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THE ROLE OF SELJUKS ON THE ABBASID'S CALIPHATE

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INTRODUCTION

Plates 215-216

In this research, an attempt is made to discuss the effect of Seljuks on Abbasid Caliphate.

The Seljuks entered Baghdad after a call from Abbasid Caliph al-Qaim in the fifth/eleventh century.

The Seljuks who were Sunni Muslims, could see themselves as true “warriors in the path of God” in liberating the Caliph and the Empire from the Shia Buwayids and from the growing threat of the Fatimid.

The Seljuks helped the Abbasid Caliphate to stand again on her legs by defeating the Fatimids and spreading the influence of Abbasid empire on Syria and al-Hejaz “Mecca & Medina”.

The Seljuks succeeded in spreading Sunni Islam through education. Nizam Almulk, who was influential vizier of Alp-Arslan and Mulik-Shah spread Sunni Islam by education. He built many schools in different cities. These schools were named upon him. They were called Nizamia Schools. These schools learned the people Sunni Islam¹.

The Seljuks period on Abbasid Caliphate was one of the best periods in their age.

TURKS IN ASIA PRE-ISLAM

At the end of the fourth/tenth century most of the area included within present-day, Iran was divided between the Gaznavid Empire and what were soon to become its tributary states in the east, and the Buwayid - controlled Abbasid Empire in the west (See figure I). Into this Islamic

¹ Alsheikh al-Amin M.: Ways of education in Islam, P. 62, Dubai 1990 and Anwar al-Gundi: Islamic History, P. 159.

World, through the corridor of Transoxiana, entered a tribe of Ghuzz Turks under their chief-tain Seljuk ibn Duqaq. These Pastoral nomads from the Central Asian Steppe initially came South as mercenary group in support of the Samanids in their battles with the Qara-Khanids².

The Turks had only recently been converted to Islam³ from Shamanism, a fact born out not only by the histories but also by their names (Figure 2). Seljuk and his father Duqaq both had Turkish names, while the sons of Seljuk (Mikail-Musa, Israil, Yunus and Yusif) all had muslim names. Israel in fact is often referred to by his Turkish name, Arsalan. And their recent conversion to Islam is important in two ways:

1) The "zeal of the convert" is often credited for their great initial military success, especially against the Byzantines.

2) They were converted to Sunni Islam and thus could see themselves as true warriors in path of God.

Many reasons are given for these pastoral nomads leaving the Central Asian Steppe. The cause of the migration probably had as much or more to do with the unstable political situation in Transoxiana at this time and the availability of an open niche attractive to these nomadic Trucks for various reasons, including the possibilities of great plunder⁴.

Whatever the reason for their entry into the Dar al-Islam, the Seljuks initial confrontation with the representatives of Islamic power was resolved through violent means. Their first battles fought not as Samanids mercenaries, but rather for their own aggrandizement were with the famous Mahmud of Ghazna, and after his death in 421/1030, with his son Masud⁵, and culminated in the victory of Seljuks grandson Tugril Beg and Chaghri Beg at the battle of Dandangan in 431/1040 Masud then retreated to Ghazna, while the Seljuks looked to the west⁶.

² Pyne: The impact of the Seljuq invasion, P.P. 119-120.

³ V. V. Bartold: Turkestan, P. 45.

⁴ Pyne: The impact of the Seljuq Invasion, P. 123.

⁵ Ibn Al-Athir, al-Kamil, IX, P.P. 457-459 and 477-484.

⁶ Ibid vol. IX, P.P. 481-484, Abd al-Naim M. Hasanein: Seljuq States (Arabic Lang.), P. 18, 1975 Egypt, and Pyne: The Impact of the Seljuq Invasion, P. 124.

THE DETERIORATION OF ABBASID CALIPHATE

The Famous Arab writer Mugaddasi published, in 985, his book entitled: *A Description of the Muslim Empire* "The People of Syria," he writes, "Live in terror of the Greeks, who have driven many from their homes and devastated the country districts, Iraq is the home of the Seditious and famine, is daily retrogressing and suffers greatly from oppression and heavy taxes... Baghdad was once a magnificent city, but is now fast falling in to ruin and decay".

The anarchy and indifference of the Buwaihids in Baghdad left a power vacuum in Syria and on the Euphrates, which resulted in the appearance of a number of independent Arab principalities. The Beni Hamdan dynasty in Aleppo, The Euphrates valley from Hit to below Kufa was ruled by the Beni Mizyed, Chiefs of Beni Asad tribe, while Mosul and the Southern Jezira were controlled by Ibn Mugallad of the Beni Uqail tribe. In Aleppos Beni Hamadan were later replaced by Ibn Mirdas, Harran was ruled by Beni Numair, while the Northern Jezira obeyed a Kardish ameer, Ibn Merwan⁷.

These Arab princes should not be thought of as ignorant tribal chiefs. Ibn Mirdas was prepared, like his predecessor Ibn Hamdan, to offer battle to the Byzantine Emperor. Ibn Merwan kept court like a minor king and correspond with the Emperor. Most of these princes were cultured, built up extensive libraries and patronized poetry and literature in the traditional Arab Style⁸.

The ruling Buwaihides prince in Baghdad died in October 1048 being succeeded by a young son who took the title of Malik al-Raheem, and immediately went off to fight a war with his brother who had seized the province of Fars- In 1054, the Turkish Mercenaries in Baghdad mutinied and the city was in confusion. For a hundred and ten years, since the seizure of Baghdad by Ibn Buwaih, the Caliphs had suffered the humiliation of being dominated by Shutes, who refused to recognise their claim to the Caliphate.

⁷ Sir John Glubb: *A short history of the Arab peoples*, P. 127.

⁸ Sir John Glubb: *Ibid*, P. 127.

The Abbasid Caliphate, which had been first ruling Egypt, al-Hejaz, Syria, Libya, Morocco and Yemen, was ruling Iraq only before Seljuqs entered Baghdad.

The Fatimid divided the Islamic Empire and spread their influence on Morocco, Egypt, Syria and al-Hejaz. They threatened Baghdad itself.

The Seljuks, however, were Sunnis. In December 1055, The Caliph al-Qaim decided to send for the Seljuks⁹ to help the Caliphate against the Buwaihids.

THE ROLE OF TUGHRIL BEG IN BAGHDAD

In 1044 the Khalif Qaim wrote to Tughril Beg, who was in Rei, to arrange a peace between him and the Buwihid prince of Baghdad.

Tughril Beg, who was a Muslim though most of the Ghuzz were heathen, received the Khalifs with profound respect.

For a short time the Khalifs situation was precarious, for he had invited Tughril Beg to come while the Buwaihid prince, Malik al Raheem, was still in Baghdad. Eventually Tughril Beg and his army arrived on the east bank of the Tigris, while Malik al Raheem confronted him from the west bank. Next morning Ghuzz soldiers entered the city in small parties but were well behaved. The citizens, however, assisted by a few Buwaihids soldiers, attacked them and drove them out¹⁰.

Tughril Beg could not find time to pay attention to the affairs at Baghdad till 477/1055 when, with the permission of the Caliph, he paid his first visit to the Metropolis of Islam, where he was received with great honour, and orders were given to mention his name in the Khutbah and on the coinage in preference to that of Malik al Raheem; and he was granted the title of Rukn al-Daulah. In spite of this, relations between the Caliph and Tughril Beg were not very cordial owing to the turbulence of both the Ghuzztroops and the citizens. The population suffered very

⁹ Sir John Glubb: Op-Cit, P. 131.

¹⁰ Sir John Glubb: A short history of the Arab peoples, P. 131, Ibn al-Athir: al-Kamil, V. 8, P.P. 71, 72, Beirut.

severely and Malik al-Rahim, in spite of the protests of the Caliph, was sent to the fort of Sirwan to be entered there¹¹.

In the summer of 1057, Tughril Beg was received in audience by the Caliph Qaim. He kissed the ground three times.

Tughril Beg a Sunni and a wild tribes man from the steppes may have been genuinely impressed by the sophisticated culture of the Caliph court and by the religious aura surrounding a lineal descendant of the prophet uncle¹².

Tughril Beg-the founder of Seljuk greatness, died in August 1063 in Rei, without ever having had any children. He had never learned to read or write, but was well gifted with the shrewdness and common sense which often distinguish illiterate old peasants, who rely on their own experience rather than on book learning. He was always patient, prudent and secretive and never relied on his subordinates. He never made any attempt to restrain the Ghuzz from killing or plundering. Tughril Beg was succeeded by his nephew Alp Arslan.

Tughril Beg was keen in giving money to the poors (sadaga) and building mosques. He said I got ashamed when I build house without building a mosque near it¹³.

THE REIGN OF ALP ARSLAN¹⁴

At an early age he led the armies of his father Caghribeg with great success, especially against the Ghaznawids, and in 450/1058 he saved his uncle, the Sultan Tughril Beg, from the revolt of Ibrahim Inal in Persia. Two or three years later he succeeded Caghribeg, who had been ill for a long time, and at the end of 453/1063 he succeeded Tughrilbeg, who died childless. He brought under his authority all the Seljukid territories.

¹¹ Amir Hassan Siddiqi: Caliphate & Sultanate in Medieval Persia, P. 154, and Sadr al-Din al-Husaini: The Fruit of histories 622 A. H., P. 60, and al-Bandari: History of Seljuq State, P. 12.

¹² Sir John Glubb: Op. Cit., P. 132.

¹³ Sadr al-Din al-Husaini: Fruit of histories, P. 65.

¹⁴ Born probably 421/1030 (Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.I, P. 420).

Alp Arslan was recognized by the Caliph al-Qaim and invested with all his predecessor's¹⁵.

Alp Arslan married his eldest son, Malik Shah, to the daughter of the Qarakhan of Trans-oxiana and another son to a daughter of the Sultan of Ghazna. Thus the three Turkish dynasties of the time were amicably united. The situation in the east being thus assured. Alp Arslan marched westwards to Armenia and then captured Aleppo, which was ruled by the independant Arab Province, Ibn Mirdas¹⁶.

Alp Arslan knew that his army was interested in the richly rewarding campaigns of a holy war (ghazwa) on the Christian territories beyond Adharbaydian, where they were concentrated.

Alp Arslan conducted a series of campaigns against the Byzantines and their Armenian and Georgian neighbours, while independant bands of Turkoman raided more deeply into territories¹⁷.

In the spring of 1071, the Byzantine Emperor Romanus Diogenes marched east wards to Armenia to defend the frontier. Before the arrival of the Seljuks, the Byzantine Emperor had gone through a phase of pacifist politics during which a great part of their armed forces had been disbanded. The appearance of the Ghuzz has resulted in an attempt rapidly to build up the army again but the force thus hastily improvised was it trained and badly equipped¹⁸.

On Friday, 19th August 1071, a pitched battle was fought at Malazkirt twenty five miles north of Lake Van. Romanus had drawn up his army in close order, but the Ghuzz, who were all cavalry, adopted their usual tactics of galloping past, shooting arrows, into the compact ranks. Unable to close hand to hand, the Byzantines were shot to pieces and eventually over run. The Emperor Romanus; taken prisoner¹⁹ was obliged to kiss the ground before the Seljuks conqueror²⁰.

¹⁵ Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.I, P. 420.

¹⁶ Sir John Glubb: A short history of the Arab peoples, P. 132.

¹⁷ Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.I, P. 420.

¹⁸ Sir John Glubb: Op. Cit., P. 132.

¹⁹ Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.I, P. 420 and al-Bandari: Op. Cit., P. 43.

²⁰ Sir John Glubb: Op. Cit., P. 132.

In the eyes of orthodox Muslims, Alp Arslan was a leader of men and a commandor capable of enforcing strict disciplines generous, just, devout, with an aversion for informers. Even at the height of his power, Alp Arslan appears to have deliberately refrained from setting foot in Baghdad, in order to avoid being involved in embarrassing and futile disputes with the Caliph and the Arabs of Irak such as had complicated the last years of Tughril Beg. On the other hand, he energetically enforced in Irak the rights of the Sultenate²¹.

The year after his victory at Malazkirt, Alp Arslan marched back to Persia where he was killed on 25th November, 1072 although illiterate, he had been an energetic ruler. He was interested in administration, kind to the poor and dealt vigorously with corrupt officials²².

THE REIGN OF MALIK SHAH

The Seljuk Empire reached its pinnacle of greatness under Malik Shah, the son and successor of Alp Arslan. Unlike his father and his great uncle, the young sultan had been educated and was especially interested in astronomy. He established an observatory in Persia, of which Umar Khayyam was in charge and which produced a calendar more accurate than the Gregorian calendar, which was issued in Europe five hundred years later.

Malik Shah added Mosul, Harran and Aleppo to Abbasid Caliphate, who for the previous century been held by independant Arab princes. Tutush, a brother of the Sultan, became king of Damascus, the Fatimid being driven out of Palestine and confined to Egypt.

In April 1087, the Caliph Muqtadi, the grandson of Qaim married a daughter of Malik Shah in Baghdad. The ceremony was made the occasion of magnificent processions through the streets of the city and dazzling display of silks, satins, jewels, silver and gold. Malik Shah again visited Baghdad in October and November 1092 one day he returned from a play's gazelle hunting with a high fever and died ten days later at the age of thirty seven²³.

²¹ Encyclopaedia of Islam, Op. Cit., article Alp Arslan.

²² Sir John Glubb: Op. Cit., P. 133.

²³ Sir John Glubb: Op. Cit., P. 134.

He left four sons, all of them still in childhood, civil war broke out immediately between them, or perhaps between the rival army chiefs, each of whom claimed to be defending the rights of one or other of the children.

THE SELJUQS WORKS ON ABBASID CALIPHATE

A new era was inaugurated in the history of the institution of the Caliphate with the establishment of a Sunni Sultanate at Baghdad. The Seljuqs, by conquering Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor, once more reunited the scattered provinces of Islam, belonging to different dynasties hostile to each other under one sovereign. In the words of Lane Poole: "They put a new life into the expiring zeal of the Muslims, drove back the re-encroaching Byzantines, and bred up a generation of fanatical Muhammadan warriors to whom, more than to anything else, the Crusades owed their repeated failure"²⁴.

The rise of the Seljuks also meant the victory of the Sunni-creed as far as their power extended over the shia tendencies which had been gaining more and more ground under the Buwayhids and the Fatimids. Since the Seljuks regarded the Abbasid Caliphate as the head of the Orthodox Islam, they constituted themselves the Champions of the Abbasid Caliphate and were naturally the declared enemies of the Fatimid Caliphate. They took energetic steps against the dangerous activities of the Ismailians and furthered the interests of Sunni theologians²⁵.

With the rapid conquests of the Seljuks, the religious authority of the Abbasid Caliphate was established in all lands that fell under their political control. Besides, the prestige of their power promoted many an independent prince to reject the religious authority of the Fatimids and recognize that of the Abbasids instead. It was during this period that the name of the Abbasid Caliph was inserted in the Khutbah in the Sacred cities of Mecca and Madinah, whose inclusion within the sphere of the Abbasid control must have raised the prestige of the Caliphate²⁶.

²⁴ Lane Poole, *Muhammadan Dynasties*, P. 50.

²⁵ Ibn Athir: *Op. Cit.*, Vol.X, P. 24.

²⁶ Amir Hassan Siddiqi: *Caliphate and Sultanate in Medieval Persia*, P.P. 158, 159.

To sum up the Seljuk period, so far as the Abbasid Caliphate is concerned, characterised by two significant features:²⁷

1) It was during this period that the renewal of the deed of investiture to individual rulers fell into disuse; and its necessity was felt only on the change of the dynasty instead of the ruler in the same family. Thus the Caliphate was politically cut off from Persia altogether and even that semblance of political control that existed during the preceding regime came to an end.

2) The other and the most important significance of the Seljuk period, as far as the Caliphate concerned, is the complete severance of the temporal and religious functions of the institutions for the first time in history the Caliphate had delegated the temporal functions of its own free will to a Sultan who was hence forward considered as the head of the temporal affairs of the Caliphate.

²⁷ Amir Hassan Siddiqi: *Ibid*, P. 193.

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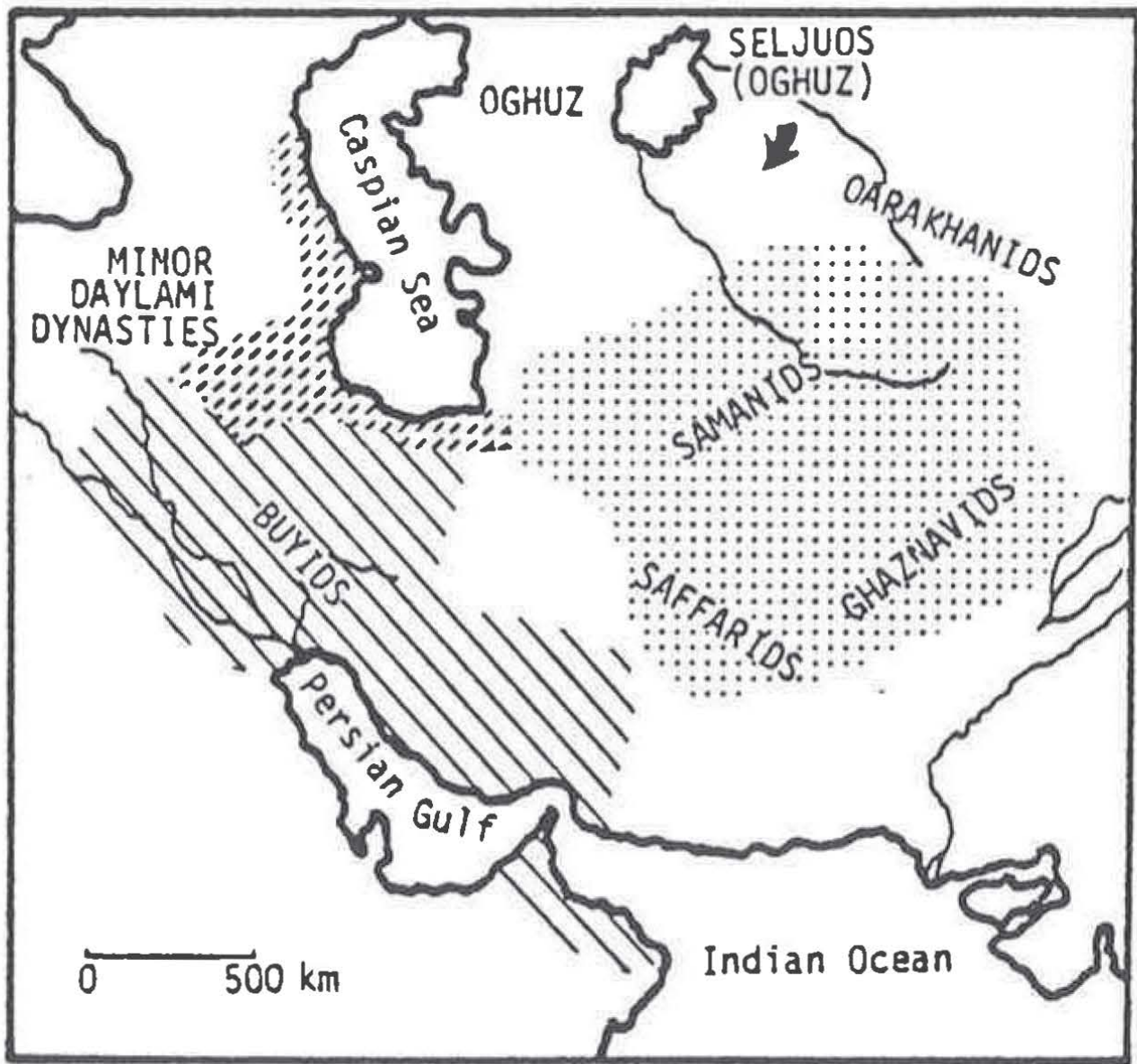


Fig. 1

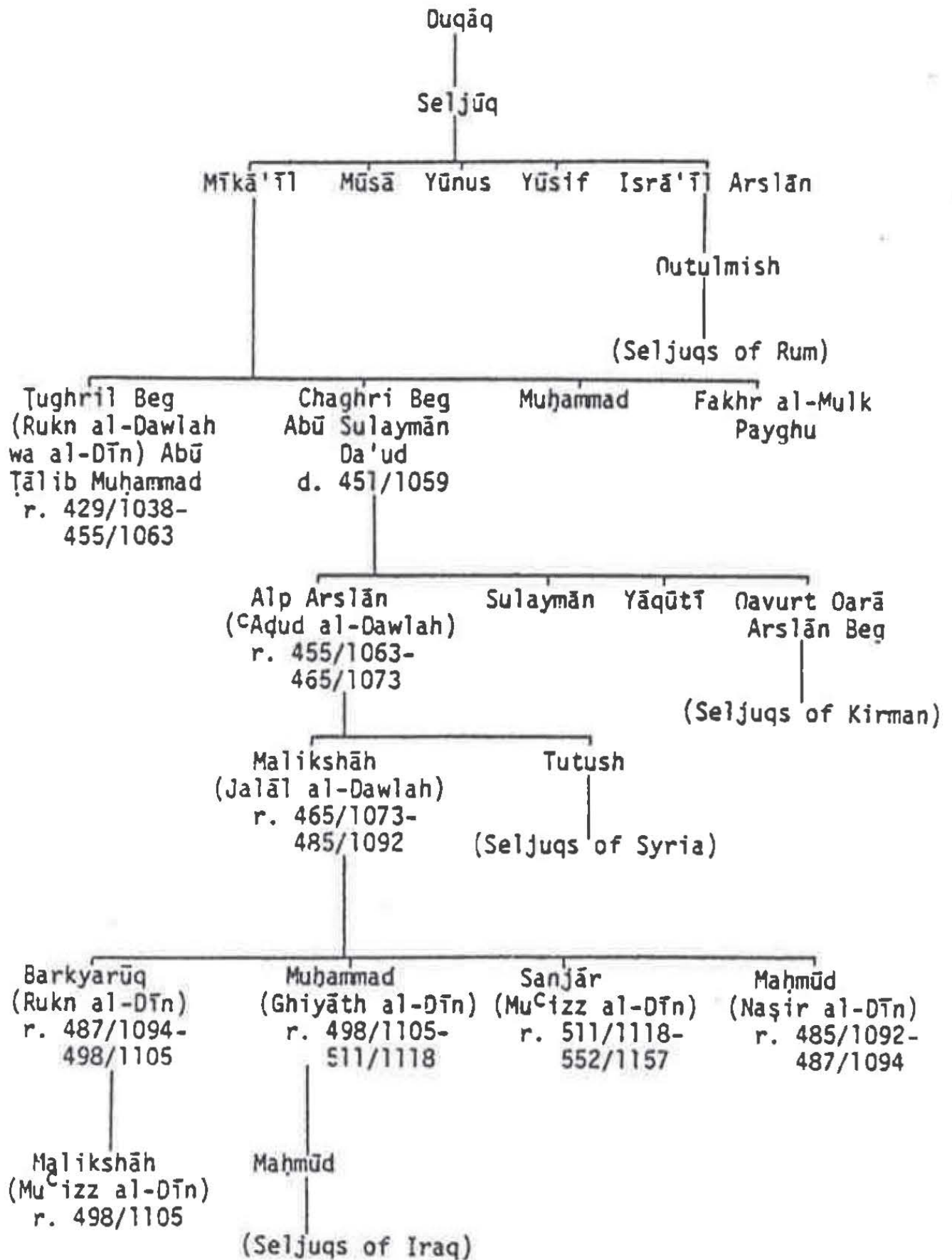


Fig. 2 — The seljuks.