PART TWO

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MUSLIM EMPIRE CULTURES:
BETWEEN ISLAMIC AND ISLAMICATE
CHAPTER THREE

SLAVES, SULTANS AND DYNASTIES (APPROX. 1000–1400)

The Muslim political control of the sub-continent took place in several stages, starting with the Ghaznawids, Turkish nomadic tribes, and military slaves who were vassals of the Saljuqs. They represented an amalgamation of Islamic and Turkic cultures with a strong Iranian basis. These Turkish military slaves from Central Asia had been the most important export factor, having been separated from their tribal and other roots and capable of adjusting to the new environment quickly.1 Because of their martial skills and alleged religious zeal they enjoyed a high reputation and therefore were provided with instruction in Islam and military drilling from their owners.2 Becoming governors of the Samanids3 in Eastern and Southern Afghanistan in the last quarter of the tenth century, the Ghaznawids gradually established themselves as independent amirs and sultans. By extending their power as far as Western Persia and the Ganges valley, they persianised the cultures of South Asia.4 Under Toghril Beg (died 1063), the founder of the Saljuq dynasty, they entered Khurasan, a major cultural and political centre, and in 1055 conquered Baghdad and liberated the Abbasids from the Shi’ite Buyids. They, however, accepted the Abbasid caliph and appropriated the title of Sultan, which was the indicator of acquired authority in the Islamic universe. Distinguished in dynastical terms our narrative is thus:

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3 Samanids were the representatives of the Abbasids in Bukhara and the area around Khurasan, but were virtually independent. Known for their trade with Turkic slaves and the establishment of a slave army, they also introduced Sunnite Islam as state religion, and used suli orders for converting local cultures.