as well as numismatic evidence (Smith, *passim*; Arroyo, pp. 302-4; and Morton, pp. 255-58) supplement these chronicles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Born out of a popular rebellion in which no one family had a hereditary monopoly on power, this state has been called a “republic of brigands” (Büchner; Grousset, p. 466). Based on the [Mahdist](#) tendencies of the movement, some scholars have labeled it a “Shi'ite republic” (Mazzaoui, p. 66; Roemer, p. 17), while others have emphasized the Shi'ite aspect of the movement (Ḥāqiqat; Šahrestāni). Following the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, in 1983 an Iranian television series brought the rebellion to public attention (Soroush Media, 12 DVDs).

Two historians have argued against the reductionist views of V. F. Büchner and R. Grousset. A. M. Belenitskiĭ (p. 115) proposed that the middle-class landowners had played a leading role in the early days of the movement, and I. P. Petrushevskii (1956, pp. 124-24; idem, 1960, pp. 409-71) suggested that the Sarbedār movement was part of the class struggle of the peasantry and the urban lower classes against the rural and urban aristocracy. A more widely accepted understanding is that the Sarbedār movement was a move toward political and administrative autonomy at the time the Il-Khanid regime was faced with disintegration (Smith; Aubin, 1976, 1974; Mahendrarajah).

THE UPRISING IN BĀŠTIN

Almost all narrative sources agree that it was widespread resentment at fiscal abuses of the Il-Khānid authorities in Khorāsān that triggered the Faryumadi Sarbedār uprising. In Bāštīn, a small village to the southwest of Bayhaq, a group of dissenters attempted to kill the local tax collector 'Alā'-al-Din Moḥammad Faryumadi and then put up an armed resistance against the troops sent to suppress the uprising (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, Persian text, p. 17; Dawlatšāh, p. 278; Faṣiḥ-e Ḳvāfi, pp. 50-51; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 357; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 357). According to Faryumadi (p. 347), this incident took place

on 13 March 1337/9 Ša'bān 737, while Ḥāfez-e Abru (*Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 11) gives 16 March/12 Ša'bān as the date of the uprising. Yet another historian points out that 16 March/12 Ša'bān marked the day on which a group of local youth led by the *pahlavān* (wrestler; see below) Jamāl-al-Din 'Abd-al-Razzāq Bāštini declared him as leader of the uprising. Their slogan was “We will struggle against the inequalities imposed by the tyrants with the help of God, or else give up our heads to the gallows (*sar-be-dār*)” (Esfezāri, II, p. 8).

The date of the uprising shows that it did not erupt immediately upon the death of Abu Sa'īd, but sixteen months later, under different circumstances, at a time the anarchy had engulfed the Il-Khanid empire. In a sense, the uprising can be taken to imply that certain social classes, who so far had somehow managed to keep up with socio-economic pressures under the Il-Khanids, now felt threatened. As the crisis of authority in the empire became increasingly obvious, they dared to defend themselves against the forces of oppression. The Bāštini uprising was only one of the consequences of the crippling fiscal pressures imposed by bureaucrats such as 'Alā'-al-Din Moḥammad Faryumadi with the objective of financing military campaigns of Toḡāy-Timur, a local claimant to the Il-Khanid throne. Āmoli (p. 181) confirms that during this period local authorities like Faryumadi had become all-powerful with no accountability for their actions, to the effect that no one could escape from their fiscal abuses.

'Abd-al-Razzāq, the first leader of the Sarbedārs, came from a wealthy family of *pahlavān* worthies. His military prowess brought his companions immense booty. This in turn helped the early Sarbedārs recruit more supporters (Ebn Baṭṭuṭa, III, p. 575; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 602). 'Abd-al-Razzāq, who had been joined by his brother Wajih-al-Din Mas'ud, then seized Sabzevār on 9 September 1337/12 Šafar 738, killing several members of Faryumadi's relatives during the infighting (Faryumadi, p. 326). Shortly thereafter, the Sarbedārs mounted raids to the north of Sabzevār, plundering the livestock belonging to Faryumadi in the vicinity of Solṭān Maydān (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 604; Ḳvāndmir, III, pp. 357-58). 'Abd-al-Razzāq, an adventurer of little significance, was good at inciting riots but proved incapable of setting up a political program that could lead the Sarbedār movement to new triumphs. A scandal regarding immoral conduct of his provided a pretext for his brother, Wajih-al-Din Mas'ud, to assassinate him in June 1338/Du'l-qa'da 738. This killing can be seen as an episode in the growing troubles of Sarbedār movement.

THE EARLY SARBEDĀR STATE



Mas'ud, who succeeded his brother, is believed to have been the political head of the movement. He represented the ambitions of the landowners who wanted to get rid of the **Mongol** regime. In order to strengthen his fragile grassroots authority, he decided to broaden his popular support by means of the prestige of Šayk Ḥasan Juri, a disciple of Šayk Kālifā, a Shi'ite **dervish** from Māzandarān (Aubin, pp. 213-14). Šayk Ḥasan Juri encouraged the people to follow his master's footsteps. In the dependent villages of **Nishapur**, he found many disciples (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 16), whose names he recorded. He told them that now it was the time for concealment, but when he gave them the signal, they would have to wage war (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 16; Mir-K'ānd, V, p. 605-606; K'āndmir, III, p. 359; Smith, p. 55-56). The majority of Šayk Ḥasan Juri's disciples came from the working classes, whose moral confusion and material degradation took some comfort from belief in the return of a Mahdi who would reestablish justice on earth. Denounced by the 'olamā', Šayk Ḥasan Juri ended up imprisoned in the fortress of Yāzor. It is hard to determine whether he had been the leader of a radical underground movement. In the letter he sent to Toḡāy-Timur and Arḡun-Šāh, the emir of the Jawni-Qorbāni, Šayk Ḥasan Juri depicted himself as overtaken by events, distrustful of social movements, and rather inclined to worm his way into the favor of the Mongol emirs (text of the letter in Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, pp. 20-23; Mir-K'ānd, V, pp. 609-13). At the very moment when the Sarbedār movement broke out, in 1337/737, he had been on a trip to Iraq.

Mas'ud came to set Šayk Ḥasan Juri free and return him to Sabzevār. Šayk Ḥasan exhibited no eagerness to follow him, but, after hesitating to join the movement, he recognized that his followers could be better served if he shared in the demands announced by Mas'ud and his partisans (Mir-K'ānd, V, p. 614). The largely Shi'ite population of Sabzevār, like those of the surrounding districts, proved to be a receptive focus for his exhortation. The difficult alliance between the Šaykis and the Sarbedārs lent the government a distinctive character.

Mas'ud and Šayk Ḥasan launched an attack against the Jawni-Qorbāni, loyal supporters of Toḡāy-Timur, who at the time was in Iraq. The strategic errors of the latter group gave the victory to the Sarbedārs, who seized Nishapur (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 19).

Toḡāy-Timur, whose name continued to be used on coinage even in Sabzevār (Smith, p. 109), could not continue to ignore the Sarbedārs. In 1342, Arḡun-Šāh

and ‘Alā’-al-Din Faryumadi, allied with ʾoḡāy-Timur, failed at retaking the town. ʾoḡāy-Timur’s army was routed, and ‘Alā’-al-Din Faryumadi was killed on 23 Ša‘bān 742/1 February 1342 (Ebn Yamin, p. 569). The Sarbedārs then struck coins in the name of Solaymān Khan, the rival of ʾoḡāy-Timur (Smith, p. 116). They then tried to extend their territory at the expense of the Kart of [Herat](#).

The Sarbedārs marched on Herat, encountering Malek Ḥosayn on 18 July 1342/13 Šafar 743 near Zāveh, in a battle in which Šayḡ Ḥasan was killed by a Sarbedār soldier. He was probably assassinated at the order of Mas‘ud, who was uneasy about the increasing influence of the dervish (Faryumadi, p. 348; Dawlatšāh, p. 281, and Mir-Ḳānd, V, p. 614, both implicate Mas‘ud directly; Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru says that the assassin was quickly liquidated, *Cinq opuscules*, Persian text, p. 25). However, this assassination cost Mas‘ud the support of the Šayḡis. He then attempted the conquest of Māzandarān, but this ended in disaster. Mas‘ud lost a great number of men, and he himself was taken prisoner and executed in April 1343/Ḍu‘l-qa‘da 743 (Faryumadi, p. 348; Āmoli, pp. 183-89). Nishapur, Sabzevār, and Jovayn remained under the control of the Sarbedārs, but they had to pay tribute to ʾoḡāy-Timur.

The alliance between the Sarbedārs and the Šayḡis proved short-lived. Mas‘ud had, for a time, had the advantage of recovering not only the power to mobilize that had been found in the exhortations of Šayḡ Ḥasan Juri on religious motives, but also the real military power of the organization of dervishes, which was disciplined by the charisma of their head. However, the two men’s objectives were quite different, and the Shiite extremism of Šayḡ Ḥasan Juri was harmful to Mas‘ud, given that the majority of the population of the region of Nishapur was Sunni.

THE LATER SARBEDĀRS

Mas‘ud’s military commander, [Moḡammad Āy-Timur](#), took over the leadership of the Sarbedār state. He had been Mas‘ud’s deputy at Sabzevār while he was on campaign in Herat and then in Māzandarān. Mas‘ud’s supporters included his family, a group of local notables, and the population of Bāštīn. Conversely, the Sabzevāris included the town aristocracy, the artisans’ guilds, and the Šayḡis. These two groups were divided because of the murder of Šayḡ Ḥasan Juri, but also because of Sabzevāri fear of seeing Mas‘ud’s supporters exercise their dominion over the government.



Āy-Timur followed Mas‘ud’s policies, but he criticized his humble origin and his attitude toward the Šaykis (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 614-616; Ḳvāndmir, III, pp. 362-63). He was assassinated in April 1346/Moḥarram 747 (Faryumadi, p. 348) at the instigation of the Šaykis, who with this murder avenged the assassination of Šayk Ḥasan Juri. There followed a period of instability, because the Sarbedārs, loyal to Mas‘ud’s family, strove for power against the Šaykis, whose principal spokesman was Ḳvāja Tāj-al-Din ‘Ali b. Šams-al-Din Češomi, a member of the Sabzevār aristocracy.

One Kolu Esfandyār was brought to power by Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi in 1347-51/748-52 (Dawlatšāh, p. 381; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 616; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 363; Smith, pp. 123-29; Morton, p. 256). His choice was probably the result of a compromise between the Šaykis and the Sarbedārs. However, he very quickly alienated both camps. This man with no background was criticized for his arrogance, his arbitrary decisions, and for having favored over the dervishes and the Sarbedārs “the crooks and criminals” (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 616). Those may perhaps have been some members of the army. They were thus the same complaints as had been made against his predecessor. He was killed in 1347/748.

We could understand the development of the situation better if we knew who had eliminated Kolu Esfandyār. Unfortunately, the sources do not agree on the names of those who struck the mortal blow. According to Faṣiḥ-e Ḳvāfi (p. 75), it was a *pahlavān* named ‘Ali Ḥitābādi and a dervish by the name of Faḳr-al-Din ‘Aṣṣār-e Mašhadi. Dawlatšāh (p. 381) writes that he was killed by members of the Sarbedār army upon the instigation of Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi. Faryumadi (p. 348) also attributes the strike to ‘Ali Češomi. But Mir-Ḳvānd (p. 616), whose version makes ‘Ali Češomi the star, relates that he was not informed until after the murder was committed, and he reprimanded the murderers. The assassination of Kolu Esfandyār, like that of his predecessor, was undoubtedly provoked by his policy of recruitment into the army. The conflict resulting from this murder was limited to the rival factions that disputed for supremacy in the Sarbedār army.

It is hard to know how deeply ‘Ali Češomi, who reprimanded the murderers, was implicated in the assassination of Kolu Esfandyār. On the other hand, he opposed the appointment of the son of Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud Bāštini, Loṭf-Allāh, whose name seems to have united the dervishes and the Sarbedārs (Dawlatšāh, p. 381). ‘Ali Češomi pointed out that he was too young and lacked authority. The choice fell instead on a brother of Mas‘ud Bāštini, Šams-al-din

(Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 617), who according to Dawlatšāh (p. 282) was to wield power until Loṭf-Allāh was of age to take over.

The choice of Šams-al-Din attests to the element of cohesion represented by the Bāštini family. Though they affected the mien of the peasantry, they had a comfortable lifestyle (Dawlatšāh, p. 282; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 617). Incapable of leading an army and, moreover, not being exactly valiant, Šams-al-Din delegated command to Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi, upon the news of an invasion by Ṭoḡāy-Timur (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 617; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 363). Ultimately, ‘Ali Češomi forced him to abdicate and took charge of the government on 21 November 1347/16 Ša‘bān 748, which thus passed from the Sabzevāri faction (Faryumadi, p. 348).

Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi’s first task was to better the condition of the army in order to meet the threat of invasion by Ṭoḡāy-Timur. He reformed taxes: everything that was collected in the region was incorporated into the Sarbedārs’ budget (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, commentary, p. 17). In this way he revitalized the Sarbedār forces and obligated Ṭoḡāy-Timur to abandon his designs on Khorāsān. According to Dawlatšāh (p. 282), Ṭoḡāy-Timur agreed that the Sarbedārs would retain the regions they had acquired under Mas‘ud Bāštini, and their independence was recognized from Nishapur to east of [Dāmḡān](#). He put into circulation the first independent Sarbedārid coinage (1348/748), of the Sunni type. It was no longer struck in the name of Ṭoḡāy-Timur, but in the names of the first four caliphs (Smith, pp. 196, 202, nos. 63-65). However, in 1351/752, when the principality of Herat was incorporated into the [Čaḡatay](#) sphere of influence, Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi once again struck coins in the name of Ṭoḡāy-Timur. This concession to circumstance did nothing to enhance his position in the eyes of the Sarbedār military faction, which refused to be subject to the Mongols (Aubin, “Khanat de Čaḡatai,” pp. 34-38).

Ḳvāja ‘Ali Češomi’s administrative reforms led the region to prosperity (Smith, pp. 130-32). He made sure that wages were paid in a timely fashion; he lent his support to the artisans’ guilds and to the militias who provided the basis of his power. Mir-Ḳvānd (p. 618) says that he fought corruption and that under him 500 prostitutes were hanged. Češomi’s policies reflected, not a dervish ethic, but a rigorous view of Islam founded on the injunction of “ordering the good and forbidding the evil” or *al-amr be’l-ma’ruf wa nahi ‘an’el-monkar* (Mahendrarajah, p. 385). With these reforms he alienated his original supporters and fell victim to his wish to strengthen morality. On 18 December 1351/28 Šawwāl 752, Češomi was assassinated by a disgruntled court



bureaucrat named *pahlavān* Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb. The incident took place after Češomi threatened to force Qaṣṣāb's wife to work in a brothel (*karābāt*) so that he could compensate for fiscal deficits in the state budget (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 619; Ebn Yamin, p. 571). The assassination was abetted by Ḳvāja Neẓām-al-Din Yaḥyā Karāvi, a landowner in the district of Bayhaq. The murder appears to have been born of Pahlavān Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb's despair and Yaḥyā Karāvi's secret ambition, but it was also one of the results of the Čaġatay invasion of Herat. So, it could be considered a coup orchestrated by the *pahlavān*-military faction that sought a more aggressive policy against the Mongols.

It was the instigator of the plot, Ḳvāja Yaḥyā Karāvi, who took power. Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru describes Yaḥyā Karāvi as a man of war (*sepāhi*) who was attentive to the needs of his fighters (Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, text, p. 25; comm., p. 17). He resumed military hostilities against ʿŤoġāy-Timur, whose *ordu* had been weakened by plague, and most of his emirs were dead. At an uncertain date there were peace talks between Yaḥyā Karāvi and ʿŤoġāy-Timur. To negotiate at Sabzevār, ʿŤoġāy-Timur sent his *amir al-omarā'* or *noyān* Šayḳ 'Ali Hindu. Yaḥyā Karāvi pretended to undertake an act of allegiance to ʿŤoġāy-Timur, but he had him assassinated in his camp at Pol-e Ḥājjī Ḳātun, near Solṭān Dovin, on 13 December 1353/16 Ḍu'l-qa'da 754 (Dawlatšāh, pp. 237-38). The sources conflict as to who actually struck the mortal blow (Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru, *Cinq Opuscules*, comm., p. 7; Faṣiḥ-e Ḳvāfi, p. 85). The Sarbedārs killed "the great and the humble, Turks and Iranians," and their herds were taken (Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru, *Cinq Opuscules*, comm., p. 8; Faṣiḥ-e Ḳvāfi, p. 85).

Ḳvāja Yaḥyā Karāvi had the support of the Sunni notables, who were unhappy with 'Ali Češomi's reforms. According to Mir-Ḳvānd, he left fiscal administration to the "olamā' of the true religion," a move that met with universal approval. He was a "*pahlavān* in appearance and nature" (*pahlavān-e surat u ma'nā*) and combined bravery with solid judgment. The same chronicler (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 620) noted that "thanks to his equity and his justice, his *velāyat* reached the acme of growth and prosperity." His murder, on 23 December 1357/10 Moḥarram 759 (Ebn Yamin, p. 568), was the only political assassination in the history of Sarbedār state that followed by the punishment of the murderers and not by their rise to power.

Another period of instability followed ensuing Karāvi's death, marked by a series of coups and political assassinations whose chronology remains obscure. The sources do not mention the reasons for Karāvi's assassination, but it appears that Mas'ud Bāštini's supporters benefited from his elimination



to attempt a return. They wished to recover the dynastic principle by preparing the way for the enthronement of Bāštin's son Loṭf-Allāh, a move that was aimed to lead to the downfall of the Sabzevāri faction. The conspirators did not achieve their goal, because *Pahlavān* Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb brought to power a nephew of Karāvi named Zāhir-al-Din (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 18; Dawlatšāh, p. 283-84; Faryumadi, p. 349; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, pp. 620-21; Ḳvāndmir, III, pp. 364-65). However, forty days later, in October 1356/Šawwāl 757, Zāhir-al-Din was deposed by *Pahlavān* Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb himself (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 18). Qaṣṣāb was in turn assassinated in 757/1356, after ruling for four months, on the order of *Pahlavān* Ḥasan Dāmḡāni, a supporter of the Bāštini faction (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq oppuscles*, Persian text, p. 18; Dawlatšāh, p. 284; Faryumadi, p. 349; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 621; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 365). Loṭf-Allāh finally acceded to power, an event that marked the return to the dynastic principle, but he too was deposed and killed in 759/1357-58, on the order of *Pahlavān* Ḥasan Dāmḡāni, which ended the possibility of establishing a dynastic lineage in the family of Mas'ud Bāštini (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscles*, Persian text, p. 18; Dawlatšāh, p. 284; Faryumadi, p. 349; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, pp. 621-22; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 365).

Pahlavān Ḥasan Dāmḡāni took power, but his close involvement in the murder of *Pahlavān* Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb, as well as his support for the landed aristocracy of Bāštin and for Mas'ud's supporters, had alienated a portion of the Sarbedārs. His authority was threatened from several sides. An adherent of Šayḡ Ḥasan Juri, Darviš 'Aziz, was installed in Mašhad, where his piety and mystical devotion attracted many disciples. With their backing, he took the citadel of Ṭus (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 622). Some sources say that he installed a theocracy in the name of the Shi'ite Hidden Imam "Solṭān Moḡammad al-Mahdi," but there is no tangible numismatic proof to support the claim that he tried to set up a Mahdist state. Smith attributes to Darviš 'Aziz a "Mahdist" coin, dated 1358/759, but it belongs to a series of coins struck at Sāri and Āmol in (at the latest) 1358-65/759-64, irrelevant to Darviš 'Aziz, whose revolt at Ṭus was much later (Morton, p. 257). Darviš 'Aziz was expelled from Ṭus, but Ḳvāja 'Ali b. Mo'ayyad, son of a prominent Sabzevāri notable, triggered a revolt in Dāmḡān. He enjoyed the support of Darviš 'Aziz and together they seized Sabzevār. *Pahlavān* Ḥasan Dāmḡāni was assassinated in 763/1362 (Dawlatšāh, p. 286; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 623; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 365).

THE END OF THE SARBEDĀR STATE

'Ali b. Mo'ayyad thereupon became the head of the state in collaboration with



Darviš ‘Aziz. Coins were struck, between 763/1362 and 772/1371, with the Shi‘ite profession of faith and the names of the Twelve Imams (Smith, pp. 77-78). The ritual of bringing out a horse twice a day to await the arrival of the Mahdi was also instituted (Esfezāri, II, p. 30; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 624). These initial measures probably reveal the influence of Darviš ‘Aziz and the Šayḳis, who hoped for a new order.

However, the same feud that shaped power relations between Mas‘ud Bāštini and Šayḳ Ḥasan Juri soon came to predominate ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad’s relations with Darviš ‘Aziz. The ideology of Darviš ‘Aziz was extremist though its details are not known (Mahendrarajah, p. 394). ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad thus resolved upon getting rid himself of his network of dervish devotees. Some nine months after the establishment of their joint rule, Darviš ‘Aziz managed to get ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad’s military support for his plans to launch an attack against Malek Ḥusayn Kart, the ruler of Herat. But in the heat of the campaign ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad ordered the heads of the army to abandon Darviš ‘Aziz and return to Sabzevār (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 624; Ḳvāndmir, III, p. 366). Darviš ‘Aziz fled for ‘Erāq with four hundred of his disciples. He was caught and killed on 5 January 1363/18 Rabi‘ I 764 by ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad’s men who had been sent after him (Faṣiḥ-e Ḳvāfi, pp. 95-96; Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 624).

Following the elimination of the dervish faction, ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad had the tombs of Šayḳ Ḳalifa and Šayḳ Ḥasan Juri destroyed and transformed into garbage dumps to be used by the bāzār merchants (*mazbala-e ahl-e bāzār*) (Mir-Ḳvānd, V, p. 624). The Šayḳis were severely persecuted. ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad tried to extirpate the extremist Shi‘ism that had been the cause of a succession of political coups, cliquish conflicts, and social unrest in Sabzevār. However, the extremist Shi‘ism of the dervishes remained a threat (Mahendrarajah, p. 395). The Šayḳis were always ready to destabilize the Sarbedār state, as is shown by the takeover of Sabzevār by the successor of Darviš ‘Aziz, Darviš Rokn-al-Din.

During ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad’s clampdown on the Šayḳis, Darviš Rokn-al-Din managed to escape to Fārs, where he was well received together with a group of three hundred devotees at the court of Šāh-Šojā‘ in Shiraz. Darviš Rokn-al-Din’s arrival in Fārs provided Šāh-Šojā‘ with a pretext for military intervention in Khorāsān. Darviš Rokn-al-Din and his supporters, outfitted by the Moẓaffarid treasury and backed up by a detachment of troops from Fārs, set out to conquer Khorāsān (Esfezāri, II, pp. 32-33). Sabzevār was taken in 1376/778 to be followed by the seizure of the castles of Baḥrābād, Jovayn, and

Jājarm. ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad was forced to seek refuge in [Astarābād](#) with Amir Wali, who helped him retake the town (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, Persian text, pp. 55-57). ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad’s territory reduced considerably over the course of the following decades. At the end of his reign, he only controlled Bayhaq, Nishapur, and the districts located to the north of Jovayn.

‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad’s anti-Šayḳi policies did not have tangible results, since the pro-Šayḳi tendencies had always existed in Sabzevār. After the suppression of the revolt of Darviš Rokn-al-Din, which took place around 780/1379, ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad sent a letter to the Damascus-based Twelver Shi‘ite jurist Moḥammad b. Makki al-‘Āmeli (Mahendrarajah, p. 396). In this letter, he expressed his wish to protect the Shi‘ites of Khorāsān, who had no religious authority to guide them: “We fear the wrath of [God] will befall this land due to the [lack] of a guide and the absence of guidance” (Mahendrarajah, p. 395). Moḥammad b. Makki was not in a position to accept the invitation, but he compiled a book on Twelver Shi‘ite jurisprudence, so that ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad and his Shi‘ite subjects in Khorāsān could use it as a practical guideline (Mazzaoui, pp. 66-67; Melville, 1997, p. 49).

At the beginning of 1381/783, when Timur entered Khorāsān, ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad had prepared his welcome by prior arrangement (Aubin, 1974, pp. 104-12). He came to pay homage in Nishapur in April 1381/Moḥarram 783 (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, commentary, p. 40). ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad’s fidelity to Timur assured the security of the Sarbedār principality: it became a vassal of the Timurid regime. ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad retained control of local administration and, theoretically, management of the tax revenues of Bayhaq and [Jovayn](#). There was neither a Timurid garrison nor a tax collector in Sabzevār. The Sarbedār leaders ended up as mercenaries: “the army of Sabzevār” participated in the major Timurid campaign. ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad was killed in a battle at Ḥowayza in 1386/788. He was buried in Sabzevār in secret out of fear of profanation of his tomb by the Šayḳis. Sarbedārid territory was divided between several governors, who also served Timur. In 1405/808, the claims of a relative of ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad to “hereditary rights” over the old Sarbedārid territories came to an end with his execution and the sacking of Sabzevār (Aubin, 1974, p. 116).

SOCIO-POLITICAL LEGACY OF THE SARBEDĀRS

The bedrock of the Sarbedār movement consisted of the property-owning middle class. Several of the leaders of the Sarbedār state, such as ‘Ali Češomi, Yaḥyā Karāvi, or ‘Ali b. Mo’ayyad, came from the same well-to-do milieu of the



Ḳvājas, or local and regional merchants and landed notables, who occupied the foremost rank in their township. *Pahlavān* Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb was also a wealthy notable, probably a major butcher who combined this profession with that of tax collector. Among the personalities known in the literary milieu of Khorāsān in the 15th century, we find sons of Sarbedār dignitaries: Šaraf-al-Din Reżā, whose ancestors were viziers “of the time of the Sarbedārs”; the Amir-Šāhis, members of a family of Sarbedār grandees (*bozorgān*) (Dawlatšāh, p. 426); and Šayḳ Āḍari, whose father was all-powerful in Esfarā’yen at the time of the Sarbedārs (Dawlatšāh, pp. 398-99). These people lived off the income from their lands, like the Bāštini.

Another common feature of the Sarbedārs of Sabzevār was their membership in those secret societies that were so widespread in medieval Iran, especially in Khorāsān. Most Sarbedār military commanders bore the title *pahlavān*. The *pahlavān* practices wrestling and archery. He is surrounded by a band of pupils and supporters. Strong is the personal link that binds the soldier to his leader. When the *pahlavān* ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Bāštini, the top Sarbedār leader, rebelled, his entire band of admirers did so as well. In the Moḯaffarid army, consisting in part of recruits from Khorāsān, the *pahlavān* who held high commands were numerous (Aigle, pp. 190-92). *Pahlavāns* are also found at the origin of social unrest in Iran in the 14th century. The uprising of Isfahan against Tamerlane, in 1387/789-90, was led by a *pahlavān* named ‘Ali Kačapā (Navā’i, p. 114, n. 1).

Thus from the beginning the Sarbedār movement acquired the fighting force it needed to assert itself by recruiting a specific category of country folk: wrestlers and archers. The creation of a professional army affected the subsequent development of the movement. Paying their wages was the big problem that the successors of Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud had to deal with. This debt could only be paid if the state possessed the necessary resources. Under Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud, as long as the Sarbedār state never stopped expanding, booty provided some of the expenses occasioned by the wages and by the maintenance of combat readiness. Things went differently after the disaster of 1343/743 against the Kart of Herat, who decimated the Sarbedār army, its leaders, and its fighting men. They recovered only slowly. Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud’s successor, Moḯammad Āy-Timur, managed only to maintain the integrity of the conquered territory. For over about ten years, the Sarbedārs did not go back to war. We have seen that the texts appear to indicate that the demises of Moḯammad Āy-Timur and Kolu Esfandyār were directly caused by

a problem relating to the army. If this was indeed so, we can understand why support for “the crooks and criminals” incited the coalition of interest groups against them. Moḥammad Āy-Timur and Kolu Esfandyār, having undertaken to remake the army by recruiting diverse elements, displeased the troops that had been recruited locally. By surrounding themselves with professional soldiers, they worried the persons of influence as well as the dervishes. We know, moreover, that Kolu Esfandyār stopped paying their wages. Some of these cash-flow problems that caused his downfall Šams-al-Din Bāštini had clearly inherited.

The army was totally disorganized when Toḡāy-Timur threatened to invade Sarbedār territory. That was when ‘Ali Češomi deposed Šams-al-Din and seized power. As a capable administrator, he appears to have undertaken the task that the initial successors of Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud had not known how to handle: to redevelop the economy on a solid footing. We may imagine that ‘Ali Češomi’s army consisted of local troops, recruited in the villages and from the artisans of the towns. According to Ḥāfez-e Abru, he dedicated the country’s entire revenue to the cost of the Sarbedārs, which must mean primarily in the military sense (Ḥāfez-e Abru, *Cinq opuscules*, commentary, p. 17).

It is difficult to shed light on the many social movements included within the term Sarbedārism: the sources are often unclear. At first, the movement seems to have been the result of a self-defense reflex of the rural landowners of Bayhaq. It does not seem to have been, as has previously been stated, a reaction of the Iranians (*tājik*) against the Mongol emirs. Resistance to the Mongols should be analyzed as a struggle for power in Khorāsān between Sarbedārs and Il-Khanid authorities. There was no real religious connotation to the movement. The exhortations of Šayḫ Ḥasan Juri were used by Wajih-al-Din Mas‘ud only as a simple rabble-rousing tool for consolidating his power. However, we might detect during the joint exercise of power by ‘Ali b. Mo‘ayyad and Darviš ‘Aziz the hesitant emergence of Shi‘ism as an expression of local idiosyncrasies. Nothing in the chronicles allows us to identify conflicts between social groups. It appears that the internecine struggles that ripped apart the Sarbedār state to some extent reflected the deterioration of the demographic and agricultural situation in Khorāsān during the second half of the 14th century.



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