



## GHURIDS

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**GHURIDS** (or Āl-e Šansab), a medieval Islamic dynasty of the eastern Iranian lands. They began as local chiefs in Ġūr (q.v.) in the heartland of what is now Afghanistan, but became a major power from the mid-12th century until the opening years of the 7th/13th century. Ġūr was then the nucleus of a vast but transient military empire which at times stretched from Gorgān (q.v.) in the west to northern India in the east, only to be overwhelmed by the Ḳvārazmšāhs (q.v.; see also CHORASMIA ii) and to disappear, as far as the eastern Iranian lands were concerned, on the eve of the Mongol cataclysm.

The Ghurids came from the Šansabānī family. The name of the eponym Šansab/Šanasb probably derives from the Middle Persian name Wišnasp (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 282). After the Ghurids had achieved fame as military conquerors, obsequious courtiers and genealogists connected the family with the legendary Iranian past by tracing it back to Žaḥḥāk, whose descendants were supposed to have settled in Ġūr after Ferēdūn had overthrown Žaḥḥāk's thousand-year tyranny. The Šansab family was then brought into the framework of Islamic history by the story that its chiefs received Islam from the hands of Imam 'Alī, subsequently aiding Abū Moslem Ḳorāsānī's uprising against the Omayyads and having its power legitimized by being invested with Ġūr by the caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd (Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt* I, pp. 318-27, tr. Raverty, I, pp. 300-16, citing a versified genealogy of the Ghurids compiled for Sultan 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn Jahānsūz by Faḳr-al-Dīn Mobārakšāh b. Ḥosayn Marvrūdī, q.v.). It goes without saying that we have no concrete evidence for any of this. The chiefs of Ġūr only achieve firm historical mention in the early 5th/11th



century with the Ghaznavid raids into their land, when Ġūr was still a pagan enclave. Nor do we know anything about the ethnic stock of the Ġūrīs in general and the Šansabānīs in particular; we can only assume that they were eastern Iranian Tajiks.

**Table 1.** Geneological table of the Šansabāni family (the Ghurids).

There were at least three raids by the early Ghaznavids into Ġūr, led by Sultan Maḥmūd and his son Mas‘ūd, in the first decades of the 5th/11th century; these introduced Islam and brought Ġūr into a state of loose vassalage to the sultans (‘Otbī, II, pp. 122-25; Bayhaqī, 113-21; Jūzjānī, I, p. 330, tr. I, p. 329; Nāẓim, pp. 70–72; Bosworth, 1961, pp. 122-23, 127–28). The Šansabānīs were only one amongst several chieftains at this time, and topographical gleanings from Bayhaqī (pp. 114-20), plus various details from Jūzjānī, show that they were petty rulers of the district of Mandēš on the upper Harīrūd near modern Āhangarān (see map in *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*<sup>2</sup>, tr. Minorsky, Second Series of Addenda, p. xxix and the detailed discussion of the locations mentioned in Ġūr at text, p. 110, comm. pp. 342-44). During the second half of the 5th/11th century, the Šansabānīs were squabbling amongst themselves but also trying to extend their power beyond Mandēš and to crush other chieftains; at one point, dissident Ġūrī leaders appealed to the Ghaznavid Ebrāhīm b. Mas‘ūd (q.v.) to intervene against the oppressive Šansabānī ‘Abbās b. Šīt (Jūzjānī, I, p. 332, tr. I, pp. 331-32; Bosworth, *Later Ghaznavids*, p. 69), and Moḥammad b. ‘Abbās was set up as chief by the sultan. Moḥammad’s son, Ḥasan, was the first Šansabānī known to have an honorific title, namely Qotb-al-Dīn, but the history of the Ghurid dynasty, as it may now be fittingly styled, only becomes reasonably well known with the accession of ‘Ezz-al-Dīn Ḥosayn b. Ḥasan (493-540/1100-46).

By now, Ghaznavid influence within the Ghurid lands was giving place to that of the Saljuqs, for Sanjar was able in 512/1118 to place his own nominee, Bahrāmšāh b. Mas‘ūd (q.v.), on the throne in Ġazna. Already in 501/1107-8 Sanjar had raided Ġūr from Khorasan (Jūzjānī, tr. Raverty, p. 336 n. 4), and ‘Ezz-al-Dīn (493-540/1100-1145) now became his vassal, sending as part of the stipulated tribute mailed coats and the local breed of fierce dogs (Jūzjānī, I, p. 335, tr. I, pp. 336-37). Sayf-al-Dīn Sūrī b. ‘Ezz-al-Dīn Ḥosayn succeed in 540/1146 in Ġūr, but shared out his lands with his brothers on the basis of Ġūrī tribal and patrimonial practice. He himself clashed with the Ghaznavids, and after an abortive attack on Ġazna, was killed by Bahrāmšāh; this marked the beginning of a deep hatred between the two families. On his accession, his son



‘Alā’-al-Dīn Ḥosayn (544-56/1149-61) avenged the two of his brothers killed by Bahrāmšāh by declaring war on the Ghaznavids. In a great battle in Zamīndāvar and then another at Ġazna itself, he defeated Bahrāmšāh and drove him into India. Ġazna and Bost suffered frightful sackings by ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Ḥosayn, in which colleges and libraries were despoiled, and the buildings of previous sultans destroyed (Jūzjānī, pp. 343-45; *Čahār maqāla*, ed. Qazvīnī, p. 31), earning him the unenviable epithet of Jahānsūz (world incendiary). The Ghurids made no attempt to annex the Ghaznavid provinces of eastern Afghanistan, and soon afterwards Bahrāmšāh returned from the Punjab; but ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Ḥosayn does seem to have sought a higher status for himself. Not content with being a mere *malek* or amir, according to Ebn al-Aṭīr (Beirut, XI, p. 166), he now styled himself, after the Saljuqs and Ghaznavids, *al-soltān al-mo‘azzam* and adopted the *čatr* (q.v.) or ceremonial parasol as one of the insignia of royalty (in fact, the designation *al-soltān al-a‘zam* already appears on the coins of his predecessor in Fīrūzkūh, Bahā’-al-Dīn Sām b. Ḥosayn, r. 544/1149; Sourdell, p. 114, nos. 1258–60). He also aspired to cast off his subordination to the Saljuqs, but was defeated by Sanjar in 547/1152, and spent his last years extending Ghurid power into northern Afghanistan and southwards to the Helmand valley (Jūzjānī, I, pp. 346-48, tr. pp. 347-62; Ebn al-Aṭīr, Beirut, XI, pp. 164-66).

‘Alā’-al-Dīn Ḥosayn’s expansionist policies raised the Ghurids into a power of significance well beyond Ġūr itself. Latterly, he was able to take advantage of a certain power-vacuum in the eastern Islamic world which had arisen through the decay of the Ghaznavids and the collapse of Saljuq power in Khorasan consequent on Sanjar’s defeat and capture by the Ġozz (q.v.) in 548/1153. The expansion of the territories controlled by the family facilitated a division of the patrimony amongst its various branches, so that, henceforth, the senior branch ruled over the heartland, Ġūr, from the capital Fīrūzkūh (q.v.) or near the upper Harīrūd. Fīrūzkūh was originally founded by Qoṭb-al-Dīn Moḥammad as the seat of his appendage of Waršāda, continued as the capital of ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Ḥosayn, and then expanded by the building activity of Ġiāt-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Bahā’-al-Dīn Sām (Jūzjānī, I, pp. 335-36, 353, tr. I, pp. 339, 370), which included the famed minaret of Jām, which was constructed either at the fortress of Fīrūzkūh itself or nearby. After Ġazna had been finally taken from the Turks who had occupied it after the last Ghaznavids (579/1183-84), another branch was established there under Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn or Šehāb-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Bahā’-al-Dīn Sām, and this branch used Ġazna as a launching-pad for expansion into northern India. Finally, Faḫr-al-Dīn Mas‘ūd b. ‘Ezz-al-



Dīn Ḥosayn was installed in newly conquered Bāmīān (q.v.), and his branch expanded into northern Afghanistan as far as the Oxus and beyond it into Čaġānīān (q.v.) and Waḳš (Jūzjānī, I, p. 385, tr. pp. 423-24).

Under the two brothers Ġiāt-al-Dīn and Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn in Fīrūzkūh and Ġazna respectively (558-99 /1163-1203 and 569-99/1173-1203), the Ghurid empire reached its greatest territorial extent and apogee of power. Although the earlier history of the Šansabānī family had been full of feuds and disputes, the brothers maintained a partnership, with mutual amity and a division of spheres of activity and influence. Ġiāt-al-Dīn was broadly concerned with expansion westwards into Khorasan and with checking the ambitions there of the Ḳwārazmšāhs, whilst Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn led raids into India.

In the west, Ġiāt-al-Dīn, often in concert with his brother, extended his suzerainty over the *maleks* of Nīmrūz or Sīstān and even over the Kermān branch of the Saljuqs. Turkish amirs in Herāt and Balḵ were humbled, but the main thrust of Ġiāt-al-Dīn’s efforts was in western Khorasan, where the Ghurid came to clash with the Ḳwārazmšāhs under Il-Arslan and Tekeš. The Ḳwārazmšāhs aimed at capturing Khorasan, backed at times by their suzerains the pagan Qara Khitay. The Ghurids adopted the role of defenders of Sunnism. They had cordial relations with the ‘Abbasids in Baghdad, frequently exchanging embassies (Jūzjānī’s father took part in one of the last, Jūzjānī, I, p. 361, tr. p. 383). Ġiāt-al-Dīn was admitted to al-Nāṣer’s *fotūwa* order, and the caliph more than once urged the Ghurids to halt the advance into western Persia of the Ḳwārazmšāhs (Jūzjānī, I, 302, tr. I, p. 243). The actual fighting in Khorasan at this time was largely between the Ghurids and Tekeš’s brother Solṭānšāh, who had carved out for himself personally a principality in western Khorasan, until in 586/1190 Ġiāt-al-Dīn and Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn defeated Solṭānšāh near Marv in 588/1192, captured him, and took over his territories (Jūzjānī, I, 303-4, tr. I, pp. 246-47). When Tekeš died in 596/1200 (Ebn al-Aṭīr, Beirut, XII, pp. 156-58), Ġiāt-al-Dīn was able to take over most of the towns of Khorasan as far west as Beṣṭām in Qūmes. At the same time, the Bāmīān branch of the dynasty under Bahā’-al-Dīn Sām b. Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad (588-602/1192-1206) secured Balḵ and Ṭoḳarestān after the death of its Turkish governor, a vassal of the Qara Khitay (Jūzjānī, I, p. 389, tr. p. 431).

Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn, installed at Ġazna since 569/1173-74 with the title also of sultan, began raiding through the Gomal Pass into India, capturing Moltān and Učċh (570/1175) and compelling the Sumerās in Lower Sind to acknowledge his suzerainty (578/1182). He was repulsed from Gujarat, hence turned to



northern India, finally extinguishing the Ghaznavids in Lahore (582/1186) and then advancing down the Ganges valley to defeat various Hindu princes and to occupy Delhi, Ajmer, and Gwalior. Mo'ezz-al-Dīn himself returned to Khorasan to aid his brother against the K̄vārazmšāhs, but his conquests in India were carried on by his Turkish commander Qoṭb-al-Dīn Aybak (q.v.) and, expanding as far east as Bengal, by Ektīār-al-Dīn Moḥammad Ḳalji. It was Aybak who at Delhi built the Qowwat-al-Eslām mosque (588/1192) and at Ajmer converted into the Arhā'i-Dīn-kā-jhompṛā mosque (comp. 596/1200) a former Hindu college as visible signs of Ghurid might in India (Burton-Page, "Dilhi," p. 259 with the plan of Qowwat-al-Eslām mosque; idem, "Hind," p. 442).

For three years until his own death in 602/1206, Mo'ezz-al-Dīn was supreme ruler, but in fact followed earlier practice by allotting appanages to members of the family, including Fīrūzkūh to Žiā'al-Dīn or 'Alā'al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Šojā'al-Dīn 'Alī, and southern and western Afghanistan to Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Moḥammad; the latter, however, very soon took control of Fīrūzkūh once Mo'ezz-al-Dīn had died. Mo'ezz-al-Dīn's last years had been characterized by failure in the west. Ghurid rule in Khorasan proved oppressive and unpopular; according to Jovaynī (II, pp. 51-52, tr. Boyle, II, p. 319), Mo'ezz-al-Dīn required forced sales and confiscated for his army grain which had been stored in the shrine of the Imām 'Alī al-Rezā at Mašhad-e Ṭūs. An attempted pursuit of the army of the new K̄vārazmšāh 'Alā'al-Dīn Moḥammad ended disastrously for the Ghurids, who were halted by flooding of the Chorazmian countryside and then routed at Andkūy (q.v.) on the Oxus by the Qara Khitay (601/1204; Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, II, pp. 57, 89, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 321-24; Barthold, *Turkestan*2, pp. 349-51). Mo'ezz-al-Dīn escaped personally, but all Khorasan except Herāt was lost, and a year or so later the sultan was assassinated in India.

After this, the Ghurid empire rapidly fell apart. Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn and Mo'ezz-al-Dīn had skillfully maintained the unity of the realm and had kept firm control over the various elements of which the multi-ethnic Ghurid army was composed. Dissension now broke out within the Šansabānī family, with military factions taking sides. Thus the Ġūrī troops supported for succession to the sultanate the Bāmīān line of the family, whereas the Turks favored Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Maḥmūd, who in the end prevailed at Fīrūzkūh. In Ġazna, power was seized by the Turkish commander Tāj-al-Dīn Yīldīz (İldüz), legitimized by Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn's grant to him of its governorship (602-11/1206-15). The last Ghurids were puppets of the K̄vārazmšāhs, until in 612/1215 'Alā'al-Dīn Moḥammad



deposed the last sultan in Firūzkūh; the Bāmīān line was likewise suppressed; and Yildiz was driven out of Ġazna. Thus all the Ghurid lands, except those in northern India, fell under Choarazmian control, although it was not long before Sultan Moḥammad himself was overwhelmed by the Mongols (Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, II, 108-16, tr. Boyle, II, pp. 327-86; Jovaynī, II, p. 85, is wrong in making the conquest of Ġazna after the death of Yildiz).

The constituting of the Ghurid empire was a remarkable achievement for a family of petty chiefs from a backward region like Ġūr, which henceforth was to play no significant role in Islamic history. The sultans' military strength was based on both the indigenous Ġūrī mountaineers and Ḳaljīs from eastern Afghanistan plus the recruitment of Turkish military slaves, but these resources were not in the end adequate to withstand the Ḳārazmšāhs, who had the manpower resources of the Inner Asian steppes behind them. It was, of course, in India that the Ghurid legacy was to be the most lasting, for it was the Turkish and Ḳaljī commanders of Mo'ezz-al-Dīn who laid the foundations of the Delhi Sultanate (q.v.), in many ways a successor-state to the Ghurids, and who permanently implanted Islam in northern India.

Although the Ghurid empire was not a durable one, it seems possible to speak of a distinct Ghurid ethos and culture. Continuing the attitudes of the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids were strong upholders of the orthodox Sunni form of Islam, once the Šansabānī family had emerged from its pagan past. Ismaili propagandists from northern Persia penetrated into Ġūr during the later years of 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn, and received some encouragement from the sultan; but his son Sayf-al-Dīn Moḥammad took strong measures to extirpate it (Jūzjānī, I, pp. 349-51, tr. I, pp. 361, 365-66). Of more lasting significance for the religious complexion of Ġūr was the wide sympathy there for the pietistic, ascetic Sunni sect of the Karrāmīya (q.v.), which had arisen in Nīšāpūr during the 4th/10th century and had been patronized by the early Ghaznavid sultans. It may be, though the sources are not explicit, that this group, which placed a strong emphasis on missionary work (see da'wa), was active in the 5th/11th century in spreading Islam in Ġūr. Certainly, in the following century, the majority of the inhabitants of Ġūr are said to have been adherents of the Karrāmīya, and it was only Ġiāṭò-al-Dīn Moḥammad and Mo'ezz-al-Dīn Moḥammad who changed over to the mainstream Shafi'ite and Hanafite law schools respectively (Bosworth, 1961, pp. 128-33). As noted above, these two sultans were certainly aware of orthodox, caliphal approval for their authority and the advantages of close diplomatic contacts with the 'Abbasids.



Literary and artistic activities under the Ghurids likewise followed on from those of the Ghaznavids. The sultans were generous patrons of the Persian literary traditions of Khorasan, and latterly fulfilled a valuable role as transmitters of this heritage to the newly conquered lands of northern India, laying the foundations for the essentially Persian culture which was to prevail in Muslim India until the 19th century. 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn Jahānsūz reportedly was also a fine poet; his poetry, of which only a few lines have been preserved, was widely appreciated in Afghanistan and northern India. Moḥammad 'Awfī had seen a copy of his *dīvān* in Samarqand (*Lobāb*, ed. Browne, I, pp. 38-39, ed. Nafīsī, pp. 39-40; Jūzjānī, pp. 343-45; Šafā, *Adabiyāt* II, pp. 53-55). The contemporary Neẓāmī 'Arūzī mentions as eulogists of the Ghurids such poets as Abu'l-Qāsem Rāfe'ī, Abū Bakr Jawharī, 'Alī Šūfī, and himself (*Čahār maqāla*, p. 28, tr. p. 30). But while we have surviving several fairly complete *dīvāns* of the Ghaznavid poets, none of those from the Ghurid period have survived. It is clear, however, that all this literature was in Persian, and claims which were made in Afghanistan some decades ago (e.g., Ḥabībī in his ed. of Moḥammad Hōtak) of the existence of poetry in Pashto from the Ghurid period remain unsubstantiated. Of Ghurid prose literature, including history and genealogy, mention should be made of Faḡr-al-Dīn Mobārakšāh Moḥammad b. Manšūr, known as Faḡr-e Modabber, the author of a genealogical work, *Baḡr al-ansāb*, and a treatise on kingship and statecraft, the *Ādāb al-ḡarb wa'l-šajā'a* (q.v.). The great historian of the Ghurids, without whose information our knowledge of the dynasty would be much sparser, was Menhāj-al-Dīn-e Serāj-al-Dīn Jūzjānī (q.v.; d. the second half of the 7th/13th century), who was a diplomatic envoy for the sultans and who composed his *Ṭabaqāt-e nāšeri*, in form a general history but in a large measure a special history of the dynasty.

So far as can be discerned from the exiguous surviving examples of Ghurid art and architecture, there was a continuity here with the Ghaznavid age, since some of it cannot easily be separated stylistically from that of the preceding period. The city of Ġazna rose again from the ashes of its destruction by 'Alā'-al-Dīn Ḥosayn, and a unique type of glazed tile work has been ascribed by Umberto Scerrato to the Ghurids of the later 6th/12th century. The splendid minaret of Jām (q.v.) is the prime extant example of Ghurid architecture, but there are other remains in Herāt and ruins of a mosque and madrasa at Češt (q.v.) on the upper Harīrūd dating from the reign of Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Moḥammad (cf. Sourdel-Thomine). In the sphere of secular architecture, the extensive palace buildings at Laškarī Bāzār (q.v.) on the Helmand river near Bost seem



to show a continuity from early Ghaznavid to Ghurid and Mongol times. Nevertheless, it does seem possible, according to Janine Sourdel-Thomine, to speak of the evolution of a distinctive Ghurid architectural style.

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