



BALĶ II. HISTORY FROM THE ARAB CONQUEST TO THE MONGOLS

ii. History from the Arab Conquest to the Mongols

Information on the process of the Arab conquest of BalĶ is somewhat vague. According to Balāḍorī (*Fotūḥ*, p. 408), Aḥnaf b. Qays raided BalĶ and Ṭoḳārestān in 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Āmer b. Korayzds governorship of Khorasan during the caliphate of 'Oṭmān (32/653), but further attempts at controlling the city were not possible until Mo'āwīa had restored a measure of peace and stability to the troubled Arab empire. In 42/662-63 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Āmer nominated Qays b. Hayṭam over Khorasan, who in turn sent 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Samora into Khorasan and Sīstān, conquering BalĶ and, allegedly, Kabul. But the people of BalĶ renounced their peace agreement with the Arabs, and in 51/671, Rabī' b. Zīād had to reappear at BalĶ; it is clear that no firm or enduring Arab control over the city was ever established in the early Omayyad period. It was, however, during these raids under 'Oṭmān and Mo'āwīa that the great Buddhist shrine of Nowbahār, situated in the *rabaż* (suburb) of the city according to the classical Arabic geographers, was despoiled and destroyed, although it long remained a sacred site; the northern Hephthalite prince Ṭarĳān Nīzak (q.v.) went to pray there and to derive blessing when he rebelled in Gūzgān and lower Ṭoḳārestān against the Arab governor Qotayba b. Moslem Bāhelī (q.v.) in 90/709 (Ṭabarī, I, p. 1205), necessitating Qotayba's



dispatching 12,000 men to Balk.

From its strenuous opposition to the Arabs on various occasions, and the latter's vengeful reprisals, Balk is described as being largely ruinous in the mid-Omayyad period, so that the Arabs built for themselves a new military encampment two *farsaks* away, called Barūqān, where what was normally a comparatively small Arab garrison (at least in comparison with that of Marv) was installed, until in 107/725, after an outbreak of feuding amongst the Arab troops at Barūqān (represented in such sources as Ṭabarī, perhaps misleadingly, as a tribal clash of Qays and Yaman), the governor Asad b. 'Abd-Allāh Qasrī (q.v.) restored Balk on its former site, employing as his agent for this Barmak, the somewhat shadowy father of the early 'Abbasid minister Kāled Barmakī (Ṭabarī, II, pp. 1490-91); Barūqān now drops out of mention. A few years later, Asad temporarily transferred the capital of Khorasan from Marv to Balk, giving the latter city an access of prosperity.

The last Omayyad governor in Khorasan, Naṣr b. Sayyār Kenānī (q.v.), built Balk up into a significant military base. In 116/734, according to Ṭabarī, II, pp. 1566-67, he had there an army of 10,000 men, composed of the Arab tribesmen of Khorasan and also probably of Syrian forces, which he used against the rebel Ḥāreṭ b. Sorayj. During the 'Abbasid *da'wa* in Khorasan led by [Abū Moslem](#), Balk was strongly defended for Naṣr and the Omayyads by Zīād b. 'Abd-Allāh Qoṣayrī. Abū Moslem sent against him and against other loyal government forces of Ṭokārestān, including the local Iranian princes, his lieutenant Abū Dāwūd Kāled b. Ebrāhīm Bakrī. Possession of the city oscillated between the Omayyad defenders and Abū Moslem's commanders Abū Dāwūd and 'Oṭmān b. Kermānī, until it was secured for the revolutionaries at the third attempt (130/747-48). See for this early period of the consolidation of Arab control and of islamization, Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, index s.v.; J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, Eng. tr., Calcutta, 1927, index s.v.; P. Schwarz, "Bemerkungen zu den arabischen Nachrichten über Balkh," in *Oriental Studies in Honour of Cursetji Erachji Pavry*, London, 1933, pp. 434-43; M. A. Shaban, *The 'Abbāsīd Revolution*, Cambridge, 1970, index s.v.

Little is heard of Balk during the early 'Abbasid period, but it was a base for Hārūn al-Rašīd's commander 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Māhān in the operations against the rebel Rāfe' b. Layṭ b. Naṣr b. Sayyār, and the fact that Balk suffered from a violent earthquake in 203/818-19 is mentioned. Soon afterwards, it came within the vast governorship of the East held by the Taherid family from the 'Abbasid caliphs. But with the seat of the Taherids' power at Nišāpūr, 500 miles



to the west, Balk seems to have been left, according to the general pattern of Taherid overlordship in the east, to local princes. These were from the Abu Dawudid or Banijurid family, most probably of Iranian stock. Dāwūd b. ‘Abbās b. Hāšem b. Banījūr was governor in Balk from 233/847-48 onwards, in succession to his father, and was the builder of the village and castle of Nowšād or Nowšār near Balk. He was still there when the Saffarid Ya‘qūb b. Layṭ destroyed Nowšād and temporarily captured Balk before going on to Kabul (in 256/870 according to Gardizī, ed. Nazim, p. 11, in 257/871 according to Ebn al-Aṭīr, ed. Beirut, VII, p. 247). Dāwūd fled to the Samanids in Samarqand, returning to Balk and retaking it soon afterwards and dying there in 259/873. His kinsman (nephew?) Abū Dāwūd Moḥammad b. Aḥmad ruled in Balk from 260/874, and was involved in the complex power struggle between rival condottieri for control of Khorasan after the Taherids’ loss of Nišāpūr to the Saffarids in 259/873. Abū Dāwūd was immediately besieged in Balk by 5,000 troops under Abū Ḥafṣ Ya‘mar b. Šarkab, and then soon afterwards was again attacked by Abū Ḥafṣ’s brother Abū Ṭalḥa Maṣṣūr after the latter had been expelled from Nišāpūr (see Ebn al-Aṭīr, VII, pp. 296, 300, giving the data for the second attack as 265/878-79 or 266/879-80). This Abū Dāwūd also controlled *Andarāb* and Panjhīr in *Badakṣān*, where he minted coins from the local silver, and was still ruling in Balk in 285/898 or 286/899, when the Saffarid ‘Amr b. Layṭ summoned him and the other local potentates of northern Khorasan and Transoxania to obedience. ‘Amr’s plans of extending his control to these regions were of course speedily dashed by his defeat near Balk, after fortifying that city with a moat and rampart, at the hands of the Samanid Esmā‘īl b. Aḥmad (q.v.) (287/900). See for these events, Gardizī, ed. Nazim, pp. 11-19; Naršaḳī, *Tārīḳ-eBoḳārā*, tr. Frye, pp. 87ff.; Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 301-02; Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 77-78, 224-25; C. E. Bosworth “Banīdjūrids,” in *EI*², Suppl.

The late 3rd/9th- and 4th/10th-century geographers expatiate with enthusiasm on the amenities and the flourishing state of Balk at that time, calling it *Omm al-belād* “the greatest of the cities of Khorasan” from the populousness of the region (Ya‘qūbī, *Boldān*, p. 287; tr. Wiet, p. 100) and *Balk al-bahīya* “Splendid Balk” (cf. Moqaddasī, p. 302); it was equal in size to Marv and Herat, and according to Moqaddasī again, rivaled Bukhara in size. It stood on a river, the Balkāb (or as Ebn Ḥawqal, ed. Kramers, p. 448, names it, the Dah-ās “[turning] ten mills”), which came down from the Hindu Kush but which did not, in Islamic times, actually reach the Oxus, petering out in the sands. The Balkāb divided at the city into twelve branches to irrigate the surrounding



countryside; among the products of this agricultural area are mentioned citrons, oranges, water-lilies, and grapes, in sufficient quantities for export, whilst the nearby open steppes were used for rearing an excellent strain of Bactrian camels. Outside these domains, however, lay salt marshes and deserts. The ruins of Nowbahār were apparently still impressive, and the author of the *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam* (372/982) mentions wall-paintings and other wonders there; by his time, construction of the original building was attributed to the Sasanian emperors. Balk had the usual tripartite plan of an inner citadel (*qohandez*), an inner city (*madīna* or *šahrestān*), and an outer city or suburb (*rabaż* or *bīrūn*). There were mud brick walls (mud brick being also the normal material for the houses of Balk) around both the *madīna* and the *rabaż*, with a ditch beyond the outer wall; in earlier times, there had been a wall twelve *farsaks* long, with twelve gates, enclosing both the city and adjacent villages, as a protection from nomads and other marauders, but by the 3rd/9th century this no longer existed. In the next century, the *rabaż* seems to have had seven gates and the *madīna* four, the latter a number characteristic of a number of other Persian cities. The seven *rabaż* gates included the Bāb Hendovān, attesting the presence nearby of a colony of Indian traders, and the Bāb al-Yahūd, showing the existence of a Jewish community also (both these groups were still of significance in Balk at the end of the nineteenth century, despite the complete eclipse of Balk as a trading center; see C. E. Yate, *Northern Afghanistan or Letters from the Afghan Boundary Commission*, Edinburgh and London, 1888, p. 256). The *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*, indeed, describes Balk as the emporium (*bārkaḍa*) of India. The markets were mainly situated in the *madīna*, where stood the main Friday mosque; according to Ya‘qūbī, there were forty-seven mosques with *menbars* in the moderate-sized towns of the Balk region. See for the information of the Arab geographers, Le Strange, *Lands*, pp. 420-22, to which should be added the Persian *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*, tr. Minorsky, p. 108; Barthold, “*Istoriko-geograficheskiĭ obzor Irana*,” in his *Sochineniya VII*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 41-44, 47-49, tr. S. Soucek, *Historical-Geographical Survey of Iran*, Princeton, 1983, pp. 25-26; Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 76-79.

This commercial and economic prosperity was reflected in Balk’s role in nurturing ulema (‘*olamā*’) and other scholars, whom Sam‘ānī, *Ansāb*, ed. Hyderabad, II, pp. 303-35, describes as innumerable. In fact, these included such figures as the early Sufi Abū Eshāq Ebrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161/778), who stemmed from Balk before he went westwards to Syria (cf. Ebn al-Aṭīr, VI, p. 56), the geographer and astronomer Abū Zayd Aḥmad Balkī (d. 322/934), and



the Mu'tazilite philosopher Abu'l-Qāsem 'Abd-Allāh Balkī (d. 319/931). Scholars like these, and especially traditionists, theologians, and religious lawyers, were surveyed and classified in the local histories and *ṭabaqāt* books on the notable men of Balk, one of which, a *Ketāb fażā'el Balk*, was apparently written by Abū Zayd Balkī himself (see Bibliography).

Thus under the Samanids, Balk was especially flourishing, although the warfare of rival military factions in the last decades of the emirate affected it on certain occasions. The Ḥājeb Fā'eq Kāṣṣa was governor there during the ascendancy of the Sīmjūrīs in the 370s/980s, and in 381/991 he was besieged in Balk by Abu'l-Ḥasan Ṭāher b. Fażl, of the Muhtajid family of Čaġānīān; the latter was, however, killed, and Fā'eq was confirmed in the governorship of Balk and Termed in 382/992 by the Qarakhanid invader of Transoxania, Boġra Khan Hārūn. When Maḥmūd of Ġazna and the Qarakhanids partitioned the Samanid empire between themselves, the lands north of the Oxus fell to the former, although the Qarakhanids for long coveted also northern Khorasan. Hence in 396/1006 the Ilig Khan Naṣr sent his general Čaġritigin or Ja'fartigin into Ṭoġārestān. The population of Balk resisted fiercely, and the city was plundered before Čaġritigin was forced to retreat to Termed on Maḥmūd's return from India, the Ilig's ambitions here being finally quelled by Maḥmūd's overwhelming victory at Katar, 12 miles from Balk, in 398/1008. It was during Čaġritigin's occupations of Balk that the Bāzār-e 'Āšeġān or "Lovers' market" built there by the sultan himself was destroyed; Maḥmūd later censured the people for resisting the enemy and so causing the loss of his lucrative property. We have other information about Ghaznavid constructions in the city, including mention of a fine garden laid out by Maḥmūd, whose upkeep was a burden on the local people until the sultan grudgingly transferred the onus to the local Jewish community. We also learn that the *ra'īs* or civic head of Balk, Abū Eshāq Moḥammad b. Ḥosayn, supplied money to Maḥmūd for his campaigns when the flow of taxation revenues from Khorasan dried up after the exactions of the vizier Esfarā'enī; doubtless these subventions were made by the Balk merchant community as a whole. See on this period, Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 253-54, 259, 272, 276, 280, 288-89, 291; M. Nāẓim, *The Life and Times of Sulṭān Maḥmūd of Ghazna*, Cambridge, 1931, pp. 31, 39, 42-43, 48-50, 154, 166; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, index s.v. Balkh.

Although threatened by the incursions of the Saljuqs during the latter years of Mas'ūd of Ġazna's reign, Balk did not, like Nīšāpūr and Marv, fall immediately into the Turkmen's hands, even after Mas'ūd's disastrous defeat at



Dandānqān in 431/1040. There seems nevertheless to have been a disaffected element in the city's population who probably wished to reach an accommodation with the Saljuqs, for Mas'ūd's vizier reported the presence of large numbers of "corrupt persons, evil-wishers and malevolently-inclined people" there, and at one point it was in fact briefly occupied and plundered by the Turkmen. But BalĶ was a key point in the Ghaznavid defense system for northern Afghanistan, protecting the capital Ġazna itself, and resistance there was organized against Čaġri Beg Dāwūd by the local *šāḥeb-e barīd* Abu'l-Ḥasan Aḥmad 'Anbarī, called [Amīrak Bayhaqī](#).

Despite his efforts, BalĶ seems to have passed definitely to the Saljuqs early in Mawdūd of Ġazna's reign, for in 435/1043-44 Čaġri Beg's son Alp Arslān, based on BalĶ, fended off a Ghaznavid attempt to reconquer northern Afghanistan. Alp Arslān was now formally invested with the governorship of all northeastern Khorasan, including BalĶ and Toġārestān, as far as the Oxus headwaters, the day-to-day running of administration here falling to Čaġri Beg's vizier Abū 'Alī Šādān; and on his accession in 451/1059 the sultan Ebrāhīm b. Mas'ūd of Ġazna made a peace treaty with Čaġri Beg at last recognizing Saljuq control of these regions. During Alp Arslān's reign, the governor here was the sultan's son Ayāz, who was momentarily ejected from BalĶ in 456/1072 by the Qarakhanids when his father died and was soon afterwards succeeded by the new Saljuq sultan's other brother Tekiš (466/1073-74). The allocation of this northeastern corner of the Saljuq empire to princes of the ruling family not infrequently led ambitious princes into rebellion against the sultan in distant western Iran. Thus in 490/1097 Berk-Yaruq (Barkīāroq) had to spend seven months at BalĶ suppressing the outbreak of a Saljuq claimant, Moḥammad b. Solaymān b. Čaġri Beg, called Amīr-e Amīrān, whose father had at one time been governor of BalĶ and who had received military help from the Ghaznavids.

During the first half of the 6th/12th century, BalĶ came within the extensive sultanate of the east held by [Sanjar](#). The city remained flourishing, not least intellectually; a *Nezāmīya madrasa* had been built there, either by the great vizier Nezām-al-Molk himself or with his encouragement, and in the later part of the century, the poet [Anwarī](#) (d. 585/1189-90?) spent his last decades there. Towards the end of Sanjar's reign, however, Saljuq power in Khorasan was challenged by external rivals such as the *Ķvārazmšāhs* and the Ghurids, and by the internal malcontent element of the Oghuz nomads who pastured their flocks in the upper Oxus region and who chafed under the heavy hand of



Saljuq taxation and officialdom, including that of Sanjar's governor in Balk, 'Emād-al-Dīn Qamāč. In 547/1152 the Ghurid 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn occupied Balk for a while with Oghuz help. In the next year the Oghuz offered conciliatory terms to Qamāč, which he shortsightedly rejected; he attacked them outside Balk, but was routed by them and had to flee to Sanjar's capital at Marv, leaving Balk to be plundered by the Oghuz, with considerable destruction of public buildings. The Oghuz now installed themselves at Balk, offering their obedience to Sanjar's nephew, the Qarakhanid Maḥmūd Khan, and held the city for several years. Later, suzerainty over it passed to the Qarā Ketāy of Transoxania, until in 594/1198 the Ghurid Bahā'-al-Dīn Sām b. Moḥammad of Bāmīān occupied it when its Turkish governor, a vassal of the Qarā Ketāy, had died, and incorporated it briefly into the Ghurid empire. Yet within a decade, Balk and Termed passed to the Ghurids' rival, the K̄vārazmšāh 'Alā'-al-Dīn Moḥammad, who seized it in 602/1205-06 and appointed as governor there a Turkish commander, Čağri or Ja'far.

In summer of 617/1220 the Mongols first appeared at Balk. It seems that the city surrendered peacefully to the incomers, but in spring 618/1221 Jengiz Khan himself arrived there, and Balk was subjected to a frightful sacking, conceivably after a revolt of the populace against the Mongol garrison. Whether Balk did indeed have a population of 200,000 before the Mongol massacres, which last involved a large part of the populace, is unconfirmed, but certainly the agricultural and commercial activities on the eve of the invasion described by Yāqūt (*Mo'jam al-boldān* I, p. 713), when Balk supplied produce to Khorasan and K̄vārazm, was dealt a severe blow, from which the city did not recover till Timurid times. See, for the Saljuq period and after, the standard sources for Saljuq and Mongol history (Bondārī, Rāvandī, Ebn al-Aṭīr, Jovaynī, etc.); of secondary literature are Barthold, *Turkestan*; Bosworth and Boyle, in *Camb. Hist. Iran*, V; and Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is substantially given in the article. It should be noted that Balk, like other cities of Khorasan, seems to have had a lively genre of local histories and



works on the excellencies and merits of the city, many of these being biographical in approach. Virtually all of these are apparently lost, but material from several of them was used by the Šayĵ-al-Eslām Abū Bakr ‘Abd-Allāh b. ‘Omar Balĵī for his *Ketāb fażā’el Balĵ* (610/1214), of which a Persian translation by ‘Abd-Allāh b. Moĥammad Ḥosaynī was made at Balĵ in 676/1278 (ed. ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī, *Fazā’el-e Balĵ*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971; cf. Storey, I, pp. 1296-97).