



JOVAYNI, 'ALĀ'-AL-DIN

JOVAYNI, 'ALĀ'-AL-DIN 'AṬĀ-MALEK b. Moḥammad (b. 1226, d. Moḡān, 1283), the governor of Iraq under the Il-khanids and the author of *Tāriḡ-e jahān-gošāy*, a major primary source for the history of Central Asia and the Mongol conquests of Persia during the 12th and 13th centuries. Jovayni has come under intense scrutiny from critics (e.g., see Ayalon, no. IVa, p. 133; Lewisohn, pp. 58-62) who were not always sympathetic to his apparently accommodating attitude to the “scourge from the East,” and suspicious of his less than reprehensive posture towards the Mongols. Jovayni's use of the formalized politeness of medieval Persian has been vastly overstated and erroneously mistaken for obsequiousness, while his literary filigree has been imbued with undeserved gravitas. Jovayni lived and worked under Mongol rule rather than under Tatar invasion, and his personal experiences did not produce either the clichéd observations of second-hand witnesses or the embittered and emotional reaction of refugees or survivors. Though Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Jovayni, wielded greater authority at the Il-khanid court in his capacity as *šāheh(-e) divān* than his younger brother, it is 'Aṭā-Malek's name that is more well-known due to his authoritative and influential history of Čengiz Khan and the Mongol conquest of Iran.

'Aṭā-Malek was a faithful servant to his own particular calling within whose moral and spiritual parameters he performed. His struggle toward a more just and equitable world was conducted not through the medium of swords and resistance but through the agency of the pen and weighted words. If 'Aṭā-Malek's great historical work betrays a certain bias toward the Chingizid



Toluids under whom he operated, it may only be indicative of the purely human tendency to self-justification rather than evidence of pressure to sanitize his masters, let alone follow a particular party line. Such distinctions in themselves may be anachronistic. 'Aṭā-Malek's masters were regal, mighty, and successful. The court historian's job was to record this irrefutable fact and to explain and reflect the circumstances of that success. The Jovaynis, just as generations of their family before them, were constant and committed to their office. It was in recognition of such loyal and devoted attachment to their profession that they earned the approbation of their contemporaries and the recognition and praise of later generations of statesmen, chroniclers, poets, artists, and functionaries, not only from their own homelands but also from those neighboring them.

That the Jovaynis were valuable and effective functionaries was a fact immediately recognized not only by their current rulers but by their ruler's would-be enemies as well. Šams-al-Din Moḥammad, 'Aṭā-Malek's grandfather, faithfully served until his death near [Aḳlāt](#) around 1229 the last ruling K̲v̲ārazmšāh, Sultan Moḥammad, and his son, the dashing Jalāl-al-Din Minkoberni. Bahā'-al-Din Moḥammad, the father of 'Aṭā-Malek, slipped easily from the circles serving the K̲v̲ārazmšāhs to the position of *ṣāḥeb(-e) divān* of Khorasan and Māzandarān in about 1233 for the Mongol conquerors (Qazvini, pp. *yḥ-yṭ*).

The Jovaynis' long and illustrious pedigree stretches back to the time of the 'Abbasids, when their ancestors, Rabi' b. Yunos and his son Faḏl b. al-Rabi', both served the caliphs al-Manṣur, al-Mahdi, al-Hādi, Hārūn al-Rašid, and al-Amin as ministers and chamberlains (*ḥājeḥ*; Qazvini, pp. *yḇ-yj*). Rabi' is alternately claimed to be of indeterminate parentage or a direct descendant of the *mawlā*, Abu (Bābi) Farwa Kaysān, who was attached to the third caliph, 'Oṭmān b. 'Affān (Qazvini, pp. *yj-yḥ*; Atiya). The family held high office under both the Great Saljuqs and the K̲v̲ārazmšāhs, so much so that the title *ṣāḥeb divān* became almost a family epithet, and indeed Šams-al-Din Jovayni, born in the village of Āzādvār in Khorasan, was universally known simply as Ṣāḥeb Divān after he became the grand vizier of [Hulāgu](#) (Hülegü) and then of [Abaqa Khan](#). 'Aṭā-Malek also adopted this title in his capacity as governor of Baghdad. The Jovaynis served the office rather than the man. Under the Great Saljuq Sultan Sanjar, Montajab-al-Din Badi' 'Ali b. Aḥmad Kāteb Jovayni, the great-great-grandfather of 'Aṭā-Malek, achieved acclaim for his services as the head of the royal secretariat (*divān-e enšā'*; see [DĪVĀN](#)) and his literary work, *'Atabat*



al-kataba, which was considered by Moḥammad ‘Awfi (I, pp. 78-80; Qazvini, pp. yv-yz) and Dawlatšāh Samarqandi (p. 72) as an important source for Sanjar’s administration.

‘Aṭā-Malek had been in continuous service with the Mongols for about ten years when his father died in 1253, and he was already exceptionally well traveled (‘Aṭā-Malek, 1912-37, I, p. 7). During this time, he had earned great esteem at the Mongol court, particularly with Möngke, a fact recorded by subsequent Persian chroniclers (e.g., Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh; Mostawfi, 1999; Waṣṣāf; K̲vāndamir). He was born in 1226 and spent the years from 1243 until 1256 in the camp of the Amir Arḡun Āqā. He first traveled to Mongolia with Arḡun Āqā in 1246-47 and again in 1249-50. He returned for a prolonged stay at the Mongol capital during the period 1251-52 and it was while in Qaraqorum (a town in central Mongolia, then the capital of the Mongol Empire) that he was persuaded by friends to begin the composition of the *Tārik-e jahāngošāy* to immortalize the Mongol sovereigns and their conquests (‘Aṭā-Malek, 1912-37, I, pp. 2-3, 6-7). He finished his famous work in 1260. Upon his return to Iran he resumed work as Arḡun Āqā’s secretary until Hulāgu’s arrival in 1256, when his master assigned him along with his own son Kerāy-Malek and Amir Aḥmad Bitekči (secretary) to help the royal prince administer Khorasan, Iraq, and Māzandarān (Qazvini, p. kv).

Under Hulāgu, ‘Aṭā-Malek steadily rose in power, and in 1257 he marched with the new king to besiege Baghdad. In 1259, a year after the capture of Baghdad, Hulāgu put him in charge of its administration (‘Aṭā-Malek, 1982, pp. 57-60, also quoted by Qazvini, pp. kṭ-lj). He kept his position as the administrator of Baghdad during the reign of Hulāgu’s son and successor, Abaqa Khan (r. 1265-82), although the Mongol general Amir Soḡončaq (Sunjāq) was assigned as overall governor of the provinces of Baghdad and Fars. During the seventeen years of Abaqa’s reign, ‘Aṭā-Malek exerted a good deal of effort to improve the living conditions of the farmers and bring prosperity to the land. He reduced taxes, built new villages, constructed a *rebāt* in Najaf, and in particular had new watercourses dug, among which the canal from Anbār on the Euphrates to Kufa and Najaf, for which he spent more than 100,000 gold dinars of his own fortune, is the most famous (Qazvini, pp. kṭ-lb, qit).

‘Aṭā-Malek’s immediate circle and audience for his histories would certainly have been his Persian fellow notables and ranking administrators. But like ‘Aṭā-Malek himself, there must have been a growing class of young Persian notables and nobles who would have grown up within the *ordus* of the Mongol



ruling classes, and Turks, Mongols, Uighurs, Armenians and Kurds would have been numbered among their intimates. 'Aṭā-Malek was one of a new generation of young notables, well educated and well-traveled, who had shared their youth and formative years with an ethnically and culturally diverse elite groomed and trained to assume the administrative mantle of the consolidating empire. Though appropriate respect for their masters might have been expected and direct criticism of Mongol individuals would have been unwise, 'Aṭā-Malek's praise for many of the qualities of the new rulers would appear to have gone beyond the usual extravagant plaudits and panegyric flattery, which were the norm in the courts of the time, and suggest genuine admiration. At that time, a taste for wallowing and indulgence in "nauseating . . . servile flattery" (Ayalon no. IVa, p. 133) was not yet a pronounced Mongol vice, a fact of which 'Aṭā-Malek was well aware.

'Aṭā-Malek began his *Tārik-e jahāngošāy* at the age of thirty, when he was not only well-traveled but also well read and versed in the literary arts of both Persian and Arabic. He wryly observes that such learning was no longer appropriately appreciated by an emerging generation of opportunists and arrivistes for whom penning Uighur represented the height of their cultural aspirations ('Aṭā-Malek, I, pp. 4-5, tr. I, pp. 7-8). It has often been noted that 'Aṭā-Malek ended his great history on the eve of the attack on Baghdad with the suggestion that the events that were to follow were too painful for him to record. That other great intellectual figure of the early Il-khanid, Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi, a Shi'ite, provided the missing chapter while 'Aṭā-Malek assumed his new duties as governor of Baghdad and no doubt found himself too busy to start a new opening chapter of possibly a new book. He had already recounted how he had been forced to "snatch an hour or so" at the end of each day for his writing (*dar asfār-e ba'id yak sā'at-i dar forṣat-e nozul eḳtelās-i mikonad wa ān hekāyāt-rā sawād-i minevisad*; 'Aṭā-Malek, 1912-37, I, p. 118, tr., I, p. 152). For him the annihilation of the hated Ismā'ilis was the final closure of an evil chapter in history which also made "God's secret intent by the rise of Chingiz-Khan has become clear and the benefit afforded by the passing of dominion and sovereignty to . . . Mengü Qā'ān plain to see " (*ḥaqiqat-e serr-e elāhi dar koruj-e Čengiz Kān rowšan šod wa maṣlaḥat-e enteḳāl molk o šāhi ba . . . Mengü Qā'ān mobayyan*; 'Aṭā-Malek, 1912-37, III, pp. 138-39, tr., II, p. 638).

'Aṭā-Malek, oversaw the re-building of Baghdad and a period of stability and prosperity returned to Iran as the benefits of the *Pax mongolica* and the close links with China began to be felt. As the provinces comprising the Il-khanate



began to experience peace and security, some for the first time in well over a century, cultural life also began to flourish, and a renaissance fired the pens and spirits of artists and wordsmiths in *divāns* nationwide. Both Jovayni brothers, ‘Aṭā-Malek and Šāḥeb Divān Šams-al-Din Moḥammad, were active patrons of this golden age of Persian poetry, and poets such as Sa‘di of Shiraz, Pur-e Bahā Jāmi, Fakr-al-Din ‘Erāqi, Homām-al-Din Moḥammad Tabrizi, Badr Jājarmi, Majd-al-Din Hamgar, Jamāl-al-Din Rostaq Qoṭni, and Sayyed Jamāl-al-Din Ḥasan Kāši recorded their gratitude and admiration in their verses (for them, see Šafā, III, ss.v.). Distinguished scholars of the time, such as Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi and Šafi-al-Din Ormavi, dedicated their works to them. According to the historian Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Dahabi (apud Qazvini, p. *sd*), every author who dedicated a book to the Jovaynis received from them a generous remuneration of one thousand gold dinars (*zar-e sorḡ*; Qazvini, pp. *sd ff.*, *qit-qk*).

There is evidence, however, that genuine friendship, admiration, and trust existed between the Jovaynis and the recipients of their largesse. Ebn Bibi, by his own admission, wrote his history at the suggestion of ‘Aṭā-Malek, then governor of Baghdad. He recorded ‘Aṭā-Malek’s patronage at the end of his chronicle. It is interesting to note that the two families of Jovayni and Ebn Bibi shared many ties during the 13th century, including their services at the court of K̲v̲ārazmšāh, where Majd-al-Din Moḥammad, Ebn Bibi’s father, served as a secretary under ‘Aṭā-Malek’s father. Ebn Bibi’s glowing eulogy to his benefactor (Ebn Bibi, pp. 9-13) suggests that his own work was a continuation of an unfulfilled historiographical project of ‘Aṭā Malek (see Melville). Moḥammad b. Badr Jājarmi recorded not only dedications from poets, including his own father who possibly acted as tutor to ‘Aṭā-Malek’s nephew, Bahā’-al-Din, but also some words of the brothers themselves (Jājarmi, II, pp. 822-28). Sa‘di (pp. 1181-82) recorded a meeting between himself, the Jovayni brothers, and the Il-khan Abaqa. He also corresponded with both at a personal level, and viewed their interpretation of the *yāsā* favorably (pp. 936-38, 1179-80). Pur-e Bahā felt confident enough to send politically satirical and ribald verse to the *divān* and not risk the wrath of the heads of the administration he was lampooning (Minorsky, pp. 292-305]. Šams-al-Din Kart (d. 1278), flamboyant ruler of Herat, was in regular correspondence with the family and enjoyed their close friendship and support until his unfortunate demise at the hands of Abaqa Khan. ‘Aṭā-Malek was held in good favor not only by his subjects and those receiving his largesse but also by the chroniclers and observers of the age. His contemporary, Ebn al-Fowaṭi, an important Arab



administrator in Baghdad, provides personal details and support. Writing some time after 'Aṭā-Malek's death, the historian, Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Dahabi (d. 1347-48), described Jovayni brothers as men "endowed with nobility, lordly qualities and experience in affairs . . . just, kind to the people, and active in promoting the prosperity of the country" (quoted by Qazvini, p. *qit*). The Egyptian Ebn Taḡriberdi (d. 1470) similarly praises "the most glorious (*al-ṣāḥeb al-ajall*) 'Alā'-al-Din" and mentions his virtue, magnanimity, and great wealth (Qazvini, pp. *qkh-qkv*).

A rare voice of dissent to these eulogies from contemporary and later chroniclers and commentators is found in the pages of a fellow Persian historian, Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfī Qazvini, with whose family the Jovaynis had been involved in a destructive and poisonous rivalry. It is, however, by omission rather than insult that Mostawfī betrayed his antipathy to the Jovaynis. Another voice of dissent, though mixed with bitter criticism, can be found in the pages of Ebn Ṭeqṭeqā's *Ketāb al-fakri*. The author's father had been assassinated and his lands confiscated at the instigation of 'Aṭā-Malek reacting against his attempts to slander maliciously the governor of Baghdad before Abaqa Khan (Browne, "Introduction," p. xxx; Qazvini, p. *lj*).

As governor and brother of the grand vizier Ṣāḥeb Divān Šams-al-Din Moḥammad, 'Aṭā-Malek made enemies though not as many as might have been expected. Bar Hebraeus reports his saving of the Catholicus of the Nestorians from an angry Muslim mob intent on killing him, which event was followed two or three years later by an unsuccessful assassination attempt by a group of assassins who were subsequently caught and executed (Bar Hebraeus, pp. 447-48; Browne, "Introduction," pp. xxxi-xlvi; Qazvini, pp. *ld-lh*). In Baghdad, a Mongol army commander and magistrate, Qarābuqā, and his Armenian adviser, Iṣāq, concocted a story of 'Aṭā-Malek having treasonable contacts with the Mamluks of Egypt and put their case before Abaqa. To the credit of the Il-khan, his investigations and interrogation of the witnesses revealed the truth and it was the mendacious accusers who ended up receiving their just rewards ('Aṭā-Malek, *Tasliat al-ekwān*, quoted by Qazvini, pp. *mṭ ff.*).

It was the intrigues of Ṣāḥeb Divān Šams-al-Din's one time protégé and later rival, Majd-al-Molk Yazdi, which were ultimately to cause ruination and indirectly the death of the two brothers. Majd-al-Molk, a notable from a powerful family (Waṣṣāf, p. 91), entered the service of Bahā'-al-Din b. Šams-al-Din Jovayni after having acted as vizier for the Atābegs of Yazd and eventually



came to the notice of the Şāḥeb Divān himself, who promoted him and appointed him, among other positions, as superintendent of the census in Georgia. It was, however, not Šams-al-Din who suffered initially as result of Majd-al-Molk's intrigues, but rather his apparently more vulnerable brother, 'Aṭā-Malek (Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh, pp. 1110-15, tr., pp. 541-42?).

It was concerning this very vexing period from 1279, near the end of his life, that 'Aṭā-Malek chose once again to commit himself to writing. The painful episode is described in his *Tasliat al-ekwān* and in another, untitled complementary manuscript (for the latter, see Qazvini, pp. *mḥ* ff.). Accused of corruption and gross misappropriation of state funds 'Aṭā-Malek deemed it worth paying up just to keep his tormentors at bay. Since he had money already owed him from the treasury, he would simply offset one amount with the other. This was not enough to satisfy Majd-al-Molk, who had succeeded in convincing Abaqa that the extent of 'Aṭā-Malek's embezzlement was truly on a grand scale and that only a thorough search of his private estates would reveal the hidden wealth. Even the intercession of his brother, Şāḥeb Divān Šams-al-Din, who had donated his own and the donations of others' wealth to help pay off the alleged debt, could not dissuade the Il-khan from giving leave to Majd-al-Molk to continue the humiliation and ruination of the once respected and loved vizier. The graves of 'Aṭā-Malek's children and kinsfolk were dug up and his servants were tortured. No hidden treasures were found and the looters made off with the actual contents of 'Aṭā-Malek's house ('Aṭā-Malek, 1982, pp. 125-27, also quoted by Qazvini, pp. *md* ff.). These indignities finally ceased after the intercession of a number of Mongol princes and princesses on 'Aṭā-Malek's behalf, most notably Abaqa's brother Qunqurātāy and a favorite wife, Princess Buluğun Kātun. 'Aṭā-Malek was released from prison on 4 Rama-zān 680/17 December 1281 ('Aṭā-Malek, 1982, pp. 135-36, also quoted by Qazvini, p. *mḥ*).

This was not the end of the Jovaynis' tribulations, however, and Majd-al-Molk, seeing his efforts to destroy his rivals once more thwarted, revived the rumors and the accusations of treachery and collaboration with the Mamluk enemy. In fact the contacts that 'Aṭā-Malek had had with the Egyptians had been with a group of rebel Baḥriya Turks who had been fleeing the Mamluk armies of the Sultan Qalāwun Alfi and were now seeking aid in Baghdad from the Il-khanid administration in order to establish their own principality in Syria. 'Aṭā-Malek had sent representatives of the defectors led by Sonqor Aşqar from his base at Şahyun, ahead to Abaqa in the royal camp, and when the party



arrived it was duly favored and 'Aṭā-Malek's role in the affair acknowledged ('Aṭā-Malek, *Tasliat al-ekwān*, quoted by Qazvini, pp. *n-nā*; Amitai-Preiss, 1995, pp. 181-83]. When the governor of Baghdad became aware of the slanderous allegations that had been put about by his foe and realized that these same accusations were being presented to Abaqa Khan, he immediately determined on traveling in person to the royal camp, which was then in the environs of Hamadān. On 22 Ramaẓān 680/1 April 1282 he was met half way by some courtiers from the Il-khan's court and informed that Abaqa had been convinced of his innocence on all charges and had commanded that all the vizier's confiscated property should henceforth be restored to him. Before he could arrive to receive the Il-khan's favor in person Abaqa had died, apparently from delirium tremors and pending the election of the new Il-khan, 'Aṭā-Malek was again thrown into jail. The announcement of Aḥmad Tegüdar's accession to the throne was accompanied by the release, and demonstrations of 'Aṭā-Malek's return to favor, all of which the historian records in considerable detail ('Aṭā-Malek, *Tasliat al-ekwān*, quoted by Qazvini, pp. *nj-nḥ*).

Majd-al-Molk was seized and, following a search of his possessions, charged with witchcraft, a crime particularly fearsome to the Mongols, and he was ordered to be placed into the hands of his enemies. To atone for his crimes his end was fittingly bloodthirsty and horrible as the loosed soldiers "like the thirsty [seeking] water, the sick [seeking] well-being, thirsted for his blood, every one with swords raised and fire raging" (*bar sār-e tešna ba-āb wa bimār bar 'āfiat ba-kun-e u tešna . . .*; 'Aṭā-Malek, *Tasliat al-ekwān*, quoted by Qazvini, pp. *nv-nz*; Faṣiḥ Aḥmad, II, pp. 350-51). As the bloody orgy commenced 'Aṭā-Malek admits to having had pangs of conscience. "Due to the civility and consideration that always prevailed over [my] nature, I had made a firm resolve that I should not seek retaliation, but the commanding carnal soul (*naḥs-e ammāra*) spoke to [my] heart . . ." ('Aṭā-Malek, *Tasliat al-ekwān*, quoted by Qazvini, p. *nv*). Pur-e Bahā Jāmi recorded the incident in a macabre burst of black humor reflecting Majd-al-Molk's ambitions: "He wanted to stretch his hands as far as Iraq, His grasp never reached that far; his hand, however, did arrive there" (Waṣṣāf, p. 109). Unfortunately for the Jovaynis, Majd-al-Molk was not completely finished and his legacy lived on in the memory of Prince Arḡun.

The short reign of the Il-khan [Aḥmad Takudār](#) ([Tegüdar]; r. 1282-84) saw both Jovayni brothers back in favor. There has been some suggestion that they were



instrumental in Takudār's conversion to Islam, though it is more likely that they encouraged the Il-khan in his openings addressed to the Mamluks of Egypt (see Amitai-Preiss, 2001). 'Aṭā-Malek was appointed supervisor of the *waqf* revenues from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as well as being re-instated as governor of Baghdad.

'Aṭā-Malek died in Moḡān on 4 Ḍu'l-ḥejja 681/5 March 1283, some eight months after his rival, foe, and accuser and was buried in Čarandāb Cemetery in Tabriz. His death was due to a fall from a horse, but it was widely believed that he had been fatally traumatized some months before when, reviving the charges of embezzlement, Prince Arḡun had begun to arrest and harass his people. The body of a recently deceased friend, Najm-al-Din Aşfar, had been exhumed in the search for evidence and then rudely discarded on the road. The distress resulting from this incident caused 'Aṭā-Malek such extreme headaches that this was believed to be the true cause of his death (Qazvini, pp. *nz-s*). He left behind at least one son, Maṣṣur (d. 1293) and a daughter who married, with a reputed bride price (*şadāq*) of 5,000 gold dinars, the eminent Sufi shaiḫ, Şadr-al-Din Ebrāhim b. Sa'd-al-Din Ḥammuya (Qazvini, pp. *sb-sj*), who became instrumental in helping Amir Nowruz in the conversion of [Ġāzān Khan](#) to Islam.

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