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## IRANIAN PROPHETS AND FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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The first few generations of Zarathushtis, after the Arab invasion, were either killed or taxed and **subdued** as required by the Quran. *“until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”*<sup>1</sup> The children and grandchildren of those that had been subdued were the ones that became leaders and freedom fighters. The Mobeds and the learned had their arms or figures cut, or burnt on the pyre of their books. The A-Vesta that had survived was not readily available to these freedom fighters to refer to and revive their ancestral faith. We see many of the freedom fighters trying to invent a religion by declaring themselves Prophets and trying to reform the Islamic beliefs. Most of them were short-lived or fizzled out in the long run. The net result was the creation of the *Qarmatians* who evolved into the Ismaili sect, then there were the Sufis and the Darvish. There were also many political divisions of Islam led by Arabs, the earliest being the Shia sect, then there are the Alavi, Wahabi, Hanafi, Shafi etc. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century once again a movement started by ‘Baha Ullah’, a Sayed (a descendant of Prophet Mohammad), gave birth to the Bahai religion. Again Baha Ullah has reformed Islam the only feature used from Zoroastrianism is the myth of the saviour Shah Bahram Varjavand and the celebration of Nou Ruz as a religious festival.

Some mobeds that survived created the Pahlavi text like Dinkard, Nirangistän, Dätistän- Denig etc which has more to do with their contemporary customs and rituals which were tailored to avoid repercussions. The Avesta that has survived, has for whatever reason, hidden the Gathas of Zarathushtra in the Yasna by way of numerology<sup>2</sup> and was discovered by the German scholar Martin Haug in 1859 based on the difference in the age of the language.

Some of the Freedom Fighters/Prophets are:

**Behafarid**

**Ostad Sis**

**Al-Muqanna**

**Sunpadh**

**Abu'l-Fadl al-Isfahani**

**Mazyar**

**Babak e Khoramdin (separate attachment)**

Abu Moslem Khorasani and Afshin are also considered Heros but in their quest, they were in service of the ‘Khilafat’ and had to betray other Iranian Freedom Fighters.

## BEHAFARID

**BEHAFARID** son of Farvardin who lived in the early 700s and died in 749 CE was a Self-Styled Prophet and leader of a heretical group. He was a Freedom Fighter who went against the Islamic rulers of his time. He accepted Zoroaster as a prophet but rejected some of the practices of contemporary Zoroastrians. He is said to have written a book but it has not survived. Arabs called him Behzad-e-Majus, he began his crusade in Shiravand in Naisapur.<sup>3</sup>

He is said to have brought from China a green silk robe that when folded was small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. He used it to stage his resurrection and claim Prophethood. Following this, many of the locals became his follower. He initiated several rules for his followers concerning killing animals for consumption, prohibiting wine drinking, not burying corpses, giving one-seventh of one's wealth to charity and building infrastructures like roads and caravansary.<sup>4</sup>

He was reconciling those customs which were controversial among contemporary Zarathushtis and at the same time making them compatible with the Islamic beliefs of the rulers. Another factor which speeded the progress of Behāfarīd's movement was the internal dissension among the Zoroastrian priests. In general, scholars have seen Behāfarīd's actions as a revolt supported by farmers and the poor against the traditional Sasanian-Zoroastrian power.

Thus a group of Mobeds and religious masters (*hīrbad*) went and complained to Abū Moslem that Behāfarid was destroying Islam and Zoroastrianism. Who sent his generals, captured Behāfarīd in the mountains of Bādġīs and brought him to Nīšāpūr where he was hanged at the Bāb al-Jāme. <sup>5</sup> Despite its limited duration, Behāfarīd's movement survived his death by several centuries.

## **Ustadh Sis – Ostad Sis**

**Ostad Sis** was a Persian heresiarch and anti-Arab rebel leader. He was once a governor of Khorasan and the alleged father to Al-Mamun's Iranian mother, Marjil, which makes him Ma'mūn's, (the seventh Abbassi Khalifa's), grandfather.

He claimed he was a Prophet of God in the eastern fringe of Khorasan in the mid 8th century and managed to gain followers among the villagers in that area. Many were previously followers of Behafarid.

Ustadh Sis launched a rebellion in 767 CE, with 300,000 fighting men.<sup>6</sup> His initial base was the mountainous region of Badghis, and he soon occupied Herat and Sistan before marching towards Merv. He initially defeated an Abbasid army under the command of al-Ajtham of Merv but was himself defeated in a bloody battle against an army led by the son of the Khalif Al-Mansur.

According to Tabari 70,000 of Ustadh Sis's followers were killed in the battle, and 14,000 were taken captive. **Khazim took the fourteen thousand prisoners and cut off their heads.**<sup>7</sup> Ustadh Sis took refuge in the mountains with a small number of his companions but was captured. He was sent in chains to Al-Mansur, who ordered his execution.<sup>8</sup>

The rebellion of Ustadh Sis and al-Harish took place in the year 767 CE and Ustadhsis was defeated in the year 768 CE.<sup>9</sup>

## AL-MUQANNA

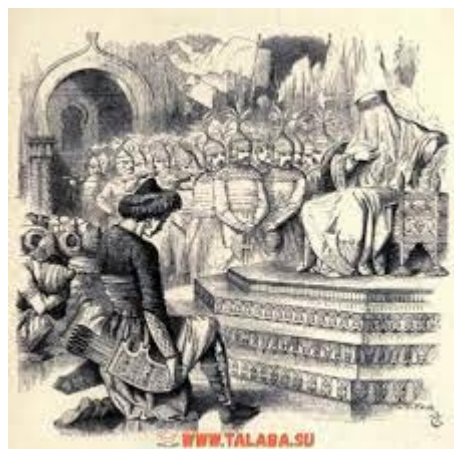
Hashim famously known as **Al-Muqanna** meaning **The Veiled** in Arabic, was the leader of an anti-Islamic revolt who was killed in 783 CE. He too claimed to be a Prophet and founded a religion which was a mixture of Zoroastrianism and Islam. He was a chemist and once while experimenting caused an explosion in which part of his face was burnt. To hide it he wore a veil all his life and so was called Al-Muqanna.

He was an Iranian from Balkh in Afghanistan who became a commander in the army of Abu Muslim. When Abu Muslim was murdered he claimed to be the incarnation of God, and that Prophet Mohammad had passed it on to him via Ali Ibn Abi Taleb and Abu Moslem. His followers wore white in opposition to the Abbassis who wore black. He used his knowledge of chemistry to engage in miracles and by that gained followers.

He was instrumental in the formation of the Khorram-Dinan armies which were led by Babak Khormadin. When Hashem started raiding towns and mosques and looting their possessions, the Abbassi's send several commanders to crush the rebellion. Finally, he was surrounded while in a fort near Kesh and he poisoned himself rather than surrender to the Abbassis. After his death, his army existed till the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1787 Napoleon Bonaparte wrote a two-page short story about Al-Muqanna called "Le Masque prophète".

Thomas Moore immortalized him in his poem "Lalla Rookh" (1817) titled '*The Veiled Prophet of Khorasan*'.



## SUNPADH

**Sunpadh** was an Iranian Nobleman from the Askanian House of Karen. He was a Zoroastrian and a native of the village Ahan in Nishapur. Following the betrayal and death of Abu Moslem by Khalifa Al- Mansur in 755 CE, Sanpadh was enraged and he revolted. He was called "Phiroz Ispahbadh" the Victorious General and he captured Nishapur, Qumis and Rey. He seized the treasuries of Abu Moslem stored in Rey and distributed them among his supporters from Jibal and Tabaristan.<sup>10</sup> He preached that Abu Moslem did not die and when Al-Mansur wanted to slay him he chanted God's name and turned into a white dove and flew away.

The Khalifa sent a force of 10,000 strong under Jahwar ibn Ljli they clashed with Sunpadh between Hamadan and Rey, Sunpadh was defeated and his army slaughtered.<sup>11</sup> According to historian Ibn Isfandiyar, the bone of the dead was still on the ground in 912 CE. Sunpadh fled to Tabaristan where he was killed by his cousin for being disrespectful.<sup>12</sup> There are other reports that he was killed to obtain from him the treasure of Abu Moslem.

## ABU'L-FADL AL-ISFAHANI

**Abu'l-Fadl al-Isfahani**, also known as the **Isfahani Mahdi** was a young Persian who in 931 AD **was declared to be "God incarnate" by the Qarmatian leader** Abu Tahir of Bahrain, Al Jannabi. This new apocalyptic leader, however, caused great disruption by rejecting traditional aspects of Islam and promoting ties to Zoroastrianism.

Abu Tahir thought that he had identified the Mahdi as a young Persian prisoner from Isfahan by the name of Abu'l-Fadl al-Isfahani, who claimed to be a descendant of the Sassanian kings. Al-Isfahani had been brought back to Bahrain from the Qarmatians' raid into Iraq in 928. In 931, Abu Tahir turned over the state to this Mahdi-Caliph, said in fact to be a Zoroastrian revivalist with anti-Arab sentiments. He reinstated the **vereneration of fire** and engaged in the burning of religious books during an eighty-day rule. Al-Isfahani also is thought to have some links with established Zoroastrian orthodoxy as the high priest of the Zoroastrians, **Esfandiar Adarbad** was executed by the Abbasid Caliph after being accused of complicity with Abu Tahir.<sup>13</sup> His reign culminated in the execution of members of Bahrain's notable families, including members of Abu Tahir's family. Abu Tahir's mother conspired to get rid of Al-Esfahani; she faked her death and sent a messenger to call the Mahdi to resurrect her. When he refused, he was exposed as being a normal human, and Abu Tahir's brother Sa'id killed Abu'l-Fadl Al-Esfahani after the Mahdi had reigned for only eighty days. Other accounts say fearing for his own life, Abu Tahir announced that he had been wrong and denounced the al-Isfahani as a false Mahdi. Begging forgiveness from the other notables, Abu Tahir had him executed.

Following this incident, the Qarmatians lost ground but later picked up again and finally became what today is the Ismaili sect.

**Note:** The story of Mazyar is also an example of conversion for convenience which is then irreversible. Also, the practice of conforming to adopting Arabic names that have caused a loss of identity among the Iranians.

## MAZYAR

**Mazyar** was an Iranian prince from the Qarinvand dynasty, who was the ruler (Ispahbadh) of the mountainous region of Tabaristan from 825/6 to 839. He converted to Islam for convenience but resisted and revolted against the Abbassi Khalifat.

Mazyar belonged to the Qarinvand dynasty, which was descended from Sukhra, a powerful magnate from the Askanian (Parthian) House of Karen, who was the de facto ruler of the Sasanian Empire from 484 to 493 CE. However, due to his great influence and power, he was exiled and executed by the Sasanian king Ghobad-I (r. 488–496 & 498–531). Sukhra was survived by eight sons, one of them being Karin, who in return for aiding Ghobad I's son and successor Khosrow I (r. 531–579) against the Western Turkic Khagan in the 550s, received land to the south of Amol in Tabaristan, thus starting the Qarinvand dynasty.

Mazyar succeeded his father Qarin ibn Vandadh Hurmuzd in ca. 817. However, his territories were soon invaded by the neighbouring Bavandid ruler Shahriyar I, who defeated Mazyar and forced him to flee. Mazyar took refuge with his cousin Vinda-Umid, who betrayed him and handed him over to Shahriyar. However, Mazyar managed to escape and reach the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun. There he met one of his astrologers, **Yahya ibn al-Munajjim**, one of the great-great-grandson of King Yazdgerd III who had recently converted to Islam and belonged to the Banu Munajjim<sup>14</sup> family. Mazyar soon also embraced Islam, and al-Mamun gave him the title of "Servant of the Commander of the Faithful" (mawlā amīr al-mu'minīn) and the Muslim name of **Abu'l-Hasan Muhammad**.

Mazyar was also granted two towns of Ruyan and Damavand in Tabaristan as his fief and was named the co-governor of Tabaristan with the Abbasid statesman Musa ibn Hafs. In 822/3, Mazyar returned to Tabaristan with Abbasid reinforcements, and began to deal with his enemies—he had his brother Quhyar exiled and did the same to Shahriyar I's son Qarin I, who was his nephew. In 825/6, Mazyar invaded the domains of the Bavandids and captured Shahriyar's son and successor, Shapur. His uncle, Vinda-Umid, was also defeated and shortly afterwards killed. Mazyar thus united the highlands under his own rule. He then assumed the titles of *Gil-Gilan*, Ispahbadh, and Padish khwargar Shah, all titles used by the 8th-century Dabuyid king of Tabaristan, Farrukhan the Great (r. 712-728).

Shapur, knowing that Mazyar planned to have him killed, sent a secret message to Musa, willing to pay him 100,000 dirhams if he would assert him as his prisoner. Musa responded by saying his best shot would be to convert to Islam and become a client of the caliph. Musa, nervous about Mazyar learning of his secret communication with Shapur, asked him how he would react if Shapur converted to Islam and offered to become a client of the caliph. Mazyar did not answer but had Shapur beheaded the same day, which greatly angered Musa. Mazyar, fearful of the consequences of having Shapur killed without consensus, apologized to Musa.

Mazyar now began constructing mosques in several towns, successfully plundered the territories of the Daylamites, and had a large number of them resettled in the bordering place of Muzn. In 826/7, Musa died and was succeeded by his son Muhammad ibn Musa, to whom Mazyar paid no attention. Mazyar continued to expand his influence, but his policies were regarded by the Muslims of Tabaristan as oppressive. The Muslims of Tabaristan and the Bavandid prince Qarin I now began complaining to al-Ma'mun about Mazyar's behaviour but did not manage to turn al-Ma'mun against Mazyar.

After al-Ma'mun became involved in a war against the Byzantine Empire, Mazyar used the opportunity to imprison Muhammad ibn Musa on the charge of being secretly involved with the Alids. Al-Mamun soon acknowledged Mazyar's rule over Tabaristan and its surrounding regions. When al-Mamun died in 833, he was succeeded by his half-brother al-Mu'tasim, who also acknowledged Mazyar as the ruler of Tabaristan.

However, when the Tahiri ruler Abdallah ibn Tahir demanded the payment of the land tax (*Kharaj*) from Mazyar, the latter refused. Abdallah, claiming Tabaristan as his fief, then demanded that Mazyar should release Muhammad ibn Musa. Mazyar, however, once again refused to obey Abdallah, and the latter went before al-Mu'tasim to accuse Mazyar of infidelity and tyranny.

Feeling threatened, Mazyar rebelled against the Abbasid Caliphate, an act which was widely supported by the native Zoroastrians and the Abbasid-controlled border regions. Mazyar tried to secure the loyalty of the noblemen of Tabaristan and imprisoned anyone he did not trust. According to the medieval historian Ibn Isfandiyyar in his *Tarikh-e-Tabaristan*, Mazyar is said to have proclaimed:

Afshin, the son of Kavus, Babak Khorramdin, and I had made an oath and allegiance that we take the country back from the Arabs and transfer the government and the country back to the family of Kasraviyan.

Abdallah and al-Mu'tasim sent five armies that entered Tabaristan from all sides. Mazyar named his brother Quhyar the defender of the Qarinvand mountains and the Bavandid Qarin I as the defender of eastern Tabaristan. However, Tabaristan fell quickly to the Abbasid invasion: several cities were taken by surprise, while Qarin I betrayed Mazyar and agreed to aid the Abbasids in exchange for being restored as the ruler of his family's domains. The people of Sari revolted against Mazyar, and Mazyar was betrayed by his brother Quhyar, who captured him and surrendered him to al-Mu'tasim.

Mazyar was brought to Samarra, where he was executed. His body later was gibbeted along with the body of Babak Khorramdin. Mazyar's brother Quhyar was shortly after killed by his Daylamite soldiers because he betrayed Mazyar. This marked the end of the Qarivand dynasty. This left the Tahirids as the rulers of Tabaristan, and Qarin I was restored as the ruler of the Bavand dynasty as a vassal.<sup>15</sup>



MAZYAR - in present-day Sari



## ADUR FARNBAG I FARROKHZADAN

**Aturfarnbag-i Farruxzatan** was a 9th-century Zoroastrian high-priest who served as the leader of the Zoroastrian community of Pars in Iran. His first name has the meaning 'Fire of Farnbag', the Farnbag fire being one of the three preeminent Fires of Iran. He is known to have held a religious disputation in 825 at the Abbassi court with the former Zoroastrian Abalish, known as "the apostate" and formerly called Dadv-Ohrmazd. Adur Farnbag managed to win the debate and Abalish was removed from the Abbassi court.

Adur Farnbag is also known to have written the Denkard, an Encyclopedia about Zoroastrian beliefs and customs. He also wrote the book *Ēwēn-nāmag* on the tenets of the Zoroastrian religion. The fourth Book of Denkard is regarded as a condensed version of this work.

Adur Farnbag was later succeeded by his son Zardusht. He also had another son named Goshnjam, who, like his father, would later have a distinguished career. Another Zoroastrian high-priest named Adurbad-i Emedan would later edit the Denkard, putting much more information about Zoroastrian beliefs and customs. Adur Farnbag was also the ancestor of the prominent Zoroastrian Manushcihr-i Goshn-Yam, who wrote the Dadestan-i Denig.

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<sup>1</sup> Quran 9:29 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=9&verse=29>

<sup>2</sup> The art of numerology has been used as follows 28=2+8=10=1+0=1, 29=2+9=11=2, 30=3+0=3 ----- 34=3+4=7, 43=4+3=7 and so on

<sup>3</sup> Iranicaonline.org

<sup>4</sup> Bīrūnī; Ta'ālebi; Gardīzī; Šahrestānī

<sup>5</sup> Šahrestānī, I, p. 239

<sup>6</sup> History of Tabari Vol 29

<sup>7</sup> History of Tabari Vol 29 p 358

<sup>8</sup> Iranicaonline.org

<sup>9</sup> History of Tabari Vol 29 p 358

<sup>10</sup> History of Tabari Vol 28 p120

<sup>11</sup> History of Tabari Vol 28 p120

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Isfandiyar, *History of Tabaristan*, 117.

<sup>13</sup> <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/carmatians-ismailis>

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banu\\_al-Munajjim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banu_al-Munajjim)

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from wekipeadia