



## ĠĀZĀN KHAN, MAḤMŪD

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**ĠĀZĀN KHAN, MAḤMŪD** (b. 29 Rabī' I 670/5 November 1271; d. 11 Šawwāl 703/17 May 1304), the oldest son of [Arġūn Khan](#) and his eventual successor as the seventh Il-khanid ruler of Persia (r. 694-703/1295-1304). Following his father's accession in 683/1284, he was appointed governor of the eastern provinces, i.e., Khorasan, Māzandarān, Qūmes and Ray, a position which he continued to hold under his uncle [Gaykātū](#), who gained the throne in 690/1291. From 1289 until 1294, Ġāzān was occupied with the revolt of his erstwhile lieutenant [Nowrūz b. Arġūn Āqā](#). In fact, he was retreating from the latter at the time of his father's death, and thus was unable to pursue effectively his candidacy for the Il-khanate. Eventually reconciled with Nowrūz, Ġāzān was better able to intervene in the aftermath of Gaykātū's deposition and murder by their kinsman [Bāydū](#). It was during the struggle against Bāydū that Ġāzān converted to Islam at the instigation of Nowrūz and assumed the name Maḥmūd. Part of the motivation for this act may have been the desire to win the support of those Mongol officers in both his and Bāydū's army who had already become Muslims (Melville, pp. 171-72). The conversion occurred on 2 Šabān 694/17 June 1295, and led to the widespread adoption of Islam among those Mongols who had not yet converted (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīk*, Baku, pp. 294-97; idem, *Tārīk-e ġāzānī*, pp. 76-78). Ġāzān soon triumphed over Bāydū whom he had executed. There yet remained, however, some who disputed his rule of the Il-khanate; he met all opposition forcefully, and several Mongol princes and other notables (including eventually Nowrūz) were executed after his accession. Once firmly on the throne, Ġāzān launched a campaign against the non-Muslims in his kingdom. Particularly affected



were the Buddhists, to which the Khan had belonged before his conversion to Islam. The Buddhist *baḵšīs* (lamas or scholars, q.v.) were given the option either to become Muslims or to leave the country. Buddhist temples were destroyed as were many churches and synagogues (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 376-77, 396-98; idem, *Tārīḵ-e ġāzānī*, pp. 169, 188-90; Continuator of Bar Hebraeus, p. 507). Eventually, however, Ġāzān returned to a more tolerant attitude reminiscent of his forbearers, and relaxed pressure on Christians and Jews (Orbelian, p. 262; Rabban Šāwmā, pp. 220, 242). The depth of Ġāzān's commitment to his new religion may be in doubt; an 8th/14th-century Arabic source reports that he considered apostasizing when informed that his desire to marry his father's widow **Bolōġān Ḳātūn** was contrary to Islamic law; eventually a compromise was proposed, and the Khan remained true to his new faith, to the relief of those Muslims in his entourage (Šafadī, fols. 62b-63a; cf. Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, p. 301). In any event, throughout his reign, Ġāzān was strict in his observance of Muslim rites, and was also a patron of Muslim institutions, such as *madrāsas*, mosques, and other pious endowments, particularly in and around Tabrīz (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 410-25; idem, *Tārīḵ-e ġāzānī*, pp. 201-17).

Ġāzān's conversion to Islam and his adoption of the title *pādšāh-e Eslām* did not affect his policy toward the traditional enemies of the Il-khans, namely the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria. In fact, Ġāzān launched more campaigns into Syria than any other Il-khan. His first offensive was in 699/1299, and resulted in the Mongol victory near Ḥoms at Majma' al-Morūj (also called Wādī'l-Ḳaznadār), which led to Ġāzān's short-term occupation of Damascus. He was, however, compelled to withdraw from the country in early 700/1300, perhaps for logistical reasons, or possibly because of incursions of the Qaraunas or Negüderis (Nīġüdārīs) in the eastern provinces (Morgan, 1985, p. 233; Boyle, pp. 363, 388; cf. Het'um, p. 196); the Mamluks thus soon reoccupied Syria without difficulty. Later that year, Ġāzān's forces again returned to northern Syria, but were forced to retreat due to harsh winter weather (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 396-98; idem, *Tārīḵ-e ġāzānī*, pp. 188-90). Finally in 702/1303, a large Mongol army succeeded in again penetrating to central Syria. Ġāzān, however, remained behind near the Euphrates, and soon received word that his forces had been decisively defeated by the Mamluks at Marj al-Šoffar (also referred to as Šaḥqab) south of Damascus. His plans for a fourth campaign were cut short by his death on 11 Šawwāl 703/17 May 1304 (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 349-58, 368; idem, *Tārīḵ-e ġāzānī*, pp. 140-47,



159). These military campaigns were accompanied by diplomatic activities on two fronts. First, embassies were twice exchanged with the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣer Moḥammad b. Qalāwūn. In his letters Ġāzān, the initiator of these exchanges, called on the Mamluks to submit; the Mamluk response was no less truculent (Horst, pp. 348-70). Second, Ġāzān sent delegations to the West, in an effort to convince the Pope (Boniface VIII) and the major European powers to participate in a joint campaign against the Mamluks. Nothing substantial came of these latter efforts, although rumors of Mongol successes in Syria around 1300, much of it apocryphal, did cause a great stir in western Europe (Schein, pp. 805-19).

At the time of Ġāzān's accession to the throne, the Il-khanid kingdom was on the verge of bankruptcy: long-term mismanagement and rapacious taxation policies had led to the economic decline of the kingdom, which was exacerbated by Gaykātū's profligacy and the experiment with paper money (see ČĀV). Ġāzān's responded with wide-ranging reforms, which included increased control over greedy officials, a regular and realistic taxation schedule, payment of the army through the granting of *eqṭā's*, land registration, increased public order, and a less predatory attitude towards the peasantry. Our main source for the sorry state of the economy before Ġāzān, his reforms and their implementation, is the *Jāme' al-tawārīk* of Rašīd-al-Dīn, his vizier (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīk*, Baku, pp. 426-571; idem, *Tārīk-e ġāzānī*, pp. 217-364). As the latter was directly responsible for the execution of these reforms, one should be cautious in accepting his claims for the effectiveness of these measures, as also his description of the poor state of the economy and administration prior to his patron's accession. There are, however, indications that these steps did lead to some improvement of the economy, which continued into the reign of his successor Öljeitü (Ūljāytü; Morgan, 1986, pp. 167-70).

In spite of his conversion to Islam, Ġāzān remained loyal to different aspects of Mongol tradition, most notably the *yāsā*, or law code attributed to Čengīz Khan. This is emphasized by the Mamluk writer Ṣafadī, in his entry on this Il-khan, as well as Ġāzān himself, who in his order (*yarlīg*) on the distribution of *eqṭā's* to the Mongol soldiers, praises Čengīz Khan's promulgation of the *yāsā* (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārīk*, Baku, p. 511; idem, *Tārīk-e ġāzānī*, p. 303). In the interest of preserving Mongol lore and the knowledge of their history, Ġāzān had his vizier Rašīd-al-Dīn commence work on a history of Čengīz Khan and his successors. This was the *Tārīk-e mobārek-e ġāzānī*, which was



completed only after ĠĀzĀn's death and became the core of the more comprehensive *Jāme' al-tawārīk*. ĠĀzĀn himself was a source of this work, as was Bolād Āqā (q.v.), the personal representative of the great khan (*qa'an/qa'ān*) at the Il-khanid court (Morgan, 1985; idem, 1986, pp. 18-21). In fact, in spite of his elimination of the title of the great khan's name on his coins, ĠĀzĀn still maintained contact with Qubilai (Qūbīlāy)'s successor, Temūr Öljeitü (Tīmūr Ūljāytū), eventually receiving from him formal recognition of his rulership. It is clear, then, that ĠĀzĀn saw himself at least *de jure* as subservient to the great khan (Allsen, pp. 230-31; cf. 'Omarī, p. 19).

The khan of the Golden Horde, Toqta'a (Tūqtāy), sent in early 702/fall 1302 a delegation to restate claims over Azarbaijan. This demand, needless to say, were dismissed by ĠĀzĀn (Rašīd-al-Dīn, Baku, p. 352; Waṣṣāf, pp. 398-99; cf. 'Omarī, ed. Lech, pp. 78-79). In spite of such belligerent talk, in general the Caucasian border remained quiet in this period, although there is report of an incursion from the Golden Horde toward Darband in 1301, which was beaten back apparently without difficulty (Spuler, p. 86).

According to Rašīd-al-Dīn (Baku, pp. 379-80; *Tārīk-e ġāzānī*, p. 171), ĠĀzĀn knew, besides Mongolian, some Arabic, Persian, "Hendī," "Kašmīrī," Tibetan, "Ķeṭāī" (evidently Chinese), Frankish (*farangī*; perhaps some dialect of old French spoken by western, mainly Italian, traders in the Il-khanate), and other languages. Ṣafadī (fol. 61a-b), on the other hand, writes that he knew Mongolian and Turkish, spoke Persian with Rašīd-al-Dīn and other close (Persian) associates, and understood most of what was said before him in Arabic (though without divulging it). Both sources also mention that ĠĀzĀn had an interest in the non-Islamic rational sciences; the latter writer adds that Rašīd-al-Dīn was his teacher in this matter. The impression gained is that of a most impressive and multi-faceted personality: a decisive and forceful leader who also possessed a deep and wide-ranging intellect. The Armenian Het'um (p. 195), who accompanied him into Syria in 1299-1300, describes him as small and of ugly appearance, in spite of his virtue and prowess; the Mamluk historians, however, write that he was of medium build and handsome. These same last-mentioned writers state that ĠĀzĀn died as a result of a poison administered by his wife Boloġān Kātūn. Modern writers (Spuler, p. 89, n. 79; Melville, in *EIr* IV, p. 339) are correct to doubt the credibility of this evidence; it appears that the Il-khan's death was brought about by natural causes, although the long-term effects of heavy alcoholic consumption may have also played their part.



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