



## 'ALĀ'-AL-DĪN MOḤAMMAD

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'ALĀ'-AL-DĪN ABU'L-FATH MOḤAMMAD B. TEKİŞ B. IL-ARSLAN, K̲v̲ārazmšāh who reigned in Transoxania and central and eastern Iran as well as in K̲v̲ārazm, 596-617/1200-20. 'Alā'-al-dīn Moḥammad (before his succession to supreme power he was actually known by the *laqab* or honorific of Qoṭb-al-dīn, traditional amongst the K̲v̲ārazmšāhs of Anūštigin's line) was the second son of Sultan Tekiš and his wife Terken K̲ātūn, who probably stemmed from the Qipčaq clan of the Yemek. He thus united within himself the blood line of the K̲v̲ārazmšāhs and that of the Turkish steppe chieftains, whom the former were always careful to cultivate as suppliers of the majority of their troops. Moḥammad succeeded his father in Šawwāl, 596/August, 1200; in K̲v̲ārazm and Transoxania he inherited a position of legal subordination to the Qara K̲iṭay (or Gūr) Khans. For a long time he was nominally their vassal, though in the later part of his reign he was in practice an independent sovereign. Tekiš had pursued a vigorous policy of, first, strengthening his power in Transoxania and the steppes, at times seeking the support of the last Qarakhanids against the Gūr Khans; second, combating the pretensions of the Ghurids in Khorasan and northern Afghanistan; and third, attempting, with considerable success, to make the K̲v̲ārazmšāhs an imperial power in western Persia, by reducing local tribal and atabeg lines there like the Ildegizids of Azarbaijan to a subordinate status, eliminating the last vestiges of Great Saljuq rule (see Toḡrīl b. Arslan), combating the resurgent political power of the Abbasid caliphs under Nāṣer, and even apparently coveting political control over Iraq itself and the heartland of the caliphate.



At the outset of his reign, Moḥammad had to combat the pretensions of the son of his deceased elder brother Malekšāh, Hendū Khan, who, with help from the Ghurids, seized Marv and other towns of northern Khorasan; in 599/1203 Moḥammad was able to recover control there, but the Ghurid sultan Mo'ezz-al-dīn Moḥammad invaded K̄vārazm in 600/1204 and almost captured the capital Gorgānj itself before he was repelled. Peace was made between the two powers, and when Mo'ezz-al-dīn died two years later, the only city of Khorasan held by the Ghurids was Herat; their threat began perceptibly to diminish as the transient empire which they had built up began to fall apart. It was also at this time that the Bavandid princes in Māzandarān began to acknowledge Khwarazmian overlordship. Moḥammad had conciliated his Qara K̄ṭay masters during the struggle with his Ghurid rivals, and in 602/1206 he had returned to them the Oxus crossing town of Termed, captured from the Ghurids. But with the threat from the latter power diminishing, Moḥammad was now able to adopt the role of defender of Islamic interests in Transoxania against the infidel Gūr Khans. He began to negotiate with the Qarakhanid ruler of Samarkand, the Solṭān-e salāṭīn 'Oṭmān Khan b. Ebrāhīm in an attempt to build up a coalition of Muslim elements dissatisfied with the anti-Islamic attitudes and the financial exactions of the Qara K̄ṭays. But 'Oṭmān Khan's restiveness brought a Qara K̄ṭay army to Samarqand in ca. 606/1209-10, only to have it withdrawn when a general revolt broke out in Semirečye and eastern Turkestan under the Naiman Mongol chief Kūčlūg. Moḥammad was thus able to invade Transoxania, and his defeat of the Qara K̄ṭay forces near Talas was extensively publicized in the Muslim world as a victory for the faith, the K̄vārazmšāh himself assuming such titles as "the second Alexander" and "shadow of God on earth." Also, Kūčlūg defeated his enemies and captured the Gūr Khan. However, Khwarazmian power, once exerted over Transoxania, no longer seemed so attractive to the local rulers of the province. 'Oṭmān Khan transferred his allegiance back to the Qara K̄ṭays, but this brought down on him Moḥammad's vengeance, with a savage sacking of Samarkand in 608/1212 and a near-complete massacre of members of the Qarakhanid family in Transoxania. Moḥammad was nevertheless unable to protect the Muslims of eastern Turkestan against Kūčlūg's anti-Muslim policies, and even had to evacuate and devastate the frontier regions of Esfījāb, Šāš, and Farḡāna to prevent them falling into the Mongol's hands in a flourishing condition; it was Čingiz Khan who was to overthrow Kūčlūg in 615/1218, but this only postponed the day of reckoning for the K̄vārazmšāh.

Moḥammad's prestige throughout the Islamic world was at this moment



unquestionably high, even though he continued to content himself with the modest title of “sultan;” his authority was even recognized in distant Oman. He now resolved to resuscitate his father’s anti-caliphal policy in the west (Tekiř, just before his death, had demanded of the caliph that his son’s name be placed in the *koṭba* in Baghdad), having learnt from captured correspondence that Nāřer had in the past incited the Ghurids against him. Unable to appeal to the sentiments of the Sunni majority in this anti-caliphal policy, he adopted—apparently for purely opportunistic motives—a pro-Shi‘ite one, declaring the ‘Abbasids usurpers and supplanters of the ‘Alids, and proclaiming a *sayyed*, ‘Alā’-al-molk Termedī, as rival caliph. He began to march on Baghdad, but his forces were halted whilst crossing the Zagros mountains by snowstorms of unparalleled intensity during the winter of 614/1217-18, and these and the appearance of the Mongols at the opposite end of his kingdom compelled him to return to Khorasan.

The sources are confused and often contradictory about the events and the exact chronology of Moḥammad’s first contacts with Čingiz Khan’s Mongols. They agree, however, that in 615/1218, the Khwarazmian governor of Otrār plundered and massacred several hundred merchants who had come peaceably from Čingiz’s dominions in Mongolia. This blunder may possibly be excused by the sultan’s lack of control over a subordinate on the fringes of his empire, but it was followed by a senseless act of provocation by Moḥammad himself when he put to death three envoys from Čingiz. Defeating Küčlüg and the tribe of the Merkit, Čingiz’s main army advanced westwards in 616/1219, and in 616-17/1220 overran most of Transoxania, sacking Bokhara and Samarkand, whilst the sultan abandoned the defense of the province at a stroke and retreated, first to Balk and then westwards into Iran. He fled to the borders of Lorestān and Fārs, attempting to rally the local chiefs of those districts, but saw no possibility of making a successful stand against the Mongols. The Mongols may well by now have given up pursuing him, but he doubled back northwards to the Caspian coastlands, and died there in wretched circumstances, probably on the Caspian island of Āřūrada near Ābaskūn, at the end of 617/1220. The struggle against the Mongols he left to be carried on much more resolutely, though ultimately also unsuccessfully, by his son Jalāl-al-dīn Mingburnu (?), last of the K̄vārazmšāhs, whom he designated his successor, in preference to his earlier choice of the younger son Uzlağřāh, just before his demise. Meanwhile, his capital in K̄vārazm, Gorgānj, was being besieged by the Mongols; in the end it was so savagely devastated (spring, 618/1221) that it never recovered.



Thus ‘Alā’-al-dīn Moḥammad threw away by his provocation of the Mongols the chance of building up an empire of some permanence in the eastern Iranian lands and the steppe fringes, and unleashed over much of the Islamic world a series of human and social disasters. It may, however, be surmised that an empire built up by Moḥammad and based on military force alone would probably not have endured much longer than those of earlier Turkish and other military conquerors, for the home base of K̄vārazm was too eccentrically situated from the heartlands of eastern Islam and too limited in resources of manpower and treasure to serve as the controlling center of a far-flung empire. Certainly, it is unlikely that the pro-Shi‘ite policy which he adopted towards the end of his reign would have brought him any significant support from the Muslim population at large, whilst the savagery and excesses of the Khwarazmian forces—many of whom were unassimilated Turks from the Qipčaq steppes and still virtually pagan—had speedily lost him support in both Transoxania and Iran.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In the field of secondary sources, the pioneer work on sorting out the chronological and other confusions on the interweaving relations between the K̄vārazmšāhs, the Ghurids, the Qarakhanids, the Qara Qıṭays, and the Mongols was done by Barthold in *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 349ff., and then, for the appearance of the Mongols in the west, by J. A. Boyle, in *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, pp. 303ff. The only monograph on the history of the dynasty of Anūštigin is that of İ. Kafesoğlu, *Harezmşahlar devleti tarihi (485-617/1092-1229)* (sic: read 1220), Ankara, 1956; on ‘Alā’-al-dīn Moḥammad, see pp. 144ff.

For accounts of Moḥammad’s reign specifically, see also Bosworth, *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, pp. 163-65, 183-84, 192-94, and *ET*<sup>2</sup> IV, pp. 1065-68.



For dynastic chronology, see Zambaur, pp. 208-09, and Bosworth, *The Islamic Dynasties*, Edinburgh, 1967, pp. 107-09.

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For some coins, see K. A. Luther, "Notes on 'Alā'-al-dīn Muhammad's Coinage of Transoxiana," *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 10, 1962, pp. 121-36.