

## Arslān Jādhīb, Governor of Ṭūs: the First Muslim Conqueror of Swat

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The bilingual epigraph found some time ago at Zalamkot (1) near Batkhela (lower Swat) in the present Malakand Agency is, to my knowledge, the earliest Persian inscription found so far in Pakistan. The inscription mentions the construction of a tomb ( مرقد ) of which the foundation stone was led by Arslān Jādhīb, the grand *amir* and governor of Ṭūs. It was completed in the month of Dhu al-Qa'ada in the Hijri year 401, that is, June A.D. 1011, not by Arslan but by a junior officer called sipahbak (junior commander) Khalilbak / Jalilbak, son of *Kotwal*, Ahmad al-Baghr. It is note worthy that all the names have Turkish origin.

The limestone foundation slab bearing this inscription is rectangular in shape measuring 55 X 36 cm but the inscribed area is little smaller and measures 45 X 30 cm. Except for the lower portion the slab is reasonably well preserved. It is believed to have been found fixed in a wall. This belief is virtually confirmed by the shape of the slab, which shows tapering sides obviously meant for fixing it in a wall. The slab came to light some ten years ago when Zalamkot was subjected to intense plundering by antiquity robbers.

The epigraph comprises a seven line text in Persian in simple *Kufic* letters and a three line text of *Sarada* script, all incised or cut into the stone in the manner of Indian inscriptions. While the calligraphy of this record does portray some *Naskh* flourishes, besides its overall *Kufic* treatment, it cannot be said to contain any of the features that later became the hall-mark of this highly decorative and pleasing writing. The style of the writing is of a fairly good quality. Diacritical marks or *Nuqtas* have been punctiliously avoided. This unfortunately makes it difficult for a person unfamiliar with Turkish nomenclature, as the present writer happens to be, to put the names back in to their original shape.

The text shows a number of lexical as well as grammatical errors and not appear to have been prepared by a learned person. Apparently the Muslim community of Zalamkot at the time of the installation of this foundation stone consisted merely of soldiers, who, as is seems, were deficient in writing correctly. Thus the word *marqad* ( مرقد ) has been misspelt as *markad* ( مركد ) by confusing the letter q ( ق ) with k ( ك ). Similarly in line 3 the word ( ایس ) (*ien*), here given a square brackets, has altogether been omitted, although the word *ra* ( را ) in the same line grammatically requires it. The restored *Kufic* text of the inscription reads as follows:

- 1- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- 2- لا اله الا الله محمد الرسول الله
- 3- بنا کرد (ایس) مرقد را امیر جلیل امیر طوس
- 4- ارسلان الجاذب اطل الله بقاءه - تمام کرد
- 5- سپهک خلیل بک ابن کوتوال احمد [ا] لبغر
- 6- ادا م الله دولته - فی ماه ذوالقعدہ
- 7- سال مرچهار صد یک بود

## Translation :

With the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful  
 There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah  
 This tomb (2) was founded by the grand *amir*, the governor of Ṭūs,  
 Arslan al-Jadhib, may Allah prolong his life. It was completed by  
 The *sipahbak*, Khalil (3)/Jalilbak, son of the *Kotwal* Ahmed al-Baghr (4)  
 May Allah perpetuate his fortune; in the month of Dhu al-qa'da  
 The current year was 401 (Hijri)

The date of the inscription, i.e. June A.D. 1011, unambiguously refers the epigraph to the time of the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud (A.D. 998-1030) b. Sabuktigin, who is known to have invaded the Indus zone (present Pakistan) several times. It is also well known about him that he was the first Muslim ruler who occupied the Peshawar valley and its neighboring territories and with him were introduced Arabic and Persian in this region. This makes it easier to identify Arslān Jādhib of the inscription with the well known Arslān Jādhib (5) who rose to great prominence under Mahmud and, in A.D. 999, was appointed governor of Ṭūs by him (6).

The text of the inscription demands the personal presence of this Arslan in lower Swat to lay the foundation of a tomb not later than June A.D. 1011. It seems that Arslan could only start the project but had no time to watch its completion as the task was handed over to a junior official, the *sipahbak* Khalil or Jalilbak who completed it in A.D. 1011.

Curiously, the epigraph has nothing to say about the person buried in the tomb. Nor does it clearly mention the initial date on which the construction work was started. Moreover, what kind of a tomb it was — just a grave, a walled enclosure or a roofed mausoleum — we do not know. Another question upon which the epigraph throws no light is the time duration. How long, for instance, did it take to complete the work? Nor do we know anything about the financial aspect of the project. Had these questions been taken care of in the inscription we would have been on a firmer ground in resolving the more enigmatic problem regarding the date mentioned therein.

As noted above the inscription records June A.D. 1011 as the completion date of the project. Is it also the initial date? Let us quickly go through contemporary history to find an answer to this question. Curiously, this is also precisely the date when Sultan Mahmud launched a campaign in Ghur and placed Arslān Jādhib, governor of Ṭūs and Altuntash, governor Herat in command of the advance guard. It was a difficult and prolonged campaign and took several months to complete. The difficult nature of the campaign may be gauged from the fact that Altuntash was virtually defeated and the Sultan himself had to rush to his assistance (7) to save him from the imminent disaster. How then was it possible for Arslan to be present at two mutually distant points such as Ghur and Swat at one and the same time, i.e. the month of June. Not even in the following year could this have happened, for, in the year A.D. 1011-12, Arslan was placed at the head of an army and dispatched to Jurjaniyya and Tabaristan to take care of imperial interests in those regions (8).

Besides these two events, the other Central Asian campaigns in which Arslān Jādhib took active part are as follow:

On 27<sup>th</sup> Jumadi I, 389 (16<sup>th</sup> May, 999) Sultan Mahmud defeated the combined forces of Amir 'Abd al-Malik (the Samanid), Fa'iq, Begtuzun and Abu al-Qasim Simjuri near Merv and placed Ṭūs under the command of Abu al-Harith Arslān Jādhib with instructions to chase Begtuzun out of Khurasan. This kept the governor busy for quite some time. This is the first time Arslan is mentioned as governor of Ṭūs (9).

After defeating 'Abd al-Malik (as mentioned above) Mahmud called upon the ruler of Gharshistan to recognize him as his overlord. The ruler entitled Shar read the *Khutba* in the name

of Mahmud. But sometime after this, the younger Shar who was at the helm of affairs in Gharshistan at that time, offended Mahmud by refusing to accompany him on an Indian expedition. The Sultan ordered Arslan and some other commanders to attack Gharshistan and reduce the recalcitrant Shar in to submission. The order was duly carried out (10).

Disgusted with the disturbance caused by Muntasir, the last of the Samanids, Mahmud sends a force against him in about in A.D. 1004. Muntasir fled to Jurjan followed by Nasr, Arslān Jādhīb and Tughanjuq, governor of Sarakhs (11).

Before his departure to Multan in 396/ A.D. 1005-6, Sultan Mahmud, in view of an expected attack from Central Asia by Ilak Khan, left Arslan at Ghazna at the head of an army as a deterrent force. But Mahmud had not yet completed the subjugation of the outlying parts of Multan when he heard about Ilak Khan's attack on the Ghaznavid territories. He left the job incomplete and rushed back to check the advancing danger. Arslan with his 10,000 troops was given an important assignment during this campaign.

By the year 397 (September -- October 1006), Ilak Khan's generals who had occupied Khurasan a little before were all driven back. But Ilak Khan, in spite of these reverses did not completely drop the idea of conquering Khurasan and this time made great preparations for another struggle. The Sultan advanced to meet him at the head of a large army. Arslan was placed in command of the left wing (12).

On 5<sup>th</sup> Safar, 408 (3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1017) Sultan Mahmud dispersed the forces of Khwarizm and appointed Altuntash to the chief command of Khwarizm and Jurjaniya. He also left Arslan to help him in restoring order in the country (13).

In A.D. 1027 the people of Nasa complained to the Sultan of the Seljuq violence (14). Mahmud dispatched Arslān Jādhīb, governor of Tūs, to punish them. The campaign kept him busy for about two years.

Thus it can be seen that Arslān Jādhīb was occupied most of the time in Central Asia and Iran. Whether he took any part in the Indian campaign of the Sultan may be anybody's guess. His name is not explicitly mentioned in this context. But the evidence of the Zalamkot inscription, which demands his personal presence in Swat, suggests that he must have taken part at least in one of these campaigns prior to June 1011. When did it really happen? The answer is hard to come by. However, a deeper analysis of the Sultan's in Indian campaigns might lead us to the right direction.

The nearest Indian campaigns prior to A.D. 1011 or those of A.D. 1008, 1009 and 1010. In 1008 the real target was Anandapala, the Hindu Shahi ruler of Udabhandapur (present Hund near Swabi), who apprehensive of the growing power of Mahmud decided to roll him back with a powerful push. The Sultan received the news in mid winter and left Ghazna on 29<sup>th</sup> Rabi' II, 399 (31<sup>st</sup> December, 1008). He crossed the Indus and met the enemy in the plains of Chhachh, opposite Hund. After some hard fighting however it became clear that success of the Muslim army was in jeopardy. But eventually Anandapala suffered a terrible defeat and fled to Kashmir. He was followed hot in the heels by Mahmud who in the course of the pursuit reached the fort of Nagarkot near Kangra (15). It must be noted that the aforementioned battle was won with great difficulty. At one stage there were clear indication that the Ghaznavid force would be beaten. Tables were turned on the Hindu army only when the Sultan's personal guard delivered a powerful attack on the enemy's rear. Under these circumstances the Sultan could ill-afford to detach Arslān Jādhīb, even if he was with him, from the main force and open a new front in Swat.

In the other two campaigns Mahmud operated in southern Panjab far away from Swat. Thus in the beginning of the year 400 (October 1009), the Sultan led an expedition to Narayanpur (16), probably in the former Alwar State. In the year 401 (October 1010) he completed the subjugation of Multan. Swat was too far away from the scene of these operations and, as it seems, was left unmolested. In any case Arslan was busy in Central Asia and Iran as pointed out above and could not have visited the distant Swat valley.

It seems therefore that Swat was conquered probably during an earlier campaign, perhaps in A.D. 1001-2, when the Ghaznavid army attacked Peshawar and Hund successively. The major battle was fought near Peshawar on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> Muharram 392 (27<sup>th</sup> ovember, 1001). Jayapala, the Hindu Shahi ruler of these places, offered tough resistance but suffered defeat and fell into the enemy hands. The Sultan then advanced to Hund, the Hindu Shahi capital, and took it easily (17). He spent the remaining winter months in reducing the adjoining territories and returned to Ghazna in the beginning of spring (Aprill, 1002).

What particular areas were reduced during operations in the "adjoining territories" is not specified. The valley of the river swat, because of its strategic location on one of the highways linking Afghanistan with Peshawar through the Nawagai pass, must have been one of these areas. Its reduction was considered necessary to mop up the remaining pocket of resistance. Another expedition might have been sent to Swabi and a third probably to Hazara. It was probably at this time that Arslān Jādhīb entered lower through the Shahkot pass and pitched a camp at its mouth upon a place now called Zalamkot. How far did he go upstream, is not known. He may have brought a considerable portion of Swat under his control, for, Ghaznavid occupation of the valley in about the middle of the same century is known from another epigraph.

Because of the rugged terrain the invaders must have suffered casualties. It seems that those among the Muslims who died during this campaign were brought to the base camp at Zalamkot and buried there. It was upon the graves of those martyrs that Arslān Jādhīb wished to build a structure — perhaps a mausoleum — and laid the foundation stone before his departure to join back the main army at Peshawar. This structure was, after the lapse of about ten years, completed by Jalilbak in A.D. 1011.

Whatever the case may be, the date of the inscription makes it absolutely clear that Arslān Jādhīb, governor of Ṭūs, was the first Muslim conqueror of Swat, and that the Zalamkot bilingual inscription is the earliest Persian epigraph found in Pakistan.

## Notes and References

1. See Abdur Rahman, "The Zalamkot Bilingual Inscription", *East and West*, IsIAQ, vol.48, Nos. 3-4, (December 1998), pp.469-73
2. Wrongly written as **مركد** (Markad) which has no meaning.
3. Jalilbak. It is difficult to restore the name. The medial long i or y ( **ی** ) has an unusual shape.
4. It is difficult to reconstruct this name.
5. J. Reynolds (Eng.trans.of *Kitab al-Yamini*, Lahore repr.1975, p.362) call Arsalan "a well known and celebrated man of Multan". H.G. Raverty (Eng.trans. of *Tabqat-e-Nasiri*, Vol.I, Ist Pakistani repr.(1977,p.32) says that "it appears he had only held the government of Multan". Ibne al- Athir (*al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh*; vol.9, Beirut 1979,p.146) says that he was one of the great generals of Mahmud.
6. M. Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian edn., New Delhi, 1971, p.44 ; Ibn al-Athir, *op.cit.*,p.146.
7. M.Nazim, *op.cit.*, p.71.
8. *Ibid.*, p.78.
9. For details see al-'Utbi, *Tarikh-i Yami-i*, Lahore edn. A.H. 1300, p. 131; Ibn al-Athir, *op.cit.*, p.146.
10. Ibn al-Athir, *op.cit.*, p.147, for details.
11. M. Nazim, *op.cit.*, p.46, for details.
12. *Ibid.*, p.50. see also W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, Ist Indian edn., New Delhi 1992, p. 273.
13. W.Barthold, *op.cit.*, p.279.
14. A. Gardizi, *Kitab Zain al-Akhbar*, ed. M. Nazim, p.85.
15. For more details see M.Nazim, *op.cit.*, pp. 89 -- 90.
16. *Ibid.*, pp.101--102.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.87--88.