Seljuk leaders—Toghril I, Alp Arslan, and Malik Shah I (see Genealogy 5.1: The Early Seljuks)—proclaimed themselves rulers, “sultans,” of a new state. Bands of herdsmen followed in their wake, moving their sheep into the very farmland of Iran (disrupting agriculture there), then continuing westward, into Armenia, which had been recently annexed by Byzantium. Meanwhile, under Alp Arslan (r.1063–1073), the Seljuk army (composed precisely of such herdsmen but also, increasingly, of other Turkic tribesmen recruited as slaves or freemen) harried Syria. This was Muslim territory, but it was equally the back door to Byzantium. Thus the Byzantines got involved, and throughout the 1050s and 1060s they fought numerous indecisive battles with the Seljuks. Then in 1071 a huge Byzantine force met an equally large Seljuk army at Manzikert (today Malazgirt, in Turkey). The battle ended with the Byzantines defeated and Anatolia open to a flood of militant nomads. (See Map 5.1.)

The Seljuks of Anatolia set up their own sultanate and were effectively independent of the Great Seljuks who ruled (and disputed among themselves) in Iran and Iraq. For the Anatolian Seljuks, this once-central Byzantine province was Rum, “Rome.” Meanwhile, other Turks in the Seljuk entourage took off on their own, hiring themselves out as military leaders. Atsiz ibn Uwaq is a good example. For a while he worked for Alp Arslan, but around 1070 he was called on by the Fatimid governor of Syria to help fight off rebellious