

## The Split of Power in the Khwārazmshāh Dynasty on the Eve of the Mongol Conquests

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This study investigates why Khwārazmshāh's rulers abandoned Khwārazm, their capital before the Mongols invaded this city. From a local dynasty in Khwārazm under the Saljuqs, the Khwārazmshāh dynasty (ca.469-628/1077-1231) rapidly expanded in the region. After conquering the Saljuqs (ca.429-590/1037-1194), they extended their territory from Hamedān in western Iran to Samarqand in Transoxiana and beyond that to Otrār to become one of the world's great medieval empires. During this critical time, Khwārazm remained their central hub of power. However, the split in the power of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty under Sultan Muhammad (ca.596-617/1200-1220) contributed to their failure to recognize the strategic role of Khwārazm in retaining and reconstructing their power. In essence, the Khwārazmshāh state was divided before the Mongol Invasion.

**Keywords:** Khwārazmshāh Dynasty, Khwārazm, Khorāsān, Transoxiana, Jebāl, Mongol Invasions.

## Introduction

The Mongol invasion was a devastating war against established dynasties, including the Khwārazmshāhs that were expanding their rule in Eastern Islamic territories. Apart from the complexities of these conquests and defeats, the Khwārazmshāh's abandonment of Khwārazm to the Mongols despite its optimal geographical conditions and human resources is incomprehensible. Khwārazm was left to its own devices while the Khwārazm-shāh fled for his life, and the Mongols crushed the cities of Khorāsān and central Iran (Jebāl) from one end to the other.

The position of Khwārazm in the formulation of Khwārazmshāh's power and its defeat at the hands of the Mongols needs to be examined critically. Throughout the entire Khwārazmshāh's reign, Khwārazm remained the physical locus of the dynasty's power. Establishing the main military tools of power in the region, the Khwārazmshāhs launched their campaigns from there to the whole empire. Khwārazm was intended to play a crucial role in launching defensive campaigns against the devastating invasions of Mongols throughout Transoxiana,<sup>1</sup> Khorāsān and central Iran (Jebāl). However, Khwārazm was not only unable to defend other regions, but it was also left defenseless before the raging troops of Mongols. Sultan Muhammad, the Khwārazmshāh's ruler, escaped from the Mongols like a head severed from its body, fruitlessly searching for an alternative locus of power in other parts of his territories. After the Mongol capture of Khwārazm in ca. 618/1222, Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn (ca.617-628/1220-1231), Sultan Muhammad's son, was in turn unable to anchor his reign in any other region.

The Khwārazmshāh dynasty has been understudied in history despite many available sources. One problematical portion of studies dealing with the dynasty focuses primarily on the Mongols. Judith Kolbas (2006) in *The Mongols in Iran* and Bertold Spuler in *Die Mongolen in Iran* (1985) go directly to the Mongol invasions and the circumstances of their rule. These studies present only a shadowy picture of the power of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty in Khwārazm, Transoxiana, and Khorāsān. *Through original sources, Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion* by Vasily Barthold (1968) provides a comprehensive account of the conquest of Khwārazm by the Mongols. However, it does not identify or explain any of the dramatic reasons for the absence of Sultan Muhammad from his capital before its conquest. *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History* by Michal Biran (2005) contributes to an understanding of some phases of the Khwārazmshāh's relationships with the Ghurids (ca.1148-1215) and, specifically, the Qarā-Khetāy Khanate in the east and the position of their capital concerning these two neighbors. Spotlighting Khwārazm, Bosworth's entry on Khwārazm in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* provides a detailed description of the historical geography of Khwārazm. Juergen Paul (2007-2008) in "The Role of Khwārazm in Saljuq Central Asian Politics, Victories and Defeats: Two Case Studies" critically analyses the position of Khwārazm under the Eurasian empires of the Ghaznavids and the Saljuqs. He argues that under the Ghaznavids and especially the Saljuqs, the rulers over Khwārazm experienced difficulties in staying loyal to their Khorāsāni overlords. They usually acted as sponsors or partners

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<sup>1</sup> Transoxiana is comprised of present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and southwest Kazakhstan.

of groups of nomads in search of new pasture or booty. As a result, the loss of control over Khwārazm contributed to the downfall of the Khorāsāni empires. In his monograph, Z.M. Bunatov (1986), *Gosudarstov Khorezmskikh-Anushteginidov* monograph translated into English in 2015 under the title of *A History of the Khorezmi State under Anushteginids* (1097-1231) examines the state of the Khwārazmshāhs under the Anushteginids. He introduces the origins of the Khwārazmshāhs from the time of Anushtegin, the ancestor of the dynasty, until the collapse of this dynasty by the Mongols. Also, he provides a detailed chapter on the fate of the exiled Khwārazmians.

This paper assesses the reasons for the collapse of Khwārazm, not from the perspective of the Mongol power assault but from the internal conditions of the Khwārazmshāhs before the Mongol invasions. It examines the collapse of Khwārazm concerning the two salient factors: the geographical position of this capital and the internal split in the power of the Khwārazmshāhs. It examines whether the geographical position of Khwārazm as a city on the margin of the Sultan's territories, resulting in the decentralization of their power, or the conflicts of the last rulers of the dynasty, led to the Khwārazmshāh's abandonment of Khwārazm before the Mongol invasions.

### **Khwārazm from Ancient Times to the Early Rule of the Khwārazmshāh Dynasty**

The geographical isolation of Khwārazm facilitated the optimal conditions for the Khwārazmshāh dynasty to achieve independence from the Saljuqs. Khwārazm /khārézm/ (خوارزم), also known as Chorasmia and now part of the separate countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan in western Central Asia, flourished in ancient and medieval times before the devastating Mongol invasions of the region in 618/1222.

Some medieval geographers, such as Ibn Hawqal, Jeyhāni, al-Istakhri, and al-Hamavi, considered Khwārazm's territory to include the western part of Transoxiana, the region between the Oxus (Jeyhun or the Āmu Daryā) and the Sir Daryā (Seyhun), which contained the cities of Bukhara, Samarqand, and Otrār (Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 2: 478-481; Al-Istakhri, 2004, 253; al-Hamavi, 1995, 5:45). On the other hand, because it was located on the northern edge of Khorāsān and shared much of its history with the prominent cities of Marv, Nesā, Sarakhs, Tus, and Neyshābur, some sources came to regard it as a part of greater Khorāsān (*Hodud al-'Ālam*, 2002, 70; Al-Istakhri, 2004, 217). Through the cities of Tabarestān, including Gorgān and Dahestān, Khwārazm was linked to the Māzandarān Sea (the present Caspian Sea). However, bordered to the south, west, and east by deserts separating it from Khorāsān and Transoxiana (Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 2: 512; Al-Istakhri, 2004, 253-254, 281; Bakri, 1992, 205), Khwārazm was predominantly identified as an area separate from the surrounding regions (Abol Fadā, 1971, 556-562). Isolated geographically by deserts, Khwārazm could easily maintain a separate political existence (Al-Istakhri, 2004, 8). On the other hand, this same condition made it difficult for Khwārazm to be the center of an empire whose rule spread throughout Transoxiana and Khorāsān.

The rich agricultural and commercial conditions of Khwārazm strengthened its status compared to adjacent areas. It owed its rich agricultural state and blessed fertility (Jeyhāni, 1991, 183; *Maqdasi*, 1990, 287-288; Al-Istakhri, 2004, 281; Bosworth, 108; Prostov, 140-142) to the Oxus, a navigable river (Jeyhāni, 1991, 183; Le Strange, 1930, 443) that crossed Khwārazm and flowed to the Ārāl Sea (Daryā-ye Khwārazm) in northern Khwārazm (Jeyhāni, 1991, 183; *Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 28; al-Hamavi, 1995, 5: 211; Le Strange, 1930, 443-444). Located on the bank of the Oxus, Khwārazm suffered inevitably from the seasonal floods of the Oxus, but on the other hand, its waterways and canals were impermeable barriers to invaders. Khwārazm through Khorāsān was connected to the commercial route of the Silk Road stretching from China in the east to Europe in the west. For this reason alone, significant wealth found a home in the region (Eqbāl, 1962, 41).

Khwārazm featured the two main cities of Kāth (*Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 138; al-Hamavi, 1995, 2: 395-396; Jeyhāni, 1991, 183) on the east and *Gorgānj* (Jeyhāni 1991, 183; *Gorgānj* was called *fil* (the Elephant) before the Arab invasion of Khwārazm, and *Mansura* (the City of Victory) after the Arabs conquered it, (Ibn Khordādbeh, 1889, 33; Abol Fadā, 1971, 392; al-Hamavi, 1995, 2: 122& 2: 395; Le Strange, 1930, 447-448) on the west of the Oxus. *Gorgānj* (Le Strange 1930, 446), which was called Jorjāniya after the Arab invasions (*Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 138; Bakri, 1992, 231; Al-Istakhri, 2004, 299) and *Urganj* that was the former center of Khwārazm (*Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 27; *Maqdasi*, 1990, 258; Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 2:514; Abol Fadā, 1971, 553; Jeyhāni, 1991, 182),<sup>2</sup> It gradually surpassed Kāth (*Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 138; Le Strange, 1930, 446; Bosworth, 2007, xlll; Frye and Sayili, 1943, 203) in both agricultural and commercial significance in the tenth to early thirteenth century (Al-Istakhri, 2004, 253-254; *Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 138; al-Hamavi, 1995, 2: 122& 4: 452 & 5: 45-47; Zakariyā Qazvini, 1995, 598; Le Strange, 1930, 448 & 459. Bosworth, 1980, 108; Chuvin, 2001, 172; Bosworth, 1973, 16; Ibn Hawqal 1938, 1: 102).<sup>3</sup> The people of Khwārazm, especially those of Jorjāniya, were known as strong fighters: “Jorjāniya is a large and crowded city whose people are mainly military-men; even the grocers, butchers, bakers, and cloth weavers are soldiers” (Qazvini, 1995, 598-599; Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 1: 102; *Hodud al-‘Ālam*, 2002, 138). This military strength was visible under the rule of Turk dynasties and particularly under the rule of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty, that readily exhibited its military power and played a critical role in the political scene of medieval times.

The geographical isolation and social and military potential of Khwārazm provided unique conditions for the semi-independence of Khwārazm throughout its history, from

<sup>2</sup> Kāth appears to have rapidly lost its position as the chief capital of Khwārazm probably because of the recurrently destructive Oxus floods, which threw down different quarters of the city and eventually it sank to be a town of secondary rank (Le Strange, 1930, 447; Chuvin, 2001, 172; Field and Prostov, 1948, 141-142).

<sup>3</sup> Khiva became the third capital of Khwārazm after *Gorgānj*, the capital of the Ma’munids (ca.385-619/995-1222), the governors of the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs, and the Khwārazm-shāhs of Anushtegin’s line. Kāth became the capital again during the 8th/14th century under the Chaghatāyid line of Mongols, while *Gorgānj* (subsequently called *Urganj*) was ruled by the Mongol line of the Golden Horde (V.V. Barthold, “Khiva” in E. Bosworth, 2007, 282-283); Khiva after the time of Teymur gradually eclipsed *Urganj* and became the capital of Khwārazm, giving its name in time to the whole province, 449.

ancient times to the time of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty (ca.469-628/1077-1231). Therefore it maintained an identity distinct from adjacent areas (Maqdasi, 1990, 258; Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 2: 347; Jeyhāni, 1991, 183; Biruni, 1973, 73, 312; Ibn Fondoq, 1983, 18; Ibn Balkhi, 212. Bosworth, 1973, 238-239). Biruni 1973, 363-440/973-1048), the mathematician, geographer, historian, and mineralogist born in Kāth, states that Khwārazm belonged to Afrāsiyāb, the mythical king whose territories were in turn conquered by Kay Khosrow, the mythical Iranian king. From his time on, all the rulers of Khwārazm called themselves Khwārazm-shāh (king of Khwārazm), simply imitating the Iranians, who called their rulers Irānshāh (king of Iran) (Biruni, 1973, 56-57; Bosworth, 1980, 108).<sup>4</sup> This report is rooted primarily in myth but points to the significance of Khwārazm as the boundary between Iran ruled by Irānshāh and Turāns ruled by Turks.

However, Biruni traces the beginnings of the political life of Khwārazm to about 1300 BC (Biruni, 1973, 56-57; Bosworth, 2005, 108) Before the Arab Umayyads had conquered it in ca.94/712 (Ya‘qubi, 2001, 94)<sup>5</sup> Khwārazm was a vassal kingdom of multiple Iranian empires from the Achaemenids (ca.550-330 BC) to the Sassanids (ca.224-651) (Bosworth, 2005, 108; Chuvin, 2001, 169; Field and Prostov, 1948, 13: 145; Spuler, 1950, 608-610). It maintained its social and political importance in medieval times while subject to the dynasties of the Samanids (ca.261-395/874-1004) (Ibn Khordābeh, 1889, 33; Gardizi, 1985, 374; Bosworth, 2005, 108), the Ghaznavids (ca.344-583/975-1187),<sup>6</sup> and the Saljuqs (Beyhaqi, 1996, 2: 669-670; Hosseini, 43, Khwāndmir, 2: 485; Ibn Fondoq, 1983, 51; Bosworth, 2007, 109). The Saljuqs appointed their most trusted emirs to rule Khwārazm to retain it as part of their territories. However, the geographical isolation of Khwārazm provided optimal conditions for this region to achieve independence during the Saljuqs and become the capital of a vast empire for the first time under the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. The cities of Khorāsān and Jebāl, including Ray were either under the rule of the Saljuqs or the Atabegs of Azerbaijan, the Ildegizid dynasty. So, it was Khwārazm that had the potential to be independent of the Saljuqs and the center of a new expanding dynasty.

The first Khwārazm-shāh of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty was Anushtegin Gharācha (d.ca.530/1135). He was an eminent *Gholām* (Slave Soldier) in the Saljuq court, who had been promoted to the rank of *shabna*, the titular governor of Khwārazm during the time of Sultan Malekshāh (r. ca.465-485/1072-1092), the most famous Sultan of the Saljuqs.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Khwārazm-shāh is a Pre-Islamic title for the governor of Khwārazm (Bosworth, 1980, 238).

<sup>5</sup> “Qotaybat Ibn Moslem, the Arab governor of Khorāsān invaded Khwārazm and wrought considerable destruction to the indigenous civilization. Therefore, it came under Muslim suzerainty, but it was not until the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century that a Khwārazm-shāh was first converted to the new faith, assuming the traditional convert’s name of ‘Abdollah” (Bosworth, 2005, 108; Bosworth, 2007, xxxi).

<sup>6</sup> Sultan Mahmud, (970-1030), the Ghaznavid Sultan appointed Āltuntāsh, his Hājeb to the reign of Khwārazm in ca.408/1018. Āltuntāsh and his descendants ruled in Khwārazm to 432/1041 (Beyhaqi, 1996, 2: 718-731; Gardizi, 1985, 395; ‘Otbi, 274; ‘Ufi, 2007, 1: 388; Bosworth, 2005, 108; Bosworth, 2007, 208-209).

<sup>7</sup> “This Belkātekin purchased from *Gharbestān* a Turkish slave called Anushtegin Gharācha, who by dint of intelligence and sagacity gradually attained to greatness of rank, until he became an important official in the House of Saljuq, just as Seboktegin in the latter days of the Samanids and received the title of Basin-Holder

Anushtegin did not originate from Khwārazm, but the passing on of his governorship to his descendants consolidated the Khwārazmshāh's reign in the region. In comparison to the *Atabegs* of Azerbaijan and Fārs known as Salghurids, the Turkish emirs who were governors of provinces and charged with raising the crown prince, Anushtegin, as “the *shabna* of Khwārazm,” (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 2) had little authority in the region where he ruled. However, the inherent weakness of the Saljuq dynasty provided optimal conditions for the gradual realization of the independence of Khwārazm (Chuvin, 2001, 177). On the other hand, the geographical proximity between Khwārazm and Marv, the capital of the Saljuqs of Khorāsān, made conflicts between these two powers all but inevitable. Despite the skirmishes between the Khwārazmshāhs and the Saljuqs and between Atsez (ca.522-551/1128-1156) and Sanjar (ca.512-536/1118-1157), the great Saljuq Sultan in Khorāsān and Transoxiana,<sup>8</sup> Khwārazm remained a vassal of the Saljuqs.

### **Khwārazm as the Center in the Geographical Margin**

With Khwārazm under Takesh's rule (r.ca.568-596/1173-1200), the son of Arslān (ca.551-565/1156-1169) transformed it from a center of a local dynasty to the center of a vast dynasty from Transoxiana to Hamedān. But geographically, it was still at the margins of the territories the Khwārazmshāhs intended to rule. Its location at the outposts of the empire endangered the safety of Khwārazm. Takesh had to deal with other dynasties ruling in Transoxiana, Khorāsān, Jebāl, and western Iran to achieve his objectives.

One of the critical events that clarified the endangered position of Khwārazm was the Qarā-Khetāy invasion of Khwārazm under Atsez (491-551/1097-1156), Takesh's grandfather. The Eastern neighbor of Khwārazm prior to the Qarā-Khetāy's dominance was the Turkish Muslim dynasty of the Qarākhānids, also known as *Khāqāniyān* ('Aruzi, 1989, 46), *Khāniyān* (Mo'ezzi Neyshāburi, 2005, 5), *Ilak-Khāniyān* (Gardizi, 1985, 378; Barthold, 1987, 465-466) or *Āle Afrāsiyāb* (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 245) who governed Samarqand, Bukhara and, Otrār in Transoxiana. However, with the conquests of the Qarā-Khetāy, the dominance of the Qarākhānids in Transoxiana and the Khwārazmshāhs in Khwārazm was seriously challenged. The Turko-Mongol dynasty of Qarā-Khetāy Khanate, also known as Kidāns (Jowzjāni, 1984, 2: 94), Kitāns, and Khetāy (Joveyni, 2006, 1: 76), originated from Khetā in the eastern parts

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(*tasht-dār*). Now in those days, the expenses of the office were met by the revenues of Khwārazm, just as the expenses of the Wardrobe were paid from the revenues of Khuzestān.” Joveyni, 2006, 2: 1-2; tr. J.A Boyle, 1958, 1: 277-278; see also Shabānkāre'i, 2:134; Bosworth, 1980, 109, Bunyatov, 2015, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Having achieved the rule of Khwārazm, the Khwārazmshāhs embarked on the campaigns against the Saljuqs to achieve complete independence and spread their territories. In particular, it was Atsez, Anushtegin's son who launched multiple campaigns against Sanjar (Barthold, 1968, 324). The strategic position of Khwārazm and the military power of the Khwārazmshāhids necessitated Sultan Sanjar to be tolerant of the steady abjurations of Sultan Atsez. The expansionist policies of Atsez resulted in a climate of constant war. The multiple battles ended with a truce in ca.544/1149, which lasted for about 40 years only because of Atsez's successors' internal rivalries (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 5-10; Barthold, 1987, 324-325).

of central Asia at the northern borders of China. Balāsāqun in present Kyrgyzstan was their geographical locus of power where Gur-khān, the *Qarā Khetāy*'s rulers stationed (Jowzjāni, 1984, 2: 94).

After the relentless steady invasions of the Muslim world, they ultimately defeated the Qarākhānids in Transoxiana and then the Khwārazmshāh dynasty under Atsez in Khwārazm. But the great distance between Balāsāqun and the conquered territories made the Qarā Khetāy reinstate them to their former positions using tributes.<sup>9</sup> To this end, the envoys of the Qarā Khetāy came to the court of the Khwārazmshāhs to receive the annual tribute.<sup>10</sup> The envoys of the Qarā Khetāy insulted the Sultan of the Khwārazmshāhs by regarding the Khwārazmshāhs merely as a local dynasty and reinforcing Qarā Khetāy dominance over Khwārazm by demanding tribute.

Joveyni reports that the disrespect of Qarā-Khetāy's envoys towards the Sultan of Khwārazm caused Takesh to put one of them to death.<sup>11</sup> However, regardless of challenges in the relationship between the Khwārazmshāhs and the Qarā-Khetāys, Takesh continued to pay the annual tribute during his rule as a strategic move to maintain the safety of Khwārazm against the Qarā-Khetāy. The Qarā-Khetāy was the great wall behind which there were terrible foes (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 89; tr. 1: 357), the rising powers of Mongol tribes that the Sultan had no desire to deal with, particularly with its unknown possibility of danger to Khwārazm, which was vulnerable to their attacks. Instead, he took advantage of the military power of the Qarā-Khetāy to subjugate his rivals in Khorāsān.

According to Joveyni, however, the Qarā-Khetāy was not the only power that endangered the safety of Khwārazm. The conflicts between Takesh and Sultan-shāh, his brother who aimed to rise to power, threatened the capital throughout Takesh's reign, especially from the southern and eastern boundaries. Sultan-shāh, the elder son of Takesh who had been kept from the throne of Khwārazm (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 19- 20; Shabānkāre 'i, 2002 2002, 2: 137; Ibn Athir, 1979, 11, 381-382, Buniyatov, 2015, 30-31), invaded Khwārazm whenever Takesh left the capital. Sultan-shāh was supported by Mo'ayyed al-Din Ay Aba (ca.569/1174), the *Gholām* of Sanjar, who was stationed in Neyshābur (Joveyni, 2006, 2, 18-19; Shabānkāre 'i, 2002, 2, 137; Mostowfi, 1985, 487). After the defeat of Mo'ayyed al-Din Ay-Aba in Khorāsān by Takesh,<sup>12</sup> Sultan-shāh resorted to approaching other powers, including the remnants of the

<sup>9</sup> Joveyni, 2006, 2: 92; Ibn Athir, 1979, 11:1979,86; Kochnev, 1993, 106.

<sup>10</sup> "Atsez, the Khwārazm-shāh, sent an envoy to him, accepted allegiance to the Gur-khān, and agreed to pay a tribute of 3000 gold dinars, which he delivered thereafter every year in goods or cattle." Joveyni, 2006, 2: 88; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 277-278; Biran, 2005, 62.

<sup>11</sup> "As for Sultan Takesh, he had completed the restoration of order in Khwārazm, and the kingdom's affairs were in good trim. Meanwhile, the envoys of Khetāy were continually passing to and fro, and their constant impositions and demands were beyond endurance, and moreover, they did not observe the conventions of courtesy. Now the nobility of the soul necessarily refuses to tolerate oppression and will not bear to accept tyranny. The nature of a free soul is filled with pride! He caused one of the notables of Khetāy, who had come upon an embassy, to be put to death on account of his unseemly behavior; and there was an exchange of abuse between Takesh and the people of Khetāy" (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 19; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 292).

<sup>12</sup> Takesh with cementing his relationship with the Qarā-Khetāy through paying annual tributes, guaranteed the

Saljuqs in Neyshābur, the Ghurids,<sup>13</sup> and even the Qarā-Khetāy, to help him return to dominate Khwārazm. These invasions of Khwārazm were predicated on the fact that Takesh was engaged in dominating central and western Iran. Finally, encouraged by the caliph, Takesh conquered Ray in ca. 589/1193 and sent the head of Toghrol III to the court of Al-Nāser in Baghdad (Rāvandī, 1985, 368-369; Joveyni, 2006, 2: 30-32; Ibn Khaldun, 1995, 5: 127-128; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 301; Mostowfī, 1985, 468; Shabānkāre'ī, 2: 138).<sup>14</sup>

After all these persistent attempts, Khwārazm was the actual capital of three distinguished geographical territories of *Arāq-e 'Ajam*, namely Jebāl, Khorāsān, and Transoxiana, which had never been ruled by a dynasty stationed in Khwārazm. Retaining the safety of the capital was the primary concern of the Sultan. There is no evidence that Takesh had decided to move the capital from Khwārazm to any other city despite his conquests of the significant cities of Khorāsān and Jebāl. Therefore, unlike the Saljuqs, who had their center of power in Ray, Marv, and Isfahan, Khwārazm remained the sole center of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty under Takesh during the expansion of their territories in northern Khorāsān and Jebāl. During all his conquests, Takesh kept returning to Khwārazm in part because it was subject to constant invasions by the Khwārazmshāh claimants, including Sultan-shāh (Ibn Athir, 1979, 11: 377-84; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 302-3; Joveyni, 2006, 2: 22-30; Mostowfī, 1985, 488; Bunatov, 1986, 34-45; Biran, 2005, 62).

The military structure of Khwārazm, which the presence of Turkish military tribes had reinforced, turned Khwārazm into a barracks from which Takesh launched his campaigns. Thus, unlike Baghdad with the ruler in residence, Khwārazm was the barracks of the Khwārazmshāhs for use in launching campaigns against its rivals. Rather than simply being a Sultan ruling his territories from his capital in Khwārazm, Takesh was a military ruler who personally launched continual campaigns to expand his territory. He launched three campaigns in central and western Iran to dominate Ray and Hamedān (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 127). But in each of them, he had to return to Khwārazm to defend it against his brother, Sultan-shāh. He was completely aware that as long as he dominated Khwārazm he would be able to fend off Sultan-shāh's attacks in northern Khorāsān. Sultan-shāh, at one point, even dominated Khwārazm while Takesh headed on to conquer the Saljuqs in Ray.<sup>15</sup> Although

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safety of the eastern borders of Khwārazm and received military assistance from the Qarā-Khetāy against the Saljuqs (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 19-20; Shabānkāre'ī, 2002, 2: 137; Ibn Athir, 1979, 11, 381-382). In 588/1193, he ultimately defeated the Saljuqs in Marv and Neyshābur and dominated the northern areas of Khorāsān (Joveyni, 1958, 2: 25).

<sup>13</sup> With the military assistance of the Ghurids, Sultan-shāh plundered the main cities of the Khwārazmshāh, Tus, and Neyshābur (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 22, 25, 26-28).

<sup>14</sup> The Caliph Al-Nāser sent the decree of conquered territories in "Iraq, Turkestan, and Khorāsān" (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 43; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 152-153; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 301) to prevent him from attempting further conquests in western Iran and approaching Baghdad.

<sup>15</sup> "Meanwhile, as he returned, he was met on the road by scouts with the news that Sultan-shāh, taking advantage of his absence, had departed to lay siege to Khwārazm. Sultan Takesh hastened thither with great speed, but when he reached Dahestān, messengers arrived with the glad tidings that upon the news of his imminent homecoming Sultan-shāh had turned back. Arriving in Khwārazm the Sultan gave himself up to feasting during



Sultan-shāh's campaigns against Khwārazm ended with his death and the collapse of the remnants of the Saljuqs in Khorāsān in 589/1193 (Ibn Athir 1979, 11: 377-382 & 12: 107; Jowzjāni 1984, 1: 301; Joveyni, 2006, 2: 22-30; Z. M. Gosudarstvo, 1986, 38-45; Biran, 2005, 62; Mostowfi, 1985, 488), its border on Ghurids in Khorāsān still left Khwārazm on the verge of a serious threat (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 135-136).

## Khwārazm, the Capital in the Center of the Empire

The decentralization of Khwārazm, its location at the margin of the Empire, and its lack of safety, particularly in the absence of the Sultan, caused the Khwārazmshāhs to find more reliable ways to maintain their capital.<sup>16</sup> The Ghurid invasion of Khwārazm early in the reign of Sultan Muhammad (596-617/ 1200-1220) made the Khwārazmshāhs seriously aware of the vulnerability of their capital against their neighbors. The Ghurids were the first to challenge the dominance of Khwārazmshāhs in northern Khorāsān and even Khwārazm itself under Sultan Muhammad, Takesh's son. The Ghurids (also known as *Shansabāni* or *Ghurshāh*) (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 318-320) originated in the mountainous region of Ghur between Herat and Ghazna in present Afghanistan and positioned their capital in Firuzkuh.<sup>17</sup> They ruled from eastern Khorāsān, including Balkh,<sup>18</sup> Herat, and Ghazna, to regions of northern India, such as Lahore (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 127). The Ghurids were the main rival of the Khwārazmshāhs in dominating Khorāsān and Jebāl.<sup>19</sup> They continued to support the claimants of Khwārazmshāhs against the Sultan of Khwārazm. Hendushāh, for instance, was the son of Malekshāh, the successor of Takesh, whose father died before coming to the

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the wintertime, but when fresh down appeared upon the lips of the earth, and the bud of spring displayed its tongue in wide-mouthed laughter, he made ready to proceed to Khorāsān and attack his brother." (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 29; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 300; Jowzjāni 1984, 1: 302-303; Shabānkāre'i, 2002, 2: 137).

<sup>16</sup> In ca.596/1200, with the death of Takesh on his way to Qohestān to subjugate the Isma'ilis, Khwārazm welcomed Sultan Muhammad, who had moved quickly from Neyshābur to establish his reign in the capital (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 46; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 302; Mostowfi, 1985, 490).

<sup>17</sup> Ghur is a province whose main city (Shahrestān) is called Āhnagarān. There are about thirty villages in this city. The people of Ghur are known as fool people" (Mostowfi, 1999, 154-155). *Hodud-al-'Ālam*, 70; al-Istakhri, 2004, 281. There was another group of Ghurids ruled in Bāmiyān, the northern part of Ghur, who are called the Ghurids of Bāmiyān (Barthold, 1968, 338, Buniyatov, 2015, 53-58).

<sup>18</sup> In ca.594/1198, after the death of the Turkish ruler of Balkh, a vassal of the Qarā-Khetāy, the Ghurid ruler of Bāmiyān, Bahā al-Din Sām seized Balkh (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 134).

<sup>19</sup> Concurrent with the time that Atsez was distressing the territories of the Saljuqs in Khorāsān under Sanjar (r.ca.511-552/1117-1157), the Saljuq Sultan, the Ghurids, paying tribute to the Saljuqs, simultaneously invaded the cities of Khorāsān (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 361-362; Zahiri Neyshāburi, 2011, 47; 'Aruzi Samarqandī, 1989, 105. The Ghurids had the same model map of territories in Khorāsān and Jebāl; therefore, they attacked the castles of the Isma'ili (ca.483-654/1090-1256) in Jebāl and Khorāsān. Since the Caliph Al-Nāser supported them against the Khwārazm-shāh, who were claimants of the Saljuq privileges in Baghdād and western Iran, the conflicts between Takesh and the Ghurids were bound to occur (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 361). The envoy of the Caliph in the sermon at the congregational mosque called Sultan Qaiyās al-Din the Ghurid Sultan, "Ayyahu al-Ghiyās al-Mustaghās men al-Takesh at-Tāgh al-bāghi." (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 302; tr. Raverti, 1991, 1: 243).

throne in ca. 598/1202.<sup>20</sup>

It seemed as though the Ghurids, in comparison to the Khwārazmshāhs were in a better geographical position to dominate Khorāsān. They made incursions on several cities of Khorāsān, in particular, Neyshābur and Tus, and Sultan Muhammad was able to drive them out simply by the supremacy of his military power (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 165-166). But to launch his campaigns, Sultan Muhammad had to return to Khwārazm, whereas the Ghurids, in addition to their capital in Firuzkuk, had centers of power in other cities of Khorāsān, such as Herat, Balkh, and Ghazna. Therefore, they could plan their campaigns more quickly and effectively. Sultan Muhammad's dominance was not complete, though, and as soon as he returned to Khwārazm, the Ghurids now ruled by Shahāb al-Din Ghuri (r.ca.599-602/1203-1206) recaptured these far-flung cities (Ibid, 173-177; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 307; Bar Hebraeus, 351). According to Qazvini,

It is said that because of the mistake of Sultan Muhammad ibn Takesh many Muslims were killed. Only the Sultan and a few soldiers could escape. Sultan Muhammad returned to Khwārazm at night so that the people would not learn about the paucity of his troops.

In the morning, he returned with 30,000 men toward the enemy.” (Zakariyā Qazvini, 1995, 598) This retreat to Khwārazm illustrated that the Khwārazmshāhs were not able to expand their military power throughout their conquered territories in northern Khorāsān. In this regard, Khwārazm still behaved not as the capital of growing power but as the main center of military power, and as long as the Sultan was not regularly returning there, he was unable to defend his territories.

The invasion of Shahāb al-Din, the Ghurid Sultan to Khwārazm in ca.600/1204, was the most drastic conflict between these two claimant dynasties and left the Khwārazmshāhs on the verge of collapse. This happened just as Sultan Muhammad had seized Herat, one of the important cities of the Ghurids, to complete his dominance on Khorāsān (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 185-186). Instead of breaking through Herat's siege, Shahāb al-Din moved toward Khwārazm to checkmate Sultan Muhammad. On his way back to Khwārazm and while camped in Marv, Sultan Muhammad learned about the abrupt tactical move of Shahāb al-Din.<sup>21</sup> Joveyni writes,

The army of Ghur, with so many troops and elephants and with such bustle and clangor that, had they wished, they could have turned the Oxus into a plain and made

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<sup>20</sup> Hendushāh rose against Sultan Muhammad to conquer Neyshābur and was supported by Qiyās al-Din Muhammad, the Ghurid Sultan. Hendushāh conquered Neyshābur while Sultan Muhammad stationed it for some years before coming to the throne. The dominance of Hendushāh over Neyshābur, which was the gate to Khwārazm, endangered the position of Sultan Muhammad even at the beginning of his reign (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 306-307; tr. Raverti, 1991, 1: 382; see also, Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 173; Joveyni, 2006, 2: 51-52).

<sup>21</sup> In the absence of Sultan Muhammad, Tarkān Khātun ruled in Khwārazm. She sent an envoy to Sultan Muhammad to come back to Khwārazm in no time (‘Ufi, 2007, 3: 13).

the plain an Oxus of blood, pitched their camp opposite on the eastern bank. The Sultan of Ghur ordered them to seek a ford in order to cross the next day and trouble the drinking-place of the Sultan's pleasure (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 55; tr. 1: 322).

Joveyni's precise description of the Ghurid's strategies of capturing Khwārazm highlights the significance of this event. Shahāb al-Dīn defeated the Sultan Muhammad on the banks of Qarāsu, one of the western branches of the Oxus and made a siege of *Gorgānj*, the center of Khwārazm on the west of the Oxus. The fact that Khwārazm included more than a single city provided the conditions for the Khwārazmshāhs to retain and consolidate their power, although the Ghurids conquered some parts of Khwārazm.

The troops of the Ghurids outnumbered the Khwārazmshāhs and were equipped with the best tools of war. To break the siege, Sultan Muhammad asked for the Khwārazmshāh's troops, including the infantry and cavalry who scattered throughout northern cities of Khorāsān. But the more effective technique was that, like Takesh, Sultan Muhammad asked Gur-khān of the Qarā-Khetāy to send him auxiliary forces to break the siege of Gorgānj and drive Shahāb al-Dīn's troops out of Gorgānj. Taking advantage of the proficiency of the forces of the Qarā-Khetāy showed that the Khwārazmshāhs did not simply pay tribute to guarantee their survival before the Qarā-Khetāy but received sufficient troops to launch campaigns against their rivals, including the Ghurids (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 186-187, Buniyatov, 2015, 56-58).

The presence of the people of Khwārazm reinforced the position of Khwārazm against the Ghurids. One initiative of Sultan Muhammad was to ask the people of Khwārazm to resist the Ghurids personally. The Sultan was aware that Khwārazm might collapse before the arrival of the Qarā-Khetāy armies, and he needed urgently to mobilize the assistance of the people of Khwārazm to defend their heritage against the raging troops of the Ghurids.<sup>22</sup>

Trusted people such as 'Olamā and prominent Sufis of Khwārazm had a critical role in persuading the citizenry to resist the Ghurids. Khwārazm possessed significant human wealth with the presence of men of knowledge, both 'Olamā, and Sufis. The Khwārazmshāhs had previously invited many scholars, including both poets and 'Olamā, to Khwārazm to enrich the cultural level of their capital. The presence of 'Olamā not only legitimized the power of the Khwārazmshāhs but also reinforced the region's defensive conditions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "In order to take his revenge Sultan Shahāb al-Dīn again prepared to go to war, and this time he intended to begin by attacking Khwārazm. When the news of his intention reached the Sultan, he proceeded cautiously by acting with the decision and returned to Khwārazm by way of the desert. In this way, he raced the army of Ghur, which even exceeded ants or locusts in their numbers, and arriving in his capital, informed the people of that army's approach and announced the imminence of that unexpected calamity. The whole population, inwardly boiling with zealous rage and outwardly agitated with fear of humiliation and abasement, with one heart and voice agreed to resist, oppose and repel, and all of them busied themselves with the provisions of arms and implements of war such as swords and lances." (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 54-55; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 321-322).

<sup>23</sup> The policy of the reinforcement of renowned men of wisdom to Khwārazm was enthusiastically followed during Sultan Muhammad's reign to strengthen the position of Khwārazm in the Islamic world. To reinforce the religious and scientific conditions of Khwārazm against Baghdād, which the Abbasids ruled, Sultan Muhammad invited outstanding 'Olamās to Khwārazm, e.g., Imam Fakhr Rāzi (ca. 606/1150-1210), a figure in Islamic theology. To learn more about him, see Griffel, 313-344; Barthold, 1968, 429; Sheikh Shahāb al-Dīn

Shahāb al-Din Khivaqī (d.ca.613/ 1216), in particular, had a critical role in persuading the people to defend Khwārazm against the Ghurids by ordering Jehād against their enemies. According to Joveyni, “The revered Imam Shahāb al-Din Khivaqī, who was a pillar of the Faith and a bulwark of the realm, went to every extreme in his efforts to discomfit the enemy and repulsed them from harem and homeland, and in sermons, from the pulpit he gave sanction for battle in accordance with the true tradition:

Whoso is slain in defense of his life and property is the same as a martyr. On this account, the zeal and good will of the people were redoubled, and they set to work as one man (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 55; tr., 1: 322).

Ultimately with the persistent resistance of the people of Khwārazm, reinforced by two sets of troops, the troops of Qarā-Khetāy led by Tāngu, a prominent commander, as well as the troops of Samarqand, Sultan Muhammad finally drove the Ghurids out of Khwārazm (Joveyni, 2006, 2:54-5; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 187; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 307-308; Shabānkāre ‘i, 2002, 2: 123). The battle, which could lead to the collapse of the Khwārazmshāhs, turned into the beginning of the Ghurid’s failure. After this intense resistance against the Ghurids, the Sultan began his expanded campaigns in Khorāsān and then Transoxiana in order to buttress the boundaries of the Khwārazmshāhs to the east and south. At last, Sultan Muhammad’s steady conquests against the Ghurids<sup>24</sup> and the Qarā-Khetāy Khanate, which led to the collapse of these dynasties (Joveyni, 2006, 2:83, 125-126; Nasavi, 2005, 79; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1:307-308, 2:96; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12:270; Shabānkāre ‘i, 2002, 2:230; Rashid, 1:335; Mirkhānd, 1960, 5:72) transformed the position of Khwārazm from a capital at the margins to the center of an Empire.

### **The Split in the Khwārazmshāh Power**

With the collapse of the Ghurids and the Qarā-Khetāy Khanate, the Khwārazmshāhs expanded their territories on their southern and eastern borders, so Khwārazm was geographically more centralized and was no longer at the margins of the Empire. However, another vulnerability of Khwārazm, i.e., its abandonment during the absences of the Sultan, was still a significant problem. Since the Sultans of Khwārazm personally led the army in

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Khīvaqī, as well as the Shāfi ‘e jurisconsult, Sheikh Majd al-Din Baghdadi (ca.555-607/1160-1211).

<sup>24</sup> The Ghurids, who had lost many initiatives against the Khwārazm-shāh, tried not to intensify their hostilities. In ca.607/1211 ‘Alishāh, Sultan Muhammad’s brother, took refuge at the Ghurid court to ask for troops against his brother, Joveyni, 2006, 2: 72; Ibn Athir 1979, *Al-Kamel*, 12: 263-264. Qiyās al-Din Mahmud (r.ca.601-608/1205-1212), the Ghurid Sultan, rejected his request and even detained him for a time (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 306-307). However, the successive internal conflicts among the Ghurid provided the conditions for Sultan Muhammad to conquer the remnants of the Ghurids in Khorāsān. Finally, ‘Alā al-Din Muhammad (r.ca.610-611/1213-1214) submitted Firuzkuh to Sultan Muhammad, that led to the final collapse of the Ghurids in Khorāsān in ca.611/1214 (Mostowfi, 1985, 491; Shabānkāre ‘i, 2002 2002, 2:138-139).

their campaigns, the throne of Khwārazm was constantly threatened by claimants of power from the Khwārazmshāhs and other dynasties. It required Sultan Muhammad to secure his vacant throne when he was not personally in the capital. This condition enhanced the position of Tarkān Khātun, Sultan Muhammad's mother, who became the power broker of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty.

Tarkān Khātun, known as *Khodāvand-e Jabān* (the Lord of the World) (Ibn Khaldun 1995, 5: 130),<sup>25</sup> came from the Turk tribe of Kipchāk (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 306) or Bayāt (Nasavi, 2005, 62), the highest-ranking tribe in Transoxiana. Therefore, her belonging to a powerful tribe differentiated her position in the Khwārazmshāh dynasty apart from personal characteristics. According to Nasavi, 2005, "Takesh ibn Il-Arslān married her based on the traditions that Sultans marry the daughters of Sultans. After Muhammad inherited the Khwārazmshāh Sultanate, the tribes of Yamak and other Turk tribes gathered around the new Sultan. They supported the Sultan and so elevated the Khwārazmshāh dynasty to higher ranks. No region was afterward conquered unless the Sultan designated a part of it to his mother." (Nasavi, 2005, 62).

Historians, particularly Nasavi, are critical of Tarkān Khātun's power in the Khwārazmshāh state. Regarding the general male and patriarchal bias against women in medieval literature in general and history in particular, historians may have exaggerated the role of Tarkān Khātun. But it seems that sources are not biased because of gender, and Tarkān Khātun and her tribe created problems in the Khwārazmshāh state during the absence of the Sultan. Unlike other court women who ruled behind the scenes of power, Tarkān Khātun played her critical role overtly in the court of Khwārazm. She played a decisive part in protecting Khwārazm in the long absences of the Sultan and even in consolidating the foundations of her power independently from her son. Therefore, Tarkān Khātun and her tribe was an independent powerhouse.

With the persistent expansion campaigns of Takesh and Sultan Muhammad, Khwārazm had achieved a more strategic position in the geography of the Khwārazmshāh's territories. However, the conflicts between the Sultan on the one hand, and the Queen mother and her tribe on the other, made the capital face more serious problems. By achieving power through his mother and her tribe's patronage, Sultan Muhammad was never able to rule independently from them.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, he lost his proper role in his capital. Tarkān Khātun's place in Khwārazm as the center of power equipped her with authority to appoint rulers of cities in Transoxiana and Khorāsān, who were primarily her relatives. The semi-independent rule of Tarkān Khātun in Khwārazm and her authority in the territories ruled by her tribe, although not necessarily in line with the directives of Sultan Muhammad, diminished the authority of Sultan in his territories. The power was now divided between the Sultan, who was engaged in

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<sup>25</sup> Her signature was *'Esmat al-Donyā va al-Dīn Oloq Tarkān Malaka Nesā' al-'Ālamīn* and her seal was *'Esmat Bellah Vahda*, Ibn Khaldun 1995, 130.

<sup>26</sup> The Sultan did not oppose his mother's commands...since most of the emirs and commanders were from Tarkān Khātun's tribe.... Moreover, he conquered the Qarā-Khetāy Khanate based on the assistance of her tribe" Nasavi, 2005, 75-76.

ongoing campaigns, and Tarkān, stationed in Khwārazm and whose command was executed wherever her tribesmen ruled.

The Sultan and the Queen mother could jointly and efficiently run their state, but Tarkān Khātun steadily replaced the Sultan in ruling Khwārazm itself. According to Nasavi, “[Tarkān] had seven men of the elites and Sayyids. Whenever there were different Toqī’s [signed letters] from the Divān of the Sultan and the Tarkān, they were confirmed based on the dates of the letters, but each one was written later it was confirmed” (Nasavi, 2005, 99). Having an independent Divān to issue decrees that could revoke the Sultan’s order proved her unsurmountable power in Khwārazm. In another section, Nasavi writes, “Tarkān Khātun had her separate court and state officials and disposed of her separate stipends and fiefs. Nevertheless, her power extended over the Sultan, his finances, and his high officers and officials” (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 198; tr. 1: 466).

The tribesmen of Tarkān’s family gradually replaced the efficient troops of the Qarā-Khetāy and played a critical role in expanding the policies of the Sultan; however, their presence as rulers of the conquered territories diminished the authority of the Sultan in those regions. Under Takesh, the northern cities of Khorāsān were ruled by the Sultan’s sons (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 25, 30), but in the time of Sultan Muhammad, his mother’s relatives were appointed to rule the conquered cities of Khorāsān and Transoxiana, including Samarqand and Otrār.<sup>27</sup> These rulers, who were supposed to be loyal to Sultan Muhammad, nonetheless chose actions as hostile as the incursions of the Ghurids in Khorāsān. In facing these situations, Sultan Muhammad never had absolute authority in affairs dealing with his mother’s tribe. For example, Neyshābur was one of the major cities entrusted to Kulzi, a family member of Tarkān Khātun in ca.605-606/1209-1210. Instead of consolidating the Sultan’s reign in Neyshābur as the gate to Khorāsān, Kuzli made incursions on his own into other cities of Khorāsān and even Kerman in southeastern Iran.<sup>28</sup> After failing in his campaigns in Khorāsān and Kerman, Kulzi was ultimately punished in ca.606/1210, not by order of the Sultan but by Tarkān Khātun herself, who seduced Kulzi to take refuge in the tomb of Takesh in Khwārazm, where he was subsequently murdered (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 72; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 264-267). This incident illustrates that Tarkān Khātun had a crucial role in appointing and dismissing rulers or reinstating them.

The split was so drastic that the Sultan could not even appoint Jalal-al-Din, his favorite son, as his successor since Tarkān Khātun and her tribe opposed having a monarch who was not from their tribe. They instead selected Qotb al-Din Uzlāghshāh as successor to Sultan Muhammad, who had been ruling in Khwārazm under Tarkān Khātun.<sup>29</sup> Finally,

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<sup>27</sup> Samarqand, Joveyni, 2006, 2: 76, Otrār, Joveyni, 2006, 2: 79-80; see also, Ibn Athir 1979, 12: 268-269; Kochnev, 1993, 34.

<sup>28</sup> When Sultan Muhammad was on a campaign against the Qarā Khetāi Khanate in Transoxiana, Khwārazm fell into turmoil. Hearing about the Sultan’s absence, both his brother ‘Alishāh, his viceroy in Tabarestān, and Kozli, his commander in Neyshābur, tried to install themselves as the rulers of Khorāsān (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 71-72; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 263-264).

<sup>29</sup> She decided not only the current affairs of the Khwārazm-shāhs but also the designation of the Sultan’s

Sultan Muhammad appointed Jalāl al-Din as his successor.<sup>30</sup> in Ābeskun Island, miles away from Khwārazm in the Māzandarān Sea (the present Caspian Sea), where he eventually died. Unlike the days of Takesh when the Sultan ruled in Khwārazm, and his successor stayed in Neyshābur, now Sultan Muhammad ruled in Neyshābur while Uzlāghshāh stationed in Khwārazm (Nasavi, 2005, 70).

This situation shows the extent of the split between the Sultan and Khwārazm as well as the diminishing significance of Khwārazm in the mind of Sultan Muhammad. The presence of Tarkān Khātun in Khwārazm, which was originally supposed to consolidate the position of Sultan Muhammad during his campaigns, turned Khwārazm into an independent city under the reign of her and her tribe. Emphasizing their critical role in the Khwārazmshāh dynasty, Nasavi indicates that Sultan Muhammad “was never satisfied with his mother’s relatives stationed in Neyshābur after coming back from Iraq [Iraq-e ‘Ajam or Jebāl]” (Nasavi, 2005, 74). With the deepening split in the Khwārazmshāh dynasty, the Sultan eventually stationed himself in Neyshābur. It seems that his stay in Neyshābur was not intended to reinforce the position of Khwārazm but to escape from the heavy shadow of Tarkān Khātun and her tribe, who had established their semi-independent power in Khwārazm. In just one example, Sultan Muhammad dismissed his vizier Muhammad ibn Sāleh, known as Nezām al-Molk, a relative of Tarkān Khātun, who had been chosen without the Sultan’s consent and appointed six viziers to avoid having a rival monarch in his territory. But as soon as Nezām al-Molk went to Khwārazm, he was warmly welcomed by Tarkān Khātun and was assigned to be the vizier of Uzlāgh,<sup>31</sup> the Sultan’s de facto successor. The Sultan’s stay at Neyshābur divided the power of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty into two parts, and, therefore, many of the decisions taken by the Sultan were rejected by the Khwārazmians in Khwārazm under Sultan’s mother and his successor. The reluctance of the Sultan to resist the Mongols seriously, this new threat to the Khwārazmshāh’s territories, and his determined decision not to return to the capital, prove that he no longer considered Khwārazm as the main center of his power.

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successor, “The reason for appointing Uzlāghshāh as the successor despite the other two elder sons, Jalāl al-Din and Rokn al-Din Ghursānchti was that the Sultan never disobeyed the order of Tarkān Khātun. Uzlāghshāh’s mother was from the tribe of Bayāvut who were close relatives of Tarkān were Khātun...and since the Sultan loved Jalāl al-Din so much, he never sent him away from himself.” Jalāl al-Din was appointed as the ruler of the Ghazna, Bāmiyān in present Afghanistan to the northern India Nasavi, 2005, 72; Ibn Khaldun, 1995, 5: 129; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 310; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313.

<sup>30</sup> Joveyni, 2006, 2: 116; Nasavi, 2005, 106; Ibn Athir1, 979, 12: 370; Jowzjāni, 1984 specifies that after Sultan Muhammad learned about his chronic abdominal disease, he asked Sultan Jalāl al-Din to take him to Khwārazm. “Muhammad Khwārazm-shāh and a few riders who accompanied him came out of the island [Ābeskun]. Suddenly the bellyache and soda overcame him, so he said to Jalāl al-Din, “Do your best to take me to Khwārazm from where our power was born...Since his belly was painful, he was riding a palanquin on the camel toward Khwārazm. On the way, he died in 617 [1220]. Sultan Jalāl al-Din took his father’s body to Khwārazm and buried him beside Takesh” (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313). Hamdollāh Mostowfi, on the other hand, believes that Sultan Jalāl al-Din buried his father in Ardehān castle, where Mongols exhumed him and was burned (Mostowfi, 1985, 394-395 & 397; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 142-143).

<sup>31</sup> Jowzjāni refers to him as *Arzālushāh* (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313); Shabānkāre‘i recorded his name as Azraqshāh (Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 143).

## Leaving Khwārazm Abandoned

The Mongol invasion of the Khwārazmshāh's territories in ca.617/1221 displayed the split in the power of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. Sultan Muhammad had received the envoys of Chinggis twice before they invaded Otrār, the farthest city conquered by Sultan Muhammad. In each of these occasions, Sultan Muhammad had been stationed in Neyshābur (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 100; Nasavi, 2005, 86-87). The first time, the Mongols brought messages concerning a commercial relationship with the Khwārazmshāhs. The next time, the Mongol merchants were killed and their wealth confiscated by Ghāyer Khān, the governor of Otrār and a relative of Tarkān Khātun (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 99-100; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 262). On that occasion, the envoys of Chinggis Khān wanted both the punishment of Ghāyer Khān and the return of the properties of the merchants who had been killed. The envoy of Chinggis Khān was killed in turn, and so a message of war was delivered to the Mongols (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 100; Nasavi, 2005, 86-87; Shabānkāre 'i, 2002, 2: 140).

The Mongols invaded the territories of Khwārazmshāhs after Sultan Muhammad had left Khwārazm defenseless. Sultan Muhammad, unlike other campaigns where he had personally led the army, scattered his troops to several cities, including Otrār, Bukhara, Samarqand, Termez, Vakhsh, Balkh, Jand, Khottalān, and Qonduz and then fled to Khorāsān. According to Nasavi,

In general, the Sultan did not leave the cities of Transoxiana without troops. But it was a big mistake since if he faced Mongols with all his troops, he could hunt them like a hawk that grabs a warbler." (Nasavi, 2005, 91).

The steady escape of the Sultan from Transoxiana to Khorāsān and then from Jebāl to Gilān and Māzandarān in northern Iran determined the direction of the rapid conquests of the Mongol's army (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 359). His escape also signaled that he could no longer rely on his troop's loyalty, which were primarily from his mother's tribe and loyal to the Sultan only as long as he was stationed in Khwārazm. But, now that he had left the main center of power and the Khwārazmshāhs defenseless, his troops sharpened their swords and prepared to kill their Sultan.<sup>32</sup>

For Mongols, the power of the Khwārazmshāhs was primarily defined by their rulers rather than their capital. Hence, they did not seize Khwārazm as long as the Sultan and his mother were not subjugated. This position was totally unlike that of the former rivals of the Khwārazmshāhs in Khorāsān and Transoxiana, who regarded Khwārazm rather than the Sultan as the target of their invasions. During the Mongol's approach, the companions of the Sultan asked him to redefine the geographical realm of the Khwārazmshāhs and defend the

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<sup>32</sup> "Now, the greater parts of his army were Turks of the tribe to which his mother's kinsmen belonged called the *Uran*. In the midst of all this distraction and confusion, they plotted to kill the Sultan. Someone informed him of their plan, and that night he changed his sleeping quarters and left his tent. At midnight, they let fly their arrows, and in the morning, the tent appeared as full of holes as a sieve from the arrow shots. On this account, the Sultan's apprehension was increased and his fright and terror redoubled." Joveyni, 2006, 2: 109; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 378.



remnant of the territories against the Mongols. They tried first in Balkh,<sup>33</sup> second in Ghazna (Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 141), then in Neyshābur,<sup>34</sup> and at last in Ray to convince the Sultan to stay and resist the Mongols (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 113; Barthold, 1968, 422). This condition was while Khwārazm, the center of the Khwārazmshāhs, had not yet been conquered and was left isolated. But the Sultan did not stay in any of these cities, not even in Neyshābur, which had been his center of power and the final place where Sultan Muhammad could launch any decisive defense against the Mongols (Nasavi, 2005, 104). At last, he fled to northern Iran in Ābeskun, where he died far from Khwārazm in ca.617/1221 (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 115; Nasavi, 2005, 107; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 141-143).

Tarkān Khātun, on the other hand, who had consolidated the foundations of her power in Khwārazm during the absence of Sultan Muhammad, abandoned the capital as soon as she heard that the Sultan had escaped from Transoxiana. Some historians including Ibn Athir, Joveyni, Jowzjāni, and Mostowfi believe that the Mongols intensified the hostilities between the Sultan and his mother by sending separate messages to them and causing the Sultan to stay away from Khwārazm and Tarkān Khātun to leave the capital (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 199; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 373; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313-314). On the other hand, some of the same historians, such as Joveyni, Jowzjāni, and Nasavi specify that Sultan Muhammad sent messages to Tarkān Khātun asking her to leave the city for Māzandarān with his family.<sup>35</sup> Whichever account is valid, she headed for Māzandarān in the southwestern area of Khwārazm, which had been the resort of the Khwārazmshāhs and was naturally well-protected (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 199; Ibn Athir 1979, 12: 373; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313-314). Before her departure, Tarkān murdered all the prominent figures imprisoned in the jail of Khwārazm (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313; see also Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 143). She didn’t institute any measures for the safety of Khwārazm and left it defenseless. Instead, she killed political figures, including descendants of the Ghurids and the Saljuqs, to ensure that Khwārazm would never become a center for the Khwārazmshāh’s claimants. Tarkān Khātun and her companions then sheltered in the castle of Ilāl in Māzandarān, where Mongols, at last, conquered them in ca.618/1222 (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 373; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 142-143).

<sup>33</sup> His counselors encouraged him to go either to Ghazna and assemble troops against the Mongols, “The position in Transoxiana has passed out of our control and it is no longer possible to hold that area, but we should do everything in our power not to lose the territories of Iraq [Jebāl] and Khorāsān. The armies which have been stationed in every city and upon every side must be recalled; a general advance must be made; the Oxus must be converted into a moat, and they must not be suffered to set foot across that river” (Joveyni, 2006, 2, 106; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 376). However, when he heard the Mongols had passed from the Oxus, Sultan Muhammad was determined to go farther away to Neyshābur (Joveyni, 2006, 2:106-107; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 140).

<sup>34</sup> In Neyshābur Jalāl al-Din persuaded his father to resist the Mongols: “My advice is that we should, as much as possible, gather the armies and proceed against the Mongols. And if the Sultan does not intend to do that, please retreat to Iraq [Jebal] and hand over the armies to me so that I can advance toward the Mongols and fight with them to smash them all together.” Joveyni, 2006, 2:107; tr. Boyle, 1958, 2: 376-377; see also, Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 370; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 141.

<sup>35</sup> “When the news that the Sultan had crossed the Āmu Daryā was spread, the damned Tarkān Khātun was intensively horrified. Immediately she left Khwārazm with the Sultan’s children and Haram and the most precious objects of the treasury.” (Nasavi, 2005, 94). See also Joveyni, 2006, 2: 199; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 313.

The absence of Sultan Muhammad and Tarkān Khātun from Khwārazm, even after the Mongol invasion, significantly and irrevocably weakened the position of the capital in the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. In the absence of the two poles of power, Khwārazm was unaware of the sweeping magnitude of the Mongol invasions. Joveyni describes the status of Khwārazm prior to the Mongol invasion very vividly. He states that Khwārazm, the capital of the most significant power of the Islamic world, was exchanged among many “Nowruz kings” (Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 142-143) short-term governors who had no plan to protect it against the Mongols. The people of Khwārazm, who were expected to be among the first to receive the news of the Mongol invasions, learned about the actual extent of the invasion just after the arrival of Jalāl al-Din and his brothers Āqshāh and Uzlāghshāh (Nasavi 2005, 121; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 315-316; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 143.). They welcomed Sultan Jalāl al-Din and his brothers with open arms, eager to have their leadership at this critical juncture and to have them prepare Khwārazm for the Mongol invasion.

The unity of Sultan Muhammad’s successors could have revitalized the power of the Khwārazmshāhs, but the power split was still the main problem. With his presence in Khwārazm, Jalāl al-Din was able to change the region to be the critical front of the Khwārazmshāhs against the Mongols, just as twelve years earlier, Sultan Muhammad had resisted the Ghurids based on the geographical, military, and social capacities of Khwārazm. However, the conflicts between Sultan Muhammad and Tarkān Khātun, which had left Khwārazm isolated and vulnerable, now turned the capital into a battlefield between Jalāl al-Din and his brothers, who could not accept Jalāl al-Din’s reign (Mostowfi, 1985, 497). Jalāl al-Din had come to Khwārazm to revitalize the Khwārazmshāh’s power from where it originated and to drive the Mongols out of Khwārazm and other territories invaded by the troops of Chinggis. But, the split in the Khwārazmshāh dynasty challenged the authority of Jalāl al-Din in Khwārazm. Uzlāghshāh and Āqshāh, who had accompanied Jalāl al-Din from Ābeskun to Khwārazm turned against him to regain power that had been ceded to them by Tarkān Khātun and by the remnants of Bayāt tribe. Under these conditions, Jalāl al-Din had no choice but to abandon Khwārazm and turn toward Khorāsān (Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 315-316). Even after his dismissal from the capital, Uzlāghshāh and Āqshāh did not stay in Khwārazm to consolidate their power against the inevitable attacks of Mongols. Instead, they pursued Jalāl al-Din out of Khwārazm to fight against him but were entrapped by the Mongols, who had surrounded Khwārazm. They were killed after an unsuccessful resistance (Nasavi, 2005, 121; Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 394.).

## Conclusion

One can posit that the contradictory and problematic policies of the last rulers of the dynasty and the split in their power rather than the geographical position of Khwārazm led to the collapse of the capital of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. The expanding campaigns of the Khwārazmshāh Sultans, in particular, Takesh and then Muhammad and their conquests

of the Ghurid and the Qarā-Khetāy territories, changed the geographical position of Khwārazm from a capital at the margins to a geographically more centralized capital of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. However, owing to the ongoing invasions, the throne of the Sultan was still able to be subject to the attacks of rival powers. The presence of Tarkān Khātun, Sultan Muhammad's mother, during his absence could have resolved this problem. However, the superpower of the Queen mother and her tribe in Khwārazm and their contradictory policies, which were not in line with the Sultan's, made him no longer regard his capital as the primary source of his power. The tensions between the Sultan and his mother, which continued under the Sultan's successors, led the Khwārazmshāhs to abandon Khwārazm before the encroaching Mongols.

The Mongols besieged Khwārazm for five to seven months before they were able to conquer it. Nasavi points out that Jochi, Chinggis' son, wanted to save the city from destruction and incorporate it into his territory, and so he invited the people to submit (Nasavi, 2005, 171). Rashid al-Din Fazl Allāh, on the other hand, reports that indecision about invading the city was due to disputes among Chinggis Khān's sons: Jochi, Chaghatāy, and Ögedei (Rashid al-Din Fazl Allāh, 1: 460-461). Despite their disagreements in their reports of the reasons for the long siege of Khwārazm, historians agree that in the absence of the Sultan and his sons, the lack of unity between the rulers of the city and the people contributed to the less than wholehearted defense against the Mongols. Thus, the Mongols were able to easily take the town, "Quarter by quarter, house by house," (Joveyni, 2006, 1: 100), destroying buildings and slaughtering inhabitants until the formerly splendid city was finally in their hands in 618/1222.

Khwārazm, one of the most cultivated cities of the medieval world, was crumbled to earth (Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 372-373; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316). According to original sources, Barthold in *Turkestan, down to the Mongol Invasion*, provided a special detailed report of the collapse of Khwārazm (1968, 431-437). The Mongols not only ravaged the city but ultimately destroyed its people, who were the true foundations of the Khwārazm civilization.<sup>36</sup> Joveyni writes that the Mongols drove them out into the open, and "those who were artisans or craftsmen, of whom there were more than a hundred thousand, were separated from the rest, the children and the young women were reduced to slavery and borne off into captivity, and the men who remained were divided among the army, and to each fighting man fell the execution of twenty-four persons" (Joveyni, 2006, 1: 100-101; tr., 1: 127-128; Nasavi, 2005, 171-172). The slaughter of the men, including prominent figures like Najm al-Din Kobrā,<sup>37</sup> the removal of the craftsmen and artisans, and the captivity of women and children left the city with only the memories of its glorious past.

The disintegration of the city of Khwārazm was also the end of the Khwārazmshāh dynasty. Jalāl al-Din (r. ca.617-628/1220-1231), as a Sultan without Khwārazm, was like

<sup>36</sup> Joveyni, 2006, 1: 100-101; tr. Boyle, 1958, 1: 127-128; Nasavi, 2005, 171-172. The slain people in Khwārazm outnumbered other entire Khwārazmshāh cities Ibn Athir, 1979, 12: 373.

<sup>37</sup> The Mystic Najm al-Din Kobrā was swallowed up in the Mongol storm and died in ca. 618/1222 fighting the enemies, though the Mongols had offered him safe passage out of the city (Chuvin, 2001, 182).

a fish out of water or a sparrow in the talons of an eagle. After leaving Khwārazm, he wandered fruitlessly from Neyshābur (Joveyni, 2006, 2:169-170; Nasavi 2005, 132; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316) to Ghazna (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 134-135; Nasavi 2005, 134, 152; Jowzjāni 1984, 1: 316; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 143) northern India (Nasavi, 2005, 174; Joveyni, 2006, 2: 136-140; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316; Mostowfi, 1985, 497; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 143); Kermān (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 149-150, 165; Nasavi, 2005, 190; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316; Mostowfi, 1985, 498; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 144.), Isfahan (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 151, 168; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316; Mostowfi, 1985, 498; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 144), Khuzestān in western Iran (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 153; Nasavi, 2005, 192; Mostowfi, 1985, 498; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 144), Hamedān (Nasavi, 2005, 192-193; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316), and Azerbaijan (Nasavi, 2005, 377-378), all to consolidate his power, but he was never able to succeed. Nasavi 2005 likened Sultan Jalāl al-Din to a sinking ship unable to find anything to grasp onto and so survive (Nasavi, 2005, 377-378). Even the death of Sultan Jalāl al-Din remains mysterious. He may have been killed in Diyarbakir by a Kurdish assassin hired by the Saljuqs of Rum (ca. 469-706/1077-1307) (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 191-192; Jowzjāni, 1984, 1: 316) or simply by Kurdish highwaymen (Joveyni, 2006, 2: 191-192; Mostowfi, 1985, 500; Shabānkāre‘i, 2002, 2: 146). After many attempts, he could never establish his Sultanate in a new center of power.

Submitted March 15, 2022, Revised June 6, 2022, Accepted May 29, 2022
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