



TERKEN KĀTUN

TERKEN (or **TORKĀN**) **KĀTUN**, the title of the wife of the Khwarazmshah Tekiš b. Il-Arslān (r. 1172-1200) and mother of ‘Alā’-al-Din Moḥammad (r. 1200-20).

Terken Kātun (cf. Bosworth, “Terken *Khātūn*”) belonged to the Qanġlı group of Turks, apparently part of the Qıpčaq confederation that at this time controlled the steppes to the north of Khwarazm (see [CHORASMIA](#)) and the Aral Sea. More precisely, Nasavi claims that she came from the Baya’ut clan of the Yemek, the earlier Kimek, (p. 71) and was the daughter of a khan called Jankši (pp. 71, 99; cf. Jovayni, tr., II, p. 465). Her marriage to Tekiš made the Qanġlı allies of the Khwarazmshahs, and thus considerably strengthened their military power. During her husband’s reign, she must have been building up a loyal following among the Qanġlı, because she seized power as queen-mother at the side of her son, ‘Alā’-al-Din Moḥammad, after Tekiš’s death in 1200. She had her own administration (*divān*), whose staff included seven of the most outstanding masters of contemporary *enšā’*, and issued documents using her title—“The inviolate one of the present world and of religion, Uluġ Terkān, queen of the women of the worlds”—and her own seal (*towqi*) with her official motto (*alāma*) “I seek refuge in God alone” (Nasavi, p. 99). At the height of her power, she used the title of “Lord of world” (*koḏāvand-e jahān*, Nasavi, p. 99), commanded her own officials, and held fiefs and other sources of personal income (Nasavi, p. 99; Kafesoġlu, pp. 208-10). A local network of Qanġlı commanders, often her kinsmen, held extensive lands within Khwarazm and important governorships. For example, Inālčik Qāyer Kān was



one of her relatives and governor of Otrār, where Mongol merchants were arrested in 1218 (Jovayni, tr., I, p. 79). She made and unmade ministers. When the vizier Neẓām-al-Molk Moḥammad Ḥeravi was dismissed, the shah appointed her nominee Moḥammad b. Şāleḥ, one of her former *gōlāms* (Nasavi, pp. 76-77). When her son was planning his succession arrangements, she prevailed upon him to allot Khwarazm, Khorasan and Mazandaran, the heartlands of his empire, to Uzlāḡşāh, one of the younger sons, preferring him over the older sons Jalāl-al-Din Mengübirdi and Rokn-al-Din Gurşāh. Uzlāḡşāh's mother was like Terken Kātun a member of the Baya'ut clan (Nasavi, p. 71; cf. Barthold, pp. 378-79; Kafesoḡlu, p. 210). The shah is said to have sought her advice and to have never contradicted her orders on any matter, great or small. Nasavi (p. 99) characterizes Terken Kātun as a woman with sound judgment, administering justice equitably, though bloodthirsty and ready to kill at the slightest provocation (*jasur 'alā' l-qatl*). And yet, the shah is also said to have chafed under his mother's control of the Khwarazmian Empire whilst he was campaigning elsewhere, unable to impose his own will (Barthold, pp. 378-79).

The geographer Yāqut (1179-1229), who traveled in Khwarazm from 1219 to early 1220, attests that under Terken Kātun's rule, the region enjoyed a last florescence of economic and cultural prosperity (Barthold, pp. 428-29). But the Mongols put an end to her power. 'Alā'-al-Din Moḥammad abandoned Transoxania, and in early 1220 she decided to leave Khwarazm and to withdraw with her entourage to fortresses in Mazandaran. But before her departure, she arranged for the execution of the local princes, who were hostages at the Khwarazmian court, as well as of other important prisoners, including the two sons of ẖoghrel b. Arslān (r. 1176-94), the last Great Saljuq sultan, and Borhān-al-Din Moḥammad (see [ĀL-E BORHĀN](#)), the religious leader (*şadr*) of Bukhara. In 1221, after a four-month siege, Terkun Kātun had to surrender to the Mongols. The boys and men of the Khwarazmshah family were killed, while the girls and women were distributed among the Mongol commanders (*amir*). Terken Kātun herself was deported to the Great Khan's court (*ordu*) at Qaraqorum, where she died in miserable circumstances between 1232 and 1233 (Nasavi, pp. 94-98; Jovayni, tr. Boyle, II, pp. 465-68; cf. Barthold, pp. 430-31).



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