



SEBÜKTEGIN

SEBÜKTEGIN, ABU MANŞUR NĀŞER-AL-DIN Wa'l-DAWLA, a slave commander of the Samanids (q.v.) and the founder of the **Ghaznavid** dynasty in eastern Afghanistan. The Turkish name Sebüktegin means “beloved prince,” but the second element (*tegin* “prince”) had declined in status from Orkhon Turkish times, becoming part of the onomastic of Turkish slave (*gōlām*) commanders under the ‘Abbasids (Golden, pp. 52-53).

Sebüktegin was probably born in the 330s/940s. The sparse details of his early life are found in a *Pand-nāma* (testament of advice) attributed to him, ostensibly an epistle of the “Mirrors for Princes” genre, but only preserved by the 8th/14th-century historian Moḥammad Šabānkāra’i (pp. 36-41) and also given by the 13th-century historian of the Ghurid and Delhi Sultanate, Juzjāni (pp. 225-28; tr. I, pp. 67-76), quoting from a lost portion of the volumes (*mojalladāt*) of the Ghaznavid historian **Abu’l-Faẓl Bayhaqi**, the *Tāriḵ-e nāšeri*, which dealt with Sebüktegin’s governorship in Ġazna (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 5 ff., 16-20).

Sebüktegin apparently stemmed from Barskān district on the shores of the Issik-Kol Lake in what is now the northern part of Kyrgyzstan (the Kyrgyz Republic), perhaps from a clan of the Qarluq tribe of the Turks. In later Ghaznavid times, obsequious genealogists fabricated an exalted *nasab* for him from the supposed connection of a daughter of the last Sasanid emperor Yazdegerd III with a Turkish steppe chief (Juzjāni, p. 226; Bosworth, 1973, p. 61). He was brought as a slave to Naḵšab in Transoxania and eventually acquired by the Samanid commander Alptegin (q.v.), in whose service he rose



rapidly. When Alptegin, after a failed coup d'état, had to withdraw from Bukhara in 350/961 into northern Afghanistan, Sebüktegin followed in his entourage, and after a series of short-reigning Turkish commanders in Ġazna, was chosen in 366/977 by the Turkish troops there as their leader. He thus began a twenty years' period of power in Ġazna, nominally as governor for the Samanids but in practice as an independent ruler. The inscription on his tomb at Ġazna styles him, however, *al-Ĥājeb al-Ajall* "Most Exalted Commander," reflecting the designation *al-Ĥājeb al-Kabir* when he was in the service of the Samanids (Flury, pp. 62-65).

From his base at Ġazna, Sebüktegin began early to expand his authority. In 367/977-78 he extended southeastwards down the Helmand valley to Roḳḳaj and Bost, subduing another group of Turkish *ḡolāms* established there earlier in the century by the Samanid general Qarategin Esfijābi, and subsequently into Qoṣḡār in northern Baluchistan. In about 376/986-87, he marched down the Kabul River valley through Lāmḡān to Peshawar and twice defeated the Hinduṣāhi Rājā of Wayhind, Jaypāl, introducing the Islamic faith to these regions. In 384-85/994-95, at the invitation of the Samanid Amir Nuḡ (II) b. Maṣṣur (I), he and his son Maḡmud (q.v.) intervened militarily in the upper Oxus region and in Khorasan against the rebel generals Fā'eḡ Ḳāṣṣa and Abu 'Ali Simjuri. He successfully combated this threat to the Samanids, but then sent Maḡmud with a force against Bukhara in order to intimidate Amir Nuḡ ('Otbi, pp. 102 ff., 136-37; cf. Barthold, pp. 261-64). However, on the way back to Ġazna, Sebüktegin died at the village of Madr-e Muy to the north of the Hindu Kush in Šā'bān 387/August-September 997. After a succession struggle with his younger brother Esmā'il, Maḡmud succeeded his father at Ġazna ('Otbi, pp. 153,-58; Nāzim, pp. 38-41).

We know very little about the internal structure of Sebüktegin's dominion or any names of his viziers or chief executives, although a reorganization by him, or by his financial officials, of the system of land grants around Ġazna supporting the Turkish soldiery is mentioned (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 41-42, 122-23). It seems that he was able to call upon the services of some local Persian secretaries and officials in Ġazna, and one result of his campaign against Bost (see above) was his acquiring the services of the noted stylist and poet in Arabic, Abu'l-Faḡ Bosti (d. 400 or 401/1010 or 1011), who then headed Sebüktegin's chancery (*Divān-e rasā'el*) until the amir's death; his poetry was to be much cited by 'Otbi (pp. 25-27, 113, 117, etc.). After his death, Sebüktegin acquired a reputation as the just amir (*amir-e 'ādel*), emphasized by anecdotes



concerning his justice in Bayhaqi (see, e.g., pp. 581-83; tr., II, pp. 107-9), but there seems to be no hard evidence for such a character trait or indeed for any other aspects of his personality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources. The only near-contemporary sources are:

Abu'l-Faẓl Bayhaqi, *Tāriḳ-e mas'udi*, ed. 'Ali-Akbar Fayyāz, as *Tāriḳ-e Bayhaqi*, Mashad, 1971; tr. Clifford Edmond Bosworth and revised by Mohsen Ashtiany, as *The History of Beyhaqi*, 3 vols., Washington, D.C., 2011, III, p. 464.

Abu Sa'id 'Abd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi, *Zayn al-aḳbār*, ed. Muhammad Nazim, Berlin, 1928, pp. 54-58; ed. Abd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabibi, Tehran, 1968, pp. 169-71; tr. Clifford Edmond Bosworth, as *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650-1041*, London, 2011, pp. 74-77.

Abu Naṣr Moḥammad 'Otbi, *Ketāb al-yamini*, ed. Eḥsān Ḍanun Ṭāmeri, as *al-Yamini fi šarḥ aḳbār al-Sulṭān Yamin al-Dawla wa Amin al-Mella Maḥmud al-Ġaznawi*, Beirut, 2004, pp. 494-95; tr. Abu'l-Šaraf Nāšeḥ Jorfādeqāni, as *Tarjama-ye Tāriḳ-e yamini*, ed. Ja'far Še'ār, Tehran, 1966.

Of later works, see:

Ebn al-Aṭir (Beirut), XIII, p. 146.

Menhāj-e Serāj Juzjāni, *Ṭabaqāt-e nāšeri*, ed. 'Abd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabibi, 2 vols., Kabul, 1963-64, I, pp. 225-28, tr. Raverty, I, pp. 67-76.

Moḥammad Šabānkāra'i, *Majma' al-ansāb*, ed. Mir Hāšem Moḥaddet, Tehran, 1984, pp. 34-44, esp. 36-41; tr. Muhammad Nazim, "The Pand-Nāmah of Subuktigīn," *JRAS*, 1933, pp. 605-28.

For a general survey, see:

Clifford Edmond Bosworth, "Early Sources for the History of the First Four



Ghaznavid Sultans (977-1040),” *Islamic Quarterly* 7, 1963, pp. 3-22.

Studies.

Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 261-64.

Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, esp. pp. 35-44.

Idem, “Sebüktingin,” in *EI* IX, 1997, p. 121.

Idem, “The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic Connections with the Past,” *Iran* 11, 1973, pp. 51-62.

Idem, “The Early Ghaznavids,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 166-8.

S. Flury, “Le décor épigraphique des monuments de Ghazna,” *Syria* 6, 1925, pp. 63-90.

Peter B. Golden, “The Terminology of Slavery and Servitude in Medieval Turkic,” in Devin DeWeese, ed., *Studies on Central Asian History in Honor of Yuri Bregel*, Bloomington, Ind., 2001, pp. 27-56.

Muḥammad Nāzım, *The Life and Times of Sulṭān Maḥmūd of Ghazna*, Cambridge, 1931, pp. 28-33.