



BARKĪĀROQ

BARKĪĀROQ, ROKN-AL-DĪN ABU'L-MOẒAFFAR B. MALEKŠĀH, Great Saljuq sultan (r. 485-98/1092-1105). Barkīāroq (properly, Berk-yaruq, Tk. “firm, strong brightness,” see Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish*, pp. 361-62, 761-63) was the eldest of Malekšāh’s sons, but still only thirteen on his father’s death. The fact that Malekšāh left no adult sons goes a considerable way toward explaining why the mighty edifice of his empire now began to crumble, so that Barkīāroq’s reign conventionally marks the opening stages of the decline of Great Saljuq unity in Iran and the Fertile Crescent. Moreover, the older Turkish tribal traditions of a patrimonial share-out of territories, in the absence of a single, mature, dominant, and experienced leader, reasserted themselves now, just as they had done twenty years previously around the time of Malekšāh’s father [Alp Arslān](#).

When Malekšāh died, his widow Terken (Torkān) Kātūn attempted to place her four-year-old son Maḥmūd on the throne in Isfahan. Barkīāroq was proclaimed ruler at Ray by the rival party of the Neẓāmīya, the sons and partisans of the great vizier Neẓām-al-Molk (q.v.), as the candidate most likely to be able to hold his father’s heritage together. Terken Kātūn and Maḥmūd conveniently died in 487/1094, and Barkīāroq was able through military force to dispose of the claims to power of other ambitious members of the Saljuq family, namely his uncle, Arslān Argūn in Khorasan and, more seriously, another uncle, Tutuš (Totaš) b. Alp Arslān (q.v.) of Damascus (487-88/1094-95). Barkīāroq was now reasonably firmly established in Iraq and Jebāl, i.e., western Iran, but he had to leave the sons of Tutuš in Syria and his half-brother Moḥammad Tapar (q.v.)



in Azarbaijan and Arrān, the latter now receiving the support of his (Moḥammad's) full brother [Sanjar](#) and of Barkīāroq's former vizier Mo'ayyed-al-Molk b. Neẓām-al-Molk.

The remaining years of Barkīāroq's reign were filled with continuous warfare and campaigns against Moḥammad, with the allegiance of the great Turkish amirs constantly changing, their underlying aim being that no one ruler should be able to secure complete domination. The sultan was driven to desperate expedients to raise money for his armies, including, reportedly, the confiscation of private property for *eqṭā'sand*, when his fortunes were especially low, the employment of Isma'ili troops in his forces, leading to accusations that Barkīāroq personally favored them. By 497/1104, war-weary and already ill, Barkīāroq, although in control of western and central Iran and Iraq, agreed to a division of power with Moḥammad, who was to have northwestern Iran, Jazīra, and Syria, while Sanjar was to remain in Khorasan acknowledging only Moḥammad as his overlord. Whether these arrangements would have lasted is unknown, since Barkīāroq died only a few months later at the age of 25, and Moḥammad was able to succeed to thirteen years of uninterrupted sultanate, Barkīāroq has inevitably suffered in comparison with his father, and the sources are lukewarm about him while being enthusiastic about Moḥammad. Yet the problems which he had faced had been formidable. The seeds of the trend toward decentralization and loosening of the fabric of the Great Saljuq empire had already been sown in his father's time; and Barkīāroq's sultanate is indeed notable for the beginnings of the Turkman atabegates and principalities which later were a feature of the lands from Kermān to Anatolia and Syria.

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