



MALEKŠĀH

MALEKŠĀH, JALĀL-AL-DAWLA MO'IZZ-al-DONYĀ WA'L-DIN ABU'L-FATH b. Alp Arslān, the Great Saljuq sultan (r. 465-85/1072-92), during whose reign the Saljuq empire attained its maximum extension.

Malekšāh was born on 19 Jomadā I 447/16 August 1055 (Bondāri, p. 68; Rāvandi, 1975, p. 125, mentions year 445 as his date of birth) and was raised in the surroundings of Isfahan (Māfarruḳi, p. 105; Durand-Guédy, 2010, p. 83). He is described as having been fair skin, tall and slightly stout (Ẓahir-al-Din, p. 33, sec. 11; Rāvandi, p. 125). His father [Alp Arslān](#) accustomed him very early to the exercise of power and warfare. In 456/1064, he took part in Alp Arslān's campaign in the Caucasus (*Aḳbār*, p. 35). The same year, he was married to Torkān (Terken) Ḳātun, the daughter of the Qara-khanid (or [Ilak-Khanid](#)) khan. In 458/1066, he was formally appointed by Alp Arslān (Arslan) as his successor (Ebn al-Aṭir, X, p. 50) and received Isfahan as *eqṭā'* (Māfarruḳi, p. 106).

In 463/1071, Malekšāh took part in the Syrian campaign, and he remained in Aleppo when his father went to fight the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes at Mantzikert (Malāzgerd; *Aḳbār*, p. 47). In 465/1072, he was again with his father when the latter was fatally wounded at the onset of the campaign against the Qara-khanids in Transoxiana. Malekšāh succeeded him as head of the army, and, accompanied by the vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, he hastened to march westward against his uncle Qāvord (Qāvurt) b. Čaġri (Čaġri) Beg, who disputed him the right to be sultan and to manage the interests of the Saljuq family. The confrontation took place on 4 or 6 Ša'bān 465/15 or 17 April



1073 near Karaj (near modern Arak). Despite the desertion of his Türkmen troops, Malekšāh emerged victorious, and Qāvord was executed and his two sons blinded (Rāvandi, pp. 126-27). The position of Malekšāh was thus firmly established among the emirs. In 466/1074, the new caliph al-Moqtadi sent him the official recognition from Baghdad (Seḅḅ b. Jawzi, p. 168).

The sultanate of Malekšāh, the second longest of the Saljuq dynasty, is characterized by territorial expansion as well as peace within the empire. In 465/1073, the Ghaznavid sultan Ebrāhim (d. 492/1099) had tried to take advantage of the death of Alp Arslān to occupy parts of Khorasan north of the Hindu Kush. Malekšāh launched a successful counterattack, but thereafter he kept the status quo and maintained with Ebrāhim (20 years his senior) good relations strengthened by matrimonial unions (Bosworth, 1973, pp. 52-55). In contrast, on all the other fronts, Malekšāh completed the conquests of his father and extended the boundaries of the Saljuq empire. In Transoxiana he made in person two campaigns. In 466/1073-74 (Ebn al-Aṭir, X, p. 92), he drove the Qara-khanids onto the right bank of the Oxus and secured control of the strategic city of Termed. In 482/1089, with the support of some of the local ulama, he took Samarkand and imprisoned its ruler Aḥmad Khan b. Kežr, who happened to be the nephew of his wife Torkān Kātun (Ebn al-Aṭir, X, pp. 171-73; Rāvandi, p. 128; Bosworth, 1968, pp. 92-93). Then, he pushed on to Semirechye, where he received the formal recognition of the ruler of the Eastern Khanate, who controlled Kāšgar (Bosworth, 1968, pp. 92-93).

In eastern Arabia, Malekšāh sent an army against the Qarmatians of al-Aḥsā' in 469/1086-87. In the Caucasus, he launched three campaigns against the Shaddadid ruler of Ganja, Fażl III, and he took part personally in two of them (471/1078-79 and 478/1086). In Mesopotamia, he backed the plan of Ebn Jahir, the caliph's vizier, to evict the Marwanid Kurds from Diārbakr (478/1085). Then, he focused his attention on the southern territories between Mosul and Aleppo, which were controlled by the Oqaylid Arabs. During the winter campaign of 479/1086-87, Malekšāh left Isfahan and occupied in person Edessa, Aleppo, and Antioch. At Latakia, "they gave to the horses water from the [Mediterranean] sea" (Zahir-al-Din, p. 28, sec. 5). No other Saljuq sultan reigned over such a vast territory, which extended "from the borders of China to the limits of Syria" (Ebn al-Aṭir, X, p. 211; for the details of the conquests and reference to the sources, see Bosworth, 1968, pp. 87-102).

Malekšāh made these conquests mainly by relying on the professional army he had inherited from his father. This army was composed of slaves (*ḡolām*)

and mercenaries (Bosworth, 1968, p. 80). According to Zahir-al-Din (p. 29, sec. 5), Malekšāh always had 46,000 horsemen at his service. His greatest emirs were Saw-Tegin (d. 477/1084), Bozan (d. 487/1094), Borsoq (d. 492/1099), Aq-Sonqor (d. 487/1094), Goharāyin (d. 493/1100), and Qomāj. It appears that, following his victory over Qāvord, Malekšāh had the Türkmén evicted from the central parts of the Jebāl province, which was the heart of the sultanate (Durand-Guédy, 2012b). It, however, does not mean that he was fundamentally hostile to them. Indeed Malekšāh continued to rely on Türkmén emirs for military operations in the west, for instance, he sent Artuq first against Atsöz in Palestine, then against the Qarmatians of eastern Arabia; he also sent Aḥmad and then Ya'qub and 'Isā-Böri against the Georgians; Čabaq was dispatched to Yemen. Besides the expansion of the Saljuq empire to the north and to the west provided the Türkmén with access to regions (esp. Arrān, Diārbakr) ideal for the type of pastoral nomadism they practiced.

When he was not campaigning, Malekšāh stayed mostly in the province of Isfahan, and Isfahan itself can be considered as the capital of the Saljuq empire at this time (Durand-Guédy, 2010, pp. 78-83). At the very end of his reign, he decided to make Baghdad his winter capital, and he launched there in 485/1092 a vast program of construction (Makdisi, 1958-59); however, he kept the treasure and the armory in the fortress of Šāhdez (royal fortress), also known as [Dezkuh](#), at about 8 km south of Isfahan (Durand Guédy, 2010, pp. 91-92).

The control exerted by Malekšāh on the different parts of his empire was not uniform. In the central and strategic regions (Baghdad, Isfahan, Nišāpur, K̄vārazm), he appointed his great *gōlām* emirs city commanders (*šehna*; e.g., Atsöz in K̄vārazm, Goharāyin in Baghdad). He proceeded the same way in the newly conquered territories of northern Syria and the Caucasus; he gave Ganja to Savtegin, Antioch to Yāgi-Basan, Aleppo to Aqsonqur, Edessa to Bozan, and Mosul to Čokermiš. The rest, he gave to his own family members, who often bore the title of *malek*: he gave Valvālej (modern Kunduz) to his uncle 'Oṭmān b. Čāgri Beg, Toḳarestān to his brothers Ayāz (d. 466/1073-4) and then Tekeš (d. 477/1084), and then the son of the latter, Aḥmad b. Tekeš; Herat to his brother Böri-Bars; Kerman to the sons of Qāvord (Solṭānšāh and Turānšāh); Azarbaijan to his cousin Esmā'il b. Yāquti b. Čāgri; Syria to his brother Totoš (Tutuš).

The case of Anatolia is more complex: the sons of Qotlomoš (Qutlumuš), who belonged to another branch of the Saljuq family, arrived there after the death



of Alp Arslān. They are presented in Persian historiography as having been invested by Malekšāh, but in reality they were rebellious against his authority (Cahen, 1948, pp. 35, 50-51).

Another category of territories was comprised the vassal kingdoms, where the princes had to pay tribute and recognize Malekšāh as their overlord sovereign. These were the Qara-khanids of Transoxiana after 482/1089, the Saffarids of Sistān (controlled de facto by the Saljuqs of Kerman), the Bavandids of Māzandarān, the Šarvānšāhs of eastern Caucasus, the Mazyadids of Lower Iraq, the Shaddadids of Āni, the Byzantines, and petty rulers in Syria, such as the lords of Šayzar.

Until the very end of his sultanate, Malekšāh kept Neẓām-al-Molk as his grand vizier. The latter enjoyed a unique power, due to his former position at the service of Alp Arslān, to the very close relationship that he had with Malekšāh since he was a child (the sultan was 36 years his junior), and also to his crucial role for securing the sultanate to Malekšāh, although it is difficult to assess the sultan's exact degree of responsibility behind the killing of Qāvord and, the following year, of Gowhar Kātun b. Alp Arslān, who had opposed this execution. Some sources say that Malekšāh appointed Neẓām-al-Molk as his *atabeg* (see [ATĀBAK](#)), which amounted to making him the effective ruler of the empire in the name of the sultan (Ebn al-Aṭīr, X, pp. 79-80). Neẓām-al-Molk has been presented as having more power than Malekšāh (Seḩ b. Jawzi, IX, p. 62; Makdisi, 1963, pp. 129-30; Bosworth, 1968, p. 68; Safī, p. 63) and as the real kingpin of the Saljuq empire; but political stability inside the empire depended on the conquests, and therefore, on Malekšāh's role as chief commander. Indeed it was the continued expansion that occupied the military (the *gōlām* as well as the Tūrkmēn emirs) on the frontiers and provided them with rewards (lands, allowances, booty) that ensured their loyalty. As a result, Malekšāh's treasure was full (probably less than the 215 millions Abbasid dinars reported by Mostawfī, p. 27, tr., pp. 33-34; Lambton, p. 255), and his authority was stronger than it had ever been and, compared to the following reigns, little challenged. After the executions of Qāvord and Gowhar Kātun, the only notable revolts were those of his brother Tekeš (in 473/1080-81 and in 478/1085, the latter forcing Malekšāh to hurry back from Syria to Khorasan; see Bosworth, 1968, pp. 90-91) and of his cousin Solṭānšāh b. Qāvord in 472 or 473/1079-81 (Lambton, p. 22).

Besides, Malekšāh and Neẓām-al-Molk cannot be put on the same level, since they were concerned with two different domains. Neẓām-al-Molk's networks

(his family and his clients) were based inside the cities, and their actions primarily concerned the control of the urban society (see Makdisi, 1961, p. 55; Bulliet, pp. 51-64; Durand-Guédy, 2010, pp. 121-29). The sultan stayed mainly at the military camp with his great emirs (e.g., the chamberlain Qomāč [Qumač]), his harem, his courtiers (e.g., the court poet Amir Mo‘ezzi), and the occasional visitors (e.g., the Syrian lord Osāma; see Osāma b. Monqed, pp. 49 and 212). The military camp could be located close to the city (to this end Malekšāh had built four walled gardens outside the walls of Isfahan), but also far away (Durand-Guédy, 2012a). Leading figures, such as the religious personality and author Abu’l-Wafā ‘Ali b. ‘Aqil, could write to Malekšāh as the head of the state (Makdisi, 2002, p. 191), but he does not seem to have been very interested in what was going on within the cities themselves. The military camp was a place of political intrigues and where several people complained against Neẓām-al-Molk to Malekšāh (Ḳomār-Tegin in 472/1079-80, Ebn Bahmanyār in 474/1081-2, Abu’l-Maḥāsen in 476/1083-4; see Makdisi, 1963, pp. 134-38), but until the very end, it did not jeopardize the special relationship between Malekšāh and his vizier.

In 483/1090, the Isma‘ili missionary (*dā‘ī*) Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ took control of the fortress of Alamut northeast of Qazvin and turned it into a base against Saljuq authority. He resisted successfully the emirs Arslāntāš and then Ġezelsāreġ (Qizil-sariġ) sent by Malekšāh (Jovayni, ed. Qazvini, III, pp. 199-203). However, with the sultan’s power at his height, no one could imagine the future extent of the threat represented by the Neẓāri Isma‘ilis (see ISMA‘ILISM iii. History). At the moment, the most salient problem was the fierce opposition between the sultan’s wife Torkān Ḳātun and the vizier Neẓām-al-Molk. The heart of the problem was the succession of Malekšāh, and thus the control of the empire. Torkān Ḳātun, who occupied a prominent position in the harem, had always played a great political role in Saljuq politics; but two sons had died prematurely, each after being designated as crown prince (Dāwud in 474/1082, Abu Šojā‘ Aḥmad in 481/1088-89), and the last son, Maḥmud (b. 480/1087), was still a young child. Neẓām-al-Molk, anxious to ensure the soundness of the sultanate (and by the same token his own network) in case of death of the sultan, inclined towards the nomination of Barkiāroq (Berk-yaruq, b. 474/1081-82), the son of the Saljuq princess Zobayda Ḳātun b. Amir Yāquti. The conflict grew bitter (the second part of Neẓām-al-Molk’s *Siār al-moluk*, pp. 189-330, tr., pp. 139-244, is a thinly veiled denunciation of Torkān Ḳātun and her personal vizier Tāj-al-Molk), and eventually on 10 Ramaḍān 485/14 October 1092, Neẓām-al-Molk was assassinated during the return journey



from Isfahan to Baghdad. The responsibility of Malekšāh in his death is possible (Bondārī, p. 63; Rāvandi, pp. 133-35; Hillenbrand, 1995, pp. 286-87). He appointed Tāj-al-Molk as his vizier, making Torkān Kātun's victory complete.

Upon his arrival in Baghdad, Malekšāh asked the caliph al-Moqtader to abdicate in favor of Ja'far, who happened to be also the little son (or the nephew) of Malekšāh (the marriage of al-Moqtadi with the Saljuq princess Māhmalek Kātun was celebrated in 480/1087). Behind this move was Malekšāh's ambition to unite the lines of the Saljuqs and the Qoraysh, thereby getting rid of the main source of authority that had hampered the Saljuqs since the establishment of their sultanate (Makdisi, 1975; Ocak, 2002, pp. 370-83). It is in this context that Malekšāh, on 16 Šawwal 485/19 November 485, died at the age of thirty-seven during a hunting excursion around Baghdad. He obviously did not die of natural causes, but was probably poisoned by the caliph (Houtsma; Hillenbrand, p. 294) or the partisans of Neẓām-al-Molk (Eqbāl, p. 66). His body was brought back to Isfahan by Torkān Kātun and buried in a *madrasa*.

The unexpected death of Malekšāh without clear succession plan and with antagonist networks at the head of the state plunged the Saljuq empire in a dynastic crisis without precedent, which weakened it irreversibly. The brutal contrast led the Iranian secretary Anušeravān b. Kāled to reconstruct the previous period as a golden age, a view which would be influential in the historiography (Durand-Guédy, 2006, pp. 194-200). In later literature, Malekšāh is unanimously remembered as a just king, whether in the Arab world (e.g., Ebn Kallekān, V, pp. 283-89, tr., III, 440-46), Iran (e.g., Rāvandi, pp. 125-26, 131), or India (Juzjāni, tr. pp. 141-42).

None of the constructions of Malekšāh has survived, but his name appears on numerous inscriptions commemorating constructions made in his name (e.g., at Isfahan or Nišāpur; cf. Blair, pp. 160-63, 170-71). However, his most lasting legacy was without doubt the "Jalāli" calendar (see [CALENDARS ii. In the Islamic period](#)) that was named after his *laqab* and based on astronomical observations made in the capital Isfahan (Sayili, 1960, pp. 161-66).

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