



## ZIYARIDS

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**ZIYARIDS** (Āl-e Ziār), a minor Islamic dynasty of the Caspian coastlands (931-*ca.* 1090). They ruled first in northern Iran, and then in Ṭabarestān and Gorgān.

The Ziyarids belonged to hitherto submerged mountain peoples, notably the [Deylamites](#), Gilites (Gelae; see [GILĀN iv](#), *EIr* X/6, p. 634), and Kurds, whose rise to power constitutes the “Daylami intermezzo” of Iranian history (Minorsky). After the decline of direct caliphal authority in northwestern Iran and the demise of local powers like the Sājīd governors of [Azarbaijan](#) (esp. *EIr* III/4, p. 227), many mountain chiefs became soldiers of fortune and contenders for authority in this power vacuum; the most successful of all these were the three Deylamite [Buyids](#).

The founder of the Ziyarid dynasty Mardāvij b. Ziār (r. 931-35) claimed to stem from the pre-Islamic royal family of [Gilān](#). He first served the Ḥasanids of Ṭabarestān and then the Gilite commander [Asfār b. Širuya](#). In 931, Asfār’s excesses in northern Iran enabled Mardāvij to defeat and kill him. Mardāvij obtained control of an extensive dominion comprising Ray and Qazvin and extending to [Hamadan](#), [Dinavar](#), and [Isfahan](#), and by 934 his troops even penetrated into [Ahvāz](#). The Buyid brothers began their careers as condottieri in Mardāvij’s service. Mardāvij seems to have had grandiose dreams of marching on [Baghdad](#), overthrowing the ‘Abbasids (q.v.) and reconstituting the ancient Persian empire and faith, but these ambitions were cut short by his death at the hands of his Turkish military slaves (*gōlām*; see [BARDA and BARDADĀRI](#)) in 935 (Mas‘udi, pars. 3587-3602; Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 216-17; Ebn



al-Atīr, VIII, pp. 298-302).

His brother Zahir al-Dowla Vošmgir (r. 935-967; *vošmgir* lit. quail catcher, see Mas'udi, par. 3603; Justī, p. 359) was hailed as his successor at Ray, and his skill and circumspection allowed for a long reign despite constant conflicts. At first he was able to hold on to Mardāvij's conquests in northern and western Iran, but about 940 the vigorously expanding Buyids challenged his rule. Vošmgir allied with Mākān b. Kāki (d. 940), another Deylamite contender for power. Mākān had renounced his allegiance to the Samanids of Transoxania, the other great power which was hoping to extend westwards into northern Iran under their commander (*amir*) Naṣr b. Aḥmad. In 940, in a battle near [Dāmḡān](#), the Samanid commander Abu 'Ali Aḥmad Moḥtāji (see [ĀL-e MOḤTĀJ](#)) defeated the troops of Mākān and Vošmgir. Mākān was killed and Vošmgir abandoned Ray to retire to Āmol in Ṭabarestān (Meskavayh, *Tajāreb al-omam*, II, pp. 3-8, tr. Margoliouth, V, pp. 3-8; Ebn Esfandiār, tr. pp. 218-19; Ebn al-Atīr, VIII, p. 359; Miles, 1938, pp. 149-53). After this defeat the Ziyarids' political and military power was limited to the Caspian coastlands (see [CASPIAN SEA](#)), and Vošmgir became effectively a vassal of the Samanids. He was involved in complex struggles to retain his power against such enemies as Ḥasan b. Firuzān, the Deylamite governor of Sāri, and the Buyid Rokn al-Dowla Ḥasan (r. 947-77), while anxiously securing Ṭabarestān and [Gorgān](#), with the backing of the Samanids, as a buffer between themselves and the Buyids (Stern, pp. 122-24). Yet these two provinces changed hands several times until in 955 Rokn al-Dowla and the Samanid 'Abd al-Malek b. Nuḥ (r. 954-61) reached a general peace agreement, according to which Vošmgir's control of Ṭabarestān was no longer challenged by the Buyid. In 958 Vošmgir briefly occupied Ray, the Rokn al-Dowla's capital, and in the last years of his life, he participated in various Samanid attempts to retake Ray. But the city remained the capital of the northern Buyid emirate until the conquest of the Ghaznavid sultan Maḥmud (r. 998-1030; see [GHAZNAVIDS](#)) in 1029. Rokn al-Dowla in turn occupied Ṭabarestān and Gorgān during the next two or three years, after 958, on one, possibly two, occasions. At the end of 967, Vošmgir was killed by a wild boar, when he was about to command a joint attack with a Samanid army under Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim Simjuri on Rokn al-Dowla (Meskavayh, II, p. 233, tr. V, p. 247; Ebn Esfandiār, p. 225; Ebn al-Atīr, VIII, pp. 577-79).

After Vošmgir's death, his eldest son Bisotun (r. 967-78), who had been governor of Ṭabarestān, successfully claimed the throne, though his brother Qābus (r. 978-81 and 997-1012), who enjoyed the support of the Samanids,



challenged his succession. But Bisotun was backed by the Buyids and established himself in Ṭabarestān and Gorgān. This alliance was sealed by his marriage to a daughter of ‘Azod al-Dowla Fanā-Ḳosrow b. Rokn al-Dowla (r. 949-83; q.v.), and in 971 the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Moṭī‘ (r. 946-74) granted Bisotun the honorific (*laqab*) of Zahir al-Dowla. With this Buyid support Bisotun retained his power until his death in 978 (Ebn Esfandiār, p. 225.)

Qābus gained the throne by elbowing aside Bisotun’s young son, the candidate of the Gilite Dobāj b. Bāni, Bisotun’s father-in-law. This seems to have been a temporal reversal of alliances, since Qābus had gained the support of ‘Azod al-Dowla, whom he in fact acknowledged on his first coins (Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 225-26; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VIII, pp. 687-88). Between 978 and 979, the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ṭā’e‘ (r. 974-991) granted Qābus the honorific title of Šams al-Ma’ālī. But Qābus gave refuge to Faḳr al-Dowla ‘Ali (r. 983-97), the brother of the Buyid emir as well as Qābus’ brother-in-law. The Buyid ruler in [Jebāl](#) was at odds with his brother, and Qābus’ relations with ‘Azod al-Dowla very soon deteriorated. In 980 and 981 Qābus lost first Ṭabarestān to ‘Azod al-Dowla and then Gorgān to ‘Azod al-Dowla’s brother Mo’ayyed al-Dowla (d. 984). After their defeat at [Astarābād](#), Qābus and Faḳr al-Dowla took refuge with Ḥosām al-Dowla Tāš, the Samanid governor in Nishapur, and the two exiles had no hope of returning to their ancestral lands as long as ‘Azod al-Dowla and Mo’ayyed al-Dowla were alive. In 984 Šāḥeb Ebn ‘Abbād (d. 995), the great Buyid vizier, supported that Faḳr al-Dowla resumed power in Ray and Jebāl, but he did not permit Qābus to return to the Caspian provinces. Only in 997, when Faḳr al-Dowla’s son Majd al-Dowla Rostam (d. 1029) claimed the throne under the tutelage of his mother Sayyeda, could Qābus return home, after seventeen years of absence, at the invitation of the people of Gorgān (Ebn Esfandiār, p. 226; Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, pp. 139-41).

The events of the second part of Qābus’s reign are less well documented in the sources. During these years he had correct rather than amicable relations with Maḥmud. In 999 the Ghaznavid sultan Maḥmud had wrested the control of Khorasan from the Samanids and promised Qābus help in regaining his principality, yet the terms were unacceptable to the Ziyarid ruler (Nāẓim, pp. 77-78). Nevertheless Qābus held on to his power without acknowledging any outside suzerain. The historians relate that Qābus’s cruelty and bloodthirsty rule, in connection with a particular animosity towards those who did not share his strongly held Sunni tenets, aroused much resentment amongst his subjects. His arbitrary government culminated in the execution of the



governor of Astarābād for his alleged Moʿtazelite beliefs. A revolt of his troops cost him the control of his capital Gorgān City, and the rebels raised to the throne his son Manučehr (r. 1012-29), while Qābus was pursued to [Beštām](#) on the Ray-Khorasan road. Although Qābus had abdicated his power, the insurgents still feared him and in 1012 contrived to kill him by exposure to the freezing winter conditions in (ʿOtbi, pp. 363-67; Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 232 -33; Ebn al-Aṭir, IX, p. 238-40).

Qābus is the most famous of Ziyarid rulers because of his cultural and literary significance (Bosworth, 1978). His military achievements were mediocre, while his rule proved in fact tyrannical. But Qābus was a fine scholar in both Arabic and Persian, a skilful poet in both languages, and famed for his command of the epistolary style (see [CORRESPONDENCE ii](#); [ENŠA](#)); a collection of his Arabic writings (*rasāʿel*) is extant (Brockelmann, *GAL*, S I, p. 154). He also had a reputation as an expert calligrapher (see [CALLIGRAPHY](#)) and as an authority on astrology (see [ASTROLOGY and ASTRONOMY iii](#)). His prolonged exile amongst the Samanids brought him into contact with some of the brightest luminaries of [Bukhara](#) and Nishapur, and the Samanid connection surely established Qābus' fame. Ṭaʿālebi (d. 1037-8) praises him as an outstanding littérateur and scholar, as well as a Maecenas (IV, pp. 59-61). [Biruni](#) (973-after 1050) visited the Ziyarid court soon after Qābus' restoration to the throne in 998, and composed around 1000 the *Al-Āṭār al-bāqiyā* which he dedicated to his patron (*EIr* IV/3, p. 275). When in 1013 Ebn Sinā (980?-1037; see [AVICENNA](#)) left his native Khwarazm (see [CHORASMIA](#)) for Gorgān, he was seeking the Ziyarid's patronage, yet Qābus had just died (*EIr* III/1, p. 69). Outside Gorgān City stands his mausoleum, the [Gonbad-e Qābus](#). Qābus himself supervised its construction between 1006 and 1007, and the tall cylindrical brick tower is one of the most renowned monuments of Iranian architecture.

Qābus's successor Manučehr received from the ʿAbbasid caliph Qāder (r. 991-1031) the honorific of Falak al-Maʿāli. But Ghaznavids controlled Khorasan, and their power extended now into the Caspian region. Sultan Maḥmud espoused the cause of Manučehr's brother Dārā b. Qābus (r. 1035-49) who had been a fugitive at the court of [Ġazni](#) during their father's lifetime. Maḥmud threatened to support Dārā's claim to the throne with sending him an army. Manučehr bought himself off by promising the Ghaznavids an annual tribute of 50,000 [dinar](#), and sealed the arrangement with marrying one of Maḥmud's daughters (ʿOtbi, pp. 367-75; Bayhaqi, p. 264; Ebn Esfandiār, p.



234). Thereafter, the Ziyarid ruler was no longer an independent ruler. Manuĉehr had, in fact, become a Ghaznavid governor (*wali*), and occasionally sent troop contingents for Maḥmud's military campaigns ('Otbi, pp. 378-79). But in 1029, shortly before the death of both Manuĉehr and Maḥmud, the Ziyarid felt again threatened when the Ghaznavids conquered Ray from the Buyid Majd al-Dowla, and he paid the sultan a heavy indemnity to prevent a possible Ghaznavid invasion (Nāẓim, pp. 78-79). It is unknown whether Manuĉehr shared his father's cultural interests and continued with the patronage of scholarship and the arts. There is, however, no supporting evidence for the assertion that the Ghaznavid poet Manuĉehri (fl. 1031-1041) derived his penname (*taḳallos*) from a stay at the Ziyarid court (Browne, pp. 104, 156; Clinton).

Manuĉehr's young son Anušervān (r. 1029-35) had been in 1029 confirmed by Maḥmud as his father's successor, with the stipulation of continued tribute to the Ghaznavids. But from 1032 until 1040 this youth was excluded from power by a maternal relative, Abu Kālijār b. Vayhān (for the exact relationship, see Bosworth, 1964, pp. 28-31). When in 1035 Abu Kālijār fell behind with his tribute payments, Mas'ud b. Maḥmud (r. 1031-1040) mounted a large-scale invasion of Gorgān and Ṭabarestān and savagely sacked Āmol. Abu Kālijār agreed to resume the tribute payments (Gardizi, pp. 198-99; Bayhaqi, pp. 583-609), while Anušervān seems to have recovered his princely power, though the end of Ghaznavid suzerainty was near. Between 1041 and 1042 the Saljuq sultan Ṭoghril Beg (r. 1043-63) first wrested Khorasan from Mas'ud and then invaded the Caspian lands, so that the Ziyarids became tributaries of the Great Saljuqs (Ebn al-Aṭir, IX, pp. 496-97).

The last decades of the Ziyarid rule are very obscure, and apparently Manuĉehr was the last Ziyarid to issue his own coinage. Both Anušervān and Abu Kālijār seem to have died between 1049 and 1050 (Ebn Esfandiār, p. 235). The last firmly attested Ziyarid is 'Onšor al-Ma'āli Kaykāvus b. Eskandar b. Qābus (d. ca. 1087; see [KAYKĀVUS](#)), the celebrated author of the *Qābus-nāma* which was named after his well-known grandfather. Statements in the *Qābus-nāma* (pp. 24-25, 135-37; tr. pp. 35-37, 230-31, 234-35) suggest that Kaykāvus spent much of his early life away from the Caspian region, first in Ġazni in the service of the Ghaznavid Mawdud b. Mas'ud (r. 1041-48) and then in [Arrān](#) in that of the Shaddadid Abu'l-Aswār Šāvor b. Fażl (r. 1049-67). Kaykāvus is said to have been succeeded by his son Gilānšāh (r. ca.1087-ca. 1090). But he is a completely shadowy figure, and may have been overthrown by the Isma'īlis



(see ISMA'ILISM ii) of the Alborz region who brought the Ziyarid dynasty to its end in ca. 1090 (Bosworth, 1964, p. 33).

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