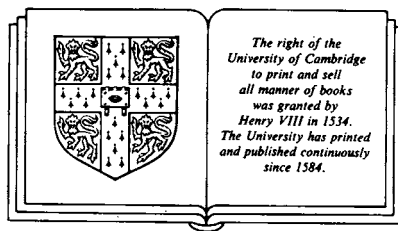


TURKO-PERSIA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

EDITED
BY
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1 Introduction: the Turko-Persian tradition

ROBERT L. CANFIELD

This book is about some developments in the history of a distinctive culture that arose, flourished for several hundred years, and then seemed to fade in early modern times as European influences were imposed upon it; however, recently it has been the culture to which contemporary Muslims of inland Asia have turned for inspiration and the expressive means to represent their interests.¹ Turko-Persian Islamicate culture, as it will be called here,² is an ecumenical mix of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic elements that melded in the ninth and tenth centuries in eastern Iran – that is, in Khurasan and Transoxiana. From there it was carried by conquering peoples to neighboring areas, so that it eventually became the predominant culture of the ruling and elite classes of West, Central and South Asia.³ In this introduction I will trace the rise and florescence of this culture and point out the topics that receive particular attention in this book. For a detailed chronology of events, please see the chart, pp. 217–29.

ORIGINS

The underlying stratum from which Turko-Persian Islamicate culture sprang was Persian. Two Persian empires – the Achaemenids of the

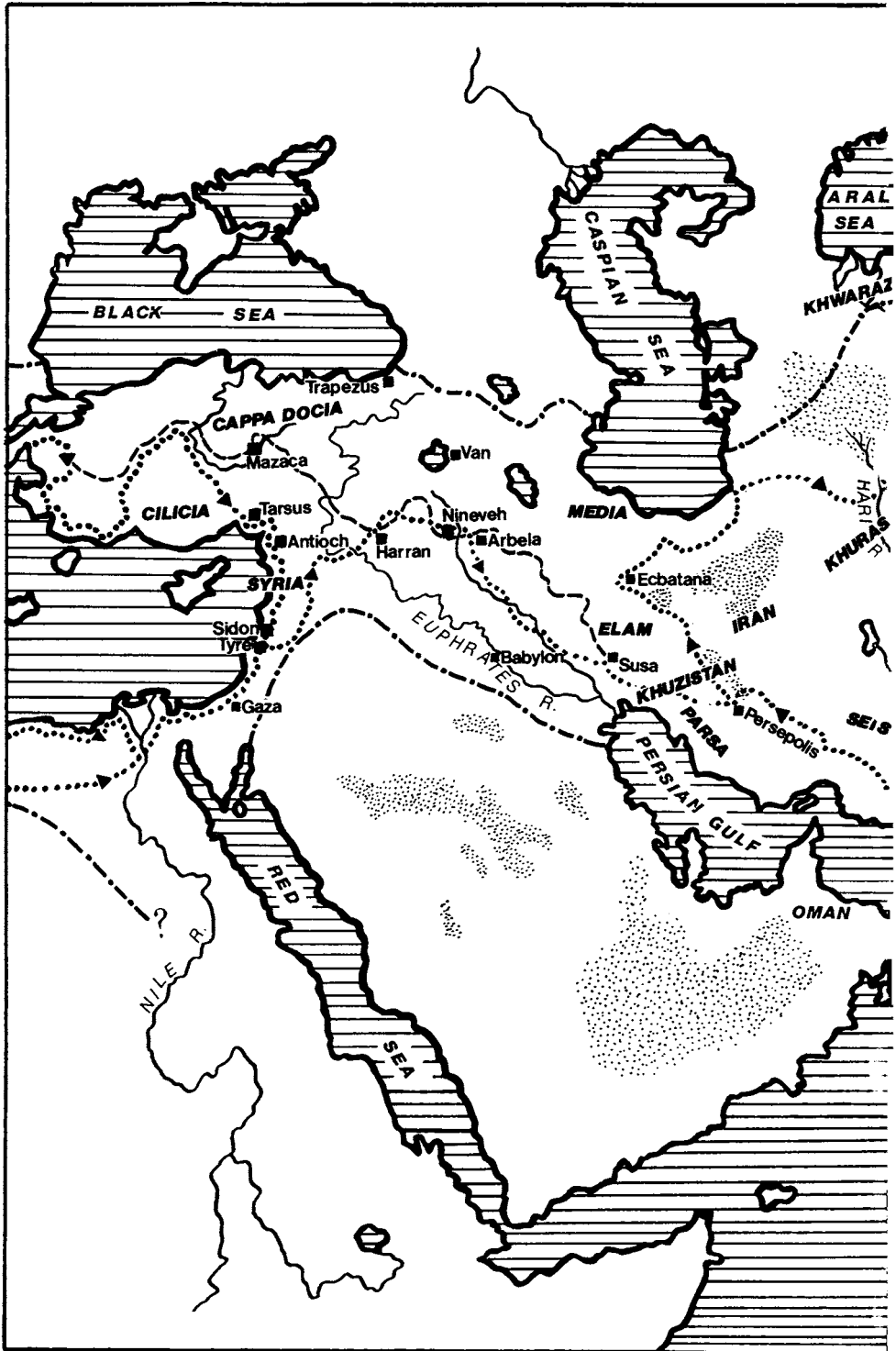
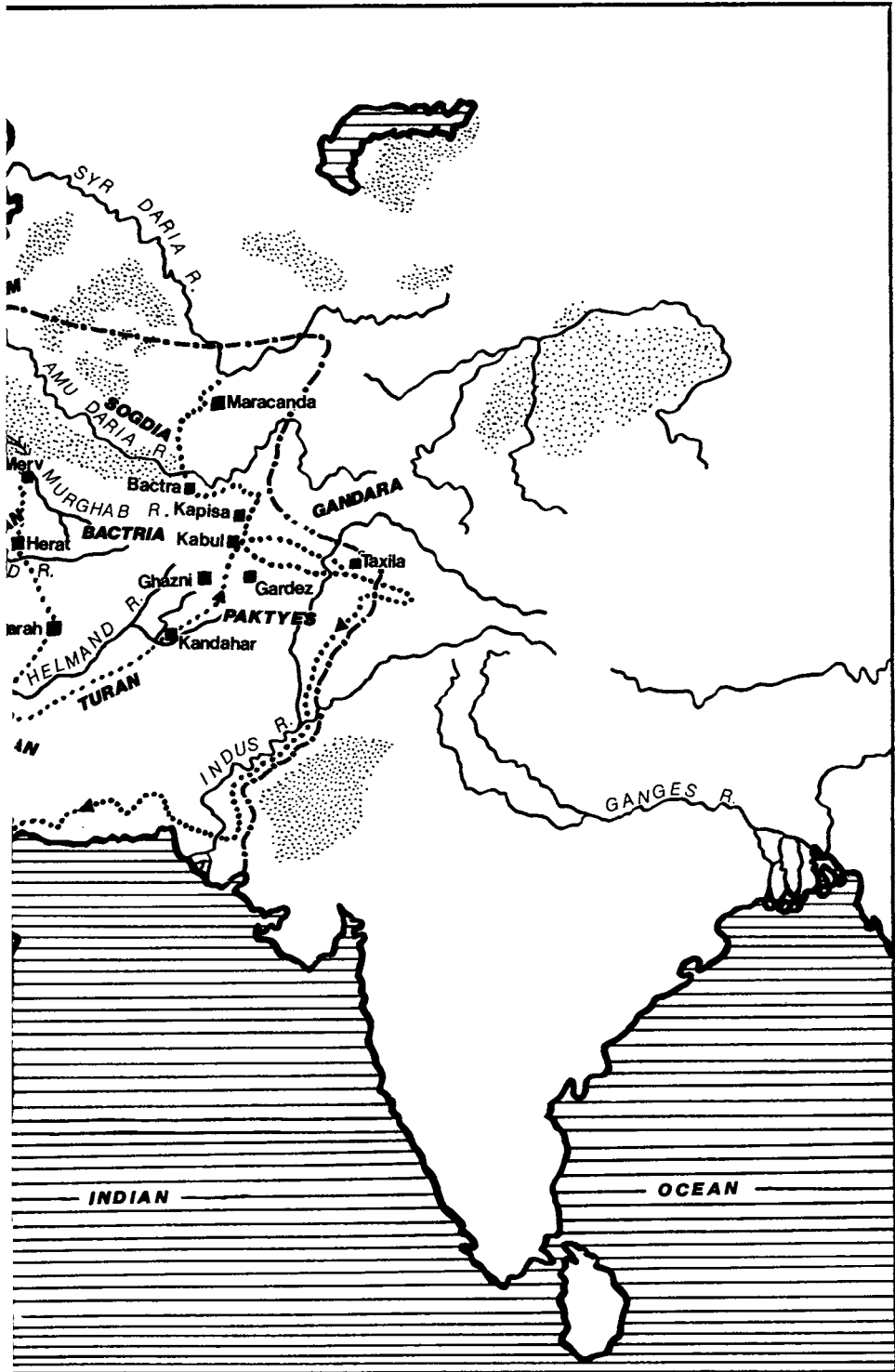


FIGURE 1 Domains of the Achaemenids (500–330 BC) and the path of Alexander (333–323 BC)



fourth and fifth centuries BC and the Sasanians of the third to seventh centuries AD, both centered in south-western Iran – disseminated Persian customs and ideas across most of the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indus River. These customs included the veneration of sacred shrines, reverence for the spirits of the dead, and the tying of rags to sacred trees for protection and blessing (Yarshater 1988:4). The ideas that were propagated included the recognition of social hierarchies and elaborate rules of deference towards rulers. The emperors, to emphasize their majesty, built lofty palaces, cultivated luxuriant gardens, presided from grand thrones, and wore huge crowns; they also patronized specialists of “high” culture: architects, artists, fine craftsmen, poets, and scholars. Claiming total power, Persian emperors ruled as warrior-chiefs, as protectors of the realm, builders of civilization, cultivators of wastelands, and paragons of equity (Yarshater 1988:5–12; Banani 1988; Hanaway 1988; Perry 1978:203). Subsequent generations celebrated in particular the glory of the Achaemenid emperors, Cyrus and Darius, and after the Hellenic invasion, Alexander. Persian legends about great heroes nourished hopes among the populace for great rulers who would arise to punish the wicked and fill the world with justice.

When the Iranian peoples of Persia (south-western Iran) and Khurasan and Transoxiana were overwhelmed by the Arab Muslim armies in the seventh and eighth centuries, they became part of an empire much larger than any previously under Persian rule. Under the Arab caliphs, especially in the “high” caliphal period (AD 692–945), a cosmopolitan culture was wrought from the strands of many traditions: commercial and tribal law from Arabia, philosophy from the Hellenic world, architecture from Syria and Persia, and astrology, medicine, music, and mathematics from India.⁴ The language that integrated this culture was Arabic, and of it many Iranians became masters; Iranians made important contributions to the scholarship and works of fine art that were burgeoning in the Islamic empire.

At the same time the Arab conquerors of Iran were being Persianized, for although they were originally garrisoned as soldiers, they soon settled in the towns and cities, especially in Khurasan, where conquerors and subjects melded into a single Persianate society (Daniel 1979:19–22; Frye 1975a). The culture that emerged in Khurasan and Transoxiana reflected a great deal of the culture that had been in place before the coming of Islam. Middle Persian, the

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language of Sasanian Persia (whose written form is called Pahlavi), continued in wide use. Well into the second Islamic century (the eighth century AD) it was the medium of administration in the eastern lands of the caliphate – that is, in the Iranian plateau and Transoxiana. When Arabic did become the language of official matters in this sector of the Islamic world, it was itself reshaped by Persian influences, as was Persian by Arabic (Clinton 1988:75–7; Ullah 1963:46). But despite the Arabicization of public affairs, the Iranian peoples retained much of their pre-Islamic outlook and way of life, adjusted to fit the demands of Islamic dogma. They still hoped for a savior who would bring justice, only they no longer called him the “Soshyant” but the “Mahdi”; they still believed the dead were tested at a bridge into eternal life on the Day of Judgment, only they called the bridge “Serat” instead of “Chinrat”; and their ancestral parents, whom they had known as “Mashay” and “Mashyana”, they now called “Adam” and “Hawwa” (Yarshater 1988:4).

Towards the end of the first Islamic century, the Iranians began to resent the cost of sustaining the Arab caliphs, the Umayyads – who had become not only oppressive, but also blatantly profane – and in the second Islamic century (eighth century AD) some of the Iranian peoples rose up against the Umayyad caliphs, sparking a general uprising that eventually brought another family, the Abbasids, into the caliphal office. Under the Abbasids, Persianate customs became the style of the ruling elite. Affecting the demeanor of Sasanian Persian emperors, the Abbasids wore Persian clothing, instituted such Persian offices as vizier and executioner, established their new capital, Baghdad, near the site of the Sasanian capital, and like the Achaemenids and Sasanians erected grand palaces and supported artists and scholars who celebrated their rule. The Abbasid caliphate at its nadir was the climax of Persianate panoply: they were “remote in a world of awesome luxury, walled off by an elaborate courtly etiquette, whose casual word was obeyed like divine law” (Hodgson 1974 I:283).

In the ninth and tenth centuries there were movements, political and cultural, among the Iranian peoples that indicated a growing frustration with the Abbasid caliphate and the Arabic hegemony. Although the Abbasid caliphs were brought to power with the support of the Iranian peoples, they soon lost their grip on Iranian territories. First, their governors in Khurasan, the Tahirids (822–73), became semi-independent; then a group of bandits from Sistan, the Saffarids

(867–908) overran the eastern lands. When the Samanids (819–1004) who were based in Transoxiana and Khurasan replaced them, they remained essentially autonomous (although they showed perfunctory deference to the caliph). Also, in the ninth and tenth centuries there were a number of radical popular movements among the Iranian peoples that were apparently inspired by pre-Islamic religious impulses (these would later be called “extremist” [*ghālī*] by Muslim heresiographers). And in the tenth century in Iraq itself the Abbasids were subjected to the rule of an Iranian tribe, the Buyids (932–1062).

EMERGENCE

The separation of the eastern lands from caliphal control and the rise of radical religious and social movements reflected the growing assertiveness of the Iranian peoples. It was finally to be expressed in a distinctive culture that would become the dominant culture of West, Central, and South Asia, and the source of innovations elsewhere in the Islamicate world. It would persist, at least in the form of the Ottoman Empire, into the present century. This new culture was marked by the use of the New Persian language as a medium of administration and literature, by the rise of Persianized Turks to administrative control, by a new political importance for the *‘ulamā*, and by the development of an ethnically composite Islamicate society.

New Persian

The New Persian language emerged as the idiom of administration and literature in the ninth century in Khurasan and Transoxiana. Middle Persian (called Pahlavi in its written form) had been the *lingua franca* of the region before the Arab invasion, but afterwards Arabic became the preferred medium of literary expression. The Iranian Tahirids continued to use Persian as an informal language (although for them Arabic was the “only proper language for recording anything worthwhile, from poetry to science” [Frye 1975a:1921]), as did the Saffarids (ibid.:188–200), but the Samanids made Persian a language of learning and formal discourse. The language that appeared under their patronage in the ninth and tenth centuries was a new form of Persian, based on the Middle Persian of pre-Islamic times but enriched by a copious Arabic vocabulary and written in the Arabic script. The

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Samanids began to record their court affairs in this language as well as in Arabic, and they used it as the main idiom of public declaration. Under their patronage this Persian language became, along with Arabic, an idiom of learning and *belles-lettres* (the earliest great poetry in New Persian was written for the Samanid court). Besides using Persian for official purposes the Samanids encouraged the translation of religious works from Arabic into Persian. Even the learned authorities of Islam, the *‘ulamā*, began to use Persian to appeal to the public, although they still used Arabic as the medium of scholarship. One effect of the wide application of Persian in this society was that the marginal Iranian peoples were incorporated into the Islamic ecumene; Iranian speakers in the marches of Khurasan and Transoxiana began to imbibe and contribute to Islamic learned culture (Frye 1965; 1975a:200ff.).

The crowning literary achievement in the early New Persian language appeared as the Samanid dynasty was fading. The *Shāhnāma* of Firdowsi, presented to the court of Mahmud in Ghazni (r. 998–1030), was more than a literary achievement; it was a kind of Iranian nationalistic memoir. By the time Firdowsi wrote his great epic poem, the Iranian peoples were looking back to their Persian heritage, and Firdowsi galvanized Iranian nationalistic sentiments by invoking pre-Islamic Persian heroic imagery. “Perhaps no single man of letters, with the possible exception of Homer, has had such a profound and decisive effect on the language and life of his people” (Banani 1988:109). Firdowsi enshrined in literary form the most treasured stories of popular folk-memory – written, moreover, in a style largely free of Arabic forms.⁵ It is perhaps because Firdowsi captured Persian nationalistic images in the cadences of poetry that poetry became “the art *par excellence* of Persia, and her salient cultural achievement” (Yarshater 1988:15; Mottahedeh 1985:161–2). In later generations poetry, including especially lines from Firdowsi, became a common source of sayings, even among Iranians who could not read. Illiterate peoples in the Persian-speaking world have for generations learned by heart the lines of Firdowsi and other great Persian poets and used them as sayings and proverbs. Poetry has often been a powerful idiom of popular protest.

Turkish supremacy

As New Persian appeared under the cultivation of the Samanid court other developments, social and structural, were taking place that the court did not foster. One of these was the ascension to power of Persianized Turks. These Turks would be the main patrons of Persianate culture, for they brought it with them from Transoxiana and Khurasan as they subjugated Western and Southern Asia. Turkish political ascendancy in the Samanid period was manifest in three tenth- and eleventh-century developments: in the decay of Samanid territories, which fell to Turks; in the fall of the Samanid ruling institution to its Turkish generals; and in the rise of Turkish pastoralists in the countryside.

An early dramatic indication of the rise of Turks in Samanid times was the loss of their southern territories to one of their Turkish slaves (*ghulāms*), who was supposed to be governing on their behalf. This Turk, with the help of a coterie of other Turkish slaves, set himself over the southeastern extremities of Samanid territories, ruling from the city of Ghazni. The empire he founded became the most powerful in the east since the Abbasid caliphs had been at their peak, and his capital at Ghazni became second only to Baghdad in cultural elegance (Bosworth 1963). It attracted not only Turkic warriors but also many learned authorities of Persian and Arabic culture – poets, historians, linguists, and mathematicians (Firdowsi's epic poem was presented at their court). The Ghaznavids (989–1149) were essentially Persianized Turks who in the manner of the pre-Islamic Persians encouraged the development of high culture.

Already before the Ghaznavid Turks broke away, however, the Samanid rulership was internally falling to its Turkish servants. The Samanids had their own guard of Turkish slaves, who were headed by a chamberlain, and a Persian- and Arabic-speaking bureaucracy, headed by a vizier. Besides these institutions there was an army, composed of mostly Turkish slaves, and a palace school, mainly populated by Turkish youths, where the servants of the court were prepared for service. By the latter part of the tenth century, as the Samanid rulers were themselves preoccupied with "high" culture, they gave the direction of their army to Turkish generals. These generals eventually had effective control over all Samanid affairs.

As these Turks were gaining control of the Samanid rulership from

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within, other Turks, the Qarakhanids (999–1140), were gaining pre-eminence over the countryside. The Qarakhanids were pastoralists from noble backgrounds and they cherished their Turkish ways. As they gained strength they fostered the development of a new Turkish literature alongside the Persian and Arabic literatures that had arisen earlier.⁶ As the tenth century ended, the Turkish generals of the Samanid regime gave way to the pastoralist Qarakhanids.

Social prominence of the 'ulamā

Another trend that began in Samanid times was the growth of the public influence of the 'ulamā, the learned scholars of Islam. In early Samanid times the 'ulamā were but one of three kinds of learned authorities, the other two being the scribes (who served in the bureaucracy), and the literati. Early in the Samanid period these were relatively equal in their influence, but the 'ulamā grew in prominence as the Samanids gave special support to Sunnism, possibly to emphasize their difference from their Shi'ite neighbors, the Buyids. In particular, the Samanids supported the Sunni 'ulamā of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence in opposition to the Shafi'is. Hanafi jurists enjoyed a strong position in the city of Bukhara early in the Samanid period (ninth century), and their influence grew until, as the Samanids declined, they became increasingly involved in city affairs. (Hanafi jurists became particularly powerful under the Samanids' successors, the Qarakhanids, when Bukhara became a center of Hanafi learning, although other parts of Transoxiana and Khurasan remained strongly Shafi'i.) It was, in fact, the decline of the Samanids in the tenth century and the rise of the Qarakhanids that established the dominance of the 'ulamā in the cities, for as societal stability weakened, the network of recognized Islamic authorities became the alternative social instrument for the maintenance of public order. By alliance with the Qarakhanids, who preferred to preside from outside the cities, the 'ulamā became the effective leaders of the cities. From their new positions of power they brought the bureaucratic class under their influence and eventually conjoined it with themselves (Frye 1965; 1975a:200ff.).

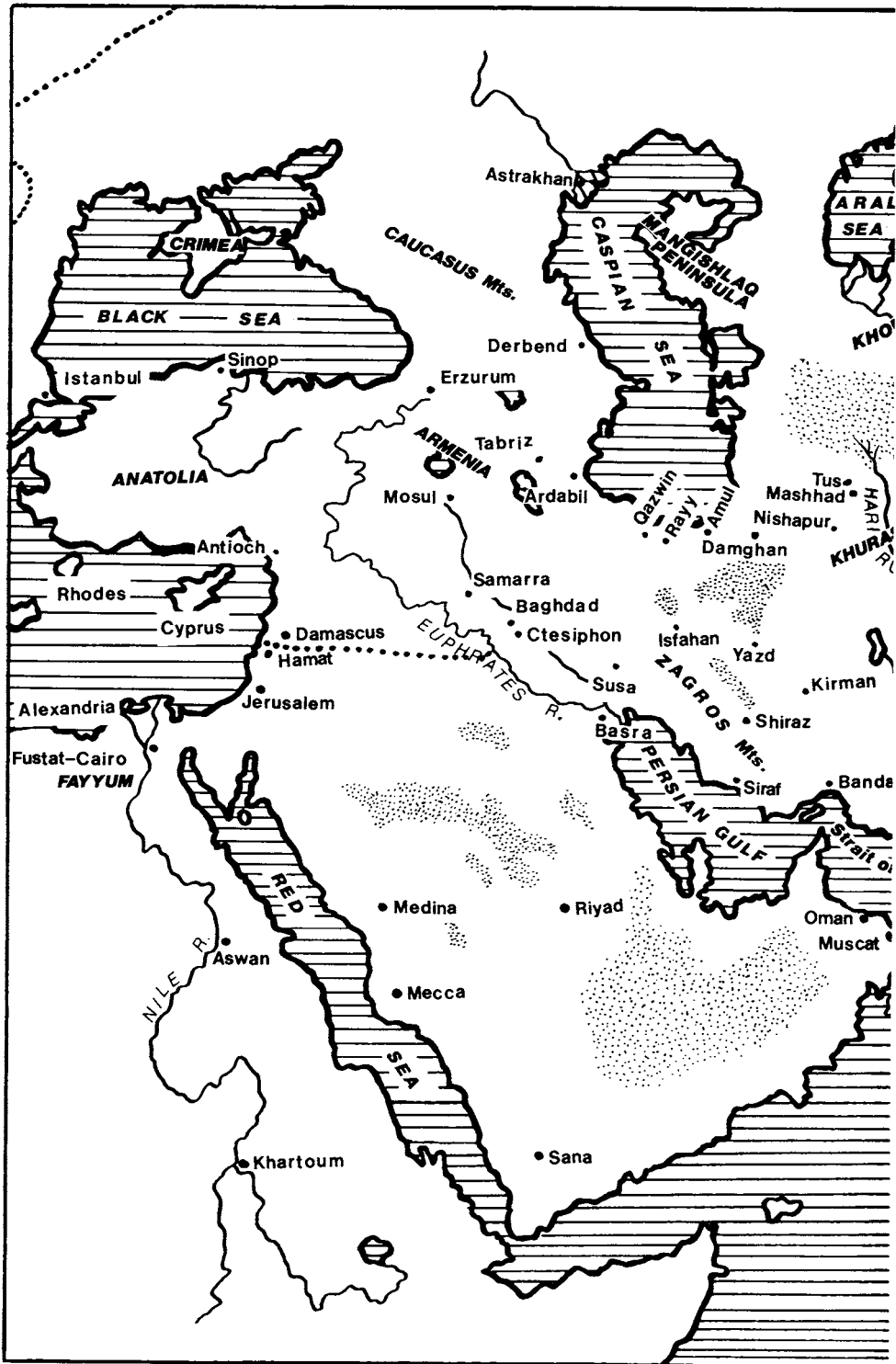
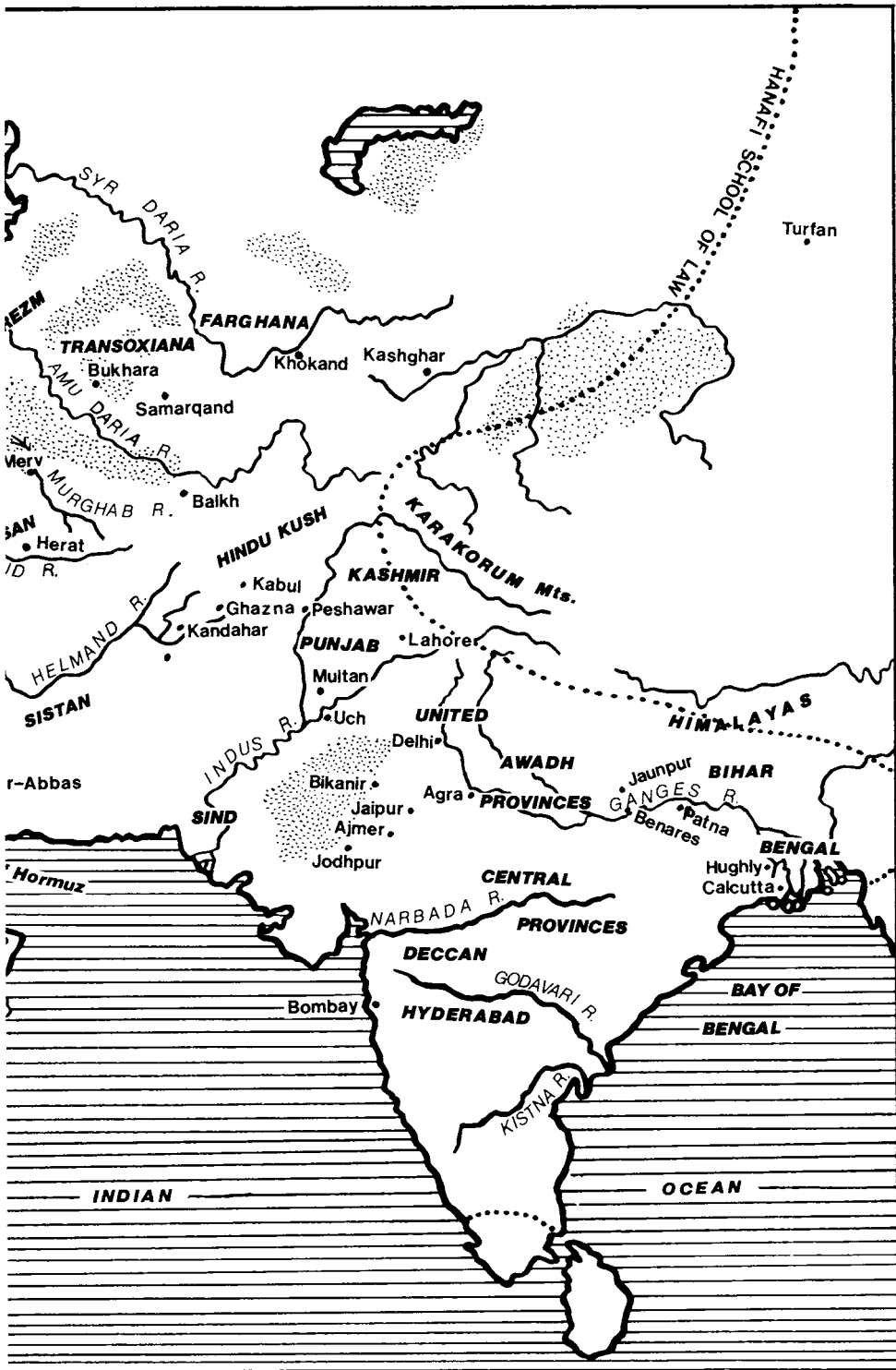


FIGURE 2 Territories of Turko-Persian culture and environs in medieval Islamic times



Composite society

Another development was taking place in this society that would affect the shape of Islamicate society, namely the formation of an ethnically and dogmatically diverse society. The eastern lands of the caliphate were ethnically and religiously still very diverse. Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians still existed in fair numbers, as did several minority Islamic sects. As the Samanids declined, security decayed in the countryside, and these diverse peoples withdrew in great numbers from their farms and towns and took refuge in the cities. Bukhara and Samarqand swelled and ethnic and sectarian neighborhoods formed, most of them physically sequestered behind walls, each with its own markets, caravansarais, and public squares. At the same time the religious authorities of these non-Muslim credal communities became their spokesmen, just as the *'ulamā* were for the Muslim community; they began also to oversee internal communal affairs. Thus, alongside the rise of the *'ulamā* there was a corresponding rise in the political importance of the religious leaders of other doctrinal communities.

A composite urban society thus took form as the Samanid dynasty gave way to the Qarakhanids in the eleventh century. The ruling institution was dominated by Turks of various sorts, some highly urbanized and Persianized, some rural and still very Turkish. It was managed by bureaucrats and *'ulamā* who used both Persian and Arabic. And its literati participated in both the Arabic and the Persian traditions of high culture extant in the wider Islamicate world. The credal communities of the cities retained their local Iranian dialects. This composite culture was the beginning of the Turko-Persian variant of Islamicate culture. It was "Persianate" in that it was centered on a lettered tradition of Iranian origin; it was Turkish in so far as it was for many generations patronized by rulers of Turkic ancestry; and it was "Islamicate" in that Islamic notions of virtue, permanence, and excellence infused discourse about public issues as well as the religious affairs of the Muslims, who were the presiding elite (Hodgson 1974 1:58). The agglutination of these elements into an Islamicate society had a far-reaching impact on the religion of Islam. For Islam was thereafter disengaged from the Arab background and bedouin mores from which it had sprung, and it became a far richer, more adaptable, and universal culture (Frye 1965:vii; 1975a:200-7).

The appearance of New Persian, the ascendancy of Turks to power

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in place of the Iranian Samanids, the rise of the *'ulamā* in the cities, and the development of an ethnically and credally complex urban society thus marked the emergence of a new Islamicate culture. The transformation became increasingly evident as this Turko-Persian Islamicate culture was exported into the wider region of Western and Southern Asia.

EXTENSION AND FIRST FLOWERING

The Turko-Persian Islamicate culture that emerged under the Samanids and the Qarakhanids was carried by succeeding dynasties into Western and Southern Asia – in particular, by the Seljuqs (1040–1118) and their successor states who presided over Iran, Syria, and Anatolia until the thirteenth century; and by the Ghaznavids, who in the same period dominated Afghanistan and India. Because of their strength and prosperity these two dynasties together drew the center of gravity of the Islamicate world eastward. And under them trends that had been set in motion in the Samanid period were established as institutions that stabilized this Islamicate society into a form that would persist, at least in Western Asia, until the twentieth century.

The Ghaznavids, who first carried the Islamicate culture into the Indian subcontinent, were eventually drawn further into India by its wealth. They moved their capital from Ghazni to Lahore, which they turned into another center of Islamicate culture. We have noted how the early Ghaznavids by their patronage encouraged the production of literary and scholarly works. Under the later Ghaznavids poets and scholars from Kashgar, Bukhara, Samarqand, Baghdad, Nishapur, and Ghazni congregated in Lahore. Thus, the Turko-Persian Islamicate culture of Khurasan and Transoxiana was brought deep into India (Ikram 1964:36); it would be taken further in the thirteenth century.

The Seljuqs, who brought this culture westward into Iran, Iraq, and Syria, were the successors of the Qarakhanids in Transoxiana. Also pastoralists, although of more humble origin, the Seljuqs won a decisive battle with the Ghaznavids and then swept into Khurasan. Pressing westward they brought Turko-Persian Islamicate culture into western Iran and Iraq. Thereafter western Iran (Persia) and eastern Iran (Khurasan and Transoxiana) became the heartland of Persianate language and culture. As the Seljuqs came to dominate Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia, they carried this Turko-Persian Islamicate culture

beyond this heartland and made it the culture of their courts in the region to as far west as the Mediterranean Sea.

Several important institutional trends, already evident under the Samanids, gained strength under the Seljuqs and the Ghaznavids. The Islamic religious institutions became more organized and Sunni orthodoxy became more codified. In particular, the great jurist/theologian al-Ghazali proposed a synthesis of Sufism and the *shari'a* that became the basis of a richer Islamic theology. Moreover, formulating the Sunni concept of the division between temporal and religious authority, he provided the theological basis for the existence of the sultanate, a temporal office that existed alongside the caliphate, which was by that time merely a religious office. The main institutional means of establishing a consensus of the *'ulamā* on these dogmatic issues were the *madrasas*, formal Islamic schools that granted licensure to teach. First established under the Seljuqs, these schools became means of uniting the Sunni *'ulamā* who as a body legitimated the rulerships of the sultans (indeed al-Ghazali was a teacher in a *madrasa* founded by a Seljuq vizier). The bureaucracies were also staffed by graduates of the *madrasas* so that both the *'ulamā* and the bureaucracies were under the influence of esteemed professors at the *madrasas* (Frye 1975a:224–30).

The period of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries was a time of great cultural florescence in Western and Southern Asia. In spite of political fragmentation and much ethnic diversity in the region from the Mediterranean to the mouth of the Ganges there was, among the elite Muslim classes, a great deal of shared culture. In this time "Iran . . . truly asserted itself as the most lively component of the Islamic *oikoumenē* . . . [This was] a brilliant period of Persian literature and art, [when] . . . the Persian literature of the time was greater than the Arabic; [when] it was Persians who for the most part . . . served as intellectual and political advisers for the Turkish princes; [when] . . . so many themes and ideas of art and architecture were carried from east to west" (Grabar 1964:45).

DEVASTATIONS, RENEWALS, AND MATURITY

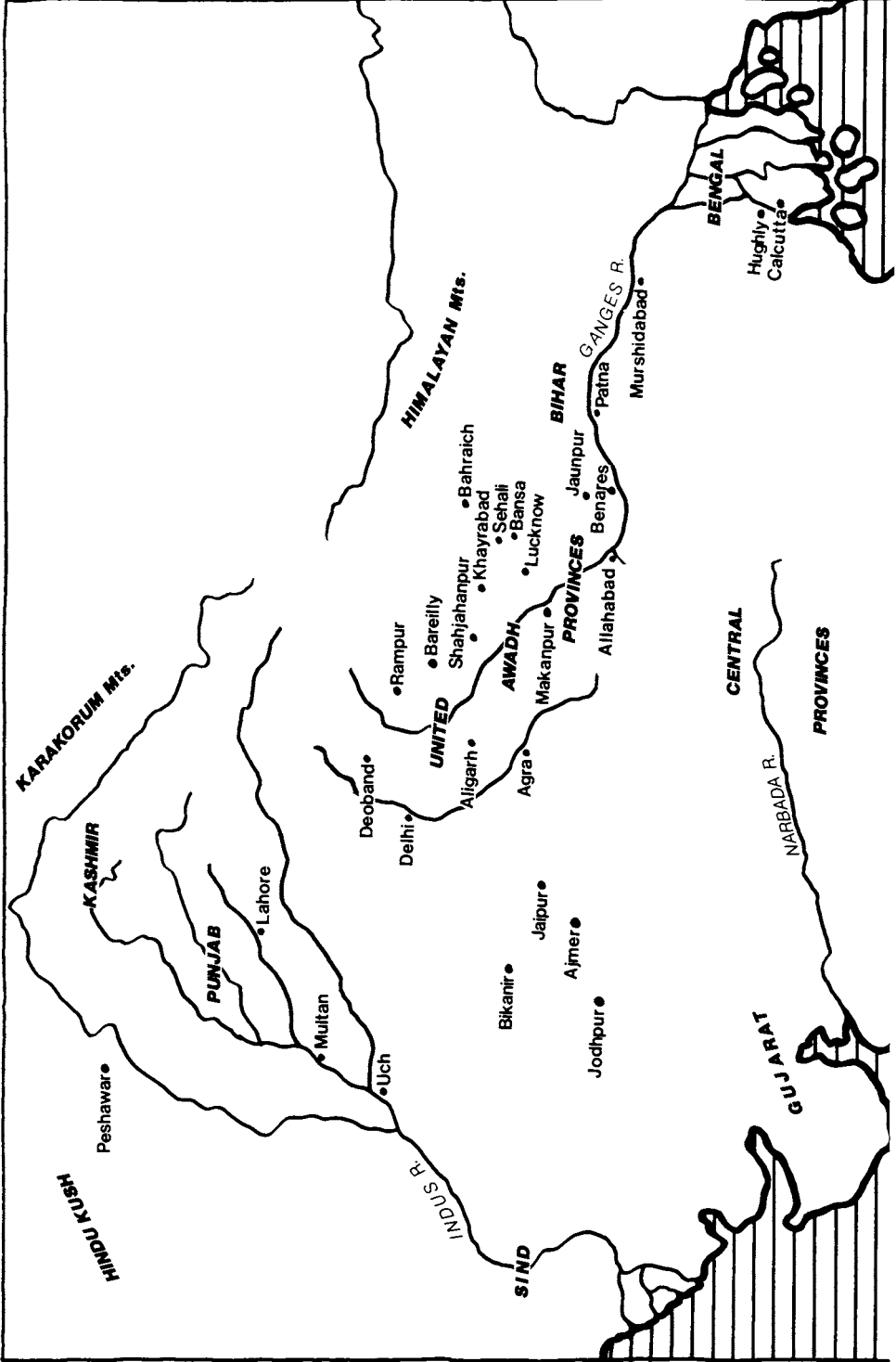
The predominant new impulses that shaped the culture of the Turko-Persian world in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries

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came out of inland Asia in the form of invading armies. Although the armies of the Mongols (1220–58) and of Timur (Tamerlane, c. 1336–1405) laid waste the urban societies of Central and West Asia, they also had the effect of stimulating the development of Persianate culture. One reason for this was the new concentrations of specialists of high culture that were created by the invasions, for many people were forced to seek refuge in a few safe havens; the most notable of those havens was India, where scholars, poets, musicians, and fine artisans intermingled and cross-fertilized. Another reason was the broad peace secured by the huge imperial systems that were established by the Mongols (in the thirteenth century) and the Timurids (in the fifteenth century); for in the quieter periods when travel was safe, scholars and artists, ideas and skills, and fine books and artifacts, circulated freely over a wide area. Also, importantly, the Mongols and Timurids deliberately patronized high culture. Under their countenance new styles of architecture developed, Persian literature was encouraged, and miniature painting and book production flourished. And under the Timurids Turkish poetry prospered, based on the vernacular known as Chaghatai (today called Uzbek).

In this period the Turko-Persian culture of India prospered. The Ghaznavids, however, were no longer in power, having lost their position in the twelfth century shortly before the first Mongol invasion of Transoxiana and Khurasan. Another Muslim dynasty, the Ghorids, had disgorge from the Hindu Kush mountains, possessed Ghazni (which they burned) and taken Lahore. Pressing further into the sub-continent, they made Delhi their capital. The Ghorids were themselves soon overtaken by their own slave guards, who were mainly Turks and Mongols (along with some Tajiks, Khaljis and Afghans), so that from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries India was dominated by “slave kings” who ruled as sultans in Delhi. It was their society that was enriched by the influx of Islamic scholars, historians, architects, musicians, and other specialists of high Persianate culture that fled the Mongol devastations of Transoxiana and Khurasan. After the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, Delhi became the most important cultural center of the Muslim east (Ikram 1964:42, 112).

Like the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs, the Ghorids and the Delhi Sultans modeled their life-styles after the Turkish and Persian upper classes who now predominated in most of Western and Central Asia. They patronized literature and music but became especially notable for



KARAKORUM Mts.

HIMALAYAN Mts.

HINDU KUSH

KASHMIR

PUNJAB

Lahore

Multan

Uch

UNITED

Rampur

Bareilly

Shahjahanpur

Aligarh

Agra

Jaipur

Ajmer

Jodhpur

AWADH

Makanpur

Allahabad

Benares

Lucknow

Bansa

Sehali

Khayrabad

Bahraich

BIHAR

Jaunpur

Patna

GANGES R.

Murshidabad

BENGAL

Hughly

Calcutta

CENTRAL

NARBADA R.

PROVINCES

GUJARAT

SIND

INDUS R.