



## KEMĀḲ

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**KEMĀḲ** (Turk. *Kemah*), a town in eastern Anatolia (lat. 39° 35' N, long. 39° 01' E), located on the southern bank of the Western Euphrates (Turk. *Karasu*) about 60 km west of *Arzenjān* (Turk. *Erzincan*). It was well known in medieval times for its formidable fortress, described with some rhetorical excess by *Ebn 'Arabšāh* (d. 854/1450) as being “as fortified and invulnerable as the faith of the devout worshipper” with “strong foundations on inaccessible cliffs” while “on one side the river Euphrates kisses its feet, on the other a wide valley guards its loftier parts” (tr. Sanders, p. 174).

The town of *Kemāk* (Arm. *Kamakha*; Gk. *κᾰμαχα*, also known as *Ani-Theodosiopolis*; see Ramsay, pp. 305, 447-48; Pauly-Wissowa, X/2, p. 1799) is of some antiquity. It was certainly of importance to the Arsacids of Armenia (*Aršakuni*; see [ARMENIA AND IRAN ii](#); [ARSACIDS vii](#)), as it was the site of a royal necropolis and the tomb of *Tiridates III* (r. 287-330; Kavtaradze, p. 49).

In the early Islamic period, *Kemāk* was a frontier outpost that was often caught up in the Byzantine-Muslim border wars. *Kamḳ* (or *Kamāk*, *Ḥesn Kamḳ*) was well known to the classical Muslim geographers (see Le Strange, p. 118), but early historical accounts in Arabic are basically limited to a brief reference to it as a bastion against the Khazars and Georgians (*Šanāriya*) by *Ya'qubi* (ed. Houtsma, II, p. 447) and a relatively long account by *Balāḍori* (*Fotuḥ*, pp. 184-85; tr., I, pp. 288-89) of campaigns there. According to the latter, the town was attacked unsuccessfully by both *Ḥabib b. Maslama Fehri* and *Šafwān b. Mo'aṭṭal Solami* during the third invasion of Armenia (ca. 24/645-6); in 59/678-9, *Šafwān*, with the assistance of *'Omair b. Ḥobāb Solami*, managed



to capture the fortress temporarily. It was alternately under Muslim or Byzantine control; in 751 the Byzantine emperor Constantine V (r. 741-75), taking advantage of the chaos caused by the 'Abbasid revolt against the Omayyads, dispatched an Armenian general who captured Kemāk and garrisoned its fortress (Brooks, pp. 121-22).

In 149/766-7, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Manṣur launched a major campaign to recapture the area. The ethnically diverse 'Abbasid army, composed of Arabs, Persians, and other peoples (Chabot, tr. p. 72), was led by 'Abbās b. Moḥammad, brother of al-Manṣur, and his general, Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba. The bombardment of the fortress at Kemāk was ineffectual, and 'Abbās lost two hundred of his men to the stones hurled back at them by the defenders. Finally, with the aid of mantelets (*dabbāba*), his forces supposedly stormed the fort, but if so they did not hold it long before it returned to Byzantine control. A rather different, and remarkably detailed, account of this campaign was provided by the author of the Zuqnin Chronicle (pseudo-Dionysius; Chabot, tr., pp. 72-83; see Kennedy, pp. 106-7), which indicates that 'Abbās and the "Persians," frustrated by famine, cold, and the tenacity of the defenders, never actually took the castle. Kemāk did fall to another 'Abbasid army on 14 Rabi' II 177/29 July 793 (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 185; tr., I, p. 289), only to be lost again after the death of Hārūn al-Rašid in 809 and the outbreak of the civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun. It was recaptured by 'Abd-Allāh b. Ṭāher in 822 (Brooks, p. 127) and then definitively lost to the Byzantines as the result of a vague conspiracy by the patriarch of Ḳelāt and the Christians of Šemšāt and Qālīqalā (Erzerum), presumably the Armenian revolt of 851 (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, p. 185, tr., I, p. 289; Brooks, p. 131). All in all, it appears that Kemāk was held only ephemerally by the Muslims and was mostly under Byzantine control until after the battle of Manzikert in 463/1071.

Following the collapse of Byzantine authority in eastern Anatolia, Kemāk became an object of contention among the competing Turko-Mongol powers of the region. It was first held by Aḥmad Mengüjek (Mangujak; d. 512/1118), a Türkmen chief who had apparently received an *eqṭā'* from Alp Arslān in the environs of Arzenjān, who claimed to have taken Kemāk from the infidels and made it his capital. It was annexed in 622/1225 from the last of the Mengüjekid amirs, who had appealed in vain to the amir of Erzerum and the Ḳvārazmšāh Jalāl-al-Din Mengübirni (q.v.) for help, by the Saljuq sultan 'Alā'-al-Din Kayqobād (r. 616-34/1219-37). After the Mongol invasion of Anatolia and the defeat of the Saljuqs at Köse Dāğ in 642/1243, Kemāk would have come under



Il-Khanid rule, but its history in that period is obscure. It is known that Kemāk became an appanage of the remarkable Qāzi Aḥmad Borhān-al-Din (745/1345-800/1398), sultan of the beylik of Eretna in central Anatolia, in 796/1394 and was governed directly by him after 799/1396-97 (Imber, p. 871). However, it appears that Borhān-al-Din almost at once quarrelled with 'Oṭmān Qarā Yürük, leader of the *Āq Qoyunlu*, who then rebelled, captured Borhān-al-Din, and executed him in 800/1398 (Woods, p. 242).

By that time, the Ottomans were being drawn into the politics of eastern Anatolia, and Kemāk was briefly captured by the sultan Bāyazid I (r. 1389-1402); according to *Ruy González de Clavijo* (d. 1412), it was Bāyazid's demand to cede Kemāk that prompted the amir of Arzenjān to appeal for aid from Timur (Clavijo, tr., pp. 73-74). After Timur decided to invade Anatolia and attack Bāyazid, Kemāk was one of his first targets. The siege of the fortress there by Timur's son, Amir Moḥammad Solṭān, in Šawwāl 804/1402 is described in detail by Ebn 'Arabšāh (tr. pp. 173-176) and Šāmi (I, pp. 250-51): The siege lasted ten days, and Timur sent out a *fath-nāma* to announce its fall. Bāyazid offered a gift of ten horses to Timur to plead for the restoration of Kemāk; Timur refused and appointed the Chagatayid amir Ṭaharṭan as its governor. Later, according to Ebn 'Arabšāh (tr. p. 202), Timur confirmed 'Oṭmān Qarā Yürük as governor of Arzenjān and gave him authority over Kemāk. The town was then a source of recurrent conflict both within the *Āq Qoyunlu* family and between the *Āq Qoyunlu* and *Qarā Qoyunlu* (Abu Bakr Ṭehrāni, pp. 69-71, 75-76, 126, 147-151, 168, 171, 180, 230, 261, 279-80) and finally with the Ottomans. As one example, Uzun Ḥasan, after ambushing and killing Jahānšāh Qarā Qoyunlu in 872/1467, laid claim to Kemāk in his *fath-nāma* to the Ottoman sultan Moḥammad II Fāteḥ (r. 1444-46 and 1451-81; Feridun Bey, I, pp. 274-75). Sultan Bāyazid II (r. 1481-1512), alarmed by the rising power of the Safavids, asked Ḥāji Rostam Beg, the commander of Kemāk, to surrender the fortress to the Ottomans, but he instead turned it over to Nur 'Ali Beg, one of Shah Esmā'il's Qizilbāš officers, in 912/1506-7 (Bedlisi, pp. 216-17). Even after the Ottoman defeat of the Safavids in 921/1515 at the battle of *Čalderān*, the Qizilbāš continued to threaten the route between Erzerum and Sivas from Kemāk; Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-20) then reorganized the Ottoman eastern frontier provinces and launched a major campaign which resulted in the definitive Ottoman conquest of Kemāk (Shaw, I, p. 82).

In the Saljuq, Timurid, and *Āq Qoyunlu* periods, Kemāk was valued as more than just an important military bastion in a border zone. Control over such



towns and fortresses facilitated access by the Türkmen tribes to summer pastures in the Armenian highlands (Woods, p. 250). Kemāk, given its location in the Euphrates valley, lay astride an important corridor of trade reaching from the Caucasus and Azarbaijan on to Trabzon, Mosul, and Konya, and it had a prosperous Armenian commercial community. Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi (ca. 680-744/1281-1344) knew it as a small town surrounded by villages that yielded 34,400 dinārs in revenue (tr. Le Strange, p. 98), about a tenth as much as the more important emporium of Arzenjān. Concern with promoting agriculture and the transit trade in the area was reflected in both the laws (*qānun*) of Uzun Ḥasan and subsequent Ottoman codes (Woods, p. 266; Imber, p. 871).

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