



ĀL-E KART

ĀL-E KART, or perhaps **ĀL-E KORT**, an east Iranian dynasty (643-791/1245-1389). Their capital was at Herat, and their realm initially comprised Sabzavār (now Šendand), Ġūr, Sīstān, Balḵ, and Kabol. Their importance thus lies mainly in their contribution to the history of what is now western and central Afghanistan.

In the onslaughts led by Čengīz Khan's son Tolui and then by his general Eljigidei, Herat in Jomādā I, 619/June, 1222 and many other Iranian (or now Afghan) cities suffered fearful destruction and thereafter were virtually deserted for long periods. It was not until 633/1236 that Čengīz Khan's son and successor, the Great Khan Ögedei (Ūkatāy), gave permission for any rebuilding. During the Mongol invasion, the Šansabānī family, an offshoot of the former Ghurid dynasty, managed to hold out in their castle of Ḳayšar southeast of Herat. Rokn-al-dīn Abū Bakr, the head of the family, married a Ghurid princess, and their son Šams-al-dīn I Moḥammad could claim with some justification to be the heir of the Ghurids. Around the year 643/1245, Šams-al-dīn made a successful sortie from Ḳayšar and occupied Herat. The Mongols decided to accept him as a native local ruler like those in several other provinces of Iran. He and his successor bore the title Malek. Knowing from the experiences of the preceding years that open resistance to the Mongols was not then feasible, he followed a policy of collaboration, notably by joining in their expedition of 644/1246 to Moltān, after which he remained in India for some time. Immediately after the accession of Mōngke (Mangū) in 649/1251, he went to Mongolia to pay homage to the new Great Khan, who



confirmed him in his possessions, which were to grow steadily in the course of the Kart dynasty's career. Šams-al-dīn directed his main expansive effort southward into the Garmsīr region adjoining the open sea. The Mongols may have seen the move as a step which would secure their forward line against India, a country which they had penetrated several times but had not been able to subjugate. Although the Kart ruler clashed with the Mongols in 656/1258, he was amicably received at the court of the Īlqān Hülegü (Hülāgū), who on behalf of his brother Möngke had marched into Iran in 654/1256 and overthrown the Baghdad caliphate in 656/1258. Hülegü, now Šams-al-dīn's immediate overlord, graciously allowed him to go back to Herat, but in 659/1261 required him to cede the province of Sistān, which was placed under a different administration.

In 664/1266 Šams-al-dīn, as a vassal prince, duly brought a contingent of troops to reinforce the army of Hülegü's successor Abāqā on its expedition to Caucasia against the forces of Berke Khan, the Mongol ruler of the Golden Horde. After Berke's death during the campaign, the frontier line beyond Bākū and Darband was held without much difficulty, though the relations between the two Mongol states long remained hostile. In 668/1270 another enemy of the Īlqāns (and an ally of the Golden Horde), namely Baraq (Borāq), the ruler of Transoxiana (Mā Warā'-al-nahr), invaded Khorasan and gave the ruler of Iran a great deal of trouble. While the fighting was in progress, Šams-al-dīn contacted Baraq, probably with a view to safeguarding his territory. In 672/1273, however, after a successful march to Bokhara the Īlqān was able to restore the status quo ante. He must now have regarded Šams-al-dīn as an unreliable ally. In 675/1276 Šams-al-dīn received an invitation to the court which he could not evade. He was not allowed to return home, but was posted to the garrison at Bākū, where he had no friends and therefore could not be dangerous. Later the Īlqān summoned him to Tabrīz and had him poisoned in prison there early in 676/1278.

The removal of Šams-al-dīn does not appear to have brought any advantage to the Īlqāns, because disturbances at Herat broke out during his absence and continued after his death. Judging it imprudent to leave the territory ungoverned, they sent out the deceased ruler's son Šams-al-dīn II (formerly named Rokn-al-dīn), who was recognized everywhere except at Qandahār, which had to be subdued by force in 679/1280-81; but several small localities were able to stay more or less independent from both him and the Mongols. His own relations with the Mongols became more and more strained,



especially at the time of their intervention in Fārs, where they deposed the vassal princess Ābeš and imposed their own direct rule in 682/1283-84. In these circumstances, Šams-al-dīn II withdrew to the castle of Kayšar, leaving his son 'Alā'-al-dīn in Herat as his representative; and before long he summoned the latter to join him at Kayšar: His aim seems to have been to retain at least the highlands as the nucleus of his state.

In the subsequent years Herat was exposed to raiding and pillage by roving bands of Mongol freebooters called Nikūdārī(ān), while the directly ruled parts of the Il-khanid empire suffered grave disorders which reached their peak when paper money on the Chinese model was introduced in 693/1294. Increasing highway robbery and worsening corruption went hand in hand with economic and particularly agricultural decline, many remote villages and small towns being abandoned altogether. There was thus a need for manifold reforms when Ġāzān, the ablest Īlqān since the foundation of the dynasty, came to power and embraced Sunni Islam in 694/1295. With guidance from Rašīd-al-dīn, his vizier from 697/1298, he initiated a wide-ranging reform policy which could not, however, be maintained after his early death in 703/1304.

One of Ġāzān's steps in the reorganization of the empire was to entrust the administration of the Kart dynasty's possessions to Faqr-al-dīn, another son of Šams-al-dīn II (who would not leave the safety of his castle and died there in 705/1305-06). After various adventures, Faqr-al-dīn enjoyed a few years of peace, which he put to good use by establishing charities and patronizing poets; but his imprudent refusal to recognise the succession of Ġāzān's brother Öljeitü (Ulġāytü) prompted a Mongol expedition to Herat, and he died in the fighting in 707/1308.

His brother and successor Ġiāt-al-dīn managed to settle the dispute and to thrust aside 'Alā'-al-dīn (see above), who died in 714/1314-15. In spite of slanderous accusations which were made against him, he showed himself to be a loyal vassal of the Īlqāns and helped them in the repulse of an invasion from Transoxiana in 715/1315-16. Thereafter he had no more trouble with the Mongols and was able to make some moves for expansion of his territory and even to absent himself on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 726/1326. On the same journey he went to pay personal homage to the Īlqān Abū Sa'īd (who had succeeded Öljeitü in 716/1316) and obtained a new diploma of investiture confirming one of 717/1317 which he already possessed. Further proof of his loyalty was given in 728/1328-29 when he executed the amir Čoban (Čübān)



and the latter's son, who had fled to Herat, and sent the amir's head to the Īlkān.

After Abū Sa'īd's death in 736/1335, the Il-khanid regime moved to its end in a series of ministerial changes and internal and external conflicts, and the risk of its intervening in Herat receded. Ġīāṭ-al-dīn had already died in 729/1328-29. The accession of three of his sons in a space of less than three years did not destabilize the Kart principality; they were Šams-al-dīn III and Ḥāfez, who soon died, and then Mo'ezz-al-dīn, who succeeded in 732/1331-32 and had a long reign. The Il-khanid empire's disintegration after 736/1335 enabled him to assert his independence. He was protected on one side by the presence of the Mozaffarids who had been independent since 713/1313 and later acquired Fārs. On the other side he had to contend with the Sarbedār rulers of Sabzavār (between Nišāpūr and Māzandarān; see J. M. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty 1336-1381 A.D. and its sources*, The Hague and Paris, 1970, index). Incursions from Transoxiana also caused him anxiety, and the failure of his attempt to intervene in Kermān in 741/1340 weakened his position. All considered, Mo'ezz-al-dīn's long reign was a time of prosperity for the Kart realm, which then comprised the regions of Marv, Mašhad, Nišāpūr to the edge of the Kavīr desert, Herat, and the Afghan highlands from their southern margins to the Hindu Kush range.

Shortly before Mo'ezz-al-dīn's death in 772/1370-71, the arrival of an emissary from Tīmūr portended a new storm. For the time being Tīmūr acquiesced in the succession of the late ruler's son Ġīāṭ-al-dīn II Pīr 'Alī with an arrangement whereby the latter's brother Moḥammad separately governed Saraḵs. The first hostilities, in 783/1381, ended with Tīmūr's occupation of Herat and capture of Pīr 'Alī, whom he then pardoned. It was not until 791/1389 that Tīmūr eliminated the last prince of the Kart dynasty.

The conduct of the Kart princes gave a period of internal autonomy to much of what is now Afghanistan and some eastern border districts of Iran and, generally speaking, strengthened that territory's capacity for self subsistence. Their long survival was not due to military exploits so much as to skillful diplomacy. The unbroken continuity of the Islamic religion and Iranian civilization in this part of the world was made possible by their efforts.



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