The Socioeconomics of State Formation
in Medieval Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the socioeconomics of state formation in medieval Afghanistan in historical and historiographic terms. It outlines the thousand year history of Ghaznavid historiography by treating primary and secondary sources as a continuum of perspectives, demonstrating the persistent problems of dynastic and political thinking across periods and cultures. It conceptualizes the geography of Ghaznavid origins by framing their rise within specific landscapes and histories of state formation, favoring time over space as much as possible and reintegrating their experience with the general histories of Iran, Central Asia, and India. Once the grand narrative is illustrated, the scope narrows to the dual process of monetization and urbanization in Samanid territory in order to approach Ghaznavid obstacles to state formation. The socioeconomic narrative then shifts to political and military specifics to demythologize the rise of the Ghaznavids in terms of the framing contexts described in the previous chapters. Finally, the study specifies the exact combination of culture and history which the Ghaznavids exemplified to show their particular and universal character and suggest future paths for research.
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I. General Introduction

This study provides a socioeconomic approach to state formation in medieval Afghanistan, focusing on the origins and expansion of the Ghaznavid sultanate. At their height, the Ghaznavids controlled territory in Iran, Central Asia, and India, incorporating a tremendous variety of peoples within their realm. By integrating several distinct regions of the greater Hindu Kush, they shaped the movement of peoples, commodities, and ideas and initiated a new phase of medieval history in that pivotal part of the world. Some scholars have overestimated the extent of the change which the Ghaznavids wrought by presenting them as an aberrant interruption, while others have falsely posited a story of continuous and predictable conquest for medieval India. As a result, many previous studies have only offered an imprecise account of the essential social and economic processes which brought about the Ghaznavid historical moment.

The history of medieval Afghanistan requires a multi-sided approach. This is illustrated vividly by the Ghaznavid period, in which Central Asian, Iranian, and Indian peoples interacted, in cooperation as well as conflict, for nearly two centuries. Our own era tends to presuppose certain realities which stem from familiar assumptions about political economy and culture, but few of these existed in similar guise a millennium ago. Consequently, the historiography of the greater Hindu Kush demands more than the transmission of empirical fact and the description of historical and cultural objects, such as the dynasty and its paraphernalia; it also necessitates an act of translation from that past world into our own as well as a coherent interpretation of those people and their times into a scientific perspective which resonates with the ideals of our own age.
In light of the importance of Afghanistan and the international nature of its study, it has been necessary from the outset to gather evidence and argument from a wide scope before narrowing the aperture to focus on specific topics in Ghaznavid era socioeconomics. A large measure of scholarship from the Cold War created certain epistemological boundaries which continue to mark our understanding of Afghanistan. Area studies specialists have usually emphasized either the Middle East, or Iran, or the Soviet Union, or South Asia, but none of these area studies designations can capture the picture of Afghanistan adequately, since they can misrepresent the region epistemologically in the same manner that the country is often divided in atlases, where it either falls into the dark center margin or splits in half at the edge of the page. In contrast, this study has sought to unify separate fields into a coherent view of the medieval Hindu Kush.

Afghanistan is both unknown and overly familiar for most readers. Too often, uninformed members of the global media comment on the purportedly remote, isolated, and obscure character of Afghanistan, but anyone with more than a passing familiarity with the history of the region knows the superficial nature of this charge: Afghanistan has consistently produced more people, artifacts, and events of world historical significance than some of the well-known powers of our day. Indeed, the international significance of Afghanistan is reflected in the multi-lingual breadth of its relevant sources and scholarship. At the same time, certain stories about the Ghaznavids and their famous Sultan Mahmud have been repeated so often that no one has bothered to verify their substance.¹ This has resulted in an erroneous sense of understanding the Ghaznavids,

¹ B. Flood also laments “the dearth of dedicated studies” of the medieval period, although this period occupies “center stage in colonial and nationalist constructions of a past that has been cast as a perpetual
when in fact a great number of narratives about the Ghaznavids have been constructed for purposes other than scientific history.

Some readers may be tempted to compare this study to two major works in English by C.E. Bosworth, so it is necessary to review those works briefly at the outset to understand precisely their approach and how this study differs from them. Bosworth’s studies are read more often by scholars of Iranian and Islamic history than by those specializing in South Asia. In *The Ghaznavids, Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994-1040*, Bosworth states in the preface that the genesis of his book was in his doctoral thesis, *The transition from Ghaznavid to Seljuq power in the Islamic East*, and this focus on Iran and the Seljuqs was largely retained in the book.²

Bosworth’s book contains three main parts. The first part on “The Ghaznavid empire at its zenith under Mahmud” begins with “The origins of the Ghaznavid empire”, which includes material on the Samanid background, Sebuktegin, and the succession of Mahmud. This short chapter cites primary sources, but does not go into depth and suggests reading elsewhere for a “continuous, chronological account” which the book omits.³ At different points, the Ghaznavid dynasty is characterized as “Turks”, “Turko-

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² “I have not concerned myself, except in passing, with India or with the role of the Sultans as standard-bearers of Muslim culture and religion there. That the Sultans did in fact fulfil such a role in India is problematical and an examination of Ghaznavid activity in India would necessitate a knowledge not merely of eastern Islamic history but also one of Indian history, and a familiarity with a culture-region very different from the Islamic one.” C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: their empire in Afghanistan and eastern Iran 994-1040*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 5.

³ Bosworth explains that “I have not aimed at a continuous, chronological account of the events of the period. This has been done for Mahmud’s reign by Nazim, and, more briefly, for the whole early Ghaznavid period by Spuler in the historical section of his *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*.” Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, 6. This is a debatable assessment. Nazim’s *The life and times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna* does include a helpful chronology, but his book is divided by geographical region and often places events within these regions out of sequence, which obviously destroys the chain of causation needed for accurate understanding of processes; additionally, Nazim usually prefers to emphasize religious motivations for Sultan Mahmud.
Persian”, and “Perso-Islamic”, as well as “of slave origin”, “racially-Turkish”, and “barbarians from the Central Asian steppe”. The remaining chapters of that part emphasize the discussion of “institutions” such as “The structure of the administration of the army”, “The army”, and “Court life and culture”. The second part treats “Khurasan under Ghaznavid rule” with chapters on Khurasan’s capital of Nishapur and its social structure. The third part emphasizes “The coming of the Seljuqs & their triumph in Mas’ud’s reign”, starting with “the origins of the Seljuqs”, a short chapter of approximately the same size as the introductory chapter on the origins of the Ghaznavids. After describing the succession of Mas’ud to the throne, it finishes with “The struggle with the Turkmens & the downfall of Ghaznavid power in Khurasan”. In contrast with this study, it is important to note that Bosworth is not interested in pre-Ghaznavid history or in Mahmud in any detail; he refers to other works which do not adequately account for the context and rise of the Ghaznavids. His main interest is in the post-Mahmud period: Mas’ud’s reign and the Seljuq conquest of Khurasan.

Bosworth’s second book, *The Later Ghaznavids: Splendour and Decay, The Dynasty in Afghanistan and Northern India, 1040-1186*, is a sequel to the first, but is somewhat different in approach. The exploration of structure and geography in the first book is eschewed in favor of traditional dynastic history, with chapters titled “The Reign of Ibrahim”, “Mas’ud III and his Sons”, and so on. There is no dedicated integration of social or economic matters, and there is little use of evidence from art, architecture, or poetry, although Bosworth notes that “the place of India as an immensely fertile

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Spuler’s seven-page discussion of Mahmud is only interested in Iran, not Central Asia or India, and characterizes Mahmud as “the most outstanding religious warrior of his time” (*der hervorragendste Glaubenskämpfer seiner Zeit*). Further discussion of Nazim, Spuler, and Bosworth can be found in chapters II and V of this study.

4 These characterizations occur in many places; for example, Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, 4.
nurturing-ground for Persian literature clearly begins in the middle Ghaznavid period.\textsuperscript{5}

Apart from strictly political and military matters, there are few references to developments in Indian scholarship as it existed in the later 1970s. Bosworth admits that “it remains to attempt a brief estimate of the historical significance of the period and dynasty under review in this book.”\textsuperscript{6}

By contrast, this study seeks to define that historical significance from the outset. It interprets the meaning of Ghaznavid origins for the general history of Afghanistan, eschewing excessive emphasis on religious or ethnic differences as a mode of explanation. Instead, the geographic and political origins of the Ghaznavids have been placed in the broad current of pre-Ghaznavid history to find non-Islamic and Islamic analogies to the Ghaznavid experience, as a way to enrich our understanding of the complexities of state and society at the time. The scope is not confined to the history of a single region, which would be a one-sided approach in the Ghaznavid case, but instead seeks to include as much as possible the entwined histories of Iran, Central Asia, and India.

Furthermore, this study provides for the first time a history of Ghaznavid historiography from its origins to the present day to find the recurring themes which have directed our view of this medieval state and its paradigmatic Sultan Mahmud. Rather than assuming Ghaznavid success based on the force of arms or purported religious fervor, it identifies the socioeconomic problématique of state formation which applied to the Ghaznavids as much as to the Samanids, Qarakhanids, and Seljuqs. It is against the disruptive centrifugal dynamics of urbanization and monetization that the Ghaznavids


\textsuperscript{6} Bosworth, \textit{The later Ghaznavids}, 4.
were able to come into being, but not without setbacks, failures, and delays which are often elided in the historiography. Finally, this study reassess the military and political account in detail through the end of Mahmud’s reign to define the obstacles hindering the Ghaznavid’s rise, to periodize the expansion of their power, and to dispel certain persistent mythologies about this history which continue to affect current politics and epistemologies. For instance, in contrast to what is frequently stated, the Ghaznavids were neither the first Turkic dynasty in Afghanistan nor the first Muslims to enter India. In the conclusion, the results of this research are expanded to challenge habitual interpretations of the Ghaznavids and suggest new heuristics and future routes of study.

The chapter “Perspectives on the Ghaznavid Age” reviews the literature on the Ghaznavids from the earliest period to the present day. It treats the literature on the Ghaznavids as a continuum in order to identify the layering of major themes by previous writers on the dynasty. It outlines a periodization and distinguishes between the changing concerns of Ghaznavid historiography in different cultural and historical contexts. While not a history of reception *per se*, it identifies recurring interpretations of the Ghaznavids, some of which originated almost as soon as the dynasty emerged. Chronicles and advice literature in Persian have long sought to explain the power of the Ghaznavids and their great Sultan Mahmud. These medieval texts often struggle with the same *problématique* of state formation which the Ghaznavids themselves confronted.

Eventually the metaphorical and ideological existence of the Ghaznavids outstripped the memory of their actual reality. This process began with Persian poetry, which the Ghaznavids patronized greatly, though in this respect they were not significantly different than Saffarid and Samanid predecessors. But later medieval poets
who had no direct experience with the dynasty found fertile imaginative ground in the
Ghaznavids, not only in the exploits and wise words of a mighty king, but also in the
esoteric truths of the relationship between Mahmud and his male servant Ayaz. This
fascinating topic has not been treated at length in the chapter as the question of reception
within the Islamic literary tradition is a separate topic which requires in-depth scrutiny to
be treated justly. Instead, this research aims at demythologizing the Ghaznavids and the
conditions for the rise of their mightiest Sultan.

The Ghaznavids continued to wear the mask of metaphor as they entered western
European literature, initially through the travel writings of French merchants in India and
subsequently through reflections of Enlightenment authors. In this literature as well, the
question of Ghaznavid state formation loomed large. As discourse on the Ghaznavids
moved into English literature, the dynasty came to mark the periodization of Indian
history. Depending on the author, the Ghaznavids signaled either the end of the medieval
period or its very start. They were often viewed as the turning point of a new phase in
Indian history. This judgment has some measure of truth, but the discussion often omits
the long-standing Muslim state in Sind and the gradual formation of Islamic society in
South Asia, particularly in western India. The chapter clarifies the extent to which
European historiography on the Ghaznavids merely imitated earlier histories in Arabic
and Persian or created new interpretations.

New themes arose as knowledge about the Ghaznavids entered the historical
discourse of early modern Europe. Some of these themes, such as the paradigmatic nature
of the Ghaznavids for explaining Hindu-Muslim conflict, were based to a degree on the
five centuries of previous literature, usually as extensions and exaggerations of pre-
existing tropes. Often these medieval narratives misconstrued ideology for fact. Other themes emerged, however, during the early modern period, such as the intense focus on despotism, which had a weak presence in the medieval literature. Simultaneously, there was a near total loss of interest in the poetic and mystical significance of the Ghaznavids. It was strikingly important for these early modern European authors to determine whether Sultan Mahmud went to war for religious or economic reasons; in biblical terms, for God or Mammon. These concerns contained the obvious echoes of their time, in which western Europe witnessed religious wars, strengthening monarchies, and growing bourgeoisies.

As European imperialism expanded, accounts of the Ghaznavids, who became a preeminent symbol of fanatic despotism, served as a device to create and exacerbate tensions between the peoples of India, particularly along the lines of religion. This deliberate formation of national blocs provided the British with a means to control British India as a whole. Only in the early 20th c. appeared a few attempts to provide a more scientific perspective in line with contemporary international advances in philology, history, economics, and sociology. But these important early studies were still hampered by the persistence of earlier ways of thought; in particular, the unwillingness to break the mold of traditional political history. Furthermore, there was a general lack of integration among the Indian, Iranian, and Central Asian aspects of the Ghaznavid age. In a sense, dynastic history remained the dominant mode of explanation for Ghaznavid power, whether the interpretation stressed political action or its structure.

The post-World War II period also saw an expansion of studies in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu about the Ghaznavids. Many of these early studies remained in
the traditional ambit of dynastic history, but contained generally a greater attention to intellectual and aesthetic themes than the western European literature. As national cultures developed, accounts of the Ghaznavids helped to assert and describe national sentiments and pasts. By the 1970s, there was also an expansion of interest in Ghaznavid social conditions, which allowed for some reexamination of the question of state formation. But it remained a persistent challenge for authors to free themselves from the strong influence of political history to look at social and economic themes more broadly.

Curiously, the uneven development of Ghaznavid power was not a major concern since it was usually presupposed to proceed without interruption, perhaps on the basis of their later greatness. In this kind of teleological thinking, it was necessary for Mahmud to rise because he was always inherently a great king, but he was struck by the unfortunate contingency of his death and his kingdom dissolved soon afterward. At the same time, the decline of Ghaznavid power was usually more interesting than its rise, which seemed to be self-explanatory. In other words, kings rise because they are ontologically kings, but they fall because of a myriad of wrong actions and misfortunes.

In contrast, this study emphasizes the origin and rise of the Ghaznavids, but does not presuppose it. The most recent crop of studies has looked at the Ghaznavids in their wider social and cultural context while not focusing on them directly. In many cases, the experience of the Ghaznavids has supported studies on the ideals of Islamic kingship, on the development of social and cultural geographies, and on the reception of the medieval past. It has been particularly valuable to clarify the meaning of the Ghaznavids in their wider context by adducing little known facts to reconfigure popular perceptions of this significant historical moment. This emphasis on meaning has been retained in this study,
with the difference that it trains its attention on state formation in the context of medieval
Eurasian socioeconomics.

The chapter on “The Geographical and Political Landscape” establishes the place
and time of the Ghaznavids’ emergence. It defines Central Asia, Iran, India, and Eurasia
since these basic geographical units recur throughout the literature but have been subject
to occasional dispute. Afghanistan is analyzed in terms of its habitable areas in the
medieval period, which in turn is bracketed by the broad outline of states in late antiquity
and the early modern period. This section lays the groundwork for Ghaznavid political
history, but seeks to place that history in the broadest meaningful context before
narrowing to specific topics. Particular attention has been given to the Indian subtext of
Afghanistan’s history prior to the arrival of the Ghaznavids.

Geography is more than nature alone, although it is necessary to understand how
people can live with nature in a region before discussing their socioeconomics in any
form. The salt deserts of Iran, for example, cannot easily support human life, but some of
the desert steppe of Central Asia can. Humankind imagines a landscape by naming spaces
and their objects, thereby combining their natural and cultural experience into a single
perception of place. This landscape, just like a language, is received by medieval people;
it is not created ex nihilo by the Ghaznavids. Accordingly, smaller and more indigenous
geographical units are outlined for their natural features which have shaped the
movement of people and ideas, but they are also seen in terms of the political history that
established the sociocultural context for state formation in the Ghaznavid age. These
“microunits” of Khurasan, Mawarannahr, Sistan, and the Kabul river valley
counterbalance the “macrounits” of regional geography discussed at the start of the chapter.

The Ghaznavids have been presented too frequently as an aberration in the historical record. Even peoples living close to Afghanistan have seen them as inaccessible and ultimately incomprehensible dwellers on the horizon, either emerging from the limitless steppe or the obscurest of mountains to plunder without cause. This chapter responds to this illusion by detailing the layered political history of the core territories from which the Ghaznavids came. It seeks to illustrate by specific examples how central and local powers interacted, how elites were created and destroyed, and how military forces formed and dissolved.

As the discussion unfolds, the social and cultural questions of landscape press themselves to the fore, particularly in Afghanistan. It is certainly true that Afghanistan possesses a great degree of heterogeneity made possible through the isolating quality of mountain valleys and elevation. This includes mixtures of religion, language, and culture which conventionally are imagined separately. These are not questions of esoterica, but solely concern the evidence of particularities. At the same time, Afghanistan frequently channels a tremendous number of people and commodities from the larger settled societies which surround it, pulling it into the cultural orbits of surrounding regions. The major alternation in Afghanistan occurs between what has been characterized as Iranian and Indian cultural spheres of influence.

To understand this dynamic in detail, it is particularly important to understand state formation in southern Afghanistan, just before the Ghaznavids appear on the historical scene. There are many debates about the Shahi, Rutbil, and Lawik lines which
ruled Afghanistan, including the very names of these formations. But it is necessary to
disentangle these details to understand the political and social traditions that the
Ghaznavids used as raw material to build their hegemony. If the process of Islamization
and Iranianization in Afghanistan is viewed as a simple teleology, then the specific form
of this pre-Ghaznavid history is easily lost, along with the context for Sultan Mahmud.
Consequently, a review of this history’s specifics undermines misperceptions about the
ethnic and religious character of medieval southern Afghanistan. This approach is
intended to familiarize the Ghaznavid phenomenon to its environment and establish its
continuity with previous state formations.

The chapter on “Monetization and Urbanization” describes the central
socioeconomic trend of monetary crisis and urban expansion which conditioned the
Ghaznavids’ rise. This discussion responds indirectly to questions about the causes of
Ghaznavid power, a preoccupation of various commentators for nearly a thousand years,
by explaining the trends feared by rulers of the age. Individual and collective motives
have been suggested to explain the Ghaznavids, alternating between Sultan Mahmud’s
individual religious zeal and his greed for treasure or the general and inexplicable
fanaticism and passion for violence of Muslim rulers. Medieval ideologies have not
particularly helped in this regard, so it is necessary to view the evidence skeptically to
detect alternative motives, in the same critical manner as one expects for political and
social phenomena in our own time.

In opposition to the view that emphasizes the will of the dynasty alone as a way to
explain historical change, this chapter explores the long-term social and economic
conditions for the deterioration of the urban state in medieval Iran and Central Asia. It
alternates between a discussion of urbanization and monetization at different scales of
detail to find their mutual connections, beginning with large brush strokes and moving to
a finer depiction as the Ghaznavid era comes into view. This chapter bridges the prior
geographical discussion with the subsequent narrative on the Ghaznavids’ political and
military evolution.

The most effective means to explain these socioeconomic changes in the medieval
period proved to be a comparison with late antiquity in precisely the same area. The
spectacular growth in Central Asian cities remained ahead of urban growth in eastern Iran
during the late antique period. Moreover, the use of money in Central Asia was not
confined to coins, as it was generally during the medieval period, due to the payment of
taxes in labor and kind and the silk trade with China.

The evidence shows that the silver-rich coins in the zone north of Afghanistan
suffered from a regular undercurrent of depreciation due to trade, which was halted on
occasion by military successes. As the monetary and fiscal system of the medieval
Islamic world intensified the use of silver coins throughout Iran and its periphery, lower
quality silver coins filtered steadily into a variety of commercial and tax spheres. A
common fabric of silver coinage developed throughout the central band of Eurasia. This
gradually transformed the hierarchy of money in the eastern Islamic world, with
consequent effects on social order. The major change to a monetized economy began
when very low quality coinage was enforced by fiat for commercial and tax purposes.
This allowed the higher silver content coins to be directed outward for export where they
were often treated as commodities instead of money.
The loci of money use were in eastern Islamic cities, which grew tremendously in the early medieval period, yet did not increase from migration or improved food supplies, as has been the case elsewhere. The transformation of these cities from compact fortified towns into extensive conurbations continued long after the Ghaznavids lost control of their northern tier. The periodization of monetization coincides closely with the expansion of these cities along with the increasing use of paid military services, which had long been a local feature of Central Asian history. Thus, the favoring of urban settlement appears to be connected to the growth of a cash nexus.

The matter of medieval economic production does not have as much relevance for this process, as fruitful as production studies can be to answer some kinds of questions. Since urban growth did not stem from improved agricultural techniques or increased labor supplies, the impact of money gains significance. By shifting attention from the sphere of production to that of finance, it becomes further important to investigate property relations and their connection to monetization. In this regard, the landowners (dehqānān) are scrutinized, as they were the firm basis for the Samanid state, but they deteriorated as a class by the end of the 10th c. This study has narrowed its scope to emphasize that the conservative tendencies of landownership in the eastern Islamic world were not able to prevent the process of de-agriculturalization, along with the loss of land tax revenue, until the piecemeal introduction of the new landownership system of ḥāṣṣā in Iran, particularly during the Seljuq period. This deterioration of the monetary and fiscal system which uprooted the agricultural population and eroded the system of landownership also gave birth to the power struggles out of which the Ghaznavids were born.
After clarifying the socioeconomics which conditioned the formation of medieval Iranian and Central Asian states, the chapter entitled “Authority and Violence” reassesses the formation of a faction in Ghazni and the rise to power of Mahmud. The discussion maintains a fairly strict chronology to illuminate processes and the relationships between events on different sides of Afghanistan. This is in contrast to scholarship which treats events primarily in terms of their geographical location and not their position in time. Additionally, this chapter aims at an even treatment of regions, so that events in Iran, for example, are not considered more historiographically worthy than events in India, and vice-versa. Apart from the fact that the Ghaznavids themselves acted within different regions without particular regard to the differences between them, it is also much easier to see links between events when regions are treated in a balanced manner. This necessarily has meant immersion in the empirical details of Ghaznavid history as a way to move beyond the brief uninformative summaries of their origins and rise that are usually referenced in the scholarship.

The faction in Ghazni began as one of many factions in southern Afghanistan which established independent power centers during the breakdown of the Samanid state. The Samanids had been the preeminent authority in eastern Iran with control of Khurasan and Transoxiana. Their rich domains were diminished in large part by the erosion of their monetary and fiscal position. Rivals formed to capture control of their crown, either composed of vassals or the mercenaries that the Samanids employed to maintain their position against other landlords. In this atmosphere of fragmentation, it was easy for power struggles to develop with little to no relation to the elevated cultural position held by the Samanid amirs, which they had acquired through aristocratic status and patronage.
of the arts. With some notable exceptions, the unstable political economy of the period extended even into the dynastic and intimate sphere.

The Ghaznavid state began with the failure of the faction of mercenaries led by Alptegin to capture control of the Samanid throne in Bukhara. In contrast with some accounts, there was no predetermined plan to sweep down from Central Asia and attack India. In fact, the final entrance by this small troop into Ghazni was won after months of pressure, and it was heavily contingent on the acquiescence of the elite in this medium-sized town. Not only was this faction besieged by the Samanids, but it later forced out of Ghazni more than once in the following decade, either by the Ghazni elite or by neighboring lords. The remarkable element from this early period is the survival and endurance of the faction in Ghazni, which was accomplished in large measure through the leadership of Sebuktegin. It is not a tale of unimpeded victory.

Sebuktegin displayed political skills even more than military acumen. Despite the elevation of several leaders within the Ghazni faction, there was no attempt at hereditary leadership until Sebuktegin bequeathed his position to his son Isma’il. At most, it appears that these plans were designed to create a local basis for authority along the lines of other vassals of the Samanids. Sebuktegin and even Mahmud were quite careful not to appear to undermine the Samanid amir, as part of a strategy which also signaled to other lords that the Ghaznavids were not interested in disrupting local power arrangements.

Sebuktegin’s expansion was strictly in southern Afghanistan and control of Khurasan was dependent in part on the nominal permission of the Samanid amir. In other words, plans for conquest appear rather limited, which probably reflected the difficulties attaining a foothold in southern Afghanistan.
Even Mahmud himself began in a weak position, as he was not his father’s choice to inherit the throne. His fight to gain control of Ghazni indicated the tenuous personal bonds which exemplified the political economy of the age. The odd fact that Mahmud was not chosen by his father has been a source of scholarly speculation in light of Mahmud’s later greatness, but it becomes comprehensible when taking into full account the particular conditions of establishing authority. The distance in character between cultured men, such as Ismaʿil, and military men, such as Mahmud, exemplified the contradictions of power in an age when the Caliphate increasingly lost its practical significance. In a parallel manner, the Samanid amir served political purposes for the Ghaznavids but held no military value. Military force alone was not enough to maintain power even for the Ghaznavids at their strongest.

In this account, Ghaznavid military expansion appears to have been more contingent and haphazard than the Ghaznavids themselves and their commentators often present it. For example, the conquest of the wetlands of Sistan involved strategy to be sure, but it does not seem possible without the invitation to Mahmud to rule them after the Sistan ruler Khalaf’s heinous betrayal of his son. At the same time, it may have been a source of political resilience that the Shahi father Jaipal and his son Anandpal appear to have had a cooperative familial relationship. In contrast with much of the later ideology about the dynasty, the Ghaznavids appear to have been preoccupied with easier and smaller scale raids than with occupation and empire-building. The Ghaznavids had more immediate concerns than aspiring to dominate permanently all of western India.

Religious politics were not simply a question of Hindu-Muslim differences, or, more precisely, medieval disputes between western Shaivism and eastern Sunni Islam. If
the causes for Ghaznavid war-making could be found in jihadi ideology alone, then it must be asked why the Ghaznavids did not stage repeated attacks on Central Asia, particularly since the non-Muslim Qarakhanids were eventually able to conquer nearby Khurasan. The most intense struggles appear to have been within Islamic sects, since these matters touched on internal as well as external affairs, as in the case of the Karramiyya, Ismaʿilis, and others. The attempt to fix religious or economic motivations alone usually overlooks the complexities of the Ghaznavids which did not fall into abstract “either/or” terms. What emerges is that the Sultan strove continuously to retain power since his state was not often in a secure position to command the loyalties of his subjects.

As far as strictly military matters are concerned, the combined picture calls into question certain common assumptions about the Ghaznavids. It is certainly true that the Ghaznavid military under Mahmud was strong, but in many respects it was simply the strongest urban military among many weak powers. It required weeks to gain advantage in some battles and there were a surprising number of cases in which the Ghaznavids suffered predations even while they busily predated on others. They were notable for their use of swift marches and relentless combined-arms attacks, but sometimes these were used out of desperation based on deteriorating conditions and they always involved a return to the home base of Ghazni. The degree of instability in Ghaznavid rule confounds the linear story of conquest.

The urban character of the Ghaznavids has been stressed in this study because their money-based mercenary army and political culture makes it impossible to maintain facile assumptions about the Ghaznavids as “nomads” simply because of their
pronounced Turkic element at the top. Despite the impression that the Ghaznavids were constantly on the offensive, it should be noted that they only controlled the Panjáb by 1015, nearly sixty years after Alptegin’s arrival in Ghazni. The campaigns in the Ganga-Yamuna were five years in total and were punctuated by stalemates. Even the campaign to Somanatha had military and practical dimensions which are usually neglected in the traditional accounts. The Ghaznavids were certainly a strong power in their day, but in general they were neither invincible nor irrational.

This study also scrutinizes dynastic and family politics in terms of the conditions outlined above. It is a fascinating and unremarked upon fact that Mahmud appears to have repeated almost exactly the same dynamic with his son as he had with his own father. The question of Mas’ud’s succession has been less interesting for many because he was in command when the Ghaznavids lost to the Seljuqs in 1040. But Mas’ud nevertheless proved to be the superior sibling when challenging the terms of his inheritance. This circularity between father and son appears to indicate the inability to secure the transfer of valuable legitimacy on the basis of convention alone, in the same manner that the “coins of the realm” in eastern Iran could not be circulated without the constant infusion of precious metals by any means necessary. Politics and economics were always threatened by debasement and required enforcement of their values. Certainly, the Ghaznavid solution was based in large part on the regular seizure of economic rents through heavy taxation and looting. But it is clear that the erosion of political authority was also a cause for violence.

The social world of greater medieval Afghanistan can be treated in a variety of ways, including the study of social classes, whether of a religious, military, or
commercial nature. In this study, the “social” appears in a few specific ways. In “Perspectives on the Ghaznavid Age”, the long-term historiography of the Ghaznavids has been stressed to demonstrate that certain ideas about them have endured regardless of the discourse within a particular historical society. In “The Geographical and Political Landscape”, the discussion treats social and political traditions in the various regions of Ghaznavid territory which shaped the context for their emergence. In “Monetization and Urbanization”, the emphasis is on the settled monetized society of the eastern Islamic world and its possibilities and limitations of state formation; the treatment of specific social classes has been eschewed in favor of explaining the interaction between these two primary spheres. In “Authority and Violence”, the perspective is also holistic, focusing on the dynamic between military and political affairs in a tri-regional context to situate the narrative of state formation in the wider social world. There are more routes of exploration for each of these topics.

This study can be seen as a kind of historiographical frame-tale. The overarching context of the socioeconomics of monetization and urbanization shaped the possibilities for power in Central Asia and Iran by the high medieval period. These possibilities were not determined by proximate material conditions alone but were framed by long-term geographic and political traditions which the Ghaznavids inherited. Within the history and spirit of the age, state formation for the Ghaznavids was often an act of resistance against centrifugal forces which undermined the construction of legitimate authority. Rather than the simplistic alternation between a God or Mammon dichotomy of causation, the concatenation of these historical processes accounts for much of the violence during Sultan Mahmud’s reign.
Following the practice of recent works on the history of this topic (W. Vogelsang, R. Thapar, W. Ball, and B. Flood), diacritics are represented minimally in the main text. If a word is already familiar in English, it has not been italicized or given diacritics. Diacritics generally follow the systems from the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and *Epigraphica Indica*, except when the original citation has its own diacritics.
II. Perspectives on the Ghaznavid age

History of the literature

A synopsis of the sources for this period has been a tradition in much of Ghaznavid scholarship since Barthold’s *Turkestan*. Nazim’s *The life and times of Sulṭān Maḥmūd of Ghazna* included many details on extant and missing manuscripts, and Bosworth compiled a classification of sources in *The Ghaznavids*. Insofar as Barthold centered on Central Asia in his discussion, it may be said that Nazim concentrated on India, while Bosworth stressed Iran. All of these overviews include some mention of non-dynastic sources, yet there has been a persistent tendency in Ghaznavid historiography to produce a dynastic and political account rather than social or economic history. Furthermore, little attention has been given to historiographical matters beyond textual criticism, perhaps due to certain presuppositions about questions appropriate to the Ghaznavids.

This chapter’s chronological exploration of the sources and the historiography builds upon previous surveys, but augments them with three permutations. It treats the “historic” and “historiographic” texts as part of a continuum in broad terms. It emphasizes the perspectives of different national and linguistic discourses. It also indicates points of entry, expanded upon in the subsequent chapters, for new approaches to the social and economic history of medieval Afghanistan and the Ghaznavids.

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The earliest source for the Ghaznavids is the chronicle of al-ʿUtbi, *al-Yamīnī*, recognized as the oldest dynastic history in Arabic.⁹ *Al-Yamīnī* covers the period from Sebuktegin to Mahmud until the year 411/1020; a stylistically complex and allusive work, it was translated into a simplified Persian version by Jurfadaqani in the 13th c., probably for an Azeri atabeg; in this way, it has served as a model for subsequent authors in both Arabic and Persian.¹⁰ It has also been subject to a long-standing debate about its meaning, for it is often panegyrical, but does not elide some of the unsavory aspects of Mahmud’s sultanate.¹¹

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¹¹ This discussion began with T. Nöldeke in “Über das Kitab Jamini”, who sought to separate “historical data” from “rhetorical exaggerations.” A positivist view of the text was also held by W. Barthold in *Turkestan*, 19, and in Nāẓīm, *The life and times*. A. Anooshahr, “ʿUtbi and the Ghaznavids at the foot of the mountain,” *Iranian Studies* 38 (2005), 271-91, and J.S. Meisami, *Persian historiography*, 53, 63-65, have
ʿUtbi, descended from a long line of administrators in Khurasan, gained position as postmaster (ṣāhib al-barīd) in Samanid Nishapur through his maternal uncle’s connections. He served as a secretary to various local potentates, such as the Chaganid Abu ʿAli Simdjury and the Ziyarid Qabus ibn Wushmgir, before attaching himself to the rising dynasty of the Ghaznavids in the 990s. After the death of Sebuktegin, ʿUtbi supported Ismaʿil against Mahmud in the struggle for the throne; perhaps for this reason he merely served as an ambassador under Mahmud but never gained high position with the Ghaznavids. He wrote works of poetry and a secretarial manual, but only his famous Al-Yamīnī has survived the centuries. ʿUtbi claimed inspiration from al-Sabiʾ’s history of the Buyids, Kitāb al-Tāj, perhaps on the basis of its veiled disparagement of the ruler and the court rather than literary style; regardless, it is curious fact that this first dynastic history in Arabic has an elaborate but undeniable subtext of criticism aimed at the sultan and his entourage.

By contrast, there is the concise Persian account of Gardizi’s Zayn al-akhbār. Composed near the middle of the 11th c., it might be termed an anthropological dynastic history. It begins with an account of the ancient kings of Persia, through the caliphate until the Samanids, before offering details about the Ghaznavids. It continues until

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14 Anooshahr, “ʿUtbi and the Ghaznavids”, 274-5. ʿUtbi is not the only contemporary writer critical of the sultan; see footnote 21.
16 Gardizi dedicated his work to Sultan ʿAbd al-Rashīd ibn Maḥmūd (r. 440-43/1049-52).
432/1041 with the vengeance of Sultan Mawdud ibn Masʿud and finishes with a
discussion of various religions, including Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, and different
peoples, such as the Turks and the Rus’. The account also includes information on the
ancient Greeks, a common reference point in the eastern Islamic world for intellectuals
such as Ibn Sina and Biruni. There remains little biographical information about
Gardizi, apart from his obvious connection to Gardiz, just east of Ghazni. It is clear that
he had some direct experience with some of the events recorded in his history; perhaps he
was a secretary (kātib / dabīr) for the Ghaznavid administration.

Abu al-Fazl Bayhaqi composed a thirty-volume retrospective of the Ghaznavid
dynasty in elaborate and perceptive Persian, which originally covered more than forty
years, from Sebuktegin’s reign to the early part of Ibrahim’s (451/1059). Since only
volumes five through ten have been found, covering the period of Sultan Masʿud (r. 421-
32/1030-1041), Bayhaqi’s work has been given the title Tārīkh-i Masʿūdī among others,
but most printed editions call his work Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī. Some fragmentary sections of
Bayhaqi’s volumes are found in other compilations; fortunately, Bayhaqi’s tenth volume

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17 Gardizi’s section on Khurasan during the Saffarids and Samanids was probably from the lost Taʾrīkh Wulāt Khurāsān of the Samanid historian Sallāmān, which was also used later by Ibn al-Athir for the period up to the mid-10th c. See W. Barthold, “Gardīzī, Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Azīz b. al-ʿAdl b. ʿAbd al-Ḥādī b. Ṣaffār”, EI2; E. C. Bosworth, “Gardīzī, Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Hās b. Ṣaffār b. ʿAbd al-Ḥādī b. Ṣaffār”, in Iranica; Meisami, Persian historiography, 66-78. There are also indications that his work shares affinities with the Persian translation of Tabari, see G. Lazard, La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1963), 71-74.

18 Some sections are missing from these volumes, possibly a portion from the fifth volume and certainly chapters from the tenth. See S. Naficy, “Bayhaqi, ‘Abd al-Ḥaḍī b. Ṣaffār”, in Iranica, 66-78. In Naficy’s view, the total collection would have had a general title, such as Jāmiʿ al-Taʾrīkh or Taʾrīkh-i Ṣaffārī, with separate volumes for each ruler, such as Taʾrīkh-i Neyrizī for Sebuktegin, Taʾrīkh-i Yamānī for Mahmud, and so on; consequently, Naficy entitled his edition Taʾrīkh-i Masʿūdī, see S. Naficy, Taʾrīkh-i Masʿūdī, with corrections, notes and commentary, (Tehran, 1953) and S. Naficy, “Bayhaqi”, Bayhaqi himself called his work Maqāmāt-i maḥmūdī and Taʾrīkh-i Yamānī, but medieval writers have referred to the work in a variety of ways, depending upon the section to which they refer. In Taʾrīkh-i Bayhaq, a kind of local history (mangaba) of Bayhaq, Ibn Funduq (d. 565/1169) refers to Bayhaqi’s work as Taʾrīkh-i Al-i Mahmuq, while in the Jawāmīʿ al-ḥekāyāt, a prose anthology by ʿAwfī (d. –630/1232-33), Bayhaqi’s book is called Taʾrīkh-i Neyrizī.
also contains a chapter on Khwarezm taken from a lost work of Biruni, *al-Musāmara fī akhbār Khwārazm*.

After his education in Nishapur, Bayhaqi entered the Ghaznavid secretariat (*dīān-i risālat*) as an assistant to the chief secretary, Abu Nasr ibn Mishkan, serving under him until his death in 1431/1039; according to Sultan Masʿud, Bayhaqi’s youth at the fresh age of forty-six prevented his subsequent appointment as chief secretary. Eventually, Bayhaqi was appointed head of the secretariat in the reign of ʿAbd al-Rashid (r. 441-44/1049-1052), but he was removed soon due to machinations of his enemies and even imprisoned during the fifty-day interregnum of Toğril (r. 444/1052). Bayhaqi was restored as chief secretary for several years, but he left his position near the end of the reign of Sultan Farrokhzad (444-51/1052-59); he may have performed some intermittent service for the Ghaznavids afterward. Bayhaqi’s history has special significance, given his access to information and key events of the Ghaznavid state; moreover, he began his composition at about sixty years of age, when he could look back on decades of direct experience in the secretariat and was able to compile his volumes through his access to official letters and documents. His writing combines elegant style, judicious observation, and direct access to events and sources.

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20 Abū Naṣr-ī Moškān, as he was called by Bayhaqi, served from 401/1011-1012 until his death in 431/1039, and most information about him appears through the glorifying gaze of Bayhaqi. See H. Moayyad, “Abū Naṣr Maṣṣūr b. Moškān”, *Iranica*.

21 Bosworth, “Early Sources”, 48; Yūsofī, “Bayhaqī”.
The polymath Biruni, the premiere scientist and scholar of the Ghaznavid court, composed dozens of works in the natural and human sciences; it is not easy to overestimate his significance. Biruni probably served as an astrologer for the Ghaznavids; he wrote on astrology, astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry, but especially important is his *Hind*, a massive compilation in Arabic of knowledge about India, which includes copious detail about sciences, religion, and peoples, the culmination of years of translation and study of Sanskrit along with much personal experience. In *Hind* and in other works, he made numerous valuable observations about geography and culture, along with details about the inner workings of the court. Although he certainly knew Persian, most of his writing was in Arabic, with the justification that it was the best language for science; nevertheless, some of his later works may have been written in Persian and Arabic, perhaps as a sign of the nascent increase of scientific discourse in Persian. This study incorporates his *Hind* and his book on mineralogy, *Kitāb al-jamāhir fī maʿrifat al-jawāhir*.

Biruni, sometimes called al-Khwarizmi, was born in the suburbs (bīrūn) of the Khwarezmian capital of Kath, where he stayed until his mid-twenties, completing his

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education with local masters and communicating with scholars in neighboring cities, such as Ibn Sina in Bukhara, who was several years younger than he. Biruni circulated for some years in regional courts, receiving patronage from the Samanid Mansur II ibn Nuh (r. 387-389/997-999) and the Ziyarid Qabus ibn Washmgir, before returning to Khwarezm, where he served the brother of the Khwarezmshah for several years, soon acting in some political capacities. With the assassination of the Khwarezmshah and the conquest of the region by Sultan Mahmud in the spring of 408/1017, Biruni was transported to Ghazni along with other prisoners, among them many intellectuals, as a kind of loot captured by the sultan. He then served the Ghaznavids for approximately three decades, accompanying them on campaigns to India, commenting on one occasion about the destructiveness of the raids.

These are the four most significant writers for the early Ghaznavid period, who have merited more extensive biographical and textual attention, but other texts contain details about the conditions for the rise of the Ghaznavid state, even if they are written from an outside perspective and include only small or fragmentary comments. Among these are the Tārīkh-i Sistān, an anonymous local history of Sistan. There is also the Tārīkh-i Bukhārā by Narshakhi (d. 348/959), a local history of Bukhara, originally

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26 al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, S.H. Nasr and M. Mohaghegh, al-As’ilah wa’l-Awjibah: (questions and answers); including the further answer of al-Birunī and al-Ma’sim’s defense of Ibn Sinā (Tehran: Markaz-i Muţāla āt wa Hamāhang-i Farhangī, 1972).

27 “Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed there wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus (hindawiyyin) became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people.”, tr. by E. Sachau in al-Biruni and E. Sachau, Alberuni’s India, preface.

composed for the Samanid Amir Nuh, which only exists in a 12th c. epitome. Within the *Tajārib al-umam* of Buyid historian Abu 'Abdallah Miskawaih (d. 421/1030), a section by Hilal ibn al-Muhassin al-Sabi adds detail to Mahmud’s early ambitions in Khurasan. The anonymous *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa-al-qīṣāṣ* includes a section about Mahmud’s conquest of the city of Ray in the 1020s, from the perspective of the last Buyid vizier. These local histories and anthologies reveal additional details about the Ghaznavid age.

The 11th c. witnessed the growth of advice literature, especially mirrors for princes, in which the Ghaznavids, Mahmud in particular, served as positive paradigms for aspiring rulers. Although these manuals of an idealized and didactic character cannot be relied upon for recording direct experiences or even a judicious weighing of events as we can often find in 'Utbi, Bayhaqi, Gardizi, and Biruni, they do illustrate the persistent tendency for medieval texts to focus on the dynasty and dynast. The *Qābūsnāma*, composed by the Ziyarid ruler Kai Ka`us in the 1080s, begins from a somewhat less abstract position, given that the Ziyarids had marital ties with the Ghaznavids and that Kai Ka`us himself spent time in the court of Maudud ibn Mas`ud; nevertheless, the text still conforms to mannered literature (*adab*) rather than empirical reports or a chronicle. Advice on rulership was considered universal culture for all rulers, regardless of their background: the famous *Siyāsatnāma*, written by the vizier Nizam al-Mulk in the early 1090s to his Seljuq lord Malikshah, describes many virtues to be derived from Ghaznavid

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32 The *Kutadgu Bilig* can be classed with the advice literature in a loose manner, but it does not mention specific historical figures, and its advice is not directed only to rulers. Ḥājjīl Yūsuf Kháṣṣ and R. Dankoff, *Wisdom of royal glory: a Turko-Islamic mirror for princes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
examples, even though the Seljuqs were Ghaznavid enemies. As part of the genre of advice, there is also the late 11th c. advice manual for boon companions (*nudamāʾ*) from Ibn Baba al-Qashani, *Kitāb raʾs māl al-nadīm*, which has a brief outline of Ghaznavid rulers.33

Post-Ghaznavid authors also contain clues about the period. The local history of Ibn Funduq (d. 565/1170), *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, includes descriptions of cities in Iran and Central Asia, along with a section possibly taken from Bayhaqi’s lost treatise on secretarial arts, *Zīnāt al-kuttāb*.34 Ibn al-Jauzī’s (d. 597/1200) *al-Muntażam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam* copies some *fathnāmas* from Sultan Mahmud. The *Taʾrīkh al-Ṭabaristān*, composed by Ibn Isfandiyar circa 613/1216-1217, has details about Ghaznavid-Ziyarid relations; the *Tārīkh-i Šabaristān va Rūyān va Māzandarān* by Marʿashi mainly follows Ibn Isfandiyar.35 Ibn al-Athīr’s (d. 630/1234) *al-Kāmil fī al-Taʾrīkh* used ʿUtbi’s *al-Yamīnī* and Ibn Funduq’s lost *Mashārib al-Tajārib* to build a narrative about the Ghaznavids and the origins of the Seljuqs.36 The *Ṭabaqāt al-Nāširī* of Juzjani (d. late 7th/13th c.) highlighted the Ghurids, the destroyers of the Ghaznavids, but Juzjani himself came from a family connected to the Ghaznavids by marriage. Juzjani’s access to the early volumes of Bayhaqi enabled him to provide information about the pre-
Sebuktegin governors of Ghazni. The Majma’ al-ansāb fī al-tawārīkh of Shabankara’i (d. 759/1358) also has some comments about the Ghaznavids along with an advice manual (naṣīḥa), the Pandnāma, purportedly from Sebuktegin. The history of Mirkhwand (d. 903/1498), Ra_udat al-ṣafā’, details some aspects of the Ghaznavids and their defeat by the Seljuqs at Dandanqan.

Poetry has been a relatively underutilized source for Ghaznavid history and culture, even though good editions have been published for nearly a half century. This is somewhat surprising given that Ghaznavid poetry has been extolled for centuries as among the best in Persian; it seems that historical study has remained somewhat separate from literary study, resulting in the impoverishment of both. There appears to be a tendency to view poetry as supplementary in the manner of an ancillary science, despite its obvious importance to the production of culture and occasionally its unique commentary on particular events; moreover, the aesthetic qualities of poetic discourse require special treatment, which may have inhibited some scholars from utilizing it further. There have been few dedicated studies of individual Ghaznavid poets (Firdowsi can be considered “Ghaznavid” only marginally), although this seems to be changing for the better; now there are extended discussions of Ḯunsuri, Farrukhi, Manuchehri, and Mas’ud-i Sa’d-i Salman which can be incorporated into a general discussion.

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40 Bosworth, The later Ghaznavids, 3.
of the question of state formation, poetry was a potent means to express the sultan’s hegemony, for it was accessible in a widely understood Persian and cogently signified the ideals and universal ambitions of the Ghaznavid court.

Apart from the above-mentioned sources, there are many other comments on the Ghaznavids and Mahmud, but some are derivative, and others tend toward the allegorical and fictive, which, while retaining significance in their own contexts, possess limited value for determining empirical specifics of high medieval Afghanistan. Among these texts is Saʿadi’s Bustān, which depicts a mystical relationship between Mahmud and Ayaz and provides a fantastical description of the temple of Somanatha.42 There is also the poetic history of Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn by ʿIsami, composed in the mid-14th c., which begins with Sebuktegin’s portentous dream about the birth of Mahmud, in an episode derived from Juzjani. The history of Islam in India by Nizam al-Din (d. 1594), the Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī, began its account with the Ghaznavids, perhaps inspired by ʿIsami; it is this work which Firishta imitates for his history. In his Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī of 1018/1609-10, Firishta combined oral accounts, earlier histories, and his own experiences to construct a kind of universal political history of Islamic India, relying on centuries of discursive accretion which had a loose relation to the original Ghaznavid sources. It has been amply established that Firishta is a notoriously unreliable source except for the period in which he was a contemporary: the early modern Deccan. Nevertheless, Firishta is the seed for many early modern European narratives which paint Mahmud as the

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42 R. Thapar juxtaposes the archaeology of the idols, the accounts of the lingam in Somanatha, and the description in Saʿadi, to demonstrate the poetic and mystical nature of the poet’s depiction. Thapar, Somanatha: 57-58.
prototypical Perso-Indian dynast, so Firishta’s version continues to resonate through interpretations in our day.\(^{43}\)

\section*{Entrance into western European discourse}

The Ghaznavids find early European mention in Enlightenment France.\(^{44}\) French commerce had plied the Indian Ocean from the mid-17\(^{th}\) c.; by the late 17\(^{th}\) c., a steady stream of new writing emerged. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier’s travels to Persia, India, and Java in the 1670s were familiar to most readers and formed the discursive background for Montesquieu’s criticism and satire.\(^{45}\) François Bernier also published in the 1670s his travels in India during the wars between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb; in fact, his writing was a kind of political allegory masquerading as empirical history, a sensibility which received wider reception through his well-known later treatise, \textit{Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races}.\(^{46}\) Most importantly, Jean Chardin had finalized his massive \textit{Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de}

\(^{43}\) I have given the post-Ghaznavid accounts in Arabic and Persian relatively brief treatment primarily due to their marginal significance in ascertaining the socioeconomics of state formation in medieval Afghanistan. There have been some recent probings into this multi-layered history of reception, most notably through the history of the Ghaznavid raid on Somanatha and the trope of the ghazi king. The topic of reception deserves separate extended treatment and lies outside the scope of this study. See R. Thapar, \textit{Somanatha: the many voices of a history} (London: Verso, 2005) and A. Anooshahr, \textit{The Ghazi sultans and the frontiers of Islam: a comparative study of the late medieval and early modern periods} (London: Routledge, 2009). Oddly, Anooshahr does not engage with Thapar.

\(^{44}\) Portuguese works discussed commodities, commerce, politics and geography, but it seems that they concentrated their historical interest on their own prowess in “conquest and discovery” of the lands and seas of Asia. There does not appear to be any writing in Dutch about the Ghaznavids at that time; perhaps most educated Dutch relied on French for their historical information, as evidenced by the large 1711 Amsterdam edition of Chardin’s travels. J.S. Grewal, \textit{Medieval India: history and historians} (Amritsar: Guru Nanak University, 1975); J.B. Harrison, “Five Portuguese Historians,” in Cyril Henry Philips (ed.), \textit{Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon} (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

\(^{45}\) Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste, \textit{Les six voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier} (Fricx : Paris, 1679).

l'Orient; circulated since the 1680s. His knowledge of Persian, coupled with wide reading and traveling, gave his writings value and currency among Enlightenment circles; his empirically grounded accounts served as the basis for much excitement in the salon. In this way, the French literary scene became ripe with talk about Persia, India, and the Orient long before the explosive success of Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes in 1721.

Jean François Melon, who never traveled to Asia, formed part of a second layer of French commentators who relied on the works of others, such as Tavernier, Bernier, and Chardin, for accounts about the Orient, primarily to make arguments about the politics, economics, and culture of France and western Europe. Out of this tendency emerged his allegorical novel, Mahmoud le Gasnevide: Fragment traduit de l’Arabe, avec des Notes, published in 1729 and written in a similar style as the Lettres persanes of Montesquieu: Sultan Mahmud had become entangled with the luxury debates of 18th c. western Europe.

Melon came from a famille de robe and practiced law; he later served as secretary to John Law just before the collapse of the Compagnie des Indes in 1720. Melon then

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48 In tune with the zeitgeist, Montesquieu emphasized that the French monarch should not trammel the nobility in the manner of an oriental despot, using “Turkish” and “Persian” rulers as the prime negative examples. European travelers to Ottoman lands in particular had great difficulty accepting the lack of aristocracy; they did not understand the actually existing hierarchies and the yeniçeri ldevşirme system, even if they occasionally envied the Ottoman organization of power. In this respect, Montesquieu’s position on despotism was less “empirical” and emerges instead from western European distinctions in political theory common since Machiavelli. See D. Young, “Montesquieu's View of Despotism and His Use of Travel Literature,” The Review of Politics 40 (1978), 392-405.
50 John Law, a Scottish economist and gambler, headed the Compagnie des Indes, also known as the Mississippi Company in its earlier phase from 1684-1717. The collapse of the Compagnie was the French side of the financial collapse which included the South Sea Bubble of England.
served the Regent, Philippe d’Orléans, but upon the Regent’s death in 1723, Melon returned to private life, publishing *Mahmoud le Gasnevide* a few years later. *Mahmoud le Gasnevide* purports to be a “found” manuscript translated from Persian with explanatory notes. Dense with historical details, Melon’s parable aims to demonstrate that success through commerce, rather than the plunder of the despot Mahmud, was the only modern way to properly acquire luxury. Mahmud had transformed into the opposite of an aspiring bourgeois.

The English soon joined the French historiography of India, initially by translating in 1695 some of the French texts, such as Bernier’s accounts and *The General History of the Mogol Empire* by Father Catrou, based on the memoirs of Niccolo Manucci, a mid-17th c. mercenary turned quack for the Mughals, who wrote in a unusual mixture of Italian and Portuguese. These books were soon augmented by the multivolume *Universal History* (1736-1765) which attempted a periodization of world history, following the schema of “ancient”, “medieval”, and “modern” and viewing the rise of Islam in Eurasia as the beginning of the “modern” period; remarkably, the inverse of what has become “traditional” periodization in our day, when the “medieval” period in the Indian context is often reckoned to end with the last Mughals.

Despite the advance toward greater knowledge about India in western Europe, brought about by these tremendous efforts and based on masses of incoming evidence about the Orient, Robert Orme’s *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* still lamented in 1763 the general lack of knowledge about pre-
He included in his narrative a fantastic story about a giant golden tree, purportedly discovered during plunder by Mahmud, who purportedly possessed the “rigor of a conqueror and fury of a converter”, thereby retaining a medieval English coloration in his description of Islam.  

A major shift, however, in Ghaznavid historiography in English arrived with the seminal translation of Firishta by Alexander Dow from 1767-1772.

Dow’s *The history of Hindostan* was a loosely translated version of Firishta interpolated frequently with Dow’s commentary. He organized a history of Islamic empires of India, emphasizing what he saw as two dynastic lines: the Afghans, starting with the Ghaznavids until the time of the Mughals, and the Mughals themselves. Dow viewed empire as the superior political achievement; he preferred the Mughals, but negatively viewed all of these Indian states as inherently despotic. By focusing on Firishta’s tendentious account in particular, the political conflicts between Hindus and Muslims was emphasized, which simplified a much more complex set of practices and institutions which actually held power in early modern India.

This imagination was further developed in English scholarship by additional translations and commentaries of Persian histories of India; it is notable that other works in Arabic and Persian, such as *al-Yamīnī*, the *Tārīkh-i Sistan*, and Isami, with more critical perspectives or with a greater emphasis on conciliation, did not receive as much

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51 The manuscript collections of James Fraser, which had been purchased by Radcliffe Library after Fraser’s death in 1754, had not yet been published, as evidenced by Orme’s distress over the absence of original sources for pre-Mughal history. Grewal, *Medieval India*: 5.


53 P. Hardy, “Firishta, by-name of Muḥammad Ḽāsim Hindū Shāh Astarābādī,” in *EI2*.

54 Grewal, *Medieval India*: 103.
In any event, the Ghaznavids in England had now entered the general narrative of kings and empires: Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) included a section on Mahmud and the Ghaznavids in connection with the rise of the Seljuqs, in which Mahmud was asserted to be the first sultan, greater than Alexander of Macedon, and a religious fanatic tarnished by avarice for gold and silver.\(^{56}\)

Over the course of the 18\(^{th}\) c., French and English literature had consolidated a view of despotism which served internal and external objectives of their respective political cultures. Their moral and logical suppositions alternated between the themes of fanaticism and plunder. Even as more empirical material arrived, these 18\(^{th}\) c. perceptions were often augmented but rarely challenged. The historiography of Islamic India expanded further with the translations and commentaries of H.M. Elliot entitled *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, first published posthumously in the 1860s.\(^ {57}\) A series of chronicles translated with the help of an unnamed *munshi*, the anthology of this servant to the East India Company and the British Crown contained brief explanatory prefaces for each excerpt. This political history focused on battles, plunder, and scandals, ignoring poetic, theological, and legal concerns. These translations have necessitated a multivolume supplement to correct omissions, distortions, and

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\(^{55}\) As Romila Thapar has noted, “The court chronicles in Persian were taken as historically accurate by British historians since they had a familiar format of a clear chronology and sequential narrative.” Thapar, *Somanatha*: 164. Dow’s partial translation was soon supplemented by Scott in 1794 and Briggs in 1829. See G. Hambly, “Ferešta, Tārik-e,” in *EIr*.

\(^{56}\) E. Gibbon and D. Womersley, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. (London: Allen Lane, 1994): Chap LVIL, 333-344. The obvious presupposition is that religious belief is inherently closer to monasticism than kingship.

mistakes; nevertheless, they have been a common starting point for contemporary
Ghaznavid studies and for the history of Islamic India in general.  

With some slight changes, Elliot’s perspective, which emphasized combat and
irrationality, recurred in 19th c. and early 20th c. British histories. The Ghaznavids again
serve as the prototypical despots; the only remaining bugaboo, it seemed, was to
determine whether Mahmud was motivated by religious conviction or by a hypocritical
passion for wealth. The religious question was not as simple as mere heresy, as in
medieval western European perceptions of Islam; rather, fanaticism proved that Indians,
Muslims, and “Orientals” were inherently inclined toward tyranny and consequently were
incapable of just self-rule.

Reevaluations of the last century

The first efforts to overcome this negative judgment about religion appeared in
the work of M. Habib. Habib’s Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin (1924) gave a succinct
account concentrated on Mahmud; nonetheless, he advanced the discussion about
causation by shifting the focus away from the dynasty. By firmly assigning an economic
motive to the Ghaznavid raids, he simultaneously acknowledged his repulsion to the
destructive invasions as he strove to save Islam as a whole from the charge of reasonless
fanaticism. This stance positioned Habib beyond nationalistic and communalistic
discourses through the separation of the history of a particular dynasty from the complex
growth of Islamic communities in India.  

Insofar as Habib presented a Marxist

58 K.A. Nizami, Supplement to Elliot and Dowson’s History of India, Vol. I-III, (Delhi, 1981).
60 See M. Habib, Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin, (Delhi, 1924): iv. He also mentions with regret the Lucknow
riots of 1924.
interpretation, his views were “modern”, but it is possible to detect an approach critical of the sources which may have deeper roots than contemporary politics. Nevertheless, he focused primarily on a single dynast and did not fully articulate the specific socioeconomic developments which might have encouraged the Ghaznavid push into South Asia.

Almost the opposite approach emerged in the work of M. Nazim, a “modern enlightened Muhammadan scholar”, who set out to retell the wars of Mahmud and debunk the Sultan’s detractors.61 The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (1931) deliberately eschews “social, political, and economic” questions to concentrate exclusively on the dynast, the prime mover of his account.62 He discusses Mahmud’s battles, surveys his administration, and includes several carefully researched appendixes. The great value of Nazim’s work lay in its thorough exploration of available sources, but unfortunately he lacks a critical eye: his last chapter has the tone of a eulogy.

While the works of both Habib and Nazim were dynastic in focus, it is Habib who made the first small step out of dynastic history, due to his strong interest in the social and economic aspects of the Ghaznavids. This can be further confirmed through contrasting the socioeconomic approach of Habib’s “An Introduction to the Study of Medieval India (A.D. 1000-1400)” with the 1956 dissertation of Y.A. Hashmi on The Successors of Mahmud of Ghazna, which, while helpful as a brief survey of the later sources, stays firmly within the bounds of traditional political history.63

61 In the introduction by Sir Thomas Arnold, in Nāzim, The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna: xii.
62 Nāzim, The Life and Times: 2. Perhaps Nazim considered the dynast’s biography a form of cultural history.
63 M. Habib, Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period, Vol. I-II: 3-122. There is some measure of naiveté in Hashmi in a manner similar to Nazim: “Wine, one of the things forbidden in Islam, was, no doubt, a favorite with the Ghaznavids; but this was only in private. None had the courage to drink
In the early 1960s, C.E. Bosworth published a history of the Ghaznavid dynasty in Iran after a series of articles. In *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 944-1040*, he combined a discussion of the administration, army, and court, with a survey of the structure of the province of Khurasan, which can be seen as a supplement to Barthold’s geographical survey of Transoxiana in *Turkestan* and a way to set the scene for a chronology of the Seljuq conquest of this rich Iranian province. He acknowledged Nazim’s survey and he felt that the chronology of the political history of Mahmud had been satisfactorily treated by Nazim and Spuler. He stressed that he was not interested in India, or in art or culture generally, except insofar as it pertained to “racial” and ethnic matters, especially within the military.

Bosworth continued with the topic through another set of essays and surveys which culminated in 1977 with a second, shorter book dealing with the remaining century and a half of the Ghaznavids’ existence. In *The Later Ghaznavids: Splendour and...*
Decay, 1040-1186, Bosworth outlined the careers of the later sultans and their demise, occasionally including some social observations; nevertheless, his commentary often extended directly from his military concerns, evaluating the sultans for their instrumental and didactic significance and emphasizing battles and decline. He told a story of strong Ghaznavids replaced by weaklings, of glorious victories by the Ghaznavid’s enemies over the erstwhile potentates. These studies have been valuable for reviving interest in the Ghaznavids during the second half of the 20th c. and have illuminated many of the key sources and moments of the period; yet, it is unclear how these contributions have taken the discussion beyond the traditional mode of political and dynastic discourse.

We are only at the beginning of overcoming the fragmentation of Islamic studies brought about by the Cold War; tragically, Afghanistan in particular has served as a proxy battleground for the clashes of great powers. This problem was well-understood by scholars of earlier generations and, fortunately, there are new developments which aim to overcome this rupture. In brief, the Soviets concentrated on Central Asia and emphasized the Turkic element in drawing national borders. They were keen to avoid too much association of Tajiki with Persian or with the connections between Central Asia and Iran, out of concern with expansionist aims of British and US-allied royalist Iran. Although there is much valuable scholarship in Russian about Iran and Persian, it tends to


68 C.E. Bosworth, The later Ghaznavids: Splendour and Decay, The dynasty in Afghanistan and northern India, 1040-1186. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). It is unclear why more than 150 years out of 200 are a “later” period of “decay”, especially when these years mark the core period of this important medieval Indian state.

obscure some commonalities between Central Asia and Iran. In turn, scholarship in English on Iran has often emphasized the Persian character of Iran and Central Asia to the extent that the specificities of Central Asia remain unclear. Furthermore, scholarship in English from India, which has often contended with British presuppositions, has tended to emphasize a strong distinction between India on the one side and Iran and Central Asia on the other. Some of this distinction is justified, but it can often miss the shared histories of all three regions, which is best exemplified through the history of Afghanistan.

By a variety of routes, these difficulties in the scholarship are gradually being overcome, although they remain present in many forms. It is a constant challenge to find the appropriate combination of unity and difference among Iran, Central Asia, and India and to illuminate fresh ways of seeing their common history over a long historical period. In the case of this study, this has meant a greater integration of the known scholarship in English and the relatively less appreciated scholarship in Russian on Iran and Central Asia, some of which has recently become available in translation and some of which remains only in Russian. Due to different ideological conditions, scholarship in Russian has had a strong interest in the material conditions of medieval Central Asia and Iran, which has been useful for our socioeconomic treatment of the topic.

Historians in the contemporary Islamic world have also written on the literature and history of the Ghaznavid period. There has been much production in Persian as well as several contributions in Arabic and sustained interest in Turkish and Urdu. It can be

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70 There has been a much greater international presence of eastern European historiography on the medieval period in recent years, especially as Russian-speaking scholars have increasingly turned to writing in western European languages. Apart from the various reference works of Y. Bregel mentioned in the bibliography, there are also the works of R. Kovalev, F. Curta, and others.
difficult to uncover these studies as they are rarely known or discussed in western
European languages, a fact which is only reinforced by their frequent oversight in
bibliographic compilations such as the *Index Islamicus*. These scholars in Persian,
Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu are often aware of major scholarly developments for Central
Asia, Iran, and India in western European languages. This is especially true in the case of
English scholarship, but less so for French or German, and rarely works produced in
Russian. Meanwhile, hardly anyone incorporates the relevant studies in Japanese or
Chinese, or in Swedish, the latter being particularly important for economic discussions
of medieval Central Asia.\(^7\)

In general, there is less concern in this group of studies for theoretical or
conceptual questions, but, as might be expected, there is often a strong interest in
philological, literary, and cultural matters, especially in the Persian and Arabic
scholarship, and a close relationship to the sources; a similar perspective can be discerned
occasionally in English and British studies of Henry II or Russian and Soviet studies of
the Kievan Rus’, usually due to the cultural and literary significance of the medieval
period for their respective national cultures.\(^2\) As far as Ghaznavid studies are concerned,
some of the most important editions of Ghaznavid primary sources, including Bayhaqi,
Gardizi, and the various Ghaznavid poets, have been published in Iran in the 20\(^{th}\) c.
Although the most important Arabic editions of Biruni were produced in the late 19\(^{th}\) c.
by the German E. Sachau, the best edition of Ṭutbi was published recently in Lebanon,

Samanid silver coins can be found in massive collections in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.
\(^2\) Another example of this phenomenon can be found in the use of the Samanids for building Tajik
nationalism; in opposition to the Soviet Tajik historian Ghaforov, the emerging consensus emphasizes class
harmony instead of class antagonism, the role of Turks and women as negative influences leading to the
deterioration of the Samanid state, and the general loss of spiritual values. See K. Nourzhanov, “The
which supersedes in most respects the previous 19th c. edition from Egypt. In this cluster of scholarship, there also remains the tendency to emphasize Sultan Mahmud and the earliest Ghaznavid state, which may stem in part from a lack of critical distance from the sources.

The scholarship from Afghanistan seems to have been particularly marginalized. For example, there is no mention in European languages of the 1954 book *Saltanat-i Ghaznaviyān* by the famous scholar and poet Khalilullah Khalili, which perhaps is not surprising given that his substantial body of poetry is also rarely mentioned outside of Persian literary circles. Khalili (d. 1987) was a university professor in Kabul, a confidant to Mohammad Zafar Shah, and the last major representative in Afghanistan of traditional Persian poetry, who had the further distinction of introducing the “modernized” and relatively free verse Nima style in Afghanistan along with politicized themes in his later years. His *Saltanat-i Ghaznaviyān*, based mainly on Persian primary sources, belonged to the earlier phase of his oeuvre. He followed a fairly traditional chronological framework of kings and battles along with long passages of poetry and an appendix of important persons which reads to some extent like a biographical dictionary. His almost exclusive focus on the Ghaznavid dynasts, the preeminent Afghan Muslim kings, may have also reflected his Tajik nationalist and monarchist sentiments.

His efforts were followed in 1966 by ʿAbd al-Hayy Habibi, who wrote a multitude of works in Persian and Pashto. Habibi was often linked with Pashtun

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75 He used translations for ʿUtbi and does not discuss Biruni in much detail.
nationalism and the republican movement, associations which occasionally led to exile or imprisonment, even as they elevated him to professorial rank in Kabul and leadership positions in the literary and cultural scene of modern Afghanistan. Although he did not write a major work on the Ghaznavids, he did mention the Ghaznavids and Sultan Mahmud many times, but not in any sustained manner. His *Tārīkh-i Afghānistān baʿd az Islām* was a major study of pre-Islamic era which terminated approximately with the rise of the Ghaznavids. He was much more aware of international developments in the scholarship on Afghanistan than Khalili, which was a necessary requirement to discuss such topics as the Hephthalites and Buddhism. Despite the importance of the Ghaznavids to the history of Afghanistan, it appears that Habibi avoided emphasizing their history precisely due to the contemporary political significance of the Ghaznavid sultanate. His goal seems to have been to establish the non-Islamic and pre-Islamic history of the country as being sharply distinct from the later religious “Islamic” period, which perhaps can be seen as a “classical” modernist move.

Afghan scholarship of the 1970s started in the traditional mode, with the book by Ghulam Jilani Jalali, *Ghaznah va Ghaznaviyān*. He confines himself mostly to Persian sources and does not include much international scholarship. The work is primarily organized along the lines of kings and battles based on Persian sources. Nevertheless, a step toward social history was made later that decade by Muhammad Akbar Madadi in *Vāzʿ-ī ijtīmāʾ ī-dawrah-ī Ghaznaviyān*. Madadi eschews a strictly dynastic chronology in favor of collecting details on specific topics, such as administration, finance, court life,
and festivals, concluding with descriptions of architectural remains from the Ghaznavid period. He based his study on primary sources, studies in Persian, and those from western European languages translated into Persian. He appears to be inspired by some of the social and general histories from Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, many of which he cites in his bibliography; his book also evokes some of the state-centric institutional histories in English from earlier decades, some of them published by South Asian authors. His discussion on “social conditions” arranged sections on departments of government, positions in the military, and some details about religious groups and beliefs, with hardly any treatment of processes or agency, except for a brief discussion in the beginning exonerating the Ghaznavids from Samanid decline. The pervasive role of economic questions to the Ghaznavid period was not a concern for him and neither was he much interested in India. Despite some valuable insights based on his reading of Ghaznavid prose and poetry, along with occasional critical comments about previous scholarship, his static taxonomy of state and “social” institutions leaves an impression of extended political history, not strictly dynastic, but not social in the full sense of the term. 80 Nevertheless, Madadi exemplified how Afghani scholarship from the 1970s showed increased aspirations toward a combined discussion of state and society.

Arabic scholarship on the Ghaznavids has been consistently focused on literary and cultural topics for about half a century. In al-Adab al-fārisī fī al-ʿaṣr al-ghaznawī, the Tunisian ʿA. Shabbi wrote a set of studies in 1965 on the literary history of the Ghaznavid age divided into sections which treated major representatives of Persian poetry and prose who had a major influence on Arabic literature; thus, Firdowsi is

80 Another example of this kind of taxonomic social thinking for Islamic history can be found in M.M. Ahsan, Social life under the Abbasids, 170-289 AH, 786-902 AD. (Longman Publishing Group, 1979).
discussed for epic poetry, Manuchehri for lyric poetry, and Biruni for scientific prose.\textsuperscript{81} Shābbī was informed about European scholarship, particularly in French, and he engages it directly. Nevertheless, his social and economic thinking was confined largely to a small section about the “conditions of the age”, in which he described the personal immorality of Mahmud and suggested that love of wealth was his primary motivation in India, even if he also spread Islam. Along with other clues, this suggests a French liberal tendency in his writing.

A 1987 study of customs under the Ghaznavids by B. Muḥammad, \textit{Rusūm al-Ghaznawīyīn wa-nuẓumuhum al-ījtimāʾīyāh}, recalls the taxonomic cultural and social studies mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{82} The positions and habits of state officials are classified without particular regard to personalities; this is no longer dynastic history but still in line with the traditions of narrow political history which have been the main form of historiography about medieval Afghanistan. The value of Muḥammad’s study lay in the details about official procedures and events. A similar scheme was followed by Hatamilah in \textit{al-Binyah al-idārīyah lil-Dawlah al-Ghaznawīyah}.\textsuperscript{83} His short book listed state positions, offices, and regions for the Ghaznavids, excluding India, along with brief descriptions of economic and social classes (\textit{ṭabaqāt}), followed by a list of famous personalities; each of these were presented in almost dictionary-like form, with little interrelation or discussion of historical processes.

A more promising development in Arabic appeared recently in M.H. Ṣīmāḍī, *Khurāsān fi al-ʿaṣr al-Ghaznavī*. Ṣīmāḍī incorporated literature in Arabic, Persian, and English to produce a kind of institutional account of Khurasan. He described different aspects and phases of Ghaznavid administration, some social and economic strata, and cultural centers and events. His relatively tight regional scope allowed him to go into these topics with great detail. Similarly to Madāḍī, the interest in social history encouraged a shift from a focus on the dynasty to the society as a whole; nevertheless, the work leaves an impression similar to the taxonomic discussions which we have seen earlier. There is an unclear sense of process or agency. Overall, there is a structural institutional focus with the state at the center.

The most striking developments have occurred in Persian and Arabic; there appears to be relatively less change in Urdu histories of the Ghaznavids. In the late 1960s, the scholar Yaqīnuddīn produced *Ṣulṭān Ṭahimūd Ghaznavī* which focused exclusively on Mahmūd in the same manner as Ṣaʿīm a generation earlier, but with far less detail. The same emphasis appeared in Mūbīn Rāshīd, *Ṣulṭān Ṭahimūd Ghaznavī*. In both works, the individual sultan is more important than the wider social context or even the state itself. The Turkish historiography, much more recent than Persian, Arabic, or Urdu, has a wider focus, but tends to concentrate on the Turkic aspects of the state. In *Gazneliler devleti tarihi*, E. Merṣil provides a history of kings and battles with depictions of the major offices of the Ghaznavids. M.H. Paḷaḇīyık in *Valilikten İmparatorluğu Gazneliler* offers an institutional history with an emphasis on what he sees as the Turkic element of government. The virtue of the Turkish scholarship is the inclusion of much

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European scholarship, in part due to the active production of translations by Turkish publishers; this is particularly the case with Palabıyık. These are some admirable efforts, yet all of these works fall into the category of political history, whether institutional or dynastic. They do not focus upon social and economic history or its significance for the context of state formation.

**Historiographic rethinking**

As evidenced above, structural and formal accounts of state institutions have been a regular feature of Ghaznavid studies since at least the early 20th c.; for Iran and India, political history has an ancient pedigree. Rigid taxonomic discussions of orders and classes tend to have a distinctly political cast, especially since the state is often placed at the center of these accounts and receives copious attention. In general, process and agency only enter the discussion during the treatment of rulers. As such, these tendencies remain within a traditional ambit, in which dynamism and change are due primarily to state-centered political factors; in other words, the *ne plus ultra* of Ghaznavid dynastic history, rather than its negation.

It has been said that a division of state and society did not exist in the medieval Islamic world because there was no “society”, especially in the form of a bourgeoisie or church. 85 This claim is true to the extent that we treat recent European history as a fixed model to be imposed on medieval Afghanistan. Curiously, this argument is based on the notion that society itself vanished because it did not become the explicit object of theory, while it assumes that the state extended itself to everything outside of it to become the

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principal content of reality; consequently, this position insinuates despotism at the social level.\(^{86}\) Since the state becomes the only substantial actor, this position also implies that there were no economic institutions independent of the state, as though the medieval Islamic world had been dominated by a kind of command economy.

From the perspective of social history, dynastic thinking makes history one-sided, whether it spotlights a single dynast or a series of them. In the dynastic vision, either the state molds society from above through specific mighty interventions or centralized attempts at complete domination, or society shapes the state in the form of discontented subjects from below or serendipitous attacks by outside forces. Neither state nor society appear necessary to one another, their distinct realities either sharply bounded or completely collapsed into the other, even when there is an obvious relationship or when one is composed by the other.

The dynastic view has also led to a narrow view of the economy and its role in state formation. For instance, even if there has been some discussion of military labor, there is less understanding of the general labor or military conditions.\(^{87}\) We are regularly told that Mahmud was interested only in plunder, without much understanding of the

\(^{86}\) The illogic of this position is perhaps clearer for some if we substitute the term “nature” for “society” and thus argue for the disappearance of the sun itself any time there is a lack of a formal science about it.

wider context for these activities. This problem is due not only to the limitations of the sources or even of their basic use, although some information is certainly sidelined, but also includes the question of presuppositions. Rather than approaching the topic from the social and economic whole, dynastic historians present the state as the alpha and omega of all discussion; thus, in dynastic history, there is the constant threat that history will succumb to the state.

There are some recent works which have begun a move beyond political history; in many respects, they are the outcome of a change in historiographic focus which has been building for decades worldwide. Particularly important for the question of state formation is the recent work by J. Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler: Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit*. His work focuses on the crucial role of intermediaries in the construction of power. He builds his argument by emphasizing three major areas: irrigation, taxation, and armed action. Paul’s notion of the state is distinctly social and benefits from delineating in specific circumstances the precise relations between the center and periphery of power as well as the inner and outer movements of intermediaries. His primary interest is the alternation of intermediaries over time: he provides a stimulating rejoinder to those who restrict their perception of political power, along with the potential for violence, to the formal state structure. This study has benefited from Paul’s research but remains distinct through its emphasis on economic factors; moreover, it gives relatively greater weight to India, a necessity for an adequate appreciation of the Ghaznavids.

Additionally, there is the multipart history of *Al-Hind: the making of the Indo-Islamic world* by A. Wink, which seeks to periodize the Indo-Islamic world into a large-
scale geographical conception which falls under the rubric of “Hind”, an Arabo-Persian term of somewhat amorphous quality which can be said to denote the Indian sphere in the widest sense, including Southeast Asia. The value of this study is the world-historical ambition of the first volume relevant to the high medieval period. As a result, Wink minimizes the individual fortunes of rulers in favor of large scale social and economic factors. The difficulty with this work lies in part with his expansive and sometimes abstract notion of Hind, but more generally with the work’s geographic emphasis, which tends to obscure the precise process by which particular historical moments emerged, even if it identifies often the general trend; in other words, an emphasis on space tends to supplant the importance of time. By comparison, this study puts greater emphasis on political factors and aims at a tighter integration of political, economic, and social developments.

The study of reception has also gained greater attention in recent years, especially through the multifaceted intervention of R. Thapar in her Somanatha, which can be considered a history of cultural politics. Thapar’s darshan combines textual and material evidence to reconstruct the early 11th c. raid on the temple of Somanatha on the Gujarati coast, which has been the occasional locus for panegyric in the Persian literature and a flashpoint for current Hindu-Muslim tensions in South Asia. She demonstrates both the lack of interest in the episode over a long period in India itself along with its aestheticized repetition in key moments of Persian literature. Through her integrated discussion, it becomes clear that the contemporary appropriation of the Somanatha episode was derived from British colonial politics designed to divide the different communities of India. Since the question of reception is a small part of this study, the most relevant aspects of her
work for us lie in its general and combined approach to evidence along with its specific treatment of the Somanatha raid.

As far as other cultural approaches are concerned, there is also A. Anooshahr, *The Ghazi sultans and the frontiers of Islam*. Anooshahr draws on postmodern traditions of literary criticism to argue for a metaphor of a ghazi king over a long period of Indo-Persian historiography. He analyzes the image of the early Ghaznavids and their reception, advocating a blurring of lines between text and reality, and argues that ghazi kings were more interested in religion than money. The strength of this work lies in its attention to discursive strategies and its capacity to uncover ideological and literary conventions among empirical claims in medieval texts. But its severe skepticism of reality in the face of the text tends to mean that the actual being of the Ghaznavids is occasionally called into question; moreover, the necessity of establishing idealized individual kings marginalizes a focus on the social collective. In this respect, it cannot help us ascertain the socioeconomic dimension of the Ghaznavids, which would seem to be a precondition to fully establishing their cultural and ideological reality.

Most recently, there has appeared the magnum opus of B. Flood, *Objects of Translation*, which aims at a history of Hindu-Muslim encounter. Flood’s interest is primarily cultural over a long period, but his regular engagement with the material objects of art and architecture has infused his work with empirical and historical concerns. Flood concentrates especially on the Ghurids, but has many valuable sections on Ghaznavids, Seljuqs, and other dynasties of Iran and India. Flood is less concerned with specific economic questions; in light of the stated focus of his study, his discussion of politics and society emphasizes the role of culture. This is not necessarily a detriment,
but it does mean that the interplay among political, economic, and social aspects of reality are often placed in the background in favor of his theoretically informed treatment of culture, art, and architecture. Given the requirements of such an approach, he presupposes some elements of Ghaznavid historiography called into question in our study, which also arrived at some of the same conclusions independently and seeks to integrate these findings within a broad socioeconomic framework.

**Synopsis**

As evidenced above, overviews of the literature on the Ghaznavids have usually treated the scholarship separate from the sources, when in fact all of these writings are textual forms of commentary based on interests in particular issues or regions. Obviously, the most valuable primary sources come from the high medieval period, but these authors’ inevitable and necessary entanglement with the experience of that age created a double-edged value to their writings. It is precisely the same subjectivity that allows insight into the culture and society of medieval Afghanistan that also stands as an impediment to the construction of the scientific perspective required in the present. The first implication of this fact is that later commentators, such as Sa‘di and Firdowsi, must be viewed as secondary sources on the Ghaznavids instead of being valued as much as the Ghaznavids’ contemporaries such as Farrukhi or Gardizi. But this also means that secondary literature of any type must produce a more objective understanding which was nearly impossible for contemporaries of the Ghaznavids. Without this attempt, there will be only the recirculation of tradition rather than the creation of new visions. As knowledge about the Ghaznavids was transferred into European languages, the most
commonly used texts were later commentators from the 17th c. In many respects, the early modern perspective still forms the basis for many current presuppositions about the Ghaznavids.

It was not at all clear in the 18th c. that western European powers would eventually grow to dominate India and the other lands in which the Ghaznavids had roamed and their traces remained. The Ghaznavids and Sultan Mahmud became valuable for answering western European questions about despotism, which was seen to threaten the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and for understanding power, riches, and violence. These were the same concerns that western European thinkers had about the Ottomans and eventually about the Mughals, Safavids, and Qing. The dichotomy between God and Mammon became paramount as this medieval Afghan dynasty was rethought in English and French literature and historiography. The 19th c. improvements in philological understanding were not accompanied by a change in interpretative focus, which only expanded incrementally in the 20th c.

The 20th c. scholarship benefited from improved philological resources and perspectives; however, it also witnessed the ossification of the early modern paradigm on the Ghaznavids. There were small steps toward a resolution of this paradigm, but there did not appear to be a break with its fundamental presuppositions about alternating religious or economic motivations for the Ghaznavids. Other concerns entered into the discourse, such as the relationship between state and society, but social and economic history has received sustained attention rather recently in historical terms. The emphasis on the Sultan and his battles, almost always conveyed in glorious terms even by those ambivalent about the Ghaznavids, was gradually supplanted by a discussion on the
political structure of the state, which was typically depicted with a certain static and immutable quality. This echoed the idealization of the Sultan in the medieval literature and it hid agency along with the grainy process of the Ghaznavids’ rise by stressing instead the decay from the perceived perfection of their power. Despite the widening to the non-dynastic concerns of society and culture, there remained the tendency to think of the Ghaznavids in terms of political history alone. The more holistic perspective of political economy was lacking.

The Ghaznavids have recaptured the intellectual imagination in the last decade along with the global reengagement in the practical politics of contemporary Afghanistan. At the same time, the interpretation of the Ghaznavids has come under scrutiny as their significance becomes clear for the construction of ideology and power in the lands around Afghanistan. Particularly in India, the image of irrational and violent Muslim warriors has been the means to incite inflammatory and fantastical views on this history which have little interest in empiricism or heuristics. This study contributes to the latest generation of scholarship which reexamines the common narrative on medieval Afghanistan by emphasizing the socioeconomic realities of state formation in the 10th and 11th centuries.
III. The Geographical and Political Landscape

Geography of the territory

This historical geography examines the *longue durée* of state formation in greater Afghanistan until the rise of the Ghaznavids in the high medieval period. The discussion frames Ghaznavid history in a wide scope with the intention of calling into question some of the commonly held perceptions about medieval religious and ethnic relations, the development of eastern Islamic states, and the conditions and causes for the rise of the faction in Ghazni. It uncovers general patterns as well as unique specificities to display the theater of historical action and introduce the cast of main characters, thereby setting the stage for the emergence of the Ghaznavid state.

This discussion treats the “coming-to-be and passing away” of polities in the core areas of settlement which eventually gave rise to the Ghaznavid state; in particular, the hills of Khurasan, the steppe of Mawarannahr, the Sistan wetlands, and the Kabul river valley. After explaining some of the key geographical concepts which must inform any discussion of medieval Afghanistan, it proceeds region by region, providing a brief overview of the natural geography and possibilities for human habitation to gain a sense of the landscape and its peculiarities. Further clarification of nomenclature and etymologies will specify the area under discussion. The treatment of peoples and the formation of polities will follow a chronological line as strictly as possible, in contrast to some predominantly geographical studies, and aims at discerning trends and transformations.
The intention is to depict the wider “eastern Iranian” world on the eve of the Ghaznavid’s appearance so that they appear fully embedded within a larger historical current. This act of demystification provides many paths toward a more realistic picture of medieval Afghanistan. While geography is not destiny, it undeniably shapes many realities in the pre-aviation age. By focusing on the rise and fall of states in the area before the emergence of the Ghaznavids, we are able to discern common patterns and continuities in the interactions between Afghanistan and the neighboring areas of India, Central Asia and Iran. Far from representing a dramatic rupture with the past, the Ghaznavids operated under similar constraints as their predecessors, specifically the Samanids, Saffarids, and Shahis. Only when we appreciate this fact will we be able to assess their distinct characteristics. The areas under discussion are also firmly part of the Arid Zone and constitute a different object of study than the area broadly characterized as “Zomia”.

As for the division between these zones of historical geography, straddled by the Hindu Kush, it is hard to dispute the judgment of Babur during his journey from Kabul toward Jalalabad, “The moment you descend, you see quite another world. The

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timber is different; its grains are of another sort; its animals are of a different species; and
the manners and customs of its inhabitants are of a different kind.\textsuperscript{89}

At its greatest measure, Ghaznavid territory by the early 11\textsuperscript{th} century extended
longitudinally from Transoxiana to the Zagros and latitudinally from Khwarezm to Sind. Brief masters of the southern edges of the Caspian and Aral seas, the Ghaznavids also
controlled the center of the Indus basin which made possible campaigns as far east as Uttar Pradesh and one famous raid on the coast of Gujarat. The center of their power,
however, rested in the multifaceted tongue of mountains called the Hindu Kush, which
extend massively toward the southwest from the middle and southern Asiatic complex.

Ghaznavid core territory included Khurasan, Sistan, Zabulistan, Panjab, and Sind in an
area which can be traced as an oval which points southeast to northwest.

In the north, the Ghaznavids eventually possessed Khwarezm from their base in Gurganj, hemmed in by the Qara-qum and Qizyl-qum deserts, along the ribbon of the
Amu Darya as it emerges from Tokharistan. Their forces generally remained west of the
Amu Darya, despite episodic skirmishes with the Qarakhanids; the Ghaznavids did not
command Mawarannahr or dominate the key cities of Bukhara and Samarqand. Khurasan
was under Ghaznavid control, along with the cities of Marv, Tus, and Nishapur, until the
upthrust of the Alborz range. Amidst the marsh and forests north of these mountains, the
Ziyarids had become their vassals, but southward, along the habitable channel between
the mountains and deserts, Ghaznavid armies eventually marched to Ray.

\textsuperscript{89} Babur and A. S. Beveridge, 'The Bábar-Náma, being the autobiography of the Emperor Babar, the
founder of the Moghul dynasty in India', in \textit{E J W Gibb memorial series, v. 1} (Leyden, E.J. Brill, 1905),
175.
In the west, the Ghaznavid realm skirted along the Zagros. In the northwest, the Ghaznavids incorporated the cities to Qum, leaving Qazvin and Hamadan in the hands of Musafirid vassals and never reaching as far as Tabriz. Further south, Ghaznavid armies conquered Isfahan and Yazd, but left them in control of Kakuyid vassals. Kerman and Makran remained outside the direct grasp of the Ghaznavids. Fars, with its jewel of Shiraz, rested in Buyid hands, as did access to the Gulf. Although the Ghaznavids used boats on the Indus and the Amu Darya, they predominantly had a land-based military. The Zagros formed a natural and political barrier between the Ghaznavids and their Buyid rivals.

In the east, the Hindu Kush became the Ghaznavids special redoubt, where they were the greatest power amidst the multiple valleys partitioned by fierce peaks. Ghuzgan and the city of Balkh was theirs, while Khuttal, with the river Wakhsh, was held by vassals. Along the lower course of the Harirud, the Ghaznavids held sway over Herat, but the upper valley of Ghur stayed under local clients. In Zamindavar, the Ghaznavids possessed the area along the Farah river until Sistan, also controlling the southern feeder river of the Helmand through Bust. Thus, at the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau, their territory included Kuhistan and Sistan and southern lands until Qusdar and Baluchistan.

The capital city of Ghazni, shielded by a rocky spine from easy attack by Qarakhanids and their vassals, overlooked the passes between Iran and India. At the midpoint of the Kabul river valley, it allowed easy access to other interior settlements, such as Bamiyan, and to the passes leading to the Indus. Although the Ghaznavids never conquered as far north as Kashmir, they occupied Waihind by way of Peshawar, entrenching themselves in Lahore and ruling over settlements southward through the city
of Multan until Sind at the lower Indus. Beyond the middle and lower Indus valley lay other powers: the western Chaulukyas in Gujarat and eventually in Maharashtra, the Chauhanas in northern Rajasthan, the Tomaras at the top of the Gangetic valley, and the Chandellas, farther east toward Khajuraho.

Regional units

This vast terrain can be treated best through providing basic definitions for Central Asia, Iran, and India, the three largest regional units that can serve as heuristics to address the complexity of medieval Afghanistan.\(^{90}\) Whether viewed through the lens of macro-regions or nation-states, these territorial spaces cohere primarily on the basis of their individual historical and cultural objectivity, though they are often shaped by their physical geography. The following definitions for these regional units will orient the discussion, although they were not necessarily used during the medieval period.

The delimitation of “Central Asia” in particular remains ambiguous and contested, buffeted by strong disciplinary and ideological currents that often undermine scientific inquiry.\(^{91}\) In this context, Central Asia extends from the Kazakh upland east of the Volga, along the forest-steppe bordering the taiga, until the opening of the Junghar basin toward Mongolia. The southern edge is marked by the Kopet Dagh, at Khurasan’s edge, and the northern Hindu Kush and the Pamir ranges until the Tarim basin. The


\(^{91}\) These have been dissected in Y. Bregel, *Notes on the study of Central Asia* (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1996). His geographic definition can be found in the preface to his Y. Bregel, *Bibliography of Islamic Central Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995) and his *Historical Atlas*. 
Tarim is bounded to its north by the Tian Shan and to its south by the Kunlun range, the high plateau itself flattening toward China. This “Central Asia” is conventionally termed western and eastern Turkestan, broken into halves at the knot of the Pamir-Alay, as much as by geography as by the political and cultural spheres of Russia and China, though it should be noted that approximately a century ago the term “Afghan Turkestan” was also used for western Turkestan. All Ghaznavid Central Asian territory lay in what became western Turkestan, but an important portion of their military originated in the eastern part, including the father of Sultan Mahmud, Sebuktegin.

In this vein, the term “Eurasia” has an even greater degree of imprecision than Central Asia.92 A dissection of the “myth of continents” has demonstrated the cultural and historical specificity of geography, thereby revealing the subjective cast of discourses on purportedly natural realities.93 In contemporary geological discourse, Eurasia is considered a large landmass and “supercontinent” which is often clustered with Africa forming “Afro-Eurasia”. Furthermore, the term “Islamic world” is not entirely adequate to describe the character of the medieval Hindu Kush or the Indus in light of the cultural mixture of the region. There are also increasing tendencies in historical discourse to look at regional designations over a large area even if a world-systems approach is not adopted. Thus, the term Eurasia has been included with its imprecision, as a way to include the units of Central Asia, Iran, and India under a single rubric and situate them in their world historical context. Indeed, some recent scholarship supports the conviction that a similar set of social and cultural processes were occurring across the medieval

92 P. Golden notes the “considerable imprecision in the terms used for Eurasia, which he treats as the “region extending from the steppelands of Ukraine to Manchuria”. Golden, Nomads and Sedentary Societies in Medieval Eurasia, ft. 1, p. 49.
world, although these similar developments may or may not have existed as a single unified “system”.\(^94\)

The definition for “Iran” appears more obvious, yet a debate still exists, one position emphasizing the widest possible scope of “Iranshahr”, extending from Asia Minor to Turkestan and west India, to a more restricted view of an upland mass vaguely following the borders of the contemporary nation-state, but including parts of Afghanistan and west Pakistan.\(^95\) The narrowest view focuses on the central endorheic basin of the Iranian plateau, which has merit since it focuses on the basin and its rough mountainous ring and acknowledges that the surrounding upland may involve different but related landforms and human environments. The northern portion skirts along the Caspian and Alburz until the Kopet Dagh in Khurasan province. The western portion emerges from low-lying Mesopotamia to the foothills and mountains of the Zagros, which extend northward to the Caucasus and southward until roughly the Straits of Hormuz. The ocean shore along Tagistan and Makran until Baluchistan defines the south. In the east, a rough edge for the Iranian plateau can be discerned along in the so-called Qain-Birjand highlands, the mountains bordering Sistan, and the hills descending into Baluchistan. A great number of Ghaznavid military and administrative personnel came


\(^{95}\) Christensen makes this argument most directly, on the basis of a fragile political unity as well as a more discernable economic unity of irrigation. See P. Christensen, *The decline of Iranshahr: irrigation and environments in the history of the Middle East, 500 BC to AD 1500* (Museum Tusculanum Press, 1993), 15-21. Fisher’s chapter on “Physical Geography” in W.B. Fisher and A.J. Arberry, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 1, The Land of Iran*, Repr. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 5, outlines the issue, in which Anglo-American writers tend to view the upland generally as the “Iranian plateau”, while French and German writers usually focus on a plateau roughly rimmed by mountains. Notably, de Planhol prefers the former definition, in that the “geographical framework of this [Iranian] culture is generally acknowledged today to include the entire Iranian plateau and its bordering plains.” See de Planhol, “Iran, i. Lands of Iran”, *Iranica*. Gnoli, *The idea of Iran: an essay on its origin* (Rome: Ist. Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), 175, maintains that the concept of Iran “as a typical elaboration of the first half of the 3rd century A.D. It seems to come into being all of a sudden, as the backbone of Sassanian propaganda, probably in the ‘twenties of that century.”
from eastern Iran, but by no means all. The Iranian heritage was crucial for the
Ghaznavids in terms of ideology and artistic culture.

The natural geographic notion of “India” consists of the peninsular plateau, its
wedged shape in the north defined by the Himalayas, which are formed largely by the
subduction of the Indian continental crust. The northern Indo-Gangetic plain gives way to
the Deccan plateau, which begins at the Vindhya range and gradually rises toward the
south. Bounded on its western and eastern edges by the Ghats, the Deccan plateau
descends after these mountains into lowland plains before submerging at the coasts. This
is the area typically referred to as “historic India”, although it should be noted that there
was no clear idea of India in this manner at that time. Given the prominence of mountains
and the embrace of waters, India seems to be the easiest to outline physically, but it is not
at all the case that the subcontinent was seen as a single cultural and political space at all
moments in its history. It is incorrect to claim that Ghaznavids conquered “India” in this
sense when they never marched east of Uttar Pradesh or south of westernmost Gujarat,
and even then only a few times. The Ghaznavids did become the strongest power in the
Indus valley, but they did so by employing Indian soldiers, administrators, and others,
which helped them maintain their power across Iran, Central Asia, and India. While
Central Asia remained a source of manpower and Iran contributed with ideas as well as
soldiers, India’s material reality shaped the Ghaznavid world to a significant extent, as
with previous dynasties coming from Afghanistan.

Ghaznavid territory occupied a great variety of biomes, or major life zones, which
are further clustered into three distinct biogeographic realms: Palearctic in western

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96 An overview can be found in O.H.K. Spate, A.T.A. Learmonth, A.M. Learmonth and B.H. Farmer, *India
Central Asia and northern Iran, Afrotropic in southern Iran and southwest Pakistan, and Indo-Malay in the Indus. These major divisions share groups of plants and animals and break primarily around the great wedges of the Hindu Kush, roughly corresponding to the macroregions of Central Asia, Iran, and India outlined above. These biomes are the basic units for the natural foundation of human life and consequently formed the ground for the limitations and possibilities of medieval society. These areas are also generally within an arid climate, determining in many respects the possibilities for transportation, communication, and subsistence.  

*Khurasan and Mawarannahr*

North of Sistan appears the topographic center of Khurasan: a parallel succession of ranges, graced occasionally with peaks more than 3000 meters, flanking a trough zone lifted at least 1000 meters above sea level. Emerging slightly west of the flow of the Hari Rud, the ridges stay aligned from the southeast to northwest for about 400 kilometers, ranking one after another until the northern line descends about 200 kilometers before the Caspian Sea and the major structures of the southern line turn westward, continuing into the Alburz. Minor folds ripple through the zone, generally along the direction of the southern ranges. Approximately at the center of this trough, which is quite prone to earthquakes, lifts a low divide which acts as a watershed and separates the westward-
oriented Atrak, which flows into the Caspian, and the Kashf, streaming southeast as a tributary of the Murghab.

The general shape of the area can be plausibly compared to parallel lines with the low divide a perpendicular at the middle, rather similar to the English letter “H”. The northern series of ranges for Khurasan trace the limit of the Alpine-Himalayan belt and constitute the outer wall of the northern Iranian plateau as well as the margin of the Turan Plate. This steep mass of the Kopet Dagh, reaching to heights of 3000 meters, blocks some of the harshness of the Turkoman plain, which flattens to an average 100 meters above sea level; on this side, rivers drain directly and swiftly down the rugged face into the dry plain. On the southern side of the range, a more intricate network gradually drains into the trough, occasionally forming deep gorges. Further heights are attained as the northern line approaches Kuh-i Hazar. The ranges deteriorate into high gaps which allow transit from one side to the other, such as the road to Nisa, the ancient Parthian capital located near the contemporary city of Ashqabad.

The southern series of mountains form an obtuse arc of upland connected with the Alburz range. Westward, the minor folds complicate the topography, producing a series of knots; however, at the mouth of Khurasan proper, steep cuestas face the Atrak valley, gathering mass and elevation until the heights of Kuh-i Ali. The upland continues into the middle Atrak, at which point the prominent Kuh-i Binalud becomes the most towering point in Khurasan. Moving downward from the highest elevations, a karst topography available for spring pasture gives way to tight valleys, some of which create oases, suitable for irrigation despite the arid climate, until steep lower slopes flatten into clay or silt plains. South and somewhat at the center to this arc of ranges lifts the Kuh-i
Chaghatai, a relatively lower and narrower range which follows the general alignment of the southern series, shaping a wider, more exposed channel for east-west transit through the province. Thus, three highpoints above 3000 meters flank the Central Asian portal of Khurasan: the high center of Kuh-i Binalud, north of which lies Tus and the peak of Kuh-i Hazar, and south of which nestles Nishapur before the summit of Kuh-i Surkh.

Marked climatic differences also distinguish the wetter northwestern and arid southeastern portions of the trough zone. More exposed to rainfall, the former supports grasses as well as hardwoods such as alder, oak, hornbeam, poplar, as well as silvery walnut trees that flower in autumn; additionally, some of the valleys encourage the cultivation of cereals and seasonal fruits and vegetables. Southward, a rain shadow extents into the trough, such that vegetation obviously diminishes by the middle Atrak valley. Since this central channel was an important passage between the two ends of Khurasan, market towns eventually sprang up, such as Bujnurd and Quchan, allowing for the exchange of pastoral and agricultural goods.

Khurasan acquired its name under the Sasanians, who divided their empire into four cardinal points, “Xvar-āsān” meaning “sun-rise” or simply “east” or “eastern land”, governed as a satrapy from Marv. According to the 8-9th c. Armenian geography of Pseudo-Moses of Chorene, Khurasan extended from the southeastern Caspian through northern Afghanistan to Bactria. The 9th c. geographer and historian Ya‘qubi offered a similar definition, suggesting that it consisted of major towns and localities positioned

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98 J. Marquart and G. Messina, A Catalogue of the provincial capitals of Ėrānshahr (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1931). Although the Sasanians split their realm administratively into four cardinal points, this is similar to the later Arab Islamic designation of their realm into two spheres of “Maghrib” and “Mashriq”, meaning western land and eastern land respectively, still connected etymologically to the rise and fall of the sun.

99 See Marquart, Ėrānshahr, 47-48. The date of Pseudo-Moses of Chorene remains unknown, but his work is certainly from the early Islamic period, not pre-Islamic, as it would be if it had been authored by the famous Armenian polymath Moses of Chorene from the fifth century.
along this same band, based on the purported Sasanian definition. In the early 10th c.,
Tabari mentions that the Sasanian king Ardashir conquered Khurasan, which included
Khwarezm. Despite these roughly similar descriptions, the region has never been
strictly demarcated; by the early 16th c., the Mughal emperor Babur viewed the land west
of Kandahar as Khurasan, explaining that “the people of Hindustān call every country
beyond their own Khorasān, in the same manner as the Arabs term all except Arabia, in
Ajem.” Such tendencies have persisted, even though Khurasan refers administratively
in our times to a province in northeastern Iran. Usually the most extensive definitions
come from those who do not live in Khurasan proper. Although the Sasanians never
conquered this entire area which has been subject to various forms of the wide definition,
perhaps the early emphasis on a direction rather than a specific locality accounts for the
persistent open-ended ambiguity of the term “Khurasan”.

In the 10th c., the eastern half of the Samanid realm was found in Central Asia in
the area called Transoxiana in Greek and Mawarannahr in Arabic or occasionally Sogdia
in Persian and Arabic. This was the center of Samanid power, the location of their capital
of Bukhara, and it was different than the more Persianate territories in Khurasan and
westward. Mawarannahr means simply “that [area] beyond the river”, i.e. behind the
Amu Darya. It is an outsider’s definition, made largely from the perspective of Khurasan,
from where the Arabs entered Central Asia, but it became a common name in the
surviving medieval sources. Samanid power never reached into the Tarim basin or much

100 See Marquart, Erânsahr, 47.
101 Babur and A.S. Beveridge, ‘The Bābar-Nāma’, Vol. 1, Ch. 92. Babur views area between the two great
markets of Kabul and Kandahar as lying between Khurasan and Hindustan, an area which would include
Ghazni. For Babur, the Ghazni area would appear to be the transit zone between Iran and India, neither one
nor the other, or fully both.
102 The shape of the debate appears cogently in M. Ghubar, Khurasan (Kabul, 1947) who delineates
between “proper” and “improper” Khurasan. Contemporary Islamist militants, especially from Pakistan,
sometimes refer sentimentally to Afghanistan as Khurasan.
farther north than the Aral Sea. The Ghaznavids never had regular control of this area despite the fact that Sebuktegin was born close to the Issu lake, far north of Samanid territory, and he was quite familiar with Central Asia’s landscape. Thus, Mawarannahr, which was Samanid territory until the expansion of the Qarakhanids at the end of the 10th c., can be viewed as a narrow definition for Central Asia; in other words, western Turkestan.

There is a clear distinction between Khurasan and Mawarannahr, despite the fact that pre-Islamic, Islamic, and some contemporary scholarship tends to combine the two under the rubric of “Khurasan”. Early Islamic usage for Khurasan could mean anywhere in Iran’s east, including the Indus and Sind. This was reinforced by the fact that Khurasan, Mawarannahr, and Sistan were often treated as a single unit for tax purposes. This tradition of a broad definition also appears in the geography of Moses of Chorene, who saw Khurasan as extending through the southern Caspian into Tukharistan and Bamiyan.103 Following this tradition to some extent, Indian usage has often combined Mawarannahr and Khurasan under the single term of Khurasan. But the dividing line between these two areas is the Amu Darya, long recognized as the major water boundary between them. The river was known as the Oxus to the ancient Greeks, the Wehrod to the Sasanians in middle Persian, the Jayhun to the Arabs, and the Kui-shui, Wu-hu, or Po-tsu to the Chinese; its modern name may be derived from a town called Amol, which had existed since antiquity as a crossing point.104 In the dry desert steppe, the great river marked the boundary. It poured from the framing mountains and descended into a series

103 Bosworth, “Khurāsān”, *EI2*.
104 Spuler, “Āmū Daryā”, *Iranica*. 
of valleys and foothills into the steppe geomorphology which eventually flattens entirely and desiccates into deserts.

Sogdia began over the Amu Darya. It consisted of the Zerafshan and Qashqa Darya river valleys: this area had grown rich and fertile during the late antique Sogdian expansion at the center of the so-called “Silk Road”, as it was depicted in late 19th c. German geography. Closer to the mountains lies the fabled city of Samarqand, nestled amidst several flows which issue from the heights. The major flow of the Zerafshan streams into the steppe-desert of the Qizil-qum and terminates at the Samanid and later Qarakhanid capital of Bukhara, which sits about a day’s ride by horse east of the Amu Darya. Bukhara was well-positioned to control the regular east-west communication between the Chinese states and Byzantium from the ancient period onward. Control of the Amu Darya border often rested with Bukhara.

Farther eastward, the Ferghana valley expands along the middle Syr Darya, which moves northward through the steppe until it joins with other waters from the mountains of Chach and drains, hundreds of kilometers later, into the Aral Sea basin. Travellers moving upvalley in Ferghana eventually reach passes which pierce the Pamir knot; these openings descend along the river Kashgar into the famous city of that name on the western edge of the Tarim basin. Sogdia and Ferghana are the major river valleys of the area, but Ferghana is not directly part of Sogdia and it is a relatively more peripheral area of western Turkestan. There has always been greater habitation in the Sogdian area which has better growing conditions and a north-south axis of trade from Khwarezm through Afghanistan to India.
Northward lies Khwarezm. The Amu Darya wriggles through the desert steppe for about two hundred kilometers after the crossing near Bukhara until the waters fan into the wetland delta of Khwarezm, pooling eastward into Lake Sariqamish and northward into the Aral Sea. The major city of Kath at the center of this delta served as an entrepôt for the people and commodities of the Khazar and Rus’ territories in the medieval period and provided access to some of the Turkic peoples in the steppe. From the 8th c. onward, the Kangar (Pechenegs) had been concentrated on the more remote and eastern Syr Darya drainage and became increasingly present across the steppe north of the Aral Sea in the 9th c. On the heels of the deterioration of the Khazar khanate and the strength of its Jewish Turkic lords in the early 10th c., the Bulgars plied the Volga and shipped slaves and many furs through Khwarezm into the commercial density of the Samanid realm. By that time, the Kangar, who had allied with the Bulgars, were moved by migration pressures toward eastern Europe and came to control the southern steppe through the Caspian and Black seas during the 10th and early 11th centuries. Increasing numbers of Oghuz had taken their place in the Central Asian steppe and began to inhabit areas in Khwarezm and Sogdia by the late Samanid period. The Seljuqs emerged out of these Oghuz, who eventually invaded the burgeoning cities and ended Ghaznavid presence in Iran.

Southward of Sogdia is Bactria. Called Baktra by the ancient Greeks, its central medieval settlement of Balkh is mostly in ruins near modern-day Mazar-i Sharif. Rather south of the Amu Darya, Bactria remains nonetheless within the Central Asia sphere of influence and communication, due to its closeness to the source tributaries of the Amu Darya, which stem from melting glaciers and snowpacks. The province was the center of
Tukharistan, the wide belt of settlement across northern Afghanistan. If Khwarezm was the lowland of the Amu Darya ribbon of habitation, then Bactria was the upland counterpart, with access to the mountainous interior to places such as Bamiyan and to routes through the upper Kabul valley toward Gandhara and India. Bactria was the main northern passage from Central Asia to India.

In terms of habitable climate, the mountain valleys of the western Pamir and northern Hindu Kush are relatively protected from the cold arid northerly winds of the steppe. Close to the Pamir, steep, sharp valleys, fractured by ravines, permit a rather moist, temperate climate relative to the rest of Central Asia. These same subtropical conditions persist in the Ferghana valley and in the upland areas of Bactria along the right bank tributaries of the Amu Darya. As water evaporates from the dry plains, precipitation accumulates again in the mountains and cycles back by river channels to the flatlands, although high evaporation enables only spring and summer fillings of several clay lake beds. Mountain waters channeled into the fertile yellow loess soil of the steppe can yield significant crops, especially close to the foothills. These areas are rich in fruits, including melons, apricots, pomegranates, and other sweet flowering plants. The lower foothills transition into a dry continental climate warmed seasonally by the desert winds of the steppe. Although parts of the steppe are well-watered by rivers, its climate is much drier, with greater extremes in temperature due to the exposure to wind and sun. This flatter land, in combination with strong sun, fresh water, and loess soil, can support wheat, millet, and barley. Water dissipates into blind deltas or into wetland ecologies which can support some of the same kinds of agricultural and pastoral activities as in Sistan. Absent water, however, the harshest areas of Central Asia can be inhospitable even for grazing.
The desert steppe gradually transitions into a band of grasslands north of the Aral Sea, meeting its limit at the alpine forest, which is filled with furred animals such as beaver, and, occasionally, terrifying bears.

Western Central Asia has more canal-supplied agriculture than one might suppose from the perspective of the great rivers of India, along with grasslands so undeniably effective for the horse raising for which the many Indo-European, Iranian, and Turkic peoples became famous. Due to high aridity, agricultural pockets can be relatively fragile and strategic for the maintenance of settled life. The plains provide zones of transition and a viable periphery for maintaining the largely animal-based food economy of pastoralists. Effective agriculture can be precarious in Sogdia, Ferghana, and, of course, Khwarezm, without determined dry farming aided by canals. This should be contrasted with Khurasan which was more dependent on the underground qanat system of irrigation; another oft-neglected difference between the Iranian and Central Asian poles of the Turko-Persian continuum.

Nevertheless, there is a kind of unity between western Central Asia and eastern Iran, despite the emphasis on river canals in the former and qanats in the latter: both areas concentrate their agriculture in mountain valley pockets or well-watered oases within a predominately arid climate which can be unfavorable to growing and even to life. This means that settled population cannot always expand agriculturally into the pasture; rather, peasants will often transform into mobile pastoralists of a kind. Moreover, the balance between densely urban areas and strictly agriculture food growing areas can be more delicate, with the result that changes in the ratio of settled urban to settled rural areas can
have a greater social effect than it might initially appear.\textsuperscript{105} Fertile areas are present but limited from the Indian perspective: there is no jungle to clear for the opening of new lands irrigated by monsoon rains. Therefore, there is a certain unity to medieval Central Asia and Iran, whether inhabited by greater Turkic or Persian speaking concentrations, in particular during the Samanid period, which was one of the key moments in the history of the region for political and cultural integration. In other words, the distinction between Khurasan and Mawarannahr is certainly there, but it should not be exaggerated in terms of medieval state formation.

Khurasan and Sogdia were Achaemenid territory in the 6\textsuperscript{th} c. BC and inhabited by speakers of eastern Iranian languages who built the first large cities. With the destruction of the Achaemenids by Alexander’s armies in the late 4\textsuperscript{th} c. BC, a greater number of Greeks were established in the area, mostly military veterans, who joined some of the pre-existing Greek inhabitants. Occasionally tension developed between these two layers of Greek population, the new arrivals and the old, as various cities called “Alexandria” were erected across the region, notably in Bactria. Alexander’s forces won in part through an arrangement with the local aristocracy who were reinstated in administrative posts; Alexander’s marriage to Roxanna in 327, a Bactrian or Sogdian princess, cemented the new alliances, which brought a great number of Iranians into his forces. However, despite the new Greek presence in Bactria, it is not at all clear that the Sogdian lords followed the new Greek lords for very long; moreover, the breakup of Alexander’s empire after his death limited Greek expansion, which did not reach the Tarim.

\textsuperscript{105} This dynamic is explored in greater depth in the following chapter.
From the perspective of Iranian and Central Asian history, it would seem that the Greeks were perhaps the Arabs of their day, in the sense that their presence destroyed the existing Iranian powers, established settlements, and arranged the cooperation of the local aristocracy. The Greek presence does appear more relatively more numerous than the Arab presence prior to the Islamic invasion. From the perspective of Indian history, the analogy with Arabs can be carried further when we recall that some Greeks armies, once established, conducted occasional raids into northern India, particularly during the southern expansion of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom from the 180s-170s. In any event, the western Central Asian and eastern Iran scene changed profoundly with the formation of the first documented nomadic state and its expansion in the 2nd c. BC by people called the Xiongnu in Chinese sources.

The expansion of the Xiongnu in Inner Asia initiated the movements of Saka and Yuezhi into Central Asia, where these nomadic peoples, called the Scythians by the Greeks and the Sakas by the Persians, were part of the same linguistic group as the settled people. The waves of displaced Saka destroyed the settled Greco-Bactrian kingdom, whose last king ruled until 141 BC. These Saka were soon supplanted by the Yuezhi, who came to occupy most of the Amu Darya / Oxus river. Central Asia dissolved into city-states ruled by Yuezhi chieftains, who were unable to expand into Khurasan due to Parthian resistance. According to Roman sources, the Parthians were particularly capable light cavalry and made extensive use of a compound bow which fired armor-piercing arrows. Their resistance to the Yuezhi and the eventual stabilization of the border during the early part of the Silk Road trade indicates that it is not a historical given for

both banks of the Amu Darya to be in the same political and cultural sphere, even if both the Parthians and the Yuezhi stem from a common military background of horse-mounted archers.

A new phase in Iranian and Central Asian history began from the 3rd c. to the middle 4th c. with the victory of the Sasanids and the arrival of various nomadic peoples who are often grouped under the single rubric of the Huns. After Sasanian victory over the Parthians in Ctesiphon in the middle of the 220s, the Sasanians expanded their power into Khurasan and Sistan. They were unable to expand into former Kushan territories in the Kabul river valley, so they settled for clients who nominally upheld the Kushan name in Merv and Bactria. These clients maintained some independence until the arrival of various nomadic peoples classified as the “Huns”, or Hephthalites in this case. The Sasanians replaced the role of the Parthians in terms of military control over Khurasan. Meanwhile, Hephthalite nomads had allied with Sogdian merchants to establish a base in Central Asia. Thus, the riparian division between Iran and Central Asia reasserted itself. The ancient period appears to have demonstrated a greater connection between Central Asia and India than between India and Iran.

The advent of the Turk qaghanate marked another key moment in Central Asian history. Over the middle of the 6th c., a group of Turkic-speaking tribes in Mongolia formed a confederation under the Ashina clan, a formerly weak group which had been pushed out of Turfan by the Rouran clan a few generations prior and turned into vassals. This ascendant Ashina-led cluster of clans called themselves “Türk”, for reasons still unknown. With the rise of their chieftain Bumūn (r. 534-553), this confederation moved near the Yellow River and allied with the Western Wei, soon subjugating the Turkic-
speaking Oghuz who lived farther north. By 551, the Ashina confederation had defeated their erstwhile Rouran masters and adopted their highest political title of qaghan. The successors of Bumîn, his son Mughan (r. 553-572) and his uncle Ishtemi (r. 552-575), expanded east and west, making vassals of Mongolic tribes in Manchuria, conquering nomads and smaller settlements through the Volga to the Byzantine frontiers in Crimea.\textsuperscript{107}

The Turk qaghanate eventually formed an alliance with the Sasanian Khosrow I Anushirvan to attack Hephthalite territory in western Central Asia. Hephthalite defeat in the 560s brought Chach, Soghd, and Fergana under Turk control, but after Ishtemi, expansionist dreams ended with Sasanian victory near Hare (Herat) in 588 by the forces of the general Bahram Chobin; thus, the Amu Darya reemerged as the border between the Sasanian and Turk domains. In this way, a predominately nomadic state had developed across Central Asia and in much of the steppe, composed of a hierarchical set of mostly Turkic-speaking tribes, organized through a bipartate chieftanship at the top and through various vassal relationships at the base.

At the start of the 7\textsuperscript{th} c., the western Turk qaghanate controlled the steppes and the Tarim basin. Their former confederates, the Khazars, dominated the lower Volga. Khurasan was a Sasanian province and Sogdia a loose aggregation of principalities. Tokharistan in northern Afghanistan still contained many Hephthalite lords, who spoke an Iranian-language even though they came to have pronounced Turkic characteristics.\textsuperscript{108}


\textsuperscript{108} The Hephthalites were defeated by a Turk army in the 560s and were found with the title yabuq at the time of the Islamic conquests. See Bregel, \textit{Historical Atlas}, 14.
These Hepthalite lords possessed various valleys and passes across the Hindu Kush until the lower Indus, where they were known as the “Sveta Huna”, or White Huns. This wide area had become an arena of struggle over control of an extensive patchwork of tributary, tax, and commercial revenues which stretched from Chang’an to Constantinople, from the headwaters of the Volga to the Indian Ocean littoral.\textsuperscript{109}

Centripetal movements centered on Iran only intensified through the early 7\textsuperscript{th} c. In 618, the Chinese Tang consolidated a Turkic federation to their north, and collaborated with them against the weakened eastern and western Turk qaghanates, until the Tang and their allies were able to dominate the Tarim basin by 650. The Tang administered directly the easternmost oases of Hami, Turfan (Qocho) and Bishbaliq (Beiting), while the remaining city-states until the city of Kashgar remitted tribute, pledged allegiance, and accepted Tang honors, hosting garrisons in the four strategic cities of Kucha, Kashgar, Hotan, and Qarashahr.

As the Tang advanced across the desert, Arab Muslim armies on camel prevailed against the Sasanian calvary, giving flight to the Sasanian king Yezdigerd III after the decisive battle of 642 at Nihawand in northwestern Iran. The king’s defensive maneuvers, during which he received a small number troops from the Turk qaghan, proved insufficient due to the lack of support from his governors and erstwhile allies, so he fled to Kirman, Sistan, and eventually Khurasan, ending his days in a mill at the hands of an assassin in Merv in 651. The remaining Sasanian court, numbering in the thousands, was unable to gather support in Sogdia; consequently, they retreated to the Tang domain,

\textsuperscript{109} This was the capital of Sui and Tang empires, near modern day Xi’an. The commercial networks of this period are detailed in E. de la Vaissière, Histoire des marchands Sogdiens (Paris: Collège de France, Inst. des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2002).
becoming vassals and servants.\textsuperscript{110} As a result of these almost simultaneous conquests from the east and west, the balance of forces by the mid-7\textsuperscript{th} c. had shifted to two new large powers, Arab and Chinese, bracketing locally strong Turkic, Sogdian, and Hephthalite lords.

Within two decades, however, the regional calculus changed again. Arab armies, from their base in Merv, gained success in the late 660s through raiding across the Amu Darya in Samarqand and Bukhara; by 667, they attacked Chaghaniyan, soon defeating Hephthalite lords across Tokharistan. Meanwhile, a newly formed confederation of Tibetan tribes invaded the Tarim, driving out the Tang from their “Four Garrisons” command by 670.\textsuperscript{111} Despite this sudden success, Tibetan control was soon eroded by internal dissent from the 690s, allowing the Tang to readvance gradually across the Tarim, and eventually proved capable of inserting themselves into some local affairs in northern Afghanistan and eastern Iran.\textsuperscript{112} At the same time, despite some fragmentation on the Arab front, the Caliphal armies, comprised increasingly of local elements, encamped themselves ever more firmly in Merv. By the start of the 8\textsuperscript{th} c., the situation had returned roughly to the status quo ante, with some slight advances into Central Asia by these new large powers. Sogdia sat in the middle of these gathering powers.

The first half of the 8\textsuperscript{th} c. was marked by continuing struggles over control of the rich commercial and urban landscape of Sogdia, with the Arab and Islamic forces the

\textsuperscript{110} See Compareti, “Chinese-Iranian Relations XV. The Last Sasanian in China”, Iranica and de la Vaissière, “Chinese-Iranian Relations XIII. Eastern Iranian Migrations to China”, Iranica. The young Pirooz II and his entourage, and eventually his son Narseh, were feted, positioned, and repositioned by the Tang, probably in Tukharistan and Sistan, as part of their strategy in western Central Asia. This last Sasanian probably died around the early 8\textsuperscript{th} c.


\textsuperscript{112} They only seized in Kashgar in 728.
most active and predominant element, launching their raids from Khurasan, which had once been the Sasanian base of operations for expansion into the east. Historians alternate between characterizing these particular conquests as “Arabic” or “Islamic”, for it is clear that the early Arab Muslim invaders had gained allies and converts, at least among some important members of the Iranian elite; these changes also appear in the transformation of the Umayyad polity into an entity more generically “Islamic” than specifically “Arab”.

A new viceroy for Khurasan, Qutayba ibn Muslim, had been appointed in 705, and sought territorial expansion in addition to raids, which became possible with the disunity of the Turco-Sogdian space and their occasional cooperation with the Arab Muslim armies. The rich mercantile city of Paykend was dominated within five years after Qutayba’s appointment. Turk fighters abandoned their Sogdian allies at Bukhara, which led to its conquest by Qutayba in 710. Qutayba assisted the shah of Khorezm with suppressing a local rebellion in 711; thus, the Islamic armies gained another vassal and troops for the campaign on Samarqand. Muslims allied with the Tibetans to overthrow the king of Ferghana, yet during this very campaign, Qutayba opposed the new caliph Suleyman, and was soon killed by his supporters.

At this same moment, the Turgesh qaghanate, which had grown out of the fragmentation of the western Turk qaghanate in the late 7th c., had begun to attain about two decades of prominence in Sogdia under their leader Suluk. The Turgesh supported local tax revolts in Sogdia, forcing a retreat of the Islamic armies. They also conquered the town of Suyab, which, although under Tang control, had been the capital for the Gokturks and an important trading center for their Sogdian allies; moreover, the Tang experienced defeats by the Turgesh across the Tarim basin from Kashghar to the Turfan
oasis. A Turgesh alliance with the Tibetans in the 730s proved short-lived, as the Tibetans turned against them while the Turgesh battled Muslim armies as far as Juzjan. The situation worsened for the Turgesh. After a loss in 737 to the Muslims, a rival Turgesh chieftain killed Suluk. The Muslims managed to maintain a small foothold in Samarqand and Dabusiya. Pressure from east and west also seems to have fractured the Qaghanate of the eastern Turks: with the death of the last Ashina-descended qaghan, a battle for supremacy ensued between former vassals, with the Uyghur emerging strongest by 744. Nevertheless, the largely settled armies of the Islamic and the Tang states had started to reassert lost ground in Central Asia against these relatively steppe-centered forces.

The Tang extended their strength in the Tarim and marched through Kashgar to establish garrisons in the Little Bolor pass against the Tibetans. Suyab was sacked by the Tang in 748. The Tang allied with the king of Ferghana to capture area around Chach, whose king was deported to China and executed. Meanwhile, the robust seed of the Islamic east sprung forth dramatically through the ‘Abbasid movement, centered in Khurasan, which overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 749. Consequently, Abu Muslim, the new ‘Abbasid viceroy of Khurasan, suppressed rebellions in Bukhara and Samarqand, and allied with the son of the murdered king of Chach, massing troops to challenge the Tang. In the summer of 751, the Tang army near Talas was routed by the ‘Abbasids due to the treason of their erstwhile Qarluq allies during battle.

The reason for the entrenchment of Islamic forces is often misattributed. Despite this inauspicious defeat, the Tang returned to the area within two years. More important to Tang fortunes was the disastrous rebellion by the Sogdian general An Lushan in 755,
which consequently limited Chinese ambitions in Central Asia throughout the medieval period. In this way, the Islamic armies overcame their weakened eastern adversaries by the middle of the 8th c., their most substantial enemies from outside the region, and managed to quell various local Turk qaghans.

Nevertheless, a threat from below remained in the newly conquered lands; indeed, it is a constant theme of the medieval period that even conquering armies could not survive long against the local population and its leadership without actively employing some combination of cooptation and repression. It is wrong to assume that the ‘Abbasid conquest led to immediate and radical political and social change. The growing power of Abu Muslim caused anxiety for the ‘Abbasid caliph, who connived to recall Abu Muslim to Baghdad, where he was executed in 754. A Pyrrhic victory ensued: Khurasan and a large part of Mawarannahr burst into rebellion, initially lead by a Zoroastrian named Sunbadh. The ‘Abbasids suppressed this uprising, but there were others in the following decades. Particularly tumultuous was the uprising led by Hashim al-Muqanna (774-780), in which large swaths of rebel peasants resisted ‘Abbasid authority in Mavarannahr and in Samarqand. Eventually the leadership was isolated in Kesh and besieged in their mountain stronghold, until the ‘Abbasids were finally able to breach the fortress and kill al-Muqanna. It was precisely the fear of local independent power which led to the murder of Abu Muslim; the instability of later decades only confirmed to the ‘Abbasids the need to regularly integrate or eliminate elements which rivalled the direct administration of Khurasan and Mawarannahr, especially as central power in Baghdad weakened.
Thus, at the same time that certain segments of Mawarannahr suffered various forms of repression, there were clearly attempts to integrate the elite of Khurasan and Mawarannahr into the new order: a large number of them appear to have been willing servants of the 'Abbasids as long as that enhanced their local standing. In this sense, rebels were matched by collaborators, as new paths to power opened across the eastern Islamic world. The 'Abbasids would not have succeeded in their overthrow of the Umayyads without Central Asia and Iranian forces; in general, they sought to tame and channel those forces to the extent possible, not necessarily confront and destroy them outright.\textsuperscript{113} Consequently, the 9\textsuperscript{th} c. witnessed political struggle between the 'Abbasid and conservative pro-'Abbasid forces from the Central Asian and Iranian elite, specifically in the regimes of the Taharids and early Samanids, and the more radical and challenging tendencies of popular rebellion and even military rivalry in the form of the Saffarids.

The start of the 9\textsuperscript{th} c., after the war of succession between the sons of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, there were new attempts to consolidate 'Abbasid power, which meant necessarily an even greater inclusion of the elite from the Islamic east. At the center, the most noteworthy administrative family to emerge was the Barmakids. The Barmakid family, descended from important priests of a Buddhist temple near Balkh, soon began to cooperate with the new Muslim authorities. They coordinated with the Turco-Sogdian military which had formed as the various Turkic peoples had settled in Central Asia. It is this Turco-Sogdian military that was imported into Mesopotamia to serve as replacement for the Arab warriors who had been the backbone of the early conquests.\textsuperscript{114} The use of

\textsuperscript{113} One is reminded of the 1964 film \textit{Becket}, adapted from the play by Jean Anouilh, in which Thomas Becket advised King Henry II: “A good occupational force must never crush; it must corrupt.”

\textsuperscript{114} See M. Gordon, \textit{The breaking of a thousand swords: a history of the Turkish military of Samarra, A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) and E. de la Vaissière,
mercenary troops instead of landed aristocracy was a long-standing practice in Central Asia which was imported into central Islamic lands.

By 820, al-Maʾmun appointed his general Tahir to govern Khurasan and administer relations with Central Asian vassals; in turn, Tahir sought to elevate some of the local lords over others, the most important of these from the line of Saman-khuda. The Samanid house emerged from landowners of Sogdia or Tukharistan, the landlord (dehqān) Saman-khuda having professed Islam to the Umayyad governor of Khurasan in first part of the 8th c.115 The family must have retained some measure of local power through the late 8th c., for they were rewarded with large holdings in Sogdia circa 819 due to their strong ‘Abbasid loyalties.116 Over time, Tahir’s line gained some independence from the Caliphate as their Samanid assistants grew in power. In 841-842, the Taharid governor of Khurasan appointed Samanid brothers to the governorships of Samarqand and Sogdia during the Saffarid expansion out of Sistan. Four sons of the Samanid family were appointed as local governors: Nuh for Samarqand, Ahmad for Fergana, Yahya for Shash, and Ilyas for Herat.

The Taharids maintained a semi-independent status vis-a-vis Baghdad for nearly a half century, until the tame surrender of the fifth Taharid to the Saffarid forces of Yaʾqub ibn Laith in Nishapur during 873. Subsequently, there was nearly two decades of competition over Khurasan between various local commanders, although the Samanid family continued to retain their Central Asian lands. In this politically unstable period,

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115 Bosworth suggests that Saman khoda comes from Saman village in the area around Balkh. Also see Barthold, Turkestan; Bosworth, “Samanids”, EI2.
116 Nothing is known about their line during the second part of the 9th c. They remained in theʿAbbasid camp during the rebellion in Transoxania of Rāfi b. al-Layt ibn Sayyār initiated in 190/806.
the Samanid Isma‘il weakened his brother’s grip on power and eventually acquired his lands, resulting in the transfer of the Samanid seat to Bukhara by 892. The armies of Isma‘il eventually defeated the Saffarid Amr ibn Layth in 900; thus, Samanid core territories now included Khurasan. Despite their control over all practical instruments of rule, the Samanid dynasts always recognized the nominal authority of the caliph in Baghdad. They ruled definitely over northeastern Iran and western central Asia together, thus combining into a single autonomous polity these two distinct cultural and social spheres.

At the start of the 10th c., the Samanid structure of rule consisted of a combination of governorships and a variable set of local vassals. The core of Sogdia in Mavarahnnahr and greater Khurasan, as well as most of Khwarezm, was more or less directly under the Samanid state: subjects paid tax and were assigned a governor. Meanwhile, vassals paid tribute and had greater control over local affairs. These included the Khwarazm Shahs from the line of Afrigh, the Farighunids in Juzjan, the Banidjurids or Abu Dawudids of Tukharistan and Badakhshan, and the Muhtajids of Chaghaniyan on the upper Amu Darya, along with other smaller local dynasts. Over the course of the 10th c., these vassals often provided military, administrative, and court personnel to Bukhara, they sent tribute, and they joined with the Samanids against their enemies. This heterogenous composition maintained the Samanid dynasty for many decades, despite various attempts at local autonomy, usurpation of governorships, and court intrigues. In many respects, the vassals’ economic relationship with the Samanids mirrored that of the Samanids with the

117 Some of these are known only through numismatic research, such as the Amir of Yun.
ʿAbbassids, although the political relationships were obviously closer at the local level, with greater practical consequences for the Samanid state.\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{The marsh of Sistan}

West of Kandahar, the soils become greyer, with more stone, clay, and rock as befitting the southern desert; obviously, agriculture is only possible in towns close to the water and soils of the river valleys, including Girichk, near medieval Bust, and Farah. The population density lessens dramatically the greater the distance from the Kabul river valley. A quite different environment emerges as the waters cut through the drylands and drain into the endorehic basin of the Sistan area of the Iranian plateau. This freshwater wetland complex, also known as Hamun (“lagoon”), contains a set of desert plateaus framed by high mountains. These plateaus, mostly pebbly dasht, include some dunes from the Rigestan in the southeast. At the bottom of the basin, valleys and wadis of clay and loam receive waters from four main rivers: the Helmand, Harutrud, Farahrud, and Kashrud. These fan into deltas as they drain into the different segments of the basin. Depending on the flow, the central lake can break into three pools or overflow into another basin in the south, especially in the late spring months of March through May, when the runoff from the Helmand is the greatest.\textsuperscript{119} The slowest trickles appear in late summer and early autumn.

\textsuperscript{118} There may be some analogy to the Sogdian city-state autonomy of the earlier period. See de la Vaissière, \textit{Histoire des marchands sogdiens}.

\textsuperscript{119} Unfortunately this area has suffered greatly from agriculture and climate change in recent years in a manner somewhat analogous to the Aral Sea. Refugees from Afghanistan, in their struggle to survive, have also strained greatly the wetlands. Water shortages have eroded agriculture, collapsed the fish population, destroyed bird migrations, reduced livestock, and buried villages under sand dunes.
An extremely arid continental climate predominates, with cold winters which can dip below freezing and hot summers of possibly 50 C. High winds from the north, called the wind of 120 days (bād-i sad u bīst rūz), speed evaporation between May and September. Mudbrick construction, strong winds, and changing river patterns undermine the archaeological record and prevent cross-checking of textual evidence with material evidence. The waters are surrounded by hardy and thick reed beds and rushes, which can survive years of drought and provide construction material for mats, curtains, boats, homes, and the like, as well as fodder and fuel. The growing season lasts from April to November, in medieval times as well as our own, although high winds and cold spells can occasionally disrupt the agricultural output. Nevertheless, the fertile wetlands was called the “Basra of Khurasan” by Maqdisi, which also indicated Sistan’s connection with medieval Khurasan. The sweet water and soils of Sistan support the cultivation of winter crops such as beans, barley, and wheat, while summer crops can include legumes, melons, and fodder crops. Beyond the reeds lie grasses for grazing goats, sheep and cattle.

Avestan sources refer to Sistan as the land of the Haetumant (Helmand) river. In Alexander’s time, Greeks referred to the Sistan area as Drangiana. In the late second and first centuries AD, the arrival of the Sakas earned the area the appellation of Sakastan or Sagastan (“Land of the Sakas”); consequently, in early Arabic it is often called Sidjistan. The lake filled by the Helmand is often called Zarah or Zirih in the Arabic geographic sources (Avestan: zrayah). The full definition of the province (shahr) under

120 Date crops withered from snow in 259/872, according Tārikh-e Sistān, 218; trans. Gold, 173-4. There are few date palms in today’s Sistan.
121 C.E. Bosworth, 'Sīstān', in EI2.
122 Avestan term from R.N. Frye, 'Hāmūn', in EI2.
the Sasanians was “Sakastān, Tūrestān, and Hind to the edges of the sea”. Obviously these are expansive definitions and also an indication that the Sasanians viewed Sistan as abutting “Indian” territory, even though it is located on the opposite side of the mountains from historic India. In Firdawsi, Sistan was also called Nimruz (“midday”), perhaps as a complement to the name of Khurasan (“sun-rise”) during the Sasanian period; the name Nimruz also appears in Ghaznavid sources.

Antique coinage also shows an Indian and Iranian mixture in Sistan. Under the Sasanians, the Saka king issued a series of copper coins in “Indian” standard, similar to Indo-Parthian issues, but now with Pahlavi legends and a Sasanian fire altar. The copper issue may also indicate that there was a variety and volume of Indian goods, since copper issues are a kind of small money, so they were probably used for common urban transactions. It seems that Sasanian political control did not mean that Sakastan was detached from the “Indian” commercial sphere in terms of its coinage styles and perhaps its weights and measures as well. There was also a tradition of considering Hind and Hindustan linked to southern Afghanistan, perhaps on the basis of “Indian” presence in the area.

Sakastan alternated between independence and dependence vis-à-vis the Iranian sphere. In the 2nd c., the King of the Sakas held a special position as one of the Sasanian “Wardens of the Marches”. Yet, a late 3rd c. rebellion in Sakastan led by a close relative of the Sasanian king was disruptive enough to be noticed as far away as Byzantium.124 In the 4th c., a Persepolis inscription records a visit from a certain Shapur titled “King of the

123 C.E. Bosworth, 'Sīstān', in EI2.
Sakas, King of Hindustan, Saka-land, and Turan as far as the sea”. When this king feasted at Persepolis, he was in the company of the satrap of Zarangia (Drangiana or Sistan) and “other Persian and Saka noblemen”. Thus, there was a distinction maintained between “Persian” and “Saka” lords although they clearly cooperated with each other to control the area.

Yet, the Iranian layers continued to grow throughout the Sasanian period and extended themselves across Sistan and southern Afghanistan. Hormizd II (r. 303-309) completed a marriage alliance with the Kushan ruler of Kabul. Larger and larger numbers of Sasanian silver drachms from the 4th c. appear throughout Afghanistan, in Herat, Sistan, Begram, Kabul, and at stupas near Jalalabad. Nevertheless, this Sasanian expansion to the east appeared quite different than that in their west, based as it was on pre-existing conventions of the local political economy. Although the Sasanian governor “king” appeared with his crown, name, and title on the obverse, the Afghan gold and copper coins imitate Kushan types on the reverse by including Shiva and his bull Nandi with a Bactrian Greek inscription reading *borzaoando iazado* (“exalted god”). The practice of producing coins with two distinct styles indicates a transitional period for the history of the area and the liminal nature of Iranian control. Clearly, their coin had to circulate in areas which still accepted the Shiva and Nandi issues. But the Sakas in Sistan

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125 This was not Shapur II. See Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 162, on the basis of the SPs-I inscription.
126 Zarangiana is the Zaranj of the Islamic sources.
129 Vogelsang on the basis of the extensive Kushano-Sasanian coin scholarship of Dani and Litvinsky.
along with the Kushan Shah in Kabul had become Sasanian officials and were often members of the Sasanian royal court.\footnote{Vogelsang, \textit{The Afghans}, 164.}

Zoroastrianism seems to have taken root in Sistan during the Sasanian period. Sasanian control over Sistan and Afghanistan was lost with the attacks of the Hephthalites in the mid-5\textsuperscript{th} c. Yet, by the mid-6\textsuperscript{th} c., the Hephthalites had split into a number of loosely united factions, which allowed the Sasanians in 565 to recapture Sistan. The area remained under their control for another century until the troops of the Umayyad governor of Khurasan compelled the surrender of Zarang, the chief city of Sistan, in 652-53. When the Umayyads arrived, they found the large fire temple of Karkuya, three farsangs from Zarang, staffed by members of the Zoroastrian hierarchy whose precise rank remains unclear; in any event, the temple flame was not extinguished by Muslims.\footnote{C.E. Bosworth, \textit{Sistân under the Arabs, from the Islamic conquest to the rise of the Saffarids (30250/651-864) Reports and memoirs} (Rome: IsMEO, 1968), 3.} If there was an attempt in the 670s to suppress the fires in Sistan in the same manner as in Fars, it does not appear to have lasted long in this peripherial area with a smaller Muslim encampment; the \textit{Târikh-i Sîstân} records that fire temples, churches, and synagogues fell into the same category of places protected due to the payment of the poll tax (\textit{jizya}).\footnote{Bahâr, \textit{Târikh-i Sîstân}, 92-4.}

Despite the disappearance of the top Zoroastrian hierarchy with the Islamic conquest, a local mobad persisted, sometimes finding reason to ally with local Muslim authorities much as they had with Sasanians. When the Samanid governor was displaced by a Saffarid revolt in 912, a Zoroastrian (\textit{gabr}) protected the displaced official. Although this may have been an anti-Samanid slight on the part of the pro-Saffarid author
of *Tārikh-i Sīstān*, it still shows the continued presence of Zoroastrians in the 10th c.

There were also Zoroastrians in neighboring Kirman, Quhistan, and Herat. Additionally, the fire temple remained in place even in the 11th c., and seems to have continued its role possibly through the 13th c. According to an unnamed source in al-Qazwini, the building had two large domes, surmounted with bent spikes curving toward each other like a bull’s horns. A team of priests attended the sacred flame beneath the domes with their mouths veiled to avoid polluting the fire.133

Christianity also found a place in Sistan, as it did in Central Asia and India. Significant numbers of eastern Christians had been part of Sasanian lands for centuries, although most of their numbers were concentrated in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Armenia. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity in the 4th c. sparked fears of Christian political sympathies with the Romans and resulted in deportations of Christian populations into parts of the Iranian plateau. Herat, which lay between Sistan and Khurasan, had been mentioned as a Nestorian bishopric from 424, until it was elevated to a metropolitan see in 585 at the end of the Hephthalite period, with control over bishops in Pushang, Badghis, and Qadistan.134 The mid-6th c. split between Monophysite and Nestorian factions in Byzantium deposited an additional layer of Christians moving eastward.

It may have been precisely on the margins of Iran that Christianity was more widespread. There is a Byzantine report of Hephthalite troops in Bahram Chobin’s Central Asian army with crosses on their foreheads as they fought the Iranian Sasanian

133 Bosworth, *Sīstān under the Arabs*, 5.
forces of Khusrau Aparviz. The anxiety over Christian sympathies with the Romans occasionally resurfaced: when Khusrau Aparviz sacked Edessa in 609, a number of Christians were deported eastward into Sistan and Khurasan. They requested spiritual leaders from the Metropolitan of Takrit, who assigned bishops to these areas. There were concentrations of Christians in Sistan and throughout southern Afghanistan, including Farah, Qash, Bust, and al-Rukhaj. Despite some efforts at proselytization and religious uniformity by Sasanian state-supported Zoroastrianism, a certain established official position for religious minorities such as Christians and Jews emerged in the late Sasanian period.

Christian presence in Sistan continued during the Islamic period. There was still a bishop and a congregation in 767 and also a monastery founded by Mar Stephen, at some point in the first half of the 9th c. When Maqdisi mentioned a small number of Christians in Khurasan around 985, his wide definition for the region probably included Sistan. The Tārikh-i Sīstān reports Christians in Sistan during the attack on Zarang by the Ghaznavid armies: the main mosque and the church burned at the hands of the religiously and ethnically mixed troops. The text also mentions at that time a form of poll tax on non-Muslims called the māl-i jawālī; this was probably applied to Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. There was probably a bishop in Khurasan and Sistan during 1063-72, based on the mid-12th c. Arabic chronicle Kitāb al-mījdal by the Nestorian Mari ibn Sulaiman. But this seems to be the last mention of Sistani Christians.

137 Bosworth, Sīstān under the Arabs, 10, on the basis of Assemanus, Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, II De scriptoribus Syria Monophysitis, Rome, 1721, Praefatio s.v. “Segestana”.
138 Bahār, Tārikh-i Sīstān, 357.
There is little evidence for Sistani Jews, although it is well-established that they were numerous in Iran. In the east, some of them may have migrated from the Khazar kingdom or converted due to trade and communication with the Volga. Some may have descended from longstanding communities in Mesopotamia. Other Jewish Turkic communities are well-established in Ghur at the start of the 11th c., and they were certainly known in Khurasan. It is not hard to imagine the presence of Jews in Sistan given the proximity to known Jewish communities in Iran and Central Asia. Thus, Zoroastrian, Christian, and Jewish believers were likely to be found in Sistan during the Islamic period and throughout the Ghaznavid presence in the area.

The Muslims conquered Sistan in the mid-7th c., adding to the mixture of the area, but it was soon clear that they did not form a unified group in Sistan any more than the other religious groups. The Muslims were victorious in 651-2 near Khurasan over Hephthalite forces from Herat, who came to the aid of the Sasanians, but they were not able to control the areas of northwestern Afghanistan in Herat, Tokharistan, or Balkh for some decades; the last great Hephthalite lord was killed in 705. Consequently, the Muslims followed a more western route through Kirman to attack Sistan in 651-652; yet, they were not able to take the fortified inner shahrastan. The local governor (marzbān) decided to set treaty terms at one million dirhams and a thousand slave boys annually; nevertheless, the subsequent decade was politically unstable with the start of the struggle over the formation of the Umayyad dynasty. The Sistanis rose against Muslim governors assigned by either the pro-Alid or pro-Umayyad camps until the firm establishment of Umayyad power, which gradually transformed Sistan from a target for

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140 Bahār, Ṭārikh-i Sīstān, 8-9.
raids to a site for permanent settlement and a base to launch the campaigns into southern Afghanistan. Nevertheless, even in this early period, Sistan appeared to attract some figures who opposed the Islamic center, notably the fiery anti-Umayyad preacher al-Hasan al-Basri, who purportedly taught at the main mosque in Zarang in the 660s for three years, and established the local tax ministry (*dīvān al-kharāj*).\(^{141}\)

Although Sistan grew as a base for Islamic forces, it was also marked by instability which seemed to be a response to taxation more than strictly religious strife. It is difficult to ascertain the tax burden on Sistan largely because geographers would often include Sistan in their description of Khurasan. At a minimum, it is certain that Sistan and Khurasan were often grouped together for taxation purposes. The rapid replacement of Arab governors in Sistan only weakened the chance for establishing a local basis for the Caliphate. Kharijite leaders constantly sought to erode the flow of tax income to the Sistani administration and the Caliphate. They killed tax collectors (*ʿāmil*), burned tax registries, and prevented regular collection, to the extent that the Taharids had to send troops and subsidies from Nishapur in the mid-9\(^{th}\) c. to the beleaguered garrison in Zarang and Bust to compensate for the shortfall. Thus, the settlement and gradual conversion of Sistanis to Islam did not impede the Sistani tendency toward local autonomy, evidenced to some measure during the late antique period and extolled in the *Tārikh-i Šīstān*.

The Kharijites were vigorously opposed to the Umayyads but after the rise of the Abbasids in the 8\(^{th}\) c., they were equally opposed to the new Caliphs and their governors in Sistan. In addition to the Kharijites, armed bands called *ʿayyār* began to organize

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\(^{141}\) Bahār, *Tārikh-i Šīstān*, 83, 88-89. Al-Basri probably traveled with the Arab armies as far east as Kabul.
themselves in Sistan and other places in the Islamic world. These bands of errant young men were viewed negatively by some of their contemporaries and they emerged as the major rivals of the Kharijites in Sistan. The 'ayyār were not sanctioned by central Caliphal authorities and their governors but they had a nascent code of chivalry (futuwwa / javānmardi) which gave them some internal cohesion and rules for attaining legitimacy. The first Saffarid ruler of Sistan, Yaqub ibn al-Laith, arose out of these groups of 'ayyār in the mid-9th c.

The 'ayyār of the Islamic east were a major force during the 'Abbasid period, but their precise nature remains a matter of inquiry and disputation. The 'ayyār were characterized in negative terms as kinds of brigands in the writings of the anti-Saffarids such as Ibn al-Athir and Ibn Khallikan; this view greatly influenced later studies. The 'ayyār have often been viewed as kinds of criminals rebelling against central authority, whether that authority emanated from the Caliphate or from closer potentates like the Ghaznavids. Occasionally, they have been admired as local patriots fighting against outsiders. A recent study has emphasized the Sunni religious motivations of the 'ayyār, grouping them together with volunteers (muta'ṭawwi' a) and warriors of the faith (ghāzis).

Ya'qub, an erstwhile coppersmith, had started as a kind of bandit until his legalization as chief gendarme by the caliph's governor of Sistan. Ya'qub initially grew

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142 The negative view of 'ayyār emerged in the 11th c. and it is this view that has led many scholars since Nöldeke to call them “bandits”. See D.G. Tor, Violent order: religious warfare, chivalry, and the 'Ayyār phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic world (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2007), 33.
143 This view entered European scholarship through Nöldeke’s study of Ya’qub bin al Laith. See T. Nöldeke and J.S. Black, Sketches from eastern history, 176-206.
146 Tor, Violent Order.
strong as an officer (sarhang) for a group of ʿayyār in Bust. By 868, he had acquired the governorship of Sistan, and soon engaged in a series of battles to subdue rival surrounding powers, seizing Herat, Fars, Balkh, Tukharistan, and all the Taharid lands. The Samanids remained independent in Central Asia, but the Saffarids had conquered all of eastern Iran and the southern territories facing the Indian Ocean. Yet his ruffian origins and methods precluded recognition by the caliph al-Muʿtamid, so Yaʿqub soon marched against Baghdad, but lost the campaign and died in 879.

The Saffarid episode indicates more than the tendency toward local autonomy. It also shows that marginal actors in eastern Iran were able to gain greater and greater power against landed aristocrats and eventually the Caliphate itself. The central problem for the Saffarids was their apparent lack of legitimacy outside of Sistan and particularly in what would become Samanid lands. The landlords (dehqānān) were still robust and were able to maintain the structure of power. Despite their local roots and military strength, they were not able to sustain their extended position for long in the conservative political culture of eastern Iran.

The placement of Afghanistan

The key to unlock the mutual relations of the regional puzzle lies in the borders of contemporary Afghanistan, which incorporates elements from each of the three macroregions defined above: Central Asia, India, and Iran. Northward, the Amu Darya basin is part of the Central Asia’s highlands and steppes. Westward extend the foothills, rivers, and marshes of eastern Iran. In the east and south, the desert, mountains, and forest conditions bring Afghanistan closer to the natural orbit of India. In its different facets,
Afghanistan includes Central Asian, Iranian, and Indian elements; such is the multisided complexity of the country that its interregional, synthetic character emerges only by adequately describing its surroundings.

The geography of Afghanistan is dominated by the Hindu Kush, which has come to stand for the entire set of ranges emerging from the southwestern corner of the Himalayas, although the appellation strictly applies to a single high range running east-west to the north of Kabul. Ibn Battuta claimed that the mountains were called “‘Slayer of the Indians” because the slave boys and girls brought from India died there in large numbers as a result of the extreme cold and the quantity of snow.”\footnote{Ibn Batūtah and H.A.R.S. Gibb, \textit{Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 178.} This is a fanciful explanation based on geographical determinism and an absurd economics of slavery. More likely, the name is a corruption of \textit{Hindu Kuh} (“Indian Mountain” or “Hindu Mountain”); in this case, Afghanistan’s most prominent geographic feature once again falls into the Indian cultural orbit.\footnote{L. Dupree, \textit{Afghanistan} (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.}

This mountainous area can be imagined as a broad oval leaf with a thick midrib, consisting of the Hindu Kush proper and the high peaks of the Baba mountain range, crowned by the Foladi peak south of Bamiyan at 5000 meters, and serving as the source for most of the major river systems of Afghanistan. The different ranges spread outward along these imaginary mountainous leaf-like veins, the spaces between them forming watered valleys often suitable for small-scale human habitation. These valleys contain swatches of settlements, sometimes in isolation from one another, but more often stitched together by regular movements through high passes and neighboring valley corridors.
As the mountains of Afghanistan appear to radiate from their central spine, waters channel into the grooves they form. Starting from Kabul and moving clockwise, there is the Kabul river, rising in the Sanglakh range, passing Kabul as it proceeds east, gathering together a series of smaller streams on its way through Jalalabad, moving north of the Khyber pass and reaching Peshawar, until it eventually drains from Attock into the Indus. The Arghandab, the major tributary of the Helmand, rises in the Koh-i Baba northwest of Ghazni, continuing past Kandahar until it merges with the Helmand near the Bust fortress, close to contemporary Gereshk. The Helmand also begins in the Baba range, flowing southwest then sharply west in the southern desert after gathering its tributaries, then distributing its water into the wetlands of the Hamun-i Helmand or Sistan depression. Numerous waters feed the Sistan depression, such as the Harut Rud, Farah Rud, and Khash Rud, forming a shallow lake that can spill into another large depression in the south called the Gud-i Zirah, feeding the marshlands of the area. Likewise, the Hari Rud rises in the Baba range, flowing down the Ghur valley until Herat, after which it soon turns north toward the Qara Qum desert, irrigating the Tadjand oasis town of Sarakhs before dissipating. The Murghab starts in the upper Safid Koh, turning north out of the mountains to form the Marv delta. The Balkhab descends toward Balkh, as the name implies, but the waters evaporate prior to the Amu Darya. The Surkhab or Qunduz river reaches the Amu Darya after passing Qunduz, part of the cluster of rivers which flow from into Bactria and eventually the Amu-Darya and the Aral Sea. Many water flows terminate in wetlands although some simply disappear into deserts depending on their volume and the season.
Once the snows begin to melt in March, streams speed rapidly through narrow defiles and sharp boulders, in some cases providing the supportive water for large-scale settlement in the lower elevations, where the rivers slow amid the diminishing scree. The waters can nourish remote settlements high in the valleys, but noticeably they tend to serve a set of towns at the initial opening into the flatlands. This first proximate ring of habitation for the Hindu Kush includes important towns such as Kandahar, Farah, Herat, Merv-i Rud, as well as Samarqand, Khojend, Benaket in Shash, and Isfijab, if we continue to trace this line of settlements along the Pamir foothills.

A second distal ring of settlement appears as the waters course into the deserts, feeding oases, deltas, and wetlands. This includes towns such as Zaranj in the Sistan basin, Serakhs, Merv, Hazarasp and Gurganj in Khwarezm, Bukhara, and Yanigikent on the Syr Darya. All of these towns have the advantage of flatter land and adequate soils for irrigation and pasture. In particular, yellow loess soil in the Central Asian deserts can become quite fertile with the application of irrigation, given the lack of opportunity for dry farming. These towns, whether near or far from the mountains, also connect the upland valleys with the main commercial routes. Accordingly, even high remote areas of the Hindu Kush can have access to people and commodities flowing around the mountains.

Ghazni of the Kabul river valley

The capital of Ghazni sits at the center of the Kabul river valley, the largest of a set of river valleys which shaped the history of settlement and movement in medieval Afghanistan. This large basin coursing along the southeast edge of the Hindu Kush serves
as the main east-west corridor for the country even today; its favorable conditions still support the densest concentration of population in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{149} The word “Kabul” in the sources can mean the city or the entire stretch of settlement in the river valley, so the term “Kabul” can often include Ghazni.\textsuperscript{150} The Ghazni area benefits from access to Gardiz and Kost valleys, an easy pass through Batay and the Tochi valley, and a route farther south from the Gomal valley to the middle Indus. At a height of approximately 2,225 meters above sea level, Ghazni sits in an upland valley on the Kandahar/Kabul route and remains today the only major walled city in all of Afghanistan. River diversion provides some irrigation in this area, but there is also intense use of qanats and aquifers. Past a high hill overlooking the river, at the edge of a rough plateau, the settlement of Ghazni is well-positioned to control this key transition zone between India and Iran.

The valley base consists of flat lands of sandy loam, adequate for tilling due to their capacity to retain water and nutrients, framed by montane coniferous forests growing in pebbly, clay soil. In lower areas, drier coniferous species predominate due to weaker monsoon rainfall while higher elevations above 2,500 meters receive greater water which insures a dense forest of deciduous and coniferous trees; these fade as the alpine zone comes into focus above 3,300 meters. In the southern bottom of the valley, on the road between the mountains and the desert, the forests become drier and the soil sandier, giving way to shrublands before reaching the hummocks and barchan dunes of Registan. The valley as a whole is replete with tens of thousands of migratory birds clustered near the many small lakes, as well as wild goat, bears, squirrels, and marten.

\textsuperscript{149} Especially in the northern area of Kabul and Charikar, although Kandahar remains the second largest city in today’s Afghanistan.
\textsuperscript{150} This happens frequently in Gardizi. Even today there can be found a broad distinction by Afghans between Kabul, meaning the entire river basin, and Khurasan, a vague term for the rest of the country.
Historically, Afghanistan has often divided along northern and southern tiers, which has been determined to some measure by the central spine of the Hindu Kush. This separates the relatively more fertile Central Asian and Iranian areas from the scrublands and deserts of the extreme south. The northern tier has been particularly subject to Iranian influence and the southern tier, accessed through smaller central valleys or through the passage of Sistan, has been influenced often by northern developments. This is evident not only with the movements of Indo-Iranian peoples who called themselves Arya, but also with the extension of Scythian/Saka power.151

By the mid-first millennium BC, there was wide belt of Scythian and Cimmerian local rulers, in an area extending from Central Asia through western Iran; although they did not control southern Afghanistan directly, they had great influence on the clothing styles and weaponry of people in southern Afghanistan, who at that time were largely a mixture of largely Indo-Aryan peoples undergoing some degree of “Iranization”.152 This northern and southern divide mediates the eastern and western transition between the Indian and Iranian worlds _grosso modo_; nevertheless, the Iranian characteristics of the river valley area of Ghazni can obscure its frequent connection to the Indian orbit.

By the early 6th c. BC, the river valley was part of an Achaemenid satrapy in their far east, inherited when the Achaemenids overthrew their Median overlords. The area was part of a single tax unit which extended from Kandahar to Gandhara, the latter being the center of _Harauvatiš_ according to the Achaemenids, the same district called Arachosia by Herodotus.153 In ancient Afghanistan, Iranians and Indians lived together;

151 See Vogelsang, _The Afghans_, 56, for etymological discussion.
152 Vogelsang, _The Afghans_, 90. This is comparable to the later influence of Turkic rulers.
153 Vogelsang, _The Afghans_, 107. There is some uncertainty about the exact location of Arachosia, but there is no doubt that it lay east of modern Kandahar and west of Gandhara.
texts and reliefs from Persepolis show eastern delegations in Indian dress, wearing
loincloths and bare-chested with bare feet or sandals, accompanied by “Afghan”
delegates bearing metal vases, leopard skins, and two-humped Bactrian camels. Other
evidence of Indian presence can be seen in the frontier town of Kaspapyros, at the
southern entrance of the Salang Pass north of Kabul, at modern day Begram: the suffix –
puros, from the Sanskrit pur or pura-, means town or fortress.\textsuperscript{154}

Ancient Greek authors confirmed “Indians” in ancient Afghanistan, especially in
the account of Alexander and his eastern campaigns in the \textit{Anabasis Alexandri} of Arrian.
There were three main satrapies in Afghanistan at the time: western Areia around modern
Herat, northern Bactria around modern Balkh, and southern Arachosia/Drangiana, around
modern Kandahar.\textsuperscript{155} From their perch in Bactra fortress in northern Afghanistan, the
Achaemenids controlled routes between Central Asia and India, in part through the
participation of “Indian” troops. When the satrap of Bactria prepared his army to confront
the Macedonians, Arrian noted among them Bactrians, Sogdians, and “Indians bordering
on the Bactrians”; these Indians are also mentioned by Curtius, another biographer of
Alexander. In Arachosia, the local satrap organized Arachosians and “Indian hillmen” to
fight the invaders.\textsuperscript{156} On their way through Arachosia to Kabul, the Macedonians
encountered “the Indians closest to the Arachosians”.\textsuperscript{157} They also reported that two
tribes in the southern Punjab paid the Arachosians tribute and, by extension, the

\textsuperscript{154} This was likely the Kapisha-kanish of the Behistun Achaemenid texts the Capisa of Pliny. See
\textsuperscript{155} These are obviously the Greek names taken from Arrian.
\textsuperscript{156} Vogelsang, \textit{The Afghans}, 116. This is unsurprising considering the “Indian” contingents of Gandharans
and Dadicae mentioned by Herodotus during the invasion of western Greece by Xerxes in the early 5\textsuperscript{th} c.
\textsuperscript{157} Vogelsang, \textit{The Afghans}, 119.
Thus, it seems that the neither Scythian nor Achaemenid rule precluded a significant proportion of “Indians” in northern, southern, and eastern Afghanistan, some of whom participated closely with the dominant powers of their day.

Eastern Afghanistan, including the Ghazni area, was acquired eventually by Candragupta Maurya in 302 BC as Macedonian power eroded. When the post-Alexander general Seleucus moved west to challenge the claims of his rivals, he signed an agreement with the Mauryans to cede Gandhara, the Kabul valley (Paropanisadae), Arachosia, and Gedrosia in exchange for 500 elephants. Apart from the evacuation of the troops of Seleucus, there are other factors which may have contributed to the extension of Mauryan control. In southern Afghanistan, the main coin type was the silver punch-marked coin of “Indian” origin, indicating the economic importance of the western part of the subcontinent. The conceded territory was also at the extreme edge of the Iranian world and certainly had a much greater proportion of people regarded as “Indian”.

Information from the Arthashâstra of Kautilya, written in the late antique period but containing some details from Mauryan times, indicates that some early Indian geographical descriptions regarded the northernmost border of Bhârata-varsha as the Wakhsu (Amu Darya) river in northern Afghanistan. Thus, “India” would appear to extend even into Central Asia in this perception. Regardless of these claims, which may reflect imperialistic hubris or pre-existing perception of these areas as part of an “Indian” cultural and political space, it seems on the basis of Greek and Achaemenid evidence that southern and eastern Afghanistan had closer ties to India than the northern and the western quarters, although “Indians” could be found even in Bactria. Many of these

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158 This situation recalls the early Ghaznavid dominance of the “Hindu” Shahis in that same area; it is not usual for powers in eastern Afghanistan to have strong influence on the Panjab.
159 See Pliny VI 23, 69; Strabo XV 1.10; 2.9.
Greek kingdoms remained under overall “Indian” control as the routes of the area soon became marked by the chains of stupas which signified Mauryan power.160

The mixed linguistic and cultural character of the area appeared strongly at this time. A Prakrit text in Aramaic script from the period has been uncovered near modern Jalalabad. Ashokan texts in Aramaic have been found north of Kabul. Bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscriptions on boulders have been located in Kandahar along with an Aramaic-Prakrit text in Aramaic script and Greek texts in Greek script. The Greek presence was certainly pronounced, but more important from the social perspective is the constant need for mixed texts to appeal to different audiences, along with the unorthodox combination of Iranian, Greek, and Indian elements. The Greek kingdoms, occasionally in conflict with one another, gained some local autonomy as Mauryan power contracted in the early 2nd c.; nevertheless, Indian elements, including syncretism with Hindu and Buddhist gods and the appearance of stupas on coins, predominated over Iranian elements in the Greco-Indian synthesis of southeastern Afghanistan and the Kabul river valley.

A new wave of Iranian peoples called the Saka entered Central Asia as the changing conditions in eastern Asia wrought their global consequences. The unifying Qin dynasty of the late 3rd c. BC had been supplanted by the powerful Han in the 2nd c. BC. Chinese troops carried out incursions against the steppe peoples to their north while the Inner Asian confederacy of the Xiongnu grew in strength. The Han emperor sent out an ambassador named Zhang Qian to gather information about these nomadic peoples; his journal provides the main account for this first textually documented movement of nomadic peoples into Central Asia.161

161 Vogelsang, The Afghans, 137.
The formation of the Xiongnu “empire” brought about the displacement of neighboring nomads. The Xiongnu spoke an unknown language and were centered in Inner Mongolia. Another group of nomads to their south, called the Yuezhi, spoke an Indo-European language which was not Iranian; they are conventionally viewed as the same as the Tokharians, from which the northern Afghanistan region of Tokharistan takes its name. The defeat of the Yuezhi at the hands of the Xiongnu in about 176 BC, pushed them westward, where they attacked in turn the nomadic Wusun, with whom they had hostile relations previously. As the Yuezhi and Wusun continued to migrate westward, they displaced Saka groups. These Saka groups overran Sistan, which came to be called Sakastan (“Land of the Sakas”). Some occupied the middle Indus in Gandhara, probably by means of a northern route through Afghanistan. Others moved past Arachosia across the mountains to the lower Indus and into Gujarat, where they founded a kingdom called by historians the Western Satraps, which lasted until the 4th c. In the Kabul river valley and Gandhara, a combined Saka and Indo-Greek presence oriented toward India came into being, according to the travel guide the Parthian Stations from Isidore of Charax. Southeastern Afghanistan and India were closely connected even when there was a strong Iranian presence.

The Yuezhi eventually occupied the rest of Bactria and divided their conquests among five different rulers, each of whom bore the title yabghu. By the end of the 1st c. BC, one of the yabghu defeated the other four to found a new kingdom called Kusana or Kushana. The northern borders of their kingdom are not certain, but they alternatively cooperated and conflicted with Han power in the Tarim until the collapse of the Han,  

162 There is no definitive proof that they spoke a Turkic or “Altaic” language.  
163 Vogelsang, The Afghans, 140.
which opened the chance for them to bring this part of the Pamirs under their aegis. These were the key commercial routes between northern China and northern India. There remained independent kings in Khwarezm and Sogdia, and their border with the Parthians in Khurasan was stable, but the Saka satraps of Sind recognized Kushan authority.¹⁶⁴ The Kushans possessed a large territory in northern India through the town of Mathura, which became an artistic center, along with Sind and the Gangetic basin to modern-day Bihar. Through the Kushans, the relative fragmentation of the nascent core space for the “silk routes” had given way to some measure of political and military integration, which appeared to facilitate commerce.

The Kushan period exhibited and intensified the complex layering which had taken place over a broad area.¹⁶⁵ Probably centered in Purushapura near modern Peshawar, the Kushans provided the nexus for the economic and cultural integration of China, Central Asia, and India. They facilitated the movement of Indian merchants who traversed the silk routes which connected China with Central Asia, Parthia, and Roman lands. During the Kushan period, Buddhist religious items were particularly important commodities traded with China along with some luxury goods such as textiles. Their vast territory allowed for the passage of Chinese goods to the Indus and the ocean for transport westward in case of war between the Parthians and the Romans. Indian merchants dominated this trade which facilitated the spread of Mahayana Buddhism.

¹⁶⁴ The Parthians are also called the Arsacids based on the name of their mid 3rd c. ruler Arsaces, which became the traditional name of every Parthian ruler, making their precise dynastic chronology difficult to ascertain. The name Parthia is from Latin to designate the people in ancient greater Khurasan based on the self-designation of their language in Old Persian.
¹⁶⁵ B.N. Mukherjee, Kushāṇa studies: new perspectives (Kolkata: Firma KLM, 2004); Thapar, Early India, 217-245.
throughout India, Central Asia, and China. In this respect, the Kushans completed the efforts of the Mauryans and greatly expanded them.

The Kushans sought to create a religious, linguistic, and aesthetic environment which combined the heterogeneous groups under their rule, probably to garner the support of various factions. They greatly patronized arts, in particular the Gandharan and Mathura syncretic artistic schools, which were nevertheless mainly Buddhist forms of expression. They adopted Greek titles, such as Soter Megas, and Sanskrit names, such as Vasudeva (Krishna). Although they did not issue silver coins in the manner of the Indo-Greeks, Graeco-Bactrians, and the Parthians, they had many copper and gold issues, imitating the Roman aureus but with representations of Shiva and horsemen, and eventually coins in Greek as well as Bactrian in Greek script. The site of Surkh Kotal, replete with combined Greek and Iranian sculptural elements contained a text in Bactrian written in Greek script. Another cluster of texts found near Ghazni has similar texts of Prakrit in Kharoshthi script and another language, perhaps Saka, also in Kharoshthi. These syncretic practices did not prevent them from military expansion in the Tarim after the collapse of Han Chinese strongholds in the early 3rd c. Nevertheless, these finds illustrate the various ethnic and linguistic affiliations of those who composed the state and society of Kushans and indicate the regular presence of a mixed cultural politics in Afghanistan.

It is during the Kushan period that Ghazni may have been mentioned first by Ptolemy in the 2nd c., who named a town Ga(n)zaka in the Paropamisadai relatively close to Kabul. The name probably came from the unattested *Ganzak < ganja meaning

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166 E. Benveniste, 'Le nom de la ville de Ghazna', *Journal Asiatique* CCXXI (1935), 141-143. He placed Ga(n)zaka north of Kabul.
“treasury” on the basis of the metathesis in eastern Iranian of -nz- / -nj- to -zn-. This implies that the town was already important at that time, perhaps a tax collection point, a mint, or a storage area for royal crafts. Eastern Afghanistan and the Kabul river valley had become a central passage for the transition of people, commodities, and ideas between India, Central Asia, and Iran.

Iranian elements were considerably strengthened in Afghanistan from the first third of the 3rd c., when the Sasanians under Ardashir defeated their Parthian lords and marched on Central Asia, seizeing Sakastan (Sistan) and Bactria. Kushan lands were probably still governed by a Kushan lord who gave allegiance to the Sasanians; hence, the passes and the Kabul river valley were probably still controlled by the Kushans. By the 4th c., the Sasanian king Hormizd II had entered a marriage alliance with the Kushan king of Kabul, and numismatic evidence indicates large number of silver drachms from Shapur II as far as east as Begram, Kabul, and Jalalabad. Despite these strengthened ties with Iran, there were still gold coins issued in the Kushan style. But it would be the waves of newcomers from the steppe who would again alter the mixture in eastern Afghanistan.

These newcomers have been grouped into an overarching and somewhat vague category of the “Huns”, as has been the case with so many steppe peoples, but it is possible to distinguish distinct groups and phases of their movement. By the middle of the 4th c., a group called the Chionites by Ammianus Marcellinus entered into a treaty with the Sasanians which may have resulted in some of their number entering Sasanian

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168 Vogelsang, The Afghans, 161.
170 Vogelsang, The Afghans, 164.
service for deployment against the Romans, such as in the town of Amida, near modern
Diyarbakir. The Chionites were apparently united under the dynasty of the Kidarites
based on the name of their king Kidara; they conquered Bactria in the late 4th c. and the
Kabul river valley including a considerable portion of central and western Punjab by the
start of the 5th c. 171 This did not seem to change cultural life much in area, at least
according to the report of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Faxian, who visited prosperous
Buddhist communities at that time in the area of Swat, Gandhara, and modern day
Jalalabad. 172 The Chionites were soon followed by and replaced with the Hephthalites in
the mid-5th c., who most likely spoke an Iranian language; these “White Huns” were to
control an even larger area across the Tarim to borders of Khurasan, through Afghanistan
and the Punjab. 173

The Chionites and the Hephthalites presumably were the last of the Iranian-
speaking nomads to play a major role in world history and the history of Afghanistan;
from that point onward, Turkic-speaking nomads assumed the predominant part. 174 The
Hephthalites have long been considered the major cause for the decline of Buddhism in
Afghanistan and the Kabul river valley, but this does not seem to be the case. 175 Perhaps
it is a recurring interpretive strategy to assign decline of settled religion to the arrival of
nomadic outsiders. The main change during the period occurred with the shifting of

171 Zeimal, E.V., “The Kidarite kingdom in Central Asia”, in B.A. Litvinsky, History of Civilizations of
Central Asia: The Crossroads of Civilization: AD 250 To 750.
Bunko: 18 (1959), 1-158. Tabari gives Iranian names for them.
174 Surprisingly, the history of the Pashtun migration is still very poorly understood. Also see Frye, “Pre-
Islamic and early Islamic cultures in Central Asia” in R.L. Canfield, Turko-Persia in historical perspective
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Vogelsang suggests that the Chionites were also Altaic
speaking.
175 This had been the opinion of Fleet, Stein, and Marshall, refuted by Kuwayama. See S. Kuwayama, “The
Hephthalites in Tokharistan and Northwest India”, Zinbun 24 (1989), 90.
commerce from the old route which passed from Gandhara through the Karakorum and
the Hindukush to Tokharistan. By the middle 6th c., the route began to pass through
Kapisa to Bamiyan and then into Tokharistan and Sogdian lands. This meant the
contraction of Gandharan trade and its Indian merchants of luxury and religious
commodities focused on China in favor of the expanding urban centers of Sogdian
merchants who traversed the entire route from Chang’an to Constantinople.¹⁷⁶ These
merchants were often Buddhist and there seems to be a continuation and reinforcement of
Buddhism at that time in the Kabul river valley.

The continuing upsurge of nomadic peoples in Inner Asia soon brought in a fresh
group of horsemen under the banner of the Turk Qaghanate which pushed southward into
Hephthalite and Sasanian lands. A turbulent set of alliances and counteralliances roiled
northern Afghanistan through the second half of the 6th c. Despite some brief success
against Sasanian troops, the Turks had retreated by the turn of the 7th c. to holdings in
former Hephthalite lands which were still largely under the control of diminished
Hephthalite lords.¹⁷⁷ Sasanians had extended their power into southern Afghanistan,
installing new governors and probably making vassals out of local lords.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, a new pattern of settlement in southern Afghanistan began, as
witnessed by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, who mentioned Turks as he passed
through the area in the early 7th c. during his travels to India. Xuanzang visited Bactria
during his return trip. He described different kinds of clothing worn in different valleys,
such as linen cotton worn in one and fur clothing in another, and noted nearly one

¹⁷⁶ For commercial history of the Sogdians, see É. de la Vaissière, Histoire des marchands sogdiens,
Deuxième édition révisée et augmentée (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoise:
Diffusion, 2004).
¹⁷⁷ Vogelsang, The Afghans, 170.
¹⁷⁸ Marquart, Eränsahr, 20.
hundred monasteries and three thousand monks in the main town adhering to Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism. Many Buddhist sanctuaries have been uncovered through archaeology and a large stupa has been found. One lies close to the ancient monastery of Naw Bahar; according to Arabic geographers, the ruins belonged to people with the same faith as the Chinese emperor and the king of Kabul. On his trip home, Xuanzang also visited the Kabul river valley and made a trip to Ho-si-na, probably Ghazni, although possibly the old city of Zabul near Ghazni.

Xuanzang noted the elevated position of the town of Ghazni, the brisk weather, the prolific vegetation, the wheat, the saffron, and the extensive irrigation. Visiting down to the Helmand, he also mentioned the variety of gods worshipped, along with the reverence for the Buddha, primarily through the Mahayana sect. Although he saw the people in the area as “clever without intelligence”, he viewed their king as “intelligent and studious.” He stated that Ho-si-na is the most important town of Zao-jiu-cha, which is likely the same name as the Arabic Zābulistān; if the identification of Xuanzang is correct, then it appears that Ghazni may have been a regional capital for Zābulistān. A Buddhist site with clay and terracotta buddhas further confirms the continuing Indian cultural influence in late antique Ghazni.

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179 This is in Tepe Rustam. See Ball and Gardin, Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan, No. 99.
181 Ho(k)-si(k)-na = Ghaznik or Ghazna. This etymology can be found in Bosworth, Historic Cities; compare with T. Watters, T.W.R. Davids, S.W. Bushell and V.A. Smith, On Yuan Chwang’s travels in India, 629-645 A.D, 2 vols (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904). Bombaci questions these associations of Ptolemy and Xuanzang. See A. Bombaci, “Ghazni”, East and West 8 (1957), 247-60. Watters, On Yuan Chwang’s travels, 265, mentions Ghaznik.
182 Watters, On Yuan Chwang’s travels, 264.
As Xuanzang returned home in the 630s, he noted that the Kabul valley as far east as Gandhara was ruled by a Buddhist king in Kapisa, who may have been a Hephthalite or a Turk; within a decade or two, this ruler was most likely a Turk, and at least one district in the south was ruled by a Turkic prince. These new rulers soon clashed with the Arab Islamic armies which had conquered Sistan by 653 and were able to impose tribute on the local rulers of Bust and Zabul. Once the Umayyads acceded to the caliphate, they dispatched the forces of general Ibn Samurah, who advanced as far as Kabul. During a retreat to the city walls, one of the Kabulshah’s injured elephants died at the gate, which made its closure impossible and allowed the Muslims to enter and conquer the city.

The Kabulshah was eventually able to expel the Muslim garrison, but the fighters of Ibn Samurah returned and managed to extract another tribute. Meanwhile, the ruler of Gandhara, Barhategin, had been sheltered behind the mountain passes of the northwestern Indus during these battles and took the chance to destroy the weakened lord of Kabul. He attacked Kabul, supplanted the Shah, and assigned a brother to rule as far south as Rukhkhaj, including the area of Ghazni. Clearly, pragmatic politics determined military action more than supposed ethnic or family alliances in 7th c. Afghanistan.

185 Baladhuri and F.C. Murgotten, The origins of the Islamic state: being a translation from the Arabic, accompanied with annotations, geographic and historic notes of the Kitāb Futūḥ Al-Buldān of al Imām abu-l `Abbās Ahmad ibn Jābir al-Baladhuri (New York: Columbia University, 1924), 186.
The Shahis and the emergence of the Ghaznavids

By the mid-7th c., two main formations appeared which would dominate the political life of the area for the following centuries. In the east, there were the Shahis, who have also been called the “Kābulshāh”, the “Türk Shāh”, and eventually the “Hindu Shāh” dynasty; they ruled the Kabul river valley, Gandhara, and eventually much of the Panjab. They may just as easily be termed the “Indian Shahs” based on Biruni’s usage, perhaps in contrast to the locational appellation of Khwarezm Shahs. Their precise origins remain obscure; this is complicated by the fact that the term “Turk” in early Muslim literature is ambiguous to the extent that even Tibetans were considered “Turks” on occasion. The Shahi summer quarters lay in Begram near the confluence of the Ghorband and Panjshir rivers and their winter residence lay in Uḍabhāṇḍapura/Waihind on the right bank of the Indus. Trading caravans and pastoralists were the bulk of the revenue in this area which supported minimal agriculture.

In the south, there was also the region of Zabul, whose ruler, the Shah’s brother at this early period, held the title of the “Zunbīl” or “Zanbīl” or possibly the “Rutbīl” or “Ratbīl”. Most likely, the name is a corruption of the Turkish title *itāｂār in light of the Turkic presence; there were other lords in northern Afghanistan with titles resembling *itāｂār in Bactrian, Middle Indic, and Chinese, which supports the idea that it was

188 This appears in the Shahname in the corrupted form of Ranmal or Ramal. See Wink, Al-Hind, Vol. 1, 116. The matter is complicated by the absence or alternation of the notation in some versions of the name. Tabari sees the form Rutbīl or Ratbīl as the same as Zunbīl when he states that “the kings were called Ratbīl in the language of Sind, just as the kings of Persia were called Khusrau, those of Rum Kaisar, and those of the Turks Khaqan”. See Zotenberg, Ṭabari Vol. 3, 518-519.
common title, perhaps in a manner similar to the use of amir in the Islamic period.\footnote{See M. Inaba, ‘The Identity of the Turkish Rulers to the South of Hindukush from the 7th to the 9th Centuries AD’, \textit{Zinbun} 38 (2005), 6, for a helpful concise chart of the variations. This knotted question has been treated somewhat incautiously in the scholarship. The use of Rutbîl as the title for the ruler of southern Afghanistan has been adopted here following Tabari and A. Rehman, \textit{The last two dynasties of the Śāhis: An analysis of their history, archaeology, coinage and palaeography} (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing, 1979). This selection deemphasizes the linguistic confusion about Zabulistan and the god Zun. Inaba concentrates on the Khalaj and the Chinese sources for the title.}

This “Rutbîl” line ruled over the wide area of Zabulistan, with their summer residence in the upper cooler mountainous zone toward the Helmand and Kandahar rivers, and in Zamindawar, the warmer lowland around Kandahar town and toward Sistan and the site of their winter residence; in other words, roughly the area of ancient Arachosia and the settlement of Ghazni.

It is possible that the Shahi and the Rutbil lines at this early stage were practicing some form of dual kingship. The Turk Qaghanate had practiced dual kingship. There was also practice of dual kingship among their Turkic contemporaries, the Khazars of the Volga, some of whom had started converting to Judaism in the late 7th c., although the royalty did not convert until the late 8th c. at the earliest. Their practice of dual kingship influenced neighbors such as the Hungarians who had a military and sacral king. The early Oghuz seem to have had this practice along with the Qarakhanids. There is not sufficient evidence to establish this practice with certainty for southern Afghanistan, but it remains a real possibility.

Nevertheless, there was continuity for the Indian influence on southern and eastern Afghanistan, despite the presence of these Turkic and Arab newcomers who did not comprise the majority of the population. On the basis of Bactrian, Chinese, Middle Indic, and Arabic evidence, it seems most likely that these Turks who replaced the Hephthalite lords were from the Khalaj clan; this is reinforced by the use of the title
*itätär*, which was held by eastern Turks other than the Ashina clan, the ruling clan of the Turk qaghanate. The close relationship of these groups to India is also reflected in the Nezak Shah coin types which indicate that these rulers had begun to use an Indianized form of the word Khalaj for themselves: *kharalāča*. The thick layer of Buddhist sites interspersed with Brahamanical sites in the region between Kabul and Begram points to the multifaceted cultural, religious, and political affiliations of the Shahi times. Due to the shifting trade routes, some of the Buddhist sites were already neglected in the time of Xuanzang; nevertheless, it seems clear that the first Shahi rulers were Buddhist.

Initially, a series of battles between the Rutbil and the Sistani Muslims turned to the disfavor of the Rutbil; Baladhuri reports the payment of millions of dirhams to the Muslims over the course of these struggles. The son of the Rutbil was sent to Basrah where he received a robe (*khilʿat*) from the governor, probably as an acknowledgment of Muslim authority. These events seem to lay the groundwork for a strange turn of events in 680, when the Rutbil fled from Kabul and made an agreement with the Sistani general to rule over southern Afghanistan. Former enemies, purportedly on religious and cultural grounds, had now become allies after this flight from Kabul into the arms of the Sistanis. Perhaps the Kabulshah wanted to remove his brother after defeats or perhaps a succession struggle had developed in Kabul. The Shahi and Rutbil families were certainly

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190 Inaba, “The Identity of the Turkish rulers”, 10. This has been a matter of confusion and dispute in the scholarship, even in al-Biruni and E. Sachau, *Alberuni’s India*, 386, who believed that they came from Tibet; however, Inaba seems to have resolved the issue.
191 This has been demonstrated in Inaba, “The Identity of the Turkish rulers”.
192 Kuwayama, “Historical Notes on Kāpiṣi and Kabul”.
194 It is difficult to be certain about the exact political arrangement for these 7th c. strongmen, but there are few possibilities. It seems that the highest title was “Shah” reserved for the Kabulshah, at least in Arab sources. The title of “Rutbil” may have been a lesser title if we accept the etymology of *itätär* as a lesser chieftain in the Ashina-led confederation. The appointment of a brother to rule southern Afghanistan, in part because he is the only other ruler mentioned in the Shahi sources, may be a sign of some form of dual
kinsmen, but apparently they could also become rivals.\textsuperscript{195} It seems that the Rutbil was seen as subordinate to the Shah, who ruled over a wider, richer territory and probably had the capacity to control the upper Indus commercial routes to a greater degree, given their respective geographic positions. In any event, the Muslim armies were not ideological to the point that they would oppose supporting a compliant client in southeastern Afghanistan who was likely Buddhist or possibly Shaivite, but certainly not a Muslim.

Despite this phase of growing Islamic strength, there were various struggles between the Rutbil and the Sistani Muslims for the next few generations which did not always favor the Muslim side; moreover, the constant clashes between Kharijite elements and the caliphal forces showed the disunity of the Muslim camp. In this period of southern Afghanistan’s history, tributes were never regular and depended on the most immediate balance of forces; in other words, payments of wealth substituted for those of blood but did not serve a sustained political or ideological function. This fact, coupled with the regular need for the various local commanders to prove their mettle, engendered several battles across southern and eastern Afghanistan. Throughout the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the situation often favored the Kabulshah and the Rutbil formations.

In 683, the Kabulshah imprisoned an important Umayyad, who could have been a soldier or an official sent to collect tribute in Kabul.\textsuperscript{196} The Sistani Muslims marched on

\textsuperscript{195} According to Tabari, the Zunbīl was the brother of the Kābulshāh in about 680 AD. See Tabari, I, 2705-6. The Zunbīl was the nephew of the Kābulshāh in 726. See Fuchs, von. W. “Huei-Ch’a’o’s Pilgerreise durch Nordwest-Indien und Zentral-Asien um 726”, Sitzungsbericht der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vol. XXX, 1938, 445. Rehman, The Last Two Dynasties, 44.

\textsuperscript{196} He was called Abū ʿUbaidaih, according to Baladhuri, The origins of the Islamic state, 397.
Kabul but were completely routed near “Junzah” or “Junza”, which seems to be a corruption of Ghazni; they paid a large ransom to free their prisoners.\footnote{See Rehman, The last two dynasties, 67, for details on this association.} In 684-685, the Rutbil supported discontents in Sistan and marshalled a large army, but he was defeated and killed by the governor of Sistan; he was replaced with his son called “Rutbīl II” by Baladhuri. As the Umayyads reorganized themselves under the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, they launched another attack on the Rutbil line, which agreed to pay more than a million dirhams as the Sistani army advanced, yet this did not slake their demands.\footnote{Baladhuri, The origins of the Islamic state, 399; Tabari, 1037.}

Nevertheless, it seems that they were drawn into a mountainous kill zone and massacred by the Rutbil’s forces; from this position of strength, the Rutbil negotiated a smaller sum of 300,000 dirhams for tribute and extracted a pledge that the Sistani governor would not attack their territory again.\footnote{He was called ʿAbd Allāh according to Baladhuri.} The failed Sistani governor was dismissed upon his return to Baghdad and replaced with the ill-fated ʿUbaid Allah assigned by the ruthless eastern commander Hajjaj. Yet ʿUbaid Allah clashed with the Kharijites in Sistan and lost many of his men, which encouraged the Rutbil and the Shahis to withhold tribute. Under strict orders, ʿUbaid Allah marched on the Rutbil in 699, but the Rutbil managed to trap the invaders in the mountains, to pledge ʿUbaid Allah to render three sons as hostages, and to extract a large ransom of 500,000 dirhams; low on food and water, many Muslim troops perished during their retreat and earned the infamous moniker jaīsh al-fāna’: “The Annihilated Army”.\footnote{Baladhuri, The origins of the Islamic state, 399.}

In response to this humiliation, Hajjaj commanded a second general named Ibn al-Ashʿath to head a grand “Peacock Army” to march on southern Afghanistan. Ibn al-
Ashʿath avoided entrapment through the clever use of garrisoned posts as he advanced, so he was able to return to Sistan with much loot, but upon his arrival he discovered the anger of Hajjaj, who wanted the entire area permanently occupied. Ibn al-Ashʿath and his men resolved to revolt against the hated Hajjaj and concluded a treaty with the Rutbil; when this revolt was defeated by the Umayyads, the Rutbil initially protected Ibn al-Ashʿath, only to exchange him later during negotiation of a peace treaty with Hajjaj. Clearly, the Umayyad had no effective power in southern Afghanistan.

In a subsequent demand for tribute in coined money, the Rutbil mollified the Umayyads with an exaggerated display of obedience and made payment only in kind. At the same time, the Rutbil was careful to send another missive of obeisance to the Chinese emperor, perhaps to bolster his political credentials with his supporters despite the treaty; soon he stopped paying the Umayyads altogether except for a token gift.201 An attempt in 726 by the Sistan troops to enforce tribute on the Rutbil resulted in another mountain trap for the Caliphal armies and a massacre. Subsequently, there was no other attempt by the Islamic armies on southern Afghanistan for four decades; instead, the Rutbil and Shahi lines had begun to fight between themselves for control of the Kabul river valley and Ghazni. This was not difficult: Ghazni and Kabul are less than a day’s ride from one another. Islamic forces played no part in these disputes which do not appear to be based on religious or ethnic strife but rather dynastic and perhaps commercial politics.

In an age of weak states with questionable legitimacy, both the Shahi and Rutbil formations attempted to curry favor with the distant Tang emperor to gain a political advantage; the Tang, embroiled in battle with the Turk Qaghanate over the Tarim and

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influence in Central Asia, were happy to oblige the squabbling kinsmen. By the early 8th c., it seems that much of eastern Afghanistan had Turkic Buddhist rulers, according to Korean pilgrim Huichao. In 710, the Rutbil sent an envoy to the Chinese court to “pay homage and tribute” before seizing Kapisa. In 719, the Shahis sent to the Tang court sutras on astronomy, secret and valuable prescriptions, and unusual drugs along with other local products; in return, the Chinese emperor issued a mandate calling the Shahis the Ka-lo-ta-chih-t’e-k’in (“Tigīn of Arokhaj”), giving the Shahis title over what was probably Rutbil lands. In 720, the Rutbil received the title of Tche-kiu’-eul of “Arokhaj”, an improvement upon his earlier title of hie-li-fa (“*itābār”). As the Shah of Kabul grew old during the 740s, he sought additional titles from the Tang for rulership over Gandhara, claims which were countered by repeated visits from the Rutbil envoys to the Chinese court. These rulers of southern Afghanistan seemed to require gestures of political support from outside powers who had no military impact on outcomes.

The Tang role in Afghanistan was an extension of Chinese-Turkic relations, particularly in Central Asia along the Turko-Sogdian band. Yet these relations of pseudo-clientage contained a degree of reciprocity. In continuity with earlier “Silk Road” connections, the Shahis were capable of leveraging the cultural value of luxury and religious items from the Buddhist pilgrimage and knowledge centers of “India”, although this time in exchange for political rank with the Chinese. The connection to China indicates a Turkic Buddhist aspect to their political culture on the one hand, but

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202 The Rutbil was a nephew of the Shahi but not his subordinate, according the Chinese traveller Huei Ch’ao. See Fuchs, von. W. ‘Huei-Ch’ao’s Pilgerreise” 444, 447-8.
203 E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) occidentaux* (St. Petersbourg, 1903), 161; Rehman, *The Last Two Dynasties*, 80.
204 Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue*, 132.
also an Indian aspect on the other, to the extent that Buddhism was still widespread among the people of India and Afghanistan, so the religion retained its ideological force even though strong Buddhist kings had been absent since the Mauryas. In a manner reminiscent of the Ghaznavids, the lords of southern and eastern Afghanistan were not able to assert their political power in their own right and even among their kinsmen without the support of outside great powers. They constantly sought higher ideological status, preferably from distant rulers who would not meddle directly in their local affairs. The Turk Shahis projected Indian Buddhism to the Tang, while the Tang emperor appeared to be the ʿAbbasid caliph of his day.

In the latter half of the 8th c., the ʿAbbasids grew strong and were able to pursue expansion. Northern and southern tiers of Afghanistan experienced new pressures. The south was marked by battles between the Rutbil and the Sistan Caliphal forces on the one hand and the Caliphal armies and the local Kharijites on the other, the latter who managed to murder or disrupt the local ʿAbbasid governor on more than one occasion. In the face of these threats, the Rutbil resorted to time-tested combined strategies of appeasement, retreat, and ambush. In the north, the troops of the Khurasan governor defeated forces in Kabul in 787 and looted “Śānahār”, a large Buddhist center filled with “idols”. Not all of the Buddhist elite should be assumed to have displayed ideological or religious purity in the face of rising ʿAbbasid power. Indeed, some may have been rewarded for the attacks on the Shahis, such as Fadl ibn Yahya ibn Khalid ibn Barmak, who probably came from a prominent Buddhist family, but had been appointed governor of Khurasan after the ʿAbbasids conquered the city of Ghurwand in 792 north of Kabul.

Ibn al-Athīr, VI, 114. This “Shahbahār” is “Śāhi vihāra”, vihāra being a Buddhist monastery, of which there were many mentioned by the traveller Huei Ch’ao. See Fuchs, “Huei Ch’ao's Pilgerreise”, 448. This is called “Naubahār” by Ya’qubi, Kitāb al-Buldān, 290.
By the end of the 8th c., the ʿAbbasids appeared to have the upper hand in southeast Afghanistan by coordinating with local clients.

The civil war over the Caliphate, however, opened an opportunity for the Kabulshah, along with other local lords, to make claims on lands adjacent to Khurasan. This proved to be a terrible mistake when Maʿmun, who had been governor of Khurasan, emerged victorious as Caliph in 814-15; he immediately dispatched troops to punish the Shah, who probably bore the Sanskrit name Spalapatideva. Crushed by the offensive during which the Muslims looted the crown and throne, the Shah presented himself to the Caliph in Merv and professed Islam. ʿAbbasid governors appeared in Bamian, Kabul, and Kandahar, accompanied by garrisons and the postal service; they seem to have reinstated the Rutbil and the Shah as titular heads, but the tribute was doubled. In pursuit of fleeing troops from Kashmir, who had come to the aid of Kabul, the ʿAbbasids advanced across Gandhara to the Indus and planted their black flag. Iran in the form of the Caliphate had advanced against India as the ʿAbbasids took control of the Kabul river valley and Ghazni.

During the Khurasan governorship of ʿAbd Allah ibn Tahir (r. 828-845), the succeeding Kabulshah, Lagaturman, paid an annual tribute of a million and a half dirhams and two thousand slaves. The burden on the political economy encouraged the machinations and complaints of internal rivals, who overthrew the Shah through the designs of the Brahmin minister Kallar in 843. Biruni refers to that new line of kings as

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207 Rehman, The Last Two Dynasties, 85.
208 Baladhuri, The origins of the Islamic state, 402.
209 M.A. Ghafur, “Two Lost Inscriptions Relating to the Arab Conquest of Kabul and the North-West Region of West Pakistan”, Ancient Pakistan II (1965), 4-12.
the “al-şāhiyyat al-hindiyya” from this point onward.\textsuperscript{210} The coinage of this dynasty was intended to distinguish them from the previous one. His phrase has conventionally been translated into “Hindu Shahis” in English, but these kings could just as well be called “Indian Shahs.” In contrast to the previous line of Kabul rulers, they all had names in Sanskrit, a phenomenon well underway in the last half century of the “Turk” Shahis.\textsuperscript{211} Apparently, the Indianization of the dynasty in Kabul was a regular tendency of state formation which intensified over time.

This internal coup probably weakened the already tenuous ties between the rulers of Kabul and Zabulistan. The Shahis reformed their coinage under a ruler called “Sāmand” by Biruni; his coins, with the legend Śrī Sāmantadeva, became the standard for the rest of the dynasty. At that time, samanta was a title similar to raja to indicate a kind of chief or feudatory.\textsuperscript{212} This change in titulature from shah to samanta may have deepened the gap between the valley’s two kingdoms. In the coming period, the two rulers of southern Afghanistan would not draw any closer.

Their weak relationship appears to have opened the space for the penetration of Kharijite factions which had often disrupted the extension of Muslim power in the east. The term Kharijite gradually emerged as a generic grouping for Muslims who were strongly opposed to the Caliphal order. Their political genealogy begins with their refusal to accept the compromise reached in 657 after the Battle of Siffin between ʿAli and Muʿawiya, which eventually marginalized ʿAli, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet

\textsuperscript{210} Biruni, Hind, 350.
\textsuperscript{211} Biruni, Hind, 351, mentions the names Kallar, Sāmand, Kamalū, Bhīm, Jaipāl, Anandināl, Tarōjanāl (Trilocanapāl) and Bhīmpāl. Coin evidence and the Rājatarāṅgiṇī adds the names Khudarayaka, Lallīya, and Vakka.
\textsuperscript{212} Originally, it meant neighbor, but an Indian process parallel to sub-infeudation had begun which would gradually replace those titles with more exalted ones. R. Thapar, Early India: from the origins to A.D. 1300 (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 444-5.
Muhammad, as Caliph. Their refusal to accept the arrangement placed them outside caliphal chains of political authority; nevertheless, their status as Muslims placed them culturally and religiously in the Islamic world. During the 9th c., the Kharijites acted as proxies between the Saffarids and the Taharids, establishing some settlements in the Kabul river area. An Arabic-Sanskrit inscription in the Tochi valley east of Ghazna mentioned a tank built under one of these Kharijite lords. There was also a Kharijite stronghold nearby in Gardiz. In this way a new heterodox Islamic element was added to the political culture of the area even as Hindu elements strengthened in the form of the reconstituted Shahis.

From the mid-9th c., these weakened Shahis were exposed to a new threat in the form of the Saffarids of Sistan. A series of battles started in the early 860s between forces in Sistan and Bust which resulted in victory for the troops of Yaʿqub ibn Laith of Sistan. Yaʿqub’s enemy in Bust was not entirely vanquished and was cooperating with the Rutbil, perhaps even having been installed by the Rutbil. When the Saffarids marched eastward, they confronted a large army of tens of thousands of troops and many elephants, but the Saffarids were able to break the lines with a small fast contingent and kill the Rutbil along with some other commanders. They captured a silver throne, four thousand horses, and a large number of camels, mules, and elephants; installing a relative of the Rutbil in Rukhkaj. The Saffarids then captured Ghazni and extracted a promise of annual tribute from the Kharijites in Gardiz; the following year, the Saffarids

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215 This Rutbil seems to have been named “Lakan the Lak”. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣīrī*, 318. Raverty’s edition used.
216 *Tārikh-i Sīstān*, 205.
conquered the upper Kabul river valley in 870-871, probably taking a route through Bamian and Balkh in the north, on the pretext of eliminating a fleeing “son of the Rutbīl”. The Rutbil was no more, although he was often confused in later accounts with the Shahis and with subsequent rulers of the Kabul river valley.

The Shahi ruler “Samanta” was imprisoned, and a Saffarid governor was installed in his place who was perhaps a pliable member of the Shahi line. His name was Śri Khudarayaka (“little raja”), and he struck Bull and Horseman coins according to the weight standard of Islamic dirhems. This period lasted only a decade, however, for soon after the death of Yaʿqub in 879, Khudarayaka appears to have been overthrown and replaced by a ruler named Lalliya. Yaʿqub’s successor ʿAmr could not reassert power over Kabul, even though he controlled Khurasan, indicating the relatively superficial power of the Saffarids over most of Afghanistan.

It is perhaps at this time that the Shahis began to actively seek increased influence in the Panjab, perhaps to compensate for their limitations in Afghanistan. Lalliya offered occasional support to the Gurjara-Pratihara rivals of the Kashmiris; eventually this antagonized the ruler of Kashmir to the extent that his troops marched on Kabul and deposed Lalliya between 902 and 904 in favor of his son, whom the minister of Kashmir renamed Kamalu. Since these powers were both Shaivite, it is unlikely that religion was a motivation for the Kashmiri invasion of Kabul.

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217 Rehman, The Last Two Dynasties, 102.
218 This confusion has also appeared in current scholarship which greatly complicates efforts to understand the history of early medieval Afghanistan. There is a persistent tendency to conflate all of the pre-Islamic rulers of southeast Afghanistan into a rather undifferentiated mass to the extent that their known differences and shifting relations disappear. This makes it particularly difficult to trace the growth of Hinduism in Afghanistan in the form of Shaivism which was patronized by the Shahis.
219 Samanta was a kind of vassal in late antique India so this may have been a title rather than a proper name. Also see Rehman, The Last Two Dynasties, 105.
From this point onward, Shahi and Kashmiri relations appear to be close and were concerned primarily with checking Gurjara-Pratihara expansionism, especially during the reign of Mahipala (r. 914-944), the Gurjara-Pratihara ruler of Kanauj. Even though the Shahis were Shaivites and entwined by marriage with Kashmir, some of their aristocracy seem to have hedged their position by adopting Muslim nomenclature. In this case, Afghanistan’s elite were inspired by pragmatism more than ideology.

The periodization and extent of Shahi rule in the Panjab is not completely clear. They certainly controlled Gandhara by the mid-9th c., but their southern border may have reached only to Nagarkot. Lahore and its environs were probably ruled by a separate raja; near the end of their reign, the Shahis defended themselves against this raja, who attacked them in Nandana and Taxila while they were battling the Ghaznavids. It is only clear that the Shahis controlled a large stretch of the Salt range when they fought the Ghaznavids from their fortress at Nandana. In any case, it is known that the Shahis were never in complete control of the entire Panjab. By the start of the 10th c., a combination of powers from Iran and India, the Saffarids and the Kashmiris, had weakened the Shahis, with no certain outcome for either “Indian” or “Iranian” forces, which generally preferred to establish subordinate clients than directly occupy the area.

Nevertheless, the 10th c. as a whole marked a stabilization and even expansion of the Shahis which was not entirely reversed until the end of that century. In 913-914, the Samanid governor in Ghazni was overthrown by ʿAbbasid officers who came to control the area from Sistan to the river valley. A turbulent battle for power in southern Afghanistan between local strongmen resulted in the victory of a pair named Ahmad ibn

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222 This supposition is based on al-Biruni who mentioned that the Turk Shahis were in Nagarkot. Al-Biruni, *Hind*, 349.
Qadam and Ṭarabil, the latter who is described as “commander of the Indians / Hindus”. These men seem to have taken control of the old Rutbil lands with the help of a substantial “Indian” contingent. Iranian forces were again on the wane in southern Afghanistan, even though they were greatly expanding in the north in Samanid territory.

Since Ghazni disappears from the historical record from 918, it is only certain that at some point in the following four decades, a new power, allied with the Kabulshah, emerged in Ghazni and the river valley. These rulers were called the Lawiks, and they controlled Ghazni as clients to the Shahis in the mid-10th c. They had the first names Abu Bakr and Abu ‘Ali, which suggests that they were perhaps partially Islamicized. Perhaps they were members of some of the aristocracy which had converted to Islam or at least had adopted Muslim names. There is no mention that they were Kharijites. The Kabulshah and Lawik only reappear in the historical record with Alptegin’s attempt to enter Ghazni in 962. Since the ruler titled “Lawik” would appear to have been a Muslim at the time of Alptegin’s siege, then the earliest enemies of these “proto-

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223 Rehman, The last two dynasties, 307. Rehman speculates plausibly that Tarabil could be an Indian name, 119.
224 Bahār, Tārīkh-i Īstān, 305-7.
225 There are serious problems with the account of the early Ghaznavids given in Wink, Hind Vol.1, 125-126: “In 933 the virtually independent Samand wālī of Zabulistan was driven out of his headquarters at Ghazna by Alptigin, the slave general who became the founder of the dynasty of the Ghaznavids and gave a new impetus to Islamic expansionism... Firishta writes that already during Alptigin’s lifetime (c. 933-963) his general Sabuktigin had begun to raid the provinces of Lamghān and Multān... When Sabuktigin attacked Jayāpāl the latter was assisted by the kings of Delhi, Ajmer, Kalinjar, and Kanauj.” In fact, Ghazni was ruled in the 960s by someone called the Lawīk, who was probably a client and brother-in-law of the Kabulshah; the Samanid governor had been deposed a half century earlier by an ʿAbbasid commander. Alptegin conquered Ghazni in 351/962 but he died the following summer and his troops were expelled by forces allied with Lawīk the following year in 964. Sebuktegin, born only in 331/942-3, did not take command of the troops in Ghazni until his mid-thirties in 366/977. Unfortunately, the incorrect dating has been repeated in Wink, “The early expansion of Islam in India”, The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The tendentious 17th c. account of the Bijapuri Firishta has been discussed in relation to the Ghaznavids in the introduction; the fictitious coalition of “Hindu kings” has a long pedigree and seems to have been adopted in this instance from Ray, The dynastic history of northern India. The political history of this period is treated in greater detail in Chapter V.
Ghaznavids” may have been a Muslim-Hindu coalition consisting of the Lawik and the Shahis.

In the 10th c., the geographer Maqdisi and the anonymous author of the Ḥudūd al-ʿālam use the name Ghaznīn. Ghazni was not considered a beautiful city due to its lack of gardens; yet, it was praised for its fresh cool climate and the absence of insects. Winter was snow-filled, and summer risked the occasional floods, such as one which inundated a suburb of the city in the 10th c. The area was rich in pomaceous fruit such as apples (amīrī) and elephant pears (pīl amrūd). Istakhri, the 10th c. geographer from Fars, maintains that no city in the area, even those in the neighborhood of Balkh, was richer in merchandise and merchants than Ghazni, the “port” (fardā) of India. It was this Indian “port” where Mahmud, the greatest Ghaznavid Sultan, was born.

At the cusp of the Ghaznavid age, the Kabul river valley was a commercially active area with a multilayered society and continuous history of state formation. This area required detailed treatment for many reasons, the most obvious being that the Ghaznavids substantially arose from this area, and they were raised there with the sole exception of Sebuktegin, who was barely twenty years old when he reached Ghazni.

Moreover, there is a persistent tendency in the scholarship to view the period between the 7th–10th c. as an obscure and confusing time, filled with strife between implacable foes, who were motivated either by a spirit of Islamic jihad or by a desire to defend their timeless traditions. There is no doubt that religion played an ideological and political role

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226 In the 13th c., Yaqt maintains that this is the correct form. Bosworth, “Ghazna” in C.E. Bosworth (ed.), Historic cities of the Islamic world (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
228 Bayhaqi, Tārikh-i Baihaqi, ed. Fayyad, 340.
229 Reports of al-Thaʿlibī, The Laṭāʾif al-maʿārif.
but the sources show a different situation than the conventional story focused on a purported civilizational clash.

The history of the area can be reconstructed on the basis of textual and material evidence to a remarkable degree; for example, there is better evidence available for the Shahis than for the Bogomils, despite the many studies on this contemporaneous political and religious movement of the medieval Balkans. The Shahis shifted their allegiance from Buddhism to Shaivism and changed from a Central Asian to a more Indian cultural affiliation. They had occasional reversals, but also some victories and they did not suffer greatly from Islamic forces until the first quarter of the 9th c. Even after that point, they reconstituted themselves and expanded to an extent through the 10th c. They had a large measure of local autonomy though they often needed some kind of political validation from external Tang, Caliphal, or Kashmiri powers. They were able to prevent an easy path to expansion for Alptegin and his successors despite having suffered some diminishment. Their greatest threats could emerge from the Indian world as much as the Iranian, in the form of Kashmiri lords, the raja of Lahore, or the Gurjara-Pratiharas.

Meanwhile, the Muslims were neither monolithic nor unchanging. In a sectarian age, they were split into various Caliphal and Kharijite factions and were often in conflict with one another prior to mounting any campaigns against “infidel” neighbors, with whom they occasionally found common cause. Usually, Muslim powers were content to use Shahi clients as long as tribute and the appearance of obeisance were maintained; sometimes they found themselves on the losing side, most shamefully during the episode of the “Annihilated Army”. Islamic forces frequently lacked the capacity to fight: Hajjaj’s command to occupy southern Afghanistan resulted in rebellion and compromise,
the Saffarids maintained a loose authority over southern Afghanistan, and the Samanids were ejected with relative ease at the start of the 10th c. A gradual process of mixture and assimilation appears to persist in Afghanistan with the primary alternation occurring between an Indian and Iranian cultural complex mediated by the northern and southern spheres of the Hindu Kush, which was not significantly different than the dynamic in previous centuries. In other words, practical considerations usually outweighed ideology for all parties in this fractious age of relatively weak rulers situated on a frontier zone.

**Medieval state building**

The Ghaznavid state of Afghanistan emerged during a period characterized by medium to small states. This long-term trend had been underway in some form for nearly three centuries in Iran, Central Asia, and India; the early Islamic caliphate was the exception which proved the rule. In the Eurasian core territory, there had been a perceptible weakening of the large sedentary powers, opening gaps for the growth of smaller and often nomadic states. Over the course of the 6th c., Byzantine and Sasanian forces had engaged in a number of battles, especially through proxies: the Banu Ghassan phylarchs on the Syrian border, proclaiming Monophysite Christianity under the king al-Harith ibn Jabalah (r. 529-569), supported Byzantium, while the Banu Lakhm of al-Hirah, near Najaf, nurtured a major center of Nestorian Christianity, heresy to the Byzantines, with the encouragement of their Sasanian allies.231 In 610, Herakleitos, son of the Byzantine governor of Carthage, used his fleet to quell a revolt in Constantinople;

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231 Houtsma, “Lakmids”, *EI*. The Monophysite orientation of the Banu Ghassan was not favored by Dyophysite Byzantium, but relatively tolerated in the face of Nestorianism, which was sheltered by the Sasanians and their Banu Lakhm allies and perceived by the Byzantines as the greater ideological and military threat.
in the chaos, the Sasanians marched into important cities in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. By 622, Herakleitos campaigned to recover eastern territories, repelling an Avar, Slav, and Sasanian siege of Constantinople in 626 and eventually advancing to surround Ctesiphon in 628. But these frequent Byzantine-Sasanian wars devastated the western Asian countryside and intensified a process of nomadization which had been expanding in south Arabia over the course of the previous century.

Eastward, the Gupta empire had resisted the Hephthalites successfully since the last decades of the 5th c., but by the start of the 6th c., most of their defenses were undermined and the Hephthalites conquered most of the Indus. Although the Guptas were able to recover some lost ground by 530, the central dynasty collapsed by 550. At the midpoint of the 6th c., the Hephthalites, centered in Bamiyan, were well-entrenched across the late antique Hindu Kush and had gained roots in parts of northwestern India. Eventually, a coalition of princes gathered around Harshavardhana (r. 590-647), the grandson of a Gupta princess, and were able to assert their strength from the central city of Kanauj, in contemporary Uttar Pradesh near Lucknow, against the newcomers and forge a new network of vassal relations across most of northern India. A rough parallel can be drawn in the first part of the 7th c. between the briefly resurgent sedentary states led by Herakleitos and Harsha on the western and eastern peripheries of “Iranshahr”. Nevertheless, this resurgence of large settled states was short-lived and deteriorated in mid-7th c. with the fragmentation of Harsha’s kingdom soon after his death, the destruction of the Sasanians, and the Byzantine loss of eastern and southern territories to the Arabs.
These events marked the end of large settled states in western, central, and south Asia, which would not reappear until the rise of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. It may be also stated that this decline of large states marked the end of ancient history across a very wide area, at least in terms of political history. From this perspective, the early Islamic caliphate can be seen as the last moment of late antique history as much as the first moment for the medieval period, which was characterized mainly by a persistent tendency toward medium to small states. The Ghaznavids appear near the middle of this almost millennium-long “medieval” period, substantially supplanting the Shahis due to their ability to draw on resources from the disintegrating Samanid domain, in addition to their rootedness with local forces in southern Afghanistan. Whether in Iran, Central Asia, or India, the contraction and even fragmentation of political power persisted throughout the medieval period and defined the channels of action for the emergent Ghaznavids who were situated between these determinative macroregions.
IV. Monetization and Urbanization

The Sultan and money

In his treatise on precious stones and metals, Biruni begins with an extended series of reflections on the anthropology of treasured objects. While discussing the relationships between monarchs, wealth, and power, he divulges a curious anecdote about Sultan Mahmud:

“I remember a constant habit of the late Amir Yamin al-Dawla Mahmud, God's mercy on him, who no sooner spotted a quarry and made a hunting of it, was in quest of another, and he took his hunting retinue in that direction. He searched for the quarry as it would move from one valley to another. Once on returning from Khwarezm, he became rather uneasy, and said: "Astrologers tell me I have a little over ten years left to me of life." And then he averred: "I have my fortresses stuffed with all kinds of wealth, which, if spent upon the people according to the time left to me, should suffice, however efficient or spendthrift I may prove to be." I was thrown into a state akin to intoxication when I heard this, and about which he was always suspicious and felt that he was wronged by me. I said: "Render thanks to God, pray to Him and beg Him to keep your treasury safe. That is to say, let your fame and your government be far from harm as these treasures accumulate only through them, and let not a day pass spelling harm to them.” His uneasiness was alleviated when he heard my rejoinder. This admonition from me has a moral for those who perceive. Look at the fate of Amir Mas’ud the Martyr (may God favour him with high station). When he was martyred, his government was dispersed, and whatever wealth he had
collected, whether inherited or earned, was scattered to the winds, as on the Day of the Smoke, everything that the tribe of ‘Ad had was wafted like dust. This was the writ by Destiny.”

Biruni wants to convey the didactic message that Fate can destroy all riches and power: behind the glory of wealth’s accumulation is the feared opposite of its dissipation. His Qur’anic allusion to the torment of the tribe of ‘Ād, a proud robust tribe which suffered from its rejection of the early prophet Hūd, elevates Biruni’s observation to the universal morality of scripture. In his clever response to the suspicious Sultan, he suggested that wise government led to the growth of wealth. Almost in the manner of a mirror for princes, Biruni contrasted Mahmud with the fate of his son and successor Mas‘ud, who lost everything at the end of his life. In the subsequent passage, Biruni implies that treasures in fortresses are similar those interred in the earth: relatively valueless until they are moved and circulated.

But this episode also betrays the Sultan’s restless and unending search for precious metals. It is notable that the great Sultan, the looter of Indian and Iranian wealth, was agitating constantly to find quarries, in a vain hope that there were riches under every mountain valley. As soon as a potential quarry was located, Mahmud dispatched a team to investigate while he rode on to hunt for another and yet another. Upon his return to Ghazni, he confessed to Biruni that he had been consulting astrologers to determine whether he would have enough wealth for the rest of his days. Biruni became dizzy with the thought that Mahmud might spend his riches rapidly, which the Sultan appeared to

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233 Their punishment appears in several places in the Qurʾan. For more on the tribe of ‘Ād and the symbolism of air and wind in the Qurʾān, see McAuliffe, J.D., Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān. (Leiden, 2001), 21-22.
detect, his visage darkening with the suspicion of avarice. Fortunately for Biruni, he restrained himself with clever speech, eventually drawing the lesson that monarchs must rule wisely to transfer their strength and riches to their progeny. But it seems for Mahmud, the anxiety was quite different: the Sultan was not focused on the distant contingency of death, but more directly on the living daily necessity of expenditure.

This chapter will concentrate on the socioeconomic reasons for the Sultan’s behavior and self-confessed fear rather than a purported personal greed for precious metals; in particular, it will examine the relationship between monetization and the urban-rural balance in the medieval Islamic east to determine how money shaped medieval Samanid society and led to the Ghaznavid moment. The intention is to clarify the actual social, political, and economic conditions for the rise of the Ghaznavids without recourse to ethnic, religious, or psychological clichés. Of course, it is hard to imagine that individual Ghaznavid dynasts had no excitement about precious metals; they were not particularly famous for their probity in comparison with other Islamic rulers, such as the Prophet Muhammad; indeed, the Ghaznavids held fabulous feasts, with colorful parades, armies of poets, and copious wine. But comprehending Mahmud’s anxiety necessitates looking beyond the moralistic lesson of Biruni or others who may want to judge the Sultans for irreligiosity in riches or pleasures. Instead, the historical task must contextualize the problem of wealth and its role in the emergence of the Ghaznavids, whether negative or positive to the construction of their power. Specifically, this requires scrutiny of Iran and Central Asia during the Samanid period. What was the historical dynamic that Mahmud was determined to resist?
The medieval silver money crisis

Many parts of the medieval Eurasian world gradually entered a kind of monetary crisis in silver coins, starting gradually in the 10th c. and persisting through the 13th c. This crisis appears to have been centered on the Islamic world, but it came to involve currency systems from southern China to northern Africa. This phenomenon has been discussed in some of its aspects by previous scholarship; nevertheless, the beginning of this development, let alone its depth and scope, has not been sufficiently explored. Consequently, there remains a need to explain the relationships between money and society in the medieval Islamic east as part of the search for clues about the Ghaznavids.

Prior to the Arab conquests, the Byzantines minted gold and copper, while the Sasanians maintained a silver direm, setting the standard for their half-drachms, obols, half-obols, and tetradrachms. The Sasanians minted gold for prestige issues which did not circulate as money; after Khusrau II (r. 580-628), fewer and fewer of these gold coins were issued. A brief surge against the Sasanians by Heraclius led to a spate of Byzantine silver hexagrams from 615 onward, melted from church treasures to pay northern mercenaries; later, this war measure became a regular minting practice. Yet silver was reduced once again by the 670s to ceremonial purposes in Byzantium. Sasanian Iran was the center for high value silver issues.

On the eastern side of Iran, there was persistently high value silver coinage in the Shahi territories which extended into India; yet, a gradual silver shortage may have started beyond the edge of their territory in the Ganga basin, where silver was priced highly as early as the 8th c., suggesting that some kind of shift between supply and
demand had begun by that time.\textsuperscript{234} By contrast, gold did not reach high prices until almost three centuries later. Only copper can be produced in sufficient volume in northern India, which lacks natural deposits of gold and silver, perhaps accounting even today for the high cultural value placed on the yellow and white precious metals. In India as in other places, progressive debasement of silver coins did not become acute until the 11\textsuperscript{th} c.\textsuperscript{235}

It may very well be the case that long-term trade imbalances in the medieval world economy led to the draining of silver from central Eurasia into south Asia, as seems to have been the case for the Mediterranean. In any case, it is a fact that any mild shortages in silver in some areas by the 8\textsuperscript{th} c. became severe and widespread in the Middle East, Iran, Central Asia, and India around the year 1000. On the western and eastern edges of high medieval Iran, a chronic trend of “living without silver” gradually extended and became a core dynamic.\textsuperscript{236}

The acute phase appeared in the 10\textsuperscript{th} c. and lasted for more than two centuries. Silver grew rare in the Levant and Asia Minor after 970 until it had nearly disappeared fifty years later.\textsuperscript{237} The problem struck Buwayhid Baghdad even sooner; by 1010, there were no major silver issues.\textsuperscript{238} The same phenomenon appeared in the Byzantine empire after the year 1000, when silver became increasingly rare with almost no new issues until after the mid-13\textsuperscript{th} c. The famous Samanid silver issues, primarily used for export, suffered debasement throughout the 10\textsuperscript{th} c. Their Qarakhanid successors in Central Asia

\textsuperscript{235} Deyell, \textit{Living without silver}, 188-191.
\textsuperscript{236} Deyell, \textit{Living without silver}, 7.
\textsuperscript{238} Watson, “Back to Gold -- and Silver”, 3, on the basis of al-Maqrizi.
fared no better, regularly using a copper hardener for their “silver” coins. In Iran, the Seljuqs minted almost no silver and used gold coins intensively throughout the 11th c., with the shortage reaching its peak in the 12th c. In China, a form of paper money began by the first quarter of the 11th c., when Sichuan governmental authorities intervened to issue notes on a large scale to deal with currency disorder, basing their practice on prior mercantile and governmental use of bills of exchange for cash or commodities. Initially, these paper notes were fully convertible and secured with deposits; soon afterward, unsecured paper money became common through during Song rule in the 12th c.\textsuperscript{239} Across a wide band of medieval Eurasia, states and societies confronted a host of negative monetary consequences due to silver shortages.

The silver crisis has been characterized in a variety of ways, and it has been recognized in some form in different parts of the medieval world. A. Watson remarked that while “Europe minted virtually no gold until the middle of the thirteenth century, but greatly increased its supply of silver coins, the Islamic countries through much of this same period were experiencing an acute silver famine during which they were able to mint only gold, billon, and base metals.”\textsuperscript{240} He noted that the abundant silver coinage throughout the 10th c. eroded as “one region after another gave up striking silver as the eleventh century progressed.” E.A. Davidovich clarified that “the general features of the silver coin crisis are: the debasing of silver dirhams with alloys (even involving various copper or non-precious metal alloys); the activation of gold coins even in regions where they had previously played no significant role in monetary circulation; and the

\textsuperscript{240} Watson, 'Back to Gold -- and Silver', 1. Italics in the original.
persistence of this situation for some 200 years.” These descriptions may undergo revision as research develops, but they capture the essential features of the phenomenon.

A revival of silver issues in the late 12th marked the beginning of the end of the crisis in western Asia, which had not discriminated between states regardless of their particular Christian or Muslim affiliation. In the Levant, the Ayyubids restarted silver coinage in Damascus by 1174/1175, and in Hama and Aleppo by 1183/1184, until silver replaced gold in Syria becoming nearly 85 percent of the issues by the 1240s. A similar revival appeared in Anatolia with the Seljuqs of Rum, who began issuing silver again in Ikonia (Konya) in 1185/1186 and in Cesarea (Kaiser) in 1199/1200. Silver in Mesopotamia reappeared somewhat latter farther south when Baghdad in 1233/1234 resumed silver minting again, and eventually also Wasit and Basra around 1300. In Trebizond, silver was reissued gradually after 1235, and soon afterward in Tiflis, Georgia after 1240. Egypt under the Bahri Mamluks experienced strong silver issues by 1257. In Central Asia and Iran, the Mongol organization of trade and travel, along with the de-theasaurization of Chinese silver, certainly played a role in the reinfusion of silver stocks: silver reappeared in Tabriz by 1271, in Bukhara by 1281, in Samarkand by 1283, and in Tashkent 1284. By the turn of the 14th c., the medieval monetary crisis in silver was over.

Ratios of gold to silver struck by the mints may help explain in part the gradual export of silver from the Islamic west to Byzantium and western Europe, even if these official ratios were not exactly identical to market valuations. In the late 7th c., gold to

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silver was struck at a 1:18 ratio in Byzantium while at 1:14 in the western Islamic world. This meant that it was profitable to buy Byzantine silver hexagrams with Umayyad gold dinars, so that the silver could be reminted as dirhams; furthermore, Byzantine legislation favored the import of gold. But in western Europe the mint ratio was 1:12, so the opposite transaction would have been profitable; it was better to sell dirhams to obtain the western Roman tremissis. It is easy to imagine an intrepid money trader selling dirhams for tremissis, only to exchange them for hexagrams to be reminted into dirhams. This circulation does not explain entirely the gradual export of silver to western Europe, but it does illustrate the potential in the medieval world for regional monetary balances to shift on the basis of differences in valuation within each zone. This imbalance in the Mediterranean cannot explain, however, the full extent of the crisis in silver money across a broad set of regions, especially in the Islamic east.

*Regions and zones of habitation*

Significantly, this silver shortage took place in an increasingly urbanized eastern Islamic world. Expanding urbanization accompanied the extension of a silver standard in the Islamic east along with innovations in monetary, fiscal, and economic practices. Urbanization has been characterized as one of the most important developments in medieval Islamic history. The study of the “Islamic city” gained ground in the 1950s, when the city was treated as a structured site for a variety of local organizations and popular movements. This provided the starting point for a new wave of research during

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the sociological turn of the late 1960s and 1970s. Over the course of the subsequent decade, scholars expanded the scope of inquiry and interrogated older paradigms, especially those promoting the “Islamic” character of the medieval city. As case studies multiplied, the utility of model building came under scrutiny, but the depth and regional focus of the research grew remarkably, despite the persistent tendency in US, UK, and French scholarship to concentrate on Near Eastern and Mediterranean cities to the marginalization of Iranian, Central Asian, and Indian urban areas.

Urban growth in the Islamic east was not directly a result of Arab colonization. Conquering Arab Muslim armies established cantonments close to major cities, thus augmenting the urban fabric, but their presence did not affect all cities in the same manner. Kufa and Basra in Iraq grew in the first Islamic century, due to their proximity to al-Hira and Ubulla, but Fustat in Egypt and Qairawan in Tunisia expanded gradually, perhaps due to the distance from Arabia, the major initial source for the influx of newcomers. In Iran and Central Asia, however, Arab migration was more sporadic and often a matter of Caliphal edict; consequently, urban growth in these regions cannot be explained simply by an increase of Arab Muslim soldiers and those who served or profited from them. In fact, in the Iranian case, the process of urbanization only


accelerated from the end of the 2nd/7th c. through the 4th/10th c., sometime after the first armies arrived.

Nevertheless, a wide band of cities from the Zagros to the Hindu Kush swelled with people by the 10th c. The combined population of Isfahan in the pre-Islamic period was probably ten to twenty thousand, but the extensive city walls of the 10th c. indicate a city of at least two hundred thousand people. The northern city of Ray showed a smaller but comparable degree of expansion.246 Nishapur possessed only few thousand souls on the eve of the Arab conquest, yet it expanded to one to two hundred thousand by the late Samanid period.247 The geographer Maqdisi reports that Merv, Herat, and Balkh were the same large size and it is certainly possible that each of these cities numbered at least one hundred thousand people within the city walls.248 When we consider the extensive suburbs of medieval cities, the total size of the urbanized population becomes even larger.

Notably, a quickening urbanization also appeared in northern India at approximately the same time.249 This marked a significant new phase of growth which reversed the tendency of stabilization or even de-urbanization since the close of the Gupta period.250 Although the general phenomenon is well-acknowledged, there are still intense debates about the meaning of this fact. There is no clear consensus about the changes in land ownership and how these affected urbanization and peasant autonomy.

There are additional questions about the condition of the money supply across the

249 We lack the kinds of population estimates for medieval India that we have for Iran and Central Asia.
subcontinent and its changes as cities developed. Particularly disputed is the characterization of the post-Gupta period as a kind of “Indian feudalism”. Despite the absence of a consensus on these stimulating points of disputation, there is an undeniable urbanization in medieval India from the 10th c. In light of this fact, the simultaneous urban expansion in Iran and Central Asia invites the suggestion that similar developments occurred across Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{251} It is more difficult to verify this supposition given the state of archaeological research in Afghanistan, but the evidence suggests that there may have been expanding urbanization across the Hindu Kush at the same time as the growth in India, Central Asia, and Iran.

Human life in medieval Iran and Central Asia can be located generally in either pastoral, rural, and urban zones, which broadly correspond to different types of economic activities. Pastoralists, mostly in the steppe in Central Asia, are primarily food producing, concentrating on animal products for personal and family consumption or for trading with the settled population. Pastoralists can trade animal goods such as hides and they can provide labor, whether free or bonded, but their basic preoccupations involve food and water, including sustenance for their life-giving animals.\textsuperscript{252} The rural agricultural zone is also food producing, but its primary products are plants instead of animals. These plants include grains, vegetables, and fruits, which can feed a number of animals, although large animal concentrations and their specialists are primarily in the pasture. The rural zone is also mostly a substance economy, but it can provide labor and it can produce cash crops, a phenomenon increasingly witnessed in the Samanid period, although this can reach a

\textsuperscript{251} Archaeology for the southern Hindu Kush is not as well developed as in the north, precluding a definitive statement.
\textsuperscript{252} See A. Khazanov, \textit{Nomads and the outside world} (University of Wisconsin Press, 1994) and A.M. Khazanov and A. Wink, \textit{Nomads in the sedentary world} (Richmond: Curzon, 2000) for more on nomadic pastoralism.
natural limitation due to the demands of food consumption for the settled and unsettled populations.

The urban zone produces little food by comparison, even if there are local gardens and the presence of animals within urban areas; certainly, these small scale activities cannot produce enough food to supply the entire urban population. In general, the urban zone relies on the agricultural and pastoral zones for food. At the same time, the urban zone has certain features which distinguish it sharply from the others: it produces a much greater number of manufactures, provides more services, including religious, administrative, and cultural services, and is usually the central locus for rent, either in terms of location, rights, or money.

The intensity and variety of exchanges in the urban sectors, including the demands of government and commerce, provide fertile ground for the establishment of abstract value to facilitate social and cultural interaction. It is not by accident that the coins which served as money are found often in urban zones as compared to rural and pastoral zones. Urban people often need money for urban exchanges and particularly may need it for the purchase of food or for the payment of various rents. These broad analytical distinctions between different zones of settlement help to distinguish logical phases of a dynamic historical interaction between these zones, which may occur through such processes as trade, migration, or loot. They also suggest the places to look for the socioeconomics of medieval money.
Long-term trends in urbanization and monetization

The baseline for growth in Iranian and Central Asian cities lies in late antiquity. The archaeological examination of Sasanian urbanization has been less favored traditionally as an object of study than the artistic and numismatic heritage, which was supplemented by the abundant legendary and historical literature, often interpreted through the lens of imaginative 19th c. European travelers. This situation changed for the better after World War I, in particular with the US and German expedition to Ctesiphon in the 1920s, the US missions in Qasr-e Abu Nasr and Estakhr in the mid-1930s, and the French expedition to Bishapur in the late 1930s. After World War II, more archaeological missions followed led by western European and US teams, but the majority of these concentrated on the Sasanian southwest and northwest, where there is a clear predominance of spectacular sites with remarkable rock carvings and stone architecture. The Sasanian layers of eastern Iran were not extensively examined until the 1970s. In any case, the eastern sites appear to have developed less dramatically than the western ones, although there are still some notable changes.

The relative paucity of Sasanian royal cities in the north and east of Iran may have been a consequence of the power of Parthian lords in the “Sasanian-Parthian confederacy.” None of the known sites in the Sasanian east are comparable to the

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254 Pigulevskaja emphasized the Sasanian concentration on urban construction in Fars and Mesopotamia. See Pigulevskaja, *Les villes de l’état Iranien aux époques Parthe et Sassanide,* Paris, 1963. There have been fewer extensive archaeological missions on Sasanian remains since the late 1970s.
255 See P. Pourshariati, *Decline and fall of the Sasanian empire: the Sasanian-Parthian confederacy and the Arab conquest of Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), for this notion, especially 39-42 for the influence on urbanization. In the *Shahrestânîhâ-ī Ėrānshâhr*, which records the founding myths of various cities under Sasanian control and probably dates from the 6th c., fewer than a fifth of northern and eastern Iranian cities were founded by Sasanians. See T. Daryaeæ, *Šahrestânîhâ-ī Ėrānshâhr: a Middle Persian text on late*
western sites. Nevertheless, some late or middle Sasanian palatial buildings have been uncovered in the area of Ray. Flourishing settlements in Sasanian Khurasan have been uncovered through study of the Damghan area and the upper Atrek valley, the route through which the Sogdian realm connected with wider Iran. In Damghan, there is a gradual expansion of settlement from the late Parthian to the early Sasanian periods, verified by mounds, canals, and the size and density of sherd scatter. By the late Sasanian period, settlement appears to undergo some contraction and a polarization into more remote areas of Damghan; perhaps this was the consequence of the growing dominance of the Hephthalites. The Sasanians moved Khurasan’s capital to Nishapur, but unfortunately very little Sasanian material has emerged and even its exact topography remains a matter of speculation. The fragmentary archaeological evidence and early stage of the scholarship on the area should not detract, however, from the observation that western Central Asia had begun to grow much more rapidly than eastern Iran in late antiquity. It is difficult to be completely certain of this conclusion, however, given the undeveloped state of Sasanian economic history.

In Central Asia, a different settlement history had come into being, overlapping partially with the Iranian tradition but with its own autonomous logic. The new phase can be discerned in the 4th c., when Sogdia was in the last stages of a decline during which


Recent archaeology has indicated the presence of some urbanization from the end of third millennium BCE, long before the Achaemenid or Hellenistic periods. See Pourshariati, 23, quoting Schippmann, Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte, Darmstadt, 1980 (Schippmann 1980).


The valuable studies of P. Christensen, F. Donner, and M. Morony have rectified matters to some measure, but there is much research to pursue before making adequate comparisons with Central Asia.
urban and rural settlement contracted noticeably in the archaeological record. Burial places at the borders of oases fell into disuse, and some settlements were abandoned. Hand-made pottery evidence from the Kashka Darya river indicates a gradual trickle of people into abandoned fertile land. By some point in the 4th c., Samarqand had shrunk so severely that a second fortified wall was built inside the old large wall: there simply were not enough people to defend the city. Yet by the 5th c., a remarkable change reversed the contracting urban zone.

A tremendous growth of settlement began in the 5th c. and persisted through the 6th c. There have been especially detailed studies of Panjkent and Samarqand. Panjkent, founded in the middle of the 5th c., overgrew its walls rapidly, requiring a new line of fortifications so extensive that they could not follow a rectangular plan to encompass the burgeoning suburbs. At the start of the 6th c., the city’s surface area had expanded from 8 to 13.5 hectares, and it continued to grow slowly through the end of the 7th c., as evidenced by a bazaar outside the northeast walls and an artisan’s suburb to the south. Samarqand’s growth was less dramatic but the city also registered the shift. A higher internal citadel was constructed along with a 20 sq. km. wall to protect the oasis, accompanied by a reoccupation and reinforcement of the old Greek ramparts. About three-fourths of the sites south of Samarqand began in this period, though many of them would be abandoned later. Between the Zerafshan steppe and the Dargom canal, 115 sites appeared and persisted through the end of the medieval period, when their numbers were finally reduced by 2/3rds. Similar developments appeared across the steppe, in the Karshi

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oasis, 350 sites were occupied in this period out of a total of 450 in the entire area. During this long 6th c., the settled core territories of medieval Central Asia were founded. In the rural zone, there are many signs of growth in population and settlement. On the whole, it is harder to date the agricultural change, especially in the absence of an undisputed ceramic typology, but it seems quite likely that already existing irrigation works were expanded, including longer canals to take advantage of the dry, but fertile, steppe soils. Western Bukhara extended irrigation works more than 20 kilometers into the steppe. Gigantic walls were built: the “Great Wall” was more than 250 kilometers in circumference and most likely dated from the 5th c. Similar walls appeared across the north from Bukhara to Ferghana. These walls aimed at guarding the rural zone. Thus, along with the obvious qualitative changes in settled life, there was a marked change in the overall quantity of settlement.

Settlement growth was accompanied by monetary and commercial strengthening. At the 5th c. dawn of Sogdia’s urbanization, the silver currency of Sogdia had become extremely debased. A significant new phase began with the Hephthalite conquest of Central Asia and their successful raids on Sasanian territory in the late 5th c. The Hephthalites extracted dozens of muleloads of silver coins annually from the Sasanian shah Peroz before they finally invaded and killed him in 484. This precious metal infusion began to reverse the debasement of silver coins which had become acute with the upswing in Sogdia’s urban expansion and burgeoning silk road trade. The Hephthalites reduced the Sasanian successor Kawad I to a protégé, who even asked the

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263 M.S. Asimov (ed.), *History of civilizations of Central Asia: Vol. 4*, 235.
Byzantines for a loan to pay the onerous tribute, until his reign finally finished in 531. This heavy tribute may have been a factor in the relatively weak growth of eastern Sasanian settlements. Sasanian apocalyptic texts viewed enemy Central Asian troops as the pillagers of Iran.

The Sasanians continued to pay massive tribute in silver coins to the Hephthalite rulers of Sogdia, which no doubt benefited Sogdian merchants. Consumption increased in the expanding Sogdian towns, which also enabled an elite aesthetics initially developed in India during Kushan times and maintained in the subsequent Kushan-Sasanian period. The wars of the 6th c. between the Kidarites, Hephthalites, and the Sasanians had also eroded the strength of Bactria, Sogdia’s main commercial rival in the region. Bactrian settlements deteriorated as those in Sogdia grew, often imitating Bactrian toponyms, architecture, art, and town planning, perhaps due in part to an influx of refugees. In the subsequent century, local Sogdian silk production for export to the west developed to the extent that the Chinese started to refer to the area as the “river of caravaneers.” The tributary transfer of silver wealth lasted for decades until the rise of Sasanian shah Khosrow I (r. 531-579), who allied with Turk invaders to bring about Hephthalite defeat and the division of their lands around 560 AD. Khosrow’s coinage is the lowest point of Sasanian coinage, with thin flans that did not hold die impressions and poor

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portraiture; by contrast, the entire Central Asian area had been infused with thick and distinct silver coins of high precious metal content by the mid-6th c.267

The coinage system transformed along with the pattern of settlement, reflecting the intensified relations with Iran and China. In Bukhara, a new silver coin type called the “Bukhar Khuda” emerged, based on those of Bahram V (r. 420-438) at Merv. There is some uncertainty about exact beginnings of this series, but it is possible that they started at the end of the 5th c. with Hephthalite victories; they were most certainly issued by the 6th c.268 The initial types were executed in dots and dashes with a Pahlavi inscription, but over time they gained a more detailed pictorial representation, so that by the 8th c. they displayed the monarch’s crowned bust on the obverse, a fire-altar with two guards on the reverse, and only a rudimentary inscription, eventually replaced by barbed spikes. The coinage of Samarkand also underwent some Iranization and abandoned the Greek types of the previous several centuries.

In addition to these layers appeared a variety of Turko-Sogdian coinages, which have not been well-studied. These include imitations of Khosrow II (r. 591-628) coins with the inscription “Vraka-tigin”, the founder of the Shahi dynasty of Kabul, Bactrian coins with Turkic titulature, and Sasanian coins countermarked with Turgesh tamgas, the abstract seals of steppe peoples known since the Scythians.269 Warlords alone did not control all coinage, as indicated by the coins in praise of the goddess Nana from Panjikent.270 Square-hole bronze coins with Sogdian inscriptions, similar to Chinese

270 de la Vaissière, Histoire des marchands, 172.
types, were issued in the 7th c. as Sogdian relations with China thickened; low in value, they probably met small money needs. At the dawn of medieval Central Asia, there was a great variety of coinages circulated as money, which reflected to some measure the heterogeneous, layered, and distributed character of the political economy.

The abundance of coins did not guarantee the availability of silver. As early as the 7th c., Bukhar Khuda coins lost 20 to 30 percent of their silver content, and they continued to decline thereafter; this may have been the result of the elimination of tribute or the operation of so-called “Gresham’s law”. These coins began to bear overstrikes to attest to their validity by fiat, not the quantity of their silver content. Long-distance trade was increasingly conducted in prestigious Sasanian and eventually Arab-Sasanian coins. A slave merchant of 639 required “drahms, very pure, minted in Persia” for his human goods. A late 7th c. hoard uncovered at the pass between Ferghana and the Tarim contained 567 Sasanian coins, 281 Arab-Sasanian coins of the Khusro II type, and 13 gold bars. The Sogdians carried these coins great distances, but their use also marked the return of depreciation in Central Asia which had waned since the influx of Sasanian tributary silver.

The mere presence of circulating coins does not indicate the fluctuations of monetization. Sogdian merchants relied heavily on their links with China, where insufficient numbers of metal coins were supplemented by units such as the roll of silk and the bushel of grain, considered monetary instruments in their own right. Silk and grain flows increased during China’s diplomacy with the nomads and came to pay for the salaries of Tang soldiers and administrators in the Tarim during westward expansion. The scale of this usage can be detected by looking at Tang state receipts from the mid-8th c.:
silk and hemp accounted for 55 percent, grain for 35 percent, and coins merely 9 percent of revenue.\textsuperscript{272}

The phases of Sogdian trade in the east have been distinguished by the absence or presence of inexpensive silk, which sourced by the mid-8\textsuperscript{th} c. from arrangements between Sogdian merchants and the Tang state. After the revolt of the Turko-Sogdian general An Lushan in 755, westward-flowing silk came from smaller-scale local Sogdian production, Tang payments to the Uighurs of Mongolia, and from a new maritime route through southeast Asia which gradually supplanted Sogdia’s mediating advantage.\textsuperscript{273} These shifts in the balance of trade, however, had little effect on the overlap between money and commodities which enabled the maintenance of commercial and governmental liquidity.

In effect, the great Sogdian commerce did not substantially rely on coinage of its own. Sogdian exchange had two faces. It facilitated a large-scale barter economy for demand in luxury commodities such as silks, spices, precious metals, and perfumes. Yet, even if Sasanian drahms could be circulated as money in China, it was not coins but silk which operated often as a monetary instrument for large-scale trade.\textsuperscript{274} Moreover, fiscal matters were often conducted in kind within Central Asia as they were within Iranian and Chinese territories. In late antique Iran, Sasanian coinage was found in towns, but peasants, soldiers, and officials were often paid in kind, while taxes were also paid in

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\textsuperscript{273} For details on this shift, see M. Jacq-Hergoulac'h, V. Hobson, \textit{The Malay Peninsula: crossroads of the maritime silk road (100 BC-1300 AD)} (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

\textsuperscript{274} See de la Vaissière, \textit{Histoire des marchands}, 174, for notes on this debate.
\end{footnotesize}
kind. In China, fiscal matters were also handled in kind rather than in money, with the obvious fluid distinctions between commodities and money already discussed.

In Central Asia, late antique documents from Dunhuang, Turfan and East Turkestan focus primarily on fiscal and administrative matters in a barter-based economy, rather than trade. They indicate that much market produce came from rents in kind paid by free and dependent peasants alike. Even in the 8th c., documents from Mount Mugh, the refuge of the anti-Umayyad Sogdian lord Dēwštīč, economic matters concern agriculture and the term “merchant” appears only once. Sogdian lords controlled agricultural revenue and occasionally sent laborers to one another, a practice which anticipated the later exchanges of bondsmen during the Islamic period. On occasion, lords lent capital primarily in the form of technology: a mill was recompensed through flour to the lord Dēwštīč. Peasants paid in kind, often through the products of nature, such as grains, lambs, fruits as well as precious metals. Artisanal goods could also meet tax demands. There was a relative paucity of money in the countryside. The Sogdian economy was based primarily on agriculture despite its reputation for commerce with outsiders; Sogdian rulers lived mostly from land rents, not commerce.

In late antique Central Asia, settlement growth did not occur at the expense of the towns, which expanded at the same time as the agricultural areas; it cannot be claimed that there was a population shift toward the rural zone. Furthermore, Bactrian

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275 Litvinsky (ed.), History of civilizations of Central Asia: Vol. 3, 43. Sasanian knights were also paid in land, thus establishing a small landowning class,
277 These documents are from the first quarter of the 8th c.
278 de la Vaissière, Histoire des marchands,65.
279 Marshak, Negmatov, “Sogdiana” in Litvinsky (ed.), History of civilizations of Central Asia: Vol. 3, 233: “Other peoples knew the Sogdians mainly as silk merchants, but the basis of the Sogdian economy was agriculture on artificially irrigated land.”
280 de la Vaissière, Histoire des marchands, 105.
depopulation is not enough to explain Sogdian urbanization. The settled population as a whole had increased due to the Hephthalite influx, although this was not the only growth factor: there were also technological, commercial, and monetary supports. Neither the Hephthalite conquests of the 5th c. nor the Turk conquests of the 6th c. appear to have caused much damage, according to archaeological evidence; in fact, it may be that urbanization was bolstered over the long-term due to settling steppe peoples and some rents from loot, which enabled high value coinage tradable for goods and supportive of an urban non-food producing population. The agricultural works which remained for centuries were quite impressive to Muslim geographers who visited the area in the 9th and 10th c. In sum, demographic expansion played a role in Sogdian urbanization, in contrast with later Samanid developments.

Moreover, there was not a great degree of monetization at that time, despite the obvious presence of monetary instruments, whether in the form of coinage or commodities. Interregional trade often required precious metal content in the form of stable high value coins or bullion, but many domestic exchanges occurred in kind, through the offering of goods and services. Small money use was limited, not at all used to pay most taxes or meet most needs. There was relatively less state control over coinage than might be supposed; even though the state issued some kinds of coinage, no one appears to have a monopoly over the profitable rights of seigniorage.

There was also a persistent and interconnected undercurrent of depreciation in silver: it may be that high silver prices in India by the 8th c. was connected to the gradual depreciation of Central Asian silver after Hephthalite defeat, through the transmission channels of Sogdian commerce and its mediation with China. Military and commercial

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monetary needs were in close relation; the military’s capacity to extract rents was sometimes the more important factor in establishing the volume of precious metals. In other terms, coinage as money was a factor in settled social relations at the start of Islamic rule in the east, but it cannot be said that there was more than a primitive degree of monetization.

Silver as money in medieval Iran

The monetary regime of the early Islamic period was very conservative. In the first half century after the conquests, there were no changes made in coin issues. The new conquerors were content to use the pre-existing money systems with the obvious difference that they drew upon the rental revenues of the diminished and destroyed empires. By the 690s, ʿAbd al-Malik’s administration minted a new series of epigraphic coins to replace the Byzantine and Sasanian monies. The changes proceeded in stages. The Byzantine gold nomisma transformed into the Umayyad dinar, thereby challenging the commanding Byzantine position in gold.282 The reverse of a nomisma, circa 691, substituted a politically coded cross-on-steps for a more generic pillar-on-steps.283 In 693-697, the obverse with the standing figure of Heraclius was replaced by the standing figure of the caliph, which was soon superseded by a purely epigraphic issue the following year. In addition to iconography, the metrology underwent a small change. The nomisma was 4.45 g., or a 1/72nd part of a Roman pound, but the dinar was lighter, based on a mithqal

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283 The Latin term solidii for gold issues was being replaced by the Greek term nomismata as Byzantium became increasingly Greek speaking. For more details on the transition to the Arab dinar, see Grierson, “The Monetary Reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik: The Metrological Basis and their financial repercussions”, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 3:3 (1960), 244.
standard which weighed around 4.25 g.\textsuperscript{284} The difference was perceptible, and the coins could not have been exchanged on equal terms. The gold dinar stayed at this weight for centuries.

Silver flowed westward from Iran for the payment of tribute and taxes after the establishment of the Umayyad capital in Damascus. The transition from silver “drachm” to “dirhem” was more complicated due to the large number of mints and transitional types.\textsuperscript{285} The earliest evidence for Sasanian-style coins struck in Damascus date from the reign of ’Abd al-Malik. These Sasanian-style coins were imitations of Khosrow II drachms, with the addition of a new mint name, date, and Arabic epigraphy, and were struck in the early 690s.\textsuperscript{286} The gradual shift to epigraphy was already underway in the last decade of the 7th c. and was basically complete in the core Umayyad area by the following decade.

The metrological changes were remarkable. Late Sasanian silver coins, based on an Attic standard initially adopted by the Hellenistic-minded Parthians, had a theoretical standard of 4.12 g., although they usually peaked at 4.00 g., according to an examination of a Susa hoard buried after 638. The Sasanian-style coin was mildly reduced in weight, usually hovering just above 3.90 g.\textsuperscript{287} But with ’Abd al-Malik’s introduction in 78-79/697-9 of the Arab epigraphic dirham, the weight standard was set at 7/10\textsuperscript{th} of a mithqal, approximate 2.90 g., a reduction about 33 percent from the old Sasanian


\textsuperscript{285} Due to different transliteration practices and general lack of knowledge of Middle Persian, it is difficult to settle on a single term for the Sasanian adoption of the Ancient Greek drachma; the terms “direm”, “dirhem”, and “drachm” appear in the scholarly literature. I have used the term “drachm” based on Schindel, “Sasanian Coinage”, \textit{Iranica}.

\textsuperscript{286} Heidemann, “The Merger of Two Currency Zones”, 100.

standard. The reform of gold coinage in western Asia was also initiated by the Caliphal state, probably in response to Byzantine use of gold and the political messages which the use of Roman coinage entailed. But in contrast to the yellow metal, silver, the main currency of the vanquished Sasanians, was not made uniform quickly, despite the reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik. Thus, at the start of the 8th c., there were three kinds of silver coins in circulation: the Sasanian drachm, the Sasanian-style drachm, and the new Umayyad dirham.

Neither the practice of Mediterranean currency arbitrage, which profited from the differences between monetary standards, nor the heterogeneous silver types in the Iran-centered zone, which persisted for more than a century, should detract from observing the broad harmonization of monetary systems across a very extensive band. When the Byzantines in 720 under Leo III reintroduced a silver miliareis for general circulation, they also used a thin broad flan with inscriptions instead of iconography; a good measure of these were simply overstruck Umayyad dirhems.288 When the Carolingian Pepin was crowned in 754-5, he also adopted a broad flan for his silver deniers. In Mesopotamia, there was an overlapping gold and silver standard at the start of the 8th c., but gold was used most often for certain official and ceremonial purposes. Most of Iran kept the broad thin flan of the Sasanian coins, which coincidentally allowed for long proclamations to substitute for the Zoroastrian fire altar. The Central Asian use of Iranian silver and local imitations has already been outlined. Thus, the 8th c. witnessed the extension of a near universal “fabric” of broad flan silver coinage from Septimania to Sogdia, providing at least the aesthetic impression of monetary fungibility.

Moreover, the widespread practice of clipping silver coins gradually equalized the standard to the lighter metrology of dirhems through a social process which continued through the 8th and early 9th c. The wide flat border was clipped around the edge, occasionally to the margin of the iconography. This has been examined for the Umayyad and ’Abbasid period in Syria and Mesopotamia by using hoard evidence, which provides a sample of circulation changes in the century between 737 and 820. None of the four known Umayyad silver hoards or the four ’Abbasid hoards include any gold coin. This is a curious phenomenon because it is known that gold coin was important and used for tax payments by non-Muslims in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Perhaps this indicates the commercial value of silver over the generally more ceremonial and governmental issues of gold. In a hoard from Bab Tuma in Damascus with a terminal date of 130/747-8, 83 percent of the coins were Sasanian, 8 percent were Sasanian-style, and only 9 percent were Umayyad. In the so-called “Damascus” hoard from about the same time, probably deposited in 131/748-9, about 33 percent was Sasanian, 3 percent was Sasanian-style, and two-thirds was Umayyad. Yet for both hoards their weights cluster between 3.76 g. and 4.00 g., with the largest number in the 3.85-3.90 g. range. Although the Sasanian coins were often clipped, the later Sasanian-style coins were hardly clipped at all. Thus, the process of clipping, as long as a half a century after ’Abd al-Malik’s reforms, had slightly altered the standard from the old Sasanian weight to the lighter Sasanian-style coin.

By the start of the 9th c., the clipping had extended to the Sasanian-style coins. The Qamishli and Umm Hajara hoards from northern Syria and the Babylon hoard from

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289 “It is a common feature of early Islamic silver hoards that a high proportion of the coins consist of clipped Sasanian coins.” In Heidemann, “The Merger of Two Currency Zones”, 100.
290 The tax system in this area was modeled from the Byzantine system. Christians in southern Iraq paid in silver. See Heidemann, “The Merger of Two Currency Zones”, 97.
Mesopotamia were deposited around the years 200/815-16 and they show a much smaller percentage of Sasanian coins. Only 12 percent of the Sasanian coins from these hoards are close to the old Sasanian standard, but even that small percentage had been clipped to weigh between 3.75 g. to 4.00 g. The Babylon hoard was almost entirely clipped. Most of the coins had been clipped to conform to the much lighter weight, clustering between 2.66 g. and 3.05 g., with the majority at 2.90 g., the 7/10th mithqal standard set by ‘Abd al-Mailk four or so generations earlier. It is remarkable not only that the Sasanian coin was still circulated nearly a century and a half after the fall of their empire, but also that ‘Abd al-Malik’s much discussed coinage reform had little practical effect on the range of silver currency prevalent in Iran until more than a century later.

Consequently, the progressive debasement of silver coins in this manner does not appear to be a top down process initiated by the state. One simple indication of this fact is the use of clipping rather than re-minting, which could easily be practiced by merchants and others who lacked access to minting facilities. Moreover, this gradual process does not appear to be standardized by direct policy at any particular point. This debasement would appear to follow so-called “Gresham’s Law” in the sense that the dirhem standard drove out the direm and its imitation by forcing them to conform to the lighter silver currency.

Legalists of the time were divided about the issue of clipping, which they doubtlessly confronted in a variety of cases. According to al-Baladhuri, the Maliki school viewed clipping as a corrupt practice, but the Hanifis had “no objection to their cutting when that does not harm Islam nor its people.” Some authorities punished clipping by

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cutting off hands or lashes, particularly for someone suspected of forgery. Curiously, it was remarked that the “unbelievers knew the place of the dirham amongst the people. They improved and purified it. But when it came unto you, [i.e. the Muslims], you debased (ghashshashtumūhu) and spoiled it (afsad tumūhu).” Both debased and spoiled in this context imply cheating and moral decay; the reproach is meant for Muslims to be better than Zoroastrians. Moral and monetary debasement were joined in judicial perception, to be justified or condemned, but not to pass without notice. Astute contemporary observers were well aware of the progressive debasement from the Sasanian silver standard, and they saw the practice as originating in society rather than the state.  

There was a brief attempt in 813 to impose standardization from above upon the victory of al-Maʿmun after the Caliphal succession struggle. The changes were mostly iconographic on both dinars and dirhems, which were both issued on the obverse with verse 30:4-5 of the Koran: “The command is God’s, before and after, and on that day the believers will rejoice in God’s victory”; this verse was possibly used to celebrate al-Maʿmun’s victory. Mint names were included, but otherwise the coins were primarily religious and initially anonymous.

These coins may have been inspired by the Bukhar Khuda types of Central Asia due to their simple inscriptions, mint names, and otherwise anonymous style. Western Indian issues were largely anonymous at this time as well, at best engraved with an oblique epithet, which perhaps provided Indian rulers with some measure of monetary stability; it is curious that al-Maʾmun, the erstwhile governor of Khurasan with control

over parts of Central Asia to the gates of India, made this decision about anonymous
coinage, which invites speculation about his eastern influences. In any event, al-
Ma’mun’s reforms took about 15 years to be implemented for all new issues. The new
issues existed side by side with the money already in circulation, which still consisted of
a large amount of the previous dirhems. As we have seen, there was already a great deal
of harmonization *de facto* before these reforms, which the state may simply have
recognized and attempted to formalize *de jure*.

Furthermore, this reform may have been an attempt by al-Ma’mun to magnify the
religious power of the Caliph over the secular authorities, such as governors and local
lords, who wanted to assert their glory through minting their names on coins (*sikka*). The
emphasis on God over the Caliphal person may have meant an ideological shift. A
Caliphal attempt at control over the monetary economy would also appear to be
confirmed by the reduction in the number of mint towns, probably meant to insure
standardization of the new issues. The anonymity in coinage did not last with al-
Ma’mun’s successor; it became a regular feature of 9th c. rulers to assert their
independence through putting their names on coins, in the case of dynasties such as the
Tulunids of Egypt (254-92/868-905), the Taharids of Khorasan (205-59/821-73), and the
Samanids of Transoxania (204-395/819-1005).

An additional reform by al-Ma’mun, however, survived for centuries: the
abolition of copper in Iran. The last copper issue in Iran dates from 210/845, even though
copper continued elsewhere in the caliphate for another 35 years. Copper would not
reappear in Iran until the 13th c., as the silver crisis gradually came to a close. Perhaps

silver clippings had already supplanted the small money role of coppers and the ʿAbbasids simply recognized the situation; the evidence remains unclear. In any event, the abolition of copper may help explain the persistence of clipping through the 9th c. as a way to generate smaller denomination units for smaller transactions. In the absence of new copper issues from the mid-9th c., silver coins played this small money role even more in Iran and perhaps even exclusively at certain point, in particular if local governments did not accept tax payments in copper or enforce its value any longer.

In general, coins of any type are usually traded at a greater worth than bullion due to portability and signs of authenticity, including official iconography and countermarks to testify precious metal content or to indicate validity within a particular currency system. In this way, standardized coinage supported the value and liquidity of the trading system. Clipping of silver may have occurred with merchants or with tax officials in the market or at the treasury. Treasury officials probably would have preferred reminting rather than clipping, especially after the reforms of al-Maʿmun; thus, social factors appear more probable for the clipping phenomenon, stemming from commercial and daily needs, rather than state policy from above.

In the late 9th c., clipped coins were still so common that clever forgeries sought to replicate their qualities. A counterfeiter’s hoard purchased in Tabriz had a terminal date of 260/873-4; the coins were probably fabricated around that time, all from the same die.²⁹⁷ Even the plated counterfeit coins were clipped to the outer circle of the image to improve the chances of their acceptance. This indicates that clipping was so widely practiced throughout the 9th c. in Iran that few readily accepted non-clipped silver coins, which were circulated from Eastern Europe to Khurasan. In sum, 10th c. Iran intensively

used silver coin for all kinds of transactions on an increasingly monometallic basis, increasing silver demand and potentially creating monetary fragility due to any disturbance to silver supplies.

During the Islamic period, Iran’s monetary and economic history became increasingly entwined with the distinct trajectory of Central Asia. The Taharid and Samanid realms included Khurasan and Mawarannahr, so a common political economy developed in Iran and Central Asia to some measure. Some important eastern Islamic cities, the loci of silver money use, have appeared in this discussion so far: Ray, Nishapur, Merv, Herat, Balkh, Samarqand, and Bukhara. As we have already seen, Central Asian monetary growth was predatory on Iran until the 6th c., when Iran asserted itself against tribute. Debasement tendencies reappeared in Central Asia afterward, with a gradual preference for Iranian silver, now under Caliphal control, for long-distance trade. Through clipping and fiscal policy, there was also debasement in Iran, perhaps resulting in the greater use of silver coin for small money needs after the abolition of copper in the early 9th c. An examination of Central Asia’s monetary and urban history reveals additional clues about the socioeconomics of Ghaznavid expansion.

Islamic Central Asia and silver money

The start of Islamic states in Central Asia brought few changes initially to coinage and monetary systems. In the 8th c., there was circulation of some Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins, along with the Arabic epigraphic dirham of ‘Abd al-Malik, also called Kufic coins. With the conquests of the mid-8th c., local mints in Transoxania started issuing gold, silver, and bronze coins with Arabic on both sides. Kufic gold dinars were
never issued regularly in large quantities: under the Taharids (831-873), there were
periodic issues from Samarkand and Chach, with the later Samanids including the capital
of Bukhara in these occasional issues. Larger numbers of Samanid dinars were actually
issued outside of Transoxania, the core of the Samanid realm, particularly in Nishapur
and Ray. The Nishapur dinars are very high standard, with usually 96 percent fine gold,
but the Ray dinars had a greater range, with a higher and lower standard; this may reflect
the greater use of gold as a monetary medium in Tabaristan and Jibal, on the western
edge of Samanid territory. In Transoxania, however, gold was primarily another
commodity. Al-Istakhri mentions that in Bukhara “dirhams are their coinage; they do not
deal among themselves in dinars, which they treat as goods.” Numismatic evidence
confirms this fact through the composition of the hoards, the well-preserved dinars, and
the episodic issues.

Silver dirhams in Transoxania consisted of two groups of very dissimilar dirhams.
The first group follows a circulation history roughly similar to that in Iran. Late Sasanian
and Sasanian-style coins were used in Transoxiana well through the 8th c., when such
coins could be found in late Sogdian markets. Increasingly these were mixed with
Kufic dirhams from the Umayyads and the early Abbasids, although these were minted in
Iran and merely circulated in Central Asia. In this respect, Central Asia was still
following a previous pattern of using Iranian silver coins for long distance trade. With the
conquest of Central Asia, these Kufic dirhams became more abundant as they were

299 This view was reinforced by Yaqut in the 13th c., who stated that “in the time of the Samanids, the
inhabitants of Bukhara used dirhams for trading purposes and did not deal among themselves in dinars.
Gold was just another commodity.” Yaqut, 392.
minted in Chach, Samarqand, and Bukhara. These also were minted from a high quantity of silver with an official weight standard of 2.97 g.\textsuperscript{301} Thus, the first group consists of high quality silver dirham types, which nonetheless experienced a process of debasement similar to that mentioned for Iran.

The second group of dirhams was the Bukhar Khuda issues, alloyed coins with a somewhat complex history. By the 8\textsuperscript{th} c. conquest, the Bukhar Khuda coins had a monarch’s crowned bust on the obverse and a fire-altar with two guards on the reverse. The Pahlavi inscription had been replaced centuries earlier by a brief Sogdian inscription and eventually barbed spikes, but these were changed in some issues to Arabic inscriptions. In the last quarter of the 8\textsuperscript{th} c., these were called in coin inscriptions “Mahdiyya” after the caliph al-Mahdi (775-85). These Mahdiyya dirhams were over 70 percent silver and weighed 3.2 g., but almost all were \textit{nummi subaerati}, meaning that silver coated a copper core. They were issued by the mints of Chach, Samarqand, and Bukhara. Near the turn of the 9\textsuperscript{th} c., the Bukhar Khuda coins underwent further reforms.

The Bukhar Khuda coins began to appear in three different issues, concentrated on the major cities of western Central Asia. In Chach, with its mines, and in the areas of Khujan, Usrushana, and the Syr Darya, circulated the “Musayyabi” coin, the highest standard of Bukhar Khuda coins, with over 70 percent silver content. Associated with the governor Musayyab ibn Zuhayr, this issue was the successor to the previous Bukhar Khuda series with an estimated annual production of less than 755,000. The “Muhammad” coins covered a wider area, issued in Samarqand for use in Sogdia, Buttam, Kash, Nasaf, Ferghana, and some parts of Usrushana. At twice the volume of production, approximately 1,417,000 annually, these had almost half the silver content.

\textsuperscript{301} M.S. Asimov (ed.), \textit{History of civilizations of Central Asia: Vol. 4, Pt. 1}, 393.
with no more than 40 percent silver. Al-Istakhri reports that these were “from various metals: from iron, copper, silver, and others.” But in Bukhara alone a new Bukhar Khuda coin appeared, containing copper or other non-precious alloys, with no silver content at all. These coins were called “Ghitrifi”, attributed by legend to Ghitrif ibn ‘Ata, the governor of Khurasan in 792-793. These had a production of nearly 1,200,000 annually. In the core of medieval Central Asia, fiat currency ruled.

These Bukhar Khuda coins were distinguished primarily by metrology, not iconography; curiously, they were commonly called after governors, even if the name “Ghitrifi”, for example, did not appear on the coins. In light of their appearance after the Muqanna episode of the mid-770s, it may be that these issues were used to pay soldiers to suppress the uprising or perhaps meet monetary needs through a debased system due to disruption of the silver mine supplies. In any case, the widespread use of these debased Central Asian coins is an obvious example of a tendency toward fiat currency, at least for local circulation. It is also noteworthy that these metallically debased coins were minted in a deliberate and decisive fashion in Central Asia, in contrast with the gradual and less conscious convergence toward debasement for the Iranian silver standard.

In a peculiar Central Asian twist, a hierarchy of fiat coinage combined different monetary practices from the regions where its merchants and soldiers moved. The Bukhar

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303 Narshakhi claims that these coins had various degrees of silver content, but the redaction by Qubawi in 1128 telescoped and confused the Bukhar Khuda reforms, which have been ascertained through textual and material evidence.
304 Debasement is not a universal evil. As C.M. Cipolla noted, “Many historians hold stubbornly to the conviction that currency devaluations in medieval and Renaissance Europe were unqualified disasters and the source of economic distress and disorder (e.g. ch. 13, “The scourge of debasement,” in P. Spufford, Money and its Uses). This is worse than simplistic: it is wrong... a distinction has to be drawn between devaluations for tax purposes, designed to increase treasury revenue, and devaluations designed to increase the amount of money in circulation.” See C.M. Cipolla, Before the Industrial Revolution: European society and economy, 1000-1700 (London: Methuen, 1976),134-135.
Khuda metrology was Iranian since the Iranian silver dirham appears to have been the presumed standard. The iconography was Indian, in the sense that anonymous issues without the names of the current ruler were considered stable currency in the same manner as much of north India. But valuation had Chinese token characteristics since worth was determined by fiat and not necessarily by the exchange price of intrinsic metal content; indeed, the Tang established by fiat in the late 10th c. an iron coin zone in their north to pay soldiers and modulate the outflow of scarce copper. In any event, the trend toward debased fiat currency within the Central Asian trading system indicates a loosened monetary system which could contract and expand with great flexibility. Money valued by fiat also allowed for the penetration of small monies into more and more transactions without particular regard to the limitations on the amount of precious metals.

An extended passage from Narshakhi provides some justification for these monetary practices and can serve as a lens for understanding the problématique of medieval money in Central Asia and Iran. The text starts with the claim that trading in Bukhara was conducted in cotton cloth and wheat at the time of Kana Bukhar Khuda, probably in the late 7th c. This is confirmed by the relatively coinless system of Sogdian trade and the taxation in kind in Sogdian lands perhaps in line with Chinese practices of taxing primarily in silk and grain. This also implies that commerce as such was conducted primarily in bulk goods and, according to the text, it did not seem to apply to the exchange of everyday items. In this sense, cloth and wheat may have been forms of 305 These strings of iron coins were minted in the millions and could be used to pay taxes. Also see Von Glahn, R., Fountain of fortune : money and monetary policy in China, fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
“money” in the Sogdian period much as they were in Chinese lands, in particular since tax revenues were calculated in these units.\textsuperscript{306}

The passage continues by claiming that Bukhar Khuda, upon hearing of coin in other countries, was supposedly the first to mint silver with his image and a crown. This is obviously legendary given the presence of coinage in the area since the Hellenistic period; nevertheless, it justified on conservative grounds the establishment of coinage. By the early 8\textsuperscript{th} c., however, Ghitrif ibn ‘Ata became amir of Khurasan and Narshakhi reports that he was soon confronted with a serious economic problem:\textsuperscript{307}

“At that time, the coins of Khwarazm were in circulation among the people, but they took those coins with reluctance. The money of Bukhara had disappeared among the people. When Ghitrif ibn ‘Ata came to Khurasan, the notables and leaders of Bukhara went to him and requested that since they had no silver left in the city, the amir of Khurasan should order money coined for them from the same die as was used for the coins of Bukhara in ancient times. “The coins should be (such) that no one would take them from us nor out of the city, so we can carry on trading among ourselves with (this) money.” At that time, silver was expensive. Then the people of the city were assembled and their opinion asked on this matter. They agreed that money should be struck of six things: gold, silver, brass, tin, iron, and copper. So it was done. They struck coins with the former die, with the name Ghitrif, i.e. – Ghitrifi money. The common people called them Ghidrifi. The old coins had been made of pure silver, but this money, which

\textsuperscript{306} The fact that silk was “money” for the Tang is commonplace from the perspective of Chinese history, but for those attached to the perception that only “coins” are money, it is salutary to remember the observation of Grierson: “Money lies behind coinage”. P. Grierson, The origins of money (London: Athlone Press, 1977), 12.

\textsuperscript{307} Narshakhi claims that this governor during the time of Harun al-Rashid took power in Ramadan 185/September 801. See Narshakhī, Frye and Qubāvī, The history of Bukhara: translated from a Persian abridgment of the Arabic original by Narshakhī (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1954), 35.
was struck in alloy, became black, and the people of Bukhara would not accept it. The ruler became angry with them and they took the money by compulsion.\textsuperscript{308}

This passage is rich with detail about monetary institutions and practices in medieval Central Asia and Iran. It appears to support the medieval Islamic theory of money, based on Aristotle, by emphasizing money’s character as a social medium of exchange; however, this story also implicates the state in money creation from the very beginning. An initial reading suggests that Bukharan notables first sought legal permission to create this token money, marked with the symbols of local dynastic tradition; afterward, they formed a compact about the precious metal composition of the coin. As a means of overcoming the restriction on trade brought about by the absence of silver, the notables and leaders, merchants or allies of merchants in this case, required political sanction to create this form of money even if they could not infuse it with expensive metal content. In other words, they wanted to value this money through customary agreement— the social aspect of the \textit{nomos} for their \textit{nomismata}.

But the base metal of the coin, blackened through use, brought about its rejection; the people of Bukhara viewed the coin as worthless because it offended their aesthetic sensibilities, even though leading merchants had initially agreed to its circulation. Perhaps to their surprise, these moneymen discovered the superficiality of money. The discrediting of money exacerbated the internal contraction of trade, so the merely symbolic character of law had to become actual force through the anger of the governor. With the breakdown of customary agreement and its consequences, including a potential insult to the minting authorities, the means of exchange had to be imposed on the markets

\textsuperscript{308} Narshakhî, Frye and Qubāvî, \textit{The history of Bukhara}, 36.
of Bukhara district through state power. Of course, this story may also attempt to justify state coercion through the fiction of a long-standing commercial agreement; as indicated below, this is not improbable. Regardless, a two-sided coin emerges from this tale of origins: Narshakhi presupposes that money has a commercial and statal face.

These coins were called Ghitrifi money, but the common people called them Ghidrifi. This may indicate the presence of Turkic speakers in the cities, as it is common to turn “t” to “d” in Turkic; Persian speakers would have lightened the “t” to a “t”. This implies that the cities were mixed Persian and Turkic at that time, much as it is today in Central Asia. We also have some indications of regional integration. Merchants at the court of Ghitrif in Khurasan petitioned for minting in Bukhara because the debased coin seeping in from Khwarezm could not meet the need; clearly, there was some monetary integration between Khwarezm, Khurasan, and Mawarannahr, even if Bukhara had its own special coins. This integration was not perfectly balanced: silver was draining from Bukhara and perhaps too from Khurasan in the 9th c., even though some of it remained in the relatively peripheral area of Khwarezm. Thus, monetary practices in one part of medieval Central Asia could easily affect those in others.

Fiscal Monetization

The state did more than enforce the use of these “base” dirhams in the markets to support commerce through an official medium of exchange. The state’s monetary flows can be treated in simple accounting terms as revenues and expenditures. Both became

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309 Khwarezm is peripheral to the thick band of cities in Khurasan and Mawarannahr. It is primarily a transit point between Central Asia and the Volga basin.
increasingly monetized throughout the Samanid period. Narshakhi mentions the following:

“The exchange was established at six Ghidrifis for one dirham’s weight of pure silver. The government accepted it at this rate (for taxes) so that it became current. Because of this the tax of Bukhara became heavy. The tax of Bukhara in olden times was 200,000 silver dirhams, or a little less. After Ghidrifis were struck and became current at six for a dirham’s weight of silver, the government compelled the people to pay (taxes) in Ghidrifis. When the Ghidrifi became dear, and it turned out that the Ghidrifi dirham became equivalent to the silver dirham, the government refused to accept the silver dirhams, but demanded the Ghidrifis. The tax of Bukhara, which was something less than 200,000 silver dirhams, at once came to 1, (1) 68, 567 Ghidrifi dirhams.”310

This passage has a vague chronology due to the textual history, so it is not completely clear if this change occurred during the Taharid or Samanid period; nevertheless, it reveals much about the evolution of Central Asian money.311 The Islamic Central Asian state had established its grip on money not only through seigniorage but also through taxation; the money of Bukhara acquired value not simply by market transactions. Token coinage was enforced when silver was dear, until these base coins gradually attained parity with silver dirhams. The state eventually refused the silver, which was probably a contributing factor in the further cheapening of silver. Fixed exchange rates with silver were the means for the transition until it became clear that token coinage could dominate the hierarchy of money.

310 Narshakhi, Frye and Qubawi, The history of Bukhara, 36-37.
When settling debts with the state, pure silver coins were weighed and base coins were counted. Tax was presumed to occur in weighed silver, but in practice, counted base tokens were the units of account for fiscal receipts, particularly after the refusal of silver dirhams. This insured demand for token money and permitted the state to extend its monetary power in simple mathematical terms across all goods and services which passed under its control, cheapening its costs tremendously and boosting its rental flows. Internally, money creation became less and less restrained by the available amount of weighed precious silver metal.

This act of state demonetized silver dirhams, perhaps speeding the flight of silver from currency into metalware and hoards; at the very least, it directed silver outward for export as a commodity since its monetary value was reduced through the increased status of base dirhams. The silver-poor monies of Central Asia had little value outside of Samanid territory. Thus, the base dirhams of Bukhara became the Samanid state’s money of account for meeting debts in the capital. Clearly, eastern Islamic authorities understood the tax gain of manipulating the exchangeability between different types of coin and the power of determining the money of account. In these respects, traditional monetary theory, which emphasizes commercial exchange, is misleading and one-sided, since it cannot completely explain the expansion of Samanid money in the growing urban zones.

Samanid state accounting was not only a matter of income, however, but also of expenditure. Revenue flows of all types in Central Asia and Iran were increasingly in money, as evidenced above, but the payments made by the state for goods and services
were calculated in monetary terms by and large. The biggest single expenditure was the military.\footnote{312}

Central Asia had a well-established tradition of professional soldiery long before the arrival of Muslim armies. The “čākar” soldiers of the Sogdian world became the “shākariyya” of the Arabic and Persian sources. These čākars were personal guards of the Iranian-speaking aristocrats and sovereigns in Sogdia, from where the practice spread to Tokharistan and eastern Khurasan.\footnote{313} This would seem to mirror the pattern of urban expansion, which appears to have happened earlier in Central Asia than in eastern Iran. The phenomenon of paid professional soldiers has been reexamined in the scholarship over the last decade in terms of the mercenaries who came to form the core ʿAbbasid army and marked the transition to a new kind of politics in western Asia.\footnote{314} The emphasis has been on the Turkic elements of this military group, and there is no doubt that there were significant numbers of Turkic speakers in the troops in Baghdad.\footnote{315} But more generally this development emerged from the urban-rural dynamics of the arid steppe zone and specifically from Central Asia.\footnote{316} In that respect, it was not restricted to the Turkic speakers alone, even in the ʿAbbasid world. A comprehensive view emerges when starting from the Turco-Sogdian continuum, which supplied troops to China in the form of An Lushan’s troops as much as to Iraq in the form of the Samarran guards of the

\footnote{312 As it is for many countries today, in which military and security expenses can be half the state budget or more.}
\footnote{313 É. de la Vaissière, “Châkars d’asie centrale : À propos d’ouvrages récents”, Studia Iranica 34 (2005), 146.}
\footnote{314 H. Kennedy, The armies of the caliphs: military and society in the early Islamic state (New York: Routledge, 2001).}
Caliph.\textsuperscript{317} In Central Asia, these troops were primarily personal guards, however, at the start of the Samanid period.\textsuperscript{318}

The Samanids emerged from the landowning gentry (\textit{dehqānān}), and their military consisted of local people led by these landowners. In this respect, this can be considered a “volunteer” army led by landlords and consisting primarily of other landlords who saw their mutual interests satisfied through cooperation. But the rise of the Samanids saw an expansion of the use of paid troops, perhaps intensifying through the imitation of their use in Baghdad, even though the practice clearly began in Central Asia. Regardless, the main point in this instance is the influence on state expenditure, which only increased through the use of these paid troops, whether they were loyal to an individual Samanid ruler or to the Samanid dynasty.\textsuperscript{319}

The shift toward paid troops seems to have begun when the Samanid ruler Isma’īl wanted to conquer northern Iran.\textsuperscript{320} A military which depended on landowners protecting their local interests would not be able to supply the necessary forces for conquest. The core of the military transformed from local “volunteers” to a “slave army” (\textit{ghilmān}) who kept their promises of loyalty to their paymaster Isma’īl as long as he was able to keep his promises to them. Although it cannot be said that there was a strictly contractual relationship between these soldiers and their employers, there was most certainly a sense of a compact of mutually understood rights and obligations which tied the troops to their “master”. This compact was not transferable in most cases, even to their master’s son,

\textsuperscript{318} J. Paul, \textit{The state and the military: the Samanid case} (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1994).
\textsuperscript{319} For the issue of loyalty in Buyid Iraq, see R. Mottahedeh, \textit{Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
\textsuperscript{320} Paul, \textit{The state and the military}, 24.
without the express establishment of a new compact. The use of mercenaries was the only route for Isma‘il in the early 10\textsuperscript{th} c. to use military forces to expand his domain.\textsuperscript{321}

In this way, the composition of the military certainly changed in the 10\textsuperscript{th} c., but even more important for these purposes is the fact that the expenses for the military changed dramatically. These soldiers fought for the sake of “benefit” (\textit{ni’ma}), which meant in most cases money or the opportunity to control monetized rental flows.\textsuperscript{322}

“Honors” typically involved the acquisition of positions to augment “benefit”. These troops were nested in their own clusters of factions which had to receive similar “benefit” as the political economy of military power increasingly turned toward them and away from the traditional landowning gentry. When resources are plentiful, then it would seem that this system could even receive the approval of the gentry, since it lifted the burden of fighting from the majority of them. But in times of scarcity, when the limitations of the system were reached, increasing rebellions from “slave troops” who could not be paid enough became a regular occurrence in the middle and late Samanid period. This process has yet to be fully articulated in the scholarship, but for these purposes it is important to note that state expenditures increased dramatically due to the payment of military services.\textsuperscript{323} The use of paid soldiers accelerated as the Samanid period continued and left the Samanid state increasingly vulnerable to monetary shocks in a way that no Central Asian or Iranian state had been previously.

The history of Samanid state revenues is complex topic which has yet to be fully explored; however, internal evidence from Narshakhi in juxtaposition with some other

\textsuperscript{321} Paul, \textit{The state and the military}, 30.
\textsuperscript{322} Paul, \textit{The state and the military}, 31.
textual sources, permit a basic outline of taxation’s trajectory. In the 9th c. Khurasan and Mawarannahr, it seems that taxes could be collected in cash and in kind, but cash became increasingly important, especially as the east gained autonomy.\textsuperscript{324} Narshakhi mentions a special tax collector who took payment for Baghdad in textiles rather than coin; this implies that regular taxation was conducted in coin.\textsuperscript{325} Narshakhi, Ibn Khurdadhbih, Maqdisi, and Yaqubi appear to converge on sums of more than a million Ghitrifi dirhams annually, at least at the start of the Samanid period, a rather large sum relative to other parts of the Islamic world. When the last Taharid fought the rise of the Samanid Isma’il in 900, he locked himself in the citadel and “seized the entire tax of Bukhara, all in Ghidrifi dirhams. He had them piled in the court and wanted to convert (melt) them all to silver but did not have time.”\textsuperscript{326} It was a sign of mortal weakness for a ruler to transform fiat money into a precious metal commodity, but more important for understanding taxation is the statement that the “entire tax” of Bukhara was not simply accounted, but actually paid in base coinage. Base coinage was more than an abstract “legal” tender: it was the actual instrument to settle debts with the state. When the last Taharid fled, the citadel was looted, and these coins appeared to have financed small fortunes afterward.

At a minimum, these episodes indicate the extent to which fiat currency had become the money of account as well as the medium of exchange at the very start of the 10th c.

\textsuperscript{324} Frye comments in \textit{History of Bukhara} on 119, ft. 100, on the basis of A. Kremer, \textit{Culturgeschichte des Orients} (Vienna, 1875), 1, 356, who mentions tax schedules by region based on late medieval sources such as Ibn Khaldun.
\textsuperscript{325} Frye comments in \textit{History of Bukhara}, 20.
\textsuperscript{326} Narshakhi, \textit{History of Bukhara}, 78.
Urbanization in the Islamic east

The reasons for urbanization in Iran and Central Asia are not without controversy. The core issue concerns the food supplies for large cities. Non-food producing city dwellers can be fed only by the surplus production of the food-producing sectors; even extensive gardens cannot supply sufficient grains and animal products. Accordingly, the daily existence of a large urban population requires the support of substantial agricultural labor, techniques, or crops; hence, urbanization would seem to point toward a change in food production. It is known that during the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid period, new crops were cultivated widely, including sorghum, rice, and hard wheat, but also citrus fruit, bananas, watermelons, spinach, artichokes, and eggplants. In the late ʿAbbasid period, agricultural manuals indicate that summer cropping, crop rotation, and water wheels became widespread; moreover, Islamic law granted tax abatements to those who encouraged production by building irrigation works and cultivating new land. On first glance, this would seem to point toward demographic growth due to improved agricultural techniques and technology.

Such agricultural developments cannot explain, however, the urban situation in Samanid lands, the source of the Ghaznavid line. Crops such as sorghum are much more popular in northern Africa than Iran or Central Asia. Rice can be grown in Mesopotamia and parts of northern Iran, but it requires too much water for most areas of the Arid Zone. Hard wheat does not give more nutritional value than soft wheat. The remaining foods

327 No one grows enough rice or raises flocks of sheep in their garden to feed a city.
328 This process for medieval Europe was outlined by B.H. Slicher van Bath, The Agrarian History of Western Europe A.D. 500-1850 (London: Arnold, 1963).
would not have substantially added to protein or carbohydrates. Neither were there large scale food imports into Iran or Central Asia, as cheaper transport for bulk commodities like food could only be provided to water-based cities, whether on sea, such as Constantinople, Alexandria, or Basra, or on river, such as Cairo, Baghdad, and Kufa. In Iran and Central Asia in particular, summer was the growing season because it was too cold to grow in winter; furthermore, qanats were the most efficient form of agriculture in these regions for some time before the Islamic conquests. During the Taharid and Samanid periods, it does not seem that settlements benefited from such an overwhelming change in food supply.

Moreover, the periodization for the increases in food surplus does not correspond to eastern Islamic urbanization. Agricultural technique is exceedingly important in the Arid Zone since most farming requires irrigation, but most of the advances occurred only after the 10th c., some time after the urbanization had been underway. In light of the necessity of irrigation, substantial capital and labor is required for farming, but there are no firm indications about the opening of new lands during the medieval Islamic period. Finally, the remarkable upswing in the consumption of cotton fabrics at this time would only have decreased the amount of land and water available for food. These factors

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331 Late antique demographic growth in Sogdia may have been close to the limits of environment and technology for the time
332 Watson recognizes the periodization of the manuals, but he does not problematize them for urbanization in the Iranian plateau. See Watson, *Agricultural Innovation*, 3.
suggest that the connection between urban growth and increases in food production is tenuous at best.\textsuperscript{334}

Nevertheless, cities grew tremendously through the Saffarid and Samanid periods and contracted gradually through the Ghaznavid, Qarakhanid, Seljuq, and Ghurid periods, so we must continue to look for the causes of increased urbanization.\textsuperscript{335} Moreover, cities were not the only zones of transformation: the rural zones, whether more agricultural or more nomadic, also underwent a shift in patterns of habitation, mostly tending toward urbanization even in formerly rural areas. Additionally, the population of the steppe zone grew in size and strength, often overwhelming the defenses of the settled population, most remarkably with the Qarakhanids and the Seljuqs, both of whom were not at all from the urban context of the Ghaznavids. Consequently, we must keep in mind constantly the interaction between different zones of habitation.\textsuperscript{336} Each had their own economics and rhythms of change, but they were often in close relation to one another. Accordingly, monetization affected each one of these broad sectors differently, with the least need for money among the steppe peoples as far as daily life is concerned.

Central Asian cities in particular underwent a metamorphosis. There was notably fast urban growth in administrative centers such as Bukhara and Samarqand. In the late 8\textsuperscript{th} c., the new ‘Abbasid governor was cajoled by the “chiefs, lords, and nobles” of Bukhara into building walls around the city to match those of Samarqand and afford protection against “infidel Turks who continually come without warning and plunder the

\textsuperscript{334} Watson seems to have applied van Bath’s perspective on medieval Europe without enough attention to particularities, leading him to infer that agricultural growth was the cause of medieval Iranian and Central Asian urbanization.

\textsuperscript{335} Bulliet acknowledges that Watson’s scheme may apply to other parts of the Islamic world. See Bulliet, \textit{Islam}, 79.

\textsuperscript{336} This is a well-known truism for Mediterranean, Indian, and Chinese history.
villages.” The layering of walls, gates, and forts erected around the city, completed in 830, required great amounts of money and labor throughout the 9th c., marking the walled phase of urbanization. Walls were still seen as necessary for the highest officials, who perhaps had as much to fear from the swelling urban population as from steppe raiders. Narshakhi mentions the high inner walls of Bukhara and their repair in the mid-9th c., just before the start of the Samanid period, but does not mention any wall construction or repair during the Samanids.

At the start of the 10th c., the Samanid amir Isma’il had claimed famously, “While I am alive, I am the wall of Bukhara.” Thus he exempted the Bukharans from the duty of wall repair, having “freed the people of this burden.” Yet, strong walls had been a regular feature of sound urban design for centuries in Central Asia and Iran, especially during the late antique flourishing of Sogdia. In any case, walled fortification of the entire urban settlement had probably become impractical by the early 10th c. In military terms, the deterioration of walls meant a shift from an emphasis on fortifications to a defense in depth strategy. Canals, streets, buildings, and other constraints on maneuver favor the defender against mounted raiders. Archaeology confirms that outposts for surveillance and harassment snaked into the steppe during the 11th and 12th c. The temptation to attribute this change to Isma’il alone neglects economic factors, and neither explains the decline of wall making before his reign nor accounts for its absence in subsequent centuries.

In general, city structures overwhelmed the walls, pushing into formerly rural areas and urbanizing them. This occurred in major and minor settlements. The well-

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337 The history of subsequent restoration and ruin can be found in Narshakhi, *History of Bukhara*, 34.
preserved suburbs of Varahsha and the Paykand oasis indicate a settlement pattern largely absent of fortified walls designed to protect the urban center.\textsuperscript{339} In these regional centers, wells and kilns were built into the walls, exposing the fortifications. Very little repair work appears to have been conducted from the 9\textsuperscript{th} c. onward\textsuperscript{340}. Over the 10\textsuperscript{th} c., city walls continued to deteriorate and no longer marked a clear separation between the urban and rural, fortified and unfortified zones. It is clear that walls were often neglected, whether in the growing settlements of older urban centers or in the newly built regions. This phenomenon also seems to have appeared in eastern Iranian cities they controlled: the inner city of Ray was decaying, even though the city size and population had expanded greatly.\textsuperscript{341} In this way, the strict line between the urban and rural spaces continued to erode in the core territory throughout the Samanid period.

Over time, some forms of production appeared outside the walls, while houses with large gardens occurred far outside them. Bazaars were erected, along with tomb complexes and sanctuaries. In the case of the oasis of Kum-Sovtan, in the lower Kashka Darya on the Karshi steppe, a survey uncovered a large area with scattered houses and canals completely open to the surrounding steppe.\textsuperscript{342} These changes in wall and housing patterns suggest that the material life of people within the old urban centers had increasing integrated with the growing suburban areas and smaller chains of villages. Urban and rural inhabitants and their activities began to blend into one another and

\textsuperscript{340} Naymark, “The Size of Samanid Bukhara”, 48.
\textsuperscript{342} Naymark, “The Size of Samanid Bukhara”, 12.
become less distinguishable over time, with a pronounced tendency for suburban areas to become more urban over time.

There was also a change in the texture of Samanid urbanization. In the pre-Islamic period, cities were often compact and protected with extensive brickwork walls, sometimes up to ten meters thick, while the rural areas were much less densely inhabited. In the Samanid era, however, many houses had only one story and sometimes an inner courtyard. Much of the new housing was small and low to the ground with little decoration, indicating that these buildings were probably inhabited by poorer members of society, who appear to have settled in large numbers. Based on excavations in Varahsha, Narinjan, and Nisa, the urban fabric appears to become more extensive but less dense: it spread out and became more commonly divided into small units at the cost of the rural zone generally.  

Even the steppe zone became entangled ever more closely with the transformations in settled Samanid territory. A tissue of canals and roads developed throughout the rural zone and deep into the steppe over the course of the 10th c. The countryside generally became a landscape of growing branches of routes and ribats, which thickened the interconnections of communications between urbanizing settlements and different parts of Samanid territory. The ribats were often situated along the main roads, at major junctions and in chains linking together primary roads, secondary roads, and settlements. Yet these Samanid ribats were not heavily fortified, especially by comparison to the Qarakhanid and Khwarazmshah periods; indeed, some new large settlements, such as Durman-tepe, have no fortifications even in the citadel. The ribats of 10th c. would then seem to function as outposts, perhaps to monitor the roads or support

343 Naymark, “The Size of Samanid Bukhara”, 58, ft. 78.
vedettes into the steppe. Bukhara sat at the center of this expansion, which occurred in all directions as urban settlement grew together in Iran and Central Asia.  

The difference between late antique Sogdian urbanization and medieval Samanid urbanization is striking. Sogdian urbanization was matched with rural growth, perhaps supplemented by a pastoralist influx, and included improvements in agricultural infrastructure and technology. Urban centers remained walled and compact, supplied by a large agricultural hinterland. By contrast, Samanid urbanization occurred at the expense of the rural zone, which gradually urbanized or turned fallow, as some poorer peasants probably became nomadic. It may be most accurate to characterize Samanid urbanization as “de-agriculturalization”. Medieval urbanization transformed rural zones and their inhabitants’ activities into urban ones. In relative terms, if sheer demographic quantity marked Sogdian urbanization, then certainly the change in the quality of settlement is most remarkable in Samanid lands.

These facts should also illuminate a way to explain this transformation. Late antique urbanization in this region may be described best through discussion of the productive forces that sustained the growing settled population, such as expanded demographics, irrigation works, farming techniques, and so on. Monetization appears to have played a minor role in this process. But given that Samanid urbanization was paired with de-agriculturalization and extensive monetization of the commercial and fiscal systems, it is more fruitful to investigate the changes in property relations which may explain the massive shift toward the urban zone and its activities, including the widespread use of money.

Property regimes in medieval Central Asia and Iran

The Islamic conquests did not disrupt substantially the property regime in Central Asia; in fact, they may have reinforced it through the 8th c., provided that a portion of the wealth flowed westward. Narshakhi mentions the story of Tughshada, the ruler of Bukhara at the start of the 8th c. on behalf of the Umayyads. A revolt had displaced Tughshada, so the Caliphal general Qutaiba and the local lord Tughshada joined forces until he was reinstalled in power. When the enemy of Tughshada, Vardan Khudah, died, Tughshada received all of his property. Tughshada demonstrated his ruthless to the extent that he decapitated hundreds of new Muslims in a Bukharan mosque, with the permission of the amir of Khurasan, Asad ibn Abdallah, on the pretext that the converts were trying to escape taxation. Narshakhi is deeply disturbed by this incident, but other sources indicate that Tughshada professed Islam only as part of a political deal; he was buried in the local Zoroastrian manner. Nevertheless, these episodes suggest that there may have been some increased power and centralization of land ownership by local lords during the early Islamic period of Central Asia.

The son of Tughshada was placed on the throne and supported by the Caliphal armies, until he backed a minor revolt and was killed. Another son of Tughshada, Bunyat, took power, but he also lost his head in 166/782-3 at Varakhsha palace after he supported the Muqanna’ uprising. In Narshakhi’s account, these Sogdian rulers do not appear to lead this resistance as much as they seem to adjust to local political vicissitudes. Despite their occasional sympathies for rebellion, the Tughshada family benefited from Caliphal policies, given that the Caliphate preferred to concentrate control of estates, servants, and

345 Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 60.
346 Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 62.
other property in their hands; this pattern appears to have been repeated in other areas under the Caliphate and accords with the recorded preservation of many property rights in newly conquered areas of western Asia.\footnote{347 See the account in Narshakhi, \textit{History of Bukhara}, 11.}

However, it is clearly the case that some property was appropriated, although mostly within the central city. Narshakhi mentions the rich mercantile Kashkatan family, who handed over all their property to Qutaiba when the Arabs conquered Bukhara, even though Qutaiba had wanted only half.\footnote{348 The first conquest was 705. The property demands seem to have occurred after the fourth conquest of 715.} It may have been out of prudence that they relinquished all of their property inside the city, as a means to avoid appropriation, but perhaps they handed over their rights through a kind of forced sale, as occurred in other instances; it is impossible to be certain. Afterward, these “dispossessed” built large villas outside the city walls, which were eventually absorbed as the city expanded through the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} c.\footnote{349 Archaeologists have noted hundreds of small villas in the Bukharan plain. Some of them may have been from this family, although Narshakhi’s text implies that these villas were in decay by the 12\textsuperscript{th} c. A similarly large number were uncovered in Balkh.} In the case of the mercantile Kashkatan family, noteworthy is not the seizure, but the fact that the extensive property belonged to outside merchants, not local landowners, illustrating the interregional integration and power of Central Asian merchants; moreover, Qutaiba did not seem interested in acquiring all of their property as much as displacing them from the most fortified area of settlement.\footnote{350 Narshakhi emphasizes that “they were not dehqans but of foreign origin”. Narshakhi, \textit{History of Bukhara}, 30.}
Yet immediately after Qutaiba, there was at least a partial reversal of affairs under the amir of Khurasan, Asad ibn ‘Abdallah al-Qasri (d. 120/738). Narshakhi views him favorably:

“He was so thoughtful that he took care of the great and old families (of Khurasan). He held in esteem the people of noble origin both the Arabs and natives. When Saman Khudah, who was the ancestor (of the Samanids), fled from Balkh and came to him in Merv, the amir showed him honor and respect. He (the amir) subdued his foes and gave Balkh back to him.”

Like the Tughshada family, the Samanids cultivated their clientage with the new administration from the west; in turn, the governor of Khurasan was pleased to oblige them with military favors, “honor and respect”. But this passage also indicates that the Caliphate often defended existing property rights in Iran and Central Asia. Even if there was a change in personnel, the basic order of “great old families” as primary landowners not only remained the same but also seems to have been reinforced as soon as the conquest ended.

This conservative tendency toward land ownership on the part of the Caliphate is further confirmed by the episode of the Khina family. Khina was a dehqan who was dispossessed from an area of Bukhara called the “district of the castle”, where many important dehqanan and notables lived. In 767, the descendants of Khina petitioned Caliph Mansur to return to their ownership nearly a quarter of the central city, in neighborhoods packed with inhabitants that also included the main road passing through

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351 Narshakhi’s text bungles the name and date, but the person is obvious enough. See Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 59, n. 216.
352 Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 59.
Nun gate and at least a thousand shops, in addition to seventy-five private villages on Bukhara river and the upper Faravaz. Bolstered by witnesses and deeds, the Khina family prevailed, and the Caliph ordered the property returned forthwith.  

It is well-known that the power of Khurasan and Mawarannahr had increased by the start of the Abbasid caliphate; this was likely a factor in the return of this property. The crafty and persistent dehqanan and other notability had learned after a generation or so effective ways to assert local power within the Caliphal framework to reestablish extensive rental revenues and control over valuable assets; indeed, a dispossessed boy from the Khina line may even have reacquired those properties as an older man. But this episode also signals that support of local elites was completely integrated into ‘Abbasid policy, which is demonstrated all the more as this was a time of strength for Baghdad, so there was little need for appeasement. The support of important families augmented the ‘Abbasids. Moreover, if local potentates lost approximately half of their city and district property by the second decade of the 8th c., then after a half-century of maneuver and intermarriage, they controlled nearly all of it again. Thus, it appears that throughout the 8th c., a small cluster of local families continued to possess the most important properties in the city and district of Bukhara.

Another curious episode about land ownership appears in the mid-9th c. under the Taharids. Hafs ibn Hashim, the chief minister for the Taharid amir in Khurasan, coveted lands in the district of ‘Ala’, which provided the owner who had built up the

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353 This property would later be sold piecemeal. Although Narshakhi provides no dates for this process, it is not hard to imagine that it happened during the collapse in land prices in the 10th c. See Narshakhi, *History of Bukhara*, 54.

354 Narshakhi’s text is somewhat vague on the amount of Qutaiba’s appropriation. Contrast the episode of the Kashkatan family with the discussion on taxation history, 53.

355 ‘Abdallah ibn Tahir ibn al Husain, r. 213-230/828-44.
district, Hasan ibn `Ala` Sughdi, a monthly revenue of 1200 dinars from its produce, which he probably used to maintain his city estates and a “villa of such a high value inside the city proper that there was no king who had a similar one.” As soon as Hafs ascended to his position, he wanted to buy these lands, which seemed to have some form of joint ownership, but the owners refused to sell, which led to their imprisonment and torture on a weekly basis for fifteen years, according to the text. Resisting the appropriation despite the threat of death, these men eventually outlasted Hafs and his master, the amir of Khurasan, and broke out of prison.

The revenue of the land seemed to be less important than the actual title, for Hafs simply could have taxed the owners; the refusal to surrender ownership may have had symbolic consequences for the limitations of Caliphal power in the city. Yet, strangely, this highly coercive relationship was somehow still constrained by law. Hafs wanted them to sell, and he needed their acquiescence, which they refused to provide. In that respect, an attempt at forced sale still required the formal submission of the owner. This illustrates that the governor’s power was not absolute and suggests that the objective was recognition of Hafs’ status more than the seizure of wealth.

Perhaps it had become traditional for a new chief to covet the lands of a rich notable. Hafs remained hidden in the area after his displacement, indicating that he had local roots and further minimizing any Caliphal role in the affair. The story also lacks ethnic or religious overtones; we never discover anything about idols, about apostasy, or even about language. These combined elements indicate that the primary focus of the story is an attempt by a governor to seize property unjustly from a prosperous family.

356 Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, p. 54-55.
357 Narshakhi uses “they” and “them” for the rest of the passage.
Narshakhi finishes on a happy note: Hafs is clearly wrong to bring suffering on these patient landowners, who prevail in the end in any case. Thus, it appears that the changes in landownership were not substantial in the Islamic east through a significant part of the 9th c.

Some changes in land ownership may have begun under the Samanids, at least in Bukhara where they established their capital. It is important to recall that the Samanids themselves rose from these landowners. Narshakhi continues the story of the Tughshada family, focusing on Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Khalid ibn Bunyat, the last of their line, to hold major estates in the Bukhara area. According to the account, the Samanid Amir Isma‘il and his chief of police coveted the “fine property, with such a produce” of Abu Ishaq. The chief of police contended that the lands of Abu Ishaq were apparently lost due to the “apostasy of their father” and then regranted as a “lease and a stipend” (iqṭāʾ), for which Abu Ishaq had not given proper service; thus, the right of ownership was purportedly a question of contingent control. On the basis of this pretext, combining a musty whiff of political and religious deviance with the claim of a broken agreement, the Amir seized the property and promised to pay Abu Ishaq directly from the treasury the sum of 20,000 dirhams annually, purportedly the yearly yield. Of course, the hypocrisy of the appropriation shows in the payment, for if the lands belonged truly to the crown as the Amir claimed, then there would be no need to exchange property rights for an annual sum. Yet, there was still a sense that the amir had to pay for the land and that that landownership per se was not at issue as much as possession of the best local land.

The Tughshada family had become superfluous with the rise of the Samanids, who themselves had risen from the local dehqanan. There was no need for that family to

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358 See Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 12.
intermediate anymore between the dehqanan and the Caliphate. By this time, many local potentates had adopted Arabic names or given them to their children, while some had married Arabs or Muslims, so we cannot assume that this episode has an ethnic character on the basis of names alone and without other supporting evidence.\footnote{The son of the first Tughshada was named Qutaiba after the conquerer Qutaiba bin Muslim.} Moreover, Narshakhi casts a highly skeptical eye on any religious motivation to the appropriation, emphasizing the Tughshada “fine property” and the absurdity that the son should be penalized for the apparent sins of his father, in an age when conversion to Islam had been normalized; indeed, Amir Isma’il himself came from a line of converts. In light of the long-standing dehqan origins of Amir Isma’il, this episode appears most predominantly to be a dispute among local potentates. To establish his strength in his capital, Amir Isma’il had to displace the family most powerful in Bukhara for the previous century. It was a sign of his new assertive dynasty and a signal to his rivals.

One of the outcomes of this process of appropriation emerges in the granting of estates next to Bukhara outside the city walls. The most famous of these areas was the Juy-i Muliyan, or the Canal of the Clients.\footnote{Actually the Juy-i Mawaliyan, but common people called it Jüy-i Müliyân. Narshakhi, \textit{History of Bukhara}, 28.} According to Narshakhi, these estates also belonged originally to the descendants of Tughshada and Isma’il probably purchased them when he was young from a certain Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Talut, a former general of the caliph al-Musta’in ibn al-Mu’tasim (r. 248-251/862-865). It is unclear whether this exchange was coercive or not. In any event, there was another royal court in this area in addition to the one inside the city walls, a paradise packed with flowing waters, gardens, and flowers. Narshakhi’s text emphasizes the favor that Amir Isma’il displayed to his clients, by granting them endowments in this beautified area, so that they
could have their own gardens and villas. Amir Isma‘il also purchased a plain called Dashtak next to the fortress of Bukhara, at the cost of 10,000 dirhams, and quickly ordered the cutting and sale of all of the cane on the property; in this way, he recouped his payment and set about ordering the construction of gardens and a large villa as well as endowing a portion for a grand mosque. The scattered courts, villas, and gardens, interpolated with endowments to ranked clients, became the royal residences; there was no other fixed location for the Amir other than the fortress. There were rich Zoroastrian villas (“villas of the Magians”) outside the city, where there were many fire temples and fine gardens, at least during the first half of the 10th c. 361 Certainly, Zoroastrian wealth existed in some form through Taharid rule, especially significant as Theravada Buddhist and Nestorian wealth gradually lost ground. 362 Nevertheless, there does not appear to be a systematic attempt by the state at dispossession of the landed and propertied.

Despite these conservative tendencies in property ownership, changes had clearly begun with the Samanid rise to power, not only in terms of increased urbanization, but also in rural land prices. The collapse in land prices over the 10th c. was well understood by contemporaries. This anecdote from Narshakhi tells the tale:

“In the reign of the amir Hamid (331-343/943-954) the estates of the villas of the Magians became expensive because the rulers of Bukhara settled there and the followers and intimates of the sovereign wished to buy the estates. So the price of one juft of these estates became 4,000 dirhams. When this information reached the amir, he said that it was known to him.

“Before the rulers moved to Bukhara, the price of these lands was higher. If a person wanted a

361 Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 31.
piece of land which a pair of oxen could work, he was unable to find it during the course of a year. If he were able to buy it, he had to pay 12,000 dirhams weight of silver for every juft. Now the price is cheap, since every juft of land is 4,000 dirhams weight of silver, which means the people have less silver (sīm).”

This passage singularly illuminates the land dilemma of the Samanid period. Of course, it is clear that rich Zoroastrian villas were not seized even if they surrounded the Samanid capital, but more important is the tremendous collapse in land prices, with a very large drop occurring in the first half of the 10th c. Clearly, weighed silver dirhams had retained some worth for important commodities such as land, even though token money probably predominated for tax purposes. But even if the Samanid Amir could force the sale, the incident reveals that he was more concerned with lamenting the decline in wealth than with its appropriation. Just a generation or two earlier, a small piece of productive land (“which a pair of oxen could work”) was nearly impossible to find for even a high price; later, even the land for fancy villas close to the growing city were cheaper by a factor of three. At that rate, prime land with villas in the capital city appear to have lost nearly half their value every quarter century during the 10th. Amir Hamid, the chief of state, appears impotent to arrest the price deterioration which continued to close in like a blight on the core of the settled zone, in Bukhara as across much of Central Asia

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363 Narshakhi, Frye, History of Bukhara, 31, translates the word “sīm” as money. I followed his translation but corrected the last word to show that silver was the topic, not money. See Narshakhī, Schefer, Boukhara, 29. As we have seen, there was plenty of fiat money, perhaps too much. It seems that by the 12th c. at the latest “the estates of the villas of the Magians were such that they were given gratis, but no one wanted them.”
and Iran. The loss of expensive productive land was a source of melancholy for Samanid authorities since it obviously affected tax revenue. It would appear that the Samanid authorities did not consciously plan to undermine the landed property relations, yet nevertheless they were profoundly changed in Iran and Central Asia at the cusp of the Qarakhanid and Ghaznavid rise to power.

The history of Samanid decline can be connected almost directly to the deterioration of their monetary system. Within the Samanid realm, it was possible to maintain a fiat currency with a low silver content; in other words, political iconography mattered. Outside of Samanid territory, however, the opposite pertained: silver coins were primarily commodities valued on the basis of their metrology. These different systems were mutually dependent on one another as long as high quality silver was available for export. In fact, the decline in silver content matches the political troubles of the Samanid state to a remarkable degree. Starting in the 940s, it seems that mint production went up briefly, perhaps as long as could be sustained to meet the demands of troops who proved able to loot the treasury and establish amirs, then declined near the end of an amir’s reign. It seems likely that this phenomenon was due to restriking the previous amir’s coinage before they had been exported, especially to northern Europe. But as Samanid revenues diminished, in part due to the loss of agricultural tax revenue and in part due to debasement of tradable silver coins, the Samanid state could not maintain the loyalty of its troops and clients.

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364 This phenomenon seemed to have encouraged more injustice, for Narshakhi continues, “Whatever was bought was obtained in vain because of the oppression and lack of clemency for the people.” Narshakhi, History of Bukhara, 27.
365 Kovalev maintains, “Specifically, beginning with the 940s, there seems to be a direct correlation between the peaks and declines in mint production and the beginning and end of a Samanid amir’s rule.” See Kovalev, “Mint Output in Tenth-Century Bukhara” Russian History 28, 1-4 (2001), 257.
Monetary flows in state and society

This discussion of monetization and urbanization has touched upon a range of themes to illuminate the problématique of money in settled life for the medieval Islamic east. It is outside the scope of this investigation to explore the full ramification of the silver crisis across contemporary Eurasia or to explain in detail the post-Ghaznavid developments in Iran and Central Asia. Nevertheless, it has been necessary to address Iranian and Central Asian socioeconomics to outline the particular historical conditions for the rise of the Ghaznavids.

In recent collective study on the city in the Islamic world, H. Kennedy suggested that cash payments and loot shares played a significant role in the expansion of Iranian cities.367 This research validates that supposition and goes beyond it. It outlines the long-term development of money and cities in the Iranian and Central Asian settled areas. It describes basics of the fiscal and commercial systems and outlines flows and changes in money and coinage. It investigates some of the social consequences of these economic developments.

The evidence suggests that a kind of “cash nexus” in medieval guise had developed in the Samanid realm. The core factor appears to have been state enforcement of tax revenue in dirhams, initially consisting of varying quantities of precious silver and later of base metals maintained through a fiat or token money practice. This had a profound effect on creating demand for money. This allowed the state to net tremendous

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367 “The early Islamic state made regular cash payments to a large number of people, mostly in the military: it created, in fact, a very numerous salariat. This was a market no enterprising tradesman or would-be cook and bottle-washer could afford to neglect. Merv, for example, was where the military campaigns against the rich cities of Transoxania were organized in the eighth century, it was here that the soldiers were paid and it was here that they sold their shares of the booty in the markets: no wonder immigrants from all over Khurasan flocked to the newly expanding market areas to cash in. On a larger or smaller scale, this pattern must have been repeated all over the Islamic East.” Kennedy, “Inherited Cities” in S.K. Jayyusi, The city in the Islamic world (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 107.
wealth and supported the interregional trade system through the export of silver as a commodity. The main fiscal expenditure was the army, paid predominantly in money, not in land. This supplied Taharid and eventually Samanid society with large numbers of coins. These flows created a great pool of monetized activities, drawing people into the cash loci of Iranian and Central Asian medieval cities, which further stimulated money demand in exchange for services or manufactures.

But the nature of commercial and monetary organization was such that the deterioration of silver supplies vis-à-vis increasing demand eroded the exchangeability and value of fiat money and probably the interregional trade system, which treated silver coin as a commodity more than a form of money. Along the northern European axis, silver coin often transformed into metalware such as jewelry and disappeared into hoards, effectively demonetized by dropping from circulation. High quality silver coin was weighed, not counted, and valued for its intrinsic metals. European silver coinage relied on Central Asian silver supplies to maintain intrinsic worth according to social norms. Along the southern Asian axis, it seems probable that coins were weighed for silver content at the border of the Indian currency zones then recast into local issues. This was the practice during the Mughal era, and there seems little reason to doubt its earlier pedigree in silver-poor India. Hence, the value of imported coinage rested also on intrinsic precious metal content, a common phenomenon between currency zones in the medieval world. Along both axes, there was a sharp limitation on coinage operating as money by fiat alone once coinage left the Samanid domain.

Most importantly, monetization was at least a two-sided affair, and it did not simply affect state formation. In the “obverse” advance of the process, it drew people out
of the rural zone into the cities, transforming gradually their economic life, enmeshing them into frequent money relations. In the “reverse” retreat, the silver crisis gradually eroded the basis of the money system, fragmenting the Samanid state and encouraging the seizure of rents violently through such means as heavy taxation and looting. This accounts for a significant measure of shifting alliances and political chaos of the age. Paid and paying subordinates became unruly. Such violence became possible only because a significant urbanized social faction now required money for the reproduction of their activities and the pursuit of power.

Although the Samanids had risen from the landed aristocracy, their rule witnessed paradoxically the destruction of the eastern dehqanan, which was debauched by the surging currents of monetization. In contrast with the late antique period, medieval money rents increasingly supplanted rents in labor and in kind. As the silver crisis became chronic in the Samanid realm, large numbers of ambitious men became willing to seek money, along with the wealth it commanded, by all available means; in fact, it even became necessary to do so, in light of the limitations on new property relations which eastern practices of ḵāṯā` had barely begun to address. The Ghaznavids issued from the “new” men who had the coercive means to power, but lacked a telos, at least at first. Some among this stock, chiefly the native southern Afghan Mahmud, grew determined to resist mightily the surging debasement of political coherence and social power which impressed itself constantly on their objectives.
V. Authority and Violence

Dynastic and Military Narratives

The story of the Ghaznavid dynasty has been repeated so often through the centuries and in contemporary scholarship that most readers suffer a mistaken sense of familiarity the moment the topic arises; this superficial presupposition can breed acute boredom as well as contempt. In the conventional narrative, the Ghaznavids are exemplified by their paradigmatic Sultan Mahmud, the fanatic and greedy Muslim warrior, who came from the Central Asian steppe to launch ruthless raids against a nearly powerless India, in accordance with the tradition of his forbearers. He adopted with little alteration the prevailing tradition of civilized Islamic and Persian kingship, despite his purported Turkic and essentially nomadic origin. After the climax of victory upon victory, a yawn-inducing gap of 150 years ensues, with the assumption that middling Ghaznavid raids filled the emptiness, before the rise of fresh barbarians, the Ghurids, who wash over the decrepit Ghaznavid lands. This uninterrupted linear account focuses on the dynasty and ends definitively with the last sultan. It should come then as no surprise to skeptics that this narrative is not only questionable, but also contains unsupportable distortions and often factual errors.

Ghaznavid military and political affairs are typically separated in the scholarship by region and focus intensely on the ambitions of Mahmud as an individual dynast. This fragmented approach provides an uneven chronology, and it is not adequate for interpreting a state which eventually covered diverse regions. For example, by emphasizing Iran alone, it is easy to omit the meaning of key events in Central Asia and
India which often connected directly to Ghaznavid activities in Iran itself. Furthermore, when Mahmud is elevated as a great ruler, there is also the tendency to obscure the collective character of the Ghaznavids, whether in terms of power politics, comparative history, or natural constraints. Accordingly, the following discussion provides a complete chronological interpretation of Ghaznavid military and political events through the reign of Mahmud as a way to understand their struggle for power.

This remarkable lacuna has been mentioned in the “General Introduction” and in the “Perspectives on the Ghaznavid Age” chapters, but it is necessary to detail the historiography further so that readers understand precisely the actual state of the scholarship, particularly from the last century or so. Through the 19th c., the first Western European information about the Ghaznavids arrived in the form of translations: initially through Dow’s work on Firishtā, then in Elliot and Dowson’s excerpts from chronicles on the history of India. As helpful as these efforts may have been as primitive first steps, they were often framed with tendentious commentary and served as the basis for some of the imperialist and communalist epistemologies and political agitations around the topic of the Ghaznavids.

M. Habib’s Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznī (1924) provided the first reinterpretation of the Ghaznavids under Mahmud, but his small study lacks many citations and admits too much from Firishtā’s distortions. It does not contextualize or periodize events, and it concentrates almost exclusively on the Indian campaigns. In 1928, W. Haig provided a brief overview of the Ghaznavid dynasty in his chapter on “The Yamīnī Dynasty of Ghaznī and Lahore, commonly known as the Ghaznavids” in the Cambridge History of...
India. His account gives a more detailed synopsis of kings and battles focused on India and the individual Mahmud, sketching the dynasty until its end at the hands of the Ghurids. Despite his background as a soldier and administrator in British India, Haig displays little interest in institutions or politics, primarily describing personalities and episodes: motivations for the Ghaznavids include “vanity”, “zeal”, and “plunder”.

The most detailed examination of Mahmud’s raids originated in Nazim’s *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna* (1931). His extensive gathering of the primary sources provided a good amount of the evidence base for later accounts such as Bosworth’s *The Ghaznavids* (1963). But after a brief discussion of Mahmud’s “predecessors”, Nazim wrote chapters on various theaters of war, arranged principally by place rather than time, i.e. “Wars in Central Asia”, “Wars in India”, and so forth. Within these sections, he did not respect chronology, breaking the sequence of causation and sometimes leading him to repeat himself, which gave the impression of almost countless battles, thus obscuring the process by which the Ghaznavids rose to power. He completed his discussion with a short chapter on “The Administrative System of Sultan Mahmūd”, emphasizing a centralized state in the supposed tradition of Persian and Islamic statecraft and the probity of the ruler Mahmud, who “was not tainted with the licentious sensuality which so often disgraced the life of Oriental despots.”

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369 Lt.-Colonel Sir Wolseley Haig was Lecturer at SOAS in Persian by the late 1920s and had served in the British Army of India, particularly involved in the suppression of “dacoits” in upper Burma (Myanmar). See *Nature*, 141, 962, (28 May 1938) for a brief mention.

370 Unusually, Nāzim writes his own name with diacritics.

371 See the table of contents of Nāzim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna*.

372 Ibid., 153. Nazim may have been haunted by the specter of Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh (r. 1847-1856), who regained fame in the 1970s through the Satyajit Ray film adaptation of Premchand’s 1924 short story.
Spuler’s *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit* (1952) has several pages on Mahmud’s activities in Iran as part of the political history of medieval Iran. His study makes little mention of the Ghaznavids in India. He has scattered references to Mahmud in his institutional sections, but he does not give the Ghaznavids further treatment past their defeat by the Seljuqs. Consequently, the particular problems of the state never emerge and Mahmud is typically characterized as a religious warrior in order to explain Ghaznavid military and political history. This is equivalent to explaining the western European Crusades by recourse to religious beliefs alone.

Bosworth’s two books on the Ghaznavids, which have been detailed above, stress the theme of dynastic decline. Only his first book is relevant to this discussion and it contains a basic summary on the rise of the Ghaznavids along with some debatable interpretations often resting on unexamined presuppositions. His book hardly enters into the military campaigns of the high period of Sultan Mahmud, and it focuses almost exclusively on Iran. His chapter in the *Cambridge History of Iran* entitled “The Early Ghaznavids” summarizes his first book. It sketches the beginning of the dynasty and some major battles, prioritizing Iran. He describes military structures, the strongest part of his exposition, and outlines the Ghaznavid defeat in Iran by the Seljuqs. Consequently, his studies do not treat the processes and problématique of state formation during the rise and greatest extent of Ghaznavid power.

The following discussion counters these tendencies with an emphasis on Ghaznavid state formation. This necessarily means a retelling of the origin and development of the Ghaznavid state, but arranged in chronological order with attention to

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*Shatranj Ke Khilari* (The Chess Players). Perhaps Nazim should have considered the views of Ayaz and some of the mystical poets before making this judgment.
processes and the interrelation of episodes. Furthermore, this account reads against the
sources and historiography by interrogating the conquests of Mahmud, seeking to
determine contextually the actual might and character of the Ghaznavid military and
administration rather than simply declare it.

The faction in Ghazni

Alptegin had been deeply involved in Samanid state affairs from his youth. Born
around 267/880-1, he was sold into the bodyguard of Samanid Amir Ahmad ibn
Isma‘il. Eventually serving the Amir Nasr ibn Ahmed, he was given command of some
troops by Amir Nuh ibn Nasr, eventually ascending to the position of chief chamberlain
(hājib al-ḥujjab). Upon Nuh’s death, Alptegin gained power over the young amir ‘Abd
al-Malik. Alptegin’s striving resulted in the death of the commander of the troops of
Khurasan, who arrived in Bukhara in winter of 956, where he was stabbed by Alptegin
himself. Amir ‘Abd al-Malik rewarded him with the governorship of Balkh, perhaps as
a means to remove this ambitious soldier from the capital, but it seems that Alptegin
wanted more, so he was soon appointed commander of the troops of Khurasan, taking
control in spring of 961. Alptegin was advancing well on the path to power in the
Samanid realm.

Upon the death of Amir ‘Abd al-Malik in the fall of that year, Alptegin received a
letter from his ally in the capital, the vizier Abu ‘Ali Bal‘ami, requesting his advice for a

373 Hamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī and E.G.S. Browne, The Tarikh-i-guzida or "select history" of
Hamdu’llah Mustawfī-i-Qazwīnī (London: Luzac, 1910), 382.
374 The commander’s name was Bakr ibn Malik. See Gardizi, Nazim, 41. Gardizi citations in Nazim’s
dition unless otherwise listed.
375 Gardizi, 42.
successor.\textsuperscript{376} Alptegin favored the young son of the Amir, probably to insure a pliable youth on the throne, but prior to receipt of his reply, the army in Bukhara swore allegiance to the late Amir’s brother Mansur. Events were not turning to the advantage of Alptegin, whose field of action became increasingly constricted.

Alptegin decided to march immediately on Bukhara to install his choice for the Samanid amir. He made an alliance with Abu Mansur Muhammad, who was the governor of Tus at the time, but this was a foolish decision, for Alptegin had supplanted him previously in Khurasan, so he soon proved unreliable. Amir Mansur saw an opportunity to eliminate Alptegin. The Amir quickly restored Khurasan to the formal control of Alptegin’s erstwhile ally and ordered him to block the Amu Darya. Abu Mansur Muhammad duly marched toward the river. Although Alptegin managed to cross the water on his march on the Samanid capital, he realized the weakness of his position. With enemies in front and behind, he feared further treason among his own troops. Igniting his camp, he abandoned his attack plan and opted for escape, speeding south to Balkh, with the troops of Amir Mansur in close pursuit. In a battle near the Khulam pass in spring of 962, the desperate troops of Alptegin defeated their hunters and even captured a maternal uncle of the Amir, among other important officers.\textsuperscript{377} Yet, the need for a distant base was obvious at this point, so Alptegin led a fighting retreat that summer through the high mountain spine of Afghanistan. He attacked the Iranian Sher of Bamiyan but did not stay in the area due to its proximity to Bukhara. Forced southward and unable to advance toward Bust, which was controlled by another contingent of ex-Samanid soldiers,

\textsuperscript{376} Gardizi, 43; Raverty, \textit{Ṭabaqāt al- Nāṣirī}, 42. \textit{Ṭabaqāt al- Nāṣirī} in Raverty’s edition unless otherwise listed.
Alptegin made his final stand on the outskirts of the only large town between Bust and Kabul: Ghazni.

As fall deepened into winter, the battered troops of Alptegin besieged the local ruler Abu Bakr Lawik for four months before gaining access to the town.378 This siege, quite lengthy in light of the one-day victories often won by Mahmud half a century later, is an undoubtedly long period of time; it is four times longer than each of the two extended sieges at the indomitable fort of Lohkot at the entrance to the Kashmir valley, when the Ghaznavids were at the height of their power. It was conducted in temperatures below freezing by harried men with no opportunity for retreat or resupply. Rather than racing down from Central Asia to conquer India, accounts indicate a desperate situation for Alptegin’s troops after the failed bid for power in Bukhara.

Ghazni was important, but not quite so significant at this time. It did not have the ancient prestige of Kandahar or Kabul. Alptegin’s troops may have concentrated on extracting protection rents from the town, but the real price of peace was access to the settlement. These soldiers were not nomads; rather, they were displaced mercenaries who were trained to serve urban courts but had lost their faction’s bid for power. Lawik was perhaps a feudatory or ally of the Shahis, for he appealed to the king of Kabul for assistance; nevertheless, the Shahi king did not come to his support, demonstrating the relatively weak political bonds of the period.379 The faction in Ghazni may not have been perceived to be a threat to the Shahis; indeed, the Shahis were correct in the near term.

378 This ruler may or may not have been a Muslim. Lawik could be connected with Anuk, which is wolf or lion cub in Old Turkic. See G. Clauson, An etymological dictionary of pre-thirteenth-century Turkish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
379 Tabaqāt al-Nāṣirī, 71 and Guzida, 385, incorrectly state that Alptegin killed Lawik, when in fact Lawik escaped to Kabul. Clearly, the Shahis did not consider the fate of this neighboring king vital to their interests.
Amir Mansur, however, maintained a persistent opposition to the faction in Ghazni, despite Samanid difficulties at home in Central Asia. He sent an army of 20,000 men against Alptegin’s troops, yet Alptegin was again able to repel his opponents.\(^{380}\) They did not yet dare an attack on the Shahi redoubt of Kabul. Alptegin sought to fortify and expand his western flank through an attack on Bust, capturing it from another set of ex-Samanid soldiers who had taken the town some decades earlier. It proved to be an easy target. Alptegin’s men had now become one of the groups of renegade “slave troops” in the southern belt of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the very first expansion of the Ghazni faction was against a Muslim force to their west.

By spring, a significant stretch of southern Afghanistan had fallen under Alptegin’s control. Meanwhile, Amir Mansur had failed to punish Alptegin, which was probably an unwelcome task for the Samanid troops in any event. Thus, the Amir attempted to improve on the bad turn of events by conferring on Alptegin a governorship of the conquered territories, perhaps in the hope of containing and stabilizing the situation either with his own unhappy troops, or with the rebellious Alptegin, or with Alptegin’s potential successors. Whatever the exact reason, the Samanid strategy of reasserting the bonds of clientage bore fruit after merely a year. The “slave” (ghulām) Alptegin was transformed into the more independent status of “client” (mawlā).

Alptegin did not enjoy the fruits of his small success: he died at the end of the following summer in 963 and his son, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, took the reins in Ghazni.\(^{381}\) The restless troops of Ghazni, however, did not obey this weakling, so Abu ʿAli Lawik,

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\(^{380}\) These were led by a man named Abu Jaʿfar. *Guzida*, 385.

\(^{381}\) 20 Shaʿbān 352/13 September 963. See *Majmaʿ al-Ansāb*, f. 224a, in Nazim, *Life and Times*, who correctly notes the error in D. Ross, *The Heart of Central Asia*, 112, where he incorrectly states that Alptegin died in 366 / 976-7 and that Sebuktegin took command immediately afterward.
the son of Abu Bakr Lawik, saw an opportunity to regain Ghazni. In 964, Abu ʿAli Lawik quickly defeated the disorganized occupiers and Ibrahim escaped to Bukhara to plead assistance from the man who had been his father’s mortal enemy, the Samanid Amir Mansur. Clearly, much had depended on Alptegin’s leadership. Ibrahim, however, was able to return the following year with a large force granted by Amir Mansur; the plea for assistance and the establishment of clientage proved successful for Ibrahim as well as for Mansur. Abu ʿAli Lawik retreated from Ghazni in late summer. Yet Ibrahim enjoyed his return for only several weeks before dying in the fall of 966, leaving no capable son.382 These are fascinating turns of fate, but they are not the signs of an uninterrupted advance into India.

In Ghazni of the mid-10th c., the notability of the town were the local kingmakers. They chose Bilkategin, a bondsman of Alptegin and commander of the bodyguard, to take his place, probably an easy selection given Bilkategin’s high position in the Ghazni faction.383 The new ruler of Ghazni immediately offered his allegiance to Bukhara; nevertheless, Faʾiq, another commander contending for power in Bukhara, sent an army to seize the town. The politics of northern Afghanistan intruded once again into southern Afghanistan. Bilkategin, however, defeated this small force and no army was sent from Bukhara again.

After nearly five years of danger, some measure of stability had arrived for the faction in Ghazni. In this era of relative calm, the first son of Sebuktegin, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud, was born to him and his mother, an unnamed daughter of a notable in

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382 Ṭabaqāt al-Nāṣirī confirms this timeline by stating that he died one year after his return from Bukhara. ʿUtbi, Manini, 15 states that he was elected by popular acclaim. Manini used unless otherwise stated. Also see Thamiri, ʿUtbi, 20.
383 Ṭabaqāt al-Nāṣirī, 73. Browne, I, 372, incorrectly states that both Abu Ishaq Ibrahim and Bilkategin were sons of Alptegin, but this was only true of the former. Also see Elliot and Dowson, II, 479.
Zabulistan, in the fall of 361/971. The future Sultan Mahmud possessed eminently local roots, born closer to India than Iran or Central Asia. His mother may or may not have been Muslim; given the configuration of culture and religion in southern Afghanistan at the time, she also could have been from a Shaivite family. His father, though born in Central Asia, spent almost his entire adult life at this “port” town on the cusp of the Indus.

This period of calm did not persist. In 974-75, Bilkategin died during a siege of Gardiz, perhaps in a bid to assert some power over the neighboring smaller town. Another soldier named Piritegin succeeded him and regarded himself, during his brief few years, as a governor for the Samanids. His coins show the name of the Samanid amir, he had an insignia of office, and he wore a pointed hat, cloak, and girdle to signify his role. In unclear circumstances, Piritegin offended the local notability, who invited Abu ʿAli Lawik to become their king. The break must have been somewhat severe, as Sebuktegin had married into the local notability and perhaps other troops had followed the same practice. Abu ʿAli Lawik saw his chance and soon marched on Ghazni with “the son of the king of Kabul”; once again, the precarious position of the Ghazni faction lay exposed. Sebuktegin led the defense and advanced on them with 500 troops, meeting them near Charakh on the road between Ghazni and Kabul. He repulsed them and took prisoner Abu ʿAli Lawik and the Shahi son, eventually executing them. Piritegin was deposed and Sebuktegin took his place, by the unanimous consent of the notables, a

384 Utbi, 114. Firishta, Briggs, I, 29, footnote, stirs the pot of scandal by claiming, without any source, that Mahmud was illegitimate. His birth is also in Darke, The Book of Government (The Siyar al-Muluk), 116, and Guzideh, 395. Mahmud is sometimes referred to as “Mahmud-i Zabuli”. 10 Muḥarram 361/2 November 971, according to Ṭabaqāt al-Ḵāṣirī, 76; Ibn Khallikan, II, 113. Ibn al-Athir, IX, 281, gives 10th Muḥarram 360/13th November 970.
385 Ṭabaqāt al-Ḵāṣirī, 75. A different account is given in Majmaʿ al-ʿAnsāb, f. 225a. Raverty, Notes, 677, places the battle too early. See Nazim, The Life and Times, 27, ft. 7.
necessary decision in light of the collapse of their scheme. By spring of 977, Sebuktegin had gained firm command of Ghazni.³⁸⁶

Sebuktegin and his son Mahmud

Sebuktegin, born about 942-3, asserted control of the warriors in Ghazni in his mid-thirties. He had been a promising officer of Alptegin of about twenty years old when they fled to southern Afghanistan.³⁸⁷ Sebuktegin was the third son of Juq, the chief of small territory in northern Central Asia and a man purportedly famous for his physical strength.³⁸⁸ At the age of twelve, Sebuktegin was captured during a raid by a neighboring tribe and remained their prisoner for four years before he was sold as a slave to man named Hajji Nasr.³⁸⁹ Nasr left Sebuktegin in Nakhshab for three years while he recovered from a long illness; nevertheless, the adolescent learned the fighting arts at this time and was eventually given command of Nasr’s other troops. Brought to Bukhara in his late teens, he was purchased by Alptegin, who had already become the chief chamberlain of Samanid Amir ʿAbd al-Malik.³⁹⁰ Thus, Hajji Nasr earned a good profit and gained the satisfaction of raising Sebuktegin to young adulthood, while Sebuktegin had acquired through military arts a greater freedom and access to power than he had ever possessed previously.

Upon the death of Alptegin in Ghazni, Sebuktegin had become the closest officer to the filial successor Abu Ishaq Ibrahim.³⁹¹ At this time, Sebuktegin also married a

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³⁸⁶ 27th Sha‘ban 366/20th April 977.
³⁸⁸ It is possible that Sebuktegin origins may have been from the same people as the Qarakhanids.
³⁸⁹ Baihaqi, Lees, 107; Tabaqāt al- Nāṣirī, 70; and Majma‘ al-Ansāb, f. 227a. Sebuktegin probably declared himself a Muslim at this time.
³⁹⁰ Majma‘ al-Ansāb, f. 227b; Tabaqāt al- Nāṣirī, 71.
³⁹¹ ʿUtbi, 15.
daughter of Alptegin, who would eventually become the mother to one of his sons, Isma‘il, who would prove to be a rival to his older brother Mahmud. During the rulership of Bilkategin and Piritegin, Sebuktegin remained in high rank and he does not appear to have contested their power until the near disaster of 977. Yet the victory in Charakh over Abu ‘Ali Lawik and the Shahi son emboldened Sebuktegin; within a year or so he acquired control of nearby towns; in the east, Bust, and in the south, Qusdar. Yet we cannot call Sebuktegin strongly expansionist because these settlements were quite close to Ghazni and certainly part of the same local political economy.

In any event, Sebuktegin apparently engaged in one raid too many for the Shahi king Jaipal. Jaipal marched on the growing power of Ghazni. In 986-7, the forces of Sebuktegin and Jaipal clashed on a hill between Ghazni and Lamaghan. The large army of Jaipal fought well, but an unexpected snowstorm distressed his men and Jaipal was compelled to ask for peace. Some of the local Khaljis and Afghans submitted to Sebuktegin and joined his army. Under Sebuktegin’s leadership, the faction in Ghazni proved able to defend itself for the second time in a decade.

The teenage Mahmud participated in this battle, perhaps one of his first, but the sources record no particular merit for him in this battle. Jaipal paid an indemnity of

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392 *Guzida*, 393. Sebuktegin had at least two wives. As already noted, Alptegin’s daughter was not Mahmud’s mother.
394 Bust was probably lost when Alptegin’s son Ibrahim was forced out of Ghazni. A dispute between Baytuz and Togan, the local rulers of Bust who succeeded the Samanid renegades, had provided a pretext for Sebuktegin’s takeover.
395 The hill was called Ghuzak and its precise location is unknown. This appears to be the first reported episode of a supposed coalition of Hindu kings organized by the Shahi Jaipal. Yet as already mentioned in Chapter 2, this tendentious story by Firishta lacks support in the contemporary sources and in all other texts for centuries. For example, Firishta, 20, mentions the Raja of Ajmer as part of this coalition, but Ajmer did not exist at this time.
396 ‘Utbi reports that Mahmud, fifteen years old at the time, wanted to continue the battle, but that his father was concerned that the Shahis would burn themselves and their valuables. Regardless of the precise conversation between father and son, Mahmud appears in ‘Utbi to be an impetuous youth who clashed with his more restrained and strategy-minded father.
1,000,000 dirhems and 50 elephants. He also ceded forts and towns on the frontier and handed over some kinsmen to Sebuktegin. Yet as soon as he had safely retreated, Jaipal immediately returned to the ceded forts and towns and detained the Ghaznavid troops guarding them, perhaps with the aim of a prisoner exchange. Sebuktegin marched again on the eastern frontier and managed to advance against this reassertion. His army captured many settlements in the area between Lamaghan and Peshawar. A number of local Khaljis and Afghans perceived the changed circumstances, submitted to Sebuktegin, and joined his army. Stability then reigned for several years between the Shahis and the army of Ghazni, certainly beneficial for the steady extraction of commercial and tax revenue for both sets of rulers.

Yet not all was calm at home in Ghazni: Sebuktegin imprisoned Mahmud for a few months in 990-1, on the basis of an apparent “misunderstanding”, but he was eventually released and restored to favor. At roughly the same age that Sebuktegin had loyally followed his master Alptegin into southern Afghanistan, Mahmud may have been involved in a scheme to usurp his father or at least defy his rule. Jaipal heard the news and sensed opportunity: he offered to save Mahmud from imprisonment and elevate him with armies, wealth, and marriage. Mahmud rejected the Shahi’s temptations, purportedly with the reply that “my father is my master (khudā and sayyid). If he wants to kill me, he is the ruler and the judge.” The situation appears to have been resolved, and Mahmud eventually rejoined his father’s side. In any case, there

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397 Utbi, 21-6.
398 Majmaʿ al-Ansāb, f. 245a; Fasihi, f. 303b. The episode is only mentioned in these works. Baihaqi, 257, probably makes a covert reference to it.
399 In Majmaʿ al-Ansāb, f. 245 and Naḥṣī, Dar pīrāmūn-i tārīkh-i Bayhaqī, I, 65.
400 Naḥṣī, Dar pīrāmūn-i tārīkh-i Bayhaqī, I, 65.
was apparently some degree of mistrust between Sebuktegin and his son, perhaps a sign that weak political bonds also extended into the family sphere.

The Shahis had suffered some material losses and tarnished honor due to the clash with the Ghazni faction, a fact soon detected by their eastern rivals. In 991, the Raja of Lahore, purportedly called Bharat, sent a large army across the Chenab, the boundary between the two kingdoms, with the aim of seizing Nandana and the Jhelum. Control of this strategic zone, rich in salt mines, would have strengthened the Raja’s military position and afforded him access to the rents for travel and trade into the heart of the Panjab. Although still licking his wounds, the Shahi lord Jaipal dispatched his son Anandpal to repulse the intruders until they were pursued to Lahore itself and defeated. Yet local notability continued to support the erstwhile ruler, promising tribute in exchange for his reinstatement. Despite their clear victory, the Shahis reinstated the defeated Raja as a client, granting him a robe of honor; however, this Raja seemed to be in power for only a short while, perhaps less than a year, before his son Chandardat usurped him.

This episode reveals a few curiosities which deserve further attention. It is quite clear that rivalries were not structured along strictly religious lines; indeed, the perceived and real benefits of poaching territory often superseded ideology. In this case, the prize was control over the natural resources and access points of the Salt Range, but even the risk appeared relatively small, due to the fact that defeated rulers could be reinstated by their enemies if they retained sufficient local elite support. It is also noteworthy that there

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401 There may be a literary flourish in the name Bharat, which was the Sanskrit name for India. This story appears in Adab al-Muluk. See M. Nazim, “The Hindu Sháhiya Kingdom of Ohind”, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland: 3 (1927), 485-495.
402 Adab al-muluk, see above citation. See Rehman, The Last Two Dynasties, for mss. variations on the spelling of Bharat.
appears to be more cooperation between the father and son of the established Shahis than the upstart Ghaznavids. Although the exact chronology is uncertain, it may even have been the case that Mahmud was imprisoned while the loyal Anandpal avenged his dynasty by invading Lahore. Crucially, rulership did not rest in the hands of the great lord alone, whether he was styled an amir or raja: the local power elite could overturn the will of a victor, effectively obstructing the imposition of government, let alone the formation of autocracy. The rise and fall of aspiring monarchs depended greatly on the will of others who composed the actual ground for practical politics.

Meanwhile, Samanid power had deteriorated further in the years since Sebuktegin’s seizure of the route to Peshawar. Sebuktegin had carefully maintained his formal submission to the current Samanid amir Nuh, but Fa‘iq and the vassal Abu ʿAli Simjuri had begun a rebellion and gathered forces against Bukhara. In desperation, Amir Nuh called on Sebuktegin for assistance against the conspirators. Sebuktegin marched his forces in haste to Herat and struck fear into their mustered army, compelling them to pay an indemnity of 15,000,000 dirhems. Yet Abu ʿAli soon broke the agreement, so Sebuktegin attacked him near Herat in early fall of 994. Mahmud played a decisive role in dispersing the forces of Abu ʿAli, who escaped westward to Ray to take refuge with the king of Tabaristan, Fakhr al-Dawla. This timely and swift response to aid the Samanid amir marked the beginning of a decisive expansion of power for Sebuktegin and his sons.

Sebuktegin received the title “Victor of the Religion and State” (Nāṣir al-Dīn wa al-Dawla) from the amir, signifying his new role as a general protector of the social and political order of the Samanid realm. He also received control of the province of Balkh.

403 ʿUtbi, 80; Gardizi, 55.
His son Mahmud also gained title and wealth. His service was recognized with the title “Sword of the State” (Sa‘īf al-Dawla), and he was given command of the troops in Khurasan. Victory secured titles which nevertheless required validation by external powers.

Flush with honors, Mahmud entered Nishapur, but he was surprised by the swift approach of Abu ʿAli and Faʾiq, causing him to evacuate the town and wait a short distance away for reinforcements from his father. The duo captured this key town, advanced on Mahmud, who was then in his early twenties, and defeated him decisively, seizing his elephants and forcing him to retreat to Herat in spring 995. In the face of this disastrous rout, Sebuktegin marched to Tus to recover his son’s losses, meeting Abu ʿAli in battle in summer of 995.404

After intense combat, Abu ʿAli lost the day, in part due to a strong attack by Mahmud’s contingent. Abu ʿAli and Faʾiq sought peace and sent ambassadors to Amir Nuh. The Samanid amir arrested Faʾiq’s ambassador and feted Abu ʿAli’s in the interest of breaking up their alliance. The plan worked. Abu ʿAli foolishly arrived in Bukhara expecting negotiation, but the Samanid amir imprisoned him and handed him over to the custody of Sebuktegin in 996.405 Meanwhile, Faʾiq fled to the Qarakhanid Ilak Khan and convinced him to advance on Bukhara. Once again, Amir Nuh called for help from Sebuktegin, who arrived with a large force, but the Amir eventually did not want to fight in battle against Ilak Khan, on the advice of his vizier. Impotent to impose his will, the Samanid Amir continued to lose control of his domain.

404 20 Jumadi II 385/22 July 995
405 ʿUtbi, Manini, 75-101; these events begin in Thamiri, ʿUtbi, 87. Abu ʿAli died a year later in 37/997.
This was a bad decision by the Amir, perhaps due to overconfidence in his ability to manipulate his clients. The warrior Sebuktegin was offended by this decision to shy from battle. Another opportunity opened: Sebuktegin ceded to Ilak Khan all of the Samanid territories east of Qatwan and ordered a troop of 20,000 horses, led by Mahmud, to depose the irritating vizier. The Amir promptly dismissed his vizier and nominated one selected by Sebuktegin. While this drama unfolded in Bukhara, the brother of Abu ʿAli managed to capture Nishapur in the absence of Sebuktegin and Mahmud, assisted by his uncle Bughrajuq, immediately marched and dislodged this troublemaker. For the first time, Sebuktegin, provoked, had directly interfered in the top organization of Samanid government, although not to the same degree of his former master Alptegin. Yet this moment also marked in some manner a completion of the mission of Alptegin to influence the top echelons of the Samanid state. Decades of maneuver began to reach their fruition.

Sebuktegin would not enjoy this moment for long; his purpose in the history of greater Afghanistan was nearly over and he had accomplished what his master could not. The warrior, now in his mid-fifties, became ill from grief over the death of one of his sisters and some of his other relatives. Filled with sentiment, he began a march toward Ghazni to recover at home but died en route at the edge of Balkh. In a strange coincidence, the Samanid Amir Nuh had died himself about a month earlier; thus, in the summer of 997, the king of Bukhara and the kingmaker of Ghazni were buried.

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406 ʿUtbi, 98-100.
407 ʿUtbi, 102-103. It is unclear why Mahmud was accompanied by his uncle and it is the only instance of such an arrangement. Perhaps Sebuktegin wanted some additional participation in Mahmud’s decisions by his older uncle, after the defeat in Nishapur.
409 In the village of Mādrū Mūy, Shaʿban 37/August 997. See ʿUtbi, 107, Gardizi, 58; and leared-i Nāṣīrī, 75.
Before passing away, Sebuktegin divided the territory among his three oldest sons. For Mahmud, he secured the hand of a Farighunid princess related to the Samanid line and allowed him the rich province of Khurasan. For Nasr, he gave charge of the province of Bust. For Isma‘il, educated but inexperienced in war and born to a daughter of Alptegen, he granted the provinces of Balkh and Ghazni, thus nominating him as his overall successor.\textsuperscript{410} Sebuktegin made his men swear allegiance to Isma‘il and entrusted him with responsibility for his family and dependents.\textsuperscript{411} Isma‘il declared himself the successor in Balkh after his father’s death. He announced his fealty to the Samanid Amir du jour, Abu al-Harith Mansur ibn Nuh, and, heaping wealth from his father’s treasury onto his men to assure their loyalty against the expected displeasure of his older brother Mahmud, he hastened to Ghazni, the seat of rulership.\textsuperscript{412} These reinforcements to Isma‘il, however, would not dissuade the ambitions of his brother.

The appointment of Isma‘il remains a mystery from the perspective of droit d’aînesse. Perhaps Sebuktegin grew sentimental on his death-bed with his younger son Isma‘il beside him. Perhaps the connection with Alptegen’s daughter convinced him that he could create a dynastic line only through Isma‘il. He might have remained distrustful of Mahmud in some fundamental way since he had imprisoned Mahmud. In any case, there is no denying the bad judgment of Sebuktegin against his eldest and most capable son, who was clearly resistant to the distribution of the inheritance from the outset.\textsuperscript{413}

\textsuperscript{410} Guzida, 393; Majma’ al-Ansāb, f. 229b.
\textsuperscript{411} ‘Utbi, Manini, 110; ‘Utbi, Thamiri, 153; Baihaqi, 306, states that Sebuktegin gave his infant son Yusuf to the care of Mahmud.
\textsuperscript{412} Lane Poole, Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum, II, 130; ‘Utbi, 114.
\textsuperscript{413} Nazim, The Life and Times, 38, is equally baffled.
The rise of Mahmud

‘Utbi maintained that Mahmud wanted to assert his authority without necessarily depriving his brother. Upon news of Sebuktegin’s death, Mahmud sent an envoy with a letter of condolence to Isma‘il, stating his fraternal affection and his willingness to exchange Khurasan for the seat of Ghazni. He also clarified that he would not have contested his brother if Isma‘il possessed sufficient experience in warfare and statecraft. Isma‘il rejected this proposal. Mahmud’s father-in-law, Abu al-Harith Farighuni, sensed the impending clash and attempted to arrange a negotiation, but Isma‘il refused to participate. Mahmud continued his mixed strategy by starting to march toward Ghazni but stopping in Herat to send a letter of reconciliation. Isma‘il again rejected discussion. The exchanges charged toward conflict while the brothers were still in the immediate aftermath of their father’s death, with all of the psychological turbulence of such a moment; moreover, each brother sat at the center of rival blocs of soldiers, administrators, and notability which were rapidly edging toward battle.

As Mahmud advanced, he gathered strength quickly. His uncle Bughrajuq, governor of Herat and Fushjang, attached himself to Mahmud; later, his brother, Abu al-Muzaffar Nasr, joined Mahmud in Bust. Abu al-Harith Farighuni also added his forces to those of his son-in-law. As this great growing army marched on Ghazni, Isma‘il moved southward from Balkh through the mountains to protect his patrimony. Mahmud sent another missive to attempt a compromise before attacking, but Isma‘il interpreted the gesture as weakness and determined to resist him.

The forces arrayed on the plain of Ghazni in spring of 998, Isma‘il’s line strengthened by hundreds of elephants. The armies battled for a day without breaking. In

\(^{414}\) ‘Utbi, 114-116.
the darkening evening, however, a charge led by Mahmud overcame the opposition. Isma‘il retreated to the fort, but soon realized that he could not sustain a long siege with the countryside under the complete control of his older brother. He surrendered when Mahmud promised to treat him well; his seven month reign had finished.\footnote{Utbi, 118. Contra W. Haig, Cambridge History of India, 11, Isma‘il was not surrendered by his notables. Nazim, The Life and Times, 40, becomes overexcited and expresses unsupportable clichés in the following comment about the battle, creating many obscurities: “The two armies [of Mahmud and Ismail] were equally matched except in the relative skill of their commanders. One was an inexperienced youth whose time had been spend chiefly in the society of scholars and literary men, the other was a man of ripe age and mature experience whose cool courage and furious charge had shattered the ranks of the impetuous Turkomāns with the same facility as those of the heterogeneous hosts of the effete Hindūs. And this disparity between the commanders made all the difference in the battle that followed.” This comment contains the presuppositions of the great man theory of history, an erroneous claim about the balance of forces, ethnic and religious stereotypes which contradict the evidence, and an undercurrent of anti-intellectualism which should be foreign to a scholar.}

It is debatable whether the faction in Ghazni led by Mahmud can be described at this point as an independent and coherent dynasty.\footnote{The same situation exists for many Roman and Byzantine emperors. There were kings and a coherent state, but the rulers were not always family-centered dynasts. There may be a general intensification of family-based dynasties in the medieval period.} It is true that there is a line of rulers situated in Ghazni, but there is no known family link between Alptegin and Sebuktegin. Apart from the exceeding short and unstable reign of Alptegin’s son Ibrahim, there is also no familial link with Alptegin for his successors of Bilkategin, Piritegin, and Sebuktegin, all of whom were chosen in consultation with the local notability. This situation was no mere interregnum in a family’s power but the actual and obvious development of leadership in 10th c. Afghanistan. Mahmud had seized power, but less certain was the extent of his right to wield it.

Certainly, the successors of Alptegin, including Sebuktegin, were not long-standing gentry and, in general, they were dependent politically on Bukhara.\footnote{No one from the period traces Alptegin’s line to the ancient Persian kings, but the procedure is carried out eventually for Sebuktegin.} Their relations with the Caliphate were remote, even non-existent: sources record no title,
investiture, robe of honor, or other symbol of authority from Baghdad at that time.

Nevertheless, not a single son of Sebuktegin had a Turkic or Persian name; their names were Arabic and not based on locality, except perhaps in poetry, in which Mahmud would later be called “al-Zabuli”, but this appellation from his birthplace was not given to him by his father. Until the sons of Sebuktegin battle for the right to the kingship, no one can be considered a *prince du sang*, even after three and a half decades of the troop in Ghazni; this is at least one or two generations, depending on the unit of measure. 418 In other words, the “Ghaznavids”, if they can be called such at that stage, did not possess the political culture of a conventional established landowning dynasty, even during the rule of Mahmud. In many respects, their ignoble origins placed them closer to the Saffarids than the Samanids; the Ghazni faction consisted primarily of bonded paid troops, but they were also men who were bound by certain socially determined constraints, despite their freedom in military action.

Sebuktegin’s decision to give the throne to Isma’il makes more sense in light of their weak hereditary claim to power in a world still based politically on long-standing families. Since he had gained power precisely by positioning himself as a dependent of a great lord, perhaps he thought that he could best reinforce his progeny by granting overall title to the son he had through the line of Alptegin, the original conqueror of Ghazni. This may also have appealed to some of the older soldiers who had been part of the faction since the beginning. Through Alptegin’s daughter, there would be a line which extended backward at least two generations. But the elevation of the recently married Mahmud would only have constituted the shortest possible dynastic line between Sebuktegin and Mahmud, thus reopening the question of political impermanence and their decent from

418 This term is not used in medieval Arabic or Persian.
non-gentry, bonded soldiers. Sebuktegin had suffered first-hand the vissicitudes of political power. With Mahmud, the connection to Alptegin, Sebuktegin’s original lord, would be diminished, and personal ambitions would be exposed to criticism. While Mahmud was obviously his father’s warrior son, these political factors may have been the reasons that Mahmud was not his father’s favorite to create continuity of power.

Sebuktegin had learned the value of loyalty to a fault, to the extent that it obscured from him certain obvious potentialities, including the rise of Mahmud. By eroding Isma’il, Mahmud actually negated the possibility of adding depth to the dynasty through family descent. With the reduction of the chain of forbearers, Mahmud had effectively transformed his father, not Alptegin, into the first “Ghaznavid.” This was recognized in the contemporary accounts, which often treated Sebuktegin as the first Ghaznavid. Thus, the maturing of the claim to authority was undermined by the usurpation; in this respect, the Ghaznavids under Mahmud resemble the Saffarids at the time of ‘Amr ibn Laith. In light of these considerations, it is justifiable to call the Ghazni faction “the Ghaznavids” at this stage, although it is questionable to do so at an earlier point. The troublesome issue of legitimate authority should be kept in mind constantly during the rise of Mahmud.

There may also have been cultural factors at play which the sources do not discuss directly: Isma’il, although he was given an Arabic name, had a father and mother who were both Turkic-speaking, the same language as Sebuktegin’s family, which hailed from northern Central Asia. Mahmud, however, may have been less Turko-Persian and more Indo-Persian, given that his mother was native to Zabulistan, where she quite likely may have spoken with her son in a dialect of early Pashtun, Persian, Hindavi, or another
western Indian language. Turkic-speaking groups had been present in the area for centuries, but there was a large degree of assimilation; the Shahis were quintessential examples of this phenomenon. Additionally, Isma’il was reputedly quite literate; he probably conformed to the ideals of the educated Persian-speaking man of the court even more than the tough and pragmatic Mahmud, which may have appealed to their father, the constant soldier, who viewed such literary men from the outside.

Apparently, Sebuktegin wanted to elevate a cultured Central Asian son with a better lineage to the top position, perhaps in imitation of what he imagined gave value to Samanid rulership. Regardless, Mahmud found his father’s arrangement intolerable, even if he understood its justification, to the extent that he was willing to exchange control over the riches of Nishapur for the relative paucity of Ghazni. Mahmud’s move on Ghazni also revealed the family’s deep roots in southern Afghanistan. In any event, the logic of Sebuktegin’s decision, whether for good or ill, in light of his clear focus on the political culture of Central Asia and Iran and relative disinterest in India, may have been more rational than has been surmised.419

Mahmud and his supporters risked and lost blood and treasure for their seizure of the throne in Ghazni. By the summer of 998, this opened the chance for rebellion in

419 Sebuktegin’s decision has been misinterpreted by other scholars. Elphinstone, History of India, 316, claims that Mahmud’s attempt at reconciliation indicated his awareness of a “weak title” to the throne because he was not an aristocrat. No Ghaznavid was an “aristocrat”. Even though Mahmud was not chosen, there is no reason to suspect that the eldest and most competent son was politically unable to claim the throne; he immediately received support from his other brother, his uncle, and his father-in-law during his march to Ghazni. Additionally, Utbi himself stresses fraternal bonds and does not imply any anxiety about the title on Mahmud’s behalf. Nazim, The Life and Times, Appendix D, correctly observes that Mahmud had high titles in contrast to Isma’il and was not disliked by his father, but he believes that the appointment of Isma’il was contingent on “a dying man’s capricious temperament.” Nazim’s individualistic great man theory of history cannot admit more. Nazim also claims that Mahmud coveted the launching ground for raids into India, but this ignores the next few years during which Mahmud concentrated on Iranian and Central Asian affairs. Both Elphinstone and Nazim do not fully appreciate the problem of legitimacy for the faction in Ghazni, particularly because they do see the larger process of the replacement of the dihqan by new “landless” warlords. As a result, neither can imagine a plausible logic for Sebuktegin’s choice of Isma’il.
Sistan. Khalaf ibn Ahmad, a descendent of Yaʿqub the Saffarid, had enjoyed greater independence as the Samanid grip on power weakened. More than once, Khalaf had tried to incite the Qarakhanid Ilak Khan to occupy Ghazni, perhaps after Sebuktegin’s occupation of nearby Bust. When Bughrajuq left the Herat area to assist Mahmud in the struggle for the throne, Khalaf promptly sent his son Tahir to occupy Herat. Mahmud’s victory in Ghazni enabled him to send troops with Bughrajuq to recover the territory. But initial success encouraged the foolish Bughrajuq to chase incautiously the fleeing Sistanis, who noticed his intoxication and turned swiftly to kill the sot. Tahir returned with seven elephants, many horses, weapons, and money.\(^{420}\) The ambitious Mahmud had lost control of the vital passage between Ghazni and Khurasan.

The northern tier continued to slip away from Mahmud’s grasp. After the deaths of Amir Nuh and Sebuktegin, the former Samanid vizier Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn ʿUzair hatched a plan to seize Khurasan by allying himself with the landlord Abu Mansur of Isfijab and inviting Ilak Khan in Kashgar to conquer the cities of Central Asia. But Ilak Khan first imprisoned the erstwhile vizier and the avaricious landlord in Samarqand, and then dispatched the double-dealing Faʾiq to seize Bukhara. The Samanid Amir Abu Harith, to whom Mahmud’s brother had sworn allegiance immediately after Sebuktegin’s death, escaped across the Amu Darya. Faʾiq, an ally of the Qarakhanids, was now master of Bukhara.

Yet it is not clear that Faʾiq had much control, even though he was well-integrated into Samanid politics. In a manner which recalled the Shahi dilemma after the capture of Lahore almost a decade earlier, Faʾiq, at the urging of local notables, invited the Samanid

\(^{420}\) Gold, Šīstān, 282. The passage also assures us that Amir Khalaf was pleased with his son, and the son was pleased with his father.
Amir to return. Upon his arrival, however, the Amir Abu Harith discovered that the two most powerful notables, Fa’iq and Begtuzun,\textsuperscript{421} were deeply bitter toward one another. To prevent their clash, which would only erode his precarious perch on the throne, Amir Abu al-Harith gave Begtuzun control of Khurasan while Mahmud was in Ghazni. The Amir hoped that dividing the riches of Central Asia and Iran would satisfy the pair of scheming vultures.

Mahmud soon discovered the deal. After successfully contesting his brother Isma’il, Mahmud traveled to Balkh to pay homage to the recently crowned Samanid Amir, in the manner of Sebuktegin. The Amir congratulated Mahmud for his victory over his brother and confirmed his possession of Balkh, Herat, Tirmidh, Bust, and Ghazni, but he denied him title to rich Nishapur, which he had “regrettably” given to the commander Begtuzun. Mahmud sent an envoy to convince the Amir to change his mind, but the Amir rejected the request. Mahmud had won Ghazni at the price of Khurasan.

Meanwhile, Mahmud’s brother, the deposed Isma’il, remained in luxurious confinement.\textsuperscript{422} Mahmud eventually realized that his brother was still plotting against him. Mahmud noticed during a hunting trip that the chief chamberlain, Nushtegin Kaj, had his hand on the hilt of his sword and waited for a signal from Isma’il to strike. Isma’il never signaled, however, either due to a loss of nerve or fear that his brother had noticed the plot. The angered Mahmud executed Nushtegin Kaj and then sent his brother to the territory of the Samanid Amir, with whom he may have been plotting.\textsuperscript{423} Brotherly

\textsuperscript{421} Malleson errs in History of Afghanistan, 57, when he claims that Amir Nuh had granted Begtuzun the governorship in Ghazni.

\textsuperscript{422} ‘Utbi, 128-132.

\textsuperscript{423} This is a good supposition by Nazim in light of the tension between the Samanid Amir and Mahmud. See Nazim, The Life and Times, 41. ‘Utbi mentions the exile; Fasihi, f. 309a, errs when he claims that Isma’il was imprisoned “in the fort of Kalanjar, now called Talwara.” Mahmud did not control Kalanjar at that time.
love did not integrate well with political power in an atmosphere of deceptive pomp and unstable alliances.

After his diplomatic efforts with the Amir failed to reinstate his position in Khurasan, Mahmud moved his army toward Nishapur. Begtuzun received reinforcements from the Samanid Amir at Sarakhs and Mahmud’s armies departed without fighting. Yet after the encounter, the restless pair of Fa’iq and Begtuzun had begun to fear that the Amir sympathized with Mahmud. In early 999, the pair imprisoned the Amir after a hunting expedition and raised ’Abd al Malik, his father’s younger brother, to the throne. Their vacillations indicate the fundamentally mercurial nature of political bonds as the Samanid house collapsed.

Mahmud used the deposition, however, to justify encampment in front of the town of Marv, where the pair had taken refuge. There is no hint in the sources that Mahmud’s earlier deposition of his brother inhibited him from suddenly claiming to be the protector of a sovereign’s rights. Even though a peace arrangement did not return possession of Khurasan, Mahmud retreated southward anyway, for reasons unknown. His enemies smelled weakness: it is reported that a portion of the Amir’s troops were incited to steal from Mahmud’s retiring baggage train. In response, Mahmud’s commanders arranged three large formations of more than 10,000 cavalry and dozens of elephants each, marching on the combined forces of the Amir ’Abd al-Malik, Fa’iq, Begtezun, and Abu Qasim Simjuri in Marv, and scattering his foes. The Samanid Amir fled to Bukhara which was still menaced by the possibility of Qarakhanid invasion. Mahmud appointed

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424 Mahmud appeared content with the terms according to Gardizi, 60 and Bayhaqi, Morley, 805. Quite likely, he was uncertain about the strength of his political or military position vis à vis the Samanids.
425 Gardizi, 60, Bayhaqi, 804.
426 27 Jumadi I 389/16 May 999.
his brother Nasr to command Khurasan’s troops so that he could retire to Balkh to monitor the events in Bukhara.

A direct challenge to the Samanid Amir, even if it proved militarily possible, would have threatened Mahmud’s political position, despite the fact that the Amir was established by his enemies. Certainly, such open strife with the Amir was in striking contrast to Sebuktegin, who had been quite scrupulous about avoiding conflict with the dynasty of his erstwhile dehqān masters. Mahmud’s naked ambitions in defiance of his dead father’s wishes may have been too much for some of his uncertain supporters to bear; at the very least, it left a question about his right to rule due to his unestablished lineage. Mahmud observed but did not act. The gap between Mahmud’s practical power and his theoretical right to rule had opened widely and could not be filled through military force alone.

Samanid fortunes continued to deteriorate after these disastrous spring defeats. Fa’iq died mid-summer, depriving the Amir of a vigorous general. Sensing opportunity, the Qarakhanids under Ilak Khan conquered Bukhara, the ripe unguarded melon of Central Asia, that autumn of 999. Emerging from a different tradition based primarily on the political economy of the medieval steppe, they had little need for the landed house of Saman. Moreover, the notables of Bukhara had tired of the flailing Samanids and recognized the inevitable course of events. A group of landlords invited the Qarakhanids to take military control.427 The congregation in the mosque ignored the appeal of the Samanid Amir ’Abd al-Malik for defense of the city, and they were confirmed in their rejection by jurists who declared it unlawful to bear arms against Ilak Khan, who was

defined as one of the “Faithful”, although he was certainly not Muslim at that time.\footnote{Utbi,135; Gardizi, 61.}

The Samanid political position had collapsed: the Bukharan notability could act as
kingmakers as well as kingbreakers.

In fall of 999, the Qarakhanids entered Bukhara nearly unopposed; the Amir ʿAbd
al-Malik was captured, along with nearly all the Samanid royal family.\footnote{10 Dhu al-Qaʿda 389/23 October 999, according to ʿUtbi and Gardizi.} Mahmud
immediately exchanged friendly letters with Ilak Khan and suggested that the Amu Darya
remain the boundary between them. Mahmud also petitioned Ilak Khan for a daughter to
marry and his wish was granted within months. Obviously, Mahmud was content with the
outcome, in part because he could not be accused of directly ending the Samanid line; it
may be said that Qarakhanids in Bukhara had excused Ghaznavid ambitions.\footnote{Some commentators, such as Madadi, 6-9, emphasize that the Qarakhanids, not the Ghaznavids, destroyed the Samanids. This is a fact but it may also be an attempt to emphasize a certain kind of Islamic or Persian solidarity against non-Muslim Turks. Certainly, this interpretation strengthens the continuity between the Persianate dynasties of the Samanids and the Ghaznavids, perhaps serving some Afghani nationalist positions. Later clashes between the Ghaznavids and the last Samanid claimant, however, are usually neglected in this view. It is hard to call Mahmud a Samanid client or even ally, particularly after the fall of Bukhara.}

The loss of Bukhara is often reckoned to be the end of the Samanid line, but the
city’s capture was no more the final end of the Samanids than the conquest of Persepolis
had been for the Sasanians. Abu Ibrahim Ismaʿil al-Muntasir, a son of the former Amir
Nuh, escaped Qarakhanid imprisonment and rallied a group of noble supporters to regain
Bukhara. This last Samanid claimant and his supporters continued to disrupt the division
of spoils between the Qarakhanids and Ghaznavids for several years. Unlike the
Qarakhanids, however, the Ghaznavids still had a political quandary to solve: their
tradition of clientage to the Samanid was no longer viable. This conjuncture probably
explains their extension into caliphal politics. By late autumn of 999, Mahmud reported
his conquest of Khurasan to Baghdad, after which he was granted nominal sovereignty over the territories that he had obtained; of course, only Mahmud’s troops were in any position to enforce any claim. Caliph al-Qadir gave Mahmud the title “Right-hand of the State and Protector of the People” (Yamīn al-Dawla wa Amīn al-Milla); purportedly, Mahmud promised to carry out raids to “Hind” each year. The pursuit of Caliphal support was a perceptive move which demonstrated the Ghaznavid desire to overstep the Samanids because the Samanids had not yet recognized the Caliph al-Qadir, even though he had been seated for several years. In this way, Mahmud’s faction attempted to establish a political legitimacy which could navigate the turbulence in Central Asia.

Mahmud then opened a front in Sistan to regain the lost passage between Khurasan and Ghazni. In the winter of 999, Mahmud besieged the fortress to which Khalaf had retreated, extracting a peace offering and a tribute of 100,000 dinars. Tahir grew afraid of his father’s wrath after failing to confront Mahmud’s retreating troops, so he fled with elephants and the army to Kerman and eventually to Fars. The angered Khalaf burned the crops of those who fed Mahmud’s army and shunned the elite of

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431 Fakhr al-Muddabir reports that Mahmud received these new titles along with khilʿat and a purported patent of sovereignty over Iraq, Khwarezm, Khurasan, Sistan, Sind, and Hind; see M. Nazim, “The Hindu Shāhiya Kingdom”, 493. But this full list of territories is probably imagined post-factum in this later work. ʿUtbi and Gardizi mention only the granting of his famous laqab in Dhu al-Hajja 389 (November 999). See ʿUtbi, 131; Gardizi, 62-3.
432 ʿUtbi, 134; ʿUtbi, Thamiri, 178.
433 Al-Qadir came to power in 991. Nagel maintains that the move was not wholly cynical and that Mahmud believed in the Caliph along with his use of caliphal titles for political purposes: “Es wäre zu einfach, Mahмūds Schreiben an al-Ḡadir als fromme Augenwischerei abzutun.” See Nagel, “Das Kaliphat der Abbasiden” in Geschichte der arabischen Welt, 154. This is not impossible, but it should be remembered that the Ghaznavids lost interest in Caliphal politics once their political power was secure in the 1010s.
434 ʿUtbi, 255-6, Gardizi, 65. The Tārīkh-i Sīstān maintains that Khalaf went to a mountain resort on Mount Espahbad with his harem and black servants, where he was surprised by Mahmud’s large force. This account seems to be some form of apology. In Bahar’s critical edition, Mahmud also won the power to have the khutba delivered in his name and his name struck on the coinage. Bahar, Sīstān, 46. Gold, Sīstān, 282. From the first mention of Mahmud in Tārīkh-i Sīstān, Mahmud is called “Sultan”.
Sistan. Eventually, Tahir limped home with a small number of men. As for Mahmud, his faction was victorious by the end of 999, and resisters were pursued throughout the junction of Iran and Central Asia. Battle had brought the desired outcome: Mahmud had finally regained control of Khurasan and passage through Sistan after more than a year of struggle.

The year 999 was marked not only by the seizure of Bukhara but also that of Lahore. Chandardat had remained Raja of Lahore for several years after overturning his father. The Shahis had been content with this state of affairs for several years, perhaps as long as non-hostility or obeisance remained. Yet in 999, the Shahis claimed that Chandardat’s acceded to power illegitimately through the deposition of his father. This pretext was sufficient for them to march on Lahore and capture the city, apparently surprising Chandardat during hunting. It seems that the Shaivite Shahis brought about the end of an independent Raja in Lahore.

Fakhr al-Muddabir’s *Adab al-Harb* does not make clear the precise date for these events in the Panjab, so they cannot be placed in exact sequence in relation to events in the west. But these events in Central Asia and India occur almost simultaneously. Apparently, the rulers of Bukhara and Lahore were both captured during hunting, and eventually both cities were lost to invaders, Qarakhanids in the former case and Shahis in the latter. This scenario may have been a literary trope: the Sistani defeat by Mahmud also occurred during a pleasure outing, purportedly with women and domestic servants. Yet, while it is possible that such a narrative about the fall of Bukhara and Lahore was

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437 The passage only mentions the year 999 but not the days or months of events.
merely discursive, perhaps symbolizing the consequences of a careless ruler engaged in hunting games rather than the rigors of battle, it is also equally possible that these events occurred that year on both sides of the mountains, given the different sources reporting on these events and the lack of didactic tone in relating them.\textsuperscript{438}

Furthermore, even if the explanation of cause by the sources seems suspect, in the sense that pleasure leads to defeat, it is still necessary to acknowledge the effect; in other words, the political and military outcome. Consequently, it seems reasonable to wonder: Did the Shahis want to reinforce their rear flank due to the rise of Mahmud? Did the Shahis need more tribute to prepare for war against Ghazni while Mahmud was preoccupied with Khurasan? Did the silver crisis grow more acute in the Panjab due to the chaos in Mawarannahr, affecting fiscal expenditures for the Shahi military? It is difficult to be certain of these suppositions, but there is no doubt that 999 marked a definite change in the balance of forces on all sides of medieval Afghanistan.

Regardless, Fakhr al-Muddabir’s didactic message about the end of the Raja of Lahore is quite clear and does not relate to harems or hunting. He mentions that Bharat of Lahore treacherously overthrew his good father to attain power, but in turn, he was overthrown by the loyal Shahi son Anandpal. Chandardat usurped his father Bharat to achieve power in Lahore, but he was once again defeated by the unswerving Anandpal, who was reported to have said to Chandardat that “unlike you who have risen against your own father and deposed him, I am obedient to my father. Your father had behaved to his father as you have behaved towards him; and it was for this reason that God granted

\textsuperscript{438} Rehman finds it impossible that the raja of Lahore was hunting and believes that he must have been scouting the terrain when he was captured. The focus of the passage is filial loyalty, however, not hunting.
me an easy victory over him, and for the same reason He will help me to vanquish you. The heroic and blessed Anandpal won Lahore because he was a loyal son.

For this Persian treatise on war, the central concern was not at all Hindu-Muslim conflict, but rather the destructive consequences of rivalry between fathers and sons. Indeed, in this “Islamic” text, the “Hindu” Shahis are elevated as examples of the victories achievable through filial loyalty. The underlying common political and military family relations of a state were more decisive for this treatise than the particular cultural or religious ideology. This suggests that the values of filial loyalty were somewhat uncommon for the high medieval period; at the very least, they were still in formation and needed to be taught. By comparison with the large bureaucratic states of the early modern period, in which a state was stable even if the ruler had gone mad or remained caged, medieval political power often appears individualistic, temperamental, and rather fragile. The medieval polities of Iran, Central Asia, and India frequently lacked clear leadership and stable succession.

**Securing the Realm**

Bukhara and Lahore had fallen almost simultaneously, but not to the armies of Ghazni, who had concentrated primarily on preservation of their existing domain. Despite Mahmud’s promises to the caliph and the affirmation of his ambitions, the year 1000 was relatively quiet according to the sources. Each faction had to adjust to new realities and make fresh agreements. In summer, Mahmud celebrated a large wedding to Ilak Khan’s

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440 Notice the contrast in tone between this work, which praises the Shahis, and Firishta’s more tendentious text.
daughter in Khurasan. Mahmud also maintained good relations with the seated Caliph, his most important source of political legitimacy. When a descendent of a long dead Caliph challenged the seated Caliph al-Qadir by seeking an alliance with the Qarakhanids, Mahmud had this descendent arrested and imprisoned as he passed through Khurasan. Mahmud saw as little benefit in supporting this claimant as he did in propping up the troublesome Samanid.

There was a short autumn skirmish against the Shahis in Lamaghan, the area around contemporary Jalalabad, during which “many forts” were captured. Although hardly the great campaign eastward that one might imagine after boasts to the Caliph, it may have been the most that could be mustered. Perhaps all parties were fatigued by the monumental changes which had taken place in such a short time. It does seem, however, that Mahmud’s men had established a dominant presence in the entire Kabul river valley, and they fully controlled the western side of the Khyber Pass by that time.

The following year, however, showed continuing fragility for Mahmud’s position in Iran. The sole claimant to the Samanid throne, al-Muntasir, had gathered supporters in Khwarezm but was unable to recapture Bukhara from the Qarakhanids. Now he focused his troop on occupying Khurasan, where Mahmud’s younger brother Nasr was in authority. Perhaps the Ghaznavids were perceived to be weaker than the Qarakhanids and the Samanid aspirants intended to rebuild their power base from Khurasan. As winter subsided, al-Muntasir’s men marched on Nasr’s, who suffered defeat near Nishapur and retreated to Herat, exposing the northern tier to further attack. Mahmud dispatched

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441 Utbi, 192-193.
442 The date of this event is not precisely clear, but it occurred around 391/1001. He was called “Wathiqi” probably because he was a descendent of Caliph al-Wathiq (r.227-32/842-7).
443 390/September 1000. Gardizi, 63.
reinforcements and al-Muntasir’s forces fled to Jurjan, but the persistent Samanid
returned to Khurasan by early fall of 1001, on the very month that Mahmud launched a
campaign against the Shahis.\textsuperscript{444} It is quite likely that the pro-Samanid faction knew about
Mahmud’s departure and correctly surmised that it was easy to capture Khurasan while
Mahmud was engaged on the other side of the passes. Mahmud’s northern flank was
clearly exposed and his realm was far from secure.

Unable to leave his offensive in Gandhara, Mahmud summoned his loyal
commander Altuntash, who had served under Sebuktegin, to recover Khurasan. When his help arrived, Nasr was able to expel al-Muntasir, who moved to capture Sarakhs, perhaps in the hope that control of this border town between Iran and Central Asia would keep the Samanid claim alive. Nasr finally had the advantage, however, and inflicted a defeat on him, capturing many of his men, including Abu Qasim Simjuri, sending them to Ghazni. Mahmud’s military control of Khurasan was unstable and needed to be reinforced with strong troops, but there was no doubt that he had been strengthened by the final end of Fa’iq and Abu al-Qasim Simjuri. The Samanid Muntasir had not yet surrendered, however, and retained a core of armed supporters who doubtlessly hated the Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids with equal fervor. The Ghaznavids were no friends of the Samanids.

Meanwhile, Mahmud’s clash with Jaipal had finally arrived.\textsuperscript{445} It is reported that Mahmud had 12,000 horsemen, 300 war elephants, and 30,000 foot soldiers. By afternoon the charging horsemen overwhelmed Jaipal’s men; by night, the field filled with 5,000 dead from battle. The defeat was severe, and the reward significant, particularly the exotic pearl necklaces, some worth tens of thousands of dinars. But the

\textsuperscript{444} Shawwal 391/September 1001
\textsuperscript{445} 8 Muharram 392/17 November 1001 ; ’Utbi, 158; Gardizi, 66.
most important loot was human: Jaipal himself and fifteen of his sons. Jaipal promised to pay 250,000 dinars ransom and deliver 50 elephants, but had to leave one son and one grandson as hostage until the payment was complete. The Ghaznavid armies continued to raid the undefended area surrounding the Shahi capital of Waihind, returning to Ghazni the next spring of 1002. Jaipal could not survive after this catastrophe: he immolated himself, probably at the start of 1002 and was succeeded by his loyal son Anandpal.\textsuperscript{446}

The resilient Shahis had suffered greatly, paying in lives and heavy tribute, but they were not vanquished.

The Shahi tragedy was matched that year by treachery in Sistan. At some point, power in Sistan had transferred from Khalaf to his son Tahir.\textsuperscript{447} Different factions supporting the father and the son remained at odds after the humiliating intervention of Mahmud. The \textit{Tārikh-i Sīstān} reports a battle between the two in which Tahir was victorious, gaining the support of the ‘ayyār and seizing the military’s provisions due to the retreat of Khalaf to the Taq fortress. When the Sistanis collectively reached Taq and engaged in bloody battle, Khalaf sued for peace and managed to convince Tahir to approach the gate nearly unarmed. The son was fooled by his father’s demonstrations of affection and, when he neared the gate, found himself dragged into the fortress.\textsuperscript{448} Khalaf executed his son Tahir soon afterward in spring of 1002: the last Saffarid in the line of Ya’qub and ‘Amr had destroyed the future of his own dynasty.\textsuperscript{449}

\textsuperscript{446} Utbi, 158-159; Gardizi, 56.

\textsuperscript{447} Utbi maintains that Khalaf abdicated willingly, perhaps in his disgust with the Sistanis, ‘Utbi, 159. But the \textit{Tārikh-i Sīstān} maintains that Tahir fought with his father when he returned, perhaps with the support of Sistanis who had come to hate Khalaf.

\textsuperscript{448} The \textit{Tārikh-i Sīstān} claims that two strong black (zanjān) warriors dragged him inside, but the \textit{Tajārib al-umam} claims that there were a hundred soldiers hidden in the reeds nearby.

Angry and disgusted, the Sistanis raised the banner of Mahmud and invited him to rule them. In autumn of 1002, Mahmud arrived from Gandhara with his warriors, who promptly besieged Khalaf’s fortress, filling in the moat, smashing the gates with elephants, and trampling Khalaf’s men. Khalaf surrendered quickly and abased himself before Mahmud, offering him pearls and jewels. Mahmud reminded him that he caused his own suffering and allowed him to depart with his property to the province of Juzjanan near Balkh. In white cloth astride a donkey—the guise of a holy man—he cautiously rode away with his baggage train, monitored by one of Mahmud’s top soldiers. The remorseless Khalaf was no heroic Rustam.

The Tārīkh-i Sīstān refers to Mahmud as the Just Sultan of the World (ṣultān-i ‘ālam-i ‘ādil); at that moment, it is hard to argue the traditional view of the scholarship which sees the Sistanis as implacable foes of the Ghaznavids. The lamentation about the period of rule by the “Turks” in the following passage does not dispel the sense that the anonymous author of Tārīkh-i Sīstān felt that the Sistanis had brought about their own ruin even before the entrance of the Ghaznavids. At later points in the text, Mahmud is blessed in the text, and he is similarly blessed when he dies. In any event, “Turks” were already among the Sistanis, including powerful warriors such as Arslan Zangi, presumably the child of Central Asian and African parents, who eventually joined with the Ghaznavids. After deliberation with Sistan’s notability, Mahmud assigned some of

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450 Haig incorrectly reports that Khalaf had rebelled against Mahmud, but there is no source for this statement. See Haig, 14; and Nazim, 68.
451 Muharram 393/November 1002, ‘Utbi, 160 and Gardizi. Guzida, 393 errs by setting this date in 374/984, well before the death of Sebuktegin. Also see Nazim, 68.
452 ‘Utbi, 160-162.
453 The Tārīkh-i Sīstān is somewhat vague about the location.
his men agreeable to the Sistanis to administer the province so that he could return to
Ghazni.

By spring of 1003, however, some Sistanis swiftly returned to their rebellious
state. Groups of Sistani military men and ḍayār had been moved by Mahmud to Bust and
Ghazni, probably to prevent resistance to the new administration, but they seemed to
have gathered again at home and expelled Mahmud’s deputy. These decisions appear to
have been somewhat impulsive: the rebels, some of whom may have been related to
Khalaf, travelled to Sistan soon after Mahmud departed toward the Indus and used a
kettle to rally their men when they could not find a drum.454 Breeches in the walls, which
had been left open by the Ghaznavids, were hastily repaired. A troop of about a thousand
Ghaznavid horsemen, composed mostly of non-Muslim Indians (hinadawān kāfir), were
ambushed near Sistan and most of them were massacred. These defeated warriors
retreated for reinforcements to another part of Sistan, where they received help from
Ghaznavid troops stationed elsewhere and waited patiently for reinforcements. The
agreement between the Ghaznavids and the Sistani elders had been easily broken.

As news of the uprising reached Ghazni, a steady stream of soldiers travelled to
Sistan to invest the fortress where the rebels had taken refuge. By fall, Mahmud had
returned from India, probably after the campaign in Gandhara, and immediate pressed on
to Sistan. Mahmud dispatched a powerful force, diverting numerous resources to contend
with the rebellion. At the head of 10,000 warriors, he marched with his brother Nasr, the
loyal commander Altuntash, and other respected officers. They erected large catapults to
tear down the ramparts. Resistance remained fierce from the rebels, but it seems that they

454 Gold, Sīstān, 290.
were betrayed at night by an `ayyār, who allowed the Ghaznavids to enter.\textsuperscript{455} In the subsequent panic and massacre, violence respected no distinction. Bazaars and houses burned. The mosque and the church were plundered, and people were murdered inside them. At daybreak, Mahmud stopped the chaos; though many died, the \textit{Tārīkh-i Sīstān} clarifies that the purpose of the violence was not murder, but loot.\textsuperscript{456} Perhaps this was unsurprising after the recent rewarding victory over the Shahis; Sistan appears to have suffered in a manner comparable to the Shahi district of Waihind. With the administration of Sistan secure at the start of 1004, Mahmud retired to Ghazni. There was never again a major uprising in Sistan during Mahmud’s reign, though there were reports of tyranny and corruption by Ghaznavid officials as the extraction of rents became regularized.

Central Asia was similarly troubled for the Ghaznavids due to the ongoing struggles of the last Samanid claimant Muntasir. The Samanid had attempted to take refuge in Marv, but was forced by its Ghaznavid governor toward Abiward on the edge of the desert. In desperation at his failures, Muntasir finally appealed to Mahmud to help him regain the lost throne. Mahmud saw another opportunity to justify expansion. He directed the governor of Herat to join forces with Muntasir in the hope that these combined forces could capture Bukhara from the Qarakhanids. But the impetuous Muntasir charged ahead without waiting for reinforcements and suffered another defeat in early summer of 1004. Muntasir retreated to the desert near Khurasan. Obviously, these failures exposed Ghaznavid designs on Qarakhanid territories which nullified the agreement established after the fall of Bukhara; moreover, the troublesome Samanid

\textsuperscript{455} This is the report of \textit{Tārīkh-i Sīstān}, 291, and seems believable due to its inside view of these events. ‘Utbi, 168-70, and Gardizi, 67, provide a more heroic view, mentioning a successful attempt to scale the walls at night.

\textsuperscript{456} ‘Utbi mentions thousands of dead, perhaps to emphasize the irreligiousity of the battle, but \textit{Tārīkh-i Sīstān} is more circumspect.
claimant was now in position to harass the Ghaznavids again in Khurasan. The continuing military and political chaos in the northern tier of the domain enraged Mahmud. Mahmud sent a force against Muntasir, who fled again into the desert near Sarakhs after attempting another attack on Bukhara. Unsurprisingly, this failure pushed his men farther from the settled zone, where he took refuge with Arab tribes who lived on the edge of the Ghuzz desert. Mahmud seemed content with this outcome as he returned to Ghazni to prepare for his fall 1004 campaign against the Raja of Bhatinda.

Bhatinda, southeast of Gandhara, had an independent ruler perhaps similar to the one in Lahore before the Shahi conquest.\textsuperscript{457} \textsuperscript{457} Utbi refers to the Raja as Baji Ray. This Raja may have been once on friendly terms with the Ghaznavids, and it seems that the Ghaznavids expected his help in their fight with the Shahis some years earlier.\textsuperscript{458} The absence of their aid was interpreted conveniently as a sign of hostility. Ghaznavids marched along the southern edge of Shahi territory. The sequence of battle events is unclear, but it seems that the Raja emerged from his fort and fought the Ghaznavids in the field.\textsuperscript{459} This aggressive posture reaped a stalemate for four days, until Mahmud was able to lead a charge into their ranks. This indicates that the Ghaznavids did not have an absolutely dominant position, but they eventually mustered enough force to overcome the Raja’s men. The Raja then took refuge in a fort encircled by a moat and the Ghaznavids proceeded to fill the moat with trees and stones. The Raja’s subsequent flight to the jungle was soon detected and he was surrounded, but the Raja reputedly resisted capture

\textsuperscript{457} Biruni situates the town on the same latitude as Multan.
\textsuperscript{458} Haig, \textit{Cambridge History of India}, 15. Haig’s identification of the Arabic “Bhatiya” as the modern Uch is probably incorrect.
\textsuperscript{459} Once again, the exaggerations of Firishta on this event are not to be trusted.
by stabbing himself with his sword. The fort surrendered, and the Ghaznavids looted gold, silver, arms, and 120 elephants.\(^{460}\)

The victory over the Shahis had clearly emboldened the Ghaznavids; however, it should be mentioned that Bhatinda was a much smaller prize than Waihind, perhaps comparable in scale to the Shahi seizure of Lahore. It appears to have been a city and its surrounding province, but not a large domain with multiple large settlements in its sphere.

Some of the warriors from Bhatinda surrendered by professing Islam; \¨Utbi claims that teachers were assigned to instruct them.\(^{461}\) This is a curious fact that appears perhaps for the first time in the sources. In the first instance, it should be obvious, particularly after the sack of Sistan, that war was not strictly a religious pursuit for the Ghaznavids. It is well-known that the verb for “surrender” in Arabic is morphologically related to the verb “to become Muslim”, which can cause some semantic ambiguity, but this alone does not account for the assignment of teachers. Instead, the implication of the passage from \¨Utbi is that some warriors were willing to join the Ghaznavids and they had to be instructed, in perhaps the same manner that Turks in Central Asia had been taught the basics of Islamic faith and practice as part of their training. The outlying parts of Bhatinda do not seem to have been subject to conversion at all; rather, they probably were looted along with the fort.\(^{462}\)

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\(^{460}\) \¨Utbi, 209-210; Gardizi, 67.

\(^{461}\) \¨Utbi, 210.

\(^{462}\) Haig assumes that the Ghaznavids stayed in the area of Bhatinda, but there is little evidence for this claim. The Ghaznavids did not appear interested in directly administering Indian territories at this time, in contrast with attitude in Iran. It is more likely that they despoiled the area in the same manner as they had parts of Gandhara, then retreated.
Despite the victory, the Ghaznavids spent too much time in Bhatinda. No doubt their intrusion antagonized the Shahis further, but they also managed to make a new enemy of the Muslim ruler of Multan, Daʿud. Although the exact boundaries between territories were not clear, it may be that Daʿud resented the Ghaznavid passage through his land. It may also be that the Ghaznavids caused disruption on his northern border, probably interfering with trade and its taxation, and perhaps causing some movements of refugees into his territory. Whatever the case, the Ghaznavids over stayed in this area of the middle Indus, out of careless and perhaps some greed, and consequently they found themselves trapped by early rains as the Panjab rivers flooded. Baggage and strong warriors were lost in the surging chaos. Daʿud of Multan saw an opportunity and attacked the treasure-laden retreating soldiers, perhaps perceiving that the Ghaznavids eventually intended to raid Sind as well, and hoping to deter them. The raiders were raided. This Ghaznavid adventure ended ignominiously: the Sultan and his ragged troops straggled home to Ghazni by early summer 1005.

Meanwhile, the Samanid Muntasir had reached his end. While Mahmud was in Bhatinda, Muntasir was murdered by an Arab chieftain with whom he had taken refuge, at the instigation of the local Ghaznavid governor. Probably the governor paid the chieftain in the hopes of pleasing headquarters in Ghazni. It was a disgraceful end for the line of Samanid dehqānān and one which faintly echoed the death of Sasanian Yazdegird centuries earlier. Obviously, this solved a problem for Mahmud, who no longer had to contend with the unpredictable Muntasir; yet, the ambitious governor had missed the larger political calculation. Upon news of the assassination, Mahmud ordered the death of

463 Firishta diminished the episode into a matter of court etiquette, implying that Daʿud was rude to Mahmud. Clearly, Firishta did not perceive the issue of caliphal politics or acknowledge the harassment of Ghaznavid troops.
the governor and the chieftain, sending a force to destroy the Arab camp as punishment. The politics of Sebuktegin were still quite alive: Mahmud could not be viewed as directly ordering the death of the Samanid Amir. This undermined the fragile basis of legitimacy that the Ghaznavids needed to administer Khurasan with the least amount of force possible. Moreover, the Ghaznavids had a large contingent of soldiers with ties to the vanishing class of landlords which had formed an important basis for Samanid support. Mahmud could not afford antagonizing those with sympathies to the Samanids by naked aggression against the paradigmatic representative of their social class, even if their steady decline had been apparent for decades.

The Ghaznavids needed several months to recover after the events in Bhatinda. They had gone to Bhatinda to punish wayward allies and return with loot, but they experienced many losses. Fortunately for them, there was no major campaign to conduct in Central Asia except for the force sent to punish the assassination of the Samanid Amir, so there was a brief chance for them to replenish themselves. But events on the Indus had shown that Ghaznavid raids to their east would be more complicated and difficult than expected: it was not enough to simply defeat the Shahis under Jaipal and assume that other local rulers would follow suit. Both the Raja of Bhatinda and the ruler of Multan had friendly relations with Sebuktegin, perhaps on the basis of their bilateral disputes with the Shahis. Now, Muslim and Hindu rulers of the Indus were opposed to Ghaznavid raids. The Ghaznavids needed greater care to avoid a repeat of the post-Bhatinda debacle.
Battle of the Orthodoxies

The predations by Ismaʿili Sindis near Bhatinda were a bitter humiliation. Mahmud had made a special show of his loyalty to the Caliph in Baghdad as a means to assert legitimacy among the Iranian urban elite whose mediation on the state’s behalf played a crucial role in the day-to-day maintenance of Ghaznavid power. In the absence of evidence from the sources, it is difficult to ascertain how the members of this elite responded to the embarrassment in India on the heels of the recent murder of the last Samanid. But it is hard to imagine that it was favorable.

This is not the place to provide a full exposition of the vexed question of social classes in the eastern Islamic world. But it is quite clear that no medieval dynasty, whether the Samanids, Ghaznavids, or Seljuqs, could effectively rule an area without taking into account the interests of its strongest members, who were typically part of large interconnected wealthy families with positions at various nodal points in the political economy, usually in higher sectors such as landowning, trade, education, or law. To further comprehend these tensions, it is important to keep in mind the general condition of Islamic political and religious authority as it had emerged by the Ghaznavid age. These two realms of authority had begun to diverge markedly by the middle of the 9th c. as ’Abbasid power waned.464 This can be seen as the retention of religious prestige by the Caliph, but the loss of political influence to local elites. Alternatively, this can also be viewed as the extension of the Caliphs’ theoretical significance over the Islamic community, but the contraction of their practical capacities. Regardless of the perspective, it is clear that this process of polarization gave greater power to local elites

precisely as the number of Muslim converts grew almost exponentially. In Khurasan, the Ghaznavids sat astride these elites as they struggled against one another for material and ideological reasons.

It remains a paradox yet to be fully explored why the plethora of legal schools which flourished under the ‘Abbasids during the 9th c. contracted steadily over the course of the medieval period while the number of converts increased. The variety decreased as the believers grew more diverse. The ‘ulamāʾ who administered these schools were not merely specialists in the Qu’ran, the body of stories about the early Islamic community (hadīth), or in ritual acts and proper belief. They also disbursed funds to manage schools and the various institutions of medieval Islamic civil society. They adjudicated legal cases concerning crimes against property and person as well as controlled commercial and financial ventures. In other words, civil society could not be ruled efficiently by the Ghaznavids without accounting for their demands, particularly in the rich Iranian province of Khurasan.

In Nishapur, the major madhhab were Hanafi, Shafiʾi, and Karrami. In the latter decades of the Samanids, the Hanafis and Shafiʿis fought one another to gain patronage and official favor from Bukhara. The Shafiʿis had been favored by the Simjurid governor, but his will was overturned in 987 when the Samanid Amir forced him to appoint a Hanafi as chief judge (qāḍī) of Nishapur. When Sebuktegin acquired the governorship in 994 after repelling Simjurid attempts to undermine the Samanids, he retained the status


quo of favoring Hanafis over the tainted Shafi’is. But the Karramis were a different matter since they had remained marginal to the battle for the Samanid throne. Sebuktegin was impressed with their faith to the extent that he reputedly accepted their beliefs.467 Yet, even though the Ghaznavids were known to patronize a different madhhab, the Hanafis remained in a dominant position in Nishapur’s civil society. In any case, all these major Khurasani madhhab were opposed to Isma‘ilis, even though there was a substantial and growing number of Isma‘ilis in their midst, particularly among richer merchants.468

Anti-Karrami heresiography has blurred the picture of this sect, but a basic outline for their growth has been uncovered. Their founder, Abu ʿAbdullah Muhammad ibn Karram (d. 255/869), came from Sistan and eventually learned ascetic and juridical practices in Nishapur. The pious Ibn Karram stressed moral and social reform, travelling to the peasants of Ghur, Gharchistan, and Khurasan; in this way, his followers may have been responsible for a large number of conversions to Islam in those areas.469 The Karrami were particularly well-known for their opposition to certain forms of profit (kasb) and prohibited supporters from working for the sake of profit. These kinds of beliefs were not unusual over the course of the 9th and 10th c., but the Karramiyya were

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467 According to ʿUtbi, Sebuktegin’s secretary Abu al-Fath Busti claimed that “The only true legal system (fiqh) is Abu Hanifa’s, just as the only true religious system (dīn) is that of Muhammad ibn Karam.” This statement should be viewed with some caution due to the undercurrent of criticism of the dynasty in ʿUtbi; nevertheless, it neatly parallels the division between theoretical and practical power which pertained for the ‘Abbasids. See Tārikh-i Sīstān, Bahar, 339; ʿUtbi, II, 310; Jurbadhqani, 254; Bosworth, "The Rise of the Karamiyah in Khurasan," Muslim World 50 (1960), 8; Bulliet, "The Political-Religious History of Nishapur," in D. S. Richards, (ed.), Islamic Civilization: 950-1150 (Oxford, 1973), 71-93.
considered particularly radical in their opposition to commercial gain.\textsuperscript{470} This may have been a factor in their widespread support among the rural classes and lower urban classes of Nishapur, where they had entrenched themselves in a poorer part of the city.\textsuperscript{471}

When Mahmud gained the governorship of Khurasan in 997, he initially favored the Hanafi \textit{madhab}. The conflict over the accession to the throne at Ghazni required him to leave Khurasan, but prior to his departure he issued a coin bearing Qur’anic verse 3:17, which was recognized as justification for the Mu’tazilite theology maintained by many Hanafis.\textsuperscript{472} This was probably intended to guard against the return of the Simjurids by currying favor with their Hanafi opponents in Nishapur, but as it happened, the Samanid Amir appointed Begtezun to command Nishapur; the coin issue had little effect. Later, once Mahmud regained the province, Mahmud’s brother Nasr endowed a madrasa for the Hanafi judge, probably to counter the Shafi’i madrasa built by the Simjurids several years earlier. The Ghaznavids had maintained a safe conservative stance with these Iranian powerbrokers which accorded with their other positions on land relations and religious authority. But the events following the episode at Bhatinda would change this posture and disrupt the interaction between the Khurasani elite and the Ghaznavid central government.

In sharp contrast with the Ghaznavids, the Sindi Muslim rulers accepted Isma’iliism and maintained close contact with the Fatimid Caliph in Egypt. Isma’ili Muslims also played a key role in the expanding Indian Ocean trade with its important growing poles in Egypt, Iraq, and Sind. The anxiety must have been heightened for both

\textsuperscript{470} Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy”, 44.  
the Ghaznavid and Sindi rulers, as it was theoretically possible to switch sides politically with ease while still remaining within a similar religious context. But in practical terms, this anxiety also meant greater potential for violence as a means to reassert boundaries which held together social and political orders on both sides. In this sense, the anti-Ismaʿili stance of the Ghaznavids can be understood as more than mere religious zealotry since it was entwined with the precarious nature of Mahmud’s political legitimacy and the consequent necessity for the imprimatur of the Caliph in Baghdad, who nominally superseded the religious authority of the Khurasani madhhab and was implacably opposed to the Fatimid counter-caliph in Cairo. Thus, the conquest of Ismaʿili Sind became an immediate necessity for his political position in Iran after the damaging retreat from Bhatinda. In all likelihood, Mahmud had lost his reputation in Khurasan. In this instance, there was no “Hindu-Muslim” conflict but primarily one based on “Muslim-Muslim” antagonisms.

In spring of 1006, the Ghaznavids marched forth toward the Indus with the intention of reaching Multan. They wanted to cross higher up on the river near Peshawar in Shahi territory to avoid the dangerous waters, but the Shahis, perhaps emboldened by the stance of the erstwhile Raja of Bhatinda, organized a blockade. The energized Ghaznavids pushed aside this attempt and forced the Shahis to retreat; their goal was Multan, not the Panjab. Upon hearing of the Ghaznavid advance, Daʿud’s men entrenched themselves in an island fort on the Indus. After a week-long battle, the Ghaznavids managed to breach the defenses, killing many Ismaʿili soldiers inside, but Daʿud himself escaped with some of his trusted men. The city dwellers agreed to an annual tribute of 20,000 silver dirhems. The mosque was used to keep horses and store
Sind paid a heavy price, but it is difficult to discern if it was more onerous than the one paid by Sistan.

The Ghaznavids began some plunder of the area around Bhatinda and Multan, but they were interrupted by news of Qarakhanid invasion in the north. This was unsurprising in light of the brief Ghaznavid support of the last Samanid’s failed attempt on Bukhara, so probably the Qarakhanids simply waited for an opportune moment to strike when the Ghaznavid army was fatigued from battle in the middle Indus, the site of the previous year’s catastrophe. Recognizing the danger, Mahmud immediately ordered a march northward and assigned the governorship of Multan to Nawasa Shah, which proved to be a fateful choice. Nawasa Shah’s given name was Sukhpal and he was the grandson of Jaipal. He was probably one of the hostages left with the Ghaznavids under Sebuktegin during their battle in 986 with the Shahis. He had been raised in the Ghaznavid household and may have been trained in administrative and military arts, in a manner similar to Sebuktegin himself. This Shahi relative was now in command of Multan.

The Qarakhanid attack opened the door for rivals to improve their position against the rising Ghaznavids. It was soon discovered that Khalaf, the disgraced former ruler of Sistan, was corresponding in secret with Ilak Khan; he was removed from his confinement in Juzjanan to the more remote area of Gardiz, dying a few years later. Anandpal attempted a more diplomatic route to placate Mahmud. In a letter much admired by Biruni, Anandpal offered to assist the strained Sultan with 5000 horsemen, 10,000 foot soldiers, and 100 elephants, with the claim that “I have been conquered by

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473 The quote is from Biruni, *Hind*, I, 117. Also see ‘Utbi, 212 and Gardizi, 67-8. This episode was later the subject of some elaboration, by Mahmud’s chief pangyryst ‘Unsuri and the didactic Adab al-Muluk.

474 Gardizi, 68.
you and therefore I do not wish that another man should conquer you." This seems to have been ignored by Mahmud who understandably did not trust those who had impeded his passage to Multan that very spring.

The northern tier fell to Ghaznavid enemies. The Qarakhanid Ilak Khan had dispatched his brother Chaghategin to capture Balkh and another relative, Subashtegin, to take Khurasan and Herat. Mahmud had left instructions in case of Qarakhanid invasion, a sensible precaution given that the Ghaznavids themselves had precipitated the deterioration of relations. Their troops withdrew to Ghazni and strengthened the mountain approaches from Balkh which ran through Panjhir and Bamiyan. Without the traditional pause in Ghazni, troops fresh from the Multan campaign moved to confront the invaders. Chagategin fled Balkh northward to Tirmidh, freeing Ghaznavid forces to fight the bigger battle against Subashtegin. Subashtegin also retreated but was unable to cross the flooding river Murghab, so he turned toward Marv and eventually Sarakhs, where he defeated a Ghuzz tribal chief who attempted to block his way. The blazing summer desert impeded refuge in the steppe, so Subashtegin moved to Jurjan, but he was unable to gain sympathy with Qabus, the ruler of Jurjan. Beset by difficulties, he now discarded his heavy baggage and sped again toward Marv, in hopes of gaining a sanctuary until the floods subsided. But a swift Arab troop of Ghaznavid soldiers surrounded him and he barely escaped across the river to Bukhara as his army was crushed behind him. Ilak Khan took advantage of the focus on Subashtegin to recapture Balkh, but Mahmud marched again on the city once he had crushed Subashtegin’s

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army. By the fall of 1006, the Ghaznavids had regained the lost Khurasan once again along with the rest of their northern tier.

The intense struggles must have fatigued all parties. There is little reported by the sources for the year 1007. But trouble continued to bubble under the surface as they readjusted to the new circumstances. The Ghaznavids had control over a wide area, from Sind to Khurasan, but it required tremendous energy and money to maintain. In this situation of extended resources, rivals again prepared their plans as the time ripened for political solutions to military problems.

Ilak Khan had finally convinced his relative in Kashgar, on the other side of the Pamir, to assist him with the formation of a large army of approximately 50,000 warriors. The Sultan advanced to meet these Turkic troops with a multicultural battle array which reflected the full range of soldiers which had gathered under the Ghaznavid banner. Khaliji Turks, Afghans, Kurds, Arabs, Oghuz, Turkomen, and Indians encamped on the plain north of Balkh, preparing three wings of cavalry bulked in the center by a line of 500 elephants. The steppe Qarakhanids and the urban Ghaznavids joined battle in winter at the start of 1008.

Ilak Khan led a strong troop of 500 slave troops into the center mass and nearly broke the Ghaznavid ranks. The Ghaznavids wavered and Mahmud soon realized that the theater of war required more than the deployment of force: he visibly prostrated himself on a hill near the field of battle, prayed to “mighty and majestic God to grant him victory” (āz khudā-i ʿizz u jall fīruzī khvāst) and launched a counterattack with a strong

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476 Utbi, 215-216; Gardizi, 68.
477 Utbi, 217; Gardizi, 69.
478 22 Rabiʿ II 398 / 5 January 1008.
group of men. His determined battle demeanor, emboldened the heterogeneous troops under his command. Following their Sultan’s example, the Ghaznavids staged repeated furious charges on the Qarakhanid lines, which began to suffer from the offensive. A moving mountain of elephants, which trampled fallen horsemen in all directions, eventually impaled Ilak Khan’s standard bearer and tore him asunder with iron-clad tusks. Mahmud understood the drama of battle and provided vigorous leadership for his mercenary army at a crucial moment. As the Qarakhanids escaped, the Ghaznavids seized their fallen baggage, discarded weapons, and riderless horses. Yet, as they pursued the fleeing forces, betrayal struck.

In Multan, Sukhpal had declared rebellion just as this massive fight got underway. The report finally reached Mahmud. Sukhpal counted on his remote location and on the continuing struggle with the Qarakhanids to weaken the Ghaznavids. He also chose a moment just before the arrival of the spring rains which proved so devastating after the campaign in Bhatinda. The Ghaznavid leadership, however, had been hardened by years of warfare on both sides of the Hindu Kush. Channeling the fresh energy of victory, they swiftly marched back toward Multan. Sukhpal fled northward toward the Salt Range and Shahi territory, but he was discovered and brought before the Sultan. Mahmud ordered him to pay a fine of 400,000 dirhems and imprisoned him, probably in the summer of 1008.

In retrospect, it was unwise to leave Sukhpal in charge of territory so close to his ancestral lands. Perhaps the same situation would not have happened if Sukhpal were given control of an area in Iran. But it should be remembered that the long tradition of

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479 Gardizi, Nazim, 69. Nazim, *Life and Times*, 51, dramatically translated this phrase as “God of Victories”.
480 ʿUtbi, 223; Gardizi, 69.
molding bonded warriors through upbringing from childhood had produced troops like Sebuktegin, so the expectation of loyalty from Sukhpal was not unreasonable. Sukhpal may have spoken Hindavi, but given the numerous presence of Indian troops, this alone cannot explain the decision to assign him to Multan. Most likely, Sukhpal was chosen because he was a Shahi relative and a dependent of the Ghaznavids. Probably the Ghaznavids thought that he would be a pliable puppet who would not offend local sensibilities. He may even have been chosen in consultation with the elite of Multan, as had been the case elsewhere in Central Asia and Iran. In this instance, as in many others, the political element superseded the purely military one.

It is this wider context of Qarakhanid, Shahi, and Ismaʿili Sindi battles that may explain the elevation of the Karrami chief Abu Bakr Muhammad to the position of raʾis in Khurasan. When Ilak Khan retreated from Khurasan, he took Abu Bakr Muhammad, as a hostage because, if ʿUtbi is to be believed, Ilak Khan knew that the Ghaznavids held his madhhab in high position. Abu Bakr escaped, however, before he was transferred to Bukhara, which only increased his prestige as a loyal subject in Ghaznavid eyes. Around this same time, news arrived of Sukhpal’s rebellion, which made clear that even members of the royal household were not to be trusted. The reason for choosing Abu Bakr for the position of raʾis is not entirely clear, but there are hints that it was more than religious sentiment alone.481

As witnessed in numerous examples, the local elite of the medieval central Eurasian world were often instrumental in maintaining social order on behalf of the dominant regional military power. Consequently, it stands to reason that some members of the Khurasani elite collaborated with the Qarakhanids when they entered, in the more

481 The exact date of his elevation to raʾis is not known, but it certainly occurred around this time.
extreme instance by inviting them into the city, or perhaps simply by welcoming them in some other form which obviously displeased the Ghaznavid central government. The motives for their betrayal of the Ghaznavids could include disappointment with the Indian campaigns against the Ismaʿilis, or anger about the tax system, or the perception of illegitimacy due to the killing of the last Samanid, but the sources do not tell. Regardless, there were only two Khurasani groups who could have concerned the Ghaznavids in this manner: the Hanafi favorites of the dynasty, one of whom was the chief judge of Ghazni, and the Mikali family, which had held the position of raʾis for many decades. As already discussed, the Hanafis were a widespread madhhab so it is entirely possible that the Khurasani Hanafis acted on a purely local basis without coordination with Hanafis in other cities such as Ghazni. As for the Mikalis, they were not ‘ulamāʾ attached to any madhhab, but rather were a powerful rich family of dehqānān with a long lineage which purportedly extended to the Sasanian period. Neither the Hanafis nor the Mikalis would have welcomed a new rival into the top circles of Khurasani politics.

The position of raʾis was a crucial mediating position between a city and the central government. There remains uncertainty about the exact functions of the raʾis, but unlike the position of judge, it was a strictly “secular” position, in the sense that the position involved taxation and perhaps some degree of public order. If later Seljuk practice is any guide, it was a position which incorporated some consent from the

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482 Bulliet defines them as “aristocratic courtiers”. See Bulliet, Patricians. An extensive history of the Mikali family has been written by Saʿid Nafisi (Baihaqi, Ṣaʿid Nafisi, 969-1008).
483 It is the second type of mediation analyzed by Paul in Ostiran.
484 Lambton, “The Internal Structure of the Seljuq Empire”, J.A. Boyle and A.J. Arberry, The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 5, 280-281. Bulliet, “Local Politics in Eastern Iran under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks”, Iranian Studies 11: 1/4 (1978), 47, states that “The central government never had firm control of the local factions. Patents of appointment issued for local posts, such as qadi, khatib, and raʾis, usually reflected not the choice of the central government but the choice, through election, heredity, or force, of the local factions, which choice they merely ratified.”
governed along with some approval from above, i.e. it was not normally a direct appointment in the manner of a military commander of a city. But it is clear that Mahmud wanted to keep control over the wayward province, so he appointed Abu Bakr, the loyal Karrami zealot with ties to the lower classes and antipathies to profiteers, to a position of financial authority with a mandate to root out heterodoxy.

For the Caliph of Baghdad, heterodoxy meant Ashʿari theology, Muʿtazilism, and Ismaʿilism. In the context of Khurasan, this meant interrogating leading Shafiʿis who favored Ashʿari theology, questioning Hanafis who tended toward Muʿtazilism, and investigating basically anyone else considered unorthodox, including Ismaʿilis, Shiʿis, Sufis, and others, by the pious, ascetic, anti-profit Karramiyya, who used their power to fine and humiliate offenders. With this busy deputy in place in the northern tier, it would be hard to argue that Mahmud was insufficiently devoted to the religious direction of the caliphate, even if there was more trouble with the Ismaʿilis in Sind. It also provided a steady stream of economic rent in the form of financial penalties for heterodoxy. By elevating the Karramiyya, Mahmud once again used the figure of the caliph to overstep the sensibilities of local authorities. The imposition of Abu Bakr disempowered and distracted the comfortable Khurasani elite who may have collaborated with the Qarakhanids. In this way, the Ghaznavids solved a military problem with a political device: Mahmud could now turn his attention fully toward the southern tier and its Indian front.

Meanwhile, the resilient Shahis had prepared another attack on the Ghaznavids at the end of that year, soon after the troops had returned to Ghazni. Diplomacy and the offer of assistance against the Qarakhanids had fallen on deaf ears. Anandpal sent his son

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485 Paul, *Ostiran*, provides a helpful heuristic for ranking the mediating value of a particular social position.
Brahmapal to advance to Peshawar in late 1008, probably with the intention of blocking the upper Indus passages which aided the Ghaznavid advance at the start of the rainy season. At the start of 1009, the Ghaznavids confronted the Shahis in a plain near Waihind. The Ghaznavid line wavered but Mahmud managed to maneuver his personal retinue to the rear of the Shahi lines, causing disarray in their ranks. This allowed the main force to advance. The fleeing soldiers left behind 30 elephants as they made their way to the fort of Nagarkot near Kangra, encircled by the river Banganga. After a three day battle, the fort was taken, along with the temple inside. According to contemporary sources, 70,000 silver dirhams and 70 manns of silver and gold bars were looted, along with a folding silver house, gold and silver poles, and a richly decorated throne, lyrically attributed to Raja Bhim from the Pandava dynasty by the Ghaznavid court poet ‘Unsuri. Satisfied with the outcome, the Sultan returned home in summer of 1009.486

It was this battle which purportedly included the formation of a so-called Hindu league against the nominally Muslim-only Ghaznavids. According to Firishta, the only writer who mentions this tale, the battle lasted for forty days and the league included Rajas from Ujjain, Gwalior, Kalinjar, Kanauj, Delhi, and Ajmer. The contemporary writers ‘Utbi, Gardizi, and Biruni make no mention of a forty day battle; in fact, this battle probably lasted only a few days at most, given the pattern of other battles and the reporting available about longer struggles. A “forty day” struggle seems to be a magic number with all kinds of mystical and religious resonances. Apart from the fact that Delhi had not yet been founded, there is little likelihood that these Rajas from such disparate locations cooperated, especially when taking into account the many rivalries which have

486 ‘Utbi, 224; Gardizi, 70. Nazim, Life and Times, 90.
already been detailed between the petty medieval kings of these regions.\textsuperscript{487} Not a single one of these cities had been besieged by the Ghaznavids by that point and only a few of them would later pay some moderate one-time tribute, so it is not clear that any of those Rajas would have perceived any collective threat. Particularly glaring is the absence of Kashmir from this “league”, when it is well-established that the Shahis were allies and perhaps even vassals to Kashmiri kings. Of course, the Ghaznavid army was not homogenously Muslim since it included Hindu and Muslim warriors from different sects, and quite possibly Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and others. This story of a “Hindu league” has been a favorite tale of imperialists and nationalists for many decades, but it appears to be entirely fictitious and primarily relevant as a narrative from the 16\textsuperscript{th} c. Adilshah Deccani realm.\textsuperscript{488} Most likely, the Shahis confronted the Ghaznavids alone near Waihind in 1009 and they hoped that the offensive would help them prevent access to their territory in the Panjab against the raids of their warlord neighbor. But the affair appears entirely local and even as a minor skirmish in light of later events.

By fall of 1009, the Ghaznavids returned to India to raid the Raja of Narayanpur. This may also have been preparatory to another assault on Multan. The Raja was defeated and his town plundered. The army returned to Ghazni to rest at home and they began to accrue the benefits of their struggles. Ilak Khan attempted to form an alliance with his brothers Tughan Khan and Qadir Khan, but both refused. In fact, Tughan Khan sent an ambassador to Ghazni soon after their return, with the obvious intention of preventing invasion through appealing to Mahmud.\textsuperscript{489} The Turkic ambassador was received and

\textsuperscript{487} Brahmaputra cannot be considered Delhi.
\textsuperscript{488} Some of Firishta’s reception has been detailed in the second chapter on Perspectives on the Ghaznavid Age.
\textsuperscript{489} Ṭutbi, 226, at the start of 400 / August 1009.
exposed to some of the more prized treasures of Nagarkot, which were displayed precisely to impress such visitors. Friendly relations had now been established to the outrage Ilak Khan. Meanwhile, the Ghaznavids prepared for a return to Multan, where Ghaznavid enemies were agitating.

Multan still remained outside of Ghaznavid control. The Isma’ili ruler Da’ud and his many supporters aimed at rebuilding their power in the lower Indus. The hasty departure to fight the Qarakhanids and the foolish decision to leave Sukhpal in charge had not resulted in firm Ghaznavid power over the territory. In the fall of 1010, the Ghaznavids marched again southward with the objective of suppressing Da’ud’s forces and of gaining the boon of loot. The Ghaznavids located Da’ud’s forces near Multan and managed to capture him. They killed some of his men and imprisoned Da’ud in the fortress of Ghurak, where it seems he lived for the rest of his days. This episode appears to be similar to that of the Sistani Khalaf and shows Ghaznavid conservatism about preserving the dignity of rulership, even with their ideological enemies.

The Ghaznavids had shown their ability to defeat the non-Muslim Shahis and pass through their territory more than a few times in the previous decade. They had also challenged the non-Muslim Qarakhanids in battle more than once and they would do so again. But there is no clear sense that the Ghaznavids were willing or able to eliminate the Shahis or Qarakhanids entirely. Whether in terms of diplomatic relations in the case of Jaipal and Anandpal, or intimate family contact in the case of Sukhpal, the Shahis and the Ghaznavids had a measure of familiarity with one another which passed beyond strictly warfare. Likewise, Mahmud had married a daughter of Ilak Khan and the sources indicate that the Ghaznavids continued to operate on the diplomatic level with the

490 Ghurak is northwest of Kandhahar. Gardizi, 70.
Qarakhanids in some form during their long engagement with them. By contrast, Ghaznavid sources on the Ismaʿилиs are frequently hostile, although Ṣūṭbi does mention some unspecified friendly exchanges between Sebuktegin and the ruler of Multan. In many respects, Sind was no more a near neighbor of the Ghaznavids than Khwarezm. The Ghaznavids seem to have a shifting but relatively equal degree of antagonism for the Ismaʿили Sindis as for the Shahis and the Qarakhanids.

In the northern tier, the situation continued to turn to the Ghaznavids’ advantage. In the winter of 1010, Ilak Khan invaded his brother’s country, still enraged with the reconciliation with Mahmud. Heavy snow forced him to return. He set out the following spring, but seemed to reach some rapprochement with his brother before the battle started. Perhaps recognizing the importance of the southern tier, the Qarakhanids induced the ruler of Qusdar in northeastern Baluchistan to withhold tribute from Ghazni, which resulted in Ghaznavid march on the province in late 1011. The ruler submitted and promised to deliver and increased tribute which included 15 elephants annually. These terms were accepted. Soon afterward, Mahmud was called to arbitrate in the Qarakhanid family dispute: it seems that they had recognized that the Ghaznavids had gained a strong position and they wanted to return to some semblance of peace as it was five years earlier. The proxy use of the late Samanid amir was no longer significant to their relations. Tensions with the Qarakhanids continued to dwindle: within a year, Ilak Khan had died, and his successor Tughan Khan sought friendly relations with the Ghaznavids.

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491 Ṣūṭbi, Manini, 250-1; Ṣūṭbi, Thamiri, 340. The amount seems to be greatly exaggerated. This expedition is omitted by Gardizi.
492 Ilak Khan died in 403/1012-13, Ṣūṭbi, 293-4.
The Ghaznavids extended themselves into smaller territories adjacent to their main holdings. These areas afforded easy opportunities for loot and probably increased tax revenue. The Ghaznavids conquered the hilly area in the lower Harirud known as Ghur, setting out in the summer of 1011. The remote interior of Ghur shielded the ruler Ibn Suri, who had withheld tribute from the Ghaznavids and occasionally robbed caravans or imposed other forms of blackmail.493 The Ghaznavid governor of Herat, Altuntash, was defeated by these mountain dwellers, which required Mahmud to come to his aid. Marching upcountry, Ghaznavid troops encountered a strong fort which they could not penetrate. Feigning retreat, they managed to draw the Ghuri warriors from their sanctuary. They returned swiftly with an attack, seizing loot and Ibn Suri himself, along with many of his officers. The Ghaznavids sent Karrami teachers to instruct them in Islam, which probably also meant informing them about their new tribute schedule. They assigned Ibn Suri’s son to rule the province on their behalf while his father, the proud chief of Ghur, consumed the poison beneath his signet ring on his way to the dungeon of Ghazni.494

In Gharshistan, the Sher had been a vassal of the Samanids who agreed to recognize Mahmud after his accession. He seems to have remain loyal but his son Shah Muhammad refused to accompany Mahmud on an expedition, perhaps because he was in an alliance with the then living Ilak Khan.495 By the fall of 1012, the Sultan dispatched troops to invade Gharshistan. The father surrendered but the son Shah Muhammad hid in a hill fort, where the Ghaznavids marched and deployed battering rams to breach the walls. Shah Muhammad was imprisoned in Mastang in Baluchistan while his father was

493 ʿUtbi, 243; Ibn al-Athir, IX, 155; Tabagat-i Nāširī, 320.
494 ʿUtbi, Manini, 243; ʿUtbi, Thamiri, 324-325.
495 Supposition by Nazim, Life and Times, 61.
given a place at the Ghaznavid court. Gharshistan was annexed and placed under the governor of Marv-i Rud. The father was a defeated monarch but he was not blamed for the loss of his sovereignty. He was paid for his land and assigned to luxurious confinement in Ghazni since he was no threat to Ghaznavid state. It was always beneficial for the Ghaznavids to be seen as respecting Sunni rulers.

More than five years had passed since the loss at Bhatinda and the flurry of battles on the Ghaznavid northern and southern tier. The Ismaʿili Sindis had been defeated and a reliable loyalist had been installed. The Qarakhanid threat had been reduced and the Ghaznavids had even deepened their alliance with them. The Shahis and the Raja of Narayanpur had suffered some plunder to meet Ghaznavid state expenses and soothe military egos. But tensions persisted in Khurasan, where the local elite continued to agitate against the humiliating dominance of Abu Bakr. Their antipathy must only have been heightened with the disruptive famine in Khurasan in 1010-11. The complaints against the Karrami raʾis multiplied and eventually reached the ears of Ghazni.

As the anti-Karrami writer ‘Utbi related, Mahmud did not want to hear about arguments against Abu Bakr. Initially, Abu Bakr appeared to have the support of some Hanafi judges, particularly the prominent judge Abu al-ʿAla Saʿid, who supported the attacks on Shafiʿis, Batinis and Sufis. Abu al-ʿAla Saʿid had served as chief judge of Nishapur until 1001, but he was replaced around the time of the attempts by the last Samanid Amir to capture the city, which suggests that he sympathized with their plight. Nevertheless, he served as the tutor to the Sultan’s children Masʿud and Muhammad, and he continued to receive the patronage of Mahmud’s brother Nasr in

496 Gardizi, 71.
497 In obvious contrast with the later Mongols, for example.
498 Bulliet, “The Political-Religious History”, 76.
Nishapur. Events came to a head in 402 / 1011-12, when this prominent judge returned from his Hajj with letter from the Caliph and, during a court audience, challenged the purported anthropomorphic beliefs of the Karramiyya.\footnote{Bosworth, “Rise of the Karamiyah”, 11-12, Utbi, Reynolds, 47, 1-84.} The counterclaim by Abu Bakr that this respected Hanafi was a Muʿatazilite exacerbated the preexisting tensions and a trial in Ghazni, which Abu Bakr was unable to defer, resulted in judgment against the Karramiyya. Abu al-ʿAla Saʿid retired to life of quietude, his duty to his legal faction complete. Abu Bakr was removed from his post as raʾis, which was promptly returned to a member of the Mikali family. The Karramiyya sect remained viable through until the 13th c., but it was diminished and never received high level Ghaznavid or Seljuq patronage again.\footnote{See Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy”, for details about the end of this sect.} There is more to this episode, however, than theological disputations. Since Mahmud went against elite consensus in Khurasan to appoint Abu Bakr as raʾis, then it stands to reason that he had even less cause to compromise after the victories of the previous five years in India, Iran, and Central Asia. With the instrument of Abu al-ʿAla Saʿid, freshly arrived from his Hajj with a letter from the Caliph, the Hanafi, Mikali, and their allies had finally found a sufficient challenge for the Karramiyya at the court of Ghazni. Yet by that time, the Ghaznavids had less need to intervene in the internal problems of Khurasani politics precisely because the Karramiyya had served their purpose as a means to fine and humiliate the elite while the Ghaznavid army fought battles on multiple fronts. The simple fact is that there was no longer any danger of Qarakhanid invasion or Ismaʿili Sindi resistance by 1011-12. Even the Shahi
Anandpal had died around this time, for reasons unknown, initiating a new period for them as well.\textsuperscript{501}

Accordingly, internal Ghaznavid politics could revert to traditional patterns since there was little necessity to agitate and distract the Khurasani elite. This did not change the benefits of anti-Ismaʿili politics: when the Fatimid al-Hakim sent Sultan Mahmud a letter in 403/1012-13, perhaps with the intention of gaining an ally, the Ghaznavids sent the letter to Baghdad where the Caliph al-Qadir burned the letter publically. When al-Hakim sent an emissary later that year, the Sultan ordered his death on the instigation of jurists and theologians, either Hanafi, Karrami, or both.\textsuperscript{502} This may have been the occasion that brought him the title “The Organizer of Religion” (\textit{niẓām al-dīn}) from Baghdad.\textsuperscript{503} Anti-Ismaʿili politics concerned the political justification of Ghaznavid rule from Baghdad, but Karramiyya politics were connected with internal control for military purposes. In any event, elevating the Karramiyya had served its purpose, but changed military conditions enabled a return to conservative Hanafi and Mikali politics. This accounts for the fall of the Karramiyya, which marks the end of remarkable period in Ghaznavid history. The Ghaznavids had proved themselves relentless and capable in the northern and southern frontiers of their territory. Khurasan would remain continuously under Ghaznavid control for the next three decades until the Seljuq conquest.

\textsuperscript{501} Circa 401 /1010-11.
\textsuperscript{502} \textsuperscript{502} ʿUtbi, 99; Gardizi, 71.
\textsuperscript{503} This is an approximate translation since the original Arabic is an abstract noun meaning “order” which has been rendered here as the active participle “organizer”. The word “orderer” in English implies that Mahmud gives commands, a connotation absent in “\textit{niẓām}”. See Nazim, \textit{Life and Times}, 145, for the source of the supposition about the Baghdad connection.
Rajas and Shahs

Sind was conquered before Hind: the Shahis were firmly entrenched at the start of the 1010s and there was no clear sign that they would be vanquished, even though they had suffered various defeats. The Shahis caused military problems for the Ghaznavids on occasion, but unlike Sind, they presented relatively few political difficulties. As evidenced above, the cultural politics of Isma‘ili Sind made acute demands on the Ghaznavids to attack and defeat them. The politics of social classes in Khurasan also necessitated a Qarakhanid defeat to diminish the threat of betrayal by the Iranian elite. These were struggles to maintain power within the domain and prevent challenges from below. Relations with the Shahis did not affect Ghaznavid politics quite as strongly.

With the death of Anandpal, a certain parallelism seems to have broken. Jaipal had been the enemy of Sebuktegin, who had challenged him for control of the Kabul river valley but had not gone much farther east. Father battled father for control of southern Afghanistan. Mahmud’s defeat of Jaipal brought about the reign of his son Anandpal. These two sons also fought every few years. But the death of Anandpal brought about the accession of his son Trilochandpal while Mahmud stood firm. Over the decades of diplomacy and war, relationships had been formed between these sets of rulers: they had cooperated in building roads, exchanged letters, and even raised one another’s children. Unable or unwilling at that time to advance further in Iran and Central Asia, which in any case were lands far from the home base of southern Afghanistan, the Ghaznavids, with their expensive and successful military, burdened with horses, elephants, and men, needed a new path for loot and glory. This road lay in the east.
In the fall of 1013, the Ghaznavids marched toward the Panjab, but were forced to return due to heavy snow fall.\textsuperscript{504} They had suffered once from defeat by the surging waters in India and they appeared determined to avoid it again. In spring of 1014, the Ghaznavids advanced across the Panjab to the Salt Range, one of the nodal points in the northern Indus which commanded access into the Indo-Gangetic expanse. A detachment of Shahi troops, commanded by a man named Bhimpal, fortified themselves at Nandana, near the mountain saddle close to this important stronghold. The pass, blocked by elephants, was inaccessible and the furious clash of arms did not change this fact for several days. When at last a Shahi detachment was drawn from the blockade, the Ghaznavids attacked and were able to score a small victory. But Bhimpal’s reinforcements soon arrived and emboldened him to charge again and again with rows of elephants. Ghaznavid archers aimed at the eyes and trunks of the great beasts and drove them back. This undermined the defense of the pass and the Shahi troops retreated behind the walls of Nandana.\textsuperscript{505}

Continuing the assault, the Ghaznavids employed masters of siege warfare along with regiments of cavalry. Sappers undermined the walls while teams of bowmen rained arrows on Nandana’s defenders. The fort soon surrendered when it realized its impossible position. The Ghaznavids broke into the gates and captured elephants, arms, and precious objects, including an adorned statue, perhaps a murthi of Shiva, given the Shahi’s religious predilections.\textsuperscript{506} The Ghaznavids gave control of Nandana to a man named

\textsuperscript{504} The year was 404 / 1013. See Baihaqi, 841; ‘Utbi, 260.

\textsuperscript{505} ‘Utbi, 260-263.

\textsuperscript{506} The Arabic term “budd” comes from the Persian “but”, which can simply mean religious statue or idol, even a pagoda. See B. Carra de Vaux, “Budd”, EI I, 49. Nazim correctly criticises Elliot and Dowson for supposing that the object was Buddhists. See Elliot and Dowson, II, 39; Nazim, \textit{Life and Times}, 92.
“Sarugh”, whose name, filtered through Gardizi’s Persian may have been “Saroj”, meaning “lotus” in Sanskrit.\(^{507}\)

In the meantime, the Shahi ruler Trilochandpal had moved up the Jhelum near the so-called “Kashmir Pass”, which was probably the lower Loharin valley, to gain the assistance of Sangramaraja of Kashmir.\(^{508}\) A Kashimiri commander named Tunga beat the Ghaznavid reconnaissance force, but he overestimated his strength in the face of the Sultan, who proved “skilled in stratagem”.\(^{509}\) Tunga was routed and Trilochandpal was unable to stop the ensuing advance.\(^{510}\) The victory brought proclamations of loyalty to the Ghaznavids from many of the local rajas who likely had been feudatories of the Shahis. The Shahis themselves retreated to the eastern Panjab, where they soon engaged in territorial struggles against Chandar Ray of Sharwa.\(^{511}\) The Ghaznavids now controlled access through the Salt Range and the Sultan returned to Ghazni.

The Shahis were the greatest power in the Panjab and their defeat along with their Kashmiri allies had exposed the east to further raids. In the fall of 1014, the Ghaznavid army set out again toward the temple town of Thanesar. Thanesar, on the banks of the Ghaggar river northwest of modern day Delhi, had been the center of the Pushyabhutis after the decline of the Guptas. Xuanzang had counted the town among the commercial centers of northern India, along with Varanasi and Mathura. Thanesar became the capital of Harsha, until he suffered defeat from the Chaulukyas and subsequently moved his headquarters to Kanauj. It was significant that this nodal settlement would become

\(^{507}\) Gardizi, 72; Baihaqi, 169. Sarugh held the position after Mahmud’s death. The supposition about the meaning of the name is mine.


\(^{509}\) Kalhana, 1, 56.

\(^{510}\) Kalhaṇa, 1, 57; Gardizi, 72.

\(^{511}\) ‘Utbi, 311-13.
subject to Ghaznavid attack, considering its previous importance for controlling north India.

When Anandpal heard the news of the Ghaznavid approach toward Thanesar, he offered the Sultan a tribute of fifty elephants to turn away from his raid. The Sultan was not swayed: he coveted strongly the special breed of elephants possessed by the Raja of the area for they were reputedly good for military purposes.\footnote{\textit{Utbi, Manini}, 264; \textit{Utbi, Thamiri}, 361.} Another Raja named Ram, the ruler of “Dera”, advanced to meet the army from Afghanistan.\footnote{Gardizi, 7. Dera may probably be identified with Dera Gopalpur, District Kangra, or with Deohra, capital of Jubbal state, Panjab. See Nazim, \textit{Life and Times}, 103.} It is unknown if this Raja was an ally or simply a vassal of the Raja of Thanesar. With his back protected by a hill, the Raja guarded his front with a line of elephants which stood across the river Sutlej. The Ghaznavids dispatched two divisions to cross the river above and below the blockade and mounted an attack. The clash of arms during that grim day eventually broke the defenders, who abandoned their mounts and numerous valuables. But the Ghaznavids had lost many more troops than their opponents. When the Sultan pressed onto to Thanesar, its Raja fled, so the Ghaznavids were able to enter the town and loot it.\footnote{Undeniably, most people gain their knowledge of these events from the internet and other popular sources, which accounts for some of the confusion. For example, examine this unsourced disaster from a Wikipedia entry on Thanesar, probably adapted from Firishta (accessed November 7th, 2010): “Mahmood, after the capture of Thanesur, was desirous of proceeding to Delhi. But his nobles told him, that it would be impossible to keep possession of it, till he had rendered Mooltan a province of his own government, and secured himself from all apprehension of Anundpal, the Hindushahi Raja of Lahore. The King resolved, therefore, for the present, to proceed no further, till he had accomplished these objects. Anundpal Shahi, however, conducted himself with so much policy and hospitality towards Mahmood, that he returned peaceably to Ghazni. On this occasion, the Mohammedan army brought to Ghazni 200,000 captives, and much wealth, so that the capital appeared like an Indian city, no soldier of the camp being without wealth, or without many slaves.” The 8th c. site of Dhillika is located near modern Delhi but it not at all what is considered Delhi today, which is at least as different as Fustat is from Cairo. Multan had been a Ghaznavid possession for five years by that time. Anandpal must have been a zombie because he had been dead for nearly five years, but in any case his capital was in Waihind, on the other side of the Salt Range. In this fiction, the zombie Anandpal preserved his position because of his courtly behavior, an explanation appropriate for men of the pen, or perhaps merely the feather, but certainly not those of the sword. Although the passage does not mention any battle, an absurd number of captives were supposedly brought to Ghazni, a number much larger than the Ghaznavid army itself. Note also the presupposition of rich}
According to Biruni, there was a bronze murthi of Chakraswamin (“Lord of the Wheel [of the World]”) brought from the town to Ghazni in the spring of 1015, thrown in the public square, and eventually kept for public display. 515

The successful raid on Thanesar seemed to have been a high point: soon afterward Mahmud wanted to secure his legacy by nominating his eldest son Masʿud as his heir apparent in 1015. He insisted that his vassals swear an oath of loyalty to Masʿud. 516 The Ghaznavids also staged an attack on southwestern Ghur in late spring, since only the eastern part of Ghur had been conquered. 517 The capture of some hill forts may have helped secure the caravan route through Herat. But the Thanesar victory had created new enemies out of the Kashmiris, who lived in a prosperous valley far more attractive than Ghur. The Ghaznavids had been successful in part through relentless pressure on their enemies, so this strategy was probably in their minds as they prepared for another campaign to break into Kashmir in late 1015.

The Ghaznavids marched confidently through their recent acquisitions in the Salt Range and crossed the river Jhelum. Heading up the Tohi river valley, they encountered the robust hill fort of Lohkot, which guarded the Toshmaidan Pass into the Kashmir valley. 518 Some of the local rajas appear to have submitted to the Ghaznavids at that time, but these positive omens were deceptive. The Sultan threw his might on the fort, along

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515 Biruni, I, 117; Gardizi, 70. Nazim’s retelling of this episode is entirely too colored by religious discourse, referring to “idols”, supposing that Rajas war for religious reasons, and claiming that “Chakraswamin was torn away from the place where it had received for ages the homage of countless multitudes.” Biruni himself said that the statue was created to honor Raja Bharat, which means that it was less than a hundred years old, less than Nazim’s “ages” of homage by “countless multitudes”.

516 Baihaqi, 256.

517 The area was called Khwabin, according to Baihaqi, 127, who is the only one to mention this expedition.

518 Only Gardizi, 72-4 details this expedition. Also see Kalhaṇa, 2, 293-5, 399.
with his sappers, his elephants, and his ruses, but nothing was able to breach this impregnable stronghold after a month’s long siege. The approaching winter required that the Ghaznavids depart, but on the return journey, the troops became lost in the hills and eventually found themselves mired in flatlands covered in water. Many exhausted troops died in this inhospitable floodplain and the Sultan himself narrowly survived. There was no choice but to camp in the Panjab until the season had passed and the Sultan was only able to return to Ghazni in the spring of 1016. The attack on Kashmir was a disaster.

This moment of weakness in India exposed the Ghaznavids to more trouble in Central Asia, this time in Khwarezm. At some point after the failure at the gates of Kashmir, Mahmud demanded that the Khwarezmshah read the sermon (khutba) in the name of the Sultan and acknowledge him as an overlord. The precise occasion for this demand is not clarified by the sources, but it may be that the Ghaznavids required troops or money to replenish themselves, which a new vassal would be compelled to provide.

The Ghaznavids had a long relationship with the Khwarezmians which extended for more than two decades. The Khwarezm kingdom had supported the Simjurid attempt to usurp the Samanids in the 990s, which gave cause to a Samanid ally based in Gurganj named Ma’mun to annex the entire area in 995. Ma’mun died within two years but his son, Abu al-Hasan, married Mahmud’s sister, Kah-Kalji, confirming his alliance with the Ghaznavids at perhaps the same time as the marriage alliance with the Qarakhanids after the conquest of Bukhara. With the death of Abu al-Hasan in 1008, his younger brother Abu al-Abbas Ma’mun, gained the throne and subsequently married the widowed Kah Kalji. Thus, the Khwarezmshah Abu al-Abbas was effectively Mahmud’s brother-in-law. It appears that the Ghaznavids and the Khwarezmians had maintained relatively

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519 Baihaqi, 838.
equal relations. Accordingly, the insertion of Sultan Mahmud’s name in the sermon was a change in the relationship since it admitted Ghaznavid superiority and the right to place monetary and labor demands on the Khwarezmshah.

Events in Khwarezm became tense. Abu al-Abbas convened a council of Khwarezmian army officers to discuss the demands and they unanimously refused to submit to the distant Ghaznavid lord. The Khwarezmian army as a whole became mutinous once they received word of the episode, particularly from the possibility that their leader had even considered acceding to the Ghaznavid imposition; this necessitated large payments in gold to stem a military uprising. With some desperation, Abu al-Abbas sought a secret alliance with the Qarakhanids. The ubiquitous spies of the Sultan dutifully reported these events, so the Ghaznavids now gathered for action, moving northward with a huge army of tens of thousands of horsemen and at least five hundred elephants.\(^{520}\) The Qarakhanids, who had just settled peace arrangements with the Ghaznavids a few years earlier, immediately intervened as negotiators, managing to convince the Ghaznavids to retreat as long as the sermon was read in the Sultan’s name in some districts of Khwarezm. This seemed to ameliorate the situation to the extent that the Sultan returned home.

A provincial officer of the Khwarezmians named Alptegin saw opportunity, however, in the rebellious Khwarezmian army.\(^{521}\) He carried out a series of murders until he managed to kill Abu al-Abbas himself by mid-spring 1017, elevating the adolescent son of the deceased shah to the throne.\(^{522}\) Mahmud was enraged by the death of his

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520 Baihaqi, 840-6.  
521 Curiously, he bore the name Alptegin, the name of leader of the Ghazni faction decades earlier, when they first entered Ghazni.  
522 15th Shawwal, 4074 (17th March, 1017), Baihaqi, 848, and Gardizi, 73.
brother-in-law and vassal, but remained vulnerable to the possibility of his sister being held hostage by Alptegin. In this moment, the Sultan’s craftiness and diplomatic prowess emerged. The Sultan and his men arranged the escape of his sister, no doubt through the generous assistance of his royal purse, and convinced the Qarakhanids to remain neutral as the Ghaznavids convened troops again in Balkh. The army officers in charge of Khwarezm attempted to negotiate, but the Ghaznavids made impossible demands. Both sides prepared tens of thousands of men for battle.

Moving from the staging area of Balkh to the fortified town of Tirmidh, the Ghaznavids boarded boats and rapidly advanced down the Oxus river toward Khwarezm. The initial engagement with the enemy was humiliating: the Ghaznavid advance troop, camped on the edge of the desert, was surprised during their morning prayers and routed by an intrepid Khwarezmian commander. Yet the Sultan’s personal body guards spurred their mounts to chase down and destroy the attackers, managing to capture their enemies’ officers. The next day, in the mid-summer heat of 1017, the Khwarezmians under Alptegin clashed with the Ghaznavids, but were crushed and dispersed by the evening. The Sultan entered triumphantly their capital in Gurganj.

The Ghaznavids mounted an extensive campaign of revenge and repression. The puppet amir and many of his relatives were imprisoned. Alptegin and his conspirators were captured and tortured extensively, then executed by disembowelment, dismemberment, and trampling by elephants. Their corpses were hanged on gibbets near the tombs of the late Amir. The Sultan left his loyal commander Altuntash in command and titled him the Khwarezmshah. Soon after Mahmud’s departure, another relative of

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523 These events are narrated in Baihaqi, 810 and Gardizi, 73.
524 ʿUtbi, 301-2; Baihaqi, 810-1.
525 These events are chronicled by ʿUtbi, 303; Baihaqi, 81; Gardizi, 74.
the late Amir organized a group to expel the Ghaznavid occupiers, but this army was quickly destroyed. Altuntash intensified the punishments and massacres to effectively crush the remaining resistance. This is the way that the Ghaznavids gained direct control of Khwarezm.

The accounts in ʿUtbi and Gardizi suggest that the violence was far worse than the events in Sistan and many, if not all, the conquests in western India. There are a few factors which may have facilitated such a response. After the losses near Kashmir, the Ghaznavid officers may have needed to redeem themselves to one another and to the Sultan. The family and dynasty linkages may have had an effect, including the strange coincidence that the rebel Central Asian commander, Alptegin, had the same name as the first “Ghaznavid”. It was also easy to prove loyalty by ostentatiously protecting Mahmud’s sister and dead brother-in-law. There are no signs that other vassals tried to break away from Ghaznavid power at that time, but vicious suppression of this widespread army rebellion would have given pause to those planning such a move in the northern tier of the domain, as had happened after the Ghaznavid losses by flooding when they returned from Bhatinda several years earlier. The army of Khwarezm had paid a terrible price for their plotting and resistance to the Ghaznavids.

The Sultan had obtained a satisfactory outcome which no doubt terrified his enemies. Once back in Ghazni, he appointed Masʿud governor of Herat as part of building his eldest son’s profile. Herat was a fairly easy position in comparison with other postings, neither as volatile as Khwarezm or Sistan, nor as complex as Khurasan. The defeat of the Ghurids had secured the hinterland of the province. The Ghaznavids could now turn their attention again toward the east.
Crossing the Ganga-Yamuna

The capture of the Salt Range provided a base for further raids as well as an additional source of customs revenue. The annexation of Khwarezm emboldened and strengthened the Ghaznavids in the end. Subsequently, petty rulers from India, Iran, and Central Asia flocked to pay tribute to the Sultan, in both material and ideological terms. After summer of 1018, the Ghaznavids set out along the edge of the Himalayas where the rivers are easily crossed. They had tens of thousands of volunteer troops to supplement their thousands of regular and mounted warriors. They were guided by Janaki, the Raja of Kalanjar, a town in the southern Kashmiri hills. It is unknown if this Raja willingly joined the Ghaznavids to predate on his rivals or if the Ghaznavids had some form of leverage on him. Within nine weeks after their departure from Ghazni, they crossed the Yamuna for the first time.

The Ghaznavids managed a series of victories as they challenged Rajput upon Rajput. The Sirsawa fort was captured when its Raja fled and garrison surrendered, yielding 30 elephants and 1,000,000 dirhems. A similar victory took place in Baran. At the fort of Mahaban, the Raja prepared a defense in the dense trees but the Sultan’s advance guard defeated them, forcing them into the river. The desperate Raja killed his wife before stabbing himself in the chest. The Ghaznavids captured 185 elephants and began their advance on the city of Mathura. Mathura had been one of the two most important Kushan cities for artistic production; the other was Purushapura in Gandhara. Mathura was a political and commercial center and particularly well-known for its Jain

\[526\] 'Utbi, 304 provides the number of regulars. Nazim infers the number of volunteers from Ibn al-Jawzi. See Nazim, *Life and Times*, 106.

\[527\] They departed on 13th Jumadi I, 409 / 27th September 1018) and crossed the river on 20th Rajab 409 / 2nd December 1018). See ‘Utbi, 304-5.

\[528\] Later called Bulandshahr.
and Buddhist sculpture. It served as a base of Buddhist missionary activity into Gandhara and Central Asia. The Ghaznavids were the first army from Afghanistan since the Kushans to cross this wide expanse.

Despite its stout walls, Mathura surrendered without a fight. The temples and their spires astonished the Sultan greatly and he reported their magnificence to his allies in Ghazni. The treasures were looted and some temples burned. Notable prizes included five golden statues, one with ruby eyes valued at 50,000 gold dinars, two hundred silver statues, and a large sapphire.⁵²⁹ Leaving much of his army behind, the Sultan marched toward Kanauj.

Kanauj had been one of the key centers of power in late antique India, gaining its greatest prominence when it became Harsha’s capital. Kanauj was relatively deep in the Ganges agricultural region, but it also allowed access to western India and control over the routes southward and eastward. In early medieval period, the city suffered a decline, precisely because of its nodal position. A “tripartite struggle” had developed between the Gurjara-Pratiharas of western India, the Rashtrakutas of the western Deccan, and the Palas of Bengal.⁵³⁰ In a series of overlapping conquests and counter-conquests, during which no kingdom held the area for very long, the former capital of Harsha had suffered greatly, in part due to its symbolic value as the reputed center for a single dominant north Indian kingdom. Decades of wars of attrition had fragmented the political fabric and allowed former vassals (samantas) to establish themselves in their own localities.

Medieval Kanauj became peripheral to all the greater powers of the region but a core territory to none. At the time the Ghaznavids arrived in Kanauj in late 1018, the city

⁵²⁹ ʿUtbi, 308; Gardizi, 76.
⁵³⁰ The most detailed study is R.S. Tripathi, History of Kanauj to the Moslem conquest (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989).
was under the control of the Gujara-Pratiharas. A Raja named Rajyapal, seeing that his allies were unwilling to help him, crossed the Ganga and fled to nearby Bari. The fort was breached and Kanauj was captured within a day. The conquest of Kanauj marked the furthest east that the Ghaznavids travelled. The ideological significance of Kanauj seemed greater than the material rewards of conquest. The account of Mathura’s conquest in ʿUtbi and Gardizi included more details about captured loot and the strong impressions that the town had made on Sultan. But Kanauj’s significance to the north Indian political scene necessitated an attack regardless of the lure of loot. In this respect, the Ghaznavids simply joined the tail-end of the tripartite struggle.

On their return journey, the Ghaznavids sacked some smaller forts. This included the fort of Munj, which they captured after brief resistance. The garrison tried to escape by jumping from the battlements, but many of them died in this way. At Asai, the Ghaznavids penetrated dense jungle to reach a cluster of five forts. The place was quickly conquered and plundered, its defenders imprisoned or killed.\(^\text{531}\) The army then marched to Sharwa.

The Raja Chandar Ray of Sharwa had been fighting with the Shahi Trilochandpal since the Shahis had lost the Salt Range and were forced into the eastern Panjab. The sack of Kanauj by the Ghaznavids encouraged Trilochandpal to make peace with his rival in Sharwa, so he sought the hand of one of Chandar Ray’s daughters for his son Bhimpal. Bhimpal went to gather his bride but was detained by Chandar Ray, who clearly was more concerned with his dispute with the Shahis more than with the threat of the Ghaznavids. But at the Ghaznavid approach to Sharwa, the Raja fled on the advice of his

\(^{531}\) ʿUtbi, 310.
future son-in-law Bhimpal. The Sultan’s army pursued Chandar Ray and overtook him at the start of 1019. After a brief fierce battle, the camp was looted, along with a large number of elephants. One of these valuable elephants was so desired by the Sultan that apparently he was ready to exchange fifty elephants for it. By chance, the elephant wandered back into the defeated camp and thus earned the name “God-given” (khudādād). The Sultan headed home to Ghazni with 3,000,000 silver dirhems, tens of thousands of slaves, and at least 350 elephants.

Crossing over the mountains beyond the Indus, groups of Afghans descended upon the treasure-laden Ghaznavid troops as they moved in small detachments through the passes. Raiders became the raided as the Afghans seized some of the riches for themselves. They had been well-known for blackmail and plunder of the caravans which moved from Khurasan to India and they had occasionally engaged in limited thievery in districts on the edge of Ghaznavid control. These Afghans, however, made a mistake when they attacked the Sultan’s army. By summer of 1019, the Ghaznavids sent strong troops into the mountains to punish these bandits. No doubt the Sultan’s men were helped by pro-Ghaznavid Afghans who had been part of the army since the days of Sebuktegin. After advancing into their lands, the Sultan pretended to head away from their hiding places, but this drew them into the open, where the Ghaznavids were able to counterattack ferociously, massacring so many that supposedly women and children were the main survivors.

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532 ‘Utbi, 311-12.
533 Gardizi, 76.
534 ‘Utbi, 33.
535 Guzida, 399.
536 ‘Utbi, 317; and Ibn al-Athir, IX, 218.
The Ghaznavids had been quite successful during their first major campaign into the Ganga-Yamuna basin. They had redeemed themselves in the Indian theater after the failure in Kashmir. The many small rajas were no match against the organized and large Ghaznavid army, which had corralled the energies of many warriors, including numerous Hindu soldiers from the Indus. Although Mathura appears to have yielded the Ghaznavids more loot, the sack of long-suffering Kanauj held special significance in the north Indian political scene, for it showed that there was now another strong ruler to contest control over this crucial area. But the Ghaznavids were uninterested in occupation and their departure left a void to be filled by ambitious rajas.

At some point after the Ghaznavid departure, Ganda, the Chandella Raja of Bundelkhand, accused Rajyapal of Kanauj for his flight from the town.⁵³⁷ Nominally, Rajyapal and Ganda were both vassals of the Pratiharas, so the Chandella casus belli centered on the abandonment of Rajyapal’s duties. Ganda formed a coalition with the Raja of Gwalior and some others in the area, dispatching his son Vidhyadhara to lead an attack on the battered town of Kanauj. Rajyapal was killed in battle and the Chandellas entered Kanauj victoriously, choosing to elevate to the seat of Kanauj a man named Trilochandpal, probably a son of the former raja Rajyapal who happened to have the same name as the Shahi lord.⁵³⁸ This increased Chandella power greatly to the extent that Ganda promised to the Shahi Trilochandpal to help him regain his kingdom from the

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⁵³⁷ Mitra, *The Early Rulers of Khajuraho* claims that the Arabic “Nanda” is not the name “Ganda” attested in the Mau Chandel inscription but rather a misreading of “Bida”, the Arabic for the subsequent ruler Vidyadhar, on the basis of Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India*, I, 606. This is implausible on linguistic grounds and contravenes the opinions of Hultzsch, Smith, and others. The “Nanda” of Ḥubī, Gardizi, Biruni, and Farrukhi is treated as Ganda here.

⁵³⁸ The existence of two Trilochandpals has been analyzed at length on the basis of Farrukhi by Nazim, *The Life and Times*, in his Appendix K.
Ghaznavid occupiers. As the fall raiding season in India approached, the Ghaznavids received word of these developments and prepared to march back to the site of their recent victories. The Chandellas had filled the void to become masters of Kanauj.

Energized by Chandella support, the Shahi Trilochandpal, the new Raja of Kanauj, and the Raja of Bari combined forces to block the Ghaznavid advance. The Ghaznavids pursued them, but Trilochandpal’s forces managed to cross at the river Ruhut, where they arranged themselves for battle on the opposite bank. On their own initiative, eight warriors from the Sultan’s body-guard mounted inflatable skins and crossed to the other side, shooting arrows at the Shahi elephant-mounted archers who had been dispatched to destroy them. They were able to cross safely and spurred the others in the army to ford the river on inflated skins and on horseback, with the Sultan’s promise ringing in their ears that they would be granted “a life of repose after that day of trouble.” At the opposite bank, they arranged themselves in battle order and successfully attacked the Shahi-led forces, capturing much wealth, with the Sultan’s share alone amounting to two chests of jewels and over 250 elephants. Trilochandpal had escaped again but two of his wives and two of his daughters seem to have been captured. After the Ghaznavids arrival in Bari, they demolished the deserted town.

The Chandellas remained the major opposition to the Ghaznavids but they were a different type of enemy. Unlike the Shahis, they had not been worn down by regular battles over the course of decades due to their proximity to Ghaznavid ambitions. Moreover, the Chandellas controlled a relatively large agricultural area so they were

539 Gardizi, 76; Ibn al-Athir, IX, 218.
540 The upper Ruhut is called Ramganga.
541 ‘Utbi, 319.
542 Gardizi, 77; Ibn al-Athir, IX, 219.
543 Gardizi, 77.
rather unlike many of the rajas who controlled little more than city and its hinterland. The mass of Chandella troops and vassals gathered to meet the Ghaznavids somewhere close to Bari. It is said that they had prepared nearly 150,000 infantry, more than 35,000 cavalry, and several hundred elephants when they received word from the Ghaznavid ambassador that they should submit or pay tribute. Ganda refused angrily and prepared for war.\(^{544}\)

From his position above the camp, the Sultan was awed by the extensive camps, fortifications, and carefully prepared battlefield of their enemies. Consultation with his commanders and prayers were the main occupations of that melancholy evening. A troop of the Ghaznavid advance guard engaged a portion of the Chandellas successfully, but there was still an air of apprehension about the impending battle. When the Ghaznavids sent out another ambassador to present demands once again, he returned quickly to state that the camp was empty. The Chandella forces had decamped that night, leaving behind many valuables. The precise reasons for departure are unknown. The Ghaznavids pursed some of these retreating forces, but Ganda himself remain far out of their grasp. By the spring of 1020, over 500 elephants fell into Ghaznavid hands on their return. The Ghaznavids had earned a prize without the dangers of battle.\(^{545}\)

In the summer of 1020, the Ghaznavids sought to extend their authority into the valleys of Nur and Qirat. Despite having lived in the neighboring area of southern Afghanistan his entire life, Mahmud purportedly expressed surprise over a report that the people of those valleys “worshipped the lion”.\(^{546}\) They may have been Buddhist, since the Lion (Śākya-sīṃha) was symbolic of the Buddha, or they may have been Vaishnavite due

\(^{544}\) Gardizi, 77; Ibn al-Athir, IX, 218.

\(^{545}\) Gardizi, 77.

\(^{546}\) Gardizi, 78.
to the fierce feline symbolism of *narasimha*, one of the avatars of Vishnu. It seems unlikely for these reasons that they were Shaivite. The Ghaznavids commanded groups of artisans to build a road into this difficult upland. The ruler of Qirat, along with many of his followers, purportedly accepted Islam, along with the new tribute schedule and his status as vassal. In the Nur valley, there was some resistance which was quickly suppressed by the occupation of the Sultan’s chamberlain. After imposing these new political and economic relations on these valleys, the Ghaznavids left behind a garrison and returned home.

Soon afterward, Mahmud dispatched his son Masʿud to extend Ghaznavid control deeper into Ghur. This was meant to be a smaller scale but substantial mission and a chance for Masʿud to prove his mettle. Masʿud marched from Herat into the Tab area of northwestern Ghur, gathering vassals who had been subdued just a few years earlier. Capturing forts along his ascent, he reached his destination and demanded submission from the ruler of Tab, who rejected the imposition. Masʿud continued his march until he reached the capital of the area, which scared the ruler sufficiently to lead him to surrender many of his remaining forts. A holdout stronghold called Tur was besieged for a week before it fell. Upon his return, Masʿud received tributary arms from the erstwhile independent rulers of Ghur.\(^{547}\) The Ghaznavids dominated Ghur almost completely. By all appearances, the year 1020 marked a high point of Ghaznavid power.

*The Last Campaigns in Hindustan*

The year 1021, however, brought a series of troubles. The time began inauspiciously with the death of Mahmud’s second brother Nasr, who had held command

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\(^{547}\) Only Baihaqi appears to mention this expedition. Baihaqi, 128-33; Nazim, *Life and Times*, 72.
of Khurasan and the governorship of Sistan. Mahmud responded to this tragedy by installing his third brother, Abu Ya’qub Yusuf. Mahmud’s choice seemed to be the best to preserve the current arrangement of power which generally elevated the eldest male. Abu Ya’qub now occupied the highest military command after the seat in Ghazni.

Yet it had become clear that Mahmud’s two children, Mas’ud and Muhammad, were intensely competing for position. The filling of the Khurasani governorship had made the inheritance of Ghazni even more desirable. Although Mas’ud had been elevated as heir apparent, Muhammad, who had the governorship of Juzjanan, had managed to gain his father’s favor, just before the departure for Kanauj three years earlier. At that time, Mahmud had left him as his deputy in Ghazni and asked for the Caliph to give precedence to his name over Mas’ud’s in official correspondence. No doubt such contradictory messages and symbolic acts embittered the brothers toward one another and stimulated the development of factionalism by their supporters. Each favor or disfavor from their father, the Sultan, was carefully scrutinized by the two sons.

In this atmosphere of jealously, Mas’ud somehow lost his father’s favor and was exiled to Multan around 1021. It is not clear if he was imprisoned there although this is not impossible, given that so many others fallen from grace had been detained in distant forts. It is also not clear if there was a plot against the Sultan or simply public argumentation and defiance. But there appears to have been a certain intimacy to this particular ostracism. Mas’ud had been raised with Mahmud’s younger third brother, so he may have seen his uncle Abu Ya’qub as simply another brother who had gained his

548 Baihaqi, 258; Tabaqāt al-Nāṣirī, 91.
549 Ibn al-Athir, IX, 283; Baihaqi, 258; Tabaqāt al-Nāṣirī, 91.
father’s attention. Multan was also the site of the rebellion of Sukhpal, who had been similarly raised in the Ghaznavid court; perhaps Multan had become a place in the Ghaznavid imagination where bad children resided. Regardless, Mas’ud fall from grace was designed to be humiliating for him. It is remarkable that Mahmud’s eldest son, who would eventually succeed him as Sultan, was effectively isolated and punished by his father, approximately a decade before his father’s death. Despite the passage of three decades, the episode mirrored quite closely the imprisonment of Mahmud by his father Sebuktegin.

Despite the dynastic turmoil, the great successes in India had emboldened the Ghaznavids once again to attempt a breach in the defenses of Kashmir. There was little to consider from the Shahis: Trilochandpal had been assassinated by some of his followers and his son Bhimpal appeared to possess only a title and some small territory in the eastern Panjab. The troops set out from Ghazni toward Kashmir in the early fall of 1021 and reached the fort of Lohkot after several weeks of marching. Horses, elephants, archers, sappers, and the efforts of thousands were not able to conquer the defenders, even after a month, the same duration spent in the first attempt on the valley five years earlier. Winter arrived. Cold and hunger beset the attackers and morale dropped precipitously. The Sultan raised the siege and retreated to the Panjab for the winter, returning to Ghazni in the spring of 1022. Kashmir proved impregnable.

The Ghaznavids had to choose an easier target; although they were at the height of their power, they forever remained unable to conduct a successful raid on Kashmir.

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550 Abu Ya’qub had been a child at the death of Sebuktegin, so he was raised in the dynastic household along with Mahmud’s two children; thus, Mahmud’s third brother and his children were all roughly the same age.

551 Gardizi, 79.
The riches of Chandella Bundelkhand still beckoned. In the fall of 1022, they set out again toward the Ganga-Yamuna basin. At Gwalior, they confronted the troops of a Chandella vassal, ensconced on the fortified heights of the tremendous rock which rises toward the sky. There had been a Muslim community in Gwalior since the 8th c. and it seems reasonable to assume that they were equally unhappy and frightened by the raiders as the rest of the inhabitants, which included a significant number of Jains, who had commissioned the monumental statues of tirthankaras which overlook the passage toward the top.\footnote{C M.D. Willis, “An Eighth Century Mihrāb in Gwalior”, \textit{Artibus Asiae} 46: 3 (1985), 227-246.} The Raja of Gwalior resisted the Sultan successfully, but decided to end the conflict with a gift of 35 elephants.\footnote{Gardizi, 79.}

Finally entering Bundelkhand proper, the Ghaznavids invested the Chandella fort of Kalinjar, situated on high rock of hard stone.\footnote{It must be emphasized for those primarily familiar with western European fortifications that many Indian forts are absolutely massive by comparison. Gwalior and Kalinjar are certainly large but rather modest by comparison with later forts such as Chittorgarh or Mandu. “Rocks” in the sources should be seen as small mountains.} They surrounded the stronghold with the intention of starving the garrison: there was no hope of surmounting the elevated defenses and penetrating the walls. In these conditions, Ganda decided to make a peace offering. Despite the appearance of Chandella loss, the ensuing encounter had the flavor of a compromise much more than a clear victory or defeat. Ganda agreed to pay an annual tribute and to deliver 300 elephants. Since the Sultan had only visited this distant area twice, it is not clear how this tribute would have been enforced.

Ganda was no weakling. He sent out the elephants to stampede riderless to test the mettle of the Sultan’s troops, but the mahouts were able to capture them and bring them under control.\footnote{Gardizi, 80. Also see Ibn al-Athir, IX, 234.} In a subsequent banquet between the Ghaznavid and Chandella chiefs,
Ganda purportedly composed a verse in Hindavi in praise of Mahmud, which apparently charmed the Sultan to the extent that he “conferred” on Ganda the rule of fifteen forts, a robe of honor (*khilʿat*), and other presents. One wonders if the impregnable fort of Gwalior was included in this consignment. The entire affair appears to have been designed to protect the honor of these rulers. There was no sack of Gwalior or Kalinjar. The Sultan returned to Ghazni in spring of 1023 and he never crossed into the Ganga-Yamuna area again.

There were fewer opportunities in Iran and Central Asia for the boon of loot; indeed, the sudden seizure of wealth usually occurred through efforts to maintain internal security or through the imposition of vassalage. Heavy taxation was the predominant mode of extraction in the west. Likewise, there appears to be little attempt at enforced vassalage in India, even for such long-standing enemies as the Shahis. Unequal economic relations could pertain sporadically in the form of tribute or loot. But these appear to be episodic affairs rather than regular forms of exaction.

The Ghaznavids mounted only two campaigns into the Ganga-Yamuna area, each punctuated at their beginning and middle points by failures at the entrance to Kashmir. These events east of the Indus were five years in total. In the end, the Ghaznavid struggle with the Chandellas appeared to be a draw: soon afterward, the Chandella Rajputs were able to construct some of the most fabulous temples in the world, including the famous Kandaryya temple of Khajuraho, with its lush and explicit erotic imagery.\(^{556}\) They

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\(^{556}\) In light of the stalemate, the exchange of presents, and the subsequent history, the speculation that Ganda cut off his fingertip for Mahmud, to signify Chandella defeat, is not plausible. My analysis does not see unambiguous Chandella defeat and suggests that the fingertip mutilation is simply inserted later in western Asian sources to conform with perceived Indian customs. Colorful details by later authors far removed from events, such as Barhebraeus in 13\(^{th}\) c. Anatolia, may be impressive, but require further investigation. There is no evidence, for example, of the Shahis cutting off their fingertips, despite multiple defeats by the Ghaznavids.
remained prosperous and strong until Chauhan and Ghurid incursions at the turn of the 13th c.

Even in the Indus, the Ghaznavid conquests happen rather late and in an almost fortuitous manner. The Ghaznavids controlled Isma’ili Multan several years before commanding Shahi Panjab. The final moves in the Salt Range seem to have been the culmination of years of trends rather than the outcome of long-term planning to occupy the area and conquer all of northern India. The tipping point may be found in part in the increasing numbers of Indian troops in the Ghaznavid army, some of whom are named in the sources as they participated. These western Indian warriors had chosen to gather with the regional power which appeared the strongest. Some may have been compelled, others may have enjoyed the pursuit of power or wealth, and yet others may have sought revenge against their neighboring counterparts in India. But it seems doubtful that religious motivations were foremost in their minds. Accordingly, it is hard to argue that there was a conscious attempt to dominate the entire subcontinent by a wholly alien power, in light of the fluctuations of the Ghaznavid advance and the mixed character of their forces.

*Maneuvers in the northern tier*

The year 1023 was rather uneventful from a military perspective. There had been some gains from the Ganga-Yamuna campaigns but also some defeats in Kashmir and an eventual stalemate with the Chandellas. Iran and Central Asia had been relatively quiet. Probably in this year, a chastened Mas’ud was recalled to Ghazni.

At some point in 1023, a rising Ghaznavid official named Hasanak returned to Ghazni from his pilgrimage to Mecca. He had been serving as the ra’is of Nishapur, the
same position given to the Karrami Abu Bakr.\textsuperscript{557} During his passage through Fatimid territory in Syria, this Khurasani official accepted a robe of honor (\textit{khil`at}) from the Fatimid Caliph al-Zahir in Cairo, which he brought with him back home. Upon his arrival, however, Caliph al-Qadir in Baghdad discovered that this important Ghaznavid official had accepted gifts from the Isma`ili caliph. Angered, he sent a letter demanding Hasanak’s execution, much to the pleasure of Hasanak’s enemies, who may have informed on him in the first place. Obviously, this created a diplomatic and political scandal for the Sultan, who still relied on the Caliph for a measure of legitimacy. The Caliph suspected that the Sultan had ordered Hasanak to accept these gifts and accused Hasanak of Qarmatianism, the doctrine of the Isma`ili Caliph. The contradictions of secular and religious power were exposed.

The Sultan was initially enraged at the demands of the Caliph and he continued to favor Hasanak over the Caliph’s demands. It should be said that the Sultan had needed the Caliph less and less as time passed. There was a noticeable lapse in the tone and frequency of communication with the Caliph; many months passed without informing the Caliph of recent events and victories.\textsuperscript{558} But diplomatic acumen won the day, and the Sultan sent the robe of honor to Baghdad, where it was burned at the Nubian Gate, a favorite site for displaying the desecration of heretical objects and people.\textsuperscript{559} The gold from the robe was gathered and distributed as alms to the poor.\textsuperscript{560} It was obvious, however, that the Sultan cared little for the Caliph’s opinions, for within a year Mahmud

\textsuperscript{557} Utbi, Manini, 329-33; Utbi, Thamiri, 409.
\textsuperscript{558} The Sultan’s letters to the Caliph are preserved in Tajārib al-umam, III.
\textsuperscript{560} Flood, \textit{Objects of Translation}, 34.
elevated Hasanak to position of vizier. The same qualities that earned Hasanak the position of ra'is in Nishapur were clearly appreciated in Mahmud’s Ghazni. Hasanak soon earned a reputation for severe punishments of tax collectors (‘amil / ‘awāmil), including lashes, the rack, and amputation of limbs.\footnote{Hasanak became vizier in 1025 after the exile and imprisonment of the previous vizier al-Maimandi. Nazim excuses these violent actions by the dubious claim that “the only justification for such harsh and even brutal measures was that, in those days of slow communication, It would have otherwise been impossible for the government to make itself feared by dishonest officials in remote parts of the empire”. Nazim, \textit{Life and Times}, 133. Hasanak’s later execution for Qarmatian beliefs has elevated him to a martyr in the 20th c., see Katouzian, “The execution of Amir Hasanak the vizir: some lessons for the historical sociology of Iran” in H. Katouzian, \textit{Iranian history and politics: the dialectic of state and society} (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) and the play \textit{Hasanak} by Soltanpur.}

This political challenge was overshadowed by changing military conditions in Central Asia. The Ghaznavids had successfully strengthened their bonds with the Qarakhanids after the disruption due to machinations around the last Samanid Amir. After the death of Ilak Khan in 1012, the crown passed to his brother Ahmed Tughan Khan, who had remained uninvolved when the Ghaznavids annexed Khwarezm. When he died around 1017, his brother Abu Mansur Arslan Khan, called “The Deaf” (al-aṣamm), came to power, and assiduously sought the favor of the Ghaznavids, sending one of his daughters to marry Mas’ud, who was heir apparent at that time.\footnote{408 / 1017-18. Ibn al-Athir, IX, 210.} But he too passed away by 1023, and a succession struggle developed between his kinsmen. The Sultan advanced the army to Balkh to observe the conflict.

A three way struggle had developed for control of Central Asia. Qadir Khan of Kashgar fought the brothers Tughan Khan and Alitegin. Eventually, Tughan Khan seized the capital of Balasaghun and Alitegin took Bukhara. The Sultan wanted to prevent the growth of a new power with whom the Ghaznavids had no arrangement, particularly to protect Khurasan. Soon, complaints about Alitegin fortuitously reached Mahmud’s ears,
and he moved his military forward for battle. Crossing the Amu Darya by a bridge of boats, the Ghaznavids headed swiftly toward Samarqand where Alitegin had taken refuge. Gathering the forces of petty chieftains and his commander in Khwarezm, the Sultan confronted Samarqand with many reinforcements and a line of 500 elephants. Alitegin fled but a group led by the Sultan’s chamberlain managed to capture Alitegin’s wife and children. This was a political mission, however, not an effort at conquest, so the Ghaznavids treated the captives with a measure of respect.563

Along with Alitegin’s harem, the Ghaznavids captured the Oghuz chief Isra’il, who had cooperated with Alitegin to conquer Bukhara. Isra’il’s father had been named Seljuq, and he had led a faction of the Oghuz into the steppe area around Bukhara in the last decades of the 10th c.564 Similar to other steppe dwellers before them, the Oghuz occasionally cooperated with the settled powers, in this case the later Samanids, to conduct wars against their enemies. After his capture, the Sultan dispatched Isra’il to a fort near Kashmir in Kalanjar. The alliance of friendship with Qadir Khan was too important to risk the possibility of unruly trouble from this steppe chief.

Qadir Khan of Kashgar soon arrived in Samarqand to complete an alliance of friendship, which was probably the objective sought by the Ghaznavids in the first place. During the spring of 1025, a tremendous feast was prepared and Mahmud heartily welcomed Qadir Khan. Mahmud gave his daughter Zainab to the son of Qadir Khan, who in turn gave one of his daughters to Muhammad, Mahmud’s favorite son for the crown. The Sultan left Samarqand in command of the Qarakhanid; he had no desire to administer another territory and sought merely to cement his relations with this new ruler.

563 Gardizi, 84-5.
Soon after his departure, however, Alitegin returned to Samarqand and forced Qadir Khan out of the city. Qadir Khan appealed for help, but there was no immediate response. The Ghaznavids were occupied with preparations for their campaign to Somanatha.

The Expedition to Somanatha

There is a heavy fog of myth around this expedition, which many consider to be paradigmatic of the Ghaznavids under Sultan Mahmud. Usually this episode is cited as proof for the claim of religious motivations for the Ghaznavid raids. For this reason, it is important to bear a few facts in mind. By the time that the Ghaznavids headed south, their army was at its most heterogeneous point. There were clearly large numbers of non-Muslim Indians in their army, at least since the time of Sistan invasion nearly a quarter century earlier, when the first mentions of Indian “infidel” troops appear in the Ghaznavid armies. In the subsequent generation or so, the quantity and quality of these troops, regardless of their religious persuasion, had only increased. Some of the top Ghaznavid commanders were from India, including “Sarugh”, who controlled the troops at Nandana. Others would become famous after the death of Mahmud, especially the well-documented Tilak from Kashmir who rose to a very high military position. Soldiers from India had “converted” to Islam after they had lost to Ghaznavid troops, rajas had guided the Ghaznavids across hilly country to defeat neighboring rajas, mahouts from the Indus had ridden the Sultan’s elephants into battle in Iran and Central Asia. Non-Muslim Ghaznavid warriors from India had their own commander, the sipahsālār-i Hinduwān,
their own quarter in Ghazni, and they continued with their religions. Some of these troops probably included former Shahi soldiers who had a long-standing rivalry with the Chaulukyas who controlled the Gujarati peninsula. In short, the raid on Somanatha was an “Indian” affair as much as an Iranian or Central Asian one.

The events at Somanatha were later subject to poetic treatment which has greatly colored the perception of the primary sources. Farrukhi sung Mahmud’s praises after the expedition in glowing terms. ʿAttar and Saʿdi both wrote detailed lyrical accounts of the “idol” at Somanatha. The fame of these poets ensured that the bowdlerized version became known by most people, although these artists lived a hundred years after the event. There are also the exaggerated statements of Firishta which have been recirculated through European and especially British discourse. These court poets and chroniclers had different interests than empirical fidelity; the most important contemporaries for this episode are Gardizi and Biruni, with some details further supplied by Farrukhi and eventually Ibn Athir.

At the start of the 11th c., Somanatha was a temple and trade center adjacent to Veraval, one of the major ports on the Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat and the westernmost accessible point for trade with the Gulf, due to the frequent silting of the Indus river delta. Unlike other major maritime trade areas in eastern Gujarat, Konkan, and Malabar, Veraval did not have an extensive hinterland, which only intensified its economic and social connection with the western Indian Ocean, including centers in

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565 Gardizi, 94; Baihaqi, 237, 251-2, 497; Nazim, *Life and Times*, 140n. 7.
566 Farrukhi actually provides the earliest account, which may account for some of the poetic license in the episode. Neither al-Biruni nor Farrukhi were present at the raid. Gardizi writes about twenty years after the fact. Ibn Athir’s account was completed in the early 13th c. There is no mention in Hindu or Jain sources about the raid, which leaves the impression that it was not particularly important for them. See Thapar, *Somanatha*, for an extended discussion of Hindu and Jain sources.
Siraf, Oman, Basra, and Baghdad. It is not impossible that Arabs lived in the Somanatha and Veraval area when the Ghaznavid armies arrived; in fact, it is likely. Further east in Maharashtra, it is well-attested in Sanskrit inscriptions that Arabs were appointed as governors and other administrative officers by the Rashtrakuta court, where they were also known to grant money to villages for temple building.  

This medieval Indian Ocean trade was multilayered. Indian exports included textiles, spices, and precious stones, which were exchanged for imports of wine, metals, and particularly for the boon of horses. Jewelers and metalsmiths held a high status due to the demand for their manufactures. The most lucrative trade, however, was in horses, which were vital for the successful conduct of war and state building. The Indian climate is not nearly as favorable for the breeding of horses as for elephants, so quality equines were imported in large quantities, either from western or central Asia. In the best conditions during the monsoon, a capable sailor could transport a horse shipment from Yemen to Gujarat in three weeks. Indeed, Veraval was the only place in western India which grew *Acacia planifonis*, closely related to the *Acacia spirocarpa* of northeastern Africa and the Arabian peninsula, probably for use as fodder for the masses of incoming horses.

As witnessed in many episodes, the Ghaznavids were known for their attraction to war elephants, which spurred them into battle in places such as Thanesar. Elephants were often demanded as tribute; female elephants were given as gifts to the Qarakhanid court.

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569 Thapar, *Somanatha*, 31.
The Sultan coveted special elephants partially because horses were relatively easy to acquire from Central Asia. While it is not impossible that the Ghaznavids wanted Arabian horses, it also possible that they wanted to deny horses to the Sindis and Chandellas who were able to confound some of their raids. The Ghaznavids were unable to easily access southern Sind, Kashmir, or Uttar Pradesh. A commercial port with wealthy temples trading in quality horses was an obvious target. These were the strategic purposes of the Somanatha raid, which could be fiscally achieved by looting.

The army left Ghazni in the fall of 1025 and reached Multan after approximately three weeks. For more than two weeks, they prepared for the desert journey southward, providing two camels per soldier to carry water for the journey, adding an additional supply of 20,000 camels in reserve. They seem to have stopped for a brief attack on the outpost of Ludrava (Lodorva). Following the ridge on the edge of the desert, the troops finally reached the Chaulukya town of Anahilavada, from which the ruler fled before the Ghaznavids arrived, leaving them to replenish their supplies undisturbed. After a brief skirmish near Mudhera, the Ghaznavids were able to reach Delvada near Una, close to the Somanatha / Veraval area, which they saw at the start of 1026. It was probably the first time that many of the troops had viewed the sea, including Panjabi Shaivite troops and the Sultan himself. The commander of the fort near Somanatha fled to a nearby island and would not return until the Ghaznavids left.

The Ghaznavids prepared for siege which they were able to conduct successfully within two days. Initially, they seem to have been repelled by the temple’s defenders, but

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570 “He left Ghazna on the morning of Monday, 22nd Sha’ban, 4163 (18th October, 1025) with an army of 30,000 regular cavalry and hundreds of volunteers. He reached Multan about 5th Ramadan (9th November).” Ibn al-Athir, IX, 241.
571 It is not clear if they sacked the town or not.
soon the fighters were able to force their way inside and kill many of the defenders. They monitored the coast with a swift guard to prevent the concentration of resistance from the sea, since some appear to have escaped the assault by climbing onto boats. While the Ghaznavids stripped the temple and fort of its wealth, fires were set, either around the temple or the idol. The “idol” itself is poorly identified; it may have been either anthropomorphic or aniconic.

After a two week rest, the Ghaznavids began their march home. A troop gathered under the Raja of Abu to challenge the raiders, which led the Ghaznavids to attempt a western route, passing through the shallow part of the sea in the Rann of Cutch. There was still enough fight in the Ghaznavids to sack the fort of Kanthkot, but subsequently the army was led astray by one of their guides into a waterless area, which proved difficult to escape. Finally entering Sind, the Ghaznavids staged an assault on Mansura, where a Qarmatian ruler lived. This makes clear that the Ghaznavids had control of the area between Multan and Lahore but little else on the Indus. During this exhausting journey, laden with treasure and probably fearful of the potential for flooding, the Ghaznavids were harried by local Jats, who managed to degrade the army, steal some baggage, and exhaust the pack animals. Deeply fatigued, the army finally returned to Ghazni in spring of 1026. It was the last major campaign into India.

The campaign was reported to the Caliph, who seemed impressed with the ordeal and perhaps wanted to make amends after the episode with Hasanak. Mahmud, his two

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572 Ibn al-Athir, IX, 24. Nazim’s account focuses on religious motivations for all parties and contains the hyperbole that “Hindu fanaticism was no match for Muslim valour and good generalship.” Nazim, Life and Times, 118.
573 Thapar’s Somanatha provides a detailed archaeological discussion on this problem, pointing out that Farrukhi associated “Somnath” with “Manat” of pre-Islamic Mecca. A detailed discussion of the reception of the Somanatha raid has been provided by Thapar, but the sheer mass of fictitious narrative requires additional separate study to be fully disentangled.
574 Gardizi, 87.
sons, and his brother were given additional titles, which simply confirmed their obvious status.\textsuperscript{575} The result was mixed. The assault was successful and the loot immense, but the return journey was arduous and there was a severe loss of men and treasure.

At home in Ghazni, the Sultan finally dispatched troops in the summer to assist Qadir Khan against Alitegin in Central Asia. Clearly, they wanted to maintain the friendship with Qadir Khan and did not wish to see expansive ambitions against Iran. In India, Bhimpal, the son of Trilochandpal had died, and the last of the Shahi court took refuge in Kashmir. But in the early spring of 1027, the Ghaznavids departed southward once again to recover from their losses to the Jats, who had taken refuge on islands in the Indus south of Multan. The Ghaznavids constructed 1400 boats fitted with spikes and manned by archers with some fire-based missile weapons.\textsuperscript{576} The Jats also prepared themselves with thousands of boats. As the Ghaznavids moved their troops downriver, they blocked the banks with elephants and horses. They managed to overturn many Jat boats and follow them to their caches of valuables, recovering their Gujarati treasures and other items accumulated by the Jats. By summer, the army returned to Ghazni. But either during the Somanatha expedition or the battle with the Jats, a fatal seed had been planted: the Sultan had contracted consumption.

\textit{The Last Days of Mahmud}

At some point after the capture and imprisonment of Isra’il, some Oghuz from his faction approached the Ghaznavids to request the right to settle in Khurasan, with the excuse that they were oppressed by Qarakhanids in Transoxania. The Sultan allowed

\textsuperscript{575} Gardizi, 87-8.
\textsuperscript{576} Gardizi, 88.
them to settle unmolested, in the hopes that they would furnish more recruits for his army. Some of the Sultan’s commanders strongly objected to the move, especially the governor of Tus, Arslan Jadhib, who reputedly suggested massacring them or cutting off their thumbs to prevent them from drawing bows.\textsuperscript{577} This unusual proposal could not be implemented and in any case would have undermined their imagined military value for the Ghaznavids. The Seljuqs crossed the river with permission to settle near Sarakhs, Farawah, and Abiward, but only if they accepted the condition that they do not bear arms and that they establish themselves in widely disbursed camps.

This plan was obviously a failure by the start of 1027. The Seljuqs had begun to raid passing caravans and otherwise disrupt the norms of the sprawling urban settlements in Khurasan. Arslan Jadhib was dispatched to challenge them, but they proved too strong for him. Chastised by the Sultan, the governor excused himself by stating that he did not have the resources as a provincial governor to handle the intruders. As a result, the Sultan, increasingly ill, marched to Tus in 1028 with a large force to aid the governor. At a small fort (\textit{ribāṭ}) near Farawah, Arslan Jadhib defeated the Seljuqs, capturing thousands and killing many.\textsuperscript{578} Survivors fled to northern and western Iran, first in Dihistan and the Balkhan mountains, but eventually also in Isfahan. The settled zone of Ghaznavid Khurasan, despite increased exposure to its steppe hinterland, had successfully resisted the intrusion of the Oghuz.

With Indian territory difficult to conquer or raid, the Ghaznavids turned their attention toward Iran, where a breakdown in authority had occurred in Ray. In the late 10\textsuperscript{th} c., Ray was ruled by a Buyid vassal, who appointed his son Majd al-Dawla to

\textsuperscript{577} Gardizi, 85. Once again appears finger-cutting imagery, but in the Central Asian case it is connected with the ability to use a bow.

\textsuperscript{578} Gardizi, 89-90.
succeed him when he died in 997. But the mother Sayyida, who was a sister to the neighboring ruler in Shahrbar, became regent and effectively prevented her son from acquiring the arts of power. When he attempted to resist his regent mother in 1006, he was captured and released on the condition that he confine himself to literary pursuits and the pleasures of the harem. Sayyida’s death in 1028 gave Majd al-Dawla the reins of control, but he proved unable for the task. Rebellious and greedy troops under his nominal command attacked the townspeople of Ray, plundered the treasury, and threatened the life of Majd al-Dawla, who then begged for the assistance of Mahmud. Mahmud had avoided any moves on Ray while Sayyida and her network of alliances were still alive, but conditions had now shifted decisively in the Sultan’s favor.579

A troop of 8,000 horses under the command of Hajib ‘Ali was immediately sent to Ray, while the ailing Sultan marched more slowly toward northern Iran. Majd al-Dawla emerged from the town with a small personal guard of 100 men, but he foolishly dismounted to hear the Sultan’s message from Hajib ‘Ali, and was quickly surrounded by Ghaznavid troops. Mahmud finally arrived in late spring of 1029 and entered the town without opposition. The troops set to plunder, gathering 1,000,000 dinars, jewels, thousands of expensive clothes, and precious metalwork.580 The Sultan imprisoned Majd al-Dawla and his son in distant India.

With the town under military occupation, the Ghaznavids were able to carry out a persecution that they would not have been able to carry out in Khurasan. Purported heretics of Qarmatians, Batins, and Mu’tazilites were gibbeted, executed, or imprisoned. This negated the possibility of local groups forming against the Ghaznavids and

579 Ibn al-Athir, IX, 261; Guzida, 429; Bayhaqi, 319.
580 Gardizi, 90.
undermined the potential for delicate and destabilizing politics as had been the norm for Khurasan. Supposedly, camel loads of books were carted to Ghazni while “heretical” books were burned. At the same time, demands of fealty were issued to the surrounding states who had previous ties with the regime in Ray. All submitted their allegiance except for the ruler of Dailam, known as “Salar”. Before returning to Ghazni, Mahmud ordered a large force to compel Salar into obeisance, but in spite of their initial success, these soldiers were eventually defeated and Salar’s men were able to reoccupy lost territory.

Nevertheless, the expansion into northern and western Iran opened a new opportunity for Mas‘ud, who was given command of the conquered province and told to capture other territories in western Iran. It seemed to have been a set-up for failure: Mas‘ud had been supplied with a small force of 2,000 men and inadequate equipment on the edge of hostile territory, close to where the Seljuqs had taken refuge in Isfahan. Mas‘ud, however, took himself energetically to the task, and employed the successful tools of his father of trickery and money to mount another assault on Salar.581 By promising rewards, Mas‘ud was able to gain the loyalty of some of Salar’s officers, who guided the Ghaznavid expedition to a weak part of the fort where Salar was entrenched. Salar was forced from the fort and soon was defeated and imprisoned. His son offered tribute. Mas‘ud had managed a small victory.

Mas‘ud proceeded to Hamadan and Isfahan, In Hamadan, the Kakuyid vassal fled before the troops arrived. The same occurred in Isfahan at the start of 1030, when the local ruler ‘Ala al-Dawla escaped to Baghdad. In Baghdad, he convinced the Caliph to suggest that Mas‘ud reinstate him. When word arrived of Mahmud’s death in late spring of 1030, Mas‘ud agreed to the terms and sped eastward to gather his strength and

581 Ibn al-Athir, IX, 262.
challenge his brother for the throne of Ghazni. The Ghaznavids would never reenter the west to fulfill the command of Mahmud to liberate the Caliph from the Buyids.

A strange logic was at work with the death of Mahmud for it seems that a kind of circularity took place. Mahmud died in his middle to late fifties, roughly the same age as Sebuktegin. He had been the eldest and most capable son of Sebuktegin, but he was imprisoned by his father about a decade before his father’s death, and lost his father’s favor. At the time of succession, Mahmud, then in Iran, was denied the throne by his father, who selected at his deathbed his younger courtly son Isma’il to succeed him. Mahmud then raced to Ghazni to seize the seat of command.

Similarly, Mas’ud, Mahmud’s eldest son, had been confined and banished by Mahmud approximately a decade before Mahmud’s death. As father and Sultan, Mahmud had given the throne to his courtly son Muhammad, who was at his Mahmud’s deathbed in Ghazni while Mas’ud was away in Iran. Yet in the same spirit as his father, it would be Mas’ud who would effectively betray Mahmud and defy the inheritance by marching on Ghazni to become Sultan. In the 11th c., the throne of Ghazni could only be held by men who resisted their dying father’s wishes.
VI. Conclusions

The Ghaznavids became paradigmatic within a short time after the death of their greatest Sultan; their territory diminished by half within a decade after Mahmud’s death. Subsequently, the Sultan appeared in mystical poetry and in advice literature which endured the centuries in Central Asia, Iran, and India. It is justified to marvel at his achievements, among the most significant of the 11th c., but it is odd to some extent that he persisted so strongly in imaginative recreations. The individual Samanid amirs are not well-known by name and Seljuqs rulers often lie in similar obscurity. But many Iranians and most South Asians, regardless of religious affiliation, not only know about “Ghaznavi Mahmud”, but sometimes have strong opinions, both favorable and unfavorable, about this significant historical personage.

This study has refracted a significant measure of history through the Ghaznavid phenomenon, more than a thousand years before the Ghaznavids and one thousand years after, in terms of geographic, cultural, political, economic, social, and military developments. It has aimed at providing substantive meaning to this historical landscape, not merely arrange masses of its facts into a taxonomy. To orient ourselves even closer to the Ghaznavids, we need to recall the conditions for state formation during the medieval period.

In central Eurasia, a new phase began in the mid-7th c. with the contraction of the Byzantines, the Sasanians, and the Guptas. In western and central Eurasia, the beginning of end was marked by Byzantine-Sasanian wars which intensified nomadization in western Asia and culminated in the expansion of the Muslim Arabs who eliminated the
Sasanian state. In southern Eurasia, the end of antiquity is the fall of Harsha, the last breath of the diminished power of the Guptas. With the contraction, destruction, and fragmentation of these major settled powers of antiquity, the medieval age of state formation dawned. This age would last until the reappearance of large states again in the 16th c., with the rise of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, who inaugurated a new moment for the creation of political culture and institutions, completing a long process which had lasted nearly a millennium.

The central node of political culture in the medieval Islamic world was the caliphate, whether the faction defined itself as anti- or pro-caliphate. The caliphate as an institution had started with a high degree of theoretical and practical integration, initially with the combination of temporal and spiritual spheres in the person of Muhammad, and later in the guise of the orthodox caliphs who became a common reference point for political conflicts within the expanding Islamic society of the 8th c. From a relatively early period, Islamic gains did not remain centralized as contestation over the distribution of social and political power spread across the realm. Despite conjunctural reinforcement during the ‘Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, this secular trend of fragmentation became pronounced in the 9th c., whether in the case of the Umayyads of Andalus, the Kharijites and eventually the Fatimids of Egypt, the Qarmatians of the Gulf, the Saffarids, the Taharids, and the Arabs of Sind.

In this long era of relatively weak states, in which the Umayyads and the early ‘Abbasids were the strongest, political disunity opened channels for the distribution of medieval Islamic culture. Over time, the theoretical and practical aspects of the caliphate separated ever more widely; some believe that this process began with the disputes about
succession centered on ʿAli, but others maintain that the rise of the Mamluk phenomenon weakened the Caliphate decisively. However it may be periodized, depending often on the individual historian’s predilection for political, economic, social, or cultural modes of interpretation, it is clear that the temporal and spiritual power of the Caliph was largely separated by the time that the Ghaznavids came into being. This is particularly important to recall in order to dispel the illusion which occasionally emerges in South Asian discourse of a monolithic centralized Islamic polity; this is not at all the considered perspective of specialists in medieval Iran or western Asia.

At their high point, the Ghaznavids were at the center of this medieval process in time and even in space. In Iran, power was initially divided along a north-south axis between the medium-sized formations of the Saffarids and the Taharids until the late 9th c., and later along an east-west axis with the Buyids and the Samanids during the 10th c. Central Asia had become part of the Iranian sphere, not simply in the sense of Khwarezmian, Sogdian, and Bactrian as Iranian languages and cultures, but also in terms of political economy, as the Taharids and especially the Samanids were able to integrate Khurasan and Mawaranahar under a single state, a feat unaccomplished by their predecessors. In India, medium-sized powers were also the norm, such as the Palas of the lower Gangetic valley and Bengal, the Gurjara-Pratihara alliance in the upper Gangetic valley and Gujarat, and the Rashtrakutas of the western Indian coast. Smaller powers existed and many of these were integrated into these medium-size formations which were not able to gain decisive dominion over their clients or their neighbors, most conspicuously evidenced by the various battles over Kanauj. It was during this moment

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582 Achaemenid control over the tributary satrapy of Sogdia was rather nominal by comparison to the integrated regional society constructed under the Samanids.
of medium and small polities in Iran, India, and Central Asia that the Ghaznavids entered history in the late 10th c.; in most respects, the Ghaznavids of Afghanistan were a medium-sized power rather similar to their contemporaries in the region. In an age of weak kings, the Ghaznavids were briefly the strongest.

There is an ongoing process of “Iranization” and “Indianization” in the history of Afghanistan. “Turkification” also occurs, but as a subordinate trend during the Ghaznavid period. Sebuktegin obviously had a Turkic name and he was born north of the Pamirs in the Issu lake region, where there had been a greater concentration of Turkic speaking peoples for nearly half a millennium. Yet, Afghanistan, where his sons were born and raised, was a very different area at the intersection of the Iranian and the Indian world. Turkification was relatively epiphenomenal for the Ghaznavids on the whole, as it seems to have been for the “Turkic” element of the Shahi dynasty, which was Buddhist from the outset and eventually supplanted by a “Hindu” or Indian element. Sebuktegin consistently sought the support of Persian and Arabic speaking rulers, first as a client to the Samanid amir, and second as a servant to the Caliph of Baghdad. All of his children bore Arabic names, although it is unlikely that any of them had an Arab mother or any Arab relatives. Over time, Ghaznavid dynasts tended to bear Persian names; this becomes more pronounced in the 12th c., such that all of the last Ghaznavid sultans had Persian names. These facts pertain not only to the level of formal political institutions but also to the wider political culture. Thus, the primary exchange in Afghanistan between Iranization and Indianization maintains a great deal of continuity through the high medieval period until the emergence of the relatively more “Turkic” Ghurids.
Furthermore, it is possible to delineate a rough geography by quadrants for these processes, as long as the actuality of overlapping cultural and material spheres is kept in mind. It has been observed that the southern Hindu Kush has been often subject to developments which originated in the north. Natural geography determined the relative fertility of the north along the possibility of supporting the long-standing commercial routes which traversed Central Asia. By contrast, the south was less populated, with harsher deserts and a longer commercial route between India and Iran. It is also the case that the western lands of Afghanistan have often fallen into the Iranian orbit, which is easy to acknowledge for Herat or Zaranj, while it is hard to dispute the continuing significance of historical India to the eastern lands, in light of the important passages to the Indus valley near locales such as Ghazni and Kabul. This historical geography of Afghanistan suggests that the western and northern quadrants of the territory have had greater exposure to the process of “Iranization” while the eastern and southern quadrants have often undergone greater “Indianization”.

This observation should be tempered by a few facts. From the ancient through the medieval period, the main commercial route ran along the north-south axis, so it is quite clear that large number of “Indians” were found in the north. At the same time, it should be remembered that that Iranian and eventually Turkic military power often included large portions of southern lands from the Achaemenids onward. As for the Turko-Sogdian milieu of Central Asia, the Sogdians, along with other Iranian language speaking peoples of the area, continued to undergo a great measure of “Iranization” and soon their language would be substantially lost; nevertheless, it was out of these eastern territories that the first Persian (Dari) speaking elites emerged, in part because it formed a *lingua*
franca among all the Iranian speaking peoples of the Iranian plateau. In terms of Turkification, Turkic speaking peoples were just beginning to take root in cities in large numbers, develop a court and administrative literature, and were eventually in a position to influence the linguistic and ethnic mixture on a large scale: this would occur during the Seljuq and Qarakhanid periods and have an influence on the later Ghurids. But this process was not pronounced at the start of the medieval period in Afghanistan. Thus, the emphasis in this rough delineation rests on the major tendencies of each sphere in relation to one another and to the major poles of Iranian and Indian settled society and culture; in other words, it orients us to the general history of Afghanistan so that we can better explore the particularities of its landscape.

In simplest terms, the Ghaznavids represent the unification of the Kabul river valley, which had been divided for nearly three centuries between the Shahis in the north and the Rutbils and Lawiks in the south. The Shahis and the Rutbils in particular were kinsmen and they often cooperated against external threats, but as soon as outside pressure abated, they sought various petty advantages over one another, mostly in the ideological realm, as evidenced by their relations with the Chinese emperor. They did not have a consistent cultural and political hegemony either over their subjects, who were composed of a variety of languages, religions, and cultures, nor were they able to extend their vision of power to neighboring realms to any significant degree. Ghazni, the center of the Kabul river valley, proved to be an ideal base to project strength into the Iranian and Indian spheres. Its potential was fully actualized by Mahmud through the unification of Hind and Khurasan into a single political economy for the first time since perhaps Alexander, whose rule in “India” was fleeting and marginal at best. At the same time, it

583 The endangered language of Yagnobi is the only remnant of Sogdian.
should also be noted that the Ghaznavids united the Indus valley under their political control for the first time in centuries.

In light of these definitions from the general history of the area, it seems fair to treat the Ghaznavids as the first Indo-Persian rulers, rather than the first Islamic rulers in India. It is clear that the Sindis were the first Islamic rulers in historic India, so the Ghaznavids cannot retain that appellation, even though it has repeated on their behalf in a variety of chronicles from the later medieval period and beyond. This definition of Indo-Persian for the Ghaznavids becomes possible as long as certain restrictions are kept in mind. Persian in this case is the common Iranian language which was developing across the Iranian plateau with many major centers in the east; other languages and cultures were soon subsumed within this Persian-speaking and increasingly Islamic culture. The language of the courts of Iran and most poetry was Persian, even during the arrival of the first Turkic state in the form of the Seljuqs. The language of diplomacy, history, and eventually science was in Persian. In other words, Persian was the specifically Iranian character of the Ghaznavids.

At the same time, the Indian element was present for the Ghaznavids from the outset. Southern Afghanistan has long been attached closely to India instead of Iran, and the definition of “Hind” in the medieval period was narrowly defined for the Ghaznavids. Obviously, the Ghaznavids were not Bengali, Tamil, or Gujarati, but they were dynasts of Hind; in effect, of the Panjab at the utmost. Isma’il, Mahmud’s defeated brother, was initially considered governor of Ghazni and Hind, when there is no indication in the sources that they even had steady occupation of Gandhara at that time. The designation of Sultan of Ghazni and Hind was kept until the end of the dynasty. Biruni’s “Hind” is not
the Hind of his Andalusi-based contemporary Ibn Hazm any more than the Umayyad emirate’s notion of Hind is the same as that of the Ghaznavid sultanate. Mahmud’s “Hind” was a much more concrete and restricted notion that it has sometimes been described in the historiography. The Ghaznavids were part of the area’s society and culture, after having moved from its margins in the mountains to its center in the Indus river valley. It is in this respect too that we can call the Ghaznavids “Indo-Persian” rulers, or perhaps simply Indian rulers, given their enduring core territory for their entire two century reign.

The Turkic element, present in the region since the 6th c., was still at the margins of Central Asian settled life and found its greatest expression in combination with Sogdian and Hephthalite lords. Particularly in this early period, the Turkic element swayed to the gravity of Indian and Iranian society and culture. This was the case with Turkic Buddhism as it was the case for the Turkic troops of the Sasanians. At the time of the Ghaznavids, the Turkic element can be seen as a binding energy or perhaps as a special kind of catalyst which did not always survive the alchemical transformation into enduring political and cultural power, which typically tended toward Indian and Iranian orbits. Only with the Qarakhanids and the Seljuqs in the mid-11th c., and eventually with the Ghurids in the 12th c., did the Turkic element emerge as a cultural factor in its own right. Consequently, the Ghaznavids must be seen as Indo-Persian kings first instead of Turko-Persian, in contrast with the Ghurids.

Along these same lines, it should be mentioned that the first Turko-Indian dynasty of Afghanistan is none other than the Shahis. They are initially known as the Turk Shahis because of the original core dynasty and leadership, but they became acclimated to the
Panjab soon enough and there is little question that they intermarried with local elites. Their religious affiliations transferred from Buddhism to Hinduism, in the form of medieval western Indian Shaivism, but it is not clear if that process began before or after the accession of Kallar. As Buddhism continued to lose ground in northern Afghanistan with the start of ʿAbbasid and eventually Samanid rule, it seems also to have deteriorated under the Shahis, Rutbils, and Lawiks in the south as it did in Sind and elsewhere in western India. The southern Afghani and Indian developments are a Hindu-Buddhist affair primarily, not involving Muslims in any direct manner. Insofar as the Ghaznavids were also “Turko-Indian”, then the Shahis and the Ghaznavids were standing on the same cultural ground as well as the same landscape. At the ideological level, the distinction between the Ghaznavids and the Shahis was Sunni Islam of mostly Hanafi persuasion and western Shaivism. But this did not seem to have an overwhelming effect on political and military decisions.

The Shahi and Ghaznavid strategies appear remarkably similar to one another in terms of state formation. They were both monarchies with a blend of Indian and Iranian elements, even though they both had a Turkic origin at their center. They both had multiple vassals and certain steady enemies, although the Ghaznavids seem to have had fewer allies at this early period; there seems to be no equivalent to Kashmiri support of the Shahis. The Ghaznavids used vassals in battle, but it appears that they had a much greater number of mercenaries, which may have been a decisive factor in their favor. Both focused on control over access points in the northwestern subcontinent to maintain steady rental flows from commerce. Both these formations appealed to distant monarchs for legitimatization: the Chinese emperor in the case of the Shahis and the Mesopotamian
caliph in the case of the Ghaznavids. These seem to have been common features of medieval polities in southern Afghanistan.

It should be recalled that northern and southern Afghanistan have been two related but separate spheres throughout the ages, as determined by the high mountain spine of the Hindu Kush. Southern Afghanistan is often in the weaker position since it is subject frequently to outside influences and exposure, in part because agricultural prospects are more favorable in Central Asia. Perhaps a comparison can be made between the Ghaznavids and Timurids in this regard. The Timurids emerged from a clearer lineage since Timur acted on behalf of the Chagatai ulus; by contrast, the Ghaznavids under Mahmud had to assert their own right to rule with the distant support of weak rulers. The Timurids, based in Central Asia, were able to extend themselves from Mesopotamia to the Ganga-Yamuna basin, while the Ghaznavids were only very briefly in western Iran. Both the Timurids and the Ghaznavids had embraced Persian culture and carried out cultural programmes which retained their fame long after their demise, but the Ghaznavids had no known patronage of Turkic works and the scope of their patronage was more limited. The Ghaznavids were also unable to generate a new formation, unlike the Timurids, who gave rise to Babur and the Mughals. Larger settled societies have consistent advantages not possessed by smaller settled areas and transit zones such as southern Afghanistan. These are just some of the points to consider in the related questions of history and geography in northern and southern Afghanistan.

It seems that rulers in Afghanistan have the chance to be strongest when other powers are weak in Iran and India. It was certainly the case for the Ghaznavids: there was no major settled power in Iran or India at the time that the Ghaznavids were able to
expand. Another possible example of this phenomenon may be found in the Durrani’s “Afghan Empire” which formed after the brief but significant expansion of Nadir Shah. In Iran, the Safavid shah abdicated to his former retainers the Ghilzai Afghans from Kandahar in 1722, but the Safavid heir Tahmasp was able to convince another retainer, Nadir Shah, to support him against the Afghans and regain the Iranian capital of Isfahan in 1729. The kingmaker Nadir Shah eventually overturned Tahmasp and established himself as Shah of Iran in 1736. In India, the Mughals had been greatly weakened since the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 so Nadir Shah was able to campaign there, where he sacked Delhi in 1739, seizing the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i Nur diamond, along with other loot so rich that Iran was not taxed for a period of three years. The assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, however, opened space for the formation of a loya jirga to elevate Ahmad Shah Abdali to the Emirate, which seized Ghazni and Kabul, annexed territory from Mashhad to Delhi, and beat back Maratha opponents at Panipat in 1761. The defeat of the Mughals by Nadir Shah had alerted the British to Mughal weakness, but until the first part of the 19th c., the British were cautious about moving against the strong Durrani. Although short-lived, less than half the time of the Ghaznavids’ reign, the political consequences of this period live to our present day, as the Durrani line is considered the foundation of the current state of Afghanistan. It is a salutary corrective to the image of robust mountain warriors invading the plains that the southern Afghan element in the early modern period could grow precisely because the Iranian and Indian political scene was fragile.

584 The current President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, is from the Shamizai sub-group of the Popalzai, who are Durrani Pashtuns.
In our age, when so many relations are monetized, it can be difficult to perceive political and economic constraints in societies with only partial monetization. As the evidence shows, monetization can have profound effects on social and state formation. The question of Ghaznavid military motivations, however, has been a regular feature of the historiography for centuries. In terms of the dualism of God vs. Mammon as a claim about causation, this might be rephrased in Islamic history to consider whether it was *jihad* (war for the faith) or *ghazw* (raiding for loot) which caused the Ghaznavids to campaign in India. The trope of war is far more important in the Indian retelling of Sultan Mahmud than in the Iranian retelling, even though the Ghaznavids campaigned heavily in Iran and Central Asia. It should be remembered that religious institutions were concerned not merely with matters of metaphysics and soteriology, but they also were involved in the spheres of law, taxation, right, and authority. The medieval world as a whole supported religious institutions for ideological and material purposes to a degree unmatched in most of today’s world. In this vein, it is fair to ask if the presentist framing of the “god or gold” question presupposes uncritically what has been called “the myth of religious violence”.585

In light of the use of religious discourse in the sources to describe causation, the historian of our day risks hewing to the sources too closely if he or she assumes that

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585 W.T. Cavanaugh, *The myth of religious violence: secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4: “The idea that religion has a tendency to promote violence is part of the conventional wisdom of Western societies, and it underlies many of our institutions and policies, from limits on the public role of churches to efforts to promote liberal democracy in the Middle East. What I call the “myth of religious violence” is the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from “secular” features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence.”
“religious” motivations were the primary cause of medieval violence. It is impossible not to notice the invocation of religious symbols and language in the sources, but the historian must connect these expressions with the other aspects of history of the time, including economic conditions, power politics, and the social moment. This balances what was said in the texts with what was meant and actually done.

Rather than falling into the “either / or” dualism of this debatable heuristic, this study emphasized certain universal themes in human affairs: materiality, power, and necessity. It traced the long term issues of fact and interpretation which shape the conditions for adequate investigation into the Ghaznavids. It detailed what was a mere possibility at an early point of the faction in Ghazni, i.e. the Panjab raids and the control of Khurasan, and determined when and how it became a necessity to raid in order to build and maintain a state. The seizure of economic rents in India was often matched by the same behavior in Iran. Iran was heavily taxed when it was not subject to loot, but it is harder to make the case for religious motivations in Iran; for instance, during the sack of Sistan or the repression in Khwarezm. Nevertheless, the problems of politics were more acute in Iran in the sense that Caliphal legitimation provided a more stable base for asserting the state’s right to rule than the collapsed post-Samanid landlords. The “religious violence” perspective misses the Iranian and Central Asian aspects of the Ghaznavids at the same time that it reduces their complexity to one-dimensionality.

The framing of the God vs. Mammon question, which emerges originally from biblical discourse, poses the issue in the manner analogous to the strict mind-body dichotomy which infuses so much popular thought about the individual person. No

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586 Nirenberg, Communities of violence: persecution of minorities in the Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) is one kind of fruitful approach to religion and violence for medieval Iberian inter-religious relations.
solution will be found by reasserting a great man view of Sultan Mahmud; it is not enough to determine the subjective psychological motives of the Sultan, even if we had his memoirs or other autobiographical texts as we do for others in Islamic history. The whole of causation, or, in this case, the socioeconomics of state formation, provides a better understanding of collective action. Cultural approaches, such as those in the recent studies by Thapar and Flood, are complementary to the approach outlined here, as they address many of these same topics, but from a different starting point.

The mystical significance of the Ghaznavids may seem particularly baffling to those attuned to the often violent struggles required to build a medieval state. It is important to keep in mind that the most famous of these courtly speculations, such as ʿAttar’s Maṇṭiq al-Ṭaʿīr and Saʿdi’s Golestān, were composed dozens of decades after the actual Sultan Mahmud vanished from the scene. Instead, the Sultan that remained for these masters of poetic art was largely gathered from the lyricism and panegyrics of the Ghaznavid court. The value of that poetry can be found by exploring the spirit of the age which produced those later poets, rather than in their empirical fidelity to the early 11th c. Similar phenomena exist in the cultural history of all peoples. In the hands of the master dramatist Shakespeare, Julius Caesar himself, who aspired to be the first Roman emperor and was also famed as a lover, transformed into a pitiable figure of tragedy after his assassination. Of course, the reality of imperial Roman militarism and politics suggests a less sanguine reading of the man once declared “dictator perpetuō”.

There remains a need to reassess the political categories for medieval polities such as the Ghaznavids. There seems little doubt that Sultan Mahmud sought power, but so did

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most of his rivals. Nevertheless, the constant limitations on his power, either from landscape, socioeconomic constraints, or political formations, make it surprisingly difficult to view this paradigmatic Sultan as a fully realized despot. Instead, it appears that political and diplomatic craft was as much as part of his arsenal as his military prowess. The Ghaznavid period is rife with negotiations, half-victories, and costs. Mahmud is marked by his resilience against destructive forces much more than his smooth path to dominance. That is not to say that conditions of unfreedom did not exist: they did for those who opposed the Sultan without the means to do so. But there were countervailing forces which inhibited unrestrained power for all parties. If one must translate this phenomenon into our early 21st c. parlance, it can be said that it is difficult to characterize the political scene in medieval Afghanistan as “democratic”, but it seems equally impossible to call the Ghaznavids “totalitarian” or a “dictatorship” in the contemporary charged meaning of these terms.

This study has emphasized the urban reality of the Ghaznavids for a reason: the tendency is still too strong to ascribe “nomadic” motives to the Ghaznavids, simply because they had a core troop of horsemen and many Turkic soldiers. This observation is racialized on occasion in a manner reminiscent of the British imperial discourse about martial races, although this kind of thinking appears elsewhere in European scholarship. The problem in this instance is primarily historiographic: it is not at all self-explanatory how “race” helps explain the Ghaznavid case. Although “Turks”, understood in the medieval sense of the term, undoubtedly played a significant role in the rise of the Ghaznavid sultanate, there is a potential misperception generated by

expressions such as “coming of the Turks” and other such phrases. This misguided heuristic extends to intellectual as well as social history. In another example, the erosion of “Arab influence” and the presence of “Turks, Afghans, and Mughals” reportedly bear the blame for the purported decline of natural science in medieval India, in which “scientific thought as a whole was petrified.”589 Numerous other cases of this incorrect presupposition and its consequences would require separate detailed exposition.590

If active commanders on horseback could be qualified as nomads for their mobility alone, then there are many Byzantine emperors who would also merit the same designation. At the end of a campaign, writers such as ‘Utbi and Gardizi frequently state that the Ghaznavids and their Sultan returned home to Ghazni. As much as they campaigned, Ghazni was the center of the Ghaznavid world, not the horse. Furthermore, there are no known tribal designations for the Ghaznavids, by sharp contrast with the early Arabs or with the later Mongols, and even Sebuktegin’s precise origin is unreported by the textual sources, although he was a child in the Central Asian steppe. Another blow to the nomadic thesis is economic: nomads are usually interested in commodities more than money. There was no reason for Oghuz to raid cities and caravans for fiat coins made from cheap metal. The Ghaznavids, by contrast, had serious money problems at their top and center, due to the nature of the state they expected to build. They were the

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589 See Ahmad, *Indo-Arab relations. An account of India’s relations with the Arab world from ancient up to modern times* (Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1969), 34-35, 41, for many examples of this viewpoint, which seems inspired by Salafi and modernist thinking. For instance, Ahmad laments that the madrasas did not change their curriculum in the 20th c., perhaps a result of the consistent separation of religious and secular spheres in India at that time. But Arabic in India actually gained in importance in the late Mughal and post-Mughal period. See S. Alavi, *Islam and healing: loss and recovery of an Indo-Muslim medical tradition 1600-1900* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

590 “Khurasan was the first settled society that the Turkish Ghaznavid dynasty (established c. 994-98) and the Saljuqs (by 1040) encountered”, Malamud, “Politics of Heresey”. There are numerous examples of this viewpoint. See V. Fourniau, *Études karakhanides* (Aix-en-Provence: Éd. ÉDISUD, 2001) for a reassessment of this question in terms of the Qarakhanids.
last great sedentary Iranian state in the region until the post-Mongol period. They raided and taxed India and Iran under Mahmud not because of the pressures of steppe movements but rather from the tumultuous political economy of the settled zone. A much better example for nomadic states can be found in the Seljuqs, who are currently undergoing a reassessment as their nomadic characteristics come under greater scrutiny.\(^{591}\)

An even more serious concern, however, is the collapsing of all Central Asian states and peoples in India into an undifferentiated mass of conquerors.\(^{592}\) In a way that Central Asian and Iranian historians might find surprising, there is occasionally a direct equation made between Turks, Mongols, Mughals, and even Arabs, with hardly any distinctions made between them. There are several reasons for this confusion. As evidenced, the Turk is often characterized as a soldier on horseback, a phenomenon discussed in a few places in the scholarship, but the fundamental lacuna is the general lack of understanding about Turkic Buddhism during late antiquity and the medieval period.\(^{593}\) There is simply not enough integration between Central Asian, Islamic, and South Asian studies, which is part of the continuing epistemological legacy of the Cold War.

\(^{591}\) A 2009 conference in Japan attended by many of the luminaries of Central Asian and Iranian studies may bring new insight into these questions.

\(^{592}\) For example, in an otherwise helpful book on the early modern trade in the gulf of Cambay, V.A. Janaki, *The Commerce of Cambay from the Earliest Period to the Nineteenth Century*, (University of Baroda: Baroda, 1980): “The Solankis were by now continuously harassed by Mongol Muslims, who, as early as the 10th century, were asserting their independence in the outlying provinces of the Abbasid Empire. By 942 the Ghaznavids had established themselves at Lahore and Mohammad Ghuri attacked Somnath Patan between 1024 and 1030. He also invaded Patan in 1026 during the reign of Bhim Dev I, who however, put up a strong resistance.” Later in a footnote he refers to Muslims as Musalmans, although he had called them Muslims in the excerpt above.

\(^{593}\) Even H. Inalcik agrees that the understanding of Turkic Buddhism by Islamic and Turkic studies scholars is quite undeveloped and not at all integrated into mainstream thinking. There is some rewriting of these topics in terms of Central Asia and its military history, but this has yet to extend into other historical questions, including the transmission of culture, social organization, and economic developments.
As part of loosening the interpretive knot of the Ghaznavids, it helps to mention analogous developments in other parts of the medieval world at basically the same time as the Ghaznavids: the Cholas and the Vikings. A series of weak Chola kings in the 10th c. was replaced by a pair of vigorous former vassals: Rajaraja I (r. 985-1014) and his son Rajendra I (r. 1012-44). Emerging from their core territory in the area later called Coromandel, they battling neighboring Deccani powers to take control of lucrative trade routes which had taken root in western Asia with the intensification of Arab commerce in the Indian Ocean. They built a large military and practiced a policy of expansion which enabled them to mount naval attacks on the key port area of Shrivijaya on the Malay peninsula and Sumatra, an area rich in gold for their coins and a stopping point western Indian Ocean trade with China. Over time, they acquired exalted titles, parallel to the expanded use of the term Sultan in Iran, such as chakravartigal (emperor). The moment of Chola power, which extended into the eastern edge of urbanizing north India, was brief but potent. They cultivated a conscious religious politics through building the monumental Rajarajesvara temple in honor of Shiva as part of their centralized royal dāna strategy in which the king played the role of pious devotee who redistributed the loot from conquest among his loyal subjects. It is important to note that Chola rental flows sourced from commercial wealth and looting as much as from agriculture, in a manner which recalls the early Ghaznavids.

Meanwhile, northern Europe was connected to the wealth of Central Asia through the mediation of the Rus’ merchants who plied the Volga and exchanged furs and slaves.

594 Thapar, Early India, 366. The Cholas are better examples than the Western Chaulukyas in this regard. 595 Ogura, “The Changing Concept of Kingship in the Cōla Period: Royal Temple Constructions, c. A.D. 850-1279” in N. Karashima, Kingship in Indian history, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 128.
for silver. They transported those silver coins into the Viking heartlands of Scandinavia, which saw a resurgence of raiding activity at the end of the 10th c. that eventually led to the conquest of England. Initially commanded by Swein Forkbeard (r. 986-1014), these Viking warriors fought for the boon of Danegeld: tens of thousands of pounds of silver paid to deter the raiders. These raids dislodged accumulated treasures, bringing precious metals into circulation and intensifying the advance of monetization, rather than ameliorating it. It does not seem entirely coincidental that the upsurge in Viking razzias occurred as the Samanid silver hoards withered. Swein’s son Cnut (r. 1018-25) united England and Denmark under a single king as the tribute of Danegeld became regularized into the tax structure along with the paid royal bodyguard called the Thingmen. The improved Viking military position permitted them to dominate the maritime zones of Great Britain and Ireland, which brought them commercial and military benefits. Nevertheless, the times still required a carefully calibrated religious politics to compete with the supporters of the archbishopic of Hamburg-Bremen; unlike Mahmud, who never went on the hajj to Mecca, this resulted in a pilgrimage to Rome by Cnut in 1027. Insofar as the Vikings and Cholas are part of similar developments across medieval Eurasia, it appears that the Ghaznavids may have mediated in practice

597 F.D. Logan, The Vikings in history, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992) has a chart of the silver paid to the Vikings. Also see J. Graham-Campbell, G. Williams, Silver Economy in the Viking Age (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007).
599 T. Bolton, The empire of Cnut the Great : conquest and the consolidation of power in Northern Europe in the early eleventh century (Leiden: Brill, 2008) details the court and church politics of the Vikings at that time.
between India and Britian what they later mediated in theory in subsequent centuries through discourse on the motivations of “despotism”.

This dissertation has aimed at an integrated discussion of the socioeconomics of state formation in medieval Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there are more topics to treat within this ambit and further questions to investigate to solve some of the knotted puzzles of this history. There are three important areas which require further consideration by the scholarship.

First, there are the fascinating questions of the Ghaznavid court. There is little doubt that the Ghaznavids sought to build a prestigious court and assert their right to rule through the use of culture. But they were not unique in that regard. The Saffarid and the Samanid court had a profound influence on Ghaznavid practice, which was continued long after the death of Mahmud. As important an intellectual as Biruni was, it was Ghaznavid use of poetry which boosted their self-projection and may be considered the major tradition which they passed on to later emulators. Nevertheless, there is still much to explore in the development of the Ghaznavid court in terms of the themes of materiality and power.

Second, there remains a need to probe the connections between medieval Indian and Central Asian history in greater detail. The most important question is the disappearance of Buddhism in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that there was some deterioration of Buddhism everywhere in western India, although there appears to have been an expansion of Shaivism in Afghanistan. The later Shahis were Shaivite

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600 I am currently preparing an article on “The Samanid court system”.
601 The stimulating study of B. Flood, Objects of Translation, concentrates mainly on material evidence over textual evidence and focuses especially on the later Ghurids.
602 I am currently gathering material for a book length study on Ghaznavid cultural production and its reception.
themselves and other polities of southern Afghanistan disappeared more gradually than it is often supposed prior to the Ghaznavid entrenchment. The history of Sind may be helpful in this regard but the conditions of Buddhism’s disappearance in the lower Indus are rather different than in central Afghanistan. It does not seem justified to imagine either that Buddhism lost ground on the basis of force alone nor that the religion disappeared at the very moment that its major patrons vanished.

Governmental and commercial conditions did not disfavor Buddhism strongly on the primary routes of communication with northern China. The Qarakhanids were not Muslim, although they dealt with Muslims and others as often as comparable Indian states. The silver standard in western India remained rather high during the 11th c., which suggests that trade with Central Asia still brought this precious metal into India. A reassessment of the very late art and architectural evidence from Afghanistan could prove valuable to addressing the question of Buddhism, particularly in terms of dating. Some Ghaznavid troops were Shaivite, perhaps even at the highest levels, and it is not impossible that some were Buddhist as well, since the sources in Persian and Arabic do not typically distinguish between Hinduism and Buddhism, with the exception of al-Biruni. An examination of evidence from eastern Turkistan may also reveal additional clues about the erosion of Buddhist commercial and religious presence, which endured in some form through the Il-Khanid period, as evidenced by debates with al-Samani.

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603 See D.N. Maclean, Religion and society in Arab Sind (Leiden: Brill, 1989), for a study of Buddhism in Sind.
604 Deyell, Living without Silver, 15.
Third, the production system in Central Asia, Iran, and India needs to be examined in greater detail. There are certain established facts which nevertheless need to come together into a fuller interpretation. There are the immediate differences which come to mind, for example, the predominant use of canals in Central Asia, the use of qanats in Iran, and the use of rain-fed farming techniques in India. It is clear that there was an expansion of cotton production and a drying period in Central Asia, but it is difficult to be certain of the effects of these changes on the Ghaznavids. Iqtā′ was not widespread in Iran during the Ghaznavid period and the Ghaznavid use of iqtā′ in their core territories appears to have been fairly limited. It seems likely that the Ghaznavids simply collected taxes on the Indus lands under their control, without changing the land regime in any significant way, in the same relatively conservative manner as the Samanids. But studies of the production system in the medieval Indus are not as developed as those of the medieval Ganga-Yamuna, particularly prior to the Ghurids. This makes it difficult to ascertain the role played by production in Ghaznavid history; however, it must be said that the results of this study show that Ghaznavid origins lie predominantly in the crises and constraints of the monetary sphere.

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607 Persian water wheels in the Indus date from the 10th c. See Jain, Western India.
608 The findings of Bulliet, Cotton, climate, and camels coupled with S.-C. Raschmann, Baumwolle im türkischen Zentralasien (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995) may bring a new synthesis on this question.
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60 Gold coin minted at Bayana in the name of Sultan Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam, with a stylized image of Lakshmi on the obverse (private collection).

64 Bull-and-horseman billon coin bearing the name of Sultan Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam in Sanskrit (courtesy of the American Numismatic Society, ANS 1920.153.22).

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Ismā'īl, governor in Ghazni and India, Sha' bān 387 / August 997.

Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd, governor and then independent sultan in Ghazni and India, Rabī' I 388 / March 998.

Abū Aḥmad Muḥammad (first reign), sultan in Ghazni and India, end of Rabī' II 421 / beginning of May 1030.

Abū Saʿīd Maṣʾūd I, sultan in Ghazni and India, Sha' bān 421 / August 1030.

Abū Aḥmad Muḥammad (second reign), sultan in India, 13 Rabī' II 432 / 20-21 December 1040.

Abū I-Fatḥ Maudūd, sultan in Ghazni and India, 23 Sha' bān 432 / 28 April 1041.

Masʿūd II, sultan in Ghazni and India, third quarter of 440 / winter 1048-9?

Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī, sultan in Ghazni and India, third quarter of 440 / winter 1048-9?

Abū Maṣūr 'Abd ar-Rashīd, sultan in Ghazni and India, end of 440 / spring 1049?

[Usurpation in Ghazni of Toghrīl, end of Sha' bān 443 / beginning of January 1052?]

Abū Shujā' Farrukh-Zād, sultan in Ghazni and India, 9 Dhū l-Qa'da 443 / 13 March 1052.

Abū I-Muẓaffar Ibrāhīm, sultan in Ghazni and India, 19 Ṣafar 451 / 6 April 1059.

Abū Saʾd Maṣʾūd III, sultan in Ghazni and India, Shawwāl 492 / August 1099 or shortly afterwards.

Shīr-Zād, sultan in Ghazni and India,
Shawwāl 508 / March 1115.

**Abū I-Mulūk Malik Arslan**, sultan in Ghazni and India,

6 Shawwāl 509 / 22 February 1116.

**Abū I-Muẓaffar Bahrām Shāh**, sultan in Ghazni and India

acknowledging Seljuq suzerainty,

everal summer 511 / summer 1117

**Khusrau Shāh**, sultan in Ghazni and India and then in India only,

early 522 / spring 1157?

**Abū I-Muẓaffar Khusrau Malik**, sultan in India,

Rajab 555 / July 1160.

[Ghūrid conquest 582/1186]
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**VIII. Selected Bibliography**

**Note:** Every reference indicated below has been checked and read. In the course of writing of this study, some sections have been removed and reserved for future publication. However, the references are retained, as they contributed to the ideas expressed in the dissertation, even if not all of them have been explicitly cited in the footnotes.


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