



KHORASAN VII. HISTORY FROM THE GHAZNAVIDS TO THE MONGOL CONQUEST

The Ghaznavids were notable in that this was the first major dynasty in the central and eastern Islamic lands to have been founded by a Turkic slave soldier (*gōlām*; see BARDA AND BARDA-DĀRI) who formally assumed rulership. In 350/961 one of the most prominent Samanid *gōlām* army commanders, Alptigin (q.v.), staged a failed palace coup. As a result, he fled into exile in Ghazna (see ĠAZNI), in the south-easternmost marcher area on the Samanid borders, where he established an emirate after having wrested the town from the brother-in-law of the Hendušāhi Kābolšāh, the ruler of the culturally Indian realm that constituted at the time the main power standing in the way of Islamic expansion into the Indian world. He also in 351/962 defeated a Samanid army sent against him, although the Ghaznavids technically recognized Samanid overlordship, and ruled as their amirs (q.v.).

Following Alptigin's death, which occurred by 352/963, he was succeeded first by his son and, after the latter's death without heirs in 355/966, by a succession of two of his slave commanders (*gōlāmān*). Finally, in 366/977, the *gōlām* army magnates chose from amongst themselves the commander Sebüktegin (d. 387/997; q.v.), Alptigin's son-in-law, as amir; he and his progeny would continue to rule over Khorasan until the Seljuqs wrested the province from them in 431/1040; and, after that date, from Ghazna eastwards into India, as



Seljuq vassals until the Ghurids finally conquered Ghazna in 545/1150-51, first driving the dynasty out of Khorasan entirely; and subsequently, in 582/1186, conquering Lahore and ending Ghaznavid rule completely.

Throughout Sebüktegin's reign, until 389/999, when his son Maḥmud was well established as the ruler in Ghazna, the Ghaznavids acknowledged Samanid overlordship and technically governed as their representatives. Sebüktegin, however, laid the moral foundations for autonomous dynastic legitimacy by following an outstandingly *ḡ āz i* policy, continued by his successors, in which the resources and manpower of Khorasan were directed toward jihad (see ISLAM IN IRAN xi. JIHAD IN ISLAM). Under the three Ghaznavid amirs who ruled Khorasan—Sebüktegin, Maḥmud (r. 388-421/998-1030; q.v.), and Mas'ud (r. 421-32/1030-41)—the region became the center of a *ḡ āz i* polity, dedicated to expanding the borders of the *Dār al-Eslām* (see DĀR AL-ḤARB), especially toward the east and south. This was a notable accomplishment, since the frontier of Islam in India had essentially remained static since the time of the original Muslim conquest establishing the provincial foothold of Sind; the Ghaznavids, harnessing the resources of Khorasan, were to break this barrier and extend the borders of Islam well into the Gangetic plain.

During the early decades of Ghaznavid rule under Sebüktegin and throughout at least the early years of Maḥmud's rule, Khorasan benefitted from this expansionist *ḡāzi* focus, due to its territorial enlargement and the enormous wealth—including vast numbers of slaves and copious amounts of precious metals—that flowed into it from the conquests: among the lands added to Khorasan by Sebüktegin and placed under Muslim rule, were Zābolestān and the Kabul (q.v.) valley in eastern Afghanistan, and Qoṣḍār (Khuzdar) in northern Baluchistan. It was this holy warrior prestige that Sebüktegin and his sons acquired that allowed Maḥmud b. Sebüktegin, in precisely the same manner as the holy war founder of autonomous Samanid power, Eṣmā'il b. Aḥmad (r. 260-79/874-92; q.v.), had originally established that dynasty's legitimacy, officially to put an end to the pretense of acknowledging Samanid overlordship in 389/999, when the Samanid lands were divided between the Ghaznavids in Cis-Oxiana and the Qara-khanids (see ILAK-KHANIDS) in Transoxiana.

Maḥmud of Ghazna is known as one of the outstanding *ḡ āz is* of history; he not only continued his father's campaigns to the east and south, on a much larger scale, but his reign was one of unremitting expansionist warfare against non-Muslim polities in India, the remaining non-Islamized areas of



Afghanistan, and the western Himalayan regions. One of his conquests, hitherto un-Islamized Ġur (q.v.), Maḥmud subjected to a systematic campaign of Islamization after its conquest, building mosques and sending Muslim clerics there to instruct the populace in the new religion, thus laying the foundation for the eventual domination of Khorasan, and the entire Muslim East, by the Šansabāni (Ghurid) dynasty in the latter part of the 12th century.

Increasingly, however, as Maḥmud focused on his unremitting war effort and directed all his polity's resources toward that end, Khorasan was not just neglected, but exploited and mulcted. This trend was only exacerbated under the rule of Maḥmud's son and successor, Mas'ud, whose "heart was occupied with India [Hendustān]" (Rāvandi, p. 95), and therefore spent almost all his time in the Indian part of his realm, neglecting Khorasan and its affairs. This neglect in turn enabled Turkmens, under the leadership of the Saljuq dynasty, who had been permitted to cross the Oxus from Central Asia, first to begin plundering and then to establish their rule in Khorasan throughout the 420s/1030s; by the time Mas'ud bestirred himself to address the crisis in Khorasan in person, in 431/1040, it was too late; he and his army were soundly defeated, ejected from all of Khorasan apart from Ghazna and its immediate surroundings, and Khorasan became a component land of the newly constituted Great Saljuq empire.

KHORASAN DURING THE SALJUQ PERIOD (431-552/1040-1157)

During the Saljuq period, Khorasan, once the conquests were over, thrived in every respect, apart from a brief period during the early part of the civil strife that followed upon the sudden death of Malekšāh (q.v.) in 485/1092. During the early decades of Saljuq rule, when the capital of the empire was located in the 'Erāqayn (the "two Iraqs" of 'Erāq-e 'Ajam[i], q.v., and 'Erāq-e 'Arab; viz., much of today's western Iran and the province of Iraq proper), the Saljuq polity was run largely by Khorasani viziers (Bowen), culminating with the decades-long dominance of the realm by the greatest of all Islamic viziers, Neẓām-al-Molk (q.v.); although Saljuq rule allowed a large measure of Khorasani local autonomy and self-government (Klausner, pp. 9-22).

With the death of Malekšāh and Neẓām-al-Molk in 485/1092, Khorasan was troubled both by the outbreak of civil war among Malekšāh's minor sons and the deceased sultan's brothers, who were jockeying for power; and also by the great Neẓāri Isma'ili uprising (see ISMA'ILISM iii. ISMA'ILI HISTORY). For the first four years of this chaotic interlude, from 485/1092 until 490/1097, the



dominant Saljuq figure in Khorasan was Malekšāh's brother, Arslān Arġun, who headed the Turkmen element whose influence in Khorasan was constantly growing, in a process that has been described as the "renomadisation" (Paul, 2011, p. 111) of the country. Although this steady rise of the Turkmen component received a check with Arslān Arġun's murder by one of his mistreated *golāmān* (Bondāri, p. 258), this Turkmen setback was to prove only temporary.

The zenith of Khorasan's political, economic, and cultural flourishing transpired during the long reign of Sultan Sanjar (q.v.), who ruled Khorasan and the entire East from 490/1097 until his downfall in 548/1153; first as "King of the East," then, from 511/1118, as Supreme Sultan, at which time he moved the capital of the empire to Marv, thereby making Khorasan the heart of the Saljuq empire. According to Zāhir-al-Din Nišāpuri (d. ca. 580/1184), "the Khorasan region in his [Sanjar's] era became the [coveted] destination of all the people of the world, and the native soil of the sciences, the fountain of literary attainments, and the mine of knowledge" (p. 56); Sanjar himself is described as "the mightiest monarch whom [God] ever made king" (Ḥosayni, p. 92) whose wealth and power provided decades of peace and prosperity for the empire as a whole, but above all for Khorasan. Partly, this was due to Khorasan's domination of adjacent lands; not only did Sanjar's overlordship extend westward over the lands that had formerly constituted the center of the empire, but also over the Qara-khanid lands in Transoxiana until 536/1141 and over the Ghaznavid lands in India.

Culturally, the flowering of classical Persian literature that had begun under the Samanids reached its apogee during the Ghaznavid and Saljuq eras (see SALJUQS v. SALJUQID LITERATURE). This period includes the magnificent literary productions of poets such as Ferdowsi (q.v.), Manuĉehri Dāmġāni, Faqr-al-Din Gorgāni (q.v.), and Awḥad-al-Din Anwari (q.v.); the belletristic and historical writings of Abu Naṣr 'Otbi (q.v.), 'Abd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi (q.v.), and the consummate historian Abu'l-Faẓl Bayhaqi (q.v.); political writings on rulership by Neẓām al-Molk, Kaykāvus b. Eskandar (q.v.), and Emām-al-Ḥaramayn Jovayni (q.v.); and the great religious and Sufi texts, in both Persian and Arabic, of luminaries such as Abu 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Solami, Abu No'aym al-Eṣfāhāni (q.v.; who studied in Nishapur), 'Abd-Allāh Anṣāri (q.v.), Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali Ḥojviri (q.v.), and Abu Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ġazāli (q.v.).

This Khorasani golden age was brought to an end by nomadic power. The very fact of Sanjar's succession to the Great Sultanate after his brother provides an



important indication that the power of the Turkmen element in both Khorasan and the Saljuq polity was steadily increasing throughout Saljuq rule, especially from the late 11th century onwards. For prior to 511/1118, in the succession struggles that invariably ensued upon the death of a Great Sultan between a camp espousing Perso-Islamic succession norms of father to son and a Turkmen camp espousing the traditional nomadic seniorate succession to an older male, usually a brother or uncle of the previous ruler, the Perso-Islamic camp had always won the struggle. In 511/1118, however, the Turkmen camp was finally powerful enough to emerge triumphant: Sanjar, the brother rather than the son of the previous Great Sultan, acceded, and his removal of the imperial capital, not merely to Khorasan, but to Marv rather than Nishapur, on the very edge of the steppes, is yet another indication of growing Turkmen presence and influence.

The first nomadic threat from the Turkic steppe to Khorasan's flourishing came in 536/1141, when the non-Muslim Qarā Keṭāy (q.v.) invaders from China, probably allied with disaffected nomads in Transoxiana, met and defeated Sanjar's Khorasani army at the battle of Qaṭvān, wresting the province of Transoxiana not just from Khorasani rule, but from Islamic rule entirely. This stinging defeat, which undermined Sanjar's aura of invincibility, led to a brief two-year period of instability in Khorasan, in which various actors, mainly nomad-supported, attempted to wrest control of several regions of the province. By 538/1143, however, this turbulence had ended, and Sanjar had re-established rule in Khorasan after several military campaigns. Thereafter, Cis-Oxanian Khorasan proper remained the flourishing, dominant power of the Islamic world east of the Mediterranean up until 548/1153; and the armies of Khorasan, over the course of the succeeding decade, conducted successful campaigns against the only other powers of the eastern Islamic world, both of whom were rebellious Saljuq vassals: the *k̄vārazmšāh*, the ambitious hereditary governor of K̄vārazm (see ĀL-E AFRĪĠ; CHORASMIA ii. IN ISLAMIC TIMES), who was a grandson of the *ġ olām* first appointed to the position by the Saljuqs in the 11th century; and the Ghurid dynasty of the Šansabāni family, against whom Sanjar conducted a highly successful military campaign in 547/1152.

The extinguishing of Khorasan's prosperity and preeminence came abruptly in 548/1153, when Sanjar, having lost control over his magnates due to the increasing infirmity accompanying senescence (Bondāri, p. 276; Ḥosayni, p. 123), was defeated and taken prisoner near Balk (q.v.) by an army composed



of Oghuz (see *ĠOZZ*) Turkmens newly arrived from the steppes (Ebn al-*Atīr*, XI, p. 176), in which durance he was held until his escape in 551/1156, dying in the spring of 552/1157. After Sanjar was taken captive by the Oghuz, Khorasan splintered politically. Although some of the Oghuz leaders did take over rule in several of the towns that they left standing—for instance, Ghazna, which they ruled for over a decade—the Oghuz tribesmen on the whole seem to have spent the bulk of their time over the succeeding years on what the sources describe as a systematic campaign of pillage and destruction.

The Oghuz Turkmens in fact ravaged the province on a vast and unprecedented scale; not only did they virtually destroy entire cities, such as Marv and Nishapur, killing tens of thousands of people, but they also targeted the religious clerics, the Khorasani intelligentsia, who were perceived as part and parcel of the Saljuq governing apparatus (Tor, 2016, p. 401). Anwari's famous elegiac poem, the so-called "Tears of Khorasan," was written in reaction, as a desperate plea to solicit outside help (Anwari, pp. 201-5). At the same time, Sanjar's disloyal magnates were quick to carve out fiefdoms for themselves, the strongest of these being Sanjar's *ḡolām* Mo'ayyed Ay-Aba (q.v.; d. 569/1174). The general anarchy and confusion in the province during Sanjar's captivity also provided an opportunity for the Isma'ilis to take the offensive; in 549/1154 Khorasan was attacked by a force of 7,000 *b āṭ eniya* (q.v.) from Kuhestān; they were repelled by several erstwhile Saljuq amirs but in 551/1156 succeeded in sacking Ṭabas and capturing a number of Saljuq officials. This political turmoil was to persist in Khorasan for several decades, compounding the effects of the original Oghuz devastation of the province.

FROM THE END OF SALJUQ RULE TO THE MONGOL INVASIONS

After the death of Sanjar in 552/1157, there was no longer any unified governing authority in Khorasan for several decades, and the province lost not only its central political and cultural standing, but its political agency and unity. Khorasan was riven by various contending forces, both inside and outside, including the continuing activities of the Oghuz tribesmen; and, from having been an imperial center, it became a zone of contention to be fought over, mainly by the two neighboring powers of the Khwarazmian and Ghurid dynasties. During the last quarter of the 6th/12th century, with the capture of Herat in 571/1175-76, the Ghurids gained the upper hand in the struggle, and succeeded by the end of the 6th/12th century in imposing their rule over much of Khorasan, which once again, albeit briefly, and never fully unified, became



the center of a powerful polity, located in present-day Ġōr province in Afghanistan. This success was, however, not only partial, but also short-lived—Ghurid control over the Balk area, for instance, lasted only a mere eight years (Bosworth, 2015, p. 216); by 601/1204 the Khwarazmshahs had definitively defeated the Ghurid sultan in battle, and taken over Khorasan, making it an appendage to their growing steppe-based empire. The Ghurid Empire itself fell apart shortly thereafter; only its Indian dominions were to emerge reconstituted, under the Ghurids' former *golāms*, as the Delhi sultanate (q.v.). Khorasan was by the early 7th/13th century, at the close of this period, in a ruinous state, after many decades of both pillaging and all-out warfare, not only on the regional level, but also among numerous rival local forces and strongmen. The country remained a subordinate province under the Khwarazmshahs for only a decade and a half, until the empire of the Khwarazmshahs was in turn swept away in the cataclysmic Mongol invasions under Čengiz Khan, beginning in 616/1219.

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