



## TĀRĀBI, MAḤMUD

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**TĀRĀBI**, MAḤMUD, the leader of a revolt in [Bukhara](#) (q.v.) and its surroundings against Mongol domination (635-636/1237-1238 CE).

Historical sources do not mention the details of the life of Maḥmud Tārābi, and his reputation is due to his insurgency against the Mongols. According to *Tāriḳ-e jahāngošāy* by ‘Alā’-al-Din ‘Aṭā-Malek Jovayni (q.v.), Maḥmud Tārābi was a sieve-maker from the village of Tārāb, three farsangs from Bukhara (ed., Qazvini, p. 85; tr. Boyle, p. 109).

Jovayni who was a contemporary of Tārābi, did not have a favorable opinion of him and his insurgence. He accompanies his story with harsh and abusive language towards Tārābi and portrays him as an imposter who sought the favor of the vulgar and dissolute (*‘awāmm wa ronud*) (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 88; tr. Boyle, pp. 112-13). In contrast, [Ebn Al-Fowaṭi](#) (q.v.) wrote respectfully of him, calling him Shaikh Abu’l-Karam, Sufi mystic in Bukhara, who had many disciples (*morids*) and with his miracles showed incredible ideas to people (Ebn Al-Fowaṭi, p. 77). An account from the Bukharan scientist-astronomer Mas’ud ‘Ališāh Daraḡāni (b. 623/1226) also writes that Maḥmud Tārābi was a famous Shaikh-*rend* (Daraḡāni, p. 150).

Although Jovayni claims that “in stupidity and ignorance, he [Maḥmud Tārābi] had not his equal” (ed., Qazvini, pp. 85-86; tr. Boyle, p. 109), the facts testify that



he was of outstanding organizational abilities. Tārābi resorted to a traditional method of attracting the sympathy and trust of simple people. He tried to convey a kind of aura of holiness by showing the common people all kinds of “miracles” and declared himself an authority between the mysterious forces of evil and good spirits and the people, and the transmitter of their will (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 86; tr. Boyle, p.110).

The political and social ideas of Tārābi can be judged by the direct and indirect data of historians and from the history of his uprising. His views were addressed to the common people in an understandable and accessible form. His main political goal was to overthrow the Čengizid’s regime. He also spoke against the Mongolian state apparatus and the destruction of the ideological basis of nomadic feudalism, the prescriptions of the “Great Yāsā” by Čengiz Khan (qq.v.). Another goal was to liberate the world from “unfaithful Christians and Jews” and return to ideal Islam (Ebn Al-Fowaṭi, p. 77). Maḥmud Tārābi wanted to introduce state orders in Bukhara and the traditional form of the Islamic monarchy. At the same time, the existence of the “sultan” or “caliph” as the supreme ruler was not ruled out. Therefore, after the victory (1238), he declared himself “sultan” and “caliph” in Bukhara. Tārābi spoke out against unlawful beatings, taxes and impunity (Boymatov, 2011b, pp. 68-69; 79-80).

Among the adherents of Maḥmud Tārābi, his sister stood out with special energy and courage. Jovayni emphasizes her role and her influence on Maḥmud, but does not give her name. Maḥmud’s sister was engaged in healing and claimed to have magical powers. Even before the beginning of the uprising, she instructed Maḥmud in the art of magic and he practiced it for securing his power (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 86; tr. Boyle, p. 110).

The most outstanding figure among the associates of Maḥmud Tārābi was the scholar-theologian Šams-al-Din Maḥbubi (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 86; tr. Boyle, p. 110). He was an opponent of Bukharan imams and actively supporting the preaching of Tārābi. Maḥbubi obviously introduced a new stream based on the principles of Sunni Islam. Given the popular opposition to the violent assertion of the Great Yāsā, he as an ideologist could use the ideas of the justice in Islam as a means of fighting against foreign invaders (Boymatov, 2011b, pp. 70-71).

As a result of his decisive actions, Tārābi attracted to his side a mass of peasants, artisans and the urban poor. Its initial activity was in the outskirts of



Bukhara, and later in the city. Tārābi, uttering angry speeches, called on the masses to fight the Mongol conquerors and their governors. He acquired great authority and trust among a broad strata of society (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 86; tr. Boyle, p. 110).

After the capture of Bukhara, the popular movement took on a large scale (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 87; tr. Boyle, p. 111). Astronomer Mas‘ud ‘Ališāh Daraġāni says that Maḥmud Tārābi, with the help of ascetics (*rendān*), ruled the city for 14 days (p. 151). The city nobility, while showing him honors and attentions, was seeking an opportunity to deal with him. One of Maḥmud’s companions warned him about the intention of the enemies. Consequently he secretly left the city. He reached the hill of Abu Ḥafṣ to the north of the city wall, where in the presence of a large number of people, he delivered a fiery speech urging the people to openly fight to cleanse the world of oppressors (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p.87; tr. Boyle, p. 111). Obviously, the slogan of “purifying the world of the infidels” expresses the confessional Islamic postulate of a “holy war” against “heathens” (Boymatov, 2011b, pp. 75-76).

The appeal of Maḥmud Tārābi was a great success. Peasants and artisans from the vicinity of Bukhara joined him. Soon a large army of people went to Bukhara through the bridge of Vazidān and Tārābi stopped at the palace of Rabi‘a. *Amirs* (commander), *basqaqs* (tribute commissioner) and the highest clergy of the city succumbed to the rebels. Bukhara with its surroundings was under the control of Tārābi. Then Maḥmud gathered the nobles (*ṣaḍr* s, q.v.), grandees and notables of the city in the palace Rabi‘a Malek and demanded from the higher clergy to proclaim him “Sultan and Caliph”. In the main mosque, the *koṭba* (q.v.) of the Sultanate was read in his name. At the same time, at his request Šams-al-Din Maḥbubi was appointed to the office of *ṣaḍr*. Thus, Tārābi actually established his spiritual and secular power in Bukhara and its environs (Jovaynī, ed., Qazvīnī, pp. 87-88; tr. Boyle, p. 112).

Proclaiming himself a sovereign ruler, Maḥmud proceeded to hold a series of activities. Mongolian *basqaqs*, *ṣadrs* and other representatives of the ruling strata were expelled from the city. Many affluent men, spiritual dignitaries, officials and Mongolian *basqaqs* were executed (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 88; tr. Boyle, p. 113). Ebn Al-Fowaṭi also reports that Tārābi ordered the killing of Christians and Jews and the seizure of their property (p. 77).

Having recently escaped from the city, *amirs*, *basqaqs* and *ṣadrs* gathered new forces and reached Bukhara. Maḥmud came forward with a large detachment



to encounter the Mongol army. After Tārābi was struck by an arrow, a strong wind arose and the enemy thought that this was one of the Tārābi's miracles; they withdrew from the battle and fled. The Tārābi forces chased the retreating troops to the very center of Karmina and crushed most of them. But the victory of the rebels cost the life of the leader of the movement, Tārābi and its ideologist, Šams-al-Din Maḥbubi; both were killed during the battle at Karmina (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 89; tr. Boyle, p.114; Ebn Al-Fowaṭi, pp. 77-78). When Maḥmud's companions returned and failed to find him they believed that "The Master has retired into the unseen," and he would appear again in the near future (Jovayni, ed., Qazvini, p. 89; tr. Boyle, p. 114). However, the death of Maḥmud did not mean the defeat of the uprising, and the revolt continued after his death. The final stage of the uprising was successfully led by Tārābi's brothers, Moḥammad and 'Ali.

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