

ISLAM IN ASIA

VOLUME I

SOUTH ASIA



The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace

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Edited by
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PREFACE

In April 1977, an International Conference on Islam in South, Southeast and East Asia was held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A substantial part of the papers presented to that Conference are being published in two volumes: the present one, which includes articles on Islam in the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, Afghanistan and Nepal; a second volume, edited by R. Israeli and A. H. Johns, which includes material on Indonesia and China. While the articles presented are disparate in approach and treat Islamic history and civilization in South Asia in both mediaeval and modern times, they all address themselves to the peculiar problems facing Islamic minorities in a peripheral area of the Muslim world.

It is the pleasant duty of the editor to record his gratitude to the institutions and individuals who contributed to the organization of the Conference and publication of the *Proceedings*. The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, which organized the Conference, has also borne the publication expenses. The Jerusalem Van Leer Institute hosted the Conference in its sumptuous and centrally located building in Jerusalem. Gratitude is due Professor H.Z. Schiffrin, Director of the Truman Institute, for his readily available help and wise counsel; Dr R. Israeli and Dr Y. Shichor, who bore the administrative burden of organizing the Conference; Mr R. Amitai and Ms Y. Cohen, who assisted me in preparation of the index; and Dr A. Altman for improving the English style of the volume. Above all, I am deeply indebted to Norma Schneider, Director of Publications of the Truman Institute, for her devoted, efficient and highly professional work on this book.

Yohanan Friedmann

Jerusalem, 1984

CONTENTS

Preface	v
The Coming of Islam to Afghanistan, <i>Clifford Edmund Bosworth</i>	1
The Origins and Significance of the Chach Nāma, <i>Yohanan Friedmann</i>	23
Didactic Historical Writing in Indian Islam: <i>Ẓiyā al-Dīn</i> Barani's Treatment of the Reign of Sultan Muḥammad Tughluq (1324–1351), <i>Peter Hardy</i>	38
Qalandars and Related Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Dehlī Sultanate of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, <i>Simon Digby</i>	60
Early Indo-Muslim Saints and Conversion, <i>Bruce B. Lawrence</i>	109
Hindu Responses to the Muslim Presence in Maharashtra, <i>Balkrishna Govind Gokhale</i>	146
Muslim Popular Literature in Tamil: The Tamimaṅcāri Mālai, <i>David Shulman</i>	174
Iqbal in the Context of Indo-Muslim Mystical Reform Movements, <i>Annemarie Schimmel</i>	208
The Ṣūfī Khānqāhs in Modern Bihar, <i>Fritz Lehmann</i>	227
Life Cycle Ceremonies of Converted Muslims in Nepal and Northern India, <i>Marc Gaborieau</i>	241
Index	263

The Coming of Islam to Afghanistan

Clifford Edmund Bosworth

I

“Afghanistan” as a geographical and political term is a fairly recent one, although the ethnic designation “Afghan” is attested as far back as the Islamic sources of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries, that is, in the anonymous geographical treatise, the *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, and in the Ghaznavid historian ‘Utbi’s *Ta’rikh al-Yamīnī*. Apparently, it denoted Pathan tribes in the Sulaiman Mountains region of southeastern Afghanistan, and a connection has been suggested with the *Aśvaka* “horse-folk” of the *Mahābhārata*. A glance at a relief map might make one wonder at first sight whether the whole concept of Afghanistan is not an artificial one, the creation of politicians and diplomats rather than of geography and history. It is undoubtedly true that the borders of Afghanistan as we know them today were only definitively fixed in the second half of the nineteenth century, by such powers as Britain, Russia and Persia, negotiating with the kings of Afghanistan, and it is equally true that such boundaries as the one dividing Sistān between Persia and Afghanistan, or the Durand line between Afghanistan and the North West Frontier region of Pakistan, make little sense ethnically or geographically.

All through recorded history, the region which we know as Afghanistan has been a corridor for the movement of people and ideas. The mountain massifs of the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs look formidable enough on a map, but there is, in fact, a good choice of

routes and passes through them, especially through the former. The passes of the Ghorband valley, of the Salang and of the Khawak leading out of the Panjīr valley, have facilitated the march of conquering armies, and it must have been across these that the Indo-Iranian peoples first came from their Central Asian *Urheimat* to the plains of India at the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. Consequently, towns like Bāmiyān, Kapiśa (the modern Begrām, near Charikar) and Kabul, have frequently been the centre of empires dominating lands both north and south of the Hindu Kush, and sometimes comprehending Bactria and Transoxania and the plains of northern India; in pre-Islamic times these included the empires of the Sakas, the Kushans and the Hephthalites. But these routes from the north are not the only ones connecting Persia or Inner Asia with the Indian world. There is a rather more circuitous, but climatically and topographically easier route from Herat and Khurasan through southern Afghanistan, the one taken by the modern Herat to Kabul road via Girishk, Qandahar and Ghazni. From Qandahar one can take the Bolan Pass to Quetta in Baluchistan, then to Sukkur and the Lower Indus Valley, and there is also choice of two routes through the Sulaiman Mountains and Waziristan to the Middle Indus. The Sakas used this southern route to invade India, giving their name in passing to Sīstān (= *Sakastān*, "land of the Sakas", Arabic *Sijistān*); Alexander the Great sent his general Craterus back with part of the army and the captured elephants via Qandahar and Sīstān, whilst he himself marched from the Indus north through Makrān or Gedrosia.

Thus, contrary to first appearances, Afghanistan is a well-defined geographical and cultural region, and not just a buffer-zone between the Indian, Iranian and Central Asian worlds. Despite innumerable waves of invaders, some of whom have merely passed through, others of whom have stayed and merged with the indigenous population, it has retained its strongly Indo-European character, that is, Tājik or Persian, Pathan, Dardic and Kātirī. The only non-Indo-European elements there today, perhaps 12–15% of the population, are some Uzbeks, Turkmens and Kirghiz along the Oxus shores; the Turco-Mongol Hazāra transhumants in the high central Hazārajāt region, unattractive for settlement by other peoples; and the vestigial

remnants of Mongol communities in southern Ghōrāt province, recently investigated by the American anthropologists Elizabeth Bacon and H.F. Schurman.

II

However, Afghanistan has certainly been a crossroads of various religious and intellectual currents. The Sāsānid emperors of Persia endeavoured at various times not merely to defend their northeastern frontier against the barbarians from Central Asia, but also to extend their territories beyond Herat and the Oxus into Soghdia and Afghanistan. Shāpūr II dealt crushing blows to the later Kushans in the first half of the fourth century, and around 340 was able to install a Sāsānid prince in Balkh with the title *Kushan-Shāh* "Ruler of the Kushans". The last wave of the Kushans, the Kidarites, were allies of the Sāsānids, and their successors and supplanters, the Hephthalites or Chionites, were tributaries of the Sāsānids, fighting as confederates against the Roman armies in Armenia and Mesopotamia. It is at this time, the end of the fourth century, that the name "Hephthalite" and its misleading synonym "White Huns", first appears in Western Asiatic sources. The *Acts of the Martyrs of Edessa* speaks of *Hunni quidam Ephthalitae, Persarum finitimi et que ad solem habitabant orientem*. In the fifth century, they tried to throw off Sāsānid control, but Bahrām Gūr won a crushing victory near Merv, crossed the Oxus into Soghdia and installed his brother Narses in Balkh with the title *Marzbān-i Kushān* "Warden of the Kushan Marches"; it is possible that Bahrām penetrated into Hephthalite territory south of the Hindu Kush. A century or so later, the Sāsānids had again to mount an offensive against the by now extremely formidable Hephthalites, and Tabarī says that in the middle years of the sixth century, Khusrau Anūshirvān occupied Sind, Bust, Arachosia, Ṭukhāristān, Dardistān and Kabul, implying that Sāsānid arms for a brief while reached the Indus but soon afterwards had to withdraw from eastern Afghanistan because of pressure from the Western Turks to their north.

Hence, for certain limited periods parts of Afghanistan were under

Sāsānid military occupation, but more important was the continuous cultural influence exercised there by Sāsānid civilization. This is seen, for instance, in the court ceremonial of the Hephthalite kingdoms of Bactria north of the Hindu Kush and of Zābul south of it, in Hephthalite royal titulature (e.g., use of the title *Shāhanshāh* "King of Kings") and in their coin-minting practices. Sāsānid culture was linked with Zoroastrianism, for Zoroastrianism was the state church and its fortunes were closely involved with Sāsānid expansionism. It was probably planted in Herat, Balkh and other cities by Persian officials and merchants; the decline of Buddhism in Transoxania early in the seventh century seems to be linked with the state-backed introduction of Zoroastrianism. Sīstān, in particular, was strongly Zoroastrian. It is well-known that this region plays a great part in Iranian mythology and the growth of the national epic as the home of a sturdy breed of Iranian heroes. The traditions incorporated in Firdausī's *Shāh-nāma*, in Asadī Ṭūsī's *Garshāsp-nāma* and in a host of other epic poems revolve round the warriors of Sīstān and Zābulistān. According to the anonymous author of the local history, the *Ta'rikh-i Sīstān* (quoting Abu 'l-Mu'ayyad Balkhī's *Kitāb-i Garshāsp*), there was a fire-temple at Karkūya near the chief town, Zarang, built by Kay Khusrau and Rustam, and dedicated to Garshāsp, with a cult in his honour.

In the east and northeast of Afghanistan, Buddhism was very widespread up to the seventh century, above all in the valley of the upper Oxus (Bactria or Ṭukhāristān) and that of the Kabul River (Kapiśa, Gandhāra). The importance of Kapiśa and Bāmiyān in the development of the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra is well-known. Chinese sources insist on the large numbers of Māhāyāna Buddhist temples and monasteries, and the gold-adorned stupas of this region. Some of the stupas in the Kabul region are now being examined by the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang travelled through these regions in about 644, not long before the first Arab invaders appeared in Khurasan and Sīstān, and he describes Kabul and Zābulistān (sc. the region round Ghazna) as profoundly Buddhist. The Hephthalite kingdom of Bactria, north of the Hindu Kush, had adopted the Bud-

dhism of their predecessors there, the Kushans, and had made Balkh, in particular, a great Buddhist centre. The *vihāra* or monastery there of Nawasaṅghārāma (Arabic-Persian: *Nau-bahār*) has a place in Islamic history because of its connection with the Barmakī family, officials and viziers of the early Abbasid Caliphs. Before their conversion to Islam, the Barmakīs had been hereditary custodians (*pramukha*, whence the form Barmak) of the Buddhist shrine and monastery there. The Arab sources describe at length the struggles of the Arabs in Khurasan during the second half of the seventh century with Nizak, king of the northern Hephthalite kingdom and a strong Buddhist. Ibn al-Faḳīh's *Kitāb al-buldān* states that Nizak came to Balkh and bitterly reproached Barmak for deserting the faith of his fathers and becoming a Muslim, in the end killing him and several of his family. It seems that, nevertheless, Buddhism was receding in the early seventh century, possibly under the pressure of Sāsānid-Zoroastrian cultural and religious pressure; the Arab invasions naturally hastened this process of decline.

Whereas the northern Hephthalites adopted Buddhism, their kingdom south of the Hindu Kush, that of Zābul, followed a different faith. There was certainly some Buddhism there, as Hsüan-tsang says that there were many monasteries, and the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan has been excavating a Buddhist site and stupa at Ghazna. Hsüan-tsang further says that the people of Ghazna sacrifice to many hundreds of gods, and venerate the *Triratna* (sc. the "three jewels", the Buddha, the Dharma or Buddhist law, and the Saṅgha or community of the faithful). But the characteristic cult of Zābulistān, and above all of Zamīndāwar, the region to the south around Qandahar, was that of the god Zhūn or Zūn, whose cult is known to us from both Chinese and Islamic sources. Hsüan-tsang says that in the kingdom of Ts'ao-chū-cha (=Zābul), the god Shu-na is highly venerated. Further Chinese sources, dating from a generation or two before Hsüan-tsang, state that there are rich temples there, with priests, devotees and their offerings, and they stress that this cult is not a Buddhist one. Arabic sources, such as Balādhurī, describe the first Arab penetration from Sistān into Zamīndāwar by Abd al-Raḥmān b. Samura in 33/653-654, and describe the shrine of this god

Shu-na or Zhūn as the Mecca of the local people, set on a hill, the *Jabal al-Zūn*, the mountain Shu-na-szū-lo of Hsüan-tsang. The Arabic and Chinese sources further give several specific details about the god and its cult. The god's embodiment was an idol of gold, with rubies for its two eyes. Set up before the temple was the gigantic bone or vertebrae of some fish or monster. The cult was highly organized, with many priests who claimed magical and curative powers, and if occasion arose, maleficent and demoniacal ones.

The king of Zābul had the title, according to Hsüan-tsang, of Shunta, whose ancient pronunciation, according to Karlgren (*Grammata serica, Recensa*, Stockholm 1957, nn. 462c and 271b), was *dž'juen-d'at*. The Arabic and Persian sources call this ruler the *Zunbil* (this seems to be the most probable vocalization of this name), and the name's recurrence for various rulers of Zamīndāwar at various times proves that it was a title and not a personal name. In an immensely erudite and detailed study of Zhūn and its cult, "*Das Reich Zābul und der Gott Zūn*" in the *Sachau Festschrift*, in which he used both Arabic and Chinese sources, Marquart saw that in the title *Zunbil* we have what looks like a theophoric name, and suggested, on the basis of the forms *Tzoundadēer* and *Zundaber* of Greek and Latin sources on the Sāsānid conquest in the east, that the original form was the MP *Zūn-dātbar* "Zhūn the justice-bringer". Equally possible would be *Zūn-dādh* "Given by Zhūn", especially as the title SUNΔANA, probably corresponding to *Zūn-dādh*, is found on coins of the southern Hephthalite kings. Both alternatives would then give the Arabic form *Zunbil*. A different interpretation of the second element in *Zunbil* might be from OP *pati* "lord, master" (cf. MP *Ispabadh* "army-leader", *Nahapat* "religious leader, priest"), with the sound-change *d>l* as is found in Pashto. One possibility is a derivation from Persian *Zruwān/Zurwān*. Also, Scarcia has written at length on the parts played by the regions of Sistān and Zābulistān in the development of that part of the Iranian national epic concerned with Rustam and his ancestors going back to Garshāsp. He has proposed, therefore, an identification of the name Zūn or Zūr with the hero Zāl, Rustam's father; on phonological grounds, at least, this is quite feasible. But in support of *Zunbil* being originally a theophoric name, we may note

that the *Zunbils*' power did apparently have divine sanctions, and they were for instance carried by 12 men in a litter on a golden throne.

The origins and exact nature of the cult of Zhūn are obscure. Hsüan-tsang's account explains that the god came to Zamīndāwar from outside and dispossessed another, local deity from the mountain A-lu-nao. This points to the introduction of the cult by an incoming group, obviously the Chionite-Hephthalite invaders from north of the Hindu Kush. It may, therefore, be of Iranian-Central Asian origin. Professor Mario Bussagli has recently pointed out certain correspondences between the cult of Zhūn and the divine rulers in Zamīndāwar, and the sacred kingship of pre-Buddhist Tibet — the mountain to which the divine emanation descends, the giant fishbone and the serpent or dragon god known in Tibet — and has suggested a common background of Central Asian religious practices. It is also possible that Zhūn was a solar deity — as his golden embodiment might suggest — later identified with the Iranian god Mithra and the Indian ones Sūryā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. It could accordingly have acquired connections with the well-known cult of the sun-god Āditya at Multān in India, not far from Zamīndāwar. Scarcia, again, has argued for links with India, and in particular, for links between Zūn and the god Sharwa known to have been worshipped later in the Kabul valley and in Kāfiristān; he calls this last cult a proto-Shivaite one.

In any case, there is no doubt that the cult of Zhūn survived well into the early Islamic period, perhaps down to Ṣaffārid times. It seems that merchants and traders from this region of Afghanistan or the adjacent parts of India carried the cult of Zhūn up the Persian Gulf to the ports of Lower Iraq. There are some mentions of Zhūn in early Arabic sources, such as the verses of the Umayyad poet Jarīr, which refer to it as a famous pilgrimage centre. An authority quoted by Yāqūt in his *Mu'jam al-buldān* says that Zhūn was an idol in Ubulla, placed there by Indian merchants who resorted to Ubulla and Basra.

Regarding Christianity, we have little information about its presence in Afghanistan, but we do know that in late Sāsānid times

Nestorian Christianity flourished in the adjoining province of Khurasan. There were bishoprics at Tūs and Abarshahr or Nishapur, and after 553 Merv became the seat of the Nestorian Metropolitan. The Metropolitan at the time of the Arab invasions is said to have been very active in evangelizing the Turks on the upper Oxus, and it is possible that Nestorian Christianity then gained some foothold in Tūkhāristān amongst the Hephthalites. It is recorded in the Conciliar Acts of the Nestorian Church that in 549 the Patriarch Mār Abhā I sent a bishop to Bactria at the request of the Hephthalite king. During this same patriarchate, several Christian communities in Sistān and Zamīndāwar are mentioned, specifically at Zarang, Farāh, Khwāsh, Bust and al-Rukkhaj, with two bishops to look after them. As late as Maḥmūd of Ghazna's time, the church of the Christians in Zarang is still mentioned — it was sacked at the beginning of the eleventh century by Maḥmūd's pagan Indian troops — although the faith never seems to have penetrated into eastern Afghanistan and Ghazna.

Finally, we may note the undoubted presence of odd pockets of Jews in early Afghanistan, apparently already settled by the coming of Islam. The three brief Judaeo-Persian inscriptions of Tang-i Azaō have been dated to 752 (they are also, incidentally, the earliest evidences of New Persian which we possess). There was a Yahūdiyya quarter in Balkh, and that city was especially connected with the Jews in that, according to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Ezekiel had resided there. The best-known Yahūdiyya of Afghanistan, however, is that of Maimana, the chief town of the mediaeval Islamic principality of Gūzgān (at the court of whose ruler the *Hudūd al-'ālam* was written), and still a town with a Jewish community today. In 1962 an important group of Judaeo-Persian funerary inscriptions (their language being a mixture of Persian and Hebrew, with Aramaic elements in one inscription) dating from the Ghūrid period (*ca.* 1115–1215) was discovered at Jām (Fīrūzkūh?), the important Ghūrid architectural site, by the Italian Archaeological Mission, and a Jewish tombstone, with a purely Hebrew legend and dating from 1365, has been found at Kabul. One may also recall the alleged origin of the Afghans from the ten lost Jewish tribes deported from Israel by

Shalmanesser V, a legend retailed, for example, by the seventeenth century author Ni'matullāh in his *Makhzan-i Afghānī*.

III

On the eve of the Arab invasions, political authority in Afghanistan was divided between the Sāsānids on the western fringes, extending to Merv-i Rūdh in the northeast to Sīstān in the south, and the Hephthalites and their epigoni in the eastern parts. Merv-i Shāhajān, called "Royal Merv" to distinguish it from Merv-i Rūdh "Merv on the river", sc. the Murghāb, was the seat of Sāsānid political and military power in the east. It was to here that the last Sāsānid Emperor, Yazdigird III, was driven by the advancing Arabs and killed, giving the city the opprobrious name of *Khudā-dushman* "hostile to God". Sīstān was administered separately from Khurasan, being considered a part of the South Persian quarter, although in Islamic times it was usually linked with Khurasan.

The greater part of what is now Afghanistan was under the rule of princes or local lords of Hephthalite origin, roughly divided into two groups, one north of the Hindu Kush and one south. In the early sixth century, the northern Hephthalites had been powerful and united, and from their capital of Balkh had for a while dominated the Sāsānids and made the Emperor Kavādh their protégé, in 499 giving him military help to regain his throne after a temporary deposition. But after the middle years of the sixth century, the Persians under Khusrau Anūshirvān once again grew strong; the Hephthalite kingdom was attacked from the north by the Western Turks, and by 567 had apparently split up into a number of principalities, some acknowledging Turkish suzerainty, some that of the Sāsānids. By the time of the Arab invasions, Turkish influence had increased, with Turkish ethnic elements now settled along the upper Oxus; Hsüan-tsang reports that there were 27 principalities in Ṭukhāristān, all acknowledging the Western Turks or Türgesh. The Turkish title *Yabghu* (Arabic, *Jabbūya*) was borne by one of the most important rulers there, and when the Arabs first appeared, they recognized this

Yabghu as king of Ṭukhārīstān. Similarly Balādhurī describes Herat, Bādghīs and Pūshang as being at this time under a "mighty man" (*ʿazīm*). The fertile district of Bādghīs had been a favourite dwelling-place of the Hephthalite kings, and Hephthalite elements must have come to form part of the local population. Perhaps local speech habits were affected, for the geographer Maqdisī describes the Persian dialect of Herat as uncouth and barbarous, fit only for a latrine.

South of the Hindu Kush, including the old Kushan kingdoms of Kapiśa and Gandhāra, lay the Hephthalite kingdom of Zābul, centred on the ancient city of Ghazna and the surrounding district of Zābulistān. The name *Zābul*, and other forms of it like *Jāuvla*, *Jāwul*, is attested from the end of the fifth century on Hephthalite coins and in their inscriptions in India; it seems to have been originally that of a Hephthalite tribe. In the early sixth century, the powerful southern Hephthalite kingdom produced two outstanding monarchs, Toramāna and Mihirakula, who overthrew the declining Gupta Empire in India and for a time established Hephthalite authority there; Mihirakula has achieved fame in Indian history as a fierce persecutor of Buddhism and a propagator of the cult of the Sun-God Mihira. After Mihirakula's death in 544, the southern kingdom became less united, and a century later Hsüan-tsang found two powerful states, centred on Kapiśa and Zābulistān respectively; in both of these, Indian cultural influences seem to have been noteworthy.

IV

After moving eastwards across the Iranian plateau and occupying Khurasan, the Arabs reached the mountain fringes of Afghanistan during 'Uthmān's caliphate. Now, instead of the demoralized Sāsānid remnants, the Arabs faced the tenacious opposition of local Turks and Hephthalites. In 652 'Abdallāh b. 'Āmir, governor of Basra, subdued Merv, Balkh, Herat and Bādghīs, but had to retreat shortly afterwards. In 653 al-Aḥnaf b. Qays raided Balkh, but the city was not definitely taken till Mu'āwiya's reign. On one of these expeditions,

the Buddhist monastery and shrine of Nau-bahār was sacked and destroyed by the Arabs. After Yazdigird was killed, his son Firūz III became titular emperor of Persia, and never ceased to dream of regaining his throne, if necessary with Turkish or Chinese help. Firūz died in 672 at the court of the T'ang emperor, but for nearly a century various Sāsānid descendants continued to hover round the borders of Transoxania, and Chinese ambitions in this area were not stilled till 751.

In the second half of the seventh century, the spearhead of resistance to the Arabs was Tarkhān Nizak, the Buddhist Hephthalite ruler of Ṭukhāristān, and from his base at Balkh, Nizak kept the Arabs from entering Bactria for a considerable number of years. The Arabs were at this time deeply divided amongst themselves both by the tribal divisions of Qays and Yaman and by the rival caliphates of the Umayyads in Damascus and 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr in Mecca and Medina and much of the eastern part of the caliphate. Thus, the governor of Khurasan, Salm b. Ziyād, and his successor, 'Abdallāh b. Khāzim, supported the cause of Ibn al-Zubayr until in 692 al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf finally took Mecca and killed the anti-caliph, after which 'Abd al-Malik appointed his own nominee in the east, Umayya b. 'Abdallāh. Such factors as this inhibited the Arabs from consolidating their position. In Transoxania the people of Bukhara and Soghdia rose and ejected them. In 658 the imperial Chinese government officially annexed all the territories formerly held by the Western Turks, including Transoxania, and apparently established Firūz as a puppet ruler in eastern Khurasan. The practical effect of these actions was small, but they greatly increased Chinese prestige and to some extent strengthened the Soghdians' will to resist the Arabs.

It was really the great Arab governor Qutayba b. Muslim (705-714) who made firm the Arab hold on northern Afghanistan and Khurasan, as also on Khwārazm and Transoxania. He managed by a clever policy of conciliation and diplomacy to bring together the Arab tribal factions and to associate the local Persians in the new Arab régime. In 705 he isolated Nizak in Bādghis and persuaded him to sign a peace treaty and surrender. Nizak was by now a very old man, but he determined on a last act of resistance. He visited Balkh

and the Buddhist shrines to invoke divine aid. Then he vainly tried to raise the local princes of northern Afghanistan, but was captured in the Baghlân region by a ruse of Qutayba's. After that, he was treacherously executed on the orders of al-Ḥajjāj. In contemporary Arabic poetry by the Khurasanian poet Nahār b. Tawsi'a, the execution is praised as a glorious deed in defence of Islam and is compared to the Prophet's massacre of the Jewish tribes of Qurayza and an-Nadhīr in Medina. Nizak's death meant the end of some 250 years of Hephthalite domination in northern Afghanistan, during which time this people, originally from the north, had become identified with the region's interests and had led resistance to the incoming Arabs. The local ruler of Chaghāniyān north of the Oxus, the *Chaghān-Khudā* Tish, now submitted peacefully to Qutayba, whilst in Ṭukhāristān a local prince with the title of *Yabghu* remained.

But after Qutayba's death, there was a general recession of Arab power in Central Asia, and in 718 the princes of Soghdia sent an embassy to China seeking help against the Arabs. The latter were routed in Farghāna in 724, the so-called "Day of Thirst", by the allied forces of the Soghdians and Türgesh, and Arab prestige all over the East slumped. The Qaghan of the Türgesh appeared in Khuttal two years later, and it required the efforts of Asad b. 'Abdallāh al-Qasrī in the 730s firmly to secure this region for Islam and to maintain a foothold across the Oxus in Khuttal. It was now possible to extend southwards into the Hindu Kush region, and in 725 the ruler of Gharchistān, the *Shīr* (< OP *Xsāθriya*), became a Muslim. Yet it was a long time before the Arabs could make lasting conquests in the Kapiśa and Kabul regions. Bāmiyān, described by Hsüan-tsang as a great Buddhist centre, with ten monasteries and a thousand monks, only gradually became Muslim in the Abbasid period. The excavation and painting of the caves associated with the two great figures of the Buddha carved in the cliffs near the town continued well into the eighth century. The local rulers were probably of Hephthalite origin, and like the rulers of Gharchistān, bore the title of *Shīr*. Exactly when these rulers and their principality became Muslim is very obscure, and the historical evidence is confused and contradictory. Ya'qūbī places the conversion of the *Shīr* in either al-Manṣūr's or al-Mahdī's caliphate,