



ATSĪZ ĠARĈĀ'Ī

ATSĪZ ĠARĈĀ'Ī, 'ALĀ'-AL-DĪN WA'L-DAWLA ABU'L-MOẒAFFAR B. MOḤAMMAD B. ANŪŠTIGIN, ruler of K̄vārazm with the traditional title K̄vārazmšāh, 521 or 522/1127 or 1128 to 551/1156. His family was of Turkish *golām* origin; his grandfather was appointed governor of K̄vārazm by the Saljuq Sultan Malekšāh; and his father Qoṭb-al-dīn MoḤammad succeeded in the office. In effect, the governorship thus became hereditary in Anūštigin's line; but Atsīz was able, in the course of his reign, to pursue a policy of greater independence from his Saljuq suzerain Sultan Sanjar. He may accordingly be regarded as the founder of a henceforth independent dynasty of K̄vārazmšāhs, who at the opening of the 7th/13th century were briefly able to constitute themselves the greatest power in the eastern Islamic world before the Mongol cataclysm.

A task of all rulers in K̄vārazm was to preserve the lengthy and exposed frontiers of the province against pressure from the nomads of the surrounding steppes—in Atsīz's time largely Q̄gūz and Q̄ipčāq (Qepčāq) who were still pagan in considerable proportion. Already during his father's lifetime, he began a policy of securing the steppes between the Aral and Caspian Seas, occupying the Manqešlāq peninsula, an important concentration-point for the nomads. He also seized the strategically important town of Jand near the mouth of the Syr Darya, from where he made incursions against the infidel Turks over the ensuing years, earning for himself the designation of *gāzī* (fighter for the faith). During the next decades, Atsīz pursued a skillful military and diplomatic policy vis-à-vis Sanjar, and after 536/1141, against the invading



Qara Ęııay (Qarā-Ęeıāy) in Central Asia. He originally showed himself perfectly loyal to the Saljuę sultan, accompanying Sanjar on campaigns in Transoxania in 524/1130 and to Ęazna against the rebellious Ghaznavid sultan Bahrām Shah in 529/1135. Relations then began to deteriorate, as Atsız felt his way towards a more independent policy. In 533/1138 he rebelled openly but was driven out of Ęvārazm to Gorgān by a Saljuę punitive expedition; he returned in the next year to Ęvārazm, but eventually deemed it expedient to submit to Sanjar.

In 536/1141 the Qara Ęııay inflicted a sharp defeat on Sanjar in Transoxania at the battle of the Qatvān steppe, with a resultant blow to Sanjar's prestige and authority in Central Asia. The reverse came so conveniently for Atsız that several sources accuse him of deliberately inciting the Qara Ęııay against Sanjar; this seems dubious, especially as Ęvārazm itself also suffered from the ravages of a Qara Ęııay invasion at this point. Atsız ambitions now led him to covet the Saljuę possessions in northern Khorasan, including Saraęs, Marv, Nġšāpūr, and Bayhaę, which his troops briefly occupied in 536/1141-42. Yet Sanjar re-established his authority over the next few years, twice invading Ęvārazm again and bringing Atsız to a reluctant submission. Atsız accordingly returned to his original direction of expansion, into the northern steppes, and in 547/1152 recaptured Jand, which had fallen into the hands of the Qarakhanid prince Kamāl-al-dġn b. Arslān Khan Maęmūd. Sanjar's capture and imprisonment by the rebellious Oęüz of Khorasan in 548/1153 was obviously opportune for the furtherance of Atsız's ambitions, but he in fact acted with restraint. A Khwarazmian army invaded as far as Bayhaę in 548-49/1154; and Atsız himself came to Khorasan in 551/1156 to quell the Oęüz at the invitation of Sanjar's nephew, the Qarakhanid Maęmūd Khan. However Sanjar escaped from captivity and resumed power; and shortly afterwards, in the same year, Atsız died at the age of 59 (26 Rabġ I 552/9 May 1157). The power of the Ęvārazmšāhs was at that point still largely confined to Ęvārazm, and Atsız was paying tribute to the Qara Ęııay; yet he had laid the firm foundations for the subsequent imperialist expansion by his successors.

Jovaynġ and 'Awfġ praise Atsız for his literacy and his personal skill as a poet in Persian, and the literary circle at his court seems to have been quite distinguished. Saljuę poets like [Adġb řāber](#) addressed odes to him, but especially connected with Atsız is the poet and prose stylist Rařġd-al-dġn Vaıvāı (q.v.), who functioned as court poet and propagandist. He engaged for instance, in poetic contests with Sanjar's panegyrist Anwarġ. The



Khwarazmian grammarian and lexicographer Jārallāh Maḥmūd Zamaḵṣārī dedicated his dictionary the *Moqaddemat al-adab* to Atsiz, and the physician Zayn-al-dīn Jorjānī composed for one of Atsiz viziers his *Aḡrāz al-ṭebb*, a revision of his celebrated *Dakīra-ye K̄vārazmšāhī* written earlier for Atsiz's father Qutb-al-dīn Moḥammad.

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