



AKLĀṬ

AKLĀṬ (or Greek Khliat, Khleat, Armenian Khlat'), a town and medieval Islamic fortress in eastern Anatolia, in the former Armenian district of Bzunik', and now in the modern Turkish *vilayet* of Van. It lies on the northwestern shore of Lake Van, between the mountain massifs of Sipan Dağ and Nimrud Dağ (lat 38° 50' N, long 42°50' E) on a historic route connecting upper Mesopotamia (the medieval Islamic Jazīra) with eastern Armenia.

i. History.

ii. Monuments.

i. History

The first contact with the Armenian town of Aklāt was made, according to Balāḍorī (*Fotūḥ*, pp. 176, 199), during 'Omar's caliphate. In 24/645, during 'Oṭman's reign, Mo'āwīa, governor of Syria, sent Ḥabīb b. Maslama into Armenia, and the local Armenian princes of the Lake Van region submitted to the Arabs. For the next four centuries, the town was ruled in turn by Arab governors, Armenian princes, and Arab amirs of the Qays tribe. By about 373/983 it was in the hands of a Kurdish chief Bād (Armenian Bat), and thereafter linked with the Kurdish dynasty of the Marwanids of Dīārbakr, which sprang from Bād. After the battle of Malāzgerd (Mantzikert) in 463/1071, it was taken over personally by the victorious Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslan, and



then was given to the line of the Saljuqs' Turkmen slave commander Soqmān, the so-called Shah Armans, who made it their capital. With the decline of the Great Saljuqs and the disturbances wrought in eastern Anatolia by the invasions of the K̄vārazmšāhs and the Mongols, possession of Aklāṭ was disputed by the Ayyubids, the Christian Georgians, and the Rūm Saljuqs.

After the battle of Köse Dağ in 641/1243 and Hülegü's capture of Baghdad fifteen years later, Aklāṭ, together with eastern Anatolia and upper Mesopotamia, came within the Mongol empire. It was ruled by the Il-khanids (who minted coins there) and then by their successor-states, the Jalayirids and the Āq Qoyunlū. Under the Il-khanids, the revenues of Aklāṭ amounted to 51,500 dinars, according to Ḥamdallāh Mostawfī (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 100, tr. p. 100). It does not seem to have been taken over by the Ottomans till Selīm I's time, at the opening of the 10th/16th century. But even then it did not come firmly within the limits of the empire (there was a temporary occupation and sacking in 955/1548 by the Safavid Shah Ṭahmāsp) till the reign of Solaymān the Magnificent (926-74/1520-66). In practice, Aklāṭ remained under the control of local Kurdish chiefs until the imposition of direct rule from Istanbul in the mid-19th century. At the end of that century V. Cuinet estimated the population of the *qazā'* of Aklāṭ at 23,700, seventy percent of whom were Muslims and the rest Christians, mostly Armenians. By this time ancient Aklāṭ had been abandoned and was known as K̄arāb Şehir (the ruined town); a new town (population 5,018 in 1961) grew up two km to the east, on the lake shore.

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ii. Monuments

Those monuments of Aḳlāt of archeological and architectural interest belong for the most part to three groupings: Eski Aḳlāt (Old Aḳlāt) on the west, the Ottoman *qaḷ'a* on the shore of Lake Van on the east, and the extensive cemeteries on the plain between and on the high ground to the west of the old city.

Eski Aḳlāt, known also as Ḳarāb Şehir, was the citadel of medieval Aḳlāt, destroyed by Shah Ṭahmāsp in 955/1548. Consisting of a rocky platform known locally as Taḳt-e Süleymān, it rises some 60 m out of the floor of the Taḳt-e Süleymān Deresi, and is oriented north to south, being about 500 m long and 100 m wide at its greatest extent. The flat top of the platform is today devoid of architectural structures, all buildings having been razed, but portions of its defensive walls are still intact. The medieval city itself seems to have extended to the south and east of the citadel. Traces of its walls were noted by Lynch (*Armenia*, II, p. 292) and Kafesoğlu (“Ahlat,” pp. 171-72), and suggest that the citadel was situated at the northwest angle of pre-16th century Aḳlāt, which appears to have had a roughly triangular plan extending east to the Emir ‘Alī Künbedi, and south to a point not far from that where the Taḳt-e Süleymān Deresi flows into Lake Van (for plan, see Kafesoğlu, “Ahlat,” p. 191).

Ottoman Aḳlāt was built to the east, on the shore of Lake Van, and consists of a large rectangular fortress enclosed by massive, bastioned walls measuring approx. 200 by 400 m. Three gates, two on the north and one on the south, give access to the interior of the *qaḷ'a*, which is divided into three enclosures—a heavily fortified citadel on the south and two outer enclosures which were



inhabited by the population of the Ottoman town. An undated inscription over the gate to the citadel identifies its founder as Sultan Süleymān I, an attribution confirmed by Evliyā Čelebi (IV, p. 138), who states that it was completed in 963/1554-55 under the supervision of the architect Sinān and Zāl Pāšā. A second inscription on the northeast gate of the outer enclosure dates the latter to the reign of Selīm II (976/1568). Two mosques are located in the outer enclosures of the fortress. One, the ruined Iskender Pāšā Jāmi'i, was built according to its inscriptions by Iskender Pāšā, a vizier of Süleymān I, between 972/1564 and 978/1570; the inscription of the other, the Qāzī Maḥmūd Jāmi'i, states that it was built in 992/1584.

On the open ground between Eski Aklāṭ and the Ottoman *qaḷ'a*, as well as to the east of the Taḳt-e Süleymān, are located vast cemeteries with richly ornamented tombstones dating to the period between the 7th/13th and 10th/16th centuries as well as tomb buildings of the Saljuq, Il-khanid, and Turkmen periods. The great majority of these latter are two-story tomb towers with square, semi-subterranean crypts, cylindrical chapels, and conical roofs. Built of fine ashlar masonry, many are richly ornamented with elaborate moldings and interlace friezes. In addition, the cemeteries contain numerous funerary steles richly carved with inscriptions and vegetal and geometric decoration. Frequently of large dimension, some are in excess of three m in height. Among them is a remarkable ram stone bearing an inscription in the name of Yār-'Alī b. Pīrī with the date 803/1401 (today in the garden of the Aklāṭ middle school).

A description of Ottoman Aklāṭ is given in Evliyā Čelebi, *Seyāḥatnāmesī* IV, Istanbul, 1318, pp. 134-42.

For the monuments of Aklāṭ see H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Studies*, London, 1901, II, pp. 280-97.

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