



A Study on the Turkmen Migration into Khorasan (Afghanistan) during the Reigns of Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazni

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Abstract: The Turkmen people, who traditionally led a nomadic lifestyle, originally inhabited the steppes of Central Asia. Their nomadism, coupled with population growth and the expansion of livestock herds, compelled them to seek new territories. Among the regions they sought to migrate to and settle in was northern Khorasan, which at that time was under the rule of the Ghaznavids. The central question of this study is how the Turkmen tribes entered Khorasan. The primary objective of this research is to explore the process and circumstances surrounding the Turkmen migration into Khorasan.

Findings derived from a systematic review indicate that the Turkmen first entered northern Khorasan under Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. However, due to ensuing disorder within the Ghaznavid realm, they were expelled to Mount Balkhan. Following the death of Sultan Mahmud, Prince Mas'ud, in his struggle for the throne against Prince Mohammad, sought assistance from Turkmen tribes.

Consequently, waves of Turkmen migrants, both military and civilian, entered Herat and its surrounding regions.

When Mas'ud ascended to power, he later attempted to expel the Turkmen from Ghaznavid territory for several reasons. The Sultan launched multiple military campaigns toward this end, yet he failed to achieve his goal. Meanwhile, after each conflict, the Turkmen tribes sent letters to the Sultan, requesting permission to settle in the regions of Marv, Farava, Sarakhs, and Nisa. The Sultan outwardly reconciled with them and granted residence permits; however, mutual distrust persisted—particularly on the Sultan's part. This suspicion was fueled by the growing number and military strength of the Turkmen cavalry, who were organized into several tribal groups.

The Battle of Dandānqān solidified the Turkmen's position as a formidable political and social force opposing the Ghaznavids. They expanded their influence across the northwestern frontiers of the Ghaznavid Empire through continuous military maneuvers. A historical overview of Afghanistan and the surrounding region reveals that the social fabric of these lands began to take shape primarily after the 5th century AH, and that the Turkmen constitute the fifth-largest ethnic group currently residing in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Turkmen, Mahmud, Mas'ud, Ghaznavids, invasion, migration, Khorasan

Introduction

The present social structure of nations and societies has been shaped through the historical events of their past. When examining the social composition of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, it becomes evident that the Turkmen constitute one of the indigenous communities inhabiting these regions. In Afghanistan, the Turkmen rank as the fifth-largest ethnic group, residing primarily in the northern and northwestern provinces of the country. Their migration into Afghanistan began in the 11th century CE and continued until the 20th century. These migrations occurred in two principal forms.

The first type was military migration, represented by Turkmen-led dynasties such as the Seljuks, Afshars, Safavids, and others. The second occurred after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, when Muslim Turkmen who refused to accept communist ideology fled Central Asia and sought refuge in Afghanistan. In several Afghan historical sources, the Turkmen population of Afghanistan is categorized into two groups: indigenous and migrant. The settlement of indigenous Turkmen in Afghanistan began in the 5th century AH. During this period, the Turkmen were divided into several groups lacking political unity; however, it was the Seljuk branch that succeeded in establishing a cohesive socio-political structure.

The core issue addressed in this study concerns how the Turkmen entered Afghanistan during the reigns of Sultans Mahmud and Mas'ud of Ghazni. This research investigates the process of Turkmen migration into Khorasan between 416–432 AH (1025–1040 CE), corresponding to the rule of the aforementioned Ghaznavid sultans. The key research question, therefore, asks: In what manner did the Turkmen enter Afghanistan during this period?

Sub-questions include:

- To which ethnic origin did the Turkmen belong?
- Was their migration primarily military or peaceful in nature?
- In which battle did they ultimately succeed in defeating Sultan Mas'ud?

The main objective of this research is to analyze the process by which the Turkmen tribes entered Khorasan (Afghanistan) during the reigns of Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazni. This historical era is of considerable importance due to the political and military transformations that occurred within Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran, as it was during this stage that much of the social fabric of these regions took shape.

Thus, addressing this topic holds significant value for understanding the ethno-historical evolution of Afghanistan. Ultimately, a comprehensive analysis of this issue contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical developments in Khorasan (Afghanistan) and the influence of the Turkmen people on the country's political and social dynamics. Furthermore, the findings of this study help elucidate the role of various ethnic groups in Afghanistan's history and their impact on the shifts of power during the Ghaznavid period.

Research Methodology

This study is library-based in nature and employs the standard note-taking (card indexing) method for data collection. Considerable effort has been made to rely primarily on authentic first-hand sources originating from the same historical period under investigation. Both printed (hard copy) and digital (soft copy) materials were utilized throughout the research process.

All relevant sources were thoroughly reviewed, and information directly related to the research topic was carefully extracted from the texts. In the final stage, the collected data were organized

systematically, maintaining logical sequence and coherence, followed by comprehensive analysis and interpretation to ensure academic rigor and clarity in the presentation of findings.

A Brief Overview of the Ghaznavid Dynasty

The Ghaznavid dynasty has long been recognized as one of the most powerful and magnificent regimes in the history of Afghanistan. This dynasty ruled from 962 to 1148 CE (351–583 AH), maintaining political authority for approximately 186 years (Zadran, 2023, p. 8). During this period, seventeen rulers from the Ghaznavid family governed the state (Dowlatabadi, 1992, p. 201).

The Ghaznavid state emerged when Alptigin, a military commander (Sipahsalar) who had seceded from the Samanid administration, established an independent government in Ghazni. His son-in-law Sebuktigin expanded the domain by conquering the regions of Bust, Kabul, Laghman, and Nangarhar, and he is regarded as the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty. The most powerful ruler of this dynasty was Sultan Mahmud, the son of Sebuktigin, who extended his empire through successful campaigns toward the east, west, and north, thereby establishing a vast and formidable Ghaznavid Empire (Rafi', 1998, p. 29).

The territorial extent of the Ghaznavid Empire varied over time. In its early phase, it encompassed areas corresponding to modern Afghanistan, parts of Iran, 'Iraq-i 'Ajam (western Iran), and the northwestern regions of ancient India (Ansari, 2016, p. 64).

The Ghaznavid dynasty is generally divided into two historical periods:

1. The first period, beginning with Alptigin and ending with Sultan Mas'ud.
2. The second period, starting with Sultan Mawdud and concluding with Khusrau Malik.

Ultimately, the Ghaznavid state was overthrown by Sultan Shihab al-Din Ghuri in 583 AH (1187 CE), marking the end of one of the most illustrious dynasties in the medieval Islamic history of Afghanistan (Majid, 2025, p. 53).

The Ethnic Origin of the Turkmen

From an ethnological standpoint, the Turkmen belong to the Ural–Altaic language and ethnic family (Urozgani, 2008, p. 274). Similar to the Turks and Mongols, the Turkmen trace their lineage to Japheth, son of the Prophet Noah (peace be upon him) (Osmani, 2009, p. 9). Within the broader Turkic world, the Turkmen are a branch of the Oghuz Turks (Vogelsang, 2002, p. 15).

The genealogical chain of the Turkmen is traditionally recorded as follows:

Oghuz Khan, son of Qara Khan, son of Alija Khan, son of Gök Khan, son of Dip Khan, son of Elija Khan, son of Tutuk Khan, son of Turk Khan, son of Japheth, son of Noah (peace be upon him).

The Turkmen comprise several tribal branches; however, Oghuz Khan is regarded as the common ancestor of all Turkmen groups (Zadran, 2023, p. 215). The Oghuz Turks were divided into nine main tribes (Sistani, 2007, p. 175).

The term “Oghuz” has been interpreted in several ways: it can mean young bull, male lion, the Amu River, or it may derive from the word “ok” (ukh) meaning tribe or clan (Gurun, 2011, pp. 337–338). According to Turkmen tradition, Oghuz Khan embraced Islam and spent seventy years preaching the faith among his people (Osmani, 2009, p. 18). It is further narrated that

Oghuz Khan had six sons and twenty-four grandsons, and that the twenty-four Turkmen tribes descended from these grandsons (Zadran, 2023, p. 217).

The term “Turkmen” first appeared in written form in 372 AH (982 CE) in the works of al-Muqaddasi. Subsequently, it was used in historical sources such as *Tārikh-e Sīstān*, *Tārikh-e Beyhaqi*, and *Zayn al-Akhbar*. Both the author of *Habib al-Siyar* and C.E. Bosworth note that the Ghaznavid-era sources repeatedly referred to the Oghuz who entered their territory as Turkmen (Ma‘tofi, 2004, pp. 223–225).

Scholars have proposed several interpretations of the term “Turkmen”, as follows:

a. Turk-man / Turk-like:

When nomadic Turks migrated into Transoxiana and Khorasan, changes in diet and climate altered their physical appearance. Consequently, local inhabitants referred to them as Turk-man—meaning “Turk-like” (Osmani, 2009, p. 12).

b. Turk-iman (Turk of faith):

According to Barthold, the word Turkmen derives from Turk-iman, referring to those Oghuz Turks who accepted Islam. The physician Marvazi, serving at the court of Malik-Shah Seljuqi, mentioned in his *Nature of Animals* that when the Oghuz Turks came into contact with Muslim lands, some converted to Islam and were thereafter known as Turk-iman, later shortened to Turkmen.

c. Torgoman / Translator:

Another interpretation suggests that when the Oghuz tribes entered Khorasan, some who adopted Islam served as interpreters (torgoman) between the local settled populations and the nomadic Oghuz. Over time, the term Turkman is believed to have evolved from torgoman (Ma‘tofi, 2004, pp. 223–224).

The Situation of the Turkmen before Entering Khorasan (Afghanistan)

Regarding the early settlements of the Oghuz or Turkmen, historians have presented varying accounts. Osmani identifies the original homeland of the Oghuz as north of Lake Balkhash, corresponding to present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Osmani, 2009, p. 27). Another account places the ancestral Turkmen homeland on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Vogelsang, 2002, p. 15). Urozgani suggests that the Oghuz ancestors initially inhabited the plains and steppes of northern Manchuria and present-day Mongolia (Urozgani, 2008, p. 137).

In 375 AH (985 CE), the *Kiniks*, the Seljuqs, and other branches of the Oghuz, facing resource scarcity and pasture shortages, migrated into Transoxiana. The leader of the *Kiniks* was Yabghu, residing in Yangi-Kent near the mouth of the Seyhun River. Later, Duqaq and his son Seljuq entered Yabghu’s service. Over time, Seljuq gained a large following and earned the trust of other Oghuz tribes, which provoked Yabghu’s jealousy.

Seljuq, accompanied by 100 family members, 1,500 camels, and 50,000 sheep, moved to the Jand region near the Seyhun River toward the late 10th century CE (Ma‘tofi, 2004, p. 320). According to Ghubar, it was not Seljuq but his father Duqaq who initially migrated, settling in Nur, near Bukhara. Seljuq himself converted to Islam in 985 CE (382 AH) (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 231).

These two Oghuz branches were long-time rivals, a conflict that continued until the Seljuqs’ conquest of Khwarazm, led by Shah Malik, an Oghuz from Yangi-Kent (Ma‘tofi, 2004, p. 320).

Yabghu converted to Islam in 393 AH and supported the Samanids, while Chaghri Beg and Tughril Beg supported Bughrakhan of the Qarakhanids. Their uncle, Arslan Isra'il, supported Alptigin. Initially, these groups formed alliances, but the imprisonment of Arslan Isra'il led to the dissolution of this union (Ma'tofi, 2005, p. 323).

Seljuq had four sons: Yabghu Arslan, also known as Isra'il, Mikail, Musa, and Yunus (Habibi, 2010, p. 232). By the late 10th century CE, Transoxiana was politically unstable. The Samanid state was in decline, and the Qarakhanid Turks and Ilkhanid Turks competed for dominance. Isra'il, Seljuq's son, allied with Alptigin Qarakhanid, becoming a powerful figure in Central Asia (Popal, 2023, p. 110).

He was known for his boldness and strength, becoming a serious rival to the Ilkhanids. According to Habibi, citing Gardizi, he earned the epithets "The Roaring Lion" and "The Leaping Lightning" (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 200; Habibi, 2010, p. 232).

Thus, the Seljuq Turkmen, as a political and nomadic group, followed a seasonal migration pattern, spending summers in Samarkand and winters in Nur near Bukhara (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 320).

The Entry of the Turkmen into Afghanistan during the Reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni

Yamin al-Dawla Mahmud, son of Amir Sebuktigin and the daughter of a noble from Zabul, was born in 361 AH (972 CE) (Khalili, 2015, Vol. 2, p. 329). Poets and historians often refer to him as Mahmud Zabli, reflecting his connection to Zabul, a region encompassing areas around Ghazni and lands between the Khashrud and Helmand rivers (Khalili, n.d., p. 17). Upon Sebuktigin's death, his sons proclaimed themselves rulers: Mahmud in Nishapur and Ismail in Balkh. However, Mahmud succeeded in sidelining his brother and ascending to the throne (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 2, p. 199). Mahmud ruled with full authority for 33 years (Habibi, 2010, p. 208), and from 387 to 421 AH (997–1030 CE), he conducted twelve campaigns in India, establishing a vast empire centered in Ghazni (Sistani, 2007, p. 147).

According to Tennywell, Mahmud's territory extended eastward from Lahore to the west as far as Isfahan, and northward from Samarkand to the south reaching Sistan (Tennywell, 2015, p. 244). Sistani, however, describes the empire as extending east from Gujarat, Kannauj, and Kashmir to Rey and Tabaristan in the west (Sistani, 2007, p. 147). Mahmud is thus regarded as the founder of the Ghaznavid Empire (Rafi', 1998, p. 29). One of the significant events during his reign was the entry of nomadic Turkmen tribes into Khorasan, which is discussed below.

Through his eastern and western campaigns, Sultan Mahmud amassed immense wealth, consolidating his status as a politically and militarily powerful ruler. In Transoxiana and the northern frontiers of the Ghaznavid state, the Ilkhanid Turks, Alptigin Qarakhanids, and Turkmen tribes were in constant conflict. In 416 AH (1025 CE), Mahmud advanced toward Transoxiana and the northern borders to establish friendly relations and support the Ilkhanid Turks against Alptigin Qarakhanid (Patsun, 2009, p. 44).

The Turkmen migration from Transoxiana into Khorasan followed this campaign; however, historians offer different accounts regarding the precise circumstances. When Sultan Mahmud approached Transoxiana, Alptigin Qarakhanid fled, but his ally Arslan Isra'il, a Turkmen leader, remained in Samarkand (Popal, 2023, p. 110). Mahmud negotiated with Qadrkhan, the Ilkhanid brother, establishing boundaries between the Ghaznavids and Ilkhanids and formalizing a friendship (Majidi, 2003, p. 20).

To strengthen ties, Mahmud acted against Isra'il and other Turkmen opposing the Ilkhanids, arresting Isra'il and his two sons and sending them to Multan prison (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 200). Another account suggests that Isra'il personally approached Mahmud, who initially honored him but later, unaware of the Turkmen's military strength and population, exiled him to India (Froozani, 2005, p. 149).

Qadrkhan requested that the Turkmen of the Seljuq lineage be allowed to cross the Amu Darya and settle in Khorasan. Mahmud sent envoys to Chaghri and Tughril, offering them settlement in Khorasan. They refused, but Arslan Yabghu (Isra'il) personally visited Mahmud and was subsequently sent to prison in India (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 244).

Mahmud's decision to detain Isra'il was motivated by the latter's military power: he commanded 100,000 soldiers in Balkhan and 200,000 across Turkistan, posing a potential threat to the Sultan (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 323). Following Isra'il's exile, his subordinate leaders approached Mahmud, requesting pasturelands and permission to settle in Khorasan (Khalili, 2017, Vol. 3, p. 355). Ma'tofi notes that lower-class Turkmen, suffering poor living conditions in Transoxiana, also petitioned the Sultan to allow 4,000 Turkmen households to cross the Amu Darya and reside in Khorasan to facilitate their participation in Mahmud's army (Froozani, 2005, p. 149). The Sultan granted their request, intending to recruit them as soldiers (Khalili, 2017, Vol. 3, p. 355).

Consequently, 4,000 Turkmen households crossed the Amu Darya into Ghaznavid territory (Habibi, 2010, p. 219), establishing their camps in the deserts of Sarakhs, Abiward, and Farava (Froozani, 2005, p. 149). According to Ghubar, Sultan Mahmud allocated the northwestern regions of Afghanistan for their settlement and grazing (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 231).

Mahmud required the Turkmen leaders to refrain from carrying weapons and to avoid causing disturbances among local populations (Khalili, 2017, Vol. 3, p. 355). Upon returning from Transoxiana, Arslan Jazib, governor of Tus, confronted the Sultan, proposing harsh measures against the Turkmen. Mahmud, considering the 4,000 Turkmen households a minor threat, rebuked Arslan Jazib and dismissed his violent recommendations (Froozani, 2005, p. 149).

In this manner, the Turkmen officially entered the northwestern regions of the Ghaznavid Empire with the Sultan's consent.

By 418 AH (1027 CE), less than a year after the Turkmen settlement, the leaders of Abiward, Farava, and Nisa complained to Sultan Mahmud about Turkmen oppression. Mahmud tasked Arslan Jazib with suppressing the Turkmen. Despite multiple campaigns, the governor faced heavy losses and repeated setbacks (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 245). Complaints from local inhabitants continued to reach Ghazni, leading Mahmud to intervene personally in 419 AH (1028 CE).

A major battle occurred near Ribat Farava, in which the Sultan's army emerged victorious. The Turkmen suffered heavy casualties, including the destruction of their cavalry. According to Ma'tofi, approximately 4,000 Turkmen cavalrymen were killed, with many captured and others fleeing to Balkhan and surrounding areas (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 245).

The most significant outcome of the Turkmen settlement under Sultan Mahmud was their acclimatization to Khorasan, enabling them to resurge and later successfully confront Sultan Mas'ud (Hosseini Afghan, 2000, p. 71). Although some rebels fled, it is likely that a portion of the Turkmen remained in northern Khorasan, establishing a lasting presence.

The Entry of the Turkmen into Afghanistan during the Reign of Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazni

Sultan Mas'ud, also known by the honorific Shihab al-Dawla, was one of the most powerful rulers of the Ghaznavid dynasty (Bosworth, 1992, p. 268). During Sultan Mahmud's lifetime,

Prince Muhammad was designated as heir apparent, while Mas'ud governed the western Ghaznavid territories from Nishapur. Upon Mahmud's death, Mas'ud advanced to Balkh, deposed Prince Muhammad, and ascended the throne (Sykes, 2003, p. 198).

The Turkmen entry into Khorasan during Mas'ud's reign was closely tied to political dynamics and the military movements of Turkmen tribes. The succession conflict between Prince Muhammad and Mas'ud brought the Turkmen into Khorasan. When Prince Muhammad declared himself ruler, Mas'ud invited the leaders of the Turkmen tribes to bring their forces to Herat. Mas'ud intended to use the Turkmen to counterbalance his brother's influence, which included control over the Ghaznavid capital and command of the main army. The Turkmen, eager for such an opportunity, responded positively (Khalili, n.d., p. 148).

Turkmen leaders, including Kuktash, Buqa, and Qizil, along with several thousand cavalymen, moved to support Mas'ud in Herat. Mas'ud reconciled with them regarding past grievances they had faced under his father, Sultan Mahmud (Froozani, 2005, p. 220). Contrary to expectations, Mas'ud secured the throne quickly without relying heavily on Turkmen support; once the conflict between the brothers began in Herat, the Ghaznavid officials and soldiers switched allegiance to Mas'ud (Khalili, n.d., p. 156).

Consequently, the Turkmen were no longer essential to his rule. Sultan Mas'ud incorporated a portion of the Turkmen cavalry into his army and settled several Turkmen households in Nishapur (Patsun, 2009, p. 46). These soldiers played a key role in securing Sistan and Baluchistan and in suppressing rebellions in Makran (Ghubar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 205).

However, the initial cooperation did not last long, as the Turkmen began to cause disturbances within the Ghaznavid territories (Froozani, 2005, p. 220). The nomadic Turkmen, organized in multiple tribes, were difficult to control. It is possible that the disorder was not caused by the Turkmen who had originally entered Herat at Mas'ud's request, but by other Turkmen groups in the region.

In 422 AH (1031 CE), Mas'ud appointed Tash Farash as commander of Iraq and instructed him to eliminate the Turkmen leaders in Nishapur within three months (Khalili, n.d., p. 157). Khwaaja Ahmad Maimandi advised against this action, noting that 2,000 Turkmen cavalry were already part of the Ghaznavid army in Makran and could revolt. Nevertheless, Mas'ud insisted. Tash Farash executed Yaghmur and fifty other Turkmen leaders in Nishapur (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 260).

Upon hearing this, Yaghmur's son in Balkhan, along with Turkmen residents in Sarakhs and Ray, rebelled against Sultan Mas'ud. In response, Mas'ud declared his intention to expel the Turkmen from Herat and relocate them to Ghazni (Khalili, n.d., p. 168). This marked the beginning of the Turkmen rebellions, primarily led by the branch loyal to Isra'il.

The Entry of Turkmen Tribes under Tughril into Khorasan

In Transoxiana, the Turkmen branches under Tughril and Chaghri Beg were still present; however, by 420 AH (1029 CE), their relations with Alptigin Qarakhanid had deteriorated (Froozani, 2005, p. 222), making life in Transoxiana increasingly difficult. During this period, Khwaaja Ahmad Abdul Samad, minister to Sultan Mas'ud, requested Altuntash, governor of Khwarazm, to provide winter refuge for the two brothers, Tughril and Chaghri Beg, along with their followers (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 508). Altuntash agreed, yet during the conflict of 423 AH (1032 CE) between Alptigin Qarakhanid of Transoxiana and Altuntash of Khwarazm, the brothers supported the latter. As a result, a man named Harun ascended to power in Khwarazm.

Harun had tense relations with Sultan Mas'ud, prompting him to invite the Turkmen under Tughril and Chaghri to Khwarazm (Froozani, 2005, p. 222).

The Turkmen, along with their tribes, entered Khwarazm. This migration sparked conflicts with the Yenikent Turkmen, who were under Sultan Mas'ud's protection. Subsequently, Shah Malik, with Mas'ud's support, defeated Harun and took control of Khwarazm (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 323).

While Sultan Mas'ud was in Gorgan, he received a letter from the chamberlain of Nishapur, reporting that Seljuq Turkmen and other Turkmen branches were entering Merv and Nisa via the Deganbadan desert (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 508). Initially, the incoming Turkmen numbered 700 cavalry, but later, 10,000 Seljuq and Yinali Turkmen cavalry entered Nisa from Merv (Froozani, 2005, p. 229). According to Ma'tofi, 7,000 to 10,000 Turkmen under the leadership of Tughril, Chaghri, and Ibrahim Yinal, Tughril's half-brother, entered Khorasan (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 326).

These three Turkmen leaders sent a pleading letter to Abu'l-Fazl Suri, governor of Nishapur (Khalili, n.d., p. 174). The letter explained that their migration with 10,000 cavalry to join the Turkmen already settled in Nisa was caused by Alptigin Qarakhanid's presence in Transoxiana and Harun's death in Khwarazm. They stated that they could neither remain in Transoxiana nor in Khwarazm, leaving Khorasan as their only option (Froozani, 2005, p. 231).

The brothers requested Abu'l-Fazl Suri to intercede with Sultan Mas'ud, seeking permission to settle in Nisa and Farava. They pledged to serve as soldiers under the Sultan, assisting in suppressing opposition, including Turkmen in Khwarazm, Iraq, regions along the Jihun River, and Balkhan. They further warned that without the Sultan's approval, they had no place to reside, and offered to send one of their number as a hostage to Ghazni to demonstrate their sincere intentions (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 2, p. 509; Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 246).

Thus, a wave of Turkmen migration, both military and civilian, entered the Ghaznavid territories, including Merv, Nisa, and Farava, without explicit prior approval from Sultan Mas'ud, marking a significant expansion of Turkmen presence in Khorasan.

Sultan Mas'ud's Response to the Settlement of Turkmen in Northern Khorasan

The presence of Turkmen in northern Khorasan was unacceptable to Sultan Mas'ud, as it carried a significant military dimension. The Sultan summoned his state officials and, during a council session, remarked that the arrival of several thousand Turkmen cavalry into his territory, claiming they had no place to settle, was unwise. He stressed that their intentions were clear and required a prompt and decisive response. The minister, however, advised caution, noting that the Turkmen had not yet committed any acts of disorder, had humbly expressed their obedience, and had appointed Minister Abu'l-Fazl Suri as their mediator. Therefore, engaging in conflict with them would be imprudent; instead, the minister suggested giving them a noncommittal reply to better understand their intentions over time (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, pp. 511–512).

Time passed, and the newly arrived Turkmen migrants did not engage in any actions that disturbed public order (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 516). Nonetheless, Sultan Mas'ud prepared a force of 15,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry to confront the Turkmen. He entrusted the command of this army to Baktugdi and Khwaaja Husayn Ali Mika'il (Khalili, n.d., p. 176). Despite there being no prior disturbance, the presence of 10,000 Turkmen cavalry in the northern regions caused significant anxiety for the Sultan (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 521).

The Sultan's army advanced to Nisa to expel the migrants. A battle took place in Spandanqan, resulting in an initial victory for the Sultan's forces, with 700–800 Turkmen cavalry killed and

several captured (Ma'tofi, 2004, p. 276). However, the army's disobedience to Baktugdi led to a reversal, and the Turkmen, led by Chaghri (Daud) Turkmen, ultimately prevailed. Baktugdi was thrown from his elephant and fled on horseback, while Khwaaja Husayn Ali Mika'il was captured (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 523). The spoils of war obtained by the Turkmen were substantial, leaving them astonished.

Despite their victory, the Turkmen persisted in their previous requests, as outlined in their initial letter (Froozani, 2005, p. 231). They considered their success to be the result of the Sultan's army's mismanagement, acknowledging that Sultan Mas'ud remained the most powerful ruler of the era. Consequently, the Turkmen sent a second humble letter, expressing regret for having initially relied on Abu'l-Fazl Suri as mediator and now requesting the intercession of a high-ranking official to obtain the Sultan's permission to settle in Abiward, Farava, and Nisa. They reiterated that they had acted only in self-defense during the Sultan's attack and requested a representative of the Sultan to negotiate directly with them (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 531).

Sultan Mas'ud accepted their request and dispatched Qazi Bunşur Sini to Nisa to negotiate and ascertain their intentions. Qazi Sini met with the Turkmen leaders, including Tughril, Daud, and Yabghu, and ultimately allocated territories: Dehestan to Daud, Farava to Yabghu, and Nisa to Tughril. The leaders swore allegiance to the Sultan, and it was agreed that one of the Turkmen chiefs would report to the Sultan's court in Ghazni at the earliest opportunity. They were recognized as official governors on behalf of the Sultan, and each received gifts of robes, a bicorne hat, a standard, and thirty pieces of luxury cloth. It was also stipulated that upon the Sultan's arrival in Balkh, one of the Turkmen leaders would come to pay homage.

Upon Qazi Sini's return, he advised the Sultan to consider expelling the Turkmen from Khorasan due to distrust. The Sultan, however, declared that the Turkmen had honored their commitments and warned that any disobedience would be suppressed by Garrison forces in Nishapur, Herat, Qa'in, and Sarakhs (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 535).

Thus, the Turkmen migrants settled in Nisa, Farava, and Dehestan, laying the groundwork for further Turkmen migration into northern Khorasan.

Entry of New Turkmen Tribes from the Jeyhun to Khorasan

In 427 AH, while Sultan Mas'ud resided in Balkh, reports reached him of Turkmen incursions and disturbances across various parts of Khorasan, attributed to Seljuqi and Iraqi Turkmen. Correspondence from Bust indicated the arrival of Turkmen in Farah and Zirkan, causing disorder, and similar reports came from Guzgan and Sarakhs (Froozani, 2005, p. 232). These accounts demonstrate the rapid spread and increasing presence of Turkmen migrants in Khorasan.

In response, the Sultan convened a council and placed an army of 10,000 cavalry and 5,000 infantry under the command of Sabashi on high alert to suppress the Turkmen migrants (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 539). In 428 AH, a delegation of scholars from Bukhara and representatives of Tughril and Daud Turkmen visited the Sultan, asserting that the recent disturbances in Khorasan were not caused by their factions but by other non-Seljuqi Turkmen rivals (Froozani, 2005, p. 234). These envoys submitted letters to Khwaja Ahmad Abd al-Samad, emphasizing that they had committed no acts of lawlessness, yet other Turkmen entering Khorasan via Belkhan and Jeyhun were creating congestion and disorder, and requested the Sultan to assign desert settlements around Sarakhs, Abiward, and Marw to them. In return, they pledged to serve as the Sultan's soldiers and suppress rebellions wherever commanded. They also noted that if Sabashi attempted to attack them at Herat, they would defend themselves. The Sultan instructed his minister to reply that "the sword will decide between us and you", but the minister recommended

a vague response until reaching Herat, which the Sultan approved (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 547; Khalili, n.d., p. 180).

While the Sultan traveled to Herat, letters arrived from the governors of Herat, Badghis, and Gharjistan, reporting that Daud Turkmen, with 4,000 cavalry, intended to advance toward Ghazni. Initially, the Sultan considered returning to Ghazni; however, it was later confirmed that only 150 cavalry were involved, and their aim was merely to harass the Sultan's movements (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 548). Concurrently, Turkmen tribes caused disturbances in Town of Tun (Froozani, 2005, p. 234).

The Sultan dispatched his minister, along with Sabashi, to Herat to repel the Turkmen rebels, and they succeeded in forcing the insurgents from Herat, Guzgan, and surrounding areas to retreat to Farava, Nisa, and Marw. The minister established a camp outside Marw and sent letters requesting guidance from the Sultan; subsequently, the Sultan summoned him back to Ghazni (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 566).

Through his intelligence network, Sultan Mas'ud discovered that Ali-tigin Qarakhan was behind the Turkmen's military activities within Ghaznavid territory (Froozani, 2005, p. 234). Thus, the Sultan now faced two adversaries, yet he ignored the counsel of his officials and proceeded with his campaign to India, delegating the suppression of the Turkmen to Abu'l-Fazl Suri from Nishapur, Sabashi with forces from Marw, and the garrisons in Qahistan, Tus, Herat, and Gharjistan (Baihaqi, 2011, p. 575).

Meanwhile, Turkmen activities continued unabated. Sabashi, commanding 30,000 troops, engaged them in battle. The second confrontation between the Ghaznavid army and the Turkmen occurred in 429 AH at Telkhab, Sarakhs. Although Sabashi initially achieved some successes, he ultimately suffered defeat and retreated to Herat (Froozani, 2005, p. 238).

Capture of Nishapur and Marw

Following their victory, Ibrahim Yinal Turkmen (Yabghu) entered Nishapur with 200 cavalymen and had the Friday sermon (khutbah) read in the city in the name of Tughril Turkmen (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, pp. 599–600). After some time, Tughril himself arrived in Nishapur, where the city's notables welcomed him (Khalili, n.d., p. 183).

Tughril, commanding 3,000 Turkmen cavalry, established his residence in the Shadyakh Garden of Nishapur (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 602). Subsequently, representatives of the Abbasid Caliphate also arrived in Nishapur. Tughril adopted the title Sultan al-Azam, consolidating his authority in the city (Motoufi, 2004, p. 338).

Meanwhile, Daud Chaghri Beg, after defeating Sabashi at Telkhab, Sarakhs, had the khutbah in the city of Marw read in his own name and assumed the title Malik al-Muluk. Ibrahim Yinal Turkmen also attempted operations in Sistan, though he achieved little success in these efforts (Motoufi, 2004, p. 325).

Response of Sultan Mas'ud to Turkmen Settlements

Sultan Mas'ud, seemingly regretful of his expedition to India, marched from Ghazni to Balkh in 430 AH to suppress the Turkmen and Portgin forces in the north (Khalili, 2016, Vol. 3, p. 481). He informed the Nishapur notables of his intent to reclaim the city (Fruzanī, 2004, p. 240) and advanced with a formidable army of 50,000 cavalry and 300 war elephants (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 603).

Sultan Mas'ud initially moved toward Termez to confront Portgin forces; however, Daud Turkmen exploited the Sultan's absence and advanced into Guzgan to block his access to Balkh. The Sultan returned promptly to Balkh, taking the initiative (Khalili, 2016, Vol. 3, p. 482). Meanwhile, Chaghri (Daud), having captured Marw, extended his control over Shiberghan, Talqan, and Faryab (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 618). Some of his soldiers even approached the Sultan's garden in Balkh and attempted to seize his elephant (Fruzanī, 2004, p. 242).

The next day, 2,000 Turkmen cavalry, led by Alti-Sikman, Daud's officer, raided villages in the Band-e Kafran area of Balkh. Sultan Mas'ud personally engaged the Turkmen, defeating Alti-Sikman's forces and forcing them to retreat to Aliabad (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 619). Daud then moved to Aliabad near Balkh, where Sultan and his court officials confronted him. After intense skirmishes, Sultan, leading 1,000 veteran cavalry, inflicted a decisive defeat on the Turkmen forces, killing 50 cavalymen and capturing 20 (Khalili, 2016, Vol. 3, p. 483).

Sultan Mas'ud then advanced toward Sarakhs to deliver a final blow to Daud (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 621; Motoufi, 2004, p. 280). Tughril from Nishapur and Ibrahim Yinal (Yabghu) from Marw, learning of Daud's defeat, moved to support him, assembling 20,000 Turkmen cavalry at Telkhab and Bazargan. Although Tughril and Yinal initially opposed confrontation, Daud convinced them that the Sultan's heavy army was a weakness, while their lightly armed forces were an advantage, citing past victories over Ghaznavid commanders Baktughdi and Sabashi (Khalili, n.d., p. 187).

The ensuing battle at Telkhab forced the Turkmen to retreat temporarily (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 628). They returned the next day to continue fighting; however, shortages of water, food, and fodder compelled Sultan Mas'ud to negotiate peace. A letter from Vizier Khwaja Ahmad Abd al-Samad, delivered by Bunsar Matui, confirmed that Bawurd, Farawah, and Nisa would officially belong to the three Turkmen leaders. Consequently, Ghaznavid forces entered Herat safely, ending the immediate conflict (Fruzanī, 2004, p. 245).

The Battle of Dandāqan and its Aftermath

The peace established between Sultan Mas'ud and the Turkmen factions proved temporary. Upon reaching Herat, Sultan Mas'ud began mobilizing his forces. He gathered war supplies and livestock from Ghazni, collected past dues and taxes from Badghis, and punished Herat's notables for their collaboration with the Turkmen (Khalili, n.d., p. 189). Meanwhile, reports arrived that the Turkmen had allied with Portgin and the sons of Altuntas, and that daily waves of Turkmen migrants were crossing the Amu River into northern Khorasan (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 649).

Turkmen leaders positioned themselves strategically: Tughril at Nishapur, the Yinal branch at Nisa, and Daud at Sarakhs, preparing for the decisive confrontation. In Safar 431 AH, Sultan Mas'ud advanced from Poushang toward the crossroads of Nishapur and Tus to block Tughril's entry into Nisa but was unsuccessful. He proceeded through Bawurd and Nisa, facing severe fodder shortages, and ultimately moved to Sarakhs (Fruzanī, 2004, pp. 247–248). Scarcity of provisions there further endangered soldiers and animals. Despite advice from Bowsahl Zuzani to retreat to Badghis and Herat, the Sultan pressed on to Marw (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 672).

The Turkmen army, estimated at 20,000, faced Sultan Mas'ud's 70,000-strong force (Ansari, 2016, p. 65). The decisive battle occurred in Dandāqan. During combat, a large portion of the Sultan's troops and slaves defected to the Turkmen. Sultan Mas'ud, alongside his son Ma'dud, attempted resistance but was forced to flee, initially to Marw, then to Gurgan, Ghor, and

eventually Ghazni (Fruzani, 2004, p. 254). While in Ghor, pursuing Turkmen forces were annihilated by the Sultan (Khalili, n.d., p. 198).

Following the Battle of Dandāqan, Turkmen forces under Daud captured Khatlan and laid siege to Balkh (Baihaqi, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 705). Sultan Mas'ud, fearing the Turkmen might advance on Ghazni, attempted to return to India to raise reinforcements but was blinded and subsequently killed by his nephew Ahmad en route (Husseini Afghan, 2000, p. 69).

As a result of this victory, northern Khorasan and northern Afghan provinces, from Nishapur to Takhar, came under Turkmen control (Ghobar, 2011, Vol. 1, p. 209). Provinces such as Herat, Kerman, and Sistan were also seized by the Turkmen (Motoufi, 2004, p. 318). This decisive triumph facilitated the settlement and expansion of Turkmen tribes into Khorasan under military and political auspices. Following the battle, territorial divisions were established: Daud controlled northern Khorasan with Marw as his center; Musa Yabghu administered Bust, Ghazni, Poushang, Ghor, Sistan, Asfizar, Hari, and parts of India; and Qavurd, Daud's son, held Tabas and Kerman (Motoufi, 2004, p. 330). These allocations delineated the spheres of influence for each leader, shaping subsequent Turkmen movements and governance in the region.

Conclusion

The Turkmen, a branch of the Turkic Oghuz tribes, originally inhabited the steppes of present-day Mongolia and gradually migrated to the Nur region of Bukhara. Over time, increasing population and livestock transformed the Turkmen into a significant political force in Transoxiana. During Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi's reign, Turkmen tribes were relocated to Khorasan, but disturbances forced their eventual expulsion.

Under Sultan Mas'ud Ghaznavi, the Turkmen initially assisted him in his struggle for the throne against his brother Muhammad. Although relations began positively, they deteriorated as Turkmen settlements increasingly disrupted administrative order. Despite repeated military campaigns, Sultan Mas'ud was unable to suppress the Turkmen, who demanded settlement in regions such as Farah, Marw, Bawurd, Sarakhs, and Nisa. Continuous reinforcements of both military and civilian Turkmen further challenged Ghaznavid control.

Ultimately, in 432 AH (1040 CE), Sultan Mas'ud suffered a decisive defeat at the Battle of Dandāqan, which secured Turkmen dominance in northern and northwestern Afghan territories. This defeat marked a turning point, establishing the Turkmen as a permanent and influential presence in the region, with significant political and military consequences for the Ghaznavid state.

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