

David C. Thomas: *The Ebb and Flow of the Ghūrid Empire*. Sydney: Sydney University Press 2018. 381 p. 10 colour plates, 164 black and white figures. A\$ 85.00. ISBN: 978-1-74332-541-4.

This is a timely, and primarily archaeological, book, with a good overview of the main historical and scholarly literature on the Ghurids. The introduction includes a clear and comprehensive overview of the scope of the book and the context, the background on the (re)discovery of the minaret of Jam, and a basic outline of who the Ghurids were. Thomas addresses the dichotomy between primarily urban archaeological evidence and seasonally nomadic societies.

The first chapter examines the meaning and usage of the term Ghurid, as well as the inherently problematic nature of terms associated with sedentarism and nomadism. The author challenges some of the terminology used by Bosworth concerning the Ghurids, and while demonstrating the complexity of the problem, there is little in the way of an alternative narrative. At times the chapter wears its theory a little more heavily than it does its answers, especially to questions concerning the nomadic aspects of the Ghurid Empire.

In chapter two the author defines the Ghurid heartland of central Afghanistan. He starts by drawing on a wide range of historical sources, both pre-modern and ones from the nineteenth century. Thomas then addresses Jam in the context of geography, geology, flora and fauna, before turning to two of the main Ghurid centres, Bamiyan and Ghazna. This is followed by a study of the lowlands, steppes and deserts.

The next chapter examines the rise of the Ghurids under the Shansabandid dynasty. It starts with a basic overview of the regional historical context, including the major aspect of Ghaznavid history. There is a proliferation of tables of data that would probably have been better placed as appendices.

Chapter four addresses sites in the Ghurid heartland prior to looking at Jam. Ninety-one Ghurid sites are identified, the overwhelming majority of which are defensive in nature, built of mud bricks on stone foundations. The material is presented primarily through a series of eleven tables and charts. This section of the book highlights the vast areas of which little or nothing is known in terms of archaeology. The author draws heavily on Warwick Ball's observations concerning the dating of sites, and gives a good overview of

the existing scholarship on the subject. Just two pages are devoted to some of the isolated monuments. Unfortunately, there is only one image of a building included in this section, and it is a shame that the standing monuments are given such limited attention.

The following section covers the urban centres on the periphery of the Ghurid heartland. There is an overview of the historical sources that mention Ghurid Herat, before attention turns to Lashkar-i Bazar/Bust. Little work has previously been done on the Ghurid phase of occupation, and Thomas includes a useful overview of the site and a review of the extant literature. There is little archaeological evidence, save a few minor structures, in Qandahar, while he notes that Helmand has considerable potential but little evidence. This is clearly a common tale for much of the archaeology of Afghanistan. A brief mention is made of the Indian sites and just two pages are addressed to material culture.

Constituting about a third of the book, chapter five is devoted to the archaeological finding of the two seasons of fieldwork conducted by the author at Jam. First the evidence for Jam being the Ghurid summer capital of Firuzkuh is examined, including primary sources and the views of previous scholars. There is an overview of the main sites in the city, followed by short section devoted to the minaret itself, and the possible mosque associated with it. Attention then turns to the castle at the top of the hill overlooking Jam. A great deal of the chapter is devoted to some of the many robber holes, due in part to the UNESCO moratorium on new excavations at the site. Most of the holes, of which there are hundreds, seem to contain evidence of architecture. New evidence of kilns and a Jewish cemetery which were found several kilometres outside the heart of Jam is presented. The material culture found at the site consists principally of ceramics, including high status glazed wares from Iran found at the mountaintop site. The following section examines the luxury goods, as well as wood, stucco and baked brick architectural decoration. Archaeobotanical samples show aspects of the main food crops in the area, as well as the types of fruit trees. The chapter concludes with some comments about the meaning of the word capital in the context of nomadic or semi-nomadic societies.

The final chapter aims to reveal unknown or long lost sites through the analysis of satellite images. The focus is on ten areas near major urban centres of the Ghurid period. Preliminary results are presented, as the necessary

fieldwork to confirm the findings remains impossible due to the current political and security situation. The author has been able to address some of the problems with the existing mapping of Jam, and the uncertainties concerning its outer limits. The use of satellite images has led to a far greater understanding of many of the monuments at Lashkar-i Bazar/Bust, improving on the plans of Schlumberger, and the newly identified sites are mainly in five areas east of Lashkar-i Bazar, as well as three areas east of Jam and two north of Herat.

The first third of this book is something of an extended introductory preamble to the excavation reports on the two seasons of fieldwork at Jam and the analysis of satellite images, which form the latter two thirds. It provides a useful synthesis of the current scholarship on the origins and nature of the Ghurid dynasty, as well as a clearer sense of the landscapes within which they existed. This book is very well researched and draws on a wide range of sources, both written and archaeological, and does a great deal to place Ghurid studies into the historiographic continuum. It also provides a major push to move the field forward through the application of a number of new approaches. There is occasional over-use of some currently trendy theoretical approaches, a lack of engagement with securely signed and dated examples of Ghurid material culture, and at times an over-reliance on the satellite images. Minor quibbles notwithstanding, this is an important contribution to the field. It presents a great deal of new archaeological data and should find a place on the shelves of anyone with a serious interest in the Ghurids and their contemporaries.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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