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Research Article

Military Organization during the Ghaznavid Period

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ABSTRACT

Afghanistan has been home to numerous kings and empires throughout its history, one of the most important of which was the Ghaznavid Empire. The Ghaznavid Empire occupies a significant place in the history of Afghanistan. Because of its inclination toward military rule, it was a military-oriented state with a powerful army. Through successive victories and its role in promoting and disseminating Islam, it attracted the attention and approval of the Abbasid Caliphate. Compared with earlier Islamic military organizations, the organization of the Ghaznavid army was advanced. The Ghaznavid army was modeled on the Samanid army, although it developed certain traditional differences, including its strong tendency toward military rule and the ethnic diversity of its soldiers. Ghaznavid troops came from different lands and various ethnic groups, forming a multi-ethnic army. Although the army consisted of people from different nations and generations, its core was primarily composed of Turkic slaves. This library-based article seeks to examine the military organization of the Ghaznavid state through the use of historical sources and existing studies.

1. Introduction

The Ghaznavids were originally Turkic slaves of the Samanid state. During his service to the Samanids, Alptigin, who had risen to the position of commander-in-chief, sought to establish a broad and extensive state through which he could distinguish himself among the rulers of the region. The Ghaznavid state was founded on the principles of empire and religious policies in support of the Abbasid Caliphate. Since such a form of government required a strong army to establish and maintain an empire, the Ghaznavids, using Turkic slaves and relying on the economic resources generated by their conquests, established a well-equipped and powerful army with considerable ethnic diversity. The Ghaznavid army consisted of multiple ethnic elements, including Turks, Indians, Tajiks, Daylamites, Kurds, and Arabs.

Several factors contributed to the consolidation of Ghaznavid power and their military victories. These included the large number of agile and capable Turkic and Indian slave soldiers, a fast and mobile cavalry, and the determination and firm resolve of the Ghaznavid rulers. One of the most important factors behind the repeated military victories of the Ghaznavid government was the use of slaves known as the *khāṣṣa* slaves (special slaves).

These were selected from among ordinary slaves on the basis of talent and high military skill. They served under the direct command of the Ghaznavid sultans and enjoyed better equipment, finer clothing, and greater support from the rulers. They were generally deployed as a victorious force in critical situations and major campaigns and returned victorious in most cases. This article examines the organization and military structure of the Ghaznavid period, taking its ethnic diversity into consideration, based primarily on the works of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Professor Ghulam Jilani Jalali's *Ghazna and the Ghaznavids*, and other valuable sources.

2. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

Main Research Question

What was the structure and organization of the Ghaznavid military, and how did its ethnic diversity, command hierarchy, and institutional frameworks contribute to the military successes of the Ghaznavid Empire?

Sub-Questions

1. What was the historical background and political context of the Ghaznavid state's formation?
2. What was the ethnic composition of the Ghaznavid army, and how did this diversity contribute to its effectiveness?
3. What were the main branches of the Ghaznavid army (cavalry, infantry, and khāṣṣa slaves)?
4. What was the command structure and rank hierarchy of the Ghaznavid military?
5. What financial and administrative systems supported the Ghaznavid military organization?
6. What role did the khāṣṣa (royal slaves) play in the military victories of the Ghaznavids?

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical and historical methodology to examine the military organization of the Ghaznavid period. The primary objective is to systematically document, analyze, and explain the structure, composition, command hierarchy, and operational mechanisms of the Ghaznavid army.

3.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative, historical-analytical study. The design focuses on the collection, verification, and interpretation of primary and secondary historical sources to reconstruct the military organization of the Ghaznavid state. The approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the various components of the Ghaznavid military system, including its ethnic composition, command structure, and institutional frameworks.

3.2 Data Collection (Source Selection)

The data for this study were collected through systematic library-based research. The sources were selected based on their relevance to the Ghaznavid period, military organization, and the broader historical context of Afghanistan and the Islamic world.

Primary Sources: The analysis is based on historical texts from the Ghaznavid period, including:

1. *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi* by Abu'l-Fadl Muhammad ibn Husayn Bayhaqi
2. *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* by Minhaj al-Siraj al-Din Juzjani
3. *Zayn al-Akhbar* by Abu Sa'id Abd al-Hayy ibn al-Dahhak ibn Mahmud Gardizi
4. These sources provide contemporary accounts of Ghaznavid military campaigns, organizational structures, and administrative systems.

Secondary Sources: The study relies extensively on modern scholarly works, including:

1. *The History of the Ghaznavids* by Clifford Edmund Bosworth
2. *Ghazna and the Ghaznavids* by Professor Ghulam Jilani Jalali
3. *Ghazna in the Course of History* by Abdullah Kargar
4. Research articles and papers on Ghaznavid military organization, including works by Milani (2015) and Joya (2022)
5. The collection of papers from the Scientific and Research Seminar on Ghazna and the Ghaznavids (1388 SH)

These sources were used to contextualize the historical information, verify claims, and provide interpretive frameworks for understanding the Ghaznavid military system.

3.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the following analytical approaches:

Historical Analysis: The historical background of the Ghaznavid state and its military organization was reconstructed through the examination of primary and secondary sources. Particular attention was paid to tracing the development of military institutions from the Samanid period through the height of Ghaznavid power.

Thematic Analysis: The military organization was analyzed according to key themes, including:

- Ethnic composition of the army
- Branches of the military (cavalry, infantry, khāṣṣa)
- Command hierarchy and ranks
- Financial and administrative systems
- Role of specific units in military campaigns

Comparative Analysis: The Ghaznavid military system was compared with earlier Islamic military organizations, particularly the Samanid model, to identify continuities and innovations.

Institutional Analysis: The administrative and organizational structures of the Ghaznavid military, including the Diwan al-'Ard and Diwan al-Rasa'il, were analyzed to understand the institutional frameworks that supported military operations.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary sources and translated historical texts. Access to original manuscripts of Ghaznavid-period sources is restricted. Furthermore, the historical records regarding specific military campaigns, troop numbers, and organizational details are often fragmented or potentially exaggerated, requiring careful interpretive analysis. The study does not include field research or archaeological investigation. Additionally, the scope of the study is limited to the Ghaznavid period and does not extensively compare the Ghaznavid military system with

contemporary or later Islamic military organizations beyond the scope of the available sources.

4. Literature Review

The military organization of the Ghaznavid period has attracted the attention of numerous scholars, historians, and researchers. The Ghaznavid army, as one of the most powerful military forces of the medieval Islamic world, has been examined from various perspectives, including its ethnic composition, command structure, and role in the expansion of the Ghaznavid Empire.

Historical Sources: Primary historical sources from the Ghaznavid period provide foundational information about the military organization. Bayhaqi's *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi* offers detailed accounts of Ghaznavid military campaigns, the composition of the army, and the role of key commanders. Gardizi's *Zayn al-Akhbar* provides valuable information about the early Ghaznavid period and the military activities of Alptigin and Sebuktigin. Juzjani's *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* traces the history of the Ghaznavid dynasty and its military institutions. These sources are essential for understanding the contemporary perspectives on Ghaznavid military organization.

Modern Scholarship: In the modern period, several scholars have contributed significantly to the study of Ghaznavid military organization. Clifford Edmund Bosworth's *The History of the Ghaznavids* (translated into Persian in 1395 AH) provides a comprehensive analysis of the Ghaznavid state, including detailed chapters on military organization, administrative systems, and the role of the army in the empire. Professor Ghulam Jalani's *Ghazna and the Ghaznavids* (1351 AH) examines the military structure in detail, including the ethnic composition, command hierarchy, and role of different units. Abdullah Kargar's *Ghazna in the Course of History* (1383 AH) provides additional insights into the administrative and military systems of the Ghaznavids.

Specialized Studies: More recent research has focused on specific aspects of Ghaznavid military organization. Milani (2015) examined the military and army department of the Ghaznavid dynasty, providing insights into the organizational structure. Joya (2022) investigated the role of the khāṣṣa slaves in the military victories of the Ghaznavids, highlighting the importance of this elite force. The collection of papers from the Scientific and Research Seminar on Ghazna and the Ghaznavids (1388 SH) includes contributions on military organization, army structure, and weapons.

Research Gap: While individual studies have examined various aspects of Ghaznavid military organization, comprehensive analyses that synthesize the available evidence across multiple dimensions—including ethnic composition, command hierarchy, institutional frameworks, and operational roles—remain limited. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the Ghaznavid military organization, drawing on both primary and secondary sources.

5. The Ghaznavid Government

The Ghaznavid dynasty marked a period of approximately 210 years in the history of Afghanistan and its surrounding regions, although its geographical extent continually changed. The Ghaznavid state was founded by Alptigin Hajib, a Turkic slave of the Samanid state who later became commander-in-chief of Khorasan (Juzjani, 1389 AH, vol. 1, p. 214).

After Alptigin's death, his son Ishaq came to power. Like his father, he enjoyed the support and assistance of the Amir of Bukhara, Nasr ibn Nuh, which reflected a degree of continued influence from the court of Bukhara. After Ishaq's death, his successor, Balka-Tegin, came to power. Following Balka-Tegin, one of Alptigin's former slaves, Puri-Tegin, assumed power. He was highly ineffective and incompetent, and his accession caused disorder among the troops. He was subsequently removed from power by Sebuktigin (Juzjani, 1389 AH, pp. 226–227).

After assuming power, Sebuktigin brought the disorder in Ghazni to an end and pursued an expansionist policy, extending his control over territories such as Bust, Bamiyan, and Ghur. This policy not only increased his territory and power but also strengthened his relations with the court of Bukhara. Because Sebuktigin regarded himself as being under the protection of the Samanid court, he became increasingly involved in the conflicts within the Bukhara court. The disputes between the Samanid amirs and the Turkic slave commanders had weakened the Samanid state to such an extent that Nuh ibn Mansur was unable to halt the Qarakhanid invasion while Bukhara was under occupation. During this period, Sebuktigin and his son Mahmud came to the aid of the Amir of Bukhara and defeated his opponents. In return, Nuh ibn Mansur incorporated the governments of Balkh and Bamiyan into the Emirate of Ghazna and appointed his son, under the title Saif al-Dawla, as commander-in-chief of Khorasan. Thus, Mahmud's control over Khorasan was consolidated (Bayhaqi, 1383 AH, pp. 250–260).

The foregoing describes the rise of the Ghaznavid state and the formation of its government. The reign of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavid, however, stands out as one of the most brilliant periods of the Ghaznavid dynasty. His precision in conducting offensive and military operations earned him the title Amir 'Kathir al-Ghazawat' (the ruler of many campaigns). Historical accounts regard Mahmud's reign as the high point of the Ghaznavids' political and social power and capacity. At the beginning of his reign, he even opposed his father's decision to designate his younger brother Ismail as his successor. Dissatisfied with this decision, Sultan Mahmud, with the cooperation of his uncle and his brother Nasr, rebelled against Ismail in a coup and removed him from the emirate (Gardizi, 1363 AH, p. 114).

Mansur ibn Nuh, the Samanid Amir, recognized Sultan Mahmud's rule over Ghazna, Bust, and the smaller cities of eastern Khorasan. In brief, Sultan Mahmud considerably expanded the territory around Ghazna and, by attracting the attention of the Caliph of Baghdad, strengthened the independence of his rule. The Caliph granted Sultan Mahmud the title Yamin al-Dawla, while Mahmud had previously held

the title Saif al-Dawla, further strengthening the foundations of his sultanate (Bosworth, 1395 AH, pp. 40–41).

After Sultan Mahmud's death, Mas'ud ascended the Ghaznavid throne. During Mas'ud's reign, the incursions of the Seljuk Turkmen, who had settled in parts of Khorasan during Mahmud's reign, led to numerous wars between Mas'ud and the Turkmen. In one of these conflicts, the Battle of Dandanaqan in 431 AH, Mas'ud was defeated. After the battle, Mas'ud set out toward India but was killed by his own slaves on the way. Following Mas'ud's death, the Ghaznavids gradually weakened, and in 483 AH the Ghaznavid state came to an end with the capture of Khusrau Malik and his son by the commanders of Shihab al-Din Ghurid (Bayhaqi, 1383 AH, p. 835).

6. Military Organization of the Ghaznavids

Before discussing the organization of the Ghaznavid state, it is necessary to briefly introduce and explain the Diwan al-'Ard of the army and the Diwan al-Rasa'il. The Diwan al-'Ard, headed by an official known as the 'Arid, was responsible for military administration. The person appointed to this position was selected primarily for administrative ability rather than military capability. Its duties included assembling the army, inspecting the condition of the troops, maintaining military records, keeping lists of soldiers with their respective ranks, and providing stipends and provisions (Kargar, 1383 AH, p. 38).

The Diwan al-Rasa'il was also considered a fundamental component of the Ghaznavid military organization. In addition to its other responsibilities, it played a particularly important role in military affairs by providing information about foreign attacks and the activities of bandits. The institution operated according to an organized system in which information was collected through a network of informants and spies. After gathering intelligence, they sent it to the central government through the barid, the official courier and intelligence network. This organization maintained fast horses that were replaced with fresh mounts at each station. The barid was intended for governmental use rather than private matters and was also used to transport political officials and other prominent individuals (Bosworth, 1395 AH, p. 89).

It should also be noted that the Diwan al-Rasa'il included an intelligence system concerned with foreign enemies. During the early Ghaznavid period, the rulers were particularly eager to learn about the plots of their enemies, the Qara Khitai, and the movements of Turkmen forces in Transoxiana and Khwarazm. Spies were therefore recruited and assigned to the courts and military camps of these forces. On occasion, the Ghaznavids also employed measures resembling psychological warfare. Sultan Ibrahim ibn Mas'ud was engaged in conflict with the Seljuks and assigned his agent, Mahter Rashid, to create an atmosphere of distrust and betrayal in Malikshah's camp. Mahter Rashid promised Seljuk commanders and officials substantial rewards if they betrayed their ruler. He then placed documents suggesting the betrayal of Seljuk commanders near Malikshah's tent, in the hope of

undermining the Sultan's trust in his troops (Bosworth, 1393 AH, p. 93).

6.1 Financial System Supporting the Army

The operation of the Ghaznavid Empire required substantial financial resources, and the famous size of its army depended on a broad flow of revenue. The Ghaznavid revenue system consisted of five principal sources: 1) crown estates and the private property of the sultans; 2) the appropriation by the Sultan of the property of persons who died without heirs and the confiscation of their assets; 3) customary taxes, including kharaj and additional taxes; 4) war booty; and 5) tribute and gifts paid to the Ghaznavid treasury by subordinate rulers, governors, and others (Bosworth, 1395 AH, p. 64).

All of these sources, in one way or another, required military force or military protection. War booty, however, was directly connected with the military power of the Ghaznavid government. The abundant spoils obtained from regions such as northern India and the western territories of the Ghaznavid state, including Iran, contributed to the growth of its military power. The army was therefore expected to remain continuously engaged in campaigns and conquests. Even when a soldier accumulated wealth, he could not simply abandon military life and take up another occupation. As a result, soldiers became almost entirely devoted to their military way of life.

A significant proportion of Ghaznavid soldiers' salaries was paid from readily available tax revenues. In addition to regular wages, soldiers received various forms of war booty, including valuable objects, weapons, slaves, and other valuable goods. For example, after the conquest of Rayy, the Ghaznavid army acquired jewels worth approximately 500,000 dinars, 260,000 coins, more than 30,000 dinars' worth of gold and silver vessels, 5,300 pieces of cloth and garments, and textiles worth 20,000 dinars. They also obtained more than fifty loads of books, except for the books of the Mu'tazilites and Shi'i philosophers, which were burned at the time (Bosworth, 1395 AH, p. 75).

7. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study organized according to the research questions and sub-questions. The findings are based on the analysis of historical texts, scholarly works, and research articles concerning the military organization of the Ghaznavid period.

7.1 Ethnic Composition of the Ghaznavid Army

Historical sources clearly indicate that the Ghaznavid army was ethnically diverse, with different ethnic groups forming various military units. New soldiers were generally recruited from Transoxiana. However, because the dominance of a single ethnic group in the army could create certain risks, the Ghaznavid rulers recruited soldiers from various groups, including Afghans, Arabs, Daylamites, Indians, Kurds, and Turks. Turks constituted the largest component of the Ghaznavid army, and most high-ranking officers were selected from among them. Since Khorasanians were generally engaged in administrative affairs, many military positions were assigned to Turks, who even performed certain duties directly connected

with the Sultan. The number of Indian troops in the Ghaznavid army increased following the expansion of Ghaznavid power in India. The Ghaznavids employed these troops partly to balance the Turkish forces, and they were considered more dependable in this respect. The Ghaznavid sultans had a particular interest in Indian slaves and designated a special quarter for Hindus in Ghazna (Jalali, 1351 AH, pp. 110–113).

The Daylamites, a hardy, warlike, and mountainous people who lived in the difficult terrain around the Caspian Sea, gained prominence in the tenth century and spread throughout many Islamic lands. Poverty and hardship also led Daylamites to serve as mercenaries in the armies of Asian states. Ali Simjuri used Daylamites against Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavid. Having observed their skill on the battlefield, the Sultan sought to incorporate them into his army. The importance of the Daylamites lay partly in their ability to form elite infantry units. Their distinctive weapon was the *jūbīn*, a small spear with a two-pronged point that was thrown at the enemy (Jalali, 1351 AH, p. 110).

Arab cavalymen were valued for their speed of movement and military skill and were incorporated into the Ghaznavid army. Arabs were recruited as organized units for sudden attacks. These Arab contingents were drawn from tribes that had migrated to the region during the early Islamic period and lived in Khorasan, Transoxiana, and Iran. Thus, the Ghaznavid army consisted of units associated with different tribes and ethnic groups, and this ethnic diversity provided the army with a range of military capabilities.

The exact size of the Ghaznavid army cannot be determined with certainty. It is clear, however, that the size of the army increased as the state rose to power. In 389 AH/999 CE, when Sultan Mahmud defeated Abd al-Malik ibn Nuh of the Samanids at Merv, he reportedly had at least 30,000 cavalymen at his disposal. In 406 AH, Sultan Mahmud marched toward Balkh with an army of 100,000 troops.

7.2 Structure of the Ghaznavid Army

The Ghaznavid army consisted of cavalry, infantry, and the *khāṣṣa* or royal slaves. Each is discussed below.

7.2.1 Cavalry

The cavalry of the Ghaznavid army consisted of members of various Turkic, Indian, Arab, and other minority groups. Arabs were among the most important cavalry forces in the Ghaznavid army and were known as the 'Demon Riders' (Riders Demon). The Arab commander in the Ghaznavid army was Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Taki al-Arabi. In 1018 CE, when Khwarazm came under attack, the Arab forces served in Sultan Mahmud's army under this commander. The Arabs participated in difficult battles because of their courage and military skill (Milani, 2015).

The number of cavalymen was greater than that of infantry because cavalry provided greater speed and mobility. War elephants were also included among Sultan Mahmud's mounted forces, and the elephant keepers were generally Indians. In 414 AH/1033 CE, Sultan Mahmud reportedly possessed 1,300 elephants, a number that later increased to

2,000. Although these elephants were among the spoils of war, each elephant was reportedly valued at up to 1,000 dirhams (Kargar, 1381 AH, pp. 72–73).

7.2.2 Infantry

In organized battles conducted according to a plan, particularly in the encirclement of enemies, infantry were skilled in siege and containment operations. Indians constituted an important part of the infantry. Because infantrymen were less mobile and agile than cavalry, their numbers were lower than those of the cavalry. Infantry nevertheless played an important role in attacks and battles and in some circumstances served as the army's standing component.

A substantial part of the infantry consisted of voluntary rural populations known as *ghazis*. People called *ghazis* joined the Ghaznavid army even from distant areas. Their names were not always recorded, and they served without regular pay. During Mahmud's attack on Somnath, for example, 4,000 volunteers reportedly joined the army, under a commander known as Amir al-Ghaziyan (Milani, 2015).

7.2.3 Royal Slaves (*Khāṣṣa*)

The *khāṣṣa*, or palace slaves, constituted a separate group distinct from the other branches of the army and possessed considerable skill and ability on the battlefield. The formation of a special force that was exclusively obedient to the Sultan demonstrated the peak of the military organization and capabilities of the Ghaznavid rulers, particularly Sultan Mahmud. This force was established during Mahmud's reign and acquired considerable strength and authority under him. A specified number of slaves, most or nearly all of whom were Turks, served as the Sultan's personal guards. They were known as palace slaves, special slaves, or royal slaves.

The *khāṣṣa* normally fought as a separate unit from the other branches of the army, although contingents of them could be dispatched alongside regular troops during military campaigns. Their loyalty and obedience were considered greater than those of other classes of soldiers because of their slave status. The Sultan personally supervised them, and their commanders and administrative officials were separate from those of the other forces. The banner of the Sultan's guards bore the image of a lion and several swords. In battle, they usually occupied the center of the army. When regular troops were defeated by the enemy, the palace slaves were deployed as a shock force to counterattack and recover the situation.

The royal slaves were continuously supervised by a *mushrif* appointed by Mahmud, who regularly reported their confidential affairs and conversations to him. During ceremonial occasions, they were required to stand in formation in the Sultan's audience hall and surround his throne. On such occasions, they wore garments made of the finest gold-brocaded silk from Baghdad or Shushtar and carried weapons richly decorated with gold and silver (Bosworth, 1395 AH, p. 102).

The exact number of Mahmud's *khāṣṣa* slaves is unknown. A report by Shabankara'i concerning Mahmud's journey to Iraq mentions a number reaching approximately 6,000–7,000. The

same account provides some details regarding the scale and magnificence of Mahmud's retinue. According to the report, when the Sultan departed for Iraq to fight the Daylamites and Qarmatians and to perform the pilgrimage, he traveled with a magnificence such as no king had ever displayed: 12,000 camels carried the arsenal; 4,000 carried the treasury, carpets, and golden and silver thrones; 300 elephants carried the Sultan's litter, tents, and camp equipment; 2,000 horses with golden saddles and jeweled bridles, as well as spare and ceremonial horses, accompanied the procession; 700 war elephants were equipped with gold-decorated coverings and harnesses; and 7,260 slaves wore golden belts and jeweled robes. Each of these slaves reportedly possessed 500 or 600 purchased slaves of his own, and each governed a district or province. These included rulers such as Arslan Jadhb, governor of the four districts of Khorasan, and Ariyaruq, governor of twelve farsakhs of territory in India. It is probable that this reported number included not only the khāṣṣa forces but also court servants and other personnel.

The palace slaves played an important role in many Ghaznavid wars and military events and were frequently decisive in securing victory. In 399 AH, during the capture of the fort of Bhinmal, in a battle between Sultan Mahmud and the Indians, the Sultan's position was nearly overrun by the enemy. Sultan Mahmud then attacked with his special slaves, causing the opposing forces to abandon their positions and flee. In this battle, Altuntash and Asghatgin, both among Mahmud's senior hajibs, were present. Sultan Mahmud assigned Asghatgin to remain at the site to protect the gold, silver, and treasury (Joya, 2022).

7.3 Ranks in the Ghaznavid Army

The highest commander of the Ghaznavid army was the Sultan himself. In major battles, he personally assumed command and direction of the armed forces in the field. Below the Sultan, command of the army was entrusted to the sipahsalar, of whom the most famous and powerful was the Sipahsalar of Khorasan (Jalali, 1351 AH, p. 117).

In the provinces of the empire, military chiefs directly administered the respective provinces while also handling related civil affairs. In important provinces such as Khorasan, Iraq, and India, the Sultan appointed a sipahsalar to command the army. Another major military rank in the Ghaznavid Empire was the Great Hajib, or Sahib-i Buzurg, who may be described as a general commander. Alongside the Arid, he supervised military affairs taking place in the field as well as their associated administrative matters (Jalali, 1351 AH, p. 130).

At another level, each tribe had its own commanders who were directly connected to the battlefield commanders and to the sipahsalar under the Sultan. The senior commander of the slave army was known as the Salar-i Ghulaman. His official rank was somewhat below that of the general sipahsalar. This officer commanded the slave forces; during the early reign of Mas'ud, the position was held by Hajib Beg Tughdi.

The palace slave army had its own internal organization, and certain individuals were selected for important responsibilities.

For example, the position of Jāmadār was responsible for preparing, distributing, and supplying clothing for soldiers and commanders. Other offices, including the arms-bearer (silāhdār), standard-bearer (alamdār), and parasol-bearer (chatrdār), were also entrusted to members of the slave corps.

Within the Ghaznavid organization, the Indian contingent of the Ghaznavid court, after the Great Hajib, had a commander known as the Salar of the Indians. Sultan Mas'ud eventually entrusted this position to Afrihind, also known as Talk. The Daylamite troops were placed under commanders associated with their own captives and groups who enjoyed the Sultan's particular attention. Kurds and Arabs generally shared a common command. Sultan Mas'ud assigned this responsibility in 347 AH to Abu al-Hasan al-Iraqi, a secretary. The Arab cavalry units, known for their speed of movement, were called the 'Demon Riders' and were also employed to carry important correspondence. Their ability to deliver rapid and powerful attacks was highly valued in warfare (Jalali, 1351 AH, pp. 120–121).

8. Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the military organization of the Ghaznavid period and its role in the political and military successes of the Ghaznavid Empire. This section discusses these findings in relation to the research questions and existing scholarship, while also identifying the contributions of this study.

8.1 The Ghaznavid Army as a Multi-Ethnic Force

The findings demonstrate that the Ghaznavid army was characterized by remarkable ethnic diversity, with soldiers drawn from Turkic, Indian, Arab, Daylamite, Kurdish, and other backgrounds. This diversity was not merely incidental but was a deliberate strategic choice by the Ghaznavid rulers. By recruiting from multiple ethnic groups, the Ghaznavids reduced the risk of any single ethnic faction dominating the army or threatening the Sultan's authority. This finding aligns with the observations of Bosworth (1395 AH), who noted that the Ghaznavid rulers employed ethnic diversity as a mechanism of political control.

The dominance of Turkic elements in the Ghaznavid army, particularly in senior command positions, reflects the broader pattern of Turkic military slavery that characterized many Islamic states of the period. However, the Ghaznavids also incorporated significant numbers of Indian troops, particularly following the expansion of Ghaznavid power in India. As Jalali (1351 AH) observed, the Indian troops served partly to balance the Turkish forces and were considered more dependable in this respect. This strategic use of ethnic diversity contributed to the stability and effectiveness of the Ghaznavid military.

8.2 The Importance of the Khāṣṣa (Royal Slaves)

One of the most significant findings of this study is the central role of the khāṣṣa, or royal slaves, in the Ghaznavid military system. The khāṣṣa represented an elite force that was directly loyal to the Sultan and served as the backbone of Ghaznavid military power. Their loyalty and obedience were considered greater than those of other classes of soldiers because of their

slave status, and they were deployed in the most critical battles and situations.

This finding is consistent with the research of Joya (2022), who emphasized the decisive role of the khāṣṣa slaves in the military victories of the Ghaznavids. The use of an elite, personally loyal force was a key innovation of Sultan Mahmud and represented the peak of Ghaznavid military organization. The khāṣṣa's distinctive equipment, higher pay, and direct connection to the Sultan made them a formidable force on the battlefield.

8.3 Institutional Frameworks: Diwan al-'Ard and Diwan al-Rasa'il

The findings reveal that the Ghaznavid military was supported by sophisticated administrative institutions. The Diwan al-'Ard, responsible for military administration, maintained records of soldiers, inspected the condition of troops, and provided stipends and provisions. The Diwan al-Rasa'il, through its intelligence network (the barid), provided crucial information about foreign attacks and enemy movements. These institutions demonstrate that the Ghaznavid military was not merely a collection of warriors but was an organized and well-administered institution.

The intelligence system, in particular, was a significant component of Ghaznavid military effectiveness. The ability to gather information about enemy movements, plots, and intentions gave the Ghaznavids a strategic advantage over their opponents. The use of spies, informants, and psychological warfare (as seen in the case of Sultan Ibrahim's agent Mahter Rashid) demonstrates the sophistication of Ghaznavid military strategy.

8.4 Financial Foundations of Military Power

The findings highlight the importance of financial resources in supporting the Ghaznavid military. The five principal sources of revenue—crown estates, appropriation of property, customary taxes, war booty, and tribute—provided the financial foundation for the army. War booty was particularly significant, as it not only provided immediate wealth but also created a self-reinforcing cycle: military success generated wealth, which in turn supported further military expansion.

The scale of the Ghaznavid army required substantial resources, and the army's effectiveness was directly tied to the state's ability to provide regular pay, equipment, and provisions. The reliance on war booty also meant that the army was expected to remain continuously engaged in campaigns and conquests. This created a militarized society in which soldiers became almost entirely devoted to their military way of life.

8.5 Command Structure and Hierarchy

The findings reveal a clear and structured command hierarchy within the Ghaznavid military. At the apex was the Sultan, who personally commanded major campaigns. Below him was the sipahsalar, with the Sipahsalar of Khorasan being the most important regional commander. The Great Hajib served as a general commander, supervising military affairs alongside the

Arid. The Salar-i Ghulaman commanded the slave forces, and the Indian and Daylamite contingents had their own commanders.

This hierarchical structure provided clear lines of command and enabled the effective coordination of diverse forces. The division of responsibilities among different commanders, each with expertise in specific types of troops or regions, contributed to the operational effectiveness of the Ghaznavid army.

8.6 Comparison with Earlier Islamic Military Organizations

The findings indicate that the Ghaznavid army was modeled on the Samanid army but developed its own distinctive characteristics. The Ghaznavids retained the core Turkic slave military tradition but expanded it significantly through the incorporation of diverse ethnic groups and the development of the khāṣṣa as an elite force.

The Ghaznavid army differed from earlier Islamic military organizations in several respects. First, the Ghaznavids placed greater emphasis on ethnic diversity as a mechanism of political control. Second, they developed the institution of the khāṣṣa to an unprecedented level of importance. Third, they relied more heavily on war booty as a source of revenue, which created a more aggressive and expansionist military policy.

8.7 Original Contribution of This Study

This study makes several original contributions to the scholarship on Ghaznavid military organization:

- It provides a comprehensive synthesis of available sources on Ghaznavid military organization, drawing on both primary historical texts and modern scholarship.
- It systematically analyzes the ethnic composition of the Ghaznavid army and its strategic significance.
- It examines the institutional frameworks (Diwan al-'Ard and Diwan al-Rasa'il) that supported military operations.
- It highlights the central role of the khāṣṣa slaves in Ghaznavid military victories.
- It provides a clear analysis of the command hierarchy and rank structure of the Ghaznavid army.

9. Conclusion

The military organization of the Ghaznavids was one of the important factors behind their political and military successes. At the height of their power, the Ghaznavids established a vast empire in the history of Afghanistan. Their territory extended from Ghazna to the Ganges and neighboring regions, and westward to Iraq and Khorasan. The extent of this empire itself demonstrates that the Ghaznavids possessed an organized army.

The Ghaznavid army consisted of Turks, Arabs, Daylamites, Indians, and other groups. This composition enabled the rulers to reduce the possibility of ethnic unrest, rebellion, and insurrection. As noted above, the Ghaznavid army consisted of

cavalry, infantry, and royal khāṣṣa slaves. The cavalry was the most valuable and powerful component. The Ghaznavids employed elephants, camels, and horses in their mounted forces. Turkic slaves were more powerful than other groups, including Indian slaves. Slaves served in both the cavalry and infantry and participated in battles as members of both forces.

The royal slaves constituted a fundamental component of Ghaznavid military operations. They were dispatched to the most distant regions and the most difficult battles. Their speed and military skills contributed significantly to the military victories of the Ghaznavids.

The Ghaznavid military organization also included several ranks. The Great Hajib, also known as the general sipahsalar, held a senior position. The Salar-i Ghulaman served as the senior commander of the slave army. Within the slave army, the Jāmadār was responsible for the preparation and distribution of clothing, while the Silāhdār, Alam-dār, and Chatr-dār also held important positions.

In response to the main research question, it can be concluded that the Ghaznavid military was a sophisticated, multi-ethnic, and well-organized force that combined institutional frameworks, ethnic diversity, and elite forces to achieve military dominance. The ethnic diversity of the army, the central role of the khāṣṣa slaves, and the command hierarchy all contributed to the military successes of the Ghaznavid Empire.

Regarding the first research question, the historical background of the Ghaznavid state reveals that it was founded on Turkic slave military traditions inherited from the Samanids and developed through a series of capable rulers, particularly Sebuktigin and Sultan Mahmud.

Regarding the second research question, the ethnic composition of the Ghaznavid army was diverse, with Turks, Indians, Arabs, Daylamites, Kurds, and other groups serving in different capacities. This diversity was a strategic choice that reduced the risk of ethnic unrest and provided a range of military capabilities.

Regarding the third research question, the Ghaznavid army consisted of cavalry, infantry, and the khāṣṣa. The cavalry was the most powerful component, with elephants, camels, and horses serving in mounted forces. The infantry included volunteers (ghazis) and played an important role in siege and containment operations. The khāṣṣa served as the elite royal guard and shock force.

Regarding the fourth research question, the command hierarchy included the Sultan, sipahsalar, Great Hajib, Salar-i Ghulaman, and commanders of ethnic contingents, providing clear lines of command and coordination.

Regarding the fifth research question, the financial and administrative systems, including the Diwan al-'Ard and Diwan al-Rasa'il, provided the institutional support for military operations, while the revenue system (crown estates, taxes, war booty, and tribute) provided the financial resources.

Regarding the sixth research question, the khāṣṣa slaves played a decisive role in Ghaznavid military victories, serving as an elite force that was directly loyal to the Sultan and deployed in the most critical battles.

Overall, the Ghaznavid military organization was a sophisticated system that combined ethnic diversity, institutional frameworks, elite forces, and effective command structures to achieve military dominance. This system enabled the Ghaznavids to establish and maintain one of the most powerful empires in the history of Afghanistan.

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Author Contributions

Suliman Kohistani is the sole author of this work, responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing, review, and editing.

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