



ARZENJĀN

ARZENJĀN or ERZENJĀN (Greek Erzingan, Armenian Erēz, Erznga(n), in modern Turkish orthography Erzincan), a town of northeastern Anatolia in 39° 45' north latitude and 39° 30' east longitude, situated on the north bank of the Qara-sū, one of the headwaters of the Euphrates at an altitude of 1,200 m. It lies in a fertile plain below high mountain ranges, and the Arzenjān corridor formerly carried the east-west caravan route from Erzerūm to Sīvās, and in recent times, the railway line running eastwards to Kars (Qārş) and Transcaucasia.

Arzenjān was a place of significance in classical times (the Akilisene of Strabo; cf. Pauly-Wissowa, I, col. 1168) and in the earliest stages of Armenian history. In the 4th century A.D. St. Gregory the Illuminator lived there and is said to have destroyed the pagan statue there of the goddess Anāhīd. Until the early 20th century, there were several Armenian monasteries, such as that of St. Nerses, in the vicinity. In the early Islamic period it was in the frontier zone fought over by the Byzantines and the Arabs. Before Anatolia passed definitively into Saljuq hands after the battle of Malāzgerd (Mantzikert) in 463/1071, it had changed hands several times. In the Saljuq period, Arzenjān was controlled by a Turkmen amir, Mengüček, and his descendants; then in 625/1228 it passed to the Rūm Saljuq sultan, 'Alā'-al-dīn Kayqobād I, who rebuilt its walls. Two years afterwards, this same ruler inflicted a decisive defeat on the K̄varazmšāh Jalāl-al-dīn at Yasičimen near Arzenjān. After 640/1242-43 it was held by the Mongols and came to form part of the Il-khanid empire. Ebn Baṭṭūṭa was there in 731/1331, and stayed in the *zāwīa* of Aḳī the



chief Nezām-al-dīn; he describes the inhabitants of the town as predominantly Armenian (Ebn Baṭṭūṭa, Paris, II, p. 293; tr. Gibb, II, p. 437).

After the disintegration of the Il-khanid empire, Arzenjān passed to the Banū Eretnā of Sīvās and Kayseri, and then to the Qāzī Borhān-al-dīn of Kayseri in 794/1394-95. The Ottoman Sultan Bāyazīd I was able in 803/1401 to conquer Arzenjān after a siege; but after his defeat by Tīmūr (Tamerlane) at Ankara in 804/1402, it went to the Turkmen dynasties of the Qara Qoyunlū and Āq Qoyunlū. After Meḥemmed the Conqueror's defeat of the Āq Qoyunlū ruler Uzun Hasan near Terjān in 878/1473, it passed to local rulers for the next few decades. It was not until Selim I's campaign against the Safavid Shah Esmā'īl, which culminated in the Ottoman victory of Čālderān, that Arzenjān was finally incorporated into the Ottoman empire. It first became a *sanjaq* of the province of Arzenjān, but ca. 941/1534-35 it became a mere *subašiliq* or *qazā'* of the *sanjaq* of Erzerūm. Not until 1281/1864-65 did it become a *sanjaq* again, composed of five *qazā'*s. From its strategic position, Arzenjān has always been an important military base; for 18 months in 1916-18 it was occupied by Russian imperial forces. At the end of the 19th century, Cuinet estimated the town's population at 23,000, of whom 15,000 were Muslims; and soon afterwards Lynch gave the figure of 156,000 for the whole *sanjaq*, of whom 31,000, almost all Armenians, were Christians. The surrounding countryside contained an admixture of Kurds. Since Arzenjān lies in the earthquake zone, it has frequently suffered thus (the earthquake of 1198/1784 being especially severe), with the regrettable consequence that no ancient monuments survive. In contemporary Turkey, Erzincan forms the capital of a *vilayet* or province of the same name; in 1970 the town had a population of 78,000 (preliminary census estimate).

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