

WHO WERE THE SULTĀNS OF THE ANATOLIAN SALJUQS?

MIHÁLY DOBROVITS

After the battle of Manzikert (Turkish: Malazgirt) on 26 August 1071 a new era in the history of Anatolia began, the era of Turkization and Islamization. Members of a Turkish speaking community professing Islam took over this land from the Byzantine Empire. A branch of the Great Seljuqs established themselves as rulers of the new country. They had been permanently evading the borders for thirty years before their final conquest took place.¹ Their first capital was Iznik (Nikaia, Nicea, 1075-1097), which was soon regained by the Byzantines (1097), but their empire flourished in Konya (Ikonion, Iconium) and later in Kayseri (Kaisaria, Ceasarea). The founder of the new empire was Rükneddīn I Süleymān šāh ibn Qutalmıř (1075-1086), a nephew of Alp Arslan (1063-1072), the Conqueror of Anatolia. His father, Qutalmıř ibn Arslan Yabġu, a grandson of Saljuq ibn Doqaq, the legendary founder of the dynasty, was killed by Alp Arslan, when he tried to declare himself sultān after the death of Toġrul Beġ, the founder of the empire (1063). His brother Resūl tegin and his sons were imprisoned by the sultān. Their father, Arslan Yabġu (or Isrā'īl as his Muslim name was) was the first ruler of the Saljuqids, still in Cand (Central Asia) who died in a prison of Maġmūd Ġaznawī, the famous ruler of what now we call Afghanistan. According to their non-Turkish names, Miġā'īl, Isrā'īl and Mūsā originally must have been adherents of either Jewish or Nestorian tradition. According to the legend of their origin, the *Malik-nāme* Saljuq ibn Doqaq originally was in the service of a Khazarian prince, only later broke away and came to Cand, then under the influence of the newly Islamized Turkic dynasty of the Qarakhanids.² It is quite probable that all these events must have been closely connected with the fall of the once mighty Empire of the Jewish Khazars in 965.

¹ Turan, O.: *Selçuklular zamanında Türkiye tarihi*, İstanbul 1984, p. 36.

² Turan: *Selçuklular*, p. 45; Sümer, F.: *Oġuzlar (Türkmenler). Tarihleri – Boyteşkilatı – Destanları*, İstanbul 1999, p. 94-95; Агаджанов, С. Г.: *Очерки по истории огузов и туркмен*; Cahen, C.: *Pre-Ottoman Turkey: A general survey of the material and spiritual culture and history, c. 1071-1330*, London 1968, p. 19-21.

The establishment of the Great Seljuq Empire

After the imprisonment of Arslan Yabġu (Isrā'īl) the two sons of Miġhā'īl, Çaġrı beġ and Toġrı (Toġrul) beġ became the chiefs of the family. They fled to H̡ārizm with their people, while the bulk of the men of Arslan Yabġu (Isrā'īl) remained in Ĥurāsān (i.e. the north-western borderland of Iran). These people brought Maġmūd more trouble than help during his last years. In 1029 he had to drive them back. Evading him, they escaped across Iran to Azerbaijan. They were later followed by the people of Çaġrı beġ and Toġrı (Toġrul) beġ. They first established themselves as rulers of Marv and Nishapur (1028-1029) and in 1040 they defeated Mas'ūd, the son of Maġmūd Ġaznawī at Dandānqān, north of Marv. Mas'ūd fled to India and the way to Iran opened to the Saljuks. In 1055 Toġrı beġ entered Baghdad.³ Proclaiming himself the Caliph's faithful client, Toġrı beġ determined to restore to Baghdad the orthodoxy which the Būyid princes, the Shiite protectors of the Caliphate were compromising. Upon Toġrı the Caliph conferred the title „King of the East and West” and he also gave him the title of *sultān*, granting of the fullest power, with the guarantee of the Caliph's sanction.⁴

Oġuz, Türkmen, Türk

Soon after coming to power Toġrı beġ was faced with a coalition of the Shiites and the Arab princes of Iraq led by al-Basāširī. At the same time a certain discontent appeared among the Türkmen. A Türkmen revolt broke out in Upper Mesopotamia and Iran led by Ibrahim Inal (the half-brother of the Sultān) and Qutalmıŝ (1059). Indeed Claude Cahen was right, indicating that the Türkmen troops of Toġrı beġ were exhausted and the princes of the Sultān's entourage, formerly regarding him merely as *primus inter pares*, were indignant to find him now assuming the style of an Irano-Muslim sovereign.⁵ On the other hand, there was another, even harder problem with these Türkmen troops.

The main bulk of Toġrı beġ's original retinue came out from the 24 Oġuz tribes of the lower Syr Darya. This is a classical territory of *excluded nomadism*. People living this way primarily rely on their own nomadic products, agriculture and urban markets are subordinated to the control of the nomadic élite. In interaction with their sedentary neighbours they follow what was called „the outer frontier strategy” by Barfield, who analysed the interaction between the Chinese and the Hsiung-nu.

³ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 21-23.

⁴ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 24.

⁵ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 25.

This strategy meant that the nomadic tribes or empires did not need to enter China, but they had to settle far from the Chinese and making use of their superiority in equestrian warfare, make them accept the exchange of goods or merely press them to give material support.⁶

The most authentic description of this strategy is, however, to be found on the famous Orkhon Inscriptions of Mongolia. Speaking about his connections with the Chinese, *Bilgä qaġan* (716-734), their ruler of the Second Turk Empire describes it as follows:

„The place from which the tribes can be (best controlled) is the Ötükän [i.e. the Khangai] mountains. Having stayed in this place, I came to an amicable agreement with the Chinese people. They (i.e. the Chinese people) give (us) gold, silver and silk in abundance. The words of the Chinese people have always been sweet and the materials of the Chinese people have always been soft. Deceiving by means of (their) sweet words and soft materials, the Chinese are said to cause the remote peoples to come close in this manner. After such a people have settled close to them, (the Chinese) are said to plan to plan their ill will there. (The Chinese) do not let the real wise men and real brave men make progress. If a man makes an error, (the Chinese) do not give shelter to anybody (from his immediate family) to the families of his clan and tribe. Having been taken in by their sweet words and soft materials, you Turkish people, were killed in great numbers. O Turkish people, you will die! If you intend to settle at the *Čoyay* mountains and the *Tögültün* plain in the south, O Turkish people, you will die. There the ill-willed persons made harmful suggestions as follows: «If a people live afar (from them), they (i.e. the Chinese) give cheap materials (to them); but, if a people live close to them, then (the Chinese) give them valuable materials.» Apparently such harmful suggestions made the ill-willed persons. Having heard these words, you unwise people went close (to the Chinese) and were (consequently) killed in great numbers. If you go toward those places, O Turkish people, you will die. If you stay in the land of Ötükän, and send caravans from there, you will have no trouble. If you stay at the Ötükän mountains, you will live forever

⁶ Barfield, Th. J.: *The Perilous Frontier. Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757*, Cambridge/Mass – Oxford/UK, p. 49-51, 70-71, 91, 139, 143, 148-149.

dominating the tribes.”⁷

After the fall of the Empire of the Türks and even after the loss of their sacral center, the *Ötükän* (i.e. the Khangai mountains), the various Turkic tribes did not cease to make use of this „outer frontier strategy” The new target was the eastern border of the Caliphate.

When the Seljuqs entered the Middle East, they met another kind of nomadic economy, *enclosed nomadism*. In this system, the prestige of the nomads was lower than that of the sedentary population, sedentary economy prevails and urban centres control the nomadic population. When, after Dandānqān, the Seljuqs left Mūsā to harass the frontiers of the Ġaznawīds, they continued the old way of their nomadic life.⁸ But soon a new settlement came to exist. The Seljuqs accepted Sunnī orthodoxy and Iranian political tradition as the fundamentals of their new-born state. The nomadic armies, without whom they would not have been able to carry out their conquest of the Middle East, turned out to be a dangerous mass, merely destabilizing the new political settlement. They had no way back, because their former pastures were now in the hands of various *Qıpçaq* tribes that forced them to the south. Only a small branch of them were able to remain in the zone of the great Eurasian steppes, they were the *Ūz* of the Hungarian sources or the *torki* (торки) of the Russian sources. They were, however driven to the far western part of the steppe-zone by their various *Qıpçaq* neighbours. As to the main bulk of the former *Oğuz* confederation, usually called *Türkmen*s at that time, they needed a new country to settle down and carry on their traditional „outer frontier strategy”. So Byzantium had become the target of their raids for many years before the battle of Manzikert took place, and their original strategy had been transformed into *ğazā*, the fight for religion.⁹

The origin of the Anatolian Seljuquids

It was also a matter of fact, that Alp Arslan and his successor, Melik-šāh (1072-1092) did not intend to annex Anatolia to their Empire.¹⁰ It was against their will and intention that the Empire of the Anatolian Seljuqs came to exist. After the revolt of 1063, Alp Arslan also planned to execute the sons of Qutalmış. It was his famous vizier, Nizāmu l-mulk who advised him not to execute the members of the dynasty, but

⁷ Translation of Talāt Tekin, in Tekin, T.: *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series 69, The Hague, p. 262.

⁸ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 22.

⁹ On these raids see Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 66-72.

¹⁰ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 72-73.

send them to the perilous borderlands instead.¹¹ It was only after the death of Alp Arslan, that Süleymān ibn Qutalmış succeeded to establish himself in Anatolia. Cahen even supposes, that the sons of Qutalmış were heterodox.¹² It happened first in 1078, that the Greek sources first made a mention of Süleymān-şāh as *sultān*. This title, however, was never conferred to him officially by the Caliph. It was the Byzantines themselves who encouraged the Turks to advance further than they would have done at once of their own accord. Süleymān-şāh himself was killed by Tutuş, the brother of Melik-şāh in a battle near Aleppo (Haleb).¹³ It happened only after the death of Melik-şāh, that the son of Süleymān-şāh, ʿIzz ed-dīn Kılıç Arslan I (1097-1107) could establish himself in Anatolia. It was his vassal, Çaqa beğ, who entered into negotiations with the Pechenegs sweeping down from the Russian steppe.¹⁴ (It seems that they were the pagan Turks the English in Byzantium fought against.)

The situation dramatically changed after the First Crusade. It drove the Turks back from the coast and enclosed them on the Anatolian Plateau. Nikaia was restored to the Byzantines, and the Anatolian Seljuqs became cut from the Arab world. They could maintain their contacts only with Iran.¹⁵ After the death of Qılıç Arslan I, a rival dynasty, that of the Danişmends challenged their position. It was only during the time of ʿIzz ed-dīn Masʿūd II. (1116-1155) that, after 1143, the Saljuqid state really became re-established.¹⁶

Languages, cultures, symbols

The country was called *Bilād al-Rūm*, but it was much more linked to the neighbouring Iranian territories than to Byzantium. The administration and the literary culture of this new Muslim state of Turkish nomads was Persian. Turkish was first proclaimed as official language in 1277 by certain Qaramanlı Mehmed bey, who occupied Konya and tried to put up on the throne his candidate, ʿAlā ad-dīn Siyāvuş, the son of Keykāvus II. The central administration followed Persian patterns. Although many non-Muslims were still present, the Muslim urban population also followed this pattern. The double-headed eagle, a Sasanian symbol of imperial majesty, borrowed also by the Later Roman Empire was also in frequent use.

Together with these, we can find out an interesting claim for legitimation in

¹¹ Turan: *Selçuklular*, p. 45.

¹² Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 74.

¹³ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 75-79.

¹⁴ Turan: *Selçuklular*, p. 84; Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 81.

¹⁵ Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman*, p. 85.

¹⁶ Turan: *Selçuklular*, p. 158-177.

the names of the Sultāns. Together with Turkish and Islamic names, the Sultāns frequently used Persian names, e.g. Ġiyās ed-dīn Keyḥūsrev I (1192-1196; 1205-1211), Ġiyās ed-dīn Keyḥūsrev II (1237-1246) and Ġiyās ed-dīn Keyḥūsrev III (1266-1284), ʿIzz ed-dīn Keykāvūs I (1200-1220) and ʿIzz ed-dīn Keykāvūs II (1246-1249), ʿAlāʿed-dīn Keyqubād I (1220-1237), ʿAlāʿed-dīn Keyqubād II (1249-1254), and ʿAlāʿed-dīn Keyqubād III (1298-1302). The frequently repeated element *key* is the New Persian form of the name of the Old Persian dynasty of the Akhaimenids. Using this element in their names, the Seljuqs of Anatolia not only pretended to be Muslim rulers of *Bilād al-Rūm*, but also emphasized a kind of continuation of the Akhaimenids.

According to the old Iranian tradition, a legitimate dynasty must be connected with the House of the *Dārā i Dārāyān*, i.e. the Akhaimenids. The Sasanids were the latest, who really proclaimed themselves the progeny of the Akhaimenids, and pretended that their rule was a restoration of the old Akhaimenid Empire. Although the Great Seljuqs of Iran were adhered to the old Iranian political tradition, they never tried to obtain such a legitimation. In Anatolia, the use of such throne-names had begun after the collapse of the Great Seljuq Empire, but continued till the last moment of the dynasty.

If they had not been their „Big Brothers”, against whom the Saljuqs of Anatolia could have made use of such legitimation, we could imagine, that they had been the Byzantines. According to the Middle Persian tradition of the *Kārnāmag* it was *Iskandar i Hrōmāyig* (the Roman Alexander), who destroyed the Akhaimenid Empire.

In the *Kār-Nāmak* of Artakhshīr Pâpakân, it is so recorded that after the death of Alexander the Arûman there were two hundred and forty princes in the country of Persia. Ispahân, Pârs, and the adjoining country were under the sway of Prince Ardawân (Artabanus IV). Pâpak was the lord of the marches and governor of Pârs, and was a nominee of Ardavân. Ardavân had his capital in Istakhr (Persepolis). And Pâpak had no child to perpetuate his name. And Sâsân was a shepherd *in the service* of Pâpak, and always remained with his *flock of sheep*. He was a descendant of Dârâê, the son of Dârâ, and during the evil reign of Alexander had fled *from Persia* and lived in concealment and passed his time with Kurdish [*recte*: nomadic] shepherds. Pâpak did not know that Sâsân was descendant of Dârâê,

the son of Dârâ.¹⁷

Although it is clear, that the tradition of the *Kârnâmag* was not known to the Saljuqids, but some other traditions preserved in the *Šāhnāme* and in Islamic historiography must clearly have been well-known for them. The *Šāhnāma* gives a detailed description of the *Mulūku t-tawā'if*, the feudal anarchy after the era of Alexander. It is clear, that the Byzantine Emperor (*βασιλεύς τῶν Ῥωμαίων*) was in the eyes of the Anatolian Seljuqids a successor of Iskandar-i Rūmī, who not only destroyed the Akhaimenid Empire but also took over Anatolia from the Persians. Stating, that they were successors of the Akhaimenids, they also demanded to be the legitimate rulers of Anatolia.

¹⁷ *Kârnâmak-i Artakshîr Pâpakân. The original Pahlavi text, with transliteration in Avesta characters, translations into English and Gujarati, and Selections from the Shâhnâme*, by Edalji Kersâspji Ântiâ, Bombay 1900, p. 1-2.