GHAZNA, a town in eastern Afghanistan situated 90 miles/145 km. south-west of Kabul in lat. 68° 18' E. and long. 33° 44' N. and lying at an altitude of 7,280 feet/2,220 m.

The original form of the name must have been *Ganzuk < gandja “treasury”, with a later metathesis in eastern Iranian of -nz-/-ndz- to -zn-, and this etymology indicates that Ghazna was already in pre-Islamic times the metropolis of the surrounding region of Zabulistan. The parallel forms Ghazni (in present-day use) and Ghaznīn must go back to forms like Ghaznik and Ghaznīn; the geographer Muḥammad and the anonymous author of the Ḥudūd al-ʿaml (end of 4th/10th century) have Ghaznīn, and Yāḵūt says that this is the correct, learned form.

The oldest mention of the town seems to be in the second century A.D., when Ptolemy gives Ga(n) zaka in the region of Paropamisādai, locating it 1,100 stadia from Kabul, but to the north of that town. It must have been of some significance under the successive waves of military conquerors in this region, such as the Kushans and Ephthalites. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang (7th century A.D.) mentions it as Ho(k)-si(k)-na = Ghaznik, and describes it as the chief town of the independent kingdom of Tsau-kiu-č'a = Zabulistan. Buddhism was known in the region, for recent excavations at Ghazna have uncovered a Buddhist site and many clay and terracotta buddhas have been found. (It should be noted that A. Bombaci, in East and West, vii (1957), 255-6, doubts the accepted identification of Ghazna with the places mentioned by Ptolemy and Hiuen-Tsang.)

The history of Ghazna in the first three Islamic centuries is most obscure. The armies of the Arab governors of Khurāsān and Sīstān penetrated into Zabulistan in ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign and fought the local ruler, the Zunbil, whose summer quarters were in Zabulistan (Baladhuri, Futūh, 397; Tabari, ii, 488). The population of this area was doubtless basically Iranian, but with a considerable admixture of Turkish and other Central Asian peoples brought in by earlier waves of conquest; as the homeland of Rustam, Zabulistan plays a part in the Iranian national epic as the homeland of heroes. At the end of the 3rd/9th century, the Ṣaffarids Yaʿṣūb and Amr b. Layth reached Ghazna and Kabul, defeating [II:1049a]
the Zunbil of that time, but it is only with the 4th/10th century that the history of Ghazna, by then a theoretical dependency of the Sāmānids, becomes reasonably clear.

In 351/962 a Samānīd slave commander, Alptigin, came to Ghazna with an army and established himself there, defeating the local ruler Abū ʿAlī Lawīk or Anūk, described as a brother-in-law of the Hindūšahī Kābul-Shāh. In 366/977 another slave commander, Schūktigin, rose to power in Ghazna, and under the dynasty which he founded, that of the Ghaznavids, the town enters the two most glorious centuries of its existence. It now became the capital of a vast empire, stretching at Sultan Māḥmūd’s death in 421/1030 from western Persia to the Ganges valley, and it shared with Kabul a dominating position on the borderland between the Islamic and Indian worlds; according to Ibn Hawkal 2, 450, Ghazna’s Indian trade did not suffer with the coming of Alptigin’s army and the temporary severance of political links with India. It was still at this time, and for several decades to come, a frontier fortress town on the edge of the pagan Indian world; in the reign of Masʿūd I of Ghazna (421-32/1030-41) there was still a Sālār or commander of the ghāzīs of Ghazna (Bayhaḵī, Taʿrīḵ-i Maʿṣūdī, ed. Ghani and Fayyād, Tehrān 1324/1945, 254; cf. the anecdote in the first discourse of Nizāmī ‘Arūḍī’s Čahār maḵāla describing the attacks in Māḥmūd’s reign of the infidels on the nearby town of Lāmghān). The geographers of the later 4th/10th century stress that Ghazna was an entrepôt (farda) for the trade between Ghazna and India, that it was a resort of merchants and that its inhabitants enjoyed prosperity and ease of life. They expatriate on its freedom from noxious insects and reptiles and its healthy climate. In winter, snow fell there extensively, and the historian Bayhaḵī describes graphically how in the summer of 422/1031 torrential rain caused the stream flowing through the Ghazna suburb of Afgān-Shāl to swell and burst its banks, carrying away the bridge and destroying many caravanserais, markets and houses. Ghazna itself was not in a fertile spot.
and had few or no gardens, but the surrounding country of Zabulistan was fertile and the town accordingly enjoyed an abundance of provisions. Tha'alib lists among the specialities of the Ghazna region amrī apples and rhubarb, and Fakhri Mudabbir Mubarakshah mentions monster pears from there, pīl-āmrīd "elephant-pears".

Mukaddasi describes the layout of Ghazna as it was during Sebūktigin's time. It had a citadel, kal'a, in the centre of the town (the modern Bala-Ḥisar), with the ruler's palace; a town proper or madina, in which many of the markets were situated, and which had a wall and four gates; and a suburb, rabad, containing the rest of the markets and houses. The citadel and madina had been rebuilt by Ya'kūb and 'Amr b. Layth (Bayhakt, 261). Recent work by the Italian Archaeological Mission at Ghazna has shown that the houses of the great men lay on the hill slopes to the east of the modern town, on the way to the Rawda-yi Sulṭān, where lies Mahmūd's tomb. In this vicinity are the two decorated brick towers built by Mas'ud III and Bahram Shāh, which may be the minarets of mosques, and not necessarily towers of victory as early western visitors to Ghazna imagined. The site of a fine palace has also been uncovered here. We learn from Bayhakt that Mahmūd had a palace at Afgān-Shal, the Sad-Hazāra garden and the Frużal palace and garden where he was eventually buried. His son Mas'ud decided in 427/1035-6 to build a splendid new palace to his own design (Bayhakt, 499, 539-41). For the erection and decoration of these and other buildings, the spoils of India were used; it seems that objects of precious metals and captured Hindu statues were directly incorporated into the palace fabrics as trophies of war. With the plunder brought back from the expedition of 409/1018 to Kanawij and Muttura, Mahmūd decided to build a great new mosque in Ghazna, to be known as the 'Arūs al-Ṣalāk "Bride of the Heavens"; to this was attached a madrasa containing a library of books filched from Khurāsān and the west (Ubīr-Mannī, ii, 290-300). Other constructional works by Mahmūd included elephant stables (pīl-ḵāna) to house 1,000 beasts, with quarters for their attendants, and various irrigation works in the district; one of his dams, the Band-i Sulṭān, a few miles to the north of the town, has survived to this day. For all these building works, it is probable that the early Ghaznavids imported skilled artisans from Persia and even from India, for Zabulistan had no artistic traditions of its own.

After the Ghaznavids' loss of their western territories, Ghazna and Lahore became their two main centres, and the minting of coins was concentrated on these two towns. In the first half of the 6th/12th century, Ghazna was twice occupied by Saldjk armies (510/1117 and 529/1135), but a much greater disaster occurred in 545/1150-1 when 'Ala' al-Dīn Ḥusayn of Ghur sacked the town in vengeance for two rebels killed by the Ghaznavid Bahram Shāh; this orgy of destruction earned for him his title of Djhāhan-sūz "World-incendiary". However, Ghazna seems to have recovered to some extent. It was finally lost to the Ghaznavids in 558/1163, and after an occupation by a group of Ghuzz from Khurāsān, passed into Ghurids hands, becoming the capital of the Sultan Mu'izz al-Dīn Muhammad. After the latter's death in 599/1203, it was held briefly by one of the Ghurids' Turkish slave commanders, Tādʒ al-Dīn Yıldız, but in 612/1215-16 came into the possession of the Ghurids' supplanters, the Khwārizm Shāhs. But Djalāl al-Dīn Mingburnu's governorship there was short. He was driven into India by Čingiz Khān's Mongols in 618/1221 and the town was then sacked by the latter.

This was really the end of Ghazna's period of glory; coins now cease to be minted there. In Il-Khanid times, it passed to the Kart ruler of Harat, Mu'izz al-Dīn Husayn. Timūr granted it in 804/1401 to his grandson Pīr Muhammad b. Djhāngār, who used it as a base for raids on India. In 910/1504 Bābur appeared at Ghazna and forced its then ruler Mukām b. Dhi ʿl-Nūn Arghān to retire to Kandahār. Bābur has left a description of the town as it was at this time, a small place where agriculture was difficult, only a few grapes, melons and apples being produced; he marvelled that so insignificant a place should once have been the capital of a mighty empire. Under the Mughals and native Afghan dynasties, Ghazna played no very great rôle. It was besieged in 1059/1649 by a
Persian army, but Awrangzib succeeded in holding on to it, despite his loss of Kandahār. Nādir Shāh captured it in 1151/1738 before occupying Kābul and marching on Delhi in the next year, and after his assassination in 1160/1747, Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī used Ghazna and Kābul as springboards for attacks on India. During the First Afghan-British War of 1839-42 Ghazna was twice taken by British forces, and on the second occasion the British commander sent back to India, at the Governor-General Lord Ellenborough’s request, the alleged Gates of Somnāth captured by Maḥmūd of Ghazna eight centuries previously.

Today, Ghazna is a town of some importance; it lies on the Kābul- Kandahār road and is the junction for the roads eastward to Gardīz and Māṭūn, Urgun and Tōči. It is the administrative centre of the province (wālīyāt) of Ghazna. The great majority of the people are Persian-speaking and are Sunnis in religion.

(C.E. Bosworth)

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