



ŠERVĀNŠAHS

ŠERVĀNŠAHS (Šarvānšāhs), the various lines of rulers, originally Arab in ethnos but speedily Persianized within their culturally Persian environment, who ruled in the eastern Caucasian region of Šervān from mid-'Abbasid times until the age of the Safavids.

The title itself probably dates back to pre-Islamic times, since Ebn Ḳordādbeh, (pp. 17-18) mentions the Shah as one of the local rulers given his title by the Sasanid founder Ardašir I, son of Pāpak. Balāḍori (*Fotuḥ*, pp. 196, 203-04) records that the first Arab raiders into the eastern Caucasus in 'Oṭmān's caliphate encountered, amongst local potentates, the shahs of Šarvān and Layzān, these rulers submitting at this time to the commander Salmān b. Rabi'a Bāheli.

The caliph Maṣṣūṭ's governor of Azarbaijan and northwestern Persia, Yazid b. Osayd Solami, took possession of the naphtha wells (*naffāṭa*) and salt pans (*mallāḥāt*) of eastern Šervān; the naphtha workings must mark the beginnings of what has become in modern times the vast Baku oilfield. By the end of this 8th century, Šervān came within the extensive governorship, comprising Azarbaijan, Arrān, Armenia and the eastern Caucasus, granted by Hārūn-al-Rašid in 183/799 to the Arab commander Yazid b. Mazyad, and this marks the beginning of the line of Yazidi Šervānšāhs which was to endure until Timurid times and the end of the 14th century (see Bosworth, 1996, pp. 140-42 n. 67). Most of what we know about the earlier centuries of their power derives from a lost Arabic *Ta'riḳ Bāb al-abwāb* preserved within an Arabic general history, the *Jāme' al-dowal*, written by the 17th century Ottoman historian Monajjem-



bāši, who states that the history went up to c. 500/1106 (Minorsky 1958, p. 41). It was exhaustively studied, translated and explained by V. Minorsky (Minorsky, 1958; *Ḥodud al-‘ālam*, commentary pp. 403-11); without this, the history of this peripheral part of the mediaeval Islamic world would be even darker than it is.

The history of Šervānšāhs was clearly closely bound up with that of another Arab military family, the Hāšemīs of Bāb al-abwāb/Darband (see on them Bosworth, 1996, pp. 143-44 n. 68), with the Šervānšāhs at times ruling in the latter town (at times invited into Darband by rebellious elements there, see Minorsky 1958, pp. 27, 29-30), and there was frequent intermarriage between the two families. By the later 10th century, the Shahs had expanded from their capital of Šammākiya/Yazidiya (see ŠERVĀN) to north of the Kura valley and had absorbed the petty principalities of Layzān and Ḳorsān, taking over the titles of their rulers (see *Ḥodud al-‘ālam*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 144-45, comm. pp. 403-11), and from the time of Yazid b. Aḥmad (r. 381-418/991-1028) we have a fairly complete set of coins issued by the Shahs (see Kouymjian, pp. 136-242; Bosworth, 1996, pp. 140-41). Just as an originally Arab family like the Rawwādids in Azarbaijan became Kurdicized from their Kurdish milieu, so the Šervānšāhs clearly became gradually Persianized, probably helped by intermarriage with the local families of eastern Transcaucasia; from the time of Manučehr b. Yazid (r. 418-25/1028-34), their names became almost entirely Persian rather than Arabic, with favored names from the heroic national Iranian past and with claims made to descent from such figures as Bahrām Gur (see Bosworth, 1996, pp. 140-41).

The anonymous local history details frequent warfare of the Shahs with the infidel peoples of the central Caucasus, such as the Alans, and the people of Sarir (i.e. Daghestan), and with the Christian Georgians and Abḳāz to their west. In 421/1030 Rus from the Caspian landed near Baku, defeated in battle the Shah Manučehr b. Yazid and penetrated into Arrān, sacking Baylaqān before departing for Rum, i.e. the Byzantine lands (Minorsky, 1958, pp. 31-32). Soon afterwards, eastern Transcaucasia became exposed to raids through northern Persia of the Turkish Oghuz. Already in c. 437/1045, the Shah Qobād b. Yazid had to build a strong stone wall, with iron gates, round his capital Yazidiya for fear of the Oghuz (Minorsky 1958, p. 33). In 458-59/1066-67 the Turkish commander Qarategin twice invaded Šervān, attacking Yazidiya and Baku and devastating the countryside. Then after his Georgian campaign of 460/1058 Alp Arslan himself was in nearby Arrān, and the Shah Fariborz b.



Sallār had to submit to the Saljuq sultan and pay a large annual tribute of 70,000 dinars, eventually reduced to 40,000 dinars; coins issued soon after this by Fariborz acknowledge the ‘Abbasid caliph and then Sultan Malekšāh as his suzerain (Minorsky 1958, pp. 35-38, 68; Kouymjian, pp. 146ff, who surmises that, since we have no evidence for the minting of gold coins in Azarbaijan and the Caucasus at this time, Fariborz must have paid the tribute in Byzantine or Saljuq coins). Fariborz’s diplomatic and military skills thus preserved much of his family’s power, but after his death in c. 487/1094 there seem to have been succession disputes and uncertainty (the information of the *Ta’riḳ Bāb al-abwāb* dries up after Fariborz’s death).

In the time of the Saljuq sultan Maḥmud b. Moḥammad (r. 511-25/1118-31), Šervān was again occupied by Saljuq troops, and the disturbed situation there encouraged invasions of Šammāka and Darband by the Georgians. During the middle years of the 12th century, Šervān was virtually a protectorate of Christian Georgia. There were marriage alliances between the Shahs and the Bagratid monarchs, who at times even assumed the title of Šervānšāh for themselves; and the regions of Šakki, Qabala and Muqān came for a time directly under Georgian rule (Nasawi, text, pp. 146, 174). The energies of the Yazidi Shahs had to be directed eastwards towards the Caspian, and on various occasions they expanded as far as Darband.

The names and the genealogical connections of the later Šervānšāhs now become very confused and uncertain, and Monajjem-bāši gives only a skeletal list of them from Manučehr (III) b. Faridun (I) onwards. He calls this Shah Manučehr b. Kasrān, and the names Kasrānids or Kāqānids appear in some sources for the later shahs of the Yazidi line in Šervān (Minorsky, 1958, pp. 129-38; Bosworth, 1996, pp. 140-41). Manučehr (III) not only called himself Šervānšāh but also Kāqān-e Kabir “Great Khan,” and it was from this that the poet *Kāqāni*, a native of Šervān and in his early years eulogist of Manučehr, derived his *taḳalloṣ* or nom-de-plume. Much of the line of succession of the Shahs at this time has to be reconstructed from coins, and from these the Shahs of the 12th century appear as Saljuq vassals right up to the time of the last Sultan, Toḡrīl (III) b. Arslān, after which the name of the caliphs alone appear on their coins (Kouymjian, pp. 153ff, 238-42).

In the 13th century, Šervān fell under the control first of the Khwarazmshah Jalāl-al-Din Mengüberti after the latter appeared in Azarbaijan; according to Nasawi (p. 75), in 622/1225 Jalāl-al-Din demanded as tribute from the Šervānšāh Garšāsp (I) b. Farroḳzād (I) (r. after 600/1204 to c. 622/1225) the



70,000 dinars (100,000 dinars?) that the Saljuq sultan Malekšāh had exacted a century or more previously (see Kouymjian, pp. 152-53). Shortly afterwards, Šervān was taken over by the Mongols, and at times came within the lands of the Il-Khanids and at others within the lands of the Golden Horde. At the outset, coins were minted there in the name of the Mongol Great Khans, with the names of the Kasrānid Shahs but without their title of Šervānšāh, but then under the Il-Khanids, no coins were struck in Šervān. The Kasrānids survived as tributaries of the Mongols, and the names of Shahs are fragmentarily known up to that of Hušang b. Kayqobād (r. in the 780s/1370s; see Bosworth, 1996, p. 141; Barthold and Bosworth, 1997, p. 489).

This marked the end of the Yazidi/Kasrānid Shahs, but after their disappearance there came to power in Šervān a remote connection of theirs, Ebrāhim b. Moḥammad of Darband (780-821/1378-1418). He founded a second line of Shahs, at first as a tributary of Timur but latterly as an independent ruler, and his family was to endure for over two centuries. The 15th century was one of peace and prosperity for Šervān, with many fine buildings erected in Šammāka/Šemāka and Baku (see Blair, pp. 155-57), but later in the century the Shahs' rule was threatened by the rise of the expanding and aggressive shaikhs of the Šafavi order; both Shaikh Jonayd b. Ebrāhim and his son Ḥaydar were killed in attempted invasions of Šervān and the Darband region (864/1460 and 893/1488 respectively; see SAFAVIDS). Once established in power in Persia, Shah Esmā'īl I avenged these deaths by an invasion of Šervān in 906/1500, in which he killed the Šervānšāh Farroḡ-siār b. Ḳalil (r. 867-905/1463-1500), then reducing the region to dependent status (see Roemer, pp. 211-12). The Shahs remained as tributaries, and continued to mint their own coins, until in 945/1538 Ṭahmāsp I's troops invaded Šervān, toppled Šāhroḡ b. Farroḡ, and made the region a mere governorship of the Safavid empire. In the latter half of the 16th century, descendants of the last Shahs endeavored, with Ottoman Turkish help, to re-establish their power there, and in the peace treaty signed at Istanbul in 998/1590 between the sultan Morād III and Shah 'Abbās I, Šervān was ceded to the Ottomans; but after 1016/1607 Safavid authority was re-imposed and henceforth became permanent till the appearance of Russia in the region in the 18th century (see Roemer, pp. 266, 268; Barthold and Bosworth, 1997, p. 489).

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