
 THE GHAZNAVIDS*

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The establishment of the Ghaznavid amirate in what is now Afghanistan in the last quarter of the tenth century A.D. represents the culmination of a process which had begun in the Samanid amirate whereby the military bases of the state had been transformed from a reliance on the indigenous, Iranian landed classes, the *dihqāns*, to a substantial dependence on Turkish slave troops. Until the decay of their power in the second half of the tenth century, the Samanid amirs had kept a firm hold on the direction of affairs, and the flourishing state of their lands in Transoxania and Khurasan had won them admiring comments from such Arab geographers who had travelled through their territories as Ibn Hawqal and al-Maqdisi (see above, Chapter 4). However, the decline of the amirs' personal authority and the growth of centrifugal forces in the state, aggravated by the personal ambitions of the great military commanders, had plunged the Samanid amirate into increasing crisis and chaos; it was these difficulties, and the mutual rivalries of leading figures, which allowed the formation of the Ghaznavid amirate. For roughly half a century, it was to be the most powerful state known in the eastern Islamic lands since the weakening of the 'Abbasid caliphate.

The prehistory of the Ghaznavids

Prominent among the disputing Turkish generals at the Samanid court in the middle years of the tenth century was the commander-in-chief (Persian, *ispahsālār*; Arabic, *hājib al-hujjāb*) of the Samanid army in Khurasan, Alptegin (appointed to this office by Amir 'Abd al-Malik in 961), who worked with the Persian vizier Abū 'Ali Muhammad Bal'ami to secure an ascendancy in the

* See Map 4, pp. 430–1.

state for their own personal interests. But their attempt, on ‘Abd al-Malik’s death in 961, to impose their own candidate on the throne in Bukhara, the dead man’s young and pliant son, failed, and under the new amir, ‘Abd al-Malik’s brother Mansūr I, a rival group of Turkish generals headed by Fā’iq Khāssa was now supreme at court. Threatened by the new regime and squeezed out of power, Alptegin prudently withdrew to the far eastern fringes of the Samanid empire with his personal force of Turkish professional, military *ghulāms* (slave soldiers) and a group of Iranian *ghāzīs* (fighters for the faith). The sources state that his aim was to carry on holy war against the infidels there and thus earn divine merit. In reality, Alptegin was seeking safety for his own person, and was very probably influenced by the example of a predecessor of his, another Turkish general of the Samanids, Karategin Isfijābi, who before his death in 929 had built up round himself a petty principality in what is now south-eastern Afghanistan centred on Bust and the region of al-Rukhkhaj or Arachosia, nominally still subject to the Samanids but in practice autonomous. This principality had continued there under succeeding Turkish *ghulām* leaders.¹

Alptegin’s destination was the region in eastern Afghanistan of Zabulistan, centred on the small and obscure town of Ghazna or Ghazni, where he now found himself; the Samanid authorities in Bukhara had to make the best of the situation and to send Alptegin an investiture patent as local governor in a region where their control had in any case been very shadowy or even non-existent. In fact, Ghazna seems to have been held by a local family, whose generic name may have been that of Lawik (although the reading as a personal name, Anūk, has been less plausibly suggested), doubtfully Muslim and closely linked with the indigenous rulers in Kabul of the Hindūshāhi family. Alptegin’s son Abū Is’hāq Ibrāhīm, who succeeded his father briefly in 963, had in 964–5 to flee to Bukhara when the Lawik dispossessed by Alptegin returned. A decade or so later, the people of Ghazna, chafing under the tyranny of one of the Turkish commanders who had by then come to power there, Bōri or Bōri Tegin, again invited Lawik back. After this temporary hiatus, however, the town remained firmly in Turkish hands, although the neighbouring town of Gardiz – which seems to have had its own local ruling family, that of the Abū Mansūr Aflah mentioned at the time of the first Saffarid Ya‘qūb b. Layth a century before – did not fall to the Turks until c. 974–5, since Bilgetegin, Abū Is’hāq Ibrāhīm’s successor in Ghazna, was killed at its siege.²

1. On the early Ghaznavids, see Barthold, 1968, pp. 249–51; Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 24–5; Bosworth, 1963, p. 37.

2. Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 25–7, 175–6; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 37–9; 1965, pp. 16–22; 1975, pp. 164–5.

The establishment of Sebüktegin in Ghazna

Thus the rule of the line of Turkish generals, all originally in the Samanid service, gradually became firmly established in the eastern part of modern Afghanistan. On the evidence of the few surviving coins of the period, however, they still recognized the Samanid amirs in Bukhara as their suzerains. This was the position when Sebüktegin (this seems to be the most probable form for this name; Turkish *sevük/sebük tegin* or ‘beloved prince’) in 977 took over from the deposed Böri, beginning a twenty-year rule in Ghazna. Sebüktegin had been one of the most trusted personal slaves of Alptegin, accompanying him on his withdrawal to Ghazna in 962. All that we know of his antecedents stems from a collection of aphorisms on statecraft and kingly power allegedly left by him to his son Mahmūd, the *Pand-nāma* [Epistle Containing Pieces of Advice], in which it is stated that he came from the Turks of Barskhan, on the shores of the Issyk-kül in the region later known as Semirechye (now in Kyrgyzstan). Obsequious genealogists later fabricated for Sebüktegin a genealogy stretching back to the Sasanian emperors of Persia, but in fact he probably came from one of the component tribes of the Karluk Turkic group. Regarding his subsequent career, the elaborate account in the Seljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk’s *Siyāsat-nāma* [Book of Statecraft] of Sebüktegin’s rise to fame under Alptegin’s patronage because of his outstanding personal qualities can hardly be taken at face value.³ Be this as it may, Sebüktegin now began an uninterrupted period of power in Ghazna (977–97), still acknowledging the Samanids as his nominal overlords: placing their names before his own on the coins which he minted and being content, it would appear from the inscription on his extant tomb in Ghazna, with the title expressing his subordinate status, *al-bājib al-ajall* (Most Noble Commander). Yet in practice, he was securely laying the foundation of an independent Ghaznavid state which his son Mahmūd was to erect into a mighty, supra-national empire. On arriving in Ghazna, Alptegin’s *ghulāms* had established on the surrounding agricultural lands a series of territorial revenue assignments (*iqṭā’s*) for their support. Sebüktegin now reformed this system, insisting on control from the central *diwān* in Ghazna and ensuring that all soldiers had adequate stipends.⁴ The Turks there were nevertheless still an isolated pocket in a hostile environment, with powers to their east like the Hindūshāhis of Wayhind and other north Indian rulers, whose attitude was bound to be hostile, for eastern Afghanistan had always tended both historically and culturally to be part of the Indian world.⁵

3. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 28–9; 1933, pp. 605–28; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 39–41; 1975, pp. 164–5.

4. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 41–2, 124–5.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–3.

Accordingly, Sebüktegin may have made a conscious decision that a policy of expansion would preserve the dynamic of his Turkish followers and ensure the survival and future florescence of his petty lordship. He early moved against the existing line of Turkish rulers in Bust, overthrowing their leader Baytuz, and also adding Qusdar (in north-eastern Baluchistan) to his dominions (c. 977–8). More significant for the future direction of Ghaznavid expansion were clashes with the Hindūshāhis, who held the Kabul river basin and the Panjab plains. Retaliatory attacks on Ghazna by the Rajah Jaypāl (c. 986–7) led to Sebüktegin's victory over his forces and the extension of Ghaznavid power into the region of Lamghan and the Kabul river valley as far as Peshawar. There is nothing to show that Islamic religious motives were uppermost here, but Islam must have been implanted in these regions, and the tradition of winter plunder raids from the mountain rim of eastern Afghanistan down to the Indian plains now took shape.⁶

The firmness of Sebüktegin's power in Ghazna and his expansionist policies enabled him in the later years of his reign to intervene in the politics of the Samanid state which had originally nurtured him. The power of the amirs was now in steep and irreversible decline, so that in 992 the capital Bukhara had been temporarily occupied by the invading Turkish Karakhanids, and the perpetuation of the amir's authority was threatened by the alliance of two of the most powerful Turkish generals in the state, Abū ʿAlī Simjūri and Fāʿiq Khāssa. Against this last threat, Amir Nūh II b. Mansūr summoned to his aid Sebüktegin and his son Mahmūd. The two swore allegiance to Nūh at Kish and appeared in Khurasan with their army. In a battle near Herat the royal forces secured a complete victory over the two rebel generals, who fled westwards to the northern Persian territories of the Samanids' Buyid rivals in 994. For these services, Sebüktegin received the honorific title (*laqab*) of *nāsir al-dīn wa ʿl-dawla* (Helper of Religion and the State) and Mahmūd that of *sayf al-dawla* (Sword of the State) plus command of the Samanid army in Khurasan; and an attempted revanche by Abū ʿAlī and Fāʿiq was defeated in the following year. Fresh incursions into Transoxania by the Karakhanids in 996 rendered the Samanid amir even more dependent on Sebüktegin and Mahmūd. They were able to compel Nūh to nominate a vizier favourable to their interests, and then to negotiate a peace treaty with the Karakhanids which left the latter in control of the Syr Darya valley and the Ghaznavids with the whole of Khurasan, which was never again to be controlled by the Samanids.⁷

6. Nāzīm, 1927, pp. 485–95; 1931, pp. 29–30; Habib, 1951, pp. 14–16; Ray, 1931–6, pp. 55–83; Bosworth, 1975, pp. 165–8.

7. Barthold, 1968, pp. 261–8; Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 30–2; Bosworth, 1963, p. 44; 1962*b*, pp. 217–18; 1975, pp. 168–9.

The succession of Mahmūd

Sebüktegin died in 997 and Ghaznavid control of Khurasan was thrown in jeopardy. Mahmūd had to hurry eastwards to Ghazna in order to wrest power from his younger half-brother Ismāʿil (997–8) whom Sebüktegin – perhaps influenced by the fact that Ismāʿil’s mother was a daughter of Alptegin – had appointed his successor there. Mahmūd’s superior military skill soon made him master in Ghazna (998); the new Samanid amir, Mansūr II b. Nūh, invested him with what is now Afghanistan and eastern Khurasan and he was able to recover western Khurasan from the Turkish general Begtuzun. Thus by 999 Mahmūd was in complete control of the whole of Afghanistan and the former Samanid territories south of the Oxus (Amu Darya) and now regarded himself as an independent sovereign. He secured legitimation of his new power from the ʿAbbasid caliph in Baghdad, al-Qādir (991–1031), who bestowed on him the titles of *walī amīr al-muʿminīn* (Friend of the Commander of the Faithful) and *yamīn al-dawla* (Right Hand of the State) the latter being the one by which Mahmūd became best known and which was at times applied to the Ghaznavid dynasty as a whole (thus the historian Jūzjānī refers to them in his *Tabaqāt-i Nāsiri* as *al-Sebūktigīniyya al-Yamīniyya al-Mahmūdiyya*). Thus was inaugurated, also, the tradition whereby the Ghaznavid sultans always buttressed their power by caliphal approval, were assiduous in sending gifts from Indian plunder to Baghdad, and carefully cultivated an image of defenders of Sunni orthodoxy against the caliph’s opponents and rivals such as the Shiʿite Buyids of Iraq and western Iran and the Ismaʿili Fatimids of Egypt and Syria.⁸

An agreement was reached at this point with the Karakhanid Ilig Nasr b. ʿAli making the Oxus the boundary between the two empires, for the shrunken Samanid amirate came to an inglorious end when the Ilig occupied Bukhara definitively in 999. This was a historical event whose significance cannot have been apparent at the time. After 1017 the north-eastern lands of Islam were wholly in the hands of two Turkish sovereign powers, ending the rule there of indigenous Iranian dynasties. The region became open to a steady flow of Turkish immigration from the Inner Asian steppes. Thus the process began of converting what had been in pre-Islamic times *l’Iran extérieur* into a majority Turkish ethnic and linguistic region by the sixteenth century; while the gradual influx over subsequent centuries of Turkish pastoral nomads and their herds from beyond the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) was to have a decisive effect on the pattern of land utilization and agricultural economy in Transoxania and the northern tier of the Middle Eastern lands.

8. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 36–45; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 45–6; 1962a, pp. 62–3; 1975, pp. 168–9.

The zenith of the empire under Mahmūd

Mahmūd's thirty-two year reign (998–1030) – lengthy by contemporary standards – enabled him to build up, by ceaseless campaigning, a vast military empire. From a nucleus in Afghanistan and Khurasan, this empire stretched by his death from the fringes of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in the west to the Ganges valley of northern India in the east, and from Khwarazm and the upper Oxus principalities in the north to the Indian Ocean shores of Sind and Makran in the south. Not since the heyday of the °Abbasid caliphs had one man ruled so much territory, and that from the insignificant town of Ghazna. For some two centuries, until the decline of Ghurid power in India at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Ghazna was to be a place of international significance. Only then did it relapse into its former obscurity, so that, visiting it three centuries later, Bābur, the founder of Mughal rule in India, was to muse, 'Ghazna is a very humble place; strange indeed it is that rulers in whose hands were Hindustan and Khurāsānāt should have chosen it for their capital.'⁹

Mahmūd's empire, extent.

As noted above, the pattern of expansionism had been set by Sebüktegin, but his son Mahmūd was now far better endowed with both military and financial resources than his father had been. Mahmūd took over the Samanid forces in Khurasan and his successes as a war leader ensured a steady stream of free soldiers and volunteers to supplement his core of Turkish *ghulāms*. Above all, the fiscal resources of the province of Khurasan, with its rich agricultural oases and its urban centres for commerce and industry, provided a steady income from taxation for the maintenance of the highly expensive Ghaznavid standing army, a financial injection which the much sparser economies of the plateaux and mountains of the Hindu Kush–Pamirs region could never have supplied.

The protection of Khurasan and the Oxus frontier was thus a prime concern of Mahmūd's, for, despite the agreement with the Karakhanids and the sultan's marriage in 1000 to a daughter of the Ilig (possibly the *Mahd-i Chigil* of certain sources), the Khans coveted Khurasan for themselves. While Mahmūd was absent at Multan in India in 1006, Karakhanid armies swept down on Balkh and on Nishapur, where the local inhabitants, exasperated at the rapacity of Ghaznavid tax-collectors, actually welcomed the invaders. Returning swiftly, Mahmūd restored the situation, but a second invasion under the Ilig and his kinsman Kadir Khan Yūsuf of Khotan came in the following year. This was stemmed by a brilliant victory of Mahmūd's near Balkh in 1008, in which the Ghaznavids' war elephants struck terror into the Karakhanid ranks, unfamiliar with these awe-inspiring beasts. This defeat quelled Karakhanid designs on Khurasan; being a tribal confederation rather

9. *Bābur-nāma*, cited in Bosworth, 1963, p. 36.

than a unitary state as was the Ghaznavid empire, the Khans were never again able to present a united front against Mahmūd.¹⁰ The sultan, for his part, negotiated marriage links (thus his son Mas'ūd, the future sultan, married a daughter of the Great Khan Arslan Khan Mansūr, brother of the Ilig Nasr) and skilfully exploited those dissensions within the Karakhanid family, which were later to lead to a division of territories into a Western and an Eastern Khanate.

The main Karakhanid threat to Mahmūd's position was now to come from his immediate neighbour to the north, 'Alī b. Bughra Khan Hasan or Hārūn, called 'Alī Tegin, of Bukhara and Samarkand – until his death in 1034, he was the most strenuous opponent of Ghaznavid ambitions in Central Asia. In 1025 Mahmūd invaded Transoxania with the aim of destroying 'Alī Tegin and he made an alliance with the latter's rival, Kadīr Khan Yūsuf (now ruling in Khotan and Kashghar), sealed, as usual, by marriage links. Although 'Alī Tegin was temporarily driven out of Samarkand, he returned in 1026 when Mahmūd left Transoxania in order to prepare for the Somnath expeditions (see below), and the sultan made no further efforts in this quarter. Barthold is probably correct in stating that Mahmūd preferred to leave 'Alī Tegin in Transoxania as a counterbalance to Kadīr Khan Yūsuf.¹¹ Significant, however, of the access of prestige which Mahmūd's campaigns in Transoxania and Khwarazm brought him within Inner Asia is the historian Gardīzi's mention under the year 1026 of embassies from the distant Kitā (sc. the Kitan or Liao of northern China) and the Uighurs of Kocho in East Turkistan (what is now Xinjiang), coming to the sultan to seek marriage alliances for their rulers; such ties with pagans were courteously but firmly rejected by Mahmūd.¹²

Mahmūd's activist policy in Transoxania during these years had been facilitated by his acquisition of an important bridgehead across the Oxus, possession of which enabled him to turn the flank of the Karakhanids and exert pressure on 'Alī Tegin. The ancient Iranian kingdom of Khwarazm had been ruled until 995 by the old-established line of Afrighids of Kath, but control subsequently passed to a new line of Khwarazm Shahs, the Ma'munids of Gurganj. Although the shahs had been nominally subject to the Samanids, in practice they had been independent, especially as Khwarazm formed an isolated salient of settled, irrigated land within the surrounding deserts and steppes. The province's agricultural richness and its historic commerce with Inner Asia and southern Russia attracted Mahmūd's greed. He married his sister (known as *Hurra-yi Khuttali* or *Kālji*) to Ma'mūn b. Ma'mūn Khwarazm

also known
Chorasmia

10. Barthold, 1968, pp. 272–4; Nāzim, 1931, pp. 47–52; Pritsak, 1953–4, pp. 28–9; Bosworth, 1963, p. 116; 1975, pp. 170–1.

11. Barthold, 1968, pp. 274, 279–86; Nāzim, 1931, pp. 52–3; Pritsak, 1953–4, pp. 29–33; 1950, pp. 216–24.

12. Barthold, 1968, p. 286; Nāzim, 1931, p. 56; Minorsky, 1942, pp. 19–20, 76–80.

Shah and, by deliberately provoking local Khwarazmian feeling and pursuing an unscrupulous diplomacy which led to his brother-in-law's murder, secured in 1017 a pretext for intervention in Khwarazm. A Ghaznavid invasion took place; the Ma'munids were overthrown, thereby putting an end to the last independent Iranian line in Central Asia; and Khwarazm was incorporated into the Ghaznavid empire under the governorship of Altuntash, a former *ghulam* of Sebüktegin, who now ruled there with the traditional title of Khwarazm Shah, the first of a series of Turks to bear that designation.¹³

Within what is now Afghanistan and Baluchistan, the heartlands of the Ghaznavid empire, various local rulers – some of whom had been loosely dependent on the Samanids – were brought into the Ghaznavid orbit. A local prince was allowed to remain in Qusdar as a vassal after a Ghaznavid show of strength there in 1010–11, as also in Makran, the coastal strip of Baluchistan, where a Ghaznavid force intervened in 1026 in a succession dispute.¹⁴ Existing local lines seem also to have been left in the trans-Oxus principalities of Chaghaniyan and Khuttal. These had strategic value as bridgeheads for Ghaznavid campaigns against the Karakhanids and were also the first line of defence for northern Afghanistan against predatory peoples like the Kumijis of the Buttaman mountains (in what is now Tajikistan) (perhaps remnants of an element of the Hephthalite confederation), whose raids were to be encouraged in the 1030s by the Karakhanid prince Böri Tegin (the later Tamghach Khan Ibrāhīm).¹⁵ We know that in Mahmūd's time, an amir survived in Chaghaniyan from the old-established Muhtājīd family, and in Mas'ūd b. Mahmūd's reign the local amir (of unspecified family) was the sultan's son-in-law.¹⁶

Within Afghanistan proper, there was no strategic need to maintain buffer-states like these. The ruler of Gharchistan in northern Afghanistan, the Shir, was deposed in 1012 and his principality was incorporated into the Ghaznavid empire, and the neighbouring one of Guzgan likewise in 1010–11 when its rulers, the Farighunids, apparently failed in the male line.¹⁷ The remote region of Ghur in central Afghanistan remained, however, substantially a pagan enclave outside Ghaznavid control. Mahmūd sent expeditions in 1011 and 1020 and with difficulty secured the submission of some local chiefs, including the lord of Ahangaran, Muhammad b. Sūri of the Shansabānī family (who were to be the driving force behind the remarkable rise to power in the

13. Sachau, 1873, pp. 292–311; Barthold, 1968, pp. 275–9; Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 56–62, 177–8; Tolstov, 1953, pp. 290–1; Bosworth, 1963, p. 237; 1975, pp. 174–5.

14. Nāzīm, 1931, p. 74; Bosworth, 1975, p. 173.

15. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 73, 239; Bosworth and Clauson, 1965, pp. 8–9; Bosworth, 1975, pp. 173–4.

16. Bosworth, 1963, p. 237.

17. Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 60–2, 177–8; Bosworth, 1975, pp. 171–2.

next century of the Ghaznavids' supplanters, the Ghurids). Ghur was never properly subdued, however, and the implantation there of Islam was to be a slow process (see below, Chapter 8).¹⁸

Sistan, in south-western Afghanistan, was a region with strong traditions of its own independence going back to the Saffarids, when it had been the centre of a vast if transient military empire. Despite the collapse of this empire, scions of the Saffarids had survived in Sistan as petty rulers under generally nominal Samanid suzerainty. Amir Khalaf b. Ahmad had become Sebüktegin's neighbour after the latter's annexation of Bust, and he feared for the integrity of his own territories. He temporarily seized Bust while Sebüktegin was involved with Jaypāl, seized Pushang while Mahmūd was disputing with Ismā'īl over the succession and intrigued with the Karakhanids. Hence Mahmūd sent forces into Sistan in 999 and 1003, on the latter occasion deposing Khalaf and annexing his territories. Nevertheless, local feeling in Sistan was always strongly anti-Ghaznavid, and when the Seljuq Turks appeared on the fringes of Sistan in the 1040s, in Mawdūd b. Mas'ūd's sultanate, the people there threw off the Ghaznavid yoke and raised to power a line of local chiefs as the Maliks of Nimruz.¹⁹

The story of Mahmūd's Indian campaigns does not directly concern the history of Central Asia, but so important an aspect of Ghaznavid policy requires some discussion. Sebüktegin's clashes with Jaypāl have been mentioned above. Mahmūd likewise felt that the Hindūshāhis were a major obstacle to any expansion into northern India. He defeated Jaypāl in 1001, and his son Anandpāl in 1009, and then a coalition of the princes of Kashmir and other regions of northern India, alarmed at the threat from the Turushkas (as the [Ghaznavids'] Turks appear in Indian sources), under the leadership of Anandpāl's son Trilochanpāl (1004). Further coalitions, including the Rajahs of Kalinjar and Kanawj, failed to stem the Ghaznavid onslaught. Trilochanpāl died in 1021, and with the death of his son Bhipāl in 1026, the line of Hindūshāhi Rajahs came to an end; surviving members of the family took refuge in Kashmir (which Mahmūd made a disastrous attempt at raiding in 1021, but which was not to be seriously penetrated by Islam until the fourteenth century).²⁰

Other expeditions were mounted by Mahmūd into what is now eastern Panjab and into the Ganges plains (modern Uttar Pradesh) and central India (modern Madhya Pradesh). Thus in 1004 the Rajah of Bhatinda, to the south of Lahore, was attacked and an immense booty, including 120 elephants, taken.

18. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 70-3.

19. *Ibid.*, 1931, pp. 69-70, 187-9; Bosworth, 1975, pp. 172-3; 1994, pp. 321-8, 368 et seq.

20. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 86-96; Ray, 1931-6, Vol. I, pp. 84-101; Habib, 1951, pp. 23-4, 27-33, 36-7, 41-7.

In 1009 the ruler of Narayanpur, in north-eastern Rajasthan, was humbled, agreeing in his peace treaty with the sultan to supply a contingent of 2,000 Indian soldiers for the Ghaznavid army. The rich and fertile Doab between the Ganges and the Yamuna was the seat of many wealthy shrines and temples. Thanesar, where the Hindus venerated an idol named Chakraswami (Lord of the Wheel), was plundered in 1014 and the idol carried off to Ghazna. The expedition in the winter of 1018–19 captured rich booty from Mathura or Muttra, the reputed birthplace of the deified Indian hero Krishna, and then pushed on to confront one of the leading Hindu princes of northern India, the Pratihāra Rajah of Kanawj, gaining from the whole expedition what was reckoned by the historian ‘Utbi at 3 million dirhams, 55,000 slaves and 350 elephants.²¹

Over the ensuing years, expeditions were sent against a coalition of princes under Ganda of Kalinjar, including also the rulers of Kanawj and Gwalior (1019–20, 1022–3), penetrating into central India. But the culmination of Mahmūd’s Indian campaigns was his attack on Somnath on the south-western coast of the Kathiawar peninsula (1025–6), where lay a temple with the lingam of the moon-god Mahādeva, endowed with fabulous riches. The raid involved an arduous march from Multan across the Thar desert and an equally difficult return one through Cutch, harassed by the Jhats, to Sind, with 30,000 of the regular army plus volunteers. The immense plunder gained from the despoiled temples, said to total over 10 million dinars and brought back to Ghazna, gave ample recompense for the hardship endured. Above all other raids of the sultan, the attack on Somnath caught the imagination of the Islamic world. Rich gifts were sent to Baghdad and the caliph awarded the sultan – his reputation as ‘hammer of the infidels’ now much inflated – further honorific titles. Over the centuries, a rich accretion of stories and legends was to attach itself to the historical core of the episode.²²

Although later generations of Indian Muslims were to venerate Mahmūd as the founding father of Islam in India, the Ghaznavid expeditions should in reality be seen as essentially plunder raids, as has been emphasized by, for example, Mohammad Habib.²³ Their aim was to exact tribute from the Indian princes in the shape of gold, elephants, slaves and – quite often – troop contingents for the Ghaznavid army, while the treasures from despoiled temples were taken to Ghazna and either converted into negotiable form or else used to adorn and beautify public buildings such as palaces, gardens and mosques. Such gains were especially welcomed by pious Muslims as *māl-i ḥalāl* (lawful wealth) as opposed to the taxation collected from Muslim sub-

21. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 99–104, 106–10, 197–203; Ray, 1931–6, Vol. I, pp. 84–98; Habib, 1951, pp. 38–42.

22. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 110–22, 209–24; Habib, 1951, pp. 48, 51–9.

23. See Habib, 1951, pp. 76–7, 81–4.

jects, frequently by oppression and violence. No conditions of adherence to Islam were imposed on the Indians, nor could any such conditions be enforced, for as soon as the Ghaznavid forces withdrew homewards, any forced converts would have apostatized. Only in western Panjab, where Lahore became the concentration-point for *ghāzīs*, can Islam have become gradually implanted at this time, adjacent as this region was to existing Muslim communities of the middle and lower Indus valley established there since the Arab conquest of Sind at the beginning of the eighth century. Only at Lahore, too, was there an attempt in the latter years of Mahmūd's reign and in the early ones of Mas'ūd's to set up a civil administration, with the aim of making western Panjab something like a regular province of the empire for fiscal purposes. This attempt foundered because of the unpacified state of northern India and the sultan's inability to control bellicose and volatile military elements and *ghāzīs* in the Muslim garrisons.²⁴

Over the three centuries since Muhammad b. al-Qāsim al-Thaqafi's conquest, the existing Islam of the Indus valley Arab communities had acquired what was, in the eyes of the sternly orthodox Mahmūd, a heretical tinge. During the tenth century, the Muslims of Sind and Multan had come to recognize the spiritual and moral supremacy not of the 'Abbasids but of their Shi'ite Fatimid rivals (see above, Chapter 2). Hence although the local ruler in Multan, Abu 'l-Fat'h Dāwūd, had been on friendly terms with the Ghaznavids, in two campaigns of 1006 and 1010 the sultan attacked Multan, massacred the Isma'ilis there (called in contemporary phraseology Qarāmita or Carmathians) and deposed Abu 'l-Fat'h. In 'Utbi's words, 'He was unable, in the interests of religion, to endure that he [Abu 'l-Fat'h] should remain in power, seeing the vileness of his evil-doing and the abomination of his affair.'²⁵ The fact that the remaining people of the prosperous trading city of Multan had to pay a heavy fine to save it from being plundered by the Ghaznavid army, however, indicates that the enforcement of orthodoxy could have its profitable side. Even so, Isma'ilism survived there and, probably after Mas'ūd's deposition and death in 1041, the Isma'ilis of Multan once more rose against Ghaznavid control, under Abu 'l-Fat'h Dāwūd's son, and the new sultan, Mawdūd, had to send a further punitive expedition.²⁶

fear of religion can be profitable.

Such campaigns as these formed part of the image that Mahmūd carefully built up round himself as the hero of Sunni orthodoxy and the scourge of heretic Muslims and of infidels like the Hindus or the pagans of Ghur and Kafiristan (modern Nuristan). Although earlier in his career as a commander in Khurasan, Mahmūd had, like his father, given support to the leaders of the

first instance of political Islam.

24. Habib, 1951, pp. 73, 76–87; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 75–6, 77–8, 114–16; 1962a, pp. 54–6.

25. *Al-Tārikh al-Yamīni*, cited in Bosworth, 1963, p. 52.

26. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 96–9; Ray, 1931–6, Vol. I, pp. 1–54; Stern, 1949, pp. 298–307; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 52, 76; 1962a, pp. 54–5; 1977, pp. 30–1.

pietistic Karrāmiyya sect, which was strong in Nishapur,²⁷ the Ghaznavids assimilated themselves to the norm for most eastern Iranian and Turkish peoples: adherence to orthodox Sunnism and the Hanafi law school. This involved allegiance to the moral and spiritual heads of Sunni Islam, the °Abbasid caliphs, by now living a reduced existence in Baghdad as pensioners of the Buyids and with their court overshadowed culturally and intellectually by the splendour of the Fatimids in Cairo. Mahmūd needed the moral backing of the °Abbasids when first he took over Khurasan and supplanted his lawful suzerains, the Samanids, just as his son Mas'ūd was to require it for the succession struggle with his brother Muhammad on their father's death in 1030. Hence gifts from plunder and announcements of victories were sent regularly to Baghdad, a harmless envoy from the Fatimids to the Ghaznavid court was summarily executed and accusations of 'Carmathian' sympathies were used to justify the removal of the sultan's internal enemies; in return, the sultans received from Baghdad grandiloquent titles and other insignia of royal power.²⁸

The excuse of an anti-Shi'ite crusade became the justification for Mahmūd's last great campaign, directed against the Buyid amirate of northern Iran. The weak ruler there, Majd al-Dawla, unable to control his Daylamite soldiery, injudiciously appealed to the sultan for help. Until then, Mahmūd had been circumspect in his dealings with the Buyids, still the dominant power in Iraq and in Iran west of Khurasan. On this pretext, in 1029 Mahmūd marched against Rayy, deposed the amir and sacked the city, carrying off rich booty from what was the main commercial and industrial centre of northern Iran. Massacres of heterodox elements, described as Bātiniyya (sc. Isma'īlis), Mu'tazilites, Mazdakites, and so on, gave the sultan religious backing for his aggression. Possession of Rayy, the strategic key to northern Iran, opened up the possibility of a drive towards the west and crusades against the Byzantines and Fatimids. Amir Mas'ūd was dispatched with an army against local Daylamite and Kurdish rulers in western Iran, although these operations were brought to an end by the sultan's death in 1030. The Ghaznavids thus came to control most of northern Iran, either through direct conquest or through vassals like the Ziyarids of Gurgan and Tabaristan in the Caspian coastlands. Their rule was to last a mere seven years, however, for the growing power of the Seljuqs and their Turkmen followers made it impossible for the sultans to retain their Iranian and Central Asian provinces (see below).²⁹

27. Barthold, 1968, pp. 289–90; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 185–9; Bulliet, 1972, pp. 42–3, 159–60, 203–5.

28. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 51–4; 1962a, pp. 59–66.

29. Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 80–5; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 53–4; 1962a, pp. 67–75.

Mas'ūd and the Seljuqs

On Mahmūd's death, rule in Ghazna passed briefly to his son Muhammad in accordance with the dead man's wishes, but after a few months, Mas'ūd arrived back from Rayy with the army of the west and Muhammad's support melted away. In an empire built up solely through Mahmūd's personal skill as a war leader, the military and civilian notables in Ghazna speedily recognized that the more experienced Mas'ūd was better fitted to maintain the momentum of his father's conquests. Unfortunately, Mas'ūd had not inherited all Mahmūd's capabilities; though personally brave in the field, his judgement was less sound and his advisers were to complain of his arbitrary decisions and unwillingness to listen to good counsel. In the early years of his reign, he conducted a vendetta against the great men of state who had been dominant in Mahmūd's reign and who had in many cases initially supported the ephemeral sultanate of Muhammad, the *Mahmūdiyyān* or *Pidariyān* ('adherents of the father'), as Bayhaqī calls them; instead, there began the ascendancy of the *Mas'ūdiyyān* or *Naw-khwāstagān* ('upstarts'), who tended to act as the sultan's yes-men. But it may be that we are unduly influenced by hindsight and by the fact that Mas'ūd's reign (1030–41) ended in failure and his death. Differences in character between him and his father were important but not decisive. The crucial point was that Mas'ūd inherited a vastly over-stretched empire, one which was rapidly threatened by a new factor that eventually overwhelmed the Ghaznavids in the west: the irruption of the Turkmen hordes into Khwarazm and northern Iran.³⁰

At first, Mas'ūd continued his father's policies in both India and the Iranian lands. He tried to round off the recent Iranian conquests by the acquisition of Kerman from the Buyids in 1003, having dreams of outflanking the Buyids via Makran and Oman and liberating the caliph in Baghdad from their tutelage, but Ghaznavid financial exactions in Kerman favoured the return of the Buyids the following year.³¹ In 1035 the sultan led a punitive expedition against the Ziyarid ruler Abū Kālijār because of his arrears of tribute; but the violent methods of the Ghaznavid army in collecting taxation at the capital of Tabaristan, Amul, caused a revulsion against Ghaznavid rule which echoed throughout the eastern Islamic world.³² In India, Mahmūd's gains were retained and Mas'ūd personally led fresh campaigns, such as that of 1037 against the 'Virgin Fortress' of Hansi to the north-west of Delhi; he also managed to restore order in Panjab after the commander of the army of India based in Lahore, Ahmad Inaltegin, rebelled in 1033. But the difficulties of

30. Barthold, 1968, p. 293; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 227–34.

31. Bosworth, 1962a, pp. 74–5.

32. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 84, 90–1.

controlling unruly *ghāzī* elements led to frequent disturbances in the Ghaznavid territories in India. Moreover, because of Mahmūd's spectacular successes there, and the importance of an inflow of tribute and plunder in maintaining the fabric of the state, India and its problems tended to dominate the central councils of the empire, and from the middle years of Mas'ūd's sultanate onwards, this became a source of weakness. Threats to the territorial integrity of the empire on its northern frontiers, from the Karakhanids and the Seljuqs, were not properly faced and the defences there neglected. Thus despite promptings from his more perspicacious ministers, Mas'ūd's attentions remained divided, with the result that the situation in the west became out of hand: the Turkmens enlarged the foothold gained there in Mahmūd's closing years and could not now be dislodged.³³

Mas'ūd initially cultivated good relations with the Karakhanid Kadir Khan Yūsuf and his son and successor, Bughra Khan Sulaymān, and himself married one of Yūsuf's daughters in 1034. 'Ali Tegin remained the common enemy and in 1032 Mas'ūd sent an army against him into Transoxania under the Khwarazm Shah Altuntash. Bukhara was captured, but a battle at Dabusiyya against 'Ali Tegin and his Seljuq allies was indecisive and led to the death of the wise and experienced Khwarazm Shah. The latter was succeeded as governor by his son Hārūn who, mindful of Mas'ūd's earlier attempt to have his father Altuntash, as one of the *Mahmūdiyyān*, murdered, adopted a hostile attitude to Mas'ūd. Hārūn allied himself with 'Ali Tegin for a joint attack on Ghaznavid territories in northern Afghanistan in 1034 and also gave help to the Seljuqs who had settled on the fringes of Khwarazm. Mas'ūd's position was saved by the deaths of 'Ali Tegin in 1034 and of Hārūn (the latter was assassinated at the sultan's instigation in 1035). But 'Ali Tegin's sons were still active along the Oxus frontier; and after 1038, Bōri Tegin (see above) began harrying Khuttal and Wakhsh in alliance with the Kumijis and the Turkmens, soon taking over almost all Transoxania.³⁴ Khwarazm had meanwhile slipped irrevocably from Ghaznavid control. The sultan could only join with a group of the Oghuz hostile to the Seljuqs, those under the leadership of Shāh Malik, who held the ancient Turkic title of Yabghu and who controlled the towns of Jand and Yengi-kent at the debouchment of the Syr Darya into the Aral Sea (see Chapter 7, Part One, below). Shāh Malik did in fact secure control of Khwarazm and proclaim Ghaznavid suzerainty there once more in 1041, but by that time Mas'ūd was dead. Three years later, the Seljuqs expelled Shāh Malik himself and became universally victorious in Khurasan and Khwarazm.³⁵

As mentioned above, the role of the Seljuqs was decisive in the downfall

33. Bosworth, 1963, p. 235.

34. Barthold, 1968, pp. 293–6; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 235–40.

35. Sachau, 1873, pp. 310–12; Barthold, 1968, pp. 296–9, 302; Tolstov, 1953, pp. 291–2; Pritsak, 1953, pp. 405–10; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 238–9; 1968a, pp. 51–2.

of Ghaznavid power in the west. Bands of Oghuz Türks from the steppes of south-western Siberia (the modern Kazakhstan) had been infiltrating southwards into the settled lands since the last decades of the tenth century, at times aiding the last Samanids and at others their Karakhanid supplinters. Support from these Oghuz – since the start of the eleventh century at least superficially Islamized – was decisive in enabling ʿAlī Tegin to retain power in the Bukhara region from c. 1025 onwards. Dislodged by the combined operations of Mahmūd of Ghazna and his ally Kadir Khan Yūsuf, some 4,000 Oghuz families, former followers of Arslan Isrāʿīl b. Seljuq, sought permission from the sultan to settle on pastures in northern Khurasan, promising to guard the frontiers there against further nomadic incursions. This proved a delusion and Ghaznavid forces had to disperse bands of plundering Oghuz throughout northern Persia. Others of the Oghuz, led by the Seljuqs Toghrīl, Chaghri, Mūsā and Ibrāhīm Inal, remained north of the Oxus, involved in the politics of Khwarazm until they too were compelled to move southwards into Ghaznavid Khurasan in 1035. There, their herds devastated the agriculture of the oases, and by their depredations they disrupted long-distance commerce also. Ghaznavid forces sent against them failed to achieve permanent success and by 1037–8 such leading towns as Rayy, Merv and Nishapur opened their gates to the Seljuqs, despairing of ever receiving adequate protection from the sultan. Masʿūd was at last deflected from his Indian preoccupations and marched westwards; but his heavily armed and ponderous, conventional-type Islamic army was defeated by some 16,000 Turkmens at Dandanqan in the desert between Merv and Sarakhs in 1040.³⁶

The result of this battle, one of the most decisive in the history of the eastern Islamic world, was that the Seljuqs, now proclaiming their allegiance to the Baghdad caliph as their sole suzerain, were able within the next 20 years to take over the whole of Iran and make it the nucleus of the Great Seljuq empire. The Ghaznavids lost all their western provinces; the frontier was stabilized in c. 1059 on a line roughly bisecting modern Afghanistan from north to south.³⁷ In future, the orientation of the Ghaznavid empire was to be towards India (for which the despairing Sultan Masʿūd had set out after the Dandanqan débâcle) and the exploitation of its riches. Thus the history of the remaining 140 or so years of the sultanate concern primarily eastern Afghanistan and India rather than Central Asia; in the last years of its existence, the sultans ruled from Lahore and not Ghazna.

Mawdūd b. Masʿūd (1041–8) was the last ruler to endeavour to concert operations with the Karakhanids against the Seljuqs.³⁸ The upper Oxus terri-

36. Barthold, 1968, pp. 297, 302–3; Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 62–6; Bosworth, 1963, p. 241–68; 1968a, pp. 15–23.

37. Bosworth, 1977, pp. 50–2.

38. Bosworth, 1968a, pp. 52–3; 1977, pp. 25–7.

tories remained the subject of Ghaznavid–Seljuq disputes during the reign of Ibrāhīm b. Mas‘ūd (1059–99), but Bahrām Shah (1118–52) ruled in a loose vassal status to the Great Seljuqs, who were however unable to save the last Ghaznavids from the rising power of the Ghurids from the modern Ghorat province of central Afghanistan (see below, Chapter 8).³⁹ In retrospect, it appears that the vast empire assembled by Mahmūd could no longer be held together by one man once the incursions of the Seljuqs had reached a certain level of intensity. The central administration in Ghazna (on which, see below) was unable to preserve its communications with distant provinces like northern Persia and Khwarazm once these regions came under pressure or threw off allegiance to the sultan. In fact, one might conclude that the loss of the western provinces to the Seljuqs reduced the Ghaznavid empire to more manageable proportions, thus enabling it to survive right down to its extinction in 1186 by the Ghurids: a respectable span of life for an Islamic state.

The nature and structure of the Ghaznavid state

The Ghaznavids display the phenomenon of the rapid transformation of a line of barbarian, originally Turkish slaves into monarchs within the Irano-Islamic tradition who presided as authoritarian rulers over a multi-ethnic realm comprising Iranians or Tajiks, Turks, Afghans, Indians and others. In this age before the evolution of the nation-state, the possession of subjects who, with their various ethnic backgrounds, could contribute differing expertise and skills to the functioning of the state was regarded as a source of strength rather than of weakness. The sultans could never forget their Turkish ethnicity, since the essential core of their military support was likewise Turkish. Thus they had to stay attuned to the needs and aspirations of those troops and, above all, to act as successful war leaders and suppliers of plunder; when Mas‘ūd’s nerve seemed to fail after Dandanqan, the army abandoned him. But for the administration and financing of their empire, the Ghaznavids early recognized the need for the services of their Iranian subjects, above all, for the secretarial class, whose secular traditions and practices went back beyond the Islamic caliphate and ultimately to the Sasanians. To this heritage had been added the Islamic element, with a stress on the ruler’s divine backing but also on his duty to act in consonance with the laws of God as exemplified in the *shari‘a*; yet in practice, rulers behaved largely as despots.

All these elements came together within what might be called the Ghaznavid ‘power-state’, in which the sultan and his servants, both military and civilian, stood over and against the mass of subjects (the division which

39. Bosworth, 1968*a*, pp. 158–9; 1977, pp. 52–5, 91–101.

was later to be termed, among the Ottomans, that of ‘askerīs and re‘āyā). There were no national or patriotic feelings which could act as a cement for society, since the vision of the subject, were he peasant, trader or artisan, was confined to his own locality and to the protection of his own immediate interests. It was the duty of the subjects to pay taxes to the state; in Bayhaqī’s words, ‘It is vital that they should be in complete fear and trembling of the king and the army, and give [them] complete obedience.’⁴⁰ The sultan and his servants, on the other hand, had an implied duty to protect the subjects militarily and thereby enable them to carry on their avocations; but the two spheres of responsibility were never to mix. According to Bayhaqī again, Mahmūd severely censured the people of Balkh for resisting the Karakhanid invaders in 1006, thus causing the destruction in the town of a market belonging to the sultan which had brought in much revenue; they should simply have submitted to the more powerful incomers.⁴¹ Hence Mahmūd’s son Mas‘ūd was only following the same line of argument when at the end of his life he resolved to abandon Ghazna for India, instructing his officials to make the best terms they could with the Seljuqs whom he expected to occupy the capital and replace his dynasty there.⁴²

Both the central and the provincial administration were run by Tajiks, with the vizier at the head of the hierarchy. The sultans disposed of the services of some of the leading littérateurs and officials of the age, such as Sebüktegin’s chief secretary Abu ‘l-Fat’h Busti, and the vizier under both Mahmūd and Mas‘ūd, Ahmad b. Hasan Maymandī. There was a fivefold division in the central bureaucracy, with separate *dīwāns* for the vizier, the chief secretary, the secretary for the army, the head of intelligence and the postal service and the chief steward of the household.⁴³ Financial demands were the overriding consideration. The maintenance of a powerful standing army and the mounting of frequent military campaigns were very expensive, as was the sultans’ extravagant lifestyle in their palaces and gardens and their lavish spending on public buildings. The bureaucracy, and with it the wages bill, grew with imperial expansion.⁴⁴ The vizier was thus under constant pressure to increase the flow of revenue and to find new sources of taxation. Failure here meant dismissal, torture to disgorge personal gains and often execution; of the six viziers serving Mahmūd, Muhammad and Mas‘ūd, three died violent deaths and one suffered prolonged imprisonment. The vizier had also to keep control over provincial governors and officials, who might be tempted, through distance from the capital, to withhold taxation and rebel; this control was exercised

40. *Tārīkh-i Mas‘ūdī*, cited in Bosworth, 1963, p. 50.

41. Barthold, 1968, p. 291; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 48–51.

42. Bosworth, 1963, p. 51.

43. Nāzīm, 1931, pp. 130–47; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 55–97.

44. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 65–7.

through a network of couriers and spies, the *barīd* and *isbrāf* system, thus contributing to the atmosphere of fear and suspicion in the empire.⁴⁵

There is ample evidence in the sources of the harshness of provincial tax-collectors, but the sufferings of the subject population were even worse when the soldiers of the army were allotted assignments of revenue (*barāts*) which they then collected personally. We know that the people of Rayy, who had originally welcomed the Ghaznavids as liberators from the excesses of the Buyid troops there, speedily turned against an oppressive military governor and were later reluctant to put up any serious resistance to the Seljuqs; and the notorious exactions of the vizier Isfarā'īnī and the governor Abu 'l-Faḍl Sūrī in Khurasan contributed powerfully to the population's disenchantment with the Ghaznavids and the capitulation of their towns to the Seljuqs without a blow.⁴⁶

The *dīwān* of the chief secretary dealt with correspondence with provincial officials and with external rulers. We possess in sources such as Bayhaqī's history and 'Aqilī's *Āthār al-wuzarā'* [Famous Past Deeds of the Viziers or Past Traces of the Viziers] the texts, in florid Arabic and Persian, of several letters to the Karakhanids and the 'Abbasid caliphs, including announcements of victories (*fat'h-nāmas*).⁴⁷ Of especial importance in a military state like that of the Ghaznavids was the *dīwān* of the 'arīd (secretary for the army), who organized mustering, the provision of matériel and the commissariat, and pay. There were regular army parades on ceremonial occasions such as the reception of diplomatic envoys or the celebration of the Islamic festivals and the Iranian ones of Nawrūz, Sada and Mihrigan, these parades being often held on a plain outside the capital.⁴⁸

The core of the army was an élite force of Turkish *ghulāms* who guarded the sultan's palaces and person and hence were known as *ghulāmān-i sarāy* (palace guards). What we know from the literary sources of their rich uniforms and bejewelled weapons has received striking confirmation from the remains of mural paintings in the audience hall of the complex of Ghaznavid palaces at Lashkar-i Bazar near Bust.⁴⁹ From these palace *ghulāms* – recorded as amounting to 4,000 at a review in 1037 – were drawn the holders of household and ceremonial offices such as the sultan's armour-bearer. Outside this inner group, however, a wider force of Turkish slave troops formed the backbone of the army; the Ghaznavids were thus continuing a feature of military organization begun by the 'Abbasids in the early ninth century and adopted by most of their successor-states, including the Samanids. Turkish troops like these were

45. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 132–7, 144–6; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 70–3, 93–7.

46. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 79–91; cf. Bulliet, 1972, pp. 69–70.

47. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 142–4; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 91–3.

48. Nāzim, 1931, pp. 137–8; Bosworth, 1963, pp. 122–6.

49. Bosworth, 1963, p. 104; Schlumberger et al., 1978, Part 1A, pp. 101–8, Part 1B, pp. 121–4.

valued above all for their hardiness, stemming from their harsh early life in the steppes, their skill as mounted archers and the single-minded loyalty which in theory (though not always in practice) they gave to their master.

The sources tell us little about the tribal origins of the Ghaznavids' Turks, who came mostly via the slave markets of Transoxania or as gifts from the Karakhanid rulers, but specifically mentioned are soldiers from the Karluk, Yaghma, Kay, Tukhsi and Chigil and the men of Khotan (?Uighurs), while the frontier auxiliaries recruited by the Ghaznavid governors in Khwarazm apparently included men from the Kīpčak and Kangli.⁵⁰ Other nationalities within the Ghaznavid forces included free troops from the local Arabs and Kurds, valued as dashing cavalymen and skirmishers; Daylamite infantrymen, who fought with their characteristic weapons of the spear and javelin; and Indians. These last were probably in large part slaves, valued for their loyalty and at times used as a counter-balance to the Turks; conversion to Islam does not seem to have been necessarily required of them.⁵¹ The elephants which were deployed as beasts of war in the Ghaznavid armies have been mentioned above; it was the sultans who reintroduced these animals, taken as tribute from the Indian princes, into military usage in the Persian lands, where they had last been thus employed by the Sasanians.⁵²

The ideology of the sultans was strongly orthodox and Sunni, and, as already described, they strove to build a contemporary image as defenders of Islam against heterodoxy and infidelity. We have little evidence of any deep personal faith on the part of Mahmūd or Mas'ūd, and they certainly enjoyed wine-drinking parties to the full. They nevertheless recognized the importance of the official religious institution of the '*ulamā*' (learned men) as part of the fabric of state and often used scholars as diplomatic envoys, with an especial penchant for the Hanafis, characterized by Mahmūd at one point as the *madhhab-i rāst* (righteous law-school). Hence the services of the leading Nishapur Hanafi family of scholars and lawyers, the Tabānīs, were often called upon. In 995 Mahmūd, as commander in Khurasan, had invited Abū Sālih Tabānī to become head of the Hanafi lawyers there and to teach in a *madrasa* (Islamic college); Abū Sālih's nephew Abū Sādiq was later appointed by Mahmūd as chief judge in Khuttal, and 1037 sent by Mas'ūd to head a successful embassy to the Karakhanids, with the promise of the judgeship of Nishapur as a reward. Another prominent Hanafi family in Khurasan was that of the Sā'idīs; Mahmūd appointed the judge Abu 'l-*Alā* Sā'id as tutor to his sons Muhammad and Mas'ūd, and this scholar was to play a leading role in reducing the power of the Karrāmiyya in 1012.⁵³

50. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 98–105, 109–10.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–12.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–18.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 175–8; Bulliet, 1972, pp. 63–4, 201–4.

There was clearly considerable royal patronage of the Sunni revival in the eastern Islamic lands as part of the general movement which had grown up in reaction to the bid for political power in the tenth century of Shi'ism. Already in the opening years of the eleventh century, it is recorded that in Khuttal there were over twenty *madrasas*, these colleges being one of the chief instruments for the education and training of an orthodox Sunni religious and official class.⁵⁴ Virtually all members of the ruling strata of Islamic society were susceptible to the appeal of a holy man or mystic, while people were often aware that there were many charlatans in the ranks of the Sufis, and this seems to have been substantially the attitude of the sultans. It is difficult to distinguish fact from pious fiction in the biography of the Khurasanian Shaykh Abū Sa'īd of Mayhana by his descendant; hence we cannot know for sure whether the sultan really paid off the remaining debt on Abū Sa'īd's *khānaqāh* (convent) when the latter died in 1049. One would expect the Ghaznavids to have lent more support to the moderate Sufi groups of the time, such as that around the Nishapur scholar Abu 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, than to an extravagant thaumaturge like Abū Sa'īd.⁵⁵ (See further below, Chapter 18.)

Cultural and intellectual life

As well as being aware of the importance of the Islamic religion in buttressing their authority, the Ghaznavids were concerned to conform to the norm of traditional Islamic rulers who made their courts centres of culture and learning, with the monarch as the recipient of laudatory poetry and as the dispenser in turn of patronage and largesse. Displaying something of the admiration that barbarians often showed for higher things, Mahmūd seems to have chosen the ideal of the Samanid court, which had nurtured such luminaries as Rūdakī and Daqīqī (see above, Chapter 4), for his own circle at Ghazna, even if we discount the later literary biographer Dawlat Shah's claim that there were 400 poets in attendance on Mahmūd, led by the laureate 'Unsuri and hymning the sultan's praises as a Maecenas and as the scourge of the *kāfirs* (pagans). The courts of Mahmūd and Mas'ūd certainly nurtured a fine school of lyric poetry in New Persian, with such notable figures as 'Unsuri, Farrukhī and Manūchihri (there were poets of similar calibre at the courts of later sultans like Mas'ūd III (1099–1115) and Bahrām Shah).⁵⁶ There are indications that Turkish poetry was also known there.⁵⁷ But modern scholars have emphasized that such

54. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 175, 176–7.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–94; Meier, 1976, pp. 325–6.

56. Browne, 1906, pp. 90–129, 317–22, 324–6; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 172–7, 196–7.

57. Köprülüzade, 1934, pp. 26–32; Gandjei, 1986, pp. 68–9.

encouragement did not necessarily arise from a disinterested love of learning. A well-known anecdote by the twelfth-century writer Nizāmī ‘Arūdi Samarqandī describes how Mahmūd peremptorily demanded of the Ma’munid Khwarazm Shah that he dispatch to his own court in Ghazna the leading literary and scientific figures in Gurganj (the physician and philosopher Ibn Sinā was so little enchanted at the prospect that he fled westwards, eventually reaching the court of the Daylamite prince Ibn Kākūya at Isfahan). Indeed, the greatest intellect of the age, the polymath Abū Rayhān al-Birūnī (973–1048), while taking advantage of the facilities offered to this Khwarazmian scholar by service under the Ghaznavids, including the opportunity to visit India and gather material for his magnum opus, the *Tahqīq mā li ’l-Hind* [Inquiry Into What is to be Found in India], never seems to have been especially close to Mahmūd or to have enjoyed any direct official encouragement from him.⁵⁸

As observed above, a substantial proportion of the state revenue went on the sultans’ palaces and on entertainment there. To some degree, this was necessary to the functioning of the state, which ensured the loyalty of the army and the bureaucracy by the distribution of favours, offices and largesse and by the visible and conspicuous image of the sultan as the munificent and successful head of state. Such sources as Bayhaqī describe at length the splendours of court life, with rich clothing and robes of honour provided by the royal workshops (*kārkhānabs*) for the embroidery of *tirāz* decoration, and with the traditional medieval Islamic separation of the open, public, court life of the ruler from his private life in the harem with its eunuch attendants. The numerous palaces and gardens at Ghazna and at provincial centres like Herat and Balkh have failed to survive in the harsh Afghan environment, although the remaining ruins at Lashkar-i Bazar (see above) show the magnificent scale on which such palaces were conceived.⁵⁹

Agriculture and trade

Given the fact that the sources for Ghaznavid history are all products of an élite, court culture, we can only piece together odd fragments of information on the life and social habits of the mass of the population, the peasants, traders and artisans. We can, however, assume that demands for taxation (the *kharāj*, or land tax) and a multitude of local tolls and dues (*mukūs*), pressed hard on them; and we know from Bayhaqī that forced labour, corvées (*mard-bīgārī*), was exacted for the construction of palaces and the driving of game on royal hunts – a practice strongly entrenched in Iranian and Afghan life and lasting

58. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 131–4.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–41.

almost to the present day.⁶⁰ Agriculture was concentrated on the oases and was essentially small-scale and designed for subsistence within the rural area concerned or for supplying towns like Herat, Merv and Nishapur which could not grow enough food for themselves. Only certain highly specialized food-stuffs like truffles and the edible earth of Khurasan are mentioned as being exported as far as Egypt and the Turkish lands.⁶¹ Within the Ghaznavid realm, comprising the plateaux and mountain regions of Afghanistan and Khurasan, the only significant permanent sources of running water were rivers like the Oxus, Murghab and Helmand, on which the geographers mention the existence of water mills. Most irrigation came from subterranean *qanāts* or *kārīzs*, requiring large injections of capital for construction and maintenance which only the more wealthy landholders could provide. The sultans themselves are recorded as responsible for hydraulic constructions in the region of Ghazna itself. Only a few favoured upland areas allowed dry-farming; the lush pastures of the upper Oxus valley and its tributaries were, however, famed for horse breeding.⁶²

Industrial production was the small-scale activity of artisans and craftsmen, and was mainly for local consumption. Only within Khurasan, where virtually all the towns produced textiles or carpets, were certain celebrated local fabrics, such as the *‘attābī* and *saqlatūnī* silk brocades of Nishapur, the white cottons of Herat and the gold-threaded *mulham* cloth of Merv, exported outside the province.⁶³ It is only for such towns as these that we know anything about municipal organization, involving the presence of a class of notables and leading families, who produced scholars, preachers and judges for the official religious hierarchy (such as the above-mentioned Tabānis and Sā‘īdis), and the existence of such municipal officers as the *ra‘īs al-balad* (the head of the local community *vis-à-vis* the central government), with functions analogous to those of the later Iranian office of *kalāntar*. In Nishapur, the important family of Mikālīs held this office of *ra‘īs* or *za‘īm* for much of the later Samanid period and the early Ghaznavid one.⁶⁴

Families like this were also involved in the caravan trade which linked Khurasan and Afghanistan with Transoxania and the steppes on the one hand, and with Baghdad and Iraq on the other, and whose disruption by the Oghuz invaders predisposed the towns of Khurasan to come to terms with the Seljuqs. One aspect of this long-distance trade was of course the traffic in slaves, for Turkish slaves had since the ninth century regularly been transported across Khurasan from the Transoxanian slave markets en route for Iraq and the

60. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 79–91, 141.

61. Bosworth, 1968*b*, pp. 131–2.

62. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 113, 139, 152–7, 161–2.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–2; 1968*b*, pp. 133, 135.

64. Bosworth, 1963, pp. 171–5; Bulliet, 1972, pp. 66–8.

Islamic heartlands; likewise, we know that slaves came directly across the upper Oxus lands through the intermediacy of the Karakhanids.⁶⁵ Finally, the inflow of plunder from India to Ghazna involved a traffic in Indian slaves and the conveyance of bullion, trophies of war, and so on. Some of this last, including captured idols and similar spoils, was apparently incorporated into the fabric of the sultan's new buildings in the capital. Other items required the services of a staff of assayers and valuers in Ghazna in order to turn these into a negotiable form or into the precious metals required for the mining of the high-quality gold and silver coinage which was a feature of Ghaznavid monetary practice and which must have stimulated economic activity within the whole eastern Islamic world.⁶⁶

In conclusion, one might observe that the establishment of the Ghaznavid sultanate represents the first major breakthrough of Turkish power in eastern Islam against the indigenous Iranian and other peoples. Although the impressive empire built up by the early rulers could not be sustained, the Ghaznavids' destruction or weakening of local dynasties and of the landed classes by the imposition of rule by a central bureaucracy in Ghazna did much to prepare the way for the coming of the Great Seljuqs, the Khwarazm Shahs of Ats'iz's line or Anushteginids, and so on. The pattern of the despotic power-state introduced by the Ghaznavids became the norm for many of the subsequent pre-modern Islamic dynasties.⁶⁷

65. Bosworth, 1963, p. 101; 1970, pp. 4-6, 16-17.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9, 140.

67. Bosworth, 1970, pp. 14, 18.