



OTRĀR

OTRĀR, a medieval town of Transoxania, in a rural district (*rostāq*) of the middle Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), apparently known in early Islamic times as Fārāb/Pārāb/Bārāb. The latter two forms are found in the 10th-century geographers (e.g., Moqaddasi [Maqdesi], pp. 263, 273; Ebn Ḥawqal, pp. 510-11, tr. Kramers and Wiet, II, p. 488; *Ḥodud al-‘ālam*, ed. Sotuda, pp. 117-18, tr. Minorsky, pp. 118-19.) It was notable as the place of origin of the famous philosopher Abu Naṣr Moḥammad Fārābi (d. 950, q.v.). At the outset, the principal town of the district was Kadar/Kader, but by the 10th century this had given place to Fārāb, now described by Moqaddasi as a fortified town with a citadel, a Friday mosque, and busy markets, doubtless frequented by nomads bringing products of the steppes; his figure of 70,000 for the population (read rather 7,000?) must, however, be exaggerated. The district, together with Asfijāb (q.v.), did not become Muslim till the Samanid period and the conquests on the steppe fringes of Nuḥ b. Asad and Esmā‘il b. Aḥmad. For long it lay on the frontier zone of Islam facing the pagan Oḡuz (see **ĠOZZ**), later Qipchaq, steppes. The actual name Otrār seems to be known at an early date; for in Ṭabari (III, pp. 815-16) we have mention of a local ruler of Transoxiana called Otrār-banda, who had refused to pay tribute to al-Ma‘mun (Barthold, *Turekstan*³, pp. 176-77; the reading Otrār-banda is, however, doubtful; see Ṭabari, tr., XXXI, p. 71, n. 292). But the name Otrār did not predominate over Fārāb until later, and the place is best known for its role in the opening stages of the Mongol invasions in the early 13th century. In the opening years of the 13th century, Otrār was ruled, according to Nasavi, by a Qarakhanid prince, Tāj-al-Din Bilge (Belgā) Khan, a vassal of the Qara Khitay,



whom the K̄vārazmšāh ‘Alā’-al-Din Moḥammad killed at Nasā shortly before the Mongols appeared (Nasavi, pp. 33-35, tr. pp. 38-41). In 615/1218 occurred the massacre at Otrār of 450 Muslim merchants sent by Čengiz Khan (q.v.) from his *ordu* to open up commercial relations with the Khwarazmian dominions, one of its leaders being in fact called K̄vāja ‘Omar Otrāri. The governor of the town Inālčiq (Ināljuq/Ināljeq) Ġāyer/Qāyer Khan, who was a kinsman of the K̄vārazmšāh, apparently with the agreement of the king himself, arrested the merchants, confiscated the goods in their caravan, and slaughtered them (Joveyni, I, pp. 58-62, tr. pp. 77-80). ‘Alā’-al-Din Moḥammad’s subsequent rejection of an embassy from Čengiz seeing reparations made a Mongol invasion of his territories inevitable, and in 616/1219 the Khan appeared on the Jaxartes with an army, besieged Otrār, and, after a lengthy investiture, captured it. He razed its walls and its citadel, deported much of its population, and executed Ġāyer Khan (Joveyni, I, pp. 62 ff., tr. pp. 82 ff.). The town nevertheless revived somewhat and was in existence two centuries later, for Timur died there in 807/1405 after meeting Toqtamiš (Šaraf-al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi, p. 646); but thereafter, it fell into ruins.

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