



GHAZNAVIDS

GHAZNAVIDS, an Islamic dynasty of Turkish slave origin (366-582/977-1186), which in its heyday ruled in the eastern Iranian lands, briefly as far west as Ray and Jebāl; for a while in certain regions north of the Oxus, most notably, in K̄vārazm; and in Baluchistan and in northwestern India. Latterly, however, its territories comprised eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and northwestern India, with its last rulers reduced to the Punjab only. The genesis of the Ghaznavids lay in the process which took place in the middle decades of the 4th/10th century, whereby Turkish slave commanders made themselves in effect autonomous on the southern fringes of the Samanid empire, i.e., in Bost and Ġazna (qq.v.). After the death of the Amir ‘Abd-al-Malek I b. Nūḥ I in 350/961, the Turkish slave general of the Samanid army in Khorasan, Alptigin (q.v.), withdrew to Ġazna after an attempted coup to place his own candidate on the throne had failed. He dispossessed an indigenous family who had ruled in Ġazna, the Lawīks (?), and he, and following him a series of slave commanders, ruled there as nominal vassals of the Samanids; they struck coins but placed the names of the Samanids on them (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 161-62; Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, pp. 226-27; Neẓām-al-Molk, pp. 142-58; Šabānkārā’ī, pp. 29-34; Bosworth, 1965, pp. 16-21). The fifth of these commanders was Sebūktigin, who governed Ġazna for twenty years till 387/997 with the title (as it appears from his tomb inscription, see Flury, pp. 62-63) of *al-ḥājeb al-ajall* (most noble commander). In fact, he laid the foundations of what was speedily to become a fully independent power when the Samanids went into terminal decline in the 990s.



Table 1. Geneological chart of the Ghaznavid rulers.

His son Maḥmūd had already been commander-in-chief of the Samanid forces in Khorasan during his father's lifetime, when the last amirs, faced with invasions by the Turkish Qarakhanids from the Inner Asian steppes, had had willy-nilly to rely on Sebūktigin and Maḥmūd to withstand these attacks. On Sebūktigin's death, Maḥmūd successfully asserted his right to succeed in Ġazna over a brother, Esmā'īl (399/998), and thereafter was in sole control of all the former Samanid lands south of the Oxus, comprising Khorasan and what is now Afghanistan. He secured from the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qāder legitimation of his independent power and a string of honorific titles, including the one by which he became best known, Yamīn al-Dawla (Bosworth, 1962a, pp. 215-18). He divided up the former Samand dominions with the Ileg Naṣr (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 175), who took over all the lands north of the Oxus for the Qarakhanids, and began a reign of thirty-two years, lengthy by contemporary standards.

By ceaseless campaigning, he built up a vast military empire under his own despotic control. He continued his father's raids into the plains of India, and his success as a military leader ensured that there was always a numerous body of volunteers (*gozāt*, *moṭawwe'ūn*), eager for plunder, flocking to his standard from all over the eastern Islamic world. They supplemented his professional army that was made of specialist contingents of Arabs, the Daylamites, etc., but was essentially composed of Turks, with a core of elite Turkish slaves, namely the palace guards or *golāmān-e kāssā* (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 78-114). Ghaznavid armies penetrated into the Ganges-Jumna Do'āb and as far as Gwalior in Central India, but the culmination of his Indian campaigns was the attack on the celebrated shrine of Somnath in the Kathiawar peninsula (416-17 /1025-6), which yielded an immense haul of treasure (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 190-91; Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, pp. 342-46; Nāẓim, pp. 115-21). The Sultans' achievements as hammer of the infidels were zealously publicized throughout the lands as far as Baghdad, but, as Muhammad Habib pointed out (pp. 81 ff.), Maḥmūd's aims were essentially secular and confiscatory, not the conversion of souls. The Indian princes were left as tributaries, for an enforced policy of Islamization would only have been possible with an immense, thickly spread army to hold down the populace permanently; the real Islamization of the subcontinent only began in the 7th/13th century under the Slave Kings of Delhi (cf. Nāẓim, pp. 86-122).

In his middle years, Maḥmūd had taken over K̲v̲ārazm (see CHORASMIA ii),



and towards the end of his life, he also extended his conquests westwards across northern Persia, his prime target here being the branch of the Buyid dynasty (q.v.) ruling at Ray. On the pretext of an anti-Shi'ite crusade, he marched against Ray in 420/1029, deposed its ruler Majd-al-Dawla and went on to attack various Daylamite and Kurdish princes of northwestern Persia (Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, pp. 371-74). Thus by his death, Maḥmūd had constituted the most powerful and extensive empire known in the Islamic world since the heyday of the 'Abbasid caliphate.

His son Mas'ūd I, after setting aside his brother Moḥammad, took over this empire (421/1030) plus the mighty but expensive army which underpinned it. Though personally brave, Mas'ūd's judgement was inferior to that of his father, and his arbitrary behavior aroused antagonisms within the army and the civilian bureaucracy which impaired the efficiency of the military machine and the administration which had to find the taxation to pay for it. He continued his father's policy of campaigning in both India and Persia, personally leading the army on occasion, as in the attack on the Qal'at-al-'Aḍrā' (Virgin fortress) of Hānsī to the northwest of Delhi, in 428/1037 (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāz, pp. 703-04; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 128, 235). In Persia, the province of Kermān was taken over from its Buyid ruler in 424/1033, but the Ghaznavid force sent there was soon driven out by a Buyid contingent sent against them the next year (Bayhaqī, pp. 552-57). Relations with the Qarakhanids of Transoxania were far from smooth. Ghaznavid vassal principalities on the upper Oxus, Kottal and Čāgānīān, were harried by Qarakhanid raiders, and by 425/1034 the outlying province of K̲v̲ārazm had slipped from Ghaznavid control. But most serious for the stability of the empire was the appearance of the Oğuz Turks or Turkmen, led by members of the Saljuq family. These nomads had been infiltrating into Transoxania in the early decades of the 5th/11th century, acting as auxiliary troops for the various powers fighting there, namely Samanids, Qarakhanids, and Ghaznavids. Towards the end of Maḥmūd's reign they reached the northern fringes of Khorasan and began raiding the towns and oases of the province, pasturing their flocks on agricultural lands, devastating the countryside and disrupting the caravan traffic across Khorasan (Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 256-57; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 219-26). The ponderous Ghaznavid armies failed to stem these incursions. By 427-28/1036-37 major cities like Marv, Ray, and Nišāpūr were opening their gates to the Oğuz, despairing of ever receiving adequate protection from the sultan. In a battle at Dandānqān (q.v.) in the desert between Saraḵs and Marv (431/1040), the Ghaznavid army was decisively



defeated by the lightly-armed but more mobile Turkmen cavalrymen. The whole of Khorasan and the lands further west were now lost to Mas'ūd, and the Oğuz moved into northern Persia to lay the foundations there for the Great Seljuq sultanate of Persia and Iraq. Mas'ūd, despaired of retrieving the situation and fully expecting to lose Ġazna itself, retired to India, but he was deposed and killed by a rebellion of his troops when crossing the Indus in 432/1041 (Bayhaqī, pp. 831-46; Rāvandī, pp. 99-101; Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, pp. 473-87; Šabānkāra'ī, pp. 79-81).

It fell to Mas'ūd's son Mawdūd in his reign of some seven or eight years to wreak vengeance on his father's killers and to endeavor to stem further Saljuq raids into Sīstān which might outflank the Ghaznavid territories from the south. Balk, Herāt, and Termed eventually passed out of Ghaznavid control and the Nasrid amirate in Sīstān was now within the Saljuq orbit, but Mawdūd's energy enabled him, after a series of campaigns in southern Afghanistan, to stabilize the situation there and to continue the Ghaznavid traditions of raids (*ġazv*) in India. The late 1040s and early 1050s were something of a "Time of Troubles" for the Ghaznavids, with some ephemeral reigns and that of Maḥmūd's surviving son 'Abd-al-Rašīd (q.v.) ending in upheaval in 443/1052, when one of Mawdūd's former commanders, the Turk Ṭoġrīl, murdered the sultan and usurped the throne in Ġazna for several months (Ebn Fondoq, pp. 177-78; Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, pp. 582-85; Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 20-33, 37-47).

Re-establishment of the sultanate on a firmer basis fell to two sons of Mas'ūd, Farroḳzād and Ebrāhīm (qq.v.), the latter of whom reigned for forty years. Not surprisingly, the Saljuq ruler of the east, Čaġrī Beg (q.v.) tried to take advantage of Ghaznavid weakness at the time of Ṭoġrīl's usurpation, but a Saljuq attack on Ghazna was beaten off. When Ebrāhīm came to the throne in 451/1059, irredentist hopes of recovering the lost territories in western Afghanistan began to look completely unrealistic, hence Ebrāhīm negotiated a peace agreement with the Saljuqs on a basis of what was then the status quo. The Ghaznavid empire, though now truncated, still comprised the region of eastern Afghanistan from Kabul to Bost, Baluchistan, and extensive lands in northwestern India, and was strong enough in many ways to deal with the Great Saljuqs on a basis of equality. This now became a time of perceptible cultural and social interaction between the two empires, with marriage alliances, a free flow of poets and scholars from one to the other, imitation by the Ghaznavids of Saljuq titlature practices (seen, e.g., in the formal use now



on Ghaznavid coins of the characteristic Saljuq formula *al-solṭān al-moʿaẓẓam*, “highly-exalted sultan”), etc. (Bosworth, 1962a, pp. 223-24, 230-31).

The half-century or so from Ebrāhīm’s death in 492/1099 till the struggle for power in eastern Afghanistan between the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids (q.v.), which broke out around 543/1148, is spanned by the reigns of Masʿūd III b. Ebrāhīm and his own three sons, Šīrzād, Malek Arslān or Arslānšāh, and Bahrāmšāh, ruling successively. Apart from the two or three years of fraternal strife (see below), it was a period of comparative tranquillity for the empire, deriving from the stability and prosperity attained by Ebrāhīm’s restraint and sagacity, which was to continue substantially until the protracted struggle, ultimately lethal for the Ghaznavid empire, with the aggressive and expansionist Ghurids. Raids across the plains of northern India, mounted from the center of Ghaznavid power in the Punjab, Lahore, continued, for the exploitation of the riches of India was increasingly the *raison d’être* for the empire’s existence, shorn as it now was of its western lands, although these raids rarely went forward unchallenged; in the early 6th/12th century the Muslim armies faced powerful and resolute Hindu opponents from such dynasties as the Paramāras of Mālwa and the Gāhaḍavalas of Kanawj.

Masʿūd III was an enthusiastic warrior whose armies were active in India against the infidels. It seems that Masʿūd, like the rest of his dynasty, employed the spoils of war and the temple treasures of India to beautify his capital Ġazna and to construct gardens and palaces (Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 35, 87-89). Adjacent to the minaret of Masʿūd (formerly, and wrongfully, attributed to Sultan Maḥmūd), the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan excavated a palace of his, notable for what was apparently a Persian poetic text on marble slabs forming a dado round an inner courtyard. The poem extolls the sultan and his forebears both as Muslim *ḡāzīs* and as heroes connected with the Iranian epic, legendary past (see Bombaci).

Signs of weakness in the state became apparent when Masʿūd III died in 508/1115 and a period of internecine warfare amongst his sons followed, out of which Bahrāmšāh (q.v.) finally emerged triumphant (511/1117), but only thanks to military aid from his Saljuq patron, the Sultan Sanjar (Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt* I, p. 241, tr. Raverty, p. 108; Faḡr-e Modabber, pp. 269-71). Bahrāmšāh now had to reign as a Saljuq vassal, paying a heavy tribute and sending his son as a hostage at Sanjar’s court in Marv; only once, in 529/1135, did he unsuccessfully rebel against Saljuq control. Thus now, for the first time since Maḥmūd had thrown off Samanid authority in 389/999, the Ghaznavid realm



was subject to an outside power. Bahrāmshāh was an active leader of raids into India, and his exploits there were hymned by his court panegyrist, the poet Sayyed Ḥasan Ḡaznavī (q.v.), but exact details of these military campaigns are lacking (Khan, pp. 62-91). In the later part of his reign, it was his fate to come up against the increasing power of the Ghurids from Ḡūr in central Afghanistan. The sultan's capture and execution of the Ghurid Sayf-al-Dīn Sūrī in 544/1149 provoked a punitive expedition by Sayf-al-Dīn's brother 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn (q.v.), culminating in a frightful sacking of Ḡazna in about 545/1150-51. Bahrāmshāh was driven into India, only returning after the Ghurid ruler had been defeated by the Saljuqs and made captive by them (Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt* I, pp. 241-42, 336; Faḡr-e Modabber, p. 437; Ebn al-Aṭīr, XI, p. 135, 164-66; Khan, pp. 199-217; Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 114-19). The exact date of his death is uncertain, but probably fell in 552/1157.

The line of the Ghaznavids continued for some thirty more years, briefly under Bahrāmshāh's son Ḳosrowshāh, and then, with a greater duration, under the latter's son Ḳosrow Malek (the two similar names are often confused and the events of their reigns conflated in the sources). Historical information on this period now grows sparse. It seems that there were further attacks by the Ghurids and that, by the early years of Ḳosrowshāh's reign, Bost and Zamīndāvar were lost to the Ghaznavids. Perhaps by the accession of Ḳosrow Malek in 555/1160 or soon afterwards, Ḡazna itself was lost, not immediately to the Ghurids but to a group of Oḡuz Turkish adventurers from Khorasan; these incomers injected a new element into the political structures of the region, and held up Ghurid expansion into the Ḡazna region and Zābolestān for up to fifteen years. Ḳosrow Malek, meanwhile, had moved his capital to Lahore, carrying on raids (*ḡazv*) against the Indian princes and making the Punjab the last redoubt of Ghaznavid power. The Ghurid Šehāb-al-Dīn or Mo'ezz-al-Dīn Moḥammad nibbled away at Ḳosrow Malek's remaining territories, capturing Multan and then Peshawar, and forced him to pay tribute and to send his son to the Ghurid court as a hostage. Finally, Ḳosrow Malek was besieged in Lahore and in 582/1186 forced to surrender, being then deposed and apparently executed shortly afterwards (Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 120-31). The Ghurids thereby succeeded to the heritage of the Ghaznavids in Afghanistan and northwestern India, but did not enjoy it for long; within a generation, their empire succumbed in turn to their ancient rivals, the Ḳvārazmšāhs.

The ethos of the Ghaznavid empire was, from the outset, strongly orthodox



Sunni, with the sultans personally followers of the Hanafite legal school. Maḥmūd was assiduous in cultivating good relations with the 'Abbasid caliphs in order to supplement the naked force, which was the practical foundation for his authoritarian rule, with a moral and religious element. Immediately on his accession, he recognized the caliph al-Qāder in the *koṭba* of Khorasan, where the Samanids had continued to acknowledge his predecessor al-Ṭā'e'. He regularly sent presents to Baghdad from the captured plunder of India. He emphasized his personal role as the enforcer of orthodoxy against dissidents within his own lands and against outside heretics like the Isma'ilis of Multan and the Shi'ites and Mu'tazilites of Ray. At the end of his life, without dwelling at all on the practicalities involved, he proclaimed that he was going to lead a crusade against the Isma'ili Fatimids of Egypt and Syria (Bosworth, 1962b, pp. 59-74). Mas'ūd I continued this policy of identifying his rule with the caliphate and religious orthodoxy, and it was only the rise of the Saljuqs and the interposition of their empire between the Ghaznavids and Iraq which reduced direct connections with Baghdad for the later Ghaznavids (Bosworth, 1962b, p. 76).

The Ghaznavid sultans were ethnically Turkish, but the sources, all in Arabic or Persian, do not allow us to estimate the persistence of Turkish practices and ways of thought amongst them. Yet given the fact that the essential basis of the Ghaznavids' military support always remained their Turkish soldiery, there must always have been a need to stay attuned to their troops' needs and aspirations; also, there are indications of the persistence of some Turkish literary culture under the early Ghaznavids (Köprülüzade, pp. 56-57). The sources do make it clear, however, that the sultans' exercise of political power and the administrative apparatus which gave it shape came very speedily to be within the Perso-Islamic tradition of statecraft and monarchical rule, with the ruler as a distant figure, buttressed by divine favor, ruling over a mass of traders, artisans, peasants, etc., whose prime duty was obedience in all respects but above all in the payment of taxes. The fact that the personnel of the bureaucracy which directed the day-to-day running of the state, and which raised the revenue to support the sultans' life-style and to finance the professional army, were Persians who carried on the administrative traditions of the Samanids, only strengthened this conception of secular power. The offices of vizier, treasurer, chief secretary, head of the war department, etc., were the preserves of Persians, and no Turks are recorded as ever having held them. It was not for nothing that the great Saljuq vizier K̲v̲āja Neẓām-al-Molk held up Maḥmūd and the early Ghaznavids as exemplars of firm rule (Neẓām-



al-Molk, *passim*; Barthold, *Turkestan*³, pp. 291-93; Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 55-97).

Persianisation of the state apparatus was accompanied by the Persianisation of high culture at the Ghaznavid court. Ferdowsī sought Maḥmūd's beneficence towards the end of his life, but Maḥmūd and Mas'ūd are most notably known as the patrons of Persian poets with a simple, lyrical style like 'Onsorī, Farrokī, and Manučeḥrī (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, pp. 173-77; Clinton; Moayyad). The level of literary creativity was just as high under Ebrāhīm and his successors up to Bahrāmšāh, with such poets as Abu'l-Faraj Rūnī, Sanā'ī, 'Oṭmān Moktārī, Mas'ūd-e Sa'd-e Salmān, and Sayyed Ḥasan Ġaznavī (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, pp. 196-97; Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 75-77, 107-10). We know from the biographical dictionaries of poets (*taḍkera-ye šo'arā*) that the court in Lahore of Ẹosrow Malek had an array of fine poets, none of whose *dīvāns* has unfortunately survived, and the translator into elegant Persian prose of Ebn Moqaffa's *Kalīla wa Demna*, namely Abu'l-Ma'ālī Naṣr-Allāh b. Moḥammad, served the sultan for a while as his chief secretary (Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 127-28). The Ghaznavids thus present the phenomenon of a dynasty of Turkish slave origin which became culturally Persianised to a perceptibly higher degree than other contemporary dynasties of Turkish origin such as Saljuqs and Qarakhanids. Whereas most of the Great Saljuq sultans seem to have remained illiterate, many of the Ghaznavids were highly cultured; as emerges from the pages of Bayhaqī, Mas'ūd I had a good knowledge of Arabic poetry and was a competent Persian chancery stylist (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 129-30); 'Abd-al-Rašīd commissioned the copying in Ġazna of a superb manuscript on traditions describing the Prophet which survives today (Stern).

Art and architecture enjoyed a great florescence in the Ghaznavid period under the stimuli first, of enthusiastic patronage from the ruling dynasty and its high officials and commanders, not only in Ġazna but in provincial centers like Herāt, Balk and Bost, and second, of the great amount of money available for the arts of peace flowing in from the spoils of India. It is possible that idols and other trophies of war were on occasion actually set into the fabric of public buildings like mosques and palaces in the capital as symbols of the triumph of Islam over paganism (Scerrato). It is literary sources like Abu'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī and Abū Sa'īd Gardīzī (qq.v.) which tell us about the numerous gardens, kiosks, and palaces laid out by the sultans in the cities of the empire, since gardens are transient affairs and the use of sun-dried brick as the



standard building material equally makes for impermanence (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 135-40). Nevertheless, some constructions have fortunately survived. At Ġazna, we have the tombs of Sebüktigin, the minarets of Mas'ūd III and Bahrāmšāh, and the palace of Mas'ūd III mentioned above. At Laškari Bāzār on the banks of the Helmand river near Bost there survives an extensive complex of military encampments and palaces, whose foundation may go back to Sebüktigin or even earlier (cf, Bombaci, "Ghaznavidi"). All these provide us with evidence of the fine quality of Ghaznavid architecture and the elegance of its decoration. On a smaller scale, finds of ceramics and bronze work show us a plastic art which evolved from Samanid models but came to be influenced by Saljuq ones, whilst the fortunate preservation, albeit fragmentarily, of some mural paintings in the reception hall of the Laškari Bāzār palace, depicting the sultans' Turkish guards, indicates the existence of a lively representational art.

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For the later Ghaznavids, the sources are much sparser. Apart from Gardīzī (see above) for the earlier years, we depend mainly on non-contemporary sources like Jūzjānī's *Ṭabaqāt* and Ebn al-Aṭīr, in addition to the literary sources, all discussed in Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, pp. 1-4, with full bibliographical details at pp. 187-91.

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