

# THE GHURIDS\*

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## The region of Ghur and the beginnings of Islamization

The mountainous region situated to the east and south-east of Herat and the south of Gharchistan and Guzgan was known as Ghur. It comprised the basins of the upper Hari Rud, the Farah Rud, the Rud-i Ghur and the Khash Rud together with the intervening mountain chains.<sup>1</sup> Geographic configurations had a profound influence on historical and cultural developments in Ghur. Geography led to the fragmentation of political power as the entire region could not be controlled from one centre. Each fortress exercised independent sway over the area immediately under its control and patriarchal traditions struck deep roots. It was as late as the time of Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad (d. 1146–7) that a portion of Ghur – the petty principality of Warshada on the Hari Rud – developed a capital at Firuzkuh.<sup>2</sup> Ghur had no compact or continuous areas of habitation, but only scattered

\* See Map 5.

<sup>1</sup> Kohzād, 1951–4.

<sup>2</sup> Vercellin, 1976, pp. 337–40.

population pockets. The landscape was studded with fortified places and towers where people could defend themselves.<sup>3</sup> Cultural movements in the neighbouring areas had only a peripheral impact on the region. The waves of Muslim conquest touched the fringes of Ghur several times during the Umayyad period but the region did not come under Islamic cultural influence. As late as the tenth century, the people of the region were said to be 'bad-tempered, unruly and ignorant'.<sup>4</sup>

The Iranian dialect of the people inhabiting Ghur differed from the dialect of Khurasan. During his campaign into Ghur in 1020, Prince Mas'ūd of Ghazna had to employ local interpreters to communicate with the people. Since they pronounced the name of the Prophet Muhammad as 'Hamad', they became known as Hamadīs after their conversion to Islam. The ethnic background of the Ghurid people is shrouded in myth and legend. After the Saffarid invasions of Zamin-Dawar and Bust, the region became exposed to tribes and peoples of different ethnic backgrounds. Contact with Ghazna led to the infiltration of Turkish tribes from the surrounding areas. Later on, Ghuzz and Khalaj ethnic elements settled on the fringes of the region, gradually breaking its cultural isolation and diversifying its ethnic composition.

The extension of Islam and its cultural institutions, and the conversion of Ghur, took a long time. As late as the end of the tenth century, the population of Ghur was for the most part heathen. According to the geographer al-Istakhrī, it was the biggest pagan enclave within the borders of Islam.<sup>5</sup> It was probably as the result of missionary activity from Khurasan that the movement of the Karrāmiyya,<sup>6</sup> a pietistic and ascetic form of Sunni Islam especially strongly represented in Nishapur, was established in Ghur in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries. It was followed by the Shansabānī Maliks, including in the later twelfth century the brothers Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muhammad and Mu'izz al-Dīn Muhammad, until they later switched to the mainstream Shāfi'ī and Hanafi law schools of Sunni Islam. The nature of the imperfect conversion is best illustrated by the fact that sometimes the names were Muslim but the people led the life of pagans. The anonymous author of the *Hudūd al-ʿālam* [The Limits of the World] (c. 982) says, 'In the days of old this province of Ghur was pagan (*kāfir*); now actually most of the people are Muslims.'<sup>7</sup> As the years passed, however, three centres came into prominence in the valley of Hari Rud: Firuzkuh (the capital of Shansabānī power), Jam and Chisht.

<sup>3</sup> Bosworth, 1961, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Anon., 1937, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> Bosworth, 1961, pp. 120–1.

<sup>6</sup> For the Karrāmiyya, see Barthold, 1968, pp. 289–90; Bosworth, 1960; *El<sup>2</sup>*, 'Karrāmiyya'.

<sup>7</sup> Anon., 1937, p. 110.

The mountains of Ghur had a large number of iron-ore workings and those of other metals. According to Togan, the entire mountain region from Ghur and Kabul to the land of the Karluk was metal-working.<sup>8</sup> It exported armour, weapons and war equipment to neighbouring areas. The chief fortress of Ghur was known as Pul-i Āhangarān (Bridge of the Blacksmiths). The Ghaznavids and the Seljuqs exacted tribute from Ghur in the form of arms, cuirasses and the ferocious watchdogs bred locally. Sultan Mas'ūd of Ghazna employed Ghurid officers as specialists in siege warfare. While it was still pagan, Ghur supplied slaves to the markets of Herat and Sistan.<sup>9</sup> It was widely known for horse-breeding. The region of Ghur thus possessed two of the most important requisites of war in the Middle Ages – horses and iron – and the Ghurids took full advantage of them.

According to Ghurid legendary tradition, Zahāk was the first ancestor of the Shansabāni dynasty. Farīdun and Shansab, the eponymous founder of the dynasty, were said to be descendants of Zahāk. While no systematic account of the early history of Ghur is available, it appears that the penetration of Islam was a slow process. The Arab historian al-Tabarī refers to a campaign in 667 by al-Hakam b. 'Āmir, the governor of Khurasan, and Ibn al-Athīr records details of an expedition undertaken against Ghur in 725. The purpose of these occasional incursions seems to have been to obtain slaves and booty, and no permanent implantation of Islam resulted.

The legendary tradition, as expressed by the early thirteenth-century historian of the Ghurid dynasty Jūzjānī in his *Tabaqāt-i Nāsiri*, our prime source for the entire history of the dynasty, holds that a Shansabāni prince, Amir Banjī, subsequently came to prominence. He was the ancestor of all the Shansabāni amirs who occupied the Ghurid lands, and secured legal sanction for his authority from the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, who conferred upon him a covenant and a standard and gave him the title of *qasīm amīr al-mu'minīn* (Partner of the Commander of the Faithful). Jūzjānī is silent about the successors of Banjī until the advent of Amir Sūrī, who in the later ninth century came into conflict with the Saffarids. Ya'qūb b. Layth, the Saffarid ruler of Sistan, conquered Zamin-Dawar, Bust and Rukhkhaj, but Ghur was saved by the inaccessibility of its mountains.

In c. 979 the Samanid overlord of northern and eastern Afghanistan, Nūh b. Mansūr, dispatched a force to conquer Ghur, but except for a few forts, no significant conquests could be made. When Sebüktegin was governor of Ghazna and Zabulistan on behalf of the Samanids (977–97) (see above, Chapter 4), he made several attacks on Ghur. After some initial set-backs, he established his authority in eastern Ghur and was recognized as suzerain by Muhammad b. Sūrī of Mandish. After the death of Sebüktegin, Muhammad

<sup>8</sup> Togan, 1936, pp. 33–4.

<sup>9</sup> Bosworth, 1961, p. 118.

withheld the payment of tribute, plundered caravans and blackmailed the subjects of Sultan Mahmūd in the neighbouring provinces.

In 1011 Sultan Mahmūd sent Altuntash and Arslan Hājib, governors of Herat and Tus respectively, on an expedition into Ghur. The Ghaznavid forces marched on Ahangaran. Muhammad b. Sūrī entrenched himself in inaccessible hills and ravines, but the Ghaznavid army routed the Ghurids, and Muhammad b. Sūrī and his son Shīth were taken prisoner. Another of Muhammad b. Sūrī's sons, Abū °Alī by name, had remained on good terms with Sultan Mahmūd when his own father was at loggerheads with him, so that Mahmūd rewarded Abū °Alī by placing Mandish under him. Mahmūd thus brought eastern Ghur under his control. Then in 1020, he sent his son Mas°ūd, at that time governor of Herat, to subdue Nab, the north-western part of Ghur; according to the Ghaznavid historian Bayhaqī, Mas°ūd was the first to penetrate to the interior of this part of Ghur.

Amir Abū °Alī was, however, overthrown at some date in the 1030s by his nephew °Abbās who established himself in Ghur. Some notables of Ghur approached Ibrāhīm b. Mas°ūd of Ghazna, who marched on Ghur with a large army. As soon as his army appeared, the forces of Ghur went over to him and °Abbās was handed over to Ibrāhīm. He was removed and the government of Ghur was placed in the hands of his son, Muhammad, who now regularly paid the tribute to his Ghaznavid overlords. During the time of Muhammad's son, Malik Qutb al-Dīn Hasan, tribal conflicts created chaos in Ghur; it was Hasan's son and successor Malik °Izz al-Dīn Husayn (1100–46) who restored peace and order in the region. While Sanjar was Seljuq ruler of the eastern Iranian lands, he fought against the ruler of Ghur and took °Izz al-Dīn Husayn prisoner. Later, however, the sultan sent him back to his native land; and thereafter, °Izz al-Dīn Husayn regularly sent tribute – which included war equipment, armour and the finely bred guard dogs of Ghur – to Sanjar in his capital at Merv.

## The rise of the Ghurids as an independent power

The period of Shansabānī expansion began with the seven sons<sup>10</sup> of °Izz al-Dīn Husayn. They divided their patrimony among themselves and consolidated their authority in and around Ghur, so that the history of Ghur as an imperial power begins with them in the mid-twelfth century. Fakhr al-Dīn Mas°ūd founded the dynasty of the rulers of Bamiyan and Tukharistan; Bahā' al-Dīn Sām became the amir of Ghur and Firuzkuh; Sayf al-Dīn Sūrī established himself at Ghazna; Sultan °Alā' al-Dīn Husayn became the sovereign over Ghur, Ghazna and Bamiyan; Shihāb al-Dīn Muhammad Kharnak established himself at

<sup>10</sup> Habib and Nizami (eds.), 1970, pp. 153–5.

Ma<sup>c</sup>din; and Shuja<sup>c</sup> al-Dīn <sup>c</sup>Alī became the amir of Jarmas. The seventh son Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad's adoption of the title of *malik al-jibāl* (Lord of the Mountains) was the first expression of his ambitions. He founded Firuzkuh and built a fortress there, while Sayf al-Dīn Sūrī made Istiya his capital.

Relations between the brothers became strained, however. Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad went over to Bahrām Shah of Ghazna (1117–57), but he was poisoned there,<sup>11</sup> leading to a war of revenge between the Ghurids and the Ghaznavids and the savage sacking of Ghazna (see below). When Qutb al-Dīn had left for Ghazna, Bahā' al-Dīn Sām came to Firuzkuh from his territory of Sanga and gave orders for the construction of strong fortresses in Ghur, the Garmsir, Gharchistan and the mountain tracts of Herat. He further married a daughter of Malik Badr al-Dīn of Kidan, also of the Shansabānī family; she was the mother of the later sultans Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muhammad and Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn Muhammad.

Bahā' al-Dīn Sām had, when he set out for Ghazna, entrusted Ghur to his brother <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn Husayn. The latter, on hearing of his brother Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad's death in 1146–7, set out towards Ghazna to accomplish what his brother had not been able to achieve. Bahrām Shah alerted the troops of Ghazna and Hindustan. The two armies met and the Ghurids employed their defence tactics of the *karwāb* (a screen made of raw bullock hides with both sides stuffed with cotton and used as a protective wall). The stratagem worked: Bahrām Shah's son Dawlat Shah was killed, and the army of Ghazna was routed. <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn took Ghazna by storm, setting fire to it for seven nights and days, and at Bust he destroyed the palaces and buildings of the Mahmudi (i.e. Ghaznavid) dynasty. He thus came to be known as Jahān-Sūz (Incendiary of the World). Mahmud's Ghazna, the 'bride of cities', and many of its fine buildings and libraries, disappeared in a bloodbath.

## The apogee of the Ghurid sultanate

Malik Bahā' al-Dīn Sām's sons, Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn, now come into prominence. Ghiyāth al-Dīn adopted a policy of fraternal co-operation and eventually gave the title of sultan to his brother Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn and to his nephew Malik Shams al-Dīn Muhammad of Bamiyan, son of Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Mas<sup>c</sup>ūd. He also established contact with the <sup>c</sup>Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, whose moral support added to his prestige. <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn Husayn had imprisoned the two brothers, but his son Sultan Sayf al-Dīn had set them free. Ghiyāth al-Dīn rendered great service to Sayf al-Dīn in dealing with the Oghuz (or

<sup>11</sup> According to one historian, Qutb al-Dīn had once supported the previous ruler in Ghazna, Arslan Shah, against his brother Bahrām Shah. See Khan, 1949, pp. 44–5.

Ghuzz), and when Sayf al-Dīn died, the amirs and Maliks of Ghur and Gharchistan gave their allegiance to him.

On Ghiyāth al-Dīn's accession to the throne in Firuzkuh in 1163, Mu'izz al-Dīn was entrusted with the territories of Istiyan and Kajuran. The two brothers lost no time in devising a stratagem to kill their rival, Abu 'l-Abbās, who was supported by the refractory elements of Ghur. His death strengthened Ghiyāth al-Dīn's position, but then his uncle Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Mas'ūd coveted the throne of Firuzkuh. However, he was unable to achieve military dominance over the two brothers, who eventually allowed him to return to his principality of Bamiyan. Ghur was now firmly in the hands of Ghiyāth al-Dīn, who then extended his power southwards into Zamin-Dawar. After the death of Tāj al-Dīn Yildiz, a military slave of the Seljuq Sultan Sanjar, the leaders and notables of Herat invited Ghiyāth al-Dīn, and the latter established himself there also. Later, he married a daughter of Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Husayn in order to consolidate his family position. When Mu'izz al-Dīn returned from campaigns in Sistan, Ghiyāth al-Dīn made over Teginabad (i.e. the region of Kandahar) to him. Ghiyāth al-Dīn then dispatched exploratory raiding parties to Kabul, Zabul and Ghazna, which the Oghuz had wrested from the last Ghaznavid ruler Khusraw Malik (1160–86), by driving him to Lahore; Ghazna was recovered in 1173. Ghiyāth al-Dīn placed Mu'izz al-Dīn on the throne of Ghazna and himself returned to Firuzkuh.

Two years later, in 1175, the armies of Ghur and Ghazna advanced to Herat and occupied it, also conquering Pushang. These successes so enhanced Ghiyāth al-Dīn's prestige that the Nasrid Malik of Nimruz (i.e. Sistan) became his vassal. The Oghuz Maliks of Kirman also submitted to him. Ghurid control was now extended over much of Khurasan and the sultan's name was pronounced from the pulpits and inscribed on the coinage there.

Ghiyāth al-Dīn was at the height of his prestige when he became involved with the Khwarazmian claimant Sultān Shāh, who had reached his court after having been driven out of his lands by his brother, the Khwarazm Shah Tekish. The conflict between the Ghurids and members of the Khwarazm Shah's family went on for several months, during which Mu'izz al-Dīn defeated Sultān Shāh. On Tekish's death in 1200, Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Mu'izz al-Dīn occupied Nishapur and assigned it to Malik Diyā' al-Dīn, son of Abū 'Alī and son-in-law of Ghiyāth al-Dīn. In 1200 Merv was taken and Malik Nasīr al-Dīn Muhammad Kharnak installed there; Sarakhs was assigned to Tāj al-Dīn Zangi, the son of Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Mas'ūd.

Ghiyāth al-Dīn died in 1202 aged 63 and was buried in Herat, but he was survived for four more years by his brother Mu'izz al-Dīn. The latter had won two historic battles in 1192, one on the banks of the River Murghab, which led to the rout of the Khwarazm

Shah, and the second at Tara'in in Panjab, which opened the gates of northern India for the Ghurid armies. The Ghurid conquests now extended as far as the frontiers of Kashmir.

The Ghurid incursions into India had begun in 1175 when Mu'izz al-Dīn marched towards Multan and overthrew the nascent Carmathians there. He then occupied Uchh and in 1178 led an army into Gujarat against the Hindu ruler of Nahrwala (the Anhilvāda of Indian geography), who had a formidable army. He defeated the Ghurid forces at Kayadra near Mount Abu and made their retreat extremely difficult. Thereafter Mu'izz al-Dīn changed his plans and decided upon a thrust through Panjab, which had been in the hands of the last Ghaznavid sultan, Khusraw Malik. In 1176 Peshawar was taken. In 1182 Mu'izz al-Dīn marched against Daybul in Sind and conquered the whole area up to the sea coast; the Sumera ruler there acknowledged his suzerainty. The conquest of Lahore was completed in 1186 after three successive expeditions and Khusraw Malik was induced, under the protection of a treaty, to surrender. He was treacherously put to death by the Ghurids, along with his son Bahrām Shah, thereby ending some two centuries of Ghaznavid power. All the strategic areas which provided the Ghurids with a springboard into India were now in the hands of Mu'izz al-Dīn.

A confrontation with the Chāhamanas, who ruled the territory extending from Ajmer to Delhi, now followed. In 1191 Mu'izz al-Dīn besieged and captured Bhatinda. The Chāhamana ruler Prithvi Rāja appeared there to recover the fortress, however, and in a battle fought at Tara'in in 1191, Mu'izz al-Dīn was utterly defeated and seriously wounded. A Khalaj soldier rescued him from the battlefield and helped him to reach Ghazna, while Prithvi Rāja invested the fortress of Bhatinda and recaptured it after 13-months' siege.<sup>12</sup> Mu'izz al-Dīn refused to take this defeat as final. After making preparations extending over a whole year, he returned with a force of 120,000 cavalry. This time he defeated his Chāhamana adversary. Govinda Rāja was killed and Prithvi Rāja captured, so that the Chāhamana kingdom now lay at the Ghurid ruler's feet. Important military points, like Hansi, Kuhram and Sarsuti, were occupied and garrisoned, and the whole of the Siwalik territory was brought under control. From Peshawar to Hansi, the entire region was now under the control of Mu'izz al-Dīn.

In 1196 Bhīma Deva, the ruler of Nahrwala, endeavoured to retrieve Ajmer from Ghurid control. The Ghurid commander Qutb al-Dīn Aybak was besieged in Ajmer for several months, but Mu'izz al-Dīn dispatched a relieving force. Bhīma Deva retreated to Gujarat, but Aybak pursued him towards Nahrwala and routed his forces. Bhīma Deva managed to escape, but thousands of his soldiers were put to the sword or taken prisoner. The victory

<sup>12</sup> For the Indian campaigns of the Ghurids, see Habib and Nizami (eds.), 1970, pp. 132–90; Nizami, 1961, pp. 75–88.

at Tara'in was a major triumph for the Ghurids in India. Their general Aybak occupied Meerut, Baran and Delhi in 1192. Soon afterwards Mu'izz al-Dīn again came to India and conquered Thankar and Vijayamandirgarh. The ruler of Gwalior accepted his suzerainty. In 1197 Aybak conquered Badaon and in 1199–1200 Malwa. Two other Ghurid generals, the Turkish slave commander Bahā' al-Dīn Toghrīl and Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī, played a significant role in the extension of Ghurid authority in India. Toghrīl consolidated the possessions of Gwalior and Bayana, while Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī supplanted the Gahadavala chiefs and carried the Ghurid banners into Bihar and Bengal. Emboldened by his victories, he pushed ahead towards the Himalayas and Tibet, but this proved a disaster in his otherwise successful career.

Mu'izz al-Dīn was assassinated in India in 1206 and his Turkish slave generals – Qutb al-Dīn Aybak, Tāj al-Dīn Yildiz and Nāsir al-Dīn Qubācha – now rose to prominence. They speedily quarrelled among themselves, however, so that Ghazna became detached from the Ghurid possessions. According to the official Ghurid historian Fakhr-i Mudabbir, Aybak was formally invested with viceregal powers in 1206 and was appointed *walī al-<sup>c</sup>ahd* (heir apparent) by his master, Mu'izz al-Dīn. For some three years he had to content himself with the positions of Malik and *sipāhsālār* (commander-in-chief),<sup>13</sup> at first clinging loyally to his background of service to the Shansabānīs, but he then was able to establish his own authority in India when it became apparent that the unity of the Ghurid empire had been irretrievably shattered by the Khwarazm Shahs.

## The Bamiyan amirate

The Shansabānīs established their control over Tukharistan and the mountain tracts of Bamiyan soon after their successes in Ghazna. As noted above, this region was known for its treasures and its mines of gold, silver and precious stones. 'Alā' al-Dīn Jahān-Sūz installed his eldest brother, Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Mas'ūd, there in 1145. Subsequently, the latter's son Shams al-Dīn Muhammad established his authority in Balkh, Chaghaniyan, Wakhsh, Jarum, Badakhshan and the hill tracts of Shughnan, acquiring from Ghiyāth al-Dīn the title of sultan for himself also. His son Bahā' al-Dīn Sām, who succeeded him in 1192, was highly respected by scholars and literati alike; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the famed Muslim philosopher, Qur'anic commentator and theologian, was associated with his court for many years. Bahā' al-Dīn Sām became the focus of Shansabānī hopes, and the Maliks and amirs of Ghur, Ghazna and Bamiyan, who now looked upon him as their head, invited him to Ghazna; but he fell ill and died, almost simultaneously with the assassination of

<sup>13</sup> *Epigraphica Indo-Moslemica*, 1911–12, p. 2.



Sultan Mu‘izz al-Dīn in 1206. Thereafter, Shansabānī fortunes in their own homelands began to wane.

The Ghurid army commanders invited ‘Alā’ al-Dīn and Jalāl al-Dīn, the sons of Bahā’ al-Dīn Sām, to Ghazna in order to occupy the throne. Jalāl al-Dīn placed his brother on the throne and himself returned to Bamiyan. The fabulous treasures of Ghazna were divided between the two brothers, but during the following years, they quarrelled over the possession of Bamiyan. Finally, Sultan ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muhammad Khwarazm Shah marched against Jalāl al-Dīn and had him put to death in 1215, thus extinguishing the Ghurid dynasty in its homelands of Afghanistan.

## The Ghurid sultanate as a world power

At the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, the Ghurid state extended from Herat in Afghanistan to Lakhnawti in Bengal and touched the borders of Tibet and Kashmir. Barthold rightly observes that, ‘the brothers Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Shihāb al-Dīn ... raised their kingdom to the rank of a world power’.<sup>14</sup> They had to deal, with varying degrees of success, with a number of powers – the Ghaznavids, the Seljuqs, the Oghuz, the Kara Khitay, the Khwarazm Shahs, the Hindu Chalukyas and Chāhamanas, and the Khokars, among others – taking full advantage of the decline of the Seljuqs and the Ghaznavids. Following the death of Seljuq Sanjar in 1157, they struggled hard, but ultimately unsuccessfully, for the control of Khurasan.<sup>15</sup> When Ghurid power in its own homelands declined, their Indian acquisitions flourished and paved the way for the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate. This was to be the most powerful state in northern India until 1526, when Bābur replaced it by the Mughal empire (see below, Chapter 14). Thus Ghurid Delhi became the repository of the Muslim culture of Central Asia.

The decline of the Seljuqs and the Ghaznavids, noted above, created a political vacuum that the Khwarazm Shahs and the Ghurids struggled to fill. Ghurid ambitions in Khurasan were blocked by the Khwarazmians, who also coveted the province and who, in the long run, could bring greater military resources to bear in the struggle. Ghiyāth al-Dīn sought the Khwarazm Shah, Tekish’s help against the latter’s rival Sultān Shāh, but the Ghurids had to deal single-handed with Sultān Shāh. In 1190–1, however, Sultān Shāh and his Turkish ally Toghrīl of Herat were defeated and Herat was annexed to Ghur. Sultān Shāh died the following year and his possessions in northern Khurasan were annexed by Tekish, so the latter for a while controlled the whole of Khurasan. His advance into western Iran

<sup>14</sup> Barthold, 1968, p. 338.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

worried the ʿAbbasid caliph, who sent emissaries to the Ghurid sultan urging immediate war against the Khwarazm Shahs. The opportunity came in 1200 when Tekish died, his enterprise in western Iran was aborted and his son ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muhammad succeeded to power in Khwarazm. In 1201 Ghurid troops entered Khurasan and captured Nishapur, Merv, Sarakhs and Tus, reaching as far as Gurgan and Bistam. Kuhistan, a stronghold of the Ismaʿīlis, was plundered and all Khurasan was brought temporarily under Ghurid control.

This success proved to be short-lived: ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muhammad recovered Nishapur and other Ghurid acquisitions, and Herat came under his control in 1201. He was, however, anxious for peace with the Ghurids so that he could combat the threat from the steppes of the Kara Khitay (see below, Chapter 11). The Ghurids, for their part, were anxious to recover Khurasan. They occupied Herat and other towns, but ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muhammad took advantage of Muʿizz al-Dīn's brief absence from Herat due to the death of his brother Ghiyāth al-Dīn in 1202, defeated the Ghurid army besieging Merv and relieved the city. In retaliation Muʿizz al-Dīn invaded Khwarazm and besieged the capital of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muhammad, but had to retreat. The Kara Khitay pursued him and inflicted a crushing defeat on the banks of the Oxus near Andkhud (modern Andkhoy) in 1204. Muʿizz al-Dīn managed to reach his capital Firuzkuh safely, but Andkhud was a disaster for the Ghurids, who now retained only Herat and Balkh of their conquests. Muʿizz al-Dīn did not lose heart, and was planning a full-scale invasion of Transoxania when developments in Panjab attracted his attention. He ordered his kinsman, the ruler of Bamiyan, to prepare for the campaign and to arrange the construction of a bridge over the Oxus, but he could not undertake this campaign as he was assassinated in 1206 at Damyak, while on his way back to Ghazna.

The death of Muʿizz al-Dīn heralded the end, a few years later, of his Ghurid empire which had spanned the Hindu Kush. Not long afterwards, his nephew and successor at Ghur, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mahmūd, had to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Khwarazm Shah. When Mahmūd died, the Shansabānī lands were absorbed into the Khwarazmian empire, and the dissolution of Ghurid power was complete when Muʿizz al-Dīn's governor, Yildiz, was driven out of Ghazna.

## The political and social organization of the Ghurid state

The Ghurid political authority, initially organized on a patriarchal basis in an inaccessible mountain region, slowly acquired some of the features of a state and briefly became one of the greatest empires of the Islamic Middle Ages, stretching from Herat in Afghanistan to

western Bengal in India. Its diversity at the height of its power is an interesting sociological phenomenon. The Firuzkuh area was essentially patriarchal, with strong tribal traditions; the Ghazna region had for two centuries nurtured the traditions of the Turco-Iranian monarchy; and Hindustan was under a decentralized feudal system of government. The rise of the Kara Khitay in Transoxania and the Oghuz of Khurasan added a new dimension to the situation.<sup>16</sup> Thus the Ghurid empire, from Ghur to Lakhnawti, comprised a multiplicity of cultural traditions. The Ghurids, with their political skill, used this cultural situation to their advantage so that when the Mongols devastated Central and Western Asia, the Ghurids' Indian acquisitions became the repositories of their cultural heritage. Thus it was in early thirteenth-century Lahore that the *littérateurs* Muhammad <sup>ʿ</sup>Awfī and Fakhr-i Mudabbir worked.

Like other Sunni powers of the eastern Islamic world, the Ghurids, beginning with Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn, thought it expedient to establish contact with the <sup>ʿ</sup>Abbasid court and receive further confirmation of their authority. Al-Mustadīʿ (1170–80) and al-Nāsir (1180–1225) both granted robes of honour to Ghiyāth al-Dīn and the imperial *nawbat* (military band salute) was introduced five times a day; all these acts of recognition enhanced the sultan's prestige.

The idea of a capital could arise only when some sort of integration had been effected among the tribal pockets of power and when the network of castles and towers had acquired a level of administrative cohesion. The fact that Firuzkuh only emerged as a Ghurid capital in the time of Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad shows the protracted nature of efforts necessary for this. The title of sultan was assumed by Amir Sūrī after his accession to the throne of Ghazna, where the institution of monarchy had earlier taken a new shape under the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmūd. The usual titles in Ghur had been the modest ones of amir and Malik. The extension of authority beyond Ghur necessitated the creation of a winter capital, and one in the warm region of Zamin-Dawar was adopted for this purpose.

Tribal traditions, ethnic considerations and the exigencies of the situation all influenced Shansabānī principles of succession. Malik Fakhr al-Dīn Mas<sup>ʿ</sup>ūd, though the eldest of the seven brothers, was not allowed to occupy the throne of Ghur because his mother was of Turkish origin. The two brothers Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>izz al-Dīn simultaneously enjoyed the title of sultan, and Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>izz al-Dīn accepted the seniority of his brother, who was known as *al-sultān al-a<sup>ʿ</sup>zam* (Supreme Sultan). After Ghiyāth al-Dīn's death, Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>izz al-Dīn came to be called *al-sultān al-a<sup>ʿ</sup>zam*. The Shansabānī amirs shared political power and often worked in collaboration, under the over-lordship of a leading member of the family. That the vassal–master relationship was frequently under strain reveals, however, the

<sup>16</sup> Habib and Nizami (eds.), 1970, pp. 185–7.

fragile nature of the system. The vassals were expected to pay regular tribute and inscribe the name of the suzerain on the coins; otherwise, they exercised all authority in their territories. At a time when political loyalties were frequently opportunistic, the system of vassalage ensured some sort of political collaboration, if not loyalty. The administrative arrangements visualized by Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn for his Indian acquisitions seem to have comprised three or four local commanders who were independent of each other, but subject to himself. Later, the institution of the *iqṭāʿ* (revenue assignment) developed in India and helped the integration of feudal units into a central organization.<sup>17</sup>

The Turkish military slave Qutb al-Dīn Aybak showed respect for legal forms and tradition when he waited for a letter of manumission from Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mahmūd, on whom the legacy of Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn had devolved. Both Aybak and another commander after him, Iltutmish, firmly demonstrated that they were not prepared to share political authority with anybody and stood for a centralized power in northern India. They recast Ghurid political traditions in the light of the Indian situation, and when the <sup>c</sup>Abbasid caliph granted a *manshūr* (patent of authority) to Iltutmish, the Ghurid possessions in India achieved recognition as an independent political entity.

Militarily, the Ghurids had certain advantages. First, as noted above, they had iron and horses in abundance. The Ghaznavids appreciated their production of arms and the Indians hailed them as *aśvapatis* (Lords of the Horse).<sup>18</sup> Second, the Ghurid sultans could dispose of a nucleus of bellicose Ghuri and Khalji tribesmen from the core of their empire, Afghanistan. Their numbers were limited, however; hence they had to be supplemented by purchasing Turkish military slaves, presumably stemming ultimately from the Inner Asian steppes. With all these forces, the sultans were able to make headway in northern India against the strenuous resistance of Rajput and other military elements in the armies of the Indian princes. However, the sultans chose to fight on two fronts, one in northern India and the other in Khurasan and Central Asia. In the long run, they were not able to sustain prolonged warfare in both spheres of action; and in the second sphere, they were at a numerical disadvantage compared with their enemies the Khwarazm Shahs, who could call upon vast reserves of Turkish manpower from the steppes around Khwarazm and beyond. Hence the Ghurids failed to make permanent conquests in Khurasan and eventually lost even their heartland of Ghur to the Khwarazm Shahs; but their commanders, as epigoni of the Ghurid sultans, successfully laid the foundations of the first large-scale, dynamic implantation of Islamic political and military control in the Indus–Ganges plains

<sup>17</sup> See Nizami, 1961, pp. 128–31.

<sup>18</sup> Nizami, 1961, p. 82.

of northern India, an achievement of lasting significance for the history of the subcontinent (see below, Chapter 14).

The institution of the slave household assumed importance under Mu<sup>ʿ</sup>izz al-Dīn, who treated his slaves as his sons, and in course of time they became the linchpin of post-Ghurid organization in India.<sup>19</sup> Government machinery in the earlier period was confined to the management of essential government functions, but when Ghazna came under Ghurid control, it was natural that the administrative institutions as developed by the Ghaznavids should be adopted. A certain number of features of the Seljuq administrative system were also taken over. Thus in India the Ghurid, Ghaznavid and indigenous Indian traditions coexisted.

The vizier was the head of the civil administration. He had no judicial functions but had a supervisory jurisdiction over the army. The *qādī al-quḍāt* (supreme judge) was the head of the judiciary, with numerous subordinate *qādīs*, including a *qādī* for the army. In India the office of *sadr-i jahān* (or *sadr al-sudūr*) looked after religious affairs. The most important officer of the household was the *amīr-i hājib*, the master of ceremonies at court who conducted notables and officials to the royal presence. During the time of Sultan Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd of Delhi, the office of *wakīl-i dār* is also mentioned. The *amīr-i shikār* was the chief huntsman. The *sar-i jāndār* commanded the king's bodyguards. The *sipāhsālār* was the supreme commander of the forces, and in India the actual organization of the army and its commissariat was the responsibility of the *ʿārid-i mamālik*. As noted above, the Ghurid armies were multi-ethnic, so that the army of Qutb al-Dīn Aybak in India comprised Turks, Tajiks of various kinds and also locally recruited Indian soldiers.

## Cultural developments

Ghur lacked any urban life until a comparatively late date. It was contact with Ghazna, the hub of the intellectual world on the eastern fringes of Islam, which initiated the Ghurids into the cultural life of Iran and Central Asia. Amir Abū ʿAlī ordered the construction of many public buildings, including mosques and *madrasas*. Malik ʿAbbās built numerous fortress-like villages in Ghur. Qutb al-Dīn Muhammad founded the fortress and city of Firuzkuh. Bahā' al-Dīn Sām erected strong fortresses in Ghur, the Garmsir, Gharchistan and Herat, keeping strategic needs in view. A castle constructed at Wadawajzd by Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn was so impregnable that it survived the onslaught of the Mongols. The remains of a Ghurid *madrasa*, constructed in 1165–76, have recently been unearthed by archaeologists in Gharchistan. It exhibits numerous parallels to many structures of the

<sup>19</sup> Habib and Nizami (eds.), 1970, pp. 194–7.

twelfth century in western Khurasan, Central Asia, Ghazna and Sistan'.<sup>20</sup> The discovery by André Maricq in 1957 at Jam in Ghur of what are possibly the minaret and citadel of Firuzkuh has also thrown valuable light on Ghurid architectural traditions.

The earliest Shansabānī ruler to take any interest in academic pursuits was Amir<sup>c</sup> Abbās, who was interested in astrology and raised a lofty castle with twelve towers for his astrological studies. His son, Amir Muhammad, extended his patronage to men of culture and learning. Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn founded many institutions for the Shāfi<sup>c</sup>īs. Bahā' al-Dīn Sām was respected for his patronage of scholars: according to the Ghurid historian Jūzjānī, 'there was no Muslim sovereign who was a greater cherisher of learned men'. As mentioned previously, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was associated with Bahā' al-Dīn Sām's court for a considerable time and wrote his *Risāla-yi Bahā'iyya* in his name, while during the time of Ghiyāth al-Dīn he wrote another treatise entitled *Latā'if-i Ghiyāthiyya*.

The religious life of the people of Ghur passed through interesting phases: as noted above, the pietistic sect of the Karrāmiyya was influential for many years. Initially, the followers of the Karrāmiyya had received encouragement in Khurasan from Sebüktegin and Mahmūd of Ghazna. But contact with Ghazna, Herat and other centres of Muslim culture slowly changed the religious complexion of Ghur and its adjoining territories, and during the course of the twelfth century, the Shansabānīs started to abandon their patronage of the Karrāmiyya. There were a number of encounters with the Karrāmiyya leaders, who were strongly opposed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī but who had a considerable popular following in Ghur. In the end, Ghiyāth al-Dīn adopted the Shāfi<sup>c</sup>ī school of law, while Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn became a Hanafī.

The Ghurids destroyed Ghazna, but in India their role was more constructive.<sup>21</sup> The intellectual heritage of Central Asia, both in the form of scholars and of books, reached India during this period and flourished under Ghurid patronage. Thus the Ghurid occupation of northern India had a social and cultural significance in the broader framework of Central Asian history.

<sup>20</sup> See Casimer and Glatzer, 1971, pp. 53–68.

<sup>21</sup> See Nizami, 1961, p. 85.