



## KĀTUN

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**KĀTUN**, a title of high-born women in the pre-modern Turkish and Persian worlds. Although the title is first attested in Orkhon Turkish, where *qatun/katun* in the Kül-tegin and Bilge-qaghan inscriptions denotes “wife of the khan or ruler, queen” (Tekin, pp. 342-43; Kāšgari, tr. Atalay I, p. 410; tr. Dankoff and Kelly I, p. 311), the word is almost certainly of Sogdian origin (*xwt’y* “lord, ruler,” *xwt’yn* “lord’s wife”; Clauson, p. 602). In the border land between the districts of Šāš and Ilāq on the middle Syr Darya lay a town Kātunkaṭ “Lady’s Town” (Barthold, *Turkestan*, 3rd ed., p. 173).

The term passed into early Islamic usage in the sense of “queen, lady” and is accordingly found in the sources for Ghaznavid and Saljuq history, cf. the Saljuq Sultan Malek-Šāh’s wife Tark-ān/Terken Kātun (see [TERKEN KĀTUN](#)), and Sultan Sanjar’s Qara-kānid wife of the same name. It then entered the usage of the K̄wārazmšāhs (cf. the queen of the Šāh Tekiš with the same name) and of the Mongols. In Arabic sources it acquired the broken plural *kawātin*. It survived long enough in the Persian world for 17th-century European travellers among the Safavids to render it; cf. Raphaël du Mans, “Chetines (impératrices de Perse)” and Sir John Chardin, “Katun, c’est à dire dame” (Doerfer III, pp. 135, 182). In Ottoman Turkish it became *qādīn* “lady, wife, a respectful designation for an elderly woman” (Redhouse, p. 1409), surviving into modern Turkish as *kadın*. In Central Asia, its usage was displaced from Tirmurid times onwards by the term *begüm*, passing thence into Muslim India as a title for high-ranking ladies such as female rulers of princely states or consorts of ruling princes (see Yule and Burnell, p. 79).



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