

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT AL-AFSHIN - THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ABBASID ARMY

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Annotation: *This article provides some information about the head of the Abbasid army during the reign of Caliph al-Mutasim, a native of Central Asia al-Afshin, about his role and fate in the life of the Caliphate, about his fight against the Khurramites and the suppression of the Babek uprising, about his betrayal and execution.*

Keywords: *Samarra, al-Mutasim, Afshin, Bobek, Khurramiyy, Central Asia*

Becoming caliph in 833, al Mutasim led punitive and military measures against the uprising of the Khurramites under the leadership of Babek and Magyar, in the eastern provinces of the empire on the one hand, on the other hand with Byzantium, which, taking advantage of the difficult position of the caliphate due to internal strife, intensified military operations on the borders.

Khurramite unrest did not stop for a long time (VII and the first half of the IX century). But the largest was the rebellion of Babek, which began during the reign of al-Mamun in Azerbaijan in 816. The uprising lasted over twenty years (816-837) and various sections of the population took part in it against the Arab domination, which was accompanied by the seizure of the lands of the Arab landowners. Initially, the uprising could not be suppressed because the situation in the caliphate was unstable, especially during the struggle between al-Amin and al-Mamun [10. 93].

The danger of the Khurramite movement was especially emphasized by the elder brother of al Mutasim al-Mamun in his will: "As for the Khurramites, send an energetic, loyal and calm person against them and back him up with money and troops, and if they hold out for a long time, then go against them yourself along with his assistants and friends." Taking into account the warnings of his brother, al Mutasim, in order to implement his daring plans to eliminate enemies, in 835 he appointed Heydar ibn Kavus, nicknamed al-Afshin, as the commander of the army. Afshin was already able to show his fighting qualities and abilities during the reign of al-Mamun during the suppression of Coptic uprisings in the Egyptian Delta in 831-832 and riots in Baghdad that occurred on religious grounds. Thus, Afshin, having become the head of the entire Caliph's army, became one of the representatives of Central Asia, who took one of the leading roles in the political life of the state [1. 357]. Who is Afshin really?

The name of the commander is Afshin, in fact the title of the ruler of Ustrshana (the mountainous region between Samarkand and Khujand [10. 92]. Ustrshana was subordinate to the ruler of Khorasan. Afshin was a Buddhist before accepting Islam, and he converted to Islam shortly before entering the service.

The results were not long in coming, and soon the army of the caliphate inflicted the first serious defeat on the troops of Babek near Hamadan. The rebel leader was so confident in his own strength that he abandoned the tactics of guerrilla warfare and accepted the battle openly, but was defeated and fled.

The military camp was set up in a huge wasteland near Baghdad, where the inhabitants of the city gathered for prayer on holidays. Having completed preparations on the eastern bank of the Tigris, al-Afshin advanced to the small ruined village of Barzand, which was located at the crossroads of four roads leading to Bazz, Ardabil, Mugan and Varsan. Due to its strategic position (the village was adjacent to the mountainous region where the main forces of Babek were concentrated), this settlement was rebuilt, fortified and turned into a command post. Having settled in Barzand, al-Afshin ordered to carefully guard the roads and fortresses that were between his headquarters and Ardabil. The detachment commanders fortified themselves in key territories: Muhammad ibn Yusuf dug in in Khosh, Haytham al-Ganawi settled in the Arshak region, rebuilt its castle and dug trenches, and Alaveykhi occupied a castle on the river beyond Ardabil. Travelers and caravans left Ardabil under guard and went to the river castle, from there the soldiers accompanied them to Kheysam al-Ganawi, who met them at a prearranged place [13. 19]. Thus, by transferring care of the caravans to each other, the detachments ensured their safety and prevented attacks by the Khurramites.

Babek did not dare to enter into an open battle, and it was not easy to lure him out of the fortress. Sometimes this was possible thanks to military cunning. When the Muslims seized the spies sent by the Khurramites, they were immediately taken to al-Afshin, who treated them well, and then lured them to his side for material reward. The exhausting tactics chosen by the Turkic commander proved to be successful, and at the beginning of 837 the position of the defenders in the Bazz fortress deteriorated noticeably. In the hope of opening a second front, Babek sent a message to the Byzantine emperor, convincing him that the caliph had used all his forces to fight the rebels and could not protect the lands bordering on Byzantium. According to historians, in order to have a stronger effect on Theophilus, he pretended to be a Christian before him and promised to subsequently convert his supporters to Christianity.

As a result, Theophilus, who wanted to get even with the Arabs for previous defeats, invaded Asia Minor. The campaign was accompanied by terrible atrocities: the prisoners' eyes were gouged out, their ears and noses were cut off. Despite the looting of several regions, al-Mutasim did not recall a single soldier from Azerbaijan. The Muslim detachments sent by the caliph reached the border with Byzantium, when Theophilus's army had already retired to its borders. The Caliph did not hurry with a reciprocal campaign against Byzantium, and already in August 837, the Muslims stormed the Bazz fortress. Babek, together with his relatives and close associates, fled to Artsakh in order to move from there to Byzantium. But his long-time ally, Prince

Sahl ibn Sumbat, betrayed him to al-Afshin for a large reward. Babek was brought to the caliph and publicly executed in January 838 [13.88].

In the spring of the same year, al-Mu'tasim personally led a campaign against Byzantium, which ended with the defeat of the imperial army and the destruction of many cities, including Ancyra and Amorium. In battles against Christians, Afshin again distinguished himself, thanks to which he managed to get closer to the caliph and earned respect among the soldiers. This greatly disturbed the vizier Abu Jafar Ibn al-Zayyat, the supreme qadi Ahmed ibn Duad and the governor of Khorasan Abdullah ibn Tahir. When it turned out that al-Afshin's henchman in Azerbaijan, his relative Mengudzhur hid huge treasures captured in Bazza from the caliph, the Turkic commander Boyuk-Buga arrested Mengudzhur. He admitted that he acted on the orders of al-Afshin, after which the caliph ordered the arrest of his commander.

Despite heavy accusations of treason and even idolatry, al-Afshin defended himself in court as best he could, but in the end he was sentenced to death and killed in prison in 841. According to some historians, al-Afshin pretended to be a Muslim and curried before the Caliph in order to seize power in Khorasan and Transoxiana. According to others, a prominent military leader was the victim of conspirators who slandered him before the Abbasid ruler.

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