CHAPTER FOUR

THE TENTS OF THE SALJUQS

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As the leading family of a group of pastoral nomads, the Saljuqs lived before the conquest of Iran like their followers: in tents. Their tented encampments appear regularly in the sources, especially when the various political leaders of the time tried to confront them. When reporting that the Saljuqs were in a certain place, the sources often say that they were camping (khayyama) there. What happened, then, after they took control of Iran and its large cities? In 1938, Pope felt intuitively that the Saljuqs had remained loyal to the tent. His brilliant intuition, however, has not been developed. While the role played by the tents of the following Turko-Mongol dynasties has been the subject of many studies, it has remained terra incognita as far as the Saljuqs are concerned. In his impressive research published in 1999, Peter Andrews has analysed in depth the connections between nomadic traditions and princely tentage, a tradition of which Tamerlane’s huge pavilion set up near Samarqand in 1404 was the “epitome”. But Andrews skips directly from the Qarakhanids to the Khitans and the Mongols. Nor are the Saljuqs referred to in the relevant entry of the Encyclopaedia of Islam or the Grove Dictionary of Art.

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1 I am very grateful to Jürgen Paul and Peter Andrews for reading earlier versions of this article and making valuable suggestions.
3 See Pope 1938, 1412: Iran was “at repeated intervals invaded by peoples who retained nomadic habits and had continued to be tent dwellers ... [the Saljuqs and the Mongols] scorned the debilitating sedentary life of those whom they conquered and made the retention of their own nomadic forms of living a point of policy and of pride”.
5 Andrews (1999, 1: 556-7) mentions the Saljuqs once, en passant, in his section on Mongol princely tentage, but in a rather anecdotal and (just the once won’t hurt) unconvincing way, see below n. 63.
6 The article “khayma” in EF (Bosworth 1978) jumps directly from the Ghaznavids to the Mongols. Likewise Peter Andrews, in his article “Tent. III Court and Ceremonial” in the Grove Dictionary, jumps directly from the caliphs to the Mongols; see Blair and Bloom 2009, 3: 282-4 (which does not name the contributor). In a recent article on the tents of the
This lack of interest was largely due to the idea that the Saljuqs were ‘Iranised’ Turks, and that the question of their dwellings is therefore irrelevant. While, historians writing on the Saljuqs in the first half of the twentieth century (such as Sanaullah) had been much more cautious, Ann Lambton subsequently argued that “the Saljuqs did not, like the Mongols, live in tented encampments”.\textsuperscript{7} Such an assertion is surprising, given the origins of the Saljuqs, and all the more surprising given the numerous references to their tents in the chronicles, not to speak of the panegyric poetry composed about them. This idea spread all the more easily as Lambton was considered an authority on the period, as Saljuq studies had remained an underdeveloped field (except in Turkey) and, moreover, as the very people who could have focused on the tents of the Saljuqs (and here I mean historians of art and techniques such as Andrews) were hampered by the lack of iconography and the difficulty of dealing with a bilingual corpus of sources (Arabic and Persian) which, furthermore, has not been translated until recently.

The present contribution is part of a larger research project started in 2006, concerned with the issue of the location of rule in pre-Mongol Iran. The main results obtained so far can be summarised as follows. First, the Saljuqs were very mobile and their travels were not merely motivated by military or political considerations. Even in peace time, the sultans used to follow an itinerant way of life, moving from one pasture to another. Second, the Saljuqs kept their distance from the city proper and stayed instead with their amirs in a military camp (Per. lashkargāh, Ar. ‘askar/\textit{mu’askar}) outside the city walls.\textsuperscript{8} This article aims to document more closely the subject of their dwellings.

I have organised my essay in three parts. The first aims to define as precisely as possible the various elements of Saljuq royal tentage as it appears in the sources.\textsuperscript{9} The second part emphasises the symbolic dimen-


\textsuperscript{8} I have dealt with these issues in two complementary articles, see Durand-Guédy 2012 and Durand-Guédy 2011b. The former outlines the aims of the project, its starting hypothesis and some preliminary results; the latter is a case-study focusing on the reign of a particular sultan.

\textsuperscript{9} I follow Peter Andrews (1997, i: 3) in his understanding of a tent: “provided a structure has covering which can be separated from its supports, and both can be transported, it is for the purpose of this book a tent”.

Ayyubids, Jean-Michel Mouton (2009) insists on their link with the tents of the Crusaders, without alluding to those of the Saljuqs.