



SIMJURIDS

SIMJURIDS, a family of Turkish *mamluks* who over four generations, from the late 9th century to the [Qarakhanid](#) conquest (389/999), played a leading role in the Samanid state. The source of their power lay in their early acquisition of a permanent appanage (*eqṭāʾ*) in Quhestān, as well as their powerful position at the Samanid court where they were among the first Turkish slaves to be promoted to high office by Esmāʿil b. Aḥmad (d. 295/907), the founder of the Samanid state. After half a century of loyal service as generals, administrators, and provincial governors, the Simjurids were appointed military governors (*sepahsālārs*) of [Khorasan](#), the largest and wealthiest of the Samanid provinces. They ruled there for much of the next fifty years, becoming increasingly independent of control from [Bukhara](#). The last significant Simjurid amir was among those local notables who appealed to the Qarakhanid ruler [Abu Musā Boḡrā Khan](#) for military assistance, thus opening the way to the Qarakhanid occupation of Bukhara in 382/992, the first step in the destruction of the Samanid house at the hands of the steppe Turks.

Their eponym, Abu ʿEmrān Simjur al-Dawāti was given the *nesba* al-Ḳ^wārazmi by Ebn Zāfer (Treadwell, 2000, p. 408, n. 57). He was a royal *ḡolām* but unlike most Turkish slaves he achieved early prominence in both civilian and military posts, serving as financial supervisor in Herat in 287/900 and twice as governor of Sistan after the conquest of the province from the [Saffarids](#) by Aḥmad b. Esmāʿil (d. 301/914). Simjur apparently took part in an unsuccessful *mamluk* conspiracy to replace the unpopular Aḥmad with his uncle, Eshāq b. Aḥmad (see Ebn Zāfer in Treadwell, 2000), but nevertheless managed to gain



the confidence of the next Samanid ruler, Naṣr b. Aḥmad (d. 331/943), during whose reign several *mamluks* were promoted to high office over the heads of local Iranian amirs. He took part in the successful defense of Khorasan against a Zaydi invasion from the Caspian region (309/ 921–2) and held important provincial governorships, including that of the city of Rayy in 314/926–7. He died in the second half of Naṣr’s reign. His son Abu Eshāq Ebrāhim (d. 336/948) began his career as the deputy of Abu ‘Ali b. Moḥtāj, the [Āl-e Moḥtāj](#) governor of Khorasan, but later profited from his fall from favor at the time of his attempted coup against the Samanid Amir Nuḥ b. Naṣr (d. 343/954) and was himself appointed governor of [Nishapur](#) in 333/944–5.

Ebrāhim’s son, Abu’l-Ḥasan Moḥammad (d. 378/989) served as governor of the province for nearly thirty years (from 345/956-7 to 349/960-1; and 350/961-2 to 371/981-2; and again from 376/986-7 to 378/988-9). He gradually established *de facto* independent rule. Abu Sa’d ‘Abd-al-Karim Sam‘āni ascribes his popularity in Nishapur to his piety, justice, and the patronage of the Shafi’ite community to which he belonged, which included the construction of a house and *madrasa* for the Ash‘arite Ebn Furak (Bulliet, p. 250). The chronicles by contrast focus on his involvement in the turbulent politics of the Caspian region, where he met with mixed success against the Buyids, the Samanids’ regional rivals. He failed to restore his Ziyarid ally Voshmgir to power in Ṭabarestān and Gorgān, backed the wrong candidate as Voshmgir’s successor, but succeeded in concluding an advantageous peace treaty between the Samanids and the Buyids in 361/971–2. As a sign of the Samanids’ increasingly desperate need to retain his loyalty, he was granted extraordinary privileges on the accession of the child ruler Nuḥ b. Maṣṣūr (365/976–387/997), including tax concessions, new territories and the prestigious *laqab* Nāser-al-Dawla (Bringer of Victory to the State). But Abu’l-Ḥasan and his son and successor Abu ‘Ali al-Moḥaffar (d. 387/997) were more concerned to protect their authority in Khorasan against the rising power of the [Ghaznavids](#) and the machinations of their enemies in Bukhara than to fulfill their obligations towards their nominal sovereigns. They soon threw off the pretence of client status and initiated a series of hostile actions against the Samanids: refusing orders to intervene in Sistan to suppress a long-running civil war (369/979–80), conniving in the murder of the vizier Abu’l-Ḥosayn ‘Otbi (d. 372/982–3), and finally stopping the payment of tribute to Bukhara and the provision of military aid. Abu ‘Ali made his intentions clear when he unilaterally awarded himself pretentious titles, among them, *amir-e jahān* (Lord of the World), while addressing Nuḥ as *wāli-e Bokhārā* (Governor of Bukhara; Treadwell, 2005, p.

148, 160), thus inverting the traditional relationship between the two houses. Under pressure from *Sebüktegin* the Ghaznavid who attacked him on the orders of the Samanids, he entered a complex series of alliances with the local powerbrokers who dominated the final chaotic years of Samanid rule, including most notably *Abu'l-Ḥasan Fā'eḳ Kaşşa*, the power behind the Samanid throne from the middle of the century. He was eventually captured and handed over to the Ghaznavid Maḥmud, who executed him and succeeded him as ruler of Khorasan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources:

Most of the information on the family comes from the major chronicles of the Samanid period, including the works of Ebn al-Aṭir, Gardizi, 'Oṭbi and Ebn Zāfer and consists of little more than a chronological listing of their appointments, military adventures, and political intrigues, which is comprehensively summarized in four articles by E. Merçil, *Sîmcûrîler, I-IV*, Istanbul n.d. (circa 1986).

The recently published chapter on the Samanids from Ebn Zāfer's history contains some useful new information (see below under Luke Treadwell). This can be supplemented by a brief family biography found in Sam'āni's *Ketāb al-ansāb*, VII, ed. M. Sadiqi, Hyderabad, 1976, pp. 351–55).

Secondary sources: Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz*, Costa Mesa and New York 1994, esp. pp. 271–73.

Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: a Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972.

Luke Treadwell, "Ibn Zāfir al-Azdī's Account of the Murder of Aḥmad b. Ismā'īl al-Sāmānī and the Succession of His Son Naşr," in Carole Hillenbrand ed., *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, II, The Sultan's Turret*, Leiden,



2000, pp. 397–419.

Idem, “The Account of the Samanid Dynasty in Ibn Zāfir’s *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi’a*, *Iran* 43, 2005, pp. 135-71.