



## ILĀQ

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**ILĀQ**, medieval name of an area in what is now Uzbekistan, to the south of Tashkent along the middle reaches of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) river. In the north Ilāq bordered on the Šāš area and Chatkal mountains of the Tien Shan range; in the west it was bounded by the river Šāš (the old name of the Syr Darya); in the east it extended to the Chatkal, Quramin, and Qaramazar mountains. The area stretched along the Āhangarān river (modern Angren, a Syr Darya tributary), the valley of which was clearly divided into two zones, mountain and plain. The plain had a fairly hot and dry climate growing milder toward the foothills; at an elevation over 1,000 m above sea level, the mountains were covered with woody shrubs and forests. Until the 20th century wild fauna was varied and abundant. The numerous tributaries of the Āhanga-rān made the foothills and the plain suitable for cultivation; and rich pastures for cattlebreeding abounded in the mountains and foothills. Ilāq was rich in minerals and precious metals, including those widely used in antiquity and the Middle Ages (e.g., gold, silver, copper, lead, iron); and mining developed at an early stage. Urban centers also appeared.

Geographically Ilāq merged into Šāš, its northern and economically more developed neighbor. (Some authors look at Ilāq as a sub-region of Šāš.) Agriculture appeared in Šāš and Ilāq early in the first millennium B.C.E., and the arrival of several Sogdian migrations led to the development of urban centers. At the turn of the Middle Ages, the [Hephthalites](#) and Turks came to power in both areas. At that time the number of urban centers (some large) increased considerably due to the area's general economic progress; by the 7th



century a ruler of one of the domains was minting his own coins (see below).

Historians who described the Arab conquest did not mention Ilāq (Barthold, *Turkestan1*, p. 169, n. 4), probably because at that time Ilāq was part of Šāš. The Mobayyeza (“white-clad” movement) was popular among the locals (see below), which suggests that the Ilāq population was involved in the 8th-century events connected with [Abu Moslem](#) and Moqanna‘. Ninth-tenth century geographical works contain fairly detailed descriptions of Ilāq and its capital. The author of the *Ḥodud al-‘ālam* (p. 117) wrote: “Ilāq, a large province stretching between the mountains and the steppe. It has a numerous population, and is cultivated and prosperous, (but) the people have little wealth (*khwāsta*). Its towns and districts (*rustā*) are numerous. The people profess mostly the creed of those ‘in white raiment’ (*sapīd jāmagān*). The people are warlike and arrogant-looking (*shūkh-rū*). In its mountains are mines of gold and silver. Its frontiers march with Farghāna, Jadghal [sic], Chāch, and the river Kha-shart. The chiefs of this province are called *Dihqān-i Īlāq*. Formerly the *dihqān* in this province were counted among the margraves (*dihqān in nāḥiyat rā az mulūk-i aṭrāf būdandi*).” The capital, Nukath, is described as having a city (*šahrestān*), citadel, and suburb (*rabaž*).

Ebn Hawqal (*BGA*, II, pp. 388-89) and Maqdisi (*BGA*, III, p. 277) offer more information. The capital of this area was called Tunkat, which was half the size of Binkath, the capital of Šāš. The palace of the ruler was found in the Tunkat citadel; and the main masjed and the prison were built next to the citadel. The markets were in the town proper—in the *madina* (i.e., *šahrestān*) and in the suburb both parts had canals. The capital was surrounded with a defensive wall. In the Ilāq mountains there were silver and gold mines. The mint was in the town proper (Barthold, *Turkestan1*, p. 172).

Coins shed some light on the history of Ilāq. Archeological research has discovered bronze coins, the obverse showing a ruler’s bust in three-quarter profile and wearing a headdress. The reverse shows a *tamga* (dynastic symbol) in the center; two parallel lines with flared ends are connected at the center with two fine lines. An inscription along the rim carries the name of the ruler and a Sogdian inscription naming the town or region of *twnyvknd* “Tunakand”; the name later became that of the capital of Ilāq, Tunkat. These coins mean that as early as the 7th to first half of the 8th centuries there was a state in Ilāq with rulers of its own. Judging by another group of coins with a similar *tamga*, one may conclude that the rulers of Tunakand or their relatives probably seized power in Šāš (Rtveladgze, 2002, pp. 262-65); but this remains



only a hypothesis.

The coins indicate that internal trade was fairly developed, and a Byzantine medallion found there (Masson, 1972) points to Ilāq's involvement in international trade. The evidence for monetary circulation is very important for the history of Ilāq in the 9th-11th centuries. In the 9th-10th centuries, Transoxiana minted dirhams used across the entire state that were distinguished from pre-Islamic coins by carrying inscriptions only in Arabic Kufic script. According to Ebn Kordādbeh, whose information relates to 826-28 C.E., Ilāq, like its neighbors Šāš and Kojand, had to pay tribute in what were termed mo-sĀayyabi dirhams (BGA, VI, pp. 27-28). These contained up to 70 percent silver—much more than the two other types mentioned in the sources (Davidovich, 1966, pp. 119-34; Davidovich, 1998, pp. 391-99).

At the same time as the common state coins with Arabic Kufic inscriptions, three other coin types were minted and widely used, imitating the issues of the Sasanian King Bahrām V (420-38). These Central Asian coins with royal portrait bust and Pahlavi inscription (obverse) and fire altar with attendants (reverse) remained in circulation until the 11th century. The Pahlavi inscription came to be replaced by a Sogdian one naming the title of the rulers of Bukhara (e.g., Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 100, 113) as Bukhar Khudat (Buḵār Ḳudāt). These coin types were the result of reforms carried out by Arab governors, and each circulated within a particular territory.

In the 9th-11th centuries Ilāq had a mint of its own; some of the coins minted there bore the word “Ilāq” (Zambaur, 1968, p. 6; Kochnev, 1995, p. 275), others, the word “Tunkat” (Zambaur, 1968, p. 72; Kochnev, 1995, p. 276; Kochnev, 1997, p. 314). Ebn Hawqal specially pointed out that in Transoxiana, other than Ilāq, only Samarqand and Bukhara had mints (BGA, VI, p. 389). The same author reported that the Ilāq mint issued gold and silver coins and that the area used numerous coins of both (BGA<sup>2</sup>, I-II, p. 510). It seems that in Ilāq, as well as in Samarqand and Bukhara, retail trade rarely used gold dinars—they were too precious; besides, they had no weight standard and had to be weighed before being accepted in payment (Davidovich, 1966, pp. 107-9).

Copper coins (folus, sing. fals) occupied a considerable place in monetary trading; on some of them a representation of the suzerain was accompanied by his title dehqān and, in some cases, his name. This is confirmed by the reference in *Ḥodud al-‘ālam* to the dehqān-e Ilāq (see above). This means that the dehqān-e Ilāq was a vassal with fairly broad rights, including the right to



put his name (or title) on copper coins. As E. A. Davidovich has established, the Samanid state employed a feudalistic system, of which the local dynasties were part (Davidovich, 1978, pp. 80-102). It seems that since pre-Islamic times there had existed a local dynasty in Ilāq; it survived after the Arab conquest and continued in the Samanid period (819–1005 C.E.). In 992, at the very end of the Samanid dynasty, the Qara-khanids (see [ILAK-KHANIDS](#)) headed by Ḥasan b. Solaymān (his title being Bughra [[Boḡrā Khan](#)]) raided Bukhara for the first time, and in that year a coin bearing his name was minted in Ilāq (Masson, 1958, p. 81). Thus Ilāq left the sphere of influence of the Samanid state, and the Qara-khanids became suzerains. This shift allowed the dehqāns of Ilāq to keep their power in the early stages of the Qara-khanid rule. The mint continued producing coins with the name and titles of the Qarakhanid suzerain and with the name of the dehqān of Ilāq or with the title of dehqān. For this reason one can believe that the local dynasty continued ruling in Ilāq and was politically very strong; apparently the Qara-khanids had to let it continue ruling (Masson, 1953, pp. 81-82; Davidovich, 1966, pp. 96-98). Coins marked as minted at Ilāq were produced until the end of the 1020s, those marked as Tunkat, until the 1060s (Kochnev, 1995, p. 246, no. 645; Kochnev, 1997, p. 281, no. 1246). Subsequently, neither name appeared on coins; obviously Ilāq had become part of Šāš (Čăč). The town of Tunkat, however, was mentioned later in written sources.

According to written, numismatic, and archeological materials Ilāq reached the peak of its prosperity in the 9th-10th centuries. According to medieval geographers there were 14 towns in the vassal state of Ilāq (Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>1</sup>, p. 179). The largest among these 14 towns was its capital Tunkat; today it lies in ruins called Imlaq (probably the distorted name of Ilāq.)

The Imlaq site lies on the left bank of the river Āhangarān; on two sides it was protected by deep ravines, which in antiquity held tributary streams. It is clearly divided into 3 parts that correspond to the citadel, šahrestān, and suburb of the medieval city. The ruins cover 180 hectares (the šahrestān, 11.5 hectares; the citadel, 6 hectares). The mound of the šahrestān and the citadel is nearly triangular and extends from west to east; a hill that forms the remains of a monumental building can be discerned in the center of citadel. The citadel had two gates and was protected by a wall, and an outer wall extended to enclose the šahrestān. The wall had towers, some at shorter intervals, where it protected the citadel, and some at longer intervals, where it protected the šahre-stān. In the southern part there were three large, projecting bastions.



The suburb was also protected with a wall. The Āhangarān protected the buildings in the west, reinforced by the ravines, which probably still held water in the Middle Ages. Altogether, the fortifications of Tunkath were nearly impregnable. Only a third of the suburb was built on, more or less densely; there were numerous workshops, especially metallurgical ones, in the suburb and to some extent in the šahrestān.

Archeological excavations of the late 1960s and early 1970s conducted by Yu. F. Buriakov showed that the city had been founded in the 6th-7th centuries. The original walls date to that period. Excavations revealed a monumental square platform (10 x 10 m) in the citadel preserved to the height of four meters. On top of it arche-ologists found traces of a huge fire. The platform might have served cultic purposes such as fire worship (a fire temple?). Much later another monumental structure was erected on the same platform and also was destroyed. Archeologists established that there was a hall with columns made of figured burnt bricks; also found burned were wooden detailings with intricate carving. It seems that it was the remains of the palace of the dehqān of Ilāq. Dwellings of common people were also investigated.

Archeologists discovered metallurgical shops with furnaces, tools, and devices at the outskirts of the šahrestān and in the suburb. The ore was crushed there with the help of gigantic millstones; then it was purified and melted. All sorts of ores were processed and melted there: gold, silver, copper, and polymetallic ores. The metal then went to smiths and jewelers working at the same places. This information refers to Tunkat in the 6th-7th through to the 11th-12th centuries; some of the finds tell us that life in Tunkat also revived later, in the 14th-15th centuries.

We know much less of the many other towns and settlements of Ilāq, although some of them continued functioning in the late Middle Ages. There were many mines and smelting centers in Ilāq, but we do not know their medieval names yet; on the whole, their development dynamics were synchronous with those of Tunkat. Local people extracted gold, silver-lead, copper, iron, and other ores, as well as turquoise. In total, 2.5 million tons of ore were mined—a huge figure even if underestimated. Half of this amount was silver-lead ores, a quarter, gold. There is no doubt that Ilāq supplied the largest amounts of gold and silver; the “Šāš mine” of the written sources was also found in Ilāq. Today these mines are known as Lashkirek, Tyzkul, etc. (Masson, 1953, pp. 70-75; Buriakov, 1974, pp. 3-11; Buriakov, 1978, pp. 90-98; Buriakov, 1982, pp. 127-29). There is no doubt that, thanks to its mining and metallurgical industry, Ilāq



played an extremely important role in the economy of Transoxiana, especially in the 9th-11th centuries.

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