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ARḠŪN KHAN

ARḠŪN KHAN, fourth Il-khan of Iran (r.683-90/1284-91), the elder son of Abaqa by Qaitmiš Igeči. He was born, according to Rašīd-al-dīn, at Baylaqān in Arrān in 660/1262, although other indications by the same author make 657/1259 more probable (*Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ* III, ed. A. A. ʿAlīzāda, p. 575; ed. Jahn, *Geschichte Ġāzān-Ḫān's*, pp. 6-7). At an early age Arḡūn seems to have been appointed nominal governor of Khorasan and Māzandarān under the supervision of the amir Sartaq of the Jalāyer tribe (Rašīd-al-dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, tr. Boyle, New York, 1971, p. 98). During his father's Khorasan campaign in 678/1279 he was sent toward Gūr and Ḡaṛčestān against the Negüderis, or Qarāʾunās, who in the previous year had ravaged Fārs; for a time he besieged Sīstān and returned with a number of submissive Chaghatayid princes (Rašīd-al-dīn, op. cit., ed. ʿAlīzāda, pp. 152-53, 252; ed. Jahn, *Geschichte der Ilḫāne Abāġā* bis *Gaiḫātū*, p. 36; idem, *Geschichte Ġāzān-Ḫān's*, p. 9).

On Abaqa's death in 680/1282 Arḡūn was induced to withdraw his candidacy for succession in favor of his uncle Aḥmad Takūdār, with whom he was soon at loggerheads. The pretext for this rivalry was furnished primarily by Aḥmad's patronage of the Jovaynī brothers, the *ṣāḥeb-e dīvān* Šams-al-dīn and the historian ʿAlāʾ-al-dīn, who had been denounced to Arḡūn as early as 678/1280; in addition the prince now suspected Šams-al-dīn of having poisoned his father. Reviving the charges of embezzlement against ʿAlāʾ-al-dīn during the winter of 681/1282-83 in Baghdad, Arḡūn moved to Khorasan, where he rose in open rebellion. He was victorious over Aḥmad's forces under Alīnāq at

Āq Ḵʷāǰa, near Qazvīn, on 16 Ṣafar 683/4 May 1284 but was eventually compelled to submit to Aḥmad in person. Owing to the Il-khan's reluctance to execute his nephew at once, Arḡūn was granted a fateful respite during which a disgruntled officer named Būqā, who had earlier been among his adherents, slew Alīnāq and the rest of the prince's guards and set Arḡūn free. With this dramatic reversal of the situation Aḥmad's authority collapsed, and he was captured fleeing toward the Caucasus. Arḡūn was enthroned on the day following his uncle's execution, 27 Jomādā I 683/11 August 1284. A second enthronement, on 10 Ṣafar 685/7 April 1286, followed the receipt of a diploma (*yarlīḡ*) of confirmation from Arḡūn's suzerain, the great khan Qubilai in China.

Arḡūn is overshadowed by the two dominant ministers of the reign, Būqā and Saʿd-al-dawla. For the first three years Būqā was all-powerful, having been showered with gold and awarded the rank of vizier for his part in Aḥmad's overthrow. It was to his influence that Šams-al-dīn Jovaynī, with whom he had once been on close terms, owed his reprieve and his reinstatement as Būqā's deputy. When informers caused a rift between the two men, however, Būqā abandoned his colleague, and Arḡūn was at last free to proceed against him; Šams-al-dīn was accused of embezzlement, tried, and executed on 4 Šaʿbān 683/16 October 1284. Waṣṣāf implies that all his sons shared his fate at this juncture, but the precise dates furnished by Rašīd-al-dīn for the wholesale murder of the Jovaynī family show that they were put to death in 688/1289 on the orders of Būqā's successor Saʿd-al-dawla, except for Hārūn who was killed in Baghdad in 685/1286. It may be that their patronage of the late minister's relatives served further to antagonize the il-khan, already resentful of the arrogance of the two brothers.

Būqā's downfall came in 685/1287, when, following the deposition of the Salghurid princess Ābeš Ḵātūn, ruler of Fārs, for conniving at the murder of Arḡūn's representative and fomenting an insurrection, the province was directly annexed to the crown lands (*īnǰū*) and Būqā was sent to restore order in Shiraz. But his activities aroused considerable opposition, and Arḡūn, transferring responsibility for the revenues of *īnǰū* lands from Būqā to the amir Taḡāčār, gave the command of the center forces (*qūl*) to Qunǰuqbāl. Perceiving that he was losing the Il-khan's favor, Būqā formed a conspiracy to put the Prince Jöškeb (Jūškāb) on the throne, but the latter, Arḡūn's cousin and former antagonist, betrayed him. Būqā attempted to flee but was caught and executed in Ḏu'l-ḥeǰǰa, 687/January, 1289 and his brother Arūq, who ruled in

Baghdad, was put to death in the following month.

This abortive coup afforded Arḡūn an opportunity to move against relatives with a strong claim to the throne. Soon Jöškeb himself came under suspicion and was executed on l5 Jomādā I 688/6 June 1289. His uncle Hülečü and Qarā Noqai, another cousin of Arḡūn, were also arrested by the Il-khan's son Prince Ḡāzān, the viceroy of Khorasan, and put to death in Ramażān, 688/October, 1289.

The news of Būqā's downfall provoked a major revolt in Khorasan by one of his dependants, the amir Nowrūz. The rebellion lasted for over five years. After an attempt to set up Arḡūn's cousin Kinšü as his sovereign in the eastern provinces (Waṣṣāf, *Taǰzīat al-amṣār*, p. 314), Nowrūz sought asylum with Qaidū, the rival khan of Central Asia, returning with a large army which was ravaging Khorasan at the time of Arḡūn's death.

Real power now passed to Saʿd-al-dawla, a Jewish physician who, as inspector of accounts (*mošref*) in Baghdad, had been strikingly successful in liquidating the arrears of revenue. In Jomādā II, 688/June, 1289 he was promoted to vizier. Saʿd-al-dawla seems to have obtained an even more pronounced stranglehold upon the country's affairs than had Būqā, securing governorships for his brothers and nephews and bolstering the position of his former patron, the amir Ordū-Qīā, and of other friendly Mongol amirs. His nepotism, and the assiduity with which he pandered to Arḡūn's constant desire for money, aroused widespread hostility, especially among the Muslim population, who resented the authority of a Jew. Yet his enemies were unable to proceed against him until Arḡūn was on his deathbed. Waṣṣāf, by no means a favorable witness, admits his outstanding efficiency in fiscal matters and credits him with administrative measures designed to protect the peasantry from oppression. His execution early in Rabīʿ I, 690/March, 1291 at the hands of a group of amirs headed by Taḡāčār was accompanied by that of Ordū-Qīā and followed by a pogrom against the Jewish population and those Muslims who had collaborated with Saʿd-al-dawla.

Against his external enemies Arḡūn remained on the defensive. He himself took the field on only two occasions: In 687/1288 he advanced as far as Šamākī to repel an invasion of the Darband region by the forces of the Golden Horde under Tamā Toqtā, who retreated at his approach, and in the spring of 689/1290 he repelled a second attack on the Qarasū river. The brunt of the attacks on Khorasan by Qaidū and his Chaghatayid allies, at the turn of

686-87/early 1288 and again three years later in support of Nowrūz, was borne by Ḡāzān, who appears to have received inadequate reinforcements and was in full retreat before them when his father died. To the west, the dethronement of the Muslim Aḥmad had restored hostile relations with the Egyptian Mamluks, who from their Syrian bases launched a series of attacks, graphically described by Bar Hebraeus (*The Chronography* I, pp. 475-77, 483-84) in 684/1285, a year later, and in 688/1289.

In contrast with his father, Abaqa, and his son Ḡāzān, Arḡūn seems to have been convinced early on of the impossibility of avenging Mamluk outrages without the aid of the rulers of western Europe (*Histoire de Mar Jabalaha* p. 53). He sent an embassy to Pope Honorius IV in 1285, possibly with the great khan's own sanction since it was accompanied by the latter's envoy, ʿĪsā Kelemiči. Two years later another embassy was dispatched, led by Rabbān Ṣawmā, visitor-general of the Nestorian church in the Near East, whose account of the Mission has come down to us at second hand. He reached Rome after Honorius's death and went on to visit successively Philip IV in Paris and Edward I of England at Bordeaux before returning to Rome for an audience with the newly elected pope, Nicholas IV, in March, 1288. The pope welcomed Arḡūn's avowed intention to receive baptism in Jerusalem once it had been liberated from the Mamluks but stressed that the Mongol ruler's immediate baptism, as an earnest sign of good faith, would facilitate the recovery of the Holy City; these sentiments were reiterated in another letter to Arḡūn dated July, 1289 and delivered by the celebrated Franciscan missionary John of Montecorvino, later to be archbishop of Peking (Ḵānbālīḡ). Arḡūn sent a third embassy in May, 1289; this was headed by the Genoese Buscarello di Ghisolifi, a member of his own guard (*qoṛčīān*), and brought specific proposals. In his letter to the French king he undertook to appear before Damascus with his forces in mid-February, 1291 (A. Mostaert and F. W. Cleaves, *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Aṛγun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962, pp. 18, 29). During the visit of Arḡūn's fourth mission, which had arrived in Rome in the latter half of 1290, Nicholas received news of the fall of Acre and the elimination of the last surviving Latin enclaves in Syria in May, 1291. These circumstances apparently account for the more positive tone of his reply regarding Western military action, but by the time his envoys left Rome in August, Arḡūn was already dead. For all his efforts, cooperation between Mongol Iran and the West during his reign had amounted to nothing more than the presence on the Tigris in the winter of 689-90/1290-91 of 900 Genoese sailors, who were intended to construct a fleet of galleys and harass Egyptian

commerce in the Indian Ocean but whose internecine quarrels put an end to the project (see J. Richard, “European Voyages in the Indian Ocean and Caspian Sea,” *Iran* 6, 1968, p. 49).

The Christian sources speak highly of Arḡūn’s favor towards Christians, and admittedly he caused one of his sons, later the Il-khan Öljeitü (q.v.), to be baptized in 688/1289 and named Nicholas in honor of the pope. This gesture represented, however, a diplomatic move rather than a symptom of Arḡūn’s internal policy. Essentially he departed from the practice of his father and grandfather only in terms of his pronounced distrust of the Muslim population. The allegation by Bar Hebraeus’s continuator that he issued an edict permitting Christians and Jews alone to become court scribes is corroborated with more accuracy by Waṣṣāf, who states specifically that Arḡūn excluded Muslims from his bureaucracy (*Taǰzīat al-amṣār*, p. 241). But above all Arḡūn’s reign represents the heyday of Buddhism in Iran. It is doubtful that he contemplated turning the Kaʿba into an idol temple at the prompting of Saʿd-al-dawla, as Waṣṣāf claims, and still more suspect is the same author’s assertion that Arḡūn thought of founding a new religion with himself as its prophet. Unfortunately we learn about the condition of Buddhism in Iran primarily through the measures taken to eradicate it following the conversion to Islam under Ḡāzān, who is known to have demolished an idol temple (*bot-ḵāna-ī wa mḏbad-ī*) built by his father and containing portraits of him (Rašīd-al-dīn, ed. ʿAlīzāda, pp. 396-97; ed. Jahn, *Geschichte Ġāzān-Ḫān’s*, pp. 188-89).

Ironically, it was Arḡūn’s patronage of Buddhist monks from abroad that brought about his premature death. Under the influence of a yogi (*baḵšī*) from India Arḡūn began to take a life-prolonging drug concocted from sulphur and quicksilver and withdrew into virtual seclusion in Tabrīz, where he was accessible only to the *baḵšī*s, Saʿd-al-dawla, and a few others. The drug brought on an illness that grew chronic and was not dispelled by the execution of a number of the Il-khan’s wives and concubines upon suspicion of sorcery. After five months Arḡūn died at Bāḡča (Arrān) on 7 Rabīʿ I 690/10 March 1291 and was buried on mount Sūǰās. He was the last Il-khan to receive a secret burial according to the Mongol custom (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 64). He had four sons, Ḡāzān, Yesü Temür (d. 689/1290), Öljeitü, and Ḵetai (d. 697/1298), of whom the eldest and the third were eventually to rule Iran, but his immediate successor was his younger brother Gayḵātū.

Ricoldo of Monte Croce describes Arḡūn as “the worst kind, given to every evil

deed" (*homo pessimus in umni scelere*; ed. J. C. M. Laurent, *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1873, p. 121), and comments upon the number of innocent persons killed on his orders. For Waṣṣāf (*Taǰzīat al-amṣār*, pp. 242-43). Arḡūn was averse to bloodshed at the outset of his reign but subsequently acquired a taste for it under the influence of Saʿd-al-dawla. In either case, he appears to have been a man of little energy and of mediocre ability. He was nevertheless interested in the sciences and was an enthusiastic builder, beginning, among other projects, the city that was later to be extended by his son Öljeitü and to achieve renown under the name of Solṭānīya (q.v.)

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Waṣṣāf, *Taǰzīat al-amṣār wa tazǰīat al-aʿṣār*, Bombay, 1269/1853, pp. 137-43, 229-49; ed. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte Wassaf's*, Vienna, 1856, text pp. 280-95, tr. pp. 262-75, containing only the beginning of the reign.

See also Ebn al-Fowaṭī, *al-Ḥawādeṯ al-ǰāmeʿa*, ed. M. Jawād, Baghdad, 1351/1932, pp. 435-67.

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