



ATĀBAK

ATĀBAK, Turkish *atabeg*, lit. “father-chief,” a Turkish title of rank which first appears, at least under this name, with the early Saljuqs. An *atābak* was a notable to whom a ruler assigned the tutoring of one of his young sons; the tutor tended to eventually marry the boy’s mother. Save for the exceptional case of the *Ḳvāja* Neẓām-al-molk who was at the same time vizier and *atābak* of the youth Malekšāh, all the *atābaks* were Turkish military leaders. The Saljuq epigones preserved this title and its formal function but considerably altered its practical features. Under the Ayyubids of Aleppo, the Saljuqs of Rūm, the Mamluks, and even in the Christian kingdom of Georgia, the title, used as an honorific, indicated no more than a military chief. Great danger to the royal dynasty was inherent in the power of an *atābak*. An adult warlord, entrusted with the care of an infant, and with full authority over him, might easily succumb to ambition and act in his own interests to the detriment of his nominal ward. In this way several new dynasties came into being which preserved the title *atābak*, even when there was no longer any royal minor. The Zangid dynasty was the most illustrious of these on account of its historical role and its having furnished the subject of a great monograph by the historian Ebn al-Aṭīr. This dynasty was founded by ‘Emād-al-dīn Zangī (d. 541/1146), who was first the Saljuq governor of Mosul (521/1127), and shortly thereafter had established himself in Aleppo as well (522/1128), ruling northern Syria and the contiguous territories of Mesopotamia. After Zangī the dynasty divided into two branches, one in Mosul under his son Sayf-al-dīn Ġāzī, which survived until the Mongol period, and another in Aleppo founded by another son, Nūr-al-dīn Abu’l-Qāsem Maḥmūd, renowned for his victories



over the Franks in Syria. Cf. also the *atābaks* of Damascus, founded by Ẓahīr-al-dīn Toġtakīn and his son Tāj-al-molūk Būrī in the beginning of the 6th/12th century. More important for the history of Iran was the dynasty of the Ildegozids (see [Atābakān-e Āḍarbāyjān](#)). The title *atābak* was revived at the end of the 6th/12th century by the Salghurid chief of Fārs, although he had no princely ward. Several other local rulers of western Iran adopted the title as well, see Fażlūya, Hazaraspīd dynasty. See also [Atābakān-e Fārs](#); [Atābakān-e Lorestān](#); [Atābakān-e Marāġa](#); [Atābakān-e Yazd](#); and Saljuqs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See M. F. Köprülü, “Ata,” in *ĪA* I, pp. 711-18 for a detailed study.

See also C. Cahen in *EI*²I, pp. 731-32.

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