

15. THE FIRST HALF OF THE 12TH CENTURY: THE SELJUKS, QARAKHANIDS, KHOREZMSHAHS, QARA-KHITAYS

The Seljuk sultan **Malik Shah and his vizier Nizam al-Mulk died in 1092**. After two years of fighting for the throne between two contenders, the winner, Malik Shah's son **Berk-Yaruq, became the new sultan**. His reign, which lasted twelve years (until 1105), was a time of internal feuds and warfare. Arslan-Arghun, who had been appointed governor of Khorezm by Alp-Arslan but under Malik Shah held another post, rebelled and was defeated with some difficulty. Later, Berk-Yaruq had to fight his brother Muhammad Tapar for supreme authority. After the death of Berk-Yaruq, Muhammad became the sultan; he ruled the western part of the empire, while his half-brother Ahmad Sanjar, based first in Balkh and later in Merv, ruled Khorasan and other provinces in the east as a viceroy with the title *malik*. After the death of Sultan Muhammad in 1118, Sanjar became the supreme sultan of the Seljuks, but the empire was now effectively divided into the eastern sultanate (which included, besides Khorasan, also Mazanderan, Damghan, and Rayy), under Sanjar, and the western sultanate centered in Iraq, under Sanjar's nephew Mahmud. In 1119, after being defeated by Sanjar, Mahmud acknowledged Sanjar's supremacy. Sanjar interfered several times in the affairs of the Qarakhanids, primarily of the Western Qaghanate, which remained a Seljuk vassal; but even the Eastern Qarakhanids recognized his overlordship. In 1130 Sanjar came with an army to Mavarannahr to reinforce the authority there of his Qarakhanid vassal, Arslan Khan Muhammad II. In 1132 he placed on the throne in Samarqand Arslan Khan Mahmud, who was his nephew. Sanjar also interfered in a succession dispute among the Ghaznavids: answering an appeal by the Ghaznavid Bahram Shah, he conquered Ghazna in 1117, sacked the city, and placed Bahram Shah on the throne; the latter agreed to become Sanjar's vassal and to pay an annual tribute. In Khorezm, the Khorezmshah 'Ala' ad-Din Atsiz, the son and successor of Qutb ad-Din Muhammad, recognized Sanjar's suzerainty; at the same time he was enlarging his domain, extending his authority over the Turkmens of the Üst-Yurt and Mangishlaq, and in the delta of the Sïr-Darya, including Jend. In 1138 Atsiz rebelled, provoking a punitive expedition by Sanjar; the army of Atsiz was routed and he fled. Sanjar appointed his own governor for Khorezm, but the following year, as soon as Sanjar returned to Merv, Atsiz returned to Khorezm and banished Sanjar's governor. He again acknowledged himself as Sanjar's vassal, but, nevertheless, within a year, in 1139 attacked Bukhara, captured the city, and demolished its citadel and walls; this attack brought no reprisals from Sanjar.

The main threat to both Atsiz and Sanjar came from the new nomadic conquerors, the Qara-Khitays. These were the successors of the Qitan, a people of Mongolic origin, who had conquered Mongolia and a part of northern China in 907 and established a dynasty there under the Chinese name Liao. After most of their domains were conquered in 1115 by another nomadic people, of Manchu origin, which established a new Chinese dynasty named Jin, a part of the Qitan, under a member of the Liao royal house, began their westward migration and conquests in 1124. They quickly grew in number after they were joined by other groups, including some Mongol, Turkic, and even Jurchen elements. In 1131 the leader of these Qitan, Yelü Dashi, was enthroned in Emil (in Jungharia) with the title of *Gürkhan* ("universal khan"); the new dynasty that he founded assumed the Chinese dynastic name *Xi Liao* (Western Liao), but in the Islamic world they became known as *Qara-Khitay*. In about 1133 one group of the Qara-Khitays moved into the territory of the Eastern Qarakhanids, but they were defeated by Arslan Khan Ahmad b. Hasan. Another part of the Qara-Khitays moved to Semirech'e and captured Balasaghun, which became the capital of the Qara-Khitay ruler (or, rather, the city near which the Gürkhan had his nomadic headquarters). In 1137 the Qarakhanid ruler of Samarqand, Mahmud Khan, was defeated by the Qara-Khitays near Khojend. In the following years the Western Qarakhanid qaghanate was weakened because of a conflict between Mahmud Khan and his nomadic *Qarluq* subjects; the latter rebelled against the khan and asked the Qara-Khitays for help. In 1141 Sanjar invaded Mavarannahr, but his large army was routed by the Qara-Khitays in a battle on the Qatvan Steppe, near Samarqand; Sanjar and Mahmud Khan fled to Khorasan, while the Qara-Khitays occupied Samarqand and Bukhara. Even before this, possibly after the battle at Khojend, the Qarakhanid rulers of Uzgend (Ferghana) separated from the Western Qarakhanids and established their own independent line of hereditary rulers.

The lands under Qara-Khitay control now stretched from Khorezm in the west to the Altay and Hami in the east and from Lake Balkhash in the north to the Amu-Darya in the south, but their core territory was in the Chu valley and around their capital, Balasaghun. The Gürkhans did not divide their core territory into appanages, and they left local dynasties (Eastern and Western Qarakhanids, the Uyghur Idiqluts, the Qarluq Yabghus in the Semirech'e, and the Khorezmshahs) in place as their vassals, sometimes attaching to them representatives of the Gürkhan who supervised the collection of tribute; Khorezm was only periodically visited by tribute-collectors, and the religious dignitaries, *sadrs*, who ruled Bukhara during this period, would themselves bring the tribute to the Gürkhan's court. The Gürkhans had a salaried standing army that was stationed only in the Qara-Khitay core territory, as well as auxiliary troops from the subject kingdoms. The Qara-Khitays were only partly sinicized. They used some Chinese official titles and Chinese for important decrees, but they had Muslim scholars and officials at the court of the Gürkhan as well. They were probably Buddhist, but they showed tolerance toward other religions, and the Nestorian Christian church was very active in their dominions.

The defeat in the Qatvan Steppe was a strong blow to Sanjar's prestige in the Islamic world. The Khorezmshah Atsiz immediately took advantage of the situation and raided Khorasan, where he captured Serakhs, Merv (which was sacked), Nishapur, and several other cities. He had to return to Khorezm, because it was also raided by the Qara-Khitays; Atsiz agreed to pay them an annual tribute and lost Jend, where the Qara-Khitays appointed their own governor. In 1143 Sanjar, having recovered after his defeat by the Qara-Khitays, marched against Khorezm and besieged Atsiz in his capital, Gurganj; Atsiz expressed his submission, and Sanjar returned to Merv, but Atsiz again pursued an independent policy, leading to another campaign by Sanjar against him in 1147. Sanjar was again satisfied with the Khorezmshah's nominal submission. In 1152 Atsiz conquered Jend and appointed his son Il-Arslan as its governor.

The fatal blow to Sanjar's empire was dealt by the Oghuz who lived in the province of Balkh. It appears that some Oghuz tribes had already migrated to this province at the time of the Seljuk conquests in the 1040s, while others came from Mavarannahr after the Qara-Khitay invasion. They were subjected to increasing taxation by the governor of Balkh, and their growing discontent and unrest resulted in an open rebellion in 1153. Sanjar moved against them with a punitive expedition, but his army was utterly defeated and the sultan himself was captured by the Oghuz, who kept him prisoner under close watch (according to some accounts, he was kept in an iron cage at night) for three years, carrying him around during their raids. In these raids they attacked and sacked the major cities of Khorasan, beginning with Sanjar's capital Merv, and the province descended into a state of anarchy. The Khorezmshah Atsiz led his army to Khorasan in 1156, but he suddenly died there. The same year Sanjar managed to escape from captivity and returned to Merv, but in 1157 he died without being able to restore his authority and order in Khorasan. With his death, Seljuk rule in eastern Iran came to an end.