

# Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Periods

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[241] During the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, Armenia was subjected to a number of attacks and invasions by Turco-Mongol peoples. The most important of these were the invasions of the Seljuks in the second half of the eleventh century, of the Khwarazmians (1225-1230), and of the Mongols (1223-1247). At the end of the fourteenth century, an already exhausted Armenia was devastated again by the Turco-Mongol armies of Timur-Leng. During the four centuries examined in this chapter, important changes took place in the demographic, economic, and sociopolitical history of the Armenian highlands. If at the beginning of the eleventh century Armenians constituted the majority of the population in many areas, at the end of the fourteenth century there were few areas where Armenians were still the majority. If in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries Armenia's economy and trading situation was to be envied, at the end of the fourteenth century, the Armenian highlands were so unsafe that caravan traffic practically ceased. If at the beginning of the eleventh century the *nakharar* (lordly) system prevailed across large areas of the highlands, at the end of the fourteenth century *nakharar* practices were confined to inaccessible mountain regions.

[242] Although the invasions differed from each other in participants, severity, and consequences, they had certain similarities. Each successive wave pushed before it, brought along with it, or dragged in its wake thousands of virtually uncontrollable nomadic warriors. Their interest lay solely in plunder and in securing pasturage for their enormous herds of sheep. When totally unchecked, such nomads devastated the cities searching for loot. They destroyed the countryside and the complex irrigation systems, turning cultivated fields into pasturage; and they reduced the possibilities for internal and international trade by infesting the trade routes between cities and attacking caravans. In scholarly literature, this unrestrainable element is referred to as Turkmen, and it is contrasted with those forces among the nomads interested in the establishment of stable forms of government and a sedentary or semisedentary existence. Centralizing forces within the various Turco-Mongol states to arise in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries were obliged to support a very delicate balance. On the one hand, the warlike Turkmens were the best, most determined fighters, and therefore necessary for victorious expeditions. On the other hand, their impulse to destroy and move on had to be fought—often literally—by those wishing to maintain authority. The Turkmens were the bane not only of the sedentary Christian Armenians and Muslims of the Middle East, but also of many rulers of stable Seljuk and Mongol states. In the end, this balance proved insupportable. The Turkmens brought down each of the Turco-Mongol states their vigor had given birth to.

Armenian sources for the history of Armenia in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries include literary histories [at Internet Archive] such as those by [Aristakes Lastivertsi](#) (Aristakes of Lastivert) (d. ca. 1073), [Vardan Areveltsi](#), [Kirakos Gandzaketsi](#) (Kirakos of Gandzak) (both d. ca. 1271), [Stepanos Orbelian](#) (d. 1304), and

[Tovma Metzopetsi](#) (Thomas of Metzop) (d. 1446); chronicles by authors such as [Matthew of Edessa](#) (d. ca. 1140), Samvel Anetsi (Samuel of Ani) (d. ca. 1180), and [Mkhitar of Ayrivan](#) (d. ca. 1290); as well as inscriptions and colophons. [The Armenian texts of many of the sources mentioned above are currently available online at Internet Archive [Classical Armenian Historical Sources](#).] Among important foreign sources are the thirteenth-century works of Ibn al-Athir, William of Rubruck, Juvaini, Ibn Bibi, Bar Hebraeus, and the fourteenth-century Rashid al-Din, Abu'l Fida, Qazvini, the Georgian Chronicle, [Ibn Battuta](#), Johann Schiltberger, and Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo.

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## Armenia on the Eve of the Seljuk Invasions

The Seljuk invasions of Armenia began in the early 1040s. For some twenty years before that date, however, Turkic bands had been raiding parts of eastern, northeastern, and southern Armenia. From 1020 to 1040 [243] these incursions were made by Turkic elements serving in the army of the Persian Dailamites of Azerbaijan and by nomadic Turkmens themselves often displaced by the Seljuks of Iran. Driven by a desire for booty and captives, relatively small bands of Turkmens (sometimes fewer than 5,000) were able to wreak havoc on many unfortified places in Armenia. In addition to superior military effectiveness, several political and demographic factors explain the ease with which the invaders gained control of the Armenian highlands. Among these were the shortsighted policies of the Byzantine Empire toward the Armenian princes and their lands, divisions among the Armenian lords, and the demographic expansion of Turkic peoples.

From the late tenth century on the Byzantine Empire had followed a policy of removing prominent *nakharars* from their native lands, absorbing those lands in the structure of the empire, and giving the *nakharars* in exchange lands and titles elsewhere. The decision of many lords to leave was frequently the result of coercion, though throughout the tenth to eleventh centuries there were also pro-Byzantine factions within the Armenian kingdoms, supporting Byzantium's aims. Already in 968 the southwestern district of Taron was annexed. In 1000, a large area embracing Tayk, Karin, and Manzikert (to the north of Lake Van) was annexed to the Byzantine Empire. In 1021 King Senekerim Artsruni of Vaspurakan ceded his kingdom to the empire and moved to Cappadocia. He was followed in 1045 by King Gagik II of Ani and King Gagik-Abas of Kars (1064). The Byzantine policy of removing important lords from their Armenian lands and settling them elsewhere (principally on imperial territory, in Cappadocia and northern Mesopotamia) proved shortsighted in two respects. First, it left eastern Asia Minor devoid of its native defenders. Second, it exacerbated Armeno-Greek ethnic tensions by the introduction of thousands of Armenian newcomers into Cappadocia. The empire compounded its error by disbanding a 50,000-man local Armenian army, ostensibly to save money. As a result, the land was left defenseless as well as leaderless. This imprudent military decision subsequently was to have an impact on the Byzantine Empire itself, since with the Armenian lands vulnerable, Byzantine holdings in central and western Asia Minor were open to invasion.

The demographic expansion and westward movement of Turkic peoples in the tenth to eleventh centuries was another important factor in the invasions of Asia Minor. In the tenth century Armenia's eastern neighbor, Azerbaijan, was becoming increasingly populated with Turkmens of the Oghuz tribe, coming there across Central Asia and [244] northern Iran. The Oghuz and other Turkic people also were invading and migrating across southern Russia to areas north of the Caucasus. In the eleventh century, as the Oghuz and others invaded Asia Minor, so to the north the Kipchak Turks were occupying the central steppe regions, from the Carpathian to the Altai Mountains.

In about 1018, at the very time Byzantium was trying to induce King Senekerim Artsruni of Vaspurakan to exchange his lands, Vaspurakan was under attack from Turkic peoples serving the Muslim emirs of Azerbaijan. Around 1021 the area from Nakhichevan to Dvin was raided by Turkmen Oghuz serving in the Persian Dailamite armies. From 1029 onward, Turkmen groups began raiding various parts of Armenia from

the direction of Azerbaijan to the east as well as from northern Mesopotamia. These initial attacks in the period from 1016-1018 to 1040 bore the nature of plundering expeditions and were carried out by nomads not under direct control of the Seljuks. This situation changed, however, after 1040. In that year two Oghuz brothers, Tughril-Bey Muhammed and Chagri-Bey Daud of the family of Seljuk conquered the Ghaznavid kingdom of Iran and established the Seljuk Empire.

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## ***The Seljuk Invasions of Armenia***

After the Seljuk conquest of Iran in 1040, Armenia became a conscious target of Turkish invasion, for several reasons. First, as a result of Turkmen successes in the preceding period and from espionage, the Seljuks knew that the Armenian lands were undefended. Second, Tughril-Bey, head of the Seljuks, was facing a dilemma with the Turkmens, which he solved temporarily by deflecting them to Armenia. After capturing the Iranian cities of Rey (1042) and Ramadan (1043), he closed them to the Turkmens to prevent them from laying waste the central provinces of Iran. Thousands of disgruntled nomads therefore headed for Azerbaijan, whence they entered Armenia. Armenia, a Byzantine possession, became a magnet for the newly Muslim nomadic Turkmens who could satisfy their lust for booty and gain religious merit by attacking Christian infidels. This was the effective military strategy of the Seljuk leadership: first to encourage or compel the Turkmens into an area to pillage and terrorize, then to send in troops more loyal to themselves, to take control. In 1042 some 15,000 Turkmens from the Urmia area attacked and looted Vaspurakan and defeated Byzantine forces near the city of Arjesh on the northeastern shore of Lake Van, [245] while yet another group was raiding around Bjni in the northern district of Ayrarat.

Once again, in 1047, Tughril had difficulties with the Turkmens. In that year he formed an army of 100,000 Turkmens from Khorasan, entrusting it to his brother, Ibrahim Innal. The intention was for Innal to unite with the Turkmens already in Azerbaijan and to invade Armenia. At the same time, Tughril was able to rid the center of the Seljuk Empire of the Turkmens, whose presence in Iran was a steady drain on its resources. Thus from the mid-1040s to about 1063, detachments of Turks, more or less controlled by Seljuk sultans and their generals, penetrated deeper into Armenia, destroying numerous cities and devastating entire districts: Ani (attacked, 1045), Vagharsavan in the western district of Basen (1047), the Mananaghi district of western Armenia (1048), Ardzin in the northwest (1048-1049), Baiburt (1054), Melitene/Malatia in the southwest, Colonea in the northwest (1057), Sebastia/Sivas (sacked, 1059), Ani (captured, 1064), Kars (1065), and Caesarea (1067), to mention only the better-known sites.

The Seljuks did encounter some resistance from Armenians as well as from the Byzantine Empire. For example, in 1042, Khul Khachik Artsruni of Tornavan attempted a heroic but futile resistance against 15,000 Turkmens in Vaspurakan. In 1042-1043, an unspecified number of Turkmens raiding Bjni in northeastern Armenia were defeated by King Gagik II Bagratuni and Grigor (Magistros) Pahlavuni. In 1053 the Armenians of Surmari destroyed an army of 60,000 Turks. It is important to note that during this very period, 1040 to 1070, the Armenian kingdoms and principalities simultaneously were under attack from Byzantium, which seemed oblivious to the danger facing it. Thus in 1044, when Turkmens were raiding and pillaging the Armenian countryside, Byzantium disbanded a local defense force of 50,000. In 1064-1065, the Byzantine Empire succeeded in bullying King Gagik-Abas of Kars to cede to it his kingdom; however, before the empire could claim it, the Seljuks under Alp-Arslan (Tughril's nephew) had snatched it away. Armenia's enmity toward the Byzantine Greeks was further aroused by Byzantine attempts to force the Chalcedonian issue again. This led to bloody race riots and assassinations on both sides. Consequently, all segments of the Armenian population did not respond in a uniform way to the Seljuk invasions. Indeed, some few Armenians saw the anti-Byzantine Turks not as the agents of God sent to punish Armenians for their sins, but as an excellent vehicle opportunely available to themselves for vengeance against the Greeks. The contemporary

[246] non-Armenian sources in particular accuse the Armenians of siding with the Turks, deserting from the Byzantine armies sent to defend Armenia, and even joining the enemy.

The Seljuks also encountered resistance from ambitious individual commanders of the Turkmens, unwilling to subordinate themselves to Seljuk authority. For example, in 1049, 1052 to 1053, and later in the mid-1080s, the Seljuk "regular army" was warring against Turkmen rebels in Asia Minor, a situation that exacerbated the chaos. In 1070-1071, in what is regarded as a battle of major significance in world military history, the forces of the Byzantine army were defeated by the Seljuks under Alp-Arslan at Manzikert on the northern shore of Lake Van. With that defeat, the Byzantine Empire ceased playing a role of importance in the affairs of central and eastern Asia Minor. While it appears that most of historical Armenia had been subjected to sack by 1070-1071, in several remote mountain areas small Armenian principalities continued to exist throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, although encircled by inimical forces and under perpetual attack. These areas comprised districts in northern and northeastern Armenia (Gugark, Siunik, and Artsakh), plus southern and southwestern Armenia (parts of Vaspurakan and Mokk and Sasun). Consequently, it would be incorrect to speak of the Seljuk conquest as being fully consummated in the eleventh century. Some few parts of Armenia never succumbed.

The Seljuk invasions acted as a catalyst on Armenian emigration. In the eleventh century, the Byzantine government had followed a policy of removing powerful Armenian lords and their dependents from their native Armenian habitats and settling them to the west and southwest. Thus, Cappadocia and Armenia Minor (Pokr Hayk), areas that centuries earlier had hosted sizable Armenian populations, suddenly became re-Armenized on the eve of the Turkish invasions. The invasions themselves quickened the tempo of Armenian emigration and extended its range in a southwesterly direction (into Cilicia) and northward (in Georgia). The *nakharars*, relocating as they did with sometimes large forces, occasionally were powers to be reckoned with. Several such powerful and ambitious *nakharars* carved out for themselves principalities over an extensive area stretching from Cilicia on the Mediterranean, southward to Antioch, eastward to Edessa, northward to Samosata, to Melitene/Malatia and elsewhere.

Armenian historical sources describe the period of the Seljuk invasions as one of chaos, accompanied by widespread destruction of human life and property. Some few areas were able to spare themselves [247] by making agreements with the Seljuks, but the generalized fate of Armenia's cities was sack (sometimes more than once), frequently accompanied by the massacre and/or enslavement of part of the population. Survivors of the invasions in some areas faced starvation, since the Turkmens often destroyed crops and cut down fruit-bearing trees in the surrounding villages. The situation of shock and confusion that many cavalrymen or *azats* (the "gentry") found themselves in, dispossessed from their lands, was described by the late-eleventh-century author Aristakes Lastiverttsi (Aristakes Lastivertc'i):

The cavalry wanders about lordlessly, some in Persia, some in Greece [Byzantium]; some in Georgia. The *sepuh* brigade of *azats* has left its patrimony and fallen from wealth; they growl wherever they happen to be, like lion cubs in their lairs (AL, 1985).

Members of the *azatagundk hayots*, the cavalry of Armenia, clustered around successful bandits such as Gogh Vasil or Philaretus Varazhnuni, in lands southwest of Armenia. Others found a warm reception in Georgia. Many remained in their own neighborhoods, living in caves and making sorties against the Turkmens whenever possible. During the fifty-odd years of the invasions (ca. 1020s-1070s), according to Lastiverttsi, the Armenian chroniclers, and the later Turkish epics (the *Book of Dede Korkut* and the *Danishmend-name*), Armenian churches were looted and some were converted to mosques. The period of the invasions also had a devastating effect on international trade crossing the Armenian highlands. Not only had the majority of Armenia's cities been sacked, but the unsettled conditions rendered caravan traffic unpredictable and dangerous.

## **Armenia and the Seljuk Domination**

The death of Alp-Arslan in 1072 brought welcome changes for the Armenians. Alp-Arlan's son, Ma1ik-Shah (1072-1092) unlike his father and great-uncle Tughril, was less a nomadic warlord than a cultured, benevolent governor. Under the tutelage of a farsighted and prudent vizier, Nizam al-Mulk (1063-1092), Malik-Shah moved to restrain Turkmen depredations against his Christian and Muslim subjects. Iran was the center of the empire of the Great Seljuks, and it was Iranian rather than Turkic culture that the young sultan and his successors promoted. The Seljuk Empire of Iran, proclaimed in 1040, lasted little more than one hundred years. It, in turn, was destroyed by another wave of Turkic nomads, the Kara Khitai. In Asia Minor a variety of states [248] arose during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, virtually independent of Iran and often inimical toward each other. The most important of these were the Danishmendid state centered at Sebastia/Sivas, the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum (or Iconium) centered at Iconia/Konia and the state of the Shah-Armens centered at Khlat.

Policies of the rulers of these states were conditioned by military, demographic, and economic factors. In 1070-1071, the same year as the Byzantine disaster at Manzikert, the Seljuk general Atsiz captured Jerusalem. This event became the impetus for the First Crusade, which was to halt Turkish penetration westward. By 1099 Europeans had established principalities in Edessa, Antioch, and elsewhere in the Levant, strengthening the hands of both Byzantium and Cilician Armenians. Throughout much of the twelfth century, the Turkic states of Asia Minor were dangerously encircled by Christian powers: Georgia to the north, Byzantium to the west, and the Crusader states and Cilician Armenia to the south and southwest. Thus the activities of the new overlords of eastern Asia Minor were conditioned by the military might of their neighbors. Another conditioning factor was the centrifugalism that quickly manifested itself among the different Turkic overlords. Indeed, prior to the establishment of Seljuk control over much of the Armenian highlands by the late eleventh century, the proliferation of small, sometimes mutually hostile, Muslim emirates had begun. In the east, embracing parts of eastern Armenia, Caucasian Albania/Aghuania, and Azerbaijan was the emirate of Gandzak (ruled independently from 1148 to 1225). In the south, in the areas of Diarbekir and Khlat, the holdings of the Muslim Marwanid emirs quickly were confiscated by the Artukids of Aghdzik (1101-1231) and the Seljuk Shah-Armens of Khlat (1100-1207). In the west, the Danishmendids (1097-1165) ruled a large area including Sebastia/Sivas, Caesarea, and Melitene/Malatia. In the northwest were the emirates of Karin/Erzerum (ruled by the Saltukids, 1080-late twelfth century) and Kars (ca. 1080-1200). From 1118 Erzinjan and Tephrice/Divrigi belonged to Mangujek, founder of yet another dynasty. The ruling dynasties of these states sometimes were joined together by marriage ties or sometimes united to fight a common enemy (usually Georgia to the north). But more often they were at war with each other. Throughout the twelfth century, the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, centered at Konia in the west, was trying to gain control over the above-mentioned states. This did not happen until late in the century.

Another factor conditioning the behavior of the new overlords was their own status as a numerical minority. During and after the conquest, [249] Turkic rulers and Muslim state-supported institutions expropriated the lands and properties of scores of lords and churches. They also became the new legislators or promulgators of law. Nonetheless, they had to contend with the reality of an overwhelmingly Armenian Christian population in eastern Asia Minor and a Greek population in western Asia Minor. In the twelfth century especially, a *modus vivendi* of sorts had developed between the rulers and the ruled. Matthew of Edessa, for example, describing the situation in the time of Malik Ismael ibn Yaqut (1085-1093), wrote that "everyone ruled his patrimony in his time." According to Vardan Areveltsi, when the Shaddadid Manuchihr ruled Ani-Shirak, he recalled from exile Grigor Pahlavuni and restored his holdings. Furthermore, Armenians, Greeks, and Georgians serving in the armies of the Shah-Armens and the sultans of Rum also received *iqtas*, originally conditional landholds that quickly became hereditary. The intermingling of cultures and institutions between the conquerors and the conquered was paralleled by intermarriage between the two peoples. It was through the gradual merging of newcomer and settled, the conversion to Islam of the previously Christian population,

and the supplemental influx of invading Turkmens in the thirteen to fifteenth centuries that Asia Minor metamorphosed from being Greek, Armenian, and Christian to being Turkish and Muslim.

The establishment of Muslim political overlordship over an Armenian Christian population in eastern Asia Minor did not immediately lead to widespread conversions to Islam. This was to occur in the twelfth and succeeding centuries. But during the time of the Seljuk invasions, Armenian Islamization seems to have been limited to those obliged to convert to save their lives and to the tens of thousands of Armenian women and children forcibly removed from their homes and sold on the slave markets of the Middle East. In this early period too, several influential Armenian *nakharar* women were sought after as brides by Seljuk rulers. Presumably many of them converted. Subsequently, after the establishment of Seljuk political control, other Armenians converted, be they young Armenian boys, *gulams*, absorbed into the Seljuk military schools, or the skilled Armenian bureaucrats and artisans who dominated many important positions within the various Turkish states and who figure prominently in Turkish epic literature. Martyrologies of the twelfth century also point to considerable voluntary conversion, prompted by the elevated status in the newly developing society converts could enjoy and especially by financial inducements. The result of this conversion, [250] forcible or voluntary, was the creation with time of a distinct group—almost excluded from the Armenian sources as "renegades" but apparently not yet fully accepted by their new Muslim coreligionists either, who in their writings usually style them as "Armenians." Despite conversion by some, most Armenians remained true to their own distinctive form of Christianity. This fact, coupled with the reality of an Armenian majority in eastern Asia Minor, led to a certain "Armenization" of the Seljuks. Not only did Armenians of different faiths—Apostolic, Orthodox, Muslim—constitute the bulk of the population in eastern Asia Minor during the Seljuk domination, but fairly quickly an Armeno-Turkish community came into existence through intermarriage. Intermarriage occurred not only between the families of Armenian civil servants and Turkish lords but at the very pinnacle of the state. By the thirteenth century few Seljuk sultans of eastern Asia Minor lacked an Armenian, Georgian, or Greek parent or grandparent. Evidence even suggests that the great warlord and founder of the Danishmendid emirate, hero of the Turkish epic (the *Danishmend-name*), emir Malik Danishmend himself, was a Muslim Armenian. Judging from the many clearly Armenian names of his comrades-in-arms who waged holy war against the Byzantine Christian "infidels," the same was true of his inner circle. Danishmendid coinage usually was stamped with the sign of the Cross and/or a bust of Christ. The hereditary rulers of the powerful emirate of Khlat in southern Armenia styled themselves Shah-i-Armen (Persian for "king of the Armenians") and married Armenians. Armenianization was not solely an ethnic process, but a cultural one as well. Seljuk architecture took some of its inspiration from Armenian architecture. In the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, many of the structures themselves were designed and built by Christian and Muslim Armenians.

The late twelfth century was a period of great brilliance in the history of central and eastern Asia Minor. In 1207 the Seljuks captured the port of Atalia on the Mediterranean; in 1214 they acquired Sinope on the Black Sea, thereby opening their state to world trade. As a result, revenues available to the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum increased dramatically, leading to a quickening of cultural and architectural development throughout Asia Minor. With the aid of the Georgian Bagratid dynasty, a small Byzantino-Georgian "empire" of Trebizond was established in 1204, becoming another important center for international exchange. Historians regard the early thirteenth century as the time when four [251] societies—the Sultanate of Rum, Georgia, Trebizond, and Cilicia—achieved the pinnacles of their development. This was a period of economic and cultural interaction and dynamism.

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## **The Emergence of Georgia**

The emergence of Georgia as a great military power in the late eleventh to twelfth centuries temporarily shifted the scales in favor of Caucasian cultural as well as political supremacy in eastern Asia Minor. Because of Georgia's military might, much of northern historical Armenia once again came under the political control of Armenians, though briefly. Those parts that were not were either tributary to Georgia or had made peace with that state. Georgia's successes in this period may be attributed to a number of factors, internal and external. Internally, the royal Bagratid dynasty of Georgia had succeeded in restraining the rebellious and separatist Georgian lords. Externally, Seljuk preoccupation with other neighbors and the Crusades left eastern Asia Minor an easy object of Georgian military ambitions.

During the reign of David (called "the Restorer" and "the Builder," 1089-1125), Georgia had become a haven for Armenian lords and lordless *azats* displaced by the Seljuk invasions. The historian Matthew of Edessa wrote that David "received and loved the Armenian people; the remnants of the Armenian forces assembled by him." He also built a special city, Gori, for the refugees. According to the medieval Armenian translation of the Georgian *History of Kartli*, David knew the Armenian language and had as his father-confessor the monophysite *vardapet* Sarkavag from Haghbat monastery in northeastern Armenia. During the reign of this king, the armies of Georgia commenced clearing southern and southeastern Georgia of nomadic Turkmens, capturing from them Shamshulde and many strongholds in the Armeno-Georgian districts of Somkhiti (1110), Lori, Agarak, and the Kiurikian holdings (1118), Shamakhi, eastern Gugark, western Utik, Gag, Kavazin, Kayian, Kaytson, Terunakan, Norberd, Tavush, Mahkanaberd, Manasgom, and Khalinchkar (1123). The same year Ani was taken, though that city passed back and forth between the Georgian and Muslim emirs many times throughout the twelfth century. During the reigns of David's successors, Demetre I (1125-1155) and Georgi III (1156-1184), the conquests continued though at a slower pace. Throughout this period, [252] the Georgian army was swelling with Armenian volunteers, enthusiastically participating in the liberation of their country. Furthermore, the dynasty of the Georgian Bagratids, itself of Armenian descent, very definitely favored certain Armenian nobles long since established within Georgia and within that country's ruling structure. Such lords as the Zakarian/Mkhargrtselis, Orbelian/Orbelis, and Artsruni/Mankaberdelis not only commanded the victorious armies, but were left in charge of the newly established administrations.

The Georgian Bagratids reached the apogee of their power under Queen Tamar (1184-1213). Under Tamar's generals, the energetic brothers Zakare and Ivane Zakarian, the Armeno-Georgian armies surged ahead reclaiming one after another fortress, city, and district: Anberd in the Aragatsotn district (1196), Shamkor, Gandzak, Artsakh, Siunik, Shirak, the Ayrarat plain and Ani (ca. 1199), Bjni (1201), and Dvin (1203). They now turned upon the southern and western emirates, defeating the renowned sultan of Rum, Rukn al-Din, in the district of Basen (1204). In 1204 or 1205, they reached as far south as Manzikert and Arjesh on the northern shore of Lake Van, although this area was not taken until ca. 1209. Ivane's daughter, Tamta, was married to the Shah-Armen of Khlat in 1210. In a great final burst, General Zakare marched through Nakhichevan and Jugha (Julfa), through (Persian) Azerbaijan to Maran, Tabriz, and Qazvin, looting and sacking Muslim settlements. By the time of Zakare's death in 1213, Georgia was the most powerful state in the region, while the status of the Armenians, be they inhabitants of historical Armenia, of Georgia, or of the numerous small communities stretching in a belt to the southwest to the independent Cilician kingdom had been changed in a very positive way.

The personalities of the dynamic individuals who shaped Armenian affairs in this period may be examined through unique perspectives. Because such people as the Zakarids, Artsrunids, and Orbelians functioned both in Georgian and Armenian milieux, both Georgian and Armenian historians wrote about them. The reader is treated to two sides of their personalities. Thus the information available in the Armenian historians Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Areveltsi, and Stepanos Orbelian is amplified in the *Georgian Chronicle*. Furthermore, the lives of Queen Tamar and her Armenian commander-in-chief Zakare are symbolically alluded to in the

great Georgian epic of the thirteenth century, the [\*Man in the Panther's Skin\*](#) [at Internet Archive]. This exquisite creation of the troubadour Shota Rustaveli reveals, among many other things, the chivalrous ideals [253] of the period and the wealth and exoticism of the court which enjoyed war booty, tribute, and the fruits of trade with far-flung states.

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## The Zakarid Period

The first decades of the thirteenth century in northeastern Armenia are known as the Zakarid period, after its most influential family. In the late twelfth century the Armenian Zakarids were used by the Georgian Bagratid dynasty to counter the native Georgian lords. Zakare and Ivane Zakarian, both notable generals, also held official positions within the Georgian court. Zakare was the commander-in-chief of the army (*amirspasalar*) as of 1191 and the "grand marshal" (*mandaturt-ukhutses*) from 1203 on; while his brother, first appointed foremost vizier at court (*msakhurt-ukhutses*) became *atabeg* in 1212, an office that was instituted within the Georgian court at Ivane's own request. To reward their military prowess, the Georgian crown entrusted administration of the many liberated districts of northeastern Armenia to Zakare and Ivane. The nature of the Zakarid brothers' service to the Georgian crown seems to have been primarily of a military sort. Armenian lands recaptured from the Turks paid taxes to the Zakarids, who probably paid some taxes to the Georgian Bagratid dynasty. During the Zakarid period, which lasted until about 1260, Armenian economic and cultural life reached a new plateau.

The properties under the overall jurisdiction of *amirspasalar* Zakare and later of his son Shahnshah were located in the northwestern parts of the reconquered lands: Lori, Ani, Aragatsotn, Bagrevand, Tsaghkotn, Kogovit, Surmari—lands from the Virahayots Mountains to the southern border of Tsaghkotn, from Bolorpahakits to Erevan. Ani was the center of this realm. Subject to Zakare's house were both newly created families (such as the Vachutians) and branches of old *nakharar* families (such as the Pahlavunis, Artsrunis, Mamikonians, and others).

Under the jurisdiction of *atabeg* Ivane Zakarian and later of his son Avag were the eastern areas: Bjni, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, most of Artsakh, Siunik, Nakhichevan, Dvin, and Erevan. The center of this realm was first Dvin and later Bjni. Subject to Ivane's house were the Orbelians, Khaghbakians, Dopians, and others. The Orbelians, who originally had been the Zakarids' overlords in Georgia, were, in the changed situation of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, their [254] subordinates in Armenia. Another of Ivane's subordinates was Vasak Khaghbakian, originally from the Khachen area, who had helped in the reconquest of Vayots Dzor, Bjni, and Dvin. This family came to be known as Proshian after Vasak's energetic son Prosh (1223-1284). A number of new and old *nakharar* families became associated with the Zakarids through marriage alliances with three of Zakare's and Ivane's sisters. Their sister Vaneni was married to Abas II Kiurikian of Matsnaberd. Dopi married Hasan, prince of the old *nakharardom* of Artsakh in eastern Armenia, receiving as dowry a large area on the southern shore of Lake Sevan and the Sotk district in Siunik. Her descendants are known as the Dopians. Khorishah Zakarian, another sister, was married to Vakhtang, lord of Khachen district. The family was named after Hasan Jalal, the issue of this union. The Hasan-Jalalians ruled southern Khachen. Within the vast territories under their jurisdiction, the two Zakarid brothers apparently established many of the same offices as existed in the Georgian court. The men chosen by them to fill these offices were those same individuals who had been instrumental as warriors in the reconquest of Armenian lands. The service tendered to the Zakarids by their appointees consisted of military aid and the payment of taxes. Thus, in return for his service, Zakare titled Vache Vachutian his "prince of princes." Members of the Khachen aristocracy served as Zakarid *hejubs*, chamberlains, court directors, and guardians of Zakarid children. Prince Bubak, Ivane's subordinate, is styled "prince of princes" and "the great *sparapet*" in the sources. Bubak also was known by the Georgian title of *msakhurt-ukhutses*—the same title originally held by

Ivane in the Georgian court. This lends credence to the view that the Zakarids created a partial microcosm of the Georgian court hierarchy on their own lands.

The nobility of Armenia in the early thirteenth century consisted of different elements. One substantial group included men of ambition and military talents from newly arisen families, who were rewarded by their Zakarid overlords with grants of land and/or rights of administration. Before and after receiving lands and villages, this category of thirteenth-century lord derived much wealth from booty taken during military campaigns. Another element is referred to in the sources from the twelfth century on as *metsatun*, which means literally "of a great house." In fact, these were men of great financial wealth who formed the upper class in the many Armenian cities that had recuperated from the Seljuk dislocations. These men, too, lacked antique pedigrees and did not belong to the old *nakharar* families. Their wealth had been [255] gained through trading and money-lending, and a substantial part of the *metsatuns'* assets were in cash. However, these merchants reinvested their capital in land, buying not only entire estates but also shares of establishments, such as mills. An inscription of one *metsatun*, Tigran, from the historically unknown family Honents, on the wall of the church of St. Gregory in Ani (ca. 1215) indicates the far-flung and multifaceted nature of *metsatun* wealth. From the inscription of another *metsatun*, one learns that about 1242, a certain Umek purchased the church of Getik for "40,000 red [gold] ducats," a currency that clearly indicates that such merchants as Umek were participating in the lucrative international trade with Italian city-states. A third element of the nobility was the high clergy of the church, including bishops and the directors of numerous monasteries founded in this period.

Non-noble elements of Armenian society in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, as in earlier centuries, are essentially omitted from the sources. Certain economic historians suggest that the Seljuk invasions of the mid-eleventh century may have had a temporary "liberating" effect on the peasantry, since the economy of the nomads did not require attachment to the soil. As martyrologies of the eleventh to twelfth centuries suggest, conversion to Islam, the religion of the new conquerors, became a means of socioeconomic elevation for many Armenians of different economic classes in Muslim-ruled areas. However, for the bulk of the peasantry that remained Christian, the twelfth to thirteenth centuries brought increasing attachment to the soil. Georgian documents from this period indicate that peasants attached to a particular plot also could be sold with the land they worked. Urban artisans—metalworkers, builders, weavers, and the like—were a group that grew in size during the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Their status as non-noble is clear, though they seem to have acquired certain special rights in this period as well as their own guild organizations.

As in Georgia proper, Rum, and Cilicia, the culture of northeastern Armenia blossomed at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. The material wealth deriving from international trade was the basis for this. Among the major intellectuals of the period belong the poet-catholicos Nerses Shnorhali, Mkhitar Heratsi (Mekhitar of Her), the author of a medical textbook; grammarians; theologians; and translators such as Shnorhali's nephew Grigor Tgha; Nerses Lambronatsi (Nerses of Lambron); Mkhitar Gosh, the codifier of Armenian law; Davit Kobayretsi; Grigor Skevratsi; Vardan Aygektsi; Aristakes the Rhetorician; Hovhannes Garnetsi; and Vanakan Vardapet. [256]

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## ***The Turco-Mongol Invasions of 1220 to 1230***

Beginning in the 1220s, the Caucasus and eastern Asia Minor were subjected to a new round of Turco-Mongol invasions. The first of the thirteenth-century incursions was made in 1220-1221 by a detachment of some 20,000 Mongols who had been sent across Central Asia by Genghis-Khan in pursuit of the shah of Khwarazm. The latter succeeded in evading his pursuers and had, in fact, died in obscurity on an island in the Caspian Sea the same time the Mongols were entering the Caucasus. The Mongol's route into Armenia was from the southeast, from western Nakhichevan north to the Aghstev region. The outcome of this first clash

with Caucasian forces was that some 10,000 Armenians and Georgians commanded by King Georgi IV Lasha and his *atabeg* Ivane Zakarian were defeated in the Kotman area of northeastern Armenia. Northern Armenia and southeastern Georgia were looted before the invaders returned to their base in Utik. Despite its success, this army had not been sent for conquest but to pursue the Khwarazm-Shah and to conduct reconnaissance for future operations. Thus, considering their mission accomplished, the Mongols departed via the Caucasus Mountains to the north, destroying the city of Shamkor en route.

The second invasion of the Caucasus took place immediately after the Mongol departure in 1222, and was caused by it. This time the participants were nomadic Kipchak Turks from the plains to the north. In their turn defeated by the Mongols, one sizable body of Kipchaks fled from them in a southward direction. These nomads pillaged and looted from Darband south to Gandzak in Azerbaijan. Atabeg Ivane mustered troops and went against them, but he was defeated, having underestimated their strength. What was worse, many *nakharars* were captured, then killed or ransomed for huge sums of money. The Kipchaks continued looting and raiding different parts of the Caucasus until 1223, when Ivane, in alliance with other Caucasian peoples, finally defeated them, killing or selling them into slavery. The Kipchak raids, though less serious than the invasions that preceded and succeeded them, nonetheless contributed to the continued unsettled state of affairs initiated by the Mongols, depleted the Armeno-Georgian military of some capable leaders, and undoubtedly weakened the army's morale.

The third devastation of Armenia took place from 1225 to about 1230, during which time various parts of the country were subjected to raids and invasions by the ethnically diverse armies of the new Khwarazm-Shah, Jalal al-Din Mangubirdi. Like his father, he offered [257] stubborn and occasionally successful resistance to his Mongol pursuers. This was, however, at the expense of other peoples, notably the Armenians and Georgians. At the head of an army of some 60,000 Turkmens and Kipchak mercenaries, Jalal al-Din invaded northeastern Armenia following the age-old route of invasion, through Nakhichevan and northward. He took and devastated Dvin, and at Garni defeated the 70,000-man-strong Armeno-Georgian army commanded by Ivane. This was followed by the capture of Gandzak, Lori, and Tiflis, where a frightful massacre of Christians ensued with the active participation of resident Muslims, who viewed Jalal as a liberator. The northern cities of Ani and Kars and the southern cities of Khlat and Manzikert were besieged unsuccessfully in 1226. Certain areas, such as Tiflis and Dvin, soon were retaken by the Caucasians, but Jalal al-Din continued devastating one or another section of Armenia until 1230, when he was decisively beaten near Erzinjan by a united force composed of troops of Malik Ashraf of Khlat, the Seljuk sultan of Rum, Cilician Armenian, and Crusader detachments. Jalal was murdered the next year by a Kurdish peasant. His raids and devastations had lasted seven years. Not only did he bring mass destruction of human life and property, but also famine and pestilence, since as contemporary historians noted, Jalal al-Din and his unruly troops frequently cut down fruit-bearing trees and vineyards and burned the crops. Furthermore, remnants of his mercenaries continued to practice banditry well into the 1230s in different parts of central Asia Minor. Following the deaths of King Georgi IV Lasha (1223) and Ivane Zakarian (1227), Christian Caucasia, already seriously weakened, was no longer able to offer united resistance against attackers, at the very moment when it was needed most.

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## ***The Mongol Conquest of Armenia***

The fourth thirteenth-century invasion of Armenia occurred in 1236. It was short and merciless, and confined to the northeastern and northern regions. In that year, the Mongol general Chormaghun, now established at the Mongol summer camp (*yayla*) in the Mughan plain of Azerbaijan, sent out detachments under various commanders to capture all the key fortresses in northeastern Armenia. Unlike the first appearance of the Mongols in the Caucasus, which had been for the pursuit of a fugitive, their reappearance now was for the purpose of conquest and occupation. On this occasion, the Mongols traveled with their families, carts, and [258] herds—their "portable economy." They also brought along sophisticated Chinese siege machinery,

rock-hurling and wall-battering devices. Upon receiving news of the return of the Mongols, the ruler of Georgia, Queen Rusudan (1223-1247) with many of the lords fled to the security of western Georgia, while others holed up in their fortresses. But no one was secure. The Mongols, having divided up the districts in advance, proceeded to take them one by one. Molar-*noyin* took the territories of Ivane's nephew Vahram of Gag. The Kiurikian fortresses of Matsnaberd and Nor Berd fell, and about the same time the clerical historians Vanakan and Kirakos Gandzaketsi were captured. Ghatagh-a-*noyin* took Gardman, Charek, Getabek, and Vardanashat. The Zakarid holdings of Lori fell, followed by Dmanis, Shamshulde, and Tiflis. *Atabeg* Avag Zakarian was among the first of the Caucasian notables to submit to the Mongols. He was rewarded and gifted by them, while he and his troops were used in the conquest of recalcitrant areas. Seeing that submission to the Mongols did not mean sudden death, the remaining princes went to them and were reinstated in their lands. The historian Vardan Arevetsi wrote that everything was surrendered to them in a short period, without toil or labor. Although the Mongols frequently spared cities that surrendered without a fight, surrender did not always elicit their sympathy. Fearing the harsh fate suffered by Ani, Kars surrendered but was devastated nonetheless. During the course of 1236, the Mongols subjugated by sword or treaty all of northeastern and northern Armenia. They met with no serious resistance anywhere.

The Mongol conquest of western and southern historical Armenia took place between 1242 and 1245. These lands, though inhabited by Armenians, were under the political domination of the Seljuks, or in the case of Khlat, of the Ayyubids. In 1242 the Mongol general Baiju-*noyin* took Karin/Erzerum after a siege of two months. Part of the population was massacred and part was led away into slavery. Participating in the Mongol campaigns in western Armenia were the lords of newly conquered eastern Armenia, who in a number of cases were able to ameliorate the lot of Armenians in some western cities. The Mongols spent the winter of 1243 at their base in Azerbaijan, but returned in springtime to crush the forces of the Seljuk sultan of Rum, Ghiyath al-Din Kai Khusrau, at Kose Dagh, near Erzinjan. The defeat of the Seljuks at Kose Dagh was an event of the greatest significance for the Armenians both locally and abroad in the independent state of Cilicia. Like dominoes, the remaining key cities of central Asia Minor fell: Erzinjan, Caesarea, Sebastia/Sivas, Melitene/Malatia, and Divrigi. In 1245 Baiju-*noyin* [259] captured Khlat, Amida, Edessa, and Nisibis. By that year the Armenian populations, be they in Caucasian Armenia, western Armenia, southern Armenia, or even Cilicia, were to a greater or lesser degree all formally under the overlordship of the Mongols.

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## ***The Mongol Domination***

During the more than one hundred years of Mongol domination, the Armenians experienced periods of benevolent, even enlightened rule and of capricious benighted misrule. The years from 1236 to 1250, though not without conflict, did not witness radical changes in Armenia's governing structure. Apparently, prior to 1243 no permanent formal taxes had been imposed on Armenia, the conquerors contenting themselves instead with the rich booty and plunder to be had from the many areas taken by military force. But in 1243 by command of the Great Khan Guyuk himself, taxes amounting to between one-thirtieth and one-tenth of value were imposed on virtually everything movable and immovable, and a heavy head tax of 60 silver drams was collected from males. The severity of the taxes and the brutal manner of their collection triggered an abortive uprising of the lords in 1248-1249. This rebellion, which was discovered by the Mongols while still in the planning stages, was crushed at the expense of human and animal lives and crops in numerous districts of northeastern Armenia and southern Georgia. Some of the arrested Armenian and Georgian conspirators, unable to raise the huge ransoms demanded for their release, were tortured or killed.

After the accession of the Great Khan Mongke (1251-1259), a thorough census was made of all parts of the empire from 1252 to 1257. The Iranian emir Arghun personally conducted the census of Caucasia in 1254, which significantly increased the tax burden. An administrative change regarding Armenia occurred in the mid-thirteenth century. This was the establishment of the Il-Khanid Mongol substate over the territory of Iran

and the inclusion of Caucasia into it, beginning in 1256. Prior to that time the Caucasus had formed a single administrative unit composed of five vilayets. Following the granting of Iran as a hereditary appanage to Hulegu Khan in 1256, Armenia experienced another shock caused by nomads on the move. First, Hulegu chose as his residence Mughan in Azerbaijan, which until then had been the camping grounds of Baiju-*noyin*. Hulegu ordered the latter and all the nomadic Mongol [260] and Turkmen warriors subordinate to him to evacuate the Caucasus, in order to create room for his own entourage. With considerable grumbling the displaced Baiju and his hosts moved westward, sacking the cities of Karin/Erzerum, Erzinga/Erzinjan, Sebastia/Sivas, Caesarea, and Konia as they went. Almost simultaneously some of Genghis-Khan's grandchildren descended on the Caucasus through the Caspian Gates in order to settle near their relation Hulegu. This unruly group also caused much damage as it traveled and extorted whatever it could from the sedentary population. The proximity of new powerful masters in 1256 in addition to the information obtained by them from the census of 1254 had yet another immediate ramification for the Caucasus. Now the *nakharars* were obliged to participate in all military ventures of the Il-Khanids on a regular basis, providing a specified number of troops yearly. Armenian and Georgian warriors fought in all the major Mongol campaigns in the Middle East from 1256 onward, which resulted in the deaths or enslavement of large numbers of Christian Caucasians abroad. Heavy taxation coupled with the onerous burden of military service in distant lands led to rebellion. The second Armeno-Georgian rebellion occurred between 1259 and 1261. Though of longer duration than the rebellion of 1248-1249, this one too eventually was brutally crushed.

In the 1260s the Caucasus became an occasional theater of warfare between the Il-Khanids and yet another Mongol state, that of the Golden Horde, centered in the lower Volga with its capital at Sarai. The organizer of this state, Berke-Khan (1257-1266), a devout Muslim, was outraged by the anti-Muslim policies of the shamanist Hulegu and especially by his massacre of the Muslim population of Baghdad in 1258. Not only did Berke and his successors attempt to infringe on the uncertain boundary between his realm and Hulegu's (i.e., the Caucasus), but they also entered into an alliance with the increasingly powerful Mamluk state in Egypt. The latter were the most ferocious enemies of the Il-Khanids in the Near East and the only power to have dealt the Mongols a severe military defeat there in 1260. During the decade of the 1260s, the Caucasus was invaded by forces of the Golden Horde in 1261 and 1265-1266. The Il-Khans were also faced with rebellions of Mongol chiefs resident in the Caucasus. For example, in 1268 one of Genghis-Khan's great-grandsons, Teguder, rebelled in the Caucasus. Teguder's holdings included parts of southern Georgia and the area around Lake Sevan in Armenia. Armeno-Georgian troops aided in the suppression of this rebellion, just as they had fought for the Il-Khans against Berke.

[261] The Mongols had a number of bases of support within Armenian society. Among these were the church hierarchy, the merchants, and certain of the lords who received special status and were Mongol favorites. Many of the Mongol generals and their wives were Nestorian Christians at the time of the invasion and sympathized with the Armenian Christians. In 1242, for example, they facilitated the return of Nerses (the Catholicos of Caucasian Albania/Aghuania) to his seat since "for a long while neither Nerses nor his predecessors had dared to circulate throughout the dioceses because of the bloodthirsty nation of Tajiks" (Kirakos Gandzaketsi, 1986). In 1248, when Catholicos Kostandin of Cilicia sent to Greater Armenia gifts and money for the monastery of St. Tadeos, the work was expedited by the Mongols. In the early 1250s Smbat Orbelian received a decree "freeing all the churches of Armenia and the priests" (Orbelian, 1859), and with encouragement from General Baiju's Christian wife, Smbat renovated Siunik's religious seat, Tatev. According to Arghun's census of 1255, neither church nor clergy was to be taxed, though the sources report numerous instances of illegal exactions from both throughout the remainder of the century. Mongol religious policy was quite complex and underwent numerous shifts. For example, at the time of the census conducted by Arghun and Buqa (1243), Muslims were used to terrorize Christians. Yet in 1258, during the siege of Baghdad, the Mongols encouraged the Christians in their army brutally to exterminate the city's Muslim population. But in retaliation for the Caucasian rebellion of 1259 to 1261, Mongols destroyed churches and the Georgian catholicosate itself, and the emir Arghun (himself a Muslim) had the Christian prince Hasan

Jalal tortured to death for failure to apostatize. Clearly, Mongols adroitly used the Christians in Muslim areas and the Muslims in Christian areas for espionage and maintenance of terror.

Armenian merchants (the *metsatuns*) were another base of support for Mongol rule during the thirteenth century. During the period of the invasions, the Mongols took some pains to prevent caravans from being attacked. At the time of the destruction of Karin/Erzerum (1242), special consideration was shown to wealthy Armenians there. The support of the merchants derived from such special treatment and from the huge profits they earned by participating in international trade. Merchants in the Mongol Empire, which united the Far and Near East, carried on a brisk and lucrative trade with the West. During the Mongol period, maritime trade expanded as the Italian states of Genoa and Venice founded trading centers along the north shore of the Black Sea. The cities [262] of Tabriz and Sultanieh in Azerbaijan were also major trading centers where Genoese and Venetian merchants had their offices. The main caravan route through Asia Minor ran from Ayas (in Cilician Armenia) through Sebastia/Sivas, Erzinga/Erzincan, and Karin/Erzerum, to Tabriz. Another important route went from Tabriz through Khoi, Arjesh, Manazkert, Karin/Erzerum to Trebizond on the Black Sea. Exported were spices, silks, gems, drugs, and other Oriental luxuries; imported were woolen cloths, linen, furs, and other manufactured goods from the West. Armenian merchants were to be found at all points along the trade routes. Ayas, the point of departure for the Far East, was a city of Cilician Armenia; there were also concentrations of Armenian merchants at Trebizond, Tabriz, Sultanieh, in Central Asia, and the Far East, and in the cities of southern Russia, the north shore of the Black Sea, and throughout Italy. Because of their far-flung connections, Armenian merchants sometimes were used by Mongol officials as couriers. It is interesting that there also seems to have been a large number of Armenian clerics present at the courts of the khans and along many of the major stops across Asia to the Far East. The majority of these were engaged in translational activity and/or serving the needs of the families of Armenian merchants. The favorable economic situation for the merchants finds reflection in the inscriptions carved on the walls of churches and other structures erected by their wealth. These inscriptions mention tens of thousands of "red [gold] ducats" lavished on the construction and maintenance of new and existing structures. References to Italian ducats in inscriptions from the mid and late thirteenth century confirm the continuing ties of these merchants with the Italian city-states.

Another group that served as a base of support for the Mongol regime consisted of certain prominent lords whose allegiance was directly to the Mongols. Such favorites, in Armenia as well as in other parts of the Mongol Empire, were given *inju* status, which meant that they paid taxes and fulfilled other obligations directly to their Mongol patrons. The effect of this practice was the same in the Caucasus as elsewhere, namely, the detachment of certain powerful lords from the preexisting political arrangements. If before the Mongol domination the lords of northeastern Armenia were subject to the Zakarids, who were subject to the Georgian crown, the Mongols now altered this arrangement by attaching these lords directly to themselves. The best known example of this involved the Armenian Orbelians of Siunik. Smbat Orbelian was granted *inju* status by Mongke-Khan in 1252 on a trip to the Far East. Another prince who apparently received *inju* status from [253] Mongke was Hasan Jalal (ca. 1257) of Khachen. Around 1273 the Georgian lord Sargs Jaqeli also received *inju* status. During the same decade the cities of Kars, Telavi, Belakan, "and many other lands" were separated from royal Georgian control and given by the Mongols to their favorite, Sadun Artsruni/Mankaberdeli.

During the thirteenth century the Mongols managed successfully to keep the lords divided and frequently absent from the area entirely. Dividing the lords was never difficult. The Mongols were adroit at exploiting antagonisms existing within branches of the same family. Thus to punish Avag Zakarian (ca. 1243), his lands were given to his more loyal cousin Shahnshah. The Georgian royal Bagratid dynasty was another family neutralized. Eventually sanctioning two monarchs, the Mongols effectively divided the kingdom and the royal treasury, expropriating one-third of it for themselves (1250s). In the 1260s and 1270s the Mongols furthered the territorial and political ambitions of the Orbelians and Artsrunis at the expense of the Zakarids and the

Georgian Bagratid dynasty. Finally, at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Mongols elevated a Jaqeli to the Georgian throne. In addition to the manipulation of *nakharar* precedence, the Mongols were able to divide the lords by creating conflicts of loyalty. With the aim of destroying the ties that had existed between the lords and the Georgian court, the Mongols incorporated certain prominent *nakharars* into their own court and administration. This is especially visible after 1256, the year in which Hulegu became Il-Khan in Iran, when Caucasian nobles were actually given symbolic offices within Hulegu's court. Cooptation of allegiance was furthered by inter-marriage between the Mongols (or officials in the Il-Khanid administration in Iran) and the Caucasian nobility. The Christian Caucasian literary sources mention eight examples of this, and the Cilician sources mention a number of Cilician Armenian notables who had Mongol spouses.

The absence of prominent lords from the Caucasus resulted from two Mongol requirements. First was the obligation of the two- to three-year journey to their capital, Kara Korum, in Mongolia, and later to Tabriz in Iran, which the Mongols insisted on for important lords. Throughout the thirteenth century, prominent Armenian lords frequently were traveling to the East. Often trips were undertaken voluntarily to advance personal interests or to resolve some local business. In any case, the effect was the removal from Armenia of the most powerful (and potentially the most dangerous) lords. In the absence of certain grandees, other lords could and did attempt to encroach upon the lands [264] and rights of their rivals. The absence of Armenian lords from their native habitats also resulted from the obligation of the lords to participate with their cavalry in Mongol campaigns. Usually forced to fight as advance attackers, the Caucasian troops had a simple choice facing them: life and the spoils of victory, or death from defeat or attempted desertion. The lords and their troops were taken on campaigns all over the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. The stringent requirements involved in participating in Mongol campaigns were a major cause of the princes' rebellion of 1259 to 1261. It is true that the Mongols placed considerable trust in certain Armenian lords, such as *amirspasalar* Shahnshah's son Zakare and Prosh Khaghbakian, who aided in the capture of Baghdad (1258). The honors bestowed upon the noted military man Tarsayich Orbelian by Abaqa Khan are also noteworthy. However, often the Caucasians suffered decimation. In 1261 many Armenian and Georgian warriors died when the Mongol general Kitbuqa's army in Egypt was wiped out. Prince Sevada Khachentsi was killed in the battle for Mayyafarikin. In 1261-1262 the young prince Burtel Orbelian died in the North Caucasus, fighting Hulegu's enemy, Berke. Caucasians died in the war between Arghun Khan and Baraq in the mid-1260s in Central Asia. In the late 1270s Caucasians suffered dreadful losses during the Mongols' ill-conceived campaigns in Gilan, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Participation in Mongol campaigns resulted in more than the deaths of thousands of men. In the absence of the *nakharar* warlords, the Caucasus was left without committed defenders to protect it from the persistent raids and sorties of Mongol, Turkmen, and local rebels.

Despite the serious shortcomings of life under the Mongols, for most of the thirteenth century Armenian culture developed freely. This was due as much to the generally free status of the church as to the largesse of the lords and merchants. In the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, there were a number of large monastic complexes where clerics were educated and where the many manuscripts surviving from this period were written, copied, and illuminated. Among the flourishing monasteries were Ayrivank, Sanahin, Haghpat, Nor Getik (Goshavank), Khoranashat, Kayenadzor, Khor Virap, Kecharuyk, and Gladzor. This last institution was founded by a student of the historian Vardan Areveltsi in the 1280s, and is described as a "university" in a colophon dating from 1321. Possessing at least nine professors and some fifteen lecturers, Gladzor's rise and decline followed that of its patrons, the Proshians and Orbelians. [265]

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## ***The Collapse of the Il-Khans***

The reign of Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) is regarded by scholars as a watershed, during which important changes took place in the Mongol Empire. Some changes, such as fiscal reforms, did not take root among

Ghazan's successors. Others, such as the Islamization of the Mongols, were of a permanent nature. A fundamental problem was that the economic system of the nomads was incompatible with the agricultural and mercantile economy of Armenia. In the thirteenth century the Mongols had expropriated for their own use vast tracts of land across the Armenian highlands, taking certain choice farming areas for summer and winter pasturage for their herds. The slopes of the Aragats Mountains, and the areas of Vayots Dzor, parts of the plain of Ayrarat, and areas around Karin/Erzerum, Van, Berkri, and Baghesh/Bitlis became summer *yaylas*, while Vaspurakan, the Ayrarat plains, and the Kharberd/Kharpert region were used for wintering places. Formerly these areas had been under intensive agricultural development, but increasingly in the late thirteenth and in the fourteenth century they became semidesert. Parts of southern and western Armenia were used almost solely for animal husbandry. The Mongols and Turkmen nomads used the area between Erzinjan, Baiburt, and Sebastia/Sivas, and areas around Van and in Diarbekir for these purposes also. Not only was good farmland allowed to desiccate, but with the mass enslavements and deportations of whole villages, there were fewer farmers; and with the theft of livestock, remaining farmers often were deprived of their only source of power for pulling the plow.

The severity of Mongol tax policies had been responsible for both Armenian rebellions of the thirteenth century. Not only was the rate of taxation high, but the manner in which taxes were collected was brutal. Beyond the difficulties posed by "legal" taxes were the problems of the illegal exactions. Such extraordinary taxes demanded by local Mongol officials and/or rebels included money and goods. The billeting of Mongol couriers and envoys in Armenian villages was another draining abuse decried in the sources. Ghazan attempted to stem the deterioration of the central government's control over its officials, but by the early fourteenth century, it was too late. The last Il-Khan, Abu Sa'id (1316-1335), futilely attempted to forbid the practices that were destroying the population and the countryside. A revealing inscription of this khan, carved on the wall of Ani's Manuche mosque, describes the situation: "[In the past] taxes were collected and force was used...the place [266] started to become deserted, men from among the common people scattered, the elders of the city and of the province because of the taxes...abandoned their possessions real and movable and their families, and went away." The breakdown of economic life in the early fourteenth century was accompanied by increasing religious intolerance. With the Islamization first of Ahmad Khan (1282-1284) and then with Ghazan's conversion to Islam, Christianity quickly passed from the status of a favored religion to that of a tolerated religion. Anti-Christian persecutions began almost at once. Though checked during part of Ghazan's reign, they became the rule rather than the exception under his intolerant successors. In the Caucasus, anti-Christian persecution was launched with the plundering and killing expeditions of the fanatical Muslim zealot Nauruz (1295-1296) during the reign of Ghazan Khan. Although Nauruz eventually was hunted down and executed at Ghazan's command, with Christian Caucasians gleefully participating, the situation never reversed itself. Religious persecution intensified during the second part of the reign of Ghazan's successor, his brother Muhammad Khuda-Banda (1304-1316). In 1307 Khuda-Banda resumed collection of the *jizya*, or head tax on non-Muslims, something Ghazan had tried but was obliged to discontinue. The sources report that even month-old children were registered for payment of the *jizya*. In the 1320s Grigor, bishop of Karin/Erzerum, was killed after refusing to convert. In 1334 Christians were obliged to wear special blue badges as a visible indicator of their subordinate status. The requirement of the blue badge, kerchief, or hat to set the Christians apart from Muslims was observed by the Bavarian captive Johann Schiltberger around 1400, and so was a feature of the entire fourteenth century.

Following the death of Abu Sa'id in 1335, nine years of internecine warfare broke out among various nomadic elements vying for power. Between 1335 and 1344 no less than eight khans were enthroned, only to be deposed or murdered shortly afterward. But the collapse of the Il-Khans, far from signaling freedom from oppressive rule for the Armenians, meant only that their land now became the theater of warfare for the various new contenders. During the first part of the fourteenth century, the first set of new contenders consisted of two nomadic clans, the Jalayirids and the Chobanids. As a result of warfare between these tribes, parts of southwestern Armenia were ravaged. The Chobanid Malik Ashraf turned his wrath on the remnants

of the once-great Armenian noble houses in Ani and Bjni, decimating them in the early [267] 1350s. The rule of the Chobanids was ended by another northern invasion, from Khan Jani Beg of the Golden Horde (1357). The latter part of the fourteenth century was occupied by warfare between two new contenders, the Kara Koyunlu Turkmens and the Ottomans. The Ottomans were part of the Oghuz tribesmen who had first come into Asia Minor in the eleventh century, but greatly increased with new arrivals during the thirteenth century. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Ottoman entity had emerged as the strongest of the many small states to arise on the ruins of the Sultanate of Rum. Throughout the fourteenth century the Ottomans continued to expand at the expense of other Turkmen principalities. Toward the end of the century, they controlled areas of western Armenia, such as Sebastia/Sivas, Erzinga/Erzinjan, and Melitene/Malatia.

The confused situation thus created in the Caucasus and Asia Minor did not go unnoticed by Khan Tokhtamysh of the Golden Horde. In 1385, with an army of 50,000, he invaded Azerbaijan via Darband and Shirvan. After taking Tabriz, his marauding army divided into sections, one group going via Marand to Nakhichevan and Siunik, which was plundered from south to north. Khan Tokhtamysh's divided army reunited in Karabagh and then returned north via Shirvan. With them went 200,000 slaves, including tens of thousands of Armenians from the districts of Parskahayk, Siunik, and Artsakh.

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## ***The Timurid Invasions***

In 1386-1387, 1394-1396, and 1399-1403, Armenia was subjected to what were perhaps the most brutal invasions yet. These were led or directed by the lame warlord Timur (Tamerlane) and constituted the last major invasions of the Armenian highlands from Central Asia. During the first Timurid invasion of 1386-1387, Nakhichevan was captured and the fortress of Ernjak was besieged (though it did not surrender until 1401). The towns and fortresses of Karbi, Bjni, Garni, Surmari, and Koghb fell, and the districts of Ayrarat and Lesser Siunik were devastated. Tiflis was taken and sacked. After wintering in Mughan in Azerbaijan, Timur's generals crossed into the Kajberunik and Chapaghjur districts of southern and southwestern historical Armenia, where they fought unsuccessfully against the Kara Koyunlu Turkmens. Some Timurid detachments reached as far north as Karin/Erzerum, looting, pillaging, and taking slaves as they went. In 1387 Timur besieged the [268] emir Ezdin at Van. When he took the citadel after a month's besiegement, the women and children were enslaved, while some 7,000 males of all faiths were killed by being hurled from the walls. After Timur left Asia Minor in 1387, severe famine ensued. Due to the disruptions he had caused, crops were not planted, and now there was nothing to harvest. Cannibalism was reported in some areas.

In 1394 Timur returned. Entering western historical Armenia from northern Mesopotamia, he took Erzinjan, parts of Basen district, and Avnik fortress. Kars, Surmari, Koghb, Bagaran, and Ayrarat were ravaged, and the Kara Koyunlu Turkmen areas, centered at Arjesh north of Lake Van, were attacked. At this point Timur turned upon Khan Tokhtamysh of the Golden Horde, who had been raiding Shirvan. The Timurids defeated Tokhtamysh and sacked his principal cities of Astrakhan and Sarai. Timur appointed Miran, his half-mad son, as governor of Iran, Iraq, Armenia, and other parts of the Caucasus. In 1396 Miran continued operations against Ernjak in the south and expanded warfare against the Kurdish emir of Bitlis. In 1397 southern Vaspurakan was ravaged and Ani in the north fell. Strangely, all powers of resistance had not been completely broken by the Timurids. In 1399 King Giorgi VII of Georgia attacked the Timurid besiegers of Ernjak fortress, temporarily freeing those inside from the thirteen-year siege. But when Timur learned about this, he left Samarkand and headed for the Caucasus. In revenge, he attacked northeastern Armenia and southern Georgia, killing, destroying, and taking slaves. More than 60,000 Caucasians were led into slavery this time (in 1400), and many districts in northern Armenia were depopulated. Subsequently, Timur headed for western historical Armenia, where he took Sebastia/Sivas and Melitene/Malatia from his arch enemies, the Ottomans. After conquering Aleppo, Damascus, Mardin, and Baghdad, Timur decisively beat and captured the Ottoman

sultan, Sultan Bayazid II, in 1402. The next year Georgia was invaded again and its king finally submitted to Timur. During 1403-1404 Timur wintered in Karabagh before returning to Samarkand, where he died in 1405.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the condition of the Armenians of central and eastern Asia Minor was bleak. Information on this period derives from the *History of Tovma Metzopetsi* (d. 1446), from colophons, and from the accounts of foreign travelers. Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazvini, the accountant-general of Iran, noted the decline of the cities and towns in Caucasia and across the Armenian highlands in his day (1340). Speaking of Georgia and Abkhazia, he stated that [269] "revenues in the time of their native kings amounted to near 5,000,000 dinars of the present currency; but in our times the government only obtains 1,202,000 dinars." About Rum, which embraced western historical Armenia, he said: "Its revenues at the present day amount to 3,300,000 dinars as set down in the registers; but during the time of the Seljuks they were in excess of 15,000,000 dinars of the present currency." The walls of Sebastia/Sivas were in ruins; Avnik was in ruins; Baiburt "was a large town; it is now but a small one"; Mush, "in former times a large city, but now a ruin"; Berkri, "a small town, that was a large place formerly." Khlat "is the capital of this province [Greater Armenia] and its revenues in former days amounted to near 2,000,000 dinars of the present currency; but now the total sum paid is only 390,000 dinars" (Qazvini, 1919). Until the Seljuk invasions, Siunik had some 1,000 villages, while at the end of the thirteenth century the figure had declined to 677 villages. According to Samvel Anetsi and Matthew of Edessa, the former Artsruni kingdom in Vaspurakan had over 4,000 villages, but thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors speak of that area with distress, as if describing a desert. Furthermore, in the 1350s the trade routes shifted away from the northern cities of Ani and Kars, to the southern cities of Khlat, Mayyafarikin, and Arjesh, helping to impoverish northeastern Armenia.

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, the Armenian Church and especially its hierarchy was under attack. In 1387-1388, Stepanos, archbishop of Sebastia/Sivas, was executed for refusing to convert to Islam. His monastery of St. Nshan was transformed into a dervish sanctuary, and other churches were demolished. In 1393-1394, Catholicos Zakaria of Aghtamar and Teodoros, the catholicos of Sis, both were executed. Between 1403 and 1406, according to the Spanish ambassador Clavijo, Timur demolished the churches of Erzinjan and Bekarich. In addition to attacks from without, the Armenian Church was suffering from internal division at the end of the fourteenth century. The influence of Roman Catholicism, which had been growing on the Cilician Armenian clergy during the thirteenth century, led to a break between Echmiadzin and Sis during the tenure of Catholicos Hakob of Sis (1327-1341, 1355-1359). But by mid century the Dominicans had won over to Catholicism the influential Hovhannes Krnetsi of southern Siunik, who began attracting to Catholicism his former classmates. The fight against the Armenian Catholics of Krna preoccupied the Armenian Church leadership for much of the fourteenth century. During the reign of Catholicos Hakob, matters had deteriorated to the point that the [270] Cilician catholicos supported Krna's efforts against Echmiadzin. Another source of jurisdictional conflict in the fourteenth century was the catholicosate (or anticatholicosate) of Aghtamar.

At the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, a few small Armenian principalities still existed. These were in the same areas that had withstood previous invaders and owed their semiautonomy to the forbidding mountainous terrain: areas of Vayots Dzor, Siunik, Artsakh, Gugark, Rshtunik, Mokk, Sasun, and Mush. The Timurids preserved the Orbelians in Siunik, the Dopians in Tsar, the Proshians in Vayots Dzor and Shahapunik. However, the circumstances of the Armenian lords were far from easy. Most were under constant pressure to convert to Islam. Tovma Metzopetsi as well as foreign travelers described the plight of the remaining lords:

During the first year of his reign [Umar, Timur's grandson], he forcibly made to apostatize three princes of our people who had remained like a tiny cluster of grapes among us: the son of Ivane and grandson of Burtel, Burtel, *ter* (lord) of Orotan, of the Orbelian family; his brother Smbat whom they took with his family to Samarqand (but subsequently, through divine mercy and their prayers

they returned to their patrimony); the *ter* of Eghegis named Tarsayich, son of Gorgon they caused to apostatize; the *ter* of Maku they detached from the false and diophysitic [beliefs] of Aghtarmayutiun [Roman Catholicism], and the son of an *azat* named Azitan from Aghtsuats village in the Ayraratiān district. Later, however, they repented and became true Believers in Christ and heirs of the Kingdom. (Tovma Metzopetsi, 1987)

The same sources refer to Crypto-Christianity, the observance of Christianity in secret. Other lords converted. Clavijo and Tovma Metzopetsi both mention the Armenian prince Taharten, governor of Erzinjan. His son by a daughter of the emperor of Trebizond was a Muslim and (perhaps because of his faith) Timur's governor of the same city. Another probable Armenian lordly convert to Islam is the emir Ezdin of Van, whom Tovma Metzopetsi described as being "of the line of King Senekerim," that is, of some Artsruni background (1987).

As a result of the unsettled, unsafe times, some lords of completely impregnable fortresses, unable to maintain themselves in any other way, turned to banditry. Prime sources of loot were the increasingly rare caravans passing over the bandits' lands, or even booty captured from [271] Timurids and Turkmens. Sometimes bandit lords operated alone, sometimes in alliance with others, Christian or Muslim. Tovma Metzopetsi speaks of one such mixed group of Kurdish Muslim and Armenian Christian brigands from Sasun and Khut that looted a Timurid camp in southwestern Armenia in the early 1390s. The Spanish ambassador Clavijo encountered Caucasian bandits both en route to Erzinjan from Trebizond in 1403, and on his return, again in northwestern Armenia and southwestern Georgia: "for though they are Armenians and profess to be Christians, all are robbers and brigands; indeed they forced us, before we were let free to pass, to give a present of our goods as toll for right of passage" (Clavijo, 1928).

Despite the extremely bleak situation across the Armenian highlands at the end of the fourteenth century, the sources still report a few instances of secular and clerical Armenian lords enjoying some influence with the Timurids. Among the secular rulers belong the unnamed woman ruler of Igdır castle mentioned by Clavijo and the Armenian lord of Bayazit. Another such lord was the Roman Catholic Nur ad-Din, mentioned earlier. Among the clerical lords enjoying some influence with the Timurids belong the director of Metzop monastery, Hovhannes, and the noted intellectual, *vardapet* Grigor Tatevatsi (Gregory of Tatev), who was a confidant of Timur's son, Miran.

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## Additional Resources, 11th-14th Centuries

### Internet Archive:

[Turco-Mongolica](#)

[Armenian History and Some Turco-Mongolica at Internet Archive](#)

[Studies by Speros Vryonis, Jr.](#)

[Cilician Armenia](#)

[Crusades](#)

[The 10th-12th Centuries](#), from the *Chronicle of Michael Rabo* [Michael the Syrian].

[The Late 12th Century](#), from the *Chronicle of Michael Rabo* [Michael the Syrian].

[The Trade and Cities of Armenia After the Fall of the Bagratid Kingdom](#), by Hagop Manandian.

## Wikipedia:

[12th Century](#)

[13th Century](#)

[14th Century](#)

## Encyclopaedia Iranica:

[Central Asia](#), multiple topics and authors.

[Saljuqs of Rum](#), by Andrew Peacock.

[Danishmend](#), by Tahsin Yazici.

[Khwarazmshahs](#), by C. Edmund Bosworth.

[Jalal al-Din Mengubirdi](#), by C. Edmund Bosworth.

[Mongols](#), by Peter Jackson.

[The Ilkhans](#), multiple authors.

[Alamūt](#), by B. Hourcade.

[Golden Horde](#), by Peter Jackson.

[Chobanids](#), 1335-1357, by Charles Melville and 'Abbās Zaryāb.

## Maps/Texts, by Robert H. Hewsen, at Internet Archive:

[11th-14th Centuries, Eastern Armenia](#). Eastern Armenia under the Saljuqs/Seljuks (11th-12th centuries), under the Georgians (1199-1236), Armenia according to Idrisi's map (1156), and Armenia under the Mongol Ilkhans (1256-1335).

[11th-14th Centuries, Cilician Armenia](#). Texts and maps of Cilician Armenia as a [Barony \(1080-1198/1199\)](#) and a [Kingdom \(1197-1375\)](#).

## Chronological Tables

The following modern chronological tables are attached to the pdf version:

Rulers of Armenia and of Eastern and Western Empires

Rulers of Mongol Empires

**Chronological Tables**, prepared by Robert Bedrosian, at Internet Archive:

[Armenia and Neighbors](#).