



BAKŠĪ

BAKŠĪ, a Buddhist lama or scholar, in particular during Mongol hegemony in Iran; subsequently, by extension, any kind of scribe or secretary. The word, which is Turkish, is derived from Chinese *po-shih* (man of learning) and not, as once believed, from Sanskrit *bhikṣu*, which itself denotes a Buddhist lama. Jovaynī, I, pp. 10, 44 (tr. Boyle, pp. 14, 59-60), employs the term *tūyīn* (Chinese *tao-jen* “man of the path”), the original of the *tuin* of his contemporary, the Flemish missionary William of Rubruck (*Itinerarium*, ed. A. van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana* I, Quaracchi and Florence, 1929, pp. 227-32, 294-97). The word *bakšī* appears only later, in the writings of Rašīd-al-Dīn Faẓl-Allāh and Waṣṣāf. The period covered by these authors, that of the il-khan Hülegü (Hülāgū) and his successors, witnessed the brief emergence of Buddhism, for the last time, as a major religion in Iran; it was facilitated by the tolerant attitude of the Mongol rulers towards the representatives of all religious groups and sects, and by the fiscal exemptions granted to them. If he did not actually embrace the Buddhist faith, as his elder brother the Great Khan Qubilai did, Hülegü at least inclined towards it during his last years (Kirakos, pp. 237-38). His son Abaqa appears to have been partial to the *bakšīs* and entrusted them with the care of his grandson, the future il-khan Ġāzān (Rašīd-al-Dīn, III, text pp. 295, 373, tr. pp. 165-66, 209). After a temporary setback under the Muslim Aḥmad-Tegüder (Takūdār), came the heyday of the *bakšīs*, coinciding with the reign of Ġāzān’s father Arġūn (683/1284-690/1291), who may actually have become a Buddhist and who showered favors upon them. During his final illness, which had apparently resulted from a life-prolonging drug prescribed by a *bakšī* from India, only two Mongol amirs, his chief



minister Sa'd-al-Dawla, and the *baḳšīs* were allowed into his presence (ibid., text pp. 223-24, tr. pp. 128-29). After his adoption of Islam in 694/1295, however, Ġāzān, in contrast with Aḥmad-Tegüder, began to enforce Islam as the state religion. Although he had been reared by *baḳšīs* and, while governor of Khorasan for his father, had built a Buddhist temple in Ḳabūšān (Qūčān; ibid., text p. 373, tr. p. 209), Ġāzān set about destroying Buddhist foundations, some of which were converted into mosques, and imposed Islam on the lamas (Waṣṣāf, p. 324). Once it became evident, however, that many were using Islam merely as a cloak for the practice of their old faith, they were given leave to depart from Iran and return to their original homes in Kashmir, India, and Tibet (Rašīd al-Dīn, III, text pp. 396-97, tr. p. 224).

The growth and termination of Buddhist influence in Mongol Iran, a phenomenon that doubtless extended very little outside the court, is an obscure process. What appear to be the remains of cave-temples from this period have been excavated in Azarbaijan; but we lack any Buddhist written sources and are dependent on those emanating from Muslim and Christian writers. One difficulty is that *baḳšīān* are sometimes linked with *qāmān* (i.e., shamans) and possibly, therefore, confused with them. The *baḳšīs*, for example, who strove to induce Ġāzān's brother and successor Öljeitü (Üljāyṭü), himself likewise at one time a Buddhist, to abandon Islam in 707/1307-8 (Kāšānī, *Tārīḳ-e-Üljāyṭü Solṭān*, ed. M. Hambly, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 98-99) were most probably shamans rather than lamas (see Boyle in *Camb. Hist. Iran* V, p. 402). Nevertheless, a lama named Kamālasrī, who apparently came from Kashmir, was in Iran at the beginning of the 8th/14th century, assisting Rašīd-al-Dīn with the composition of the Indian section of his great historical encyclopedia (*Die Indiangeschichte des Rašīd al-dīn*, ed. and tr. K. Jahn, Vienna, 1980, introd., pp. 10-12).

After the suppression and eclipse of Buddhism in Iran, the term *baḳšī* came to denote a scribe who drafted Turkish or Mongol documents (e.g., Barthold, *Turkestan*³, p. 55 n. 4), and was thus synonymous with *bitikčī*. In time it was applied to any master, including quacks and sorcerers, and even, among the Anatolian Turkmen of the 15th-16th centuries, a wandering minstrel. The connection with the military officer entitled *baḳšī* in Mughal India, and with the Anglo-Indian term *buxee* derived from it (Sir Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, new ed. W. Crooke, London, 1903, s.v.), is regarded as somewhat tenuous.



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For the relations of the lamas with the Mongol imperial family in general, see H. Franke, "Tibetans in Yüan China," in *China under Mongol Rule*, ed. J. D.



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