

Chapter Two: “stimulating concepts” – theoretical approaches to studying the Ghūrīds

2.1 Introduction

Archaeologists have long been aware of the intertwined nature of theory, data and interpretation. David Clarke (1973), for example, proposed that archaeology is not, and cannot be, atheoretical, while more recently Ian Hodder (1997: 693) has argued that “[i]nterpretation occurs at the trowel’s edge”. Attempts to force archaeological data into grand theoretical models, however, have largely been shown to be inappropriate (Bintliff 2006: 192) and it is now generally accepted that the major schism between Processual Archaeology and the plethora of approaches labelled Post-processual Archaeology has become unnecessarily antagonistic (Kohl 1993: 19; Schiffer 1996: 643). Indeed, many archaeologists, particularly those outside the UK and north America (Coudart 1999), feel that the Processual versus Post-processual archaeological debate has become irrelevant (Yoffee 2007: 7).

Rather than presenting a detailed discussion of a wide range of alternative theoretical approaches in this chapter, I will outline several theoretical themes which I believe are particularly relevant to the Ghūrīds, critically evaluating key studies where possible. The discussions primarily relate to the core themes of my thesis – nomads and their relationships with sedentary states, the rise and fall of pre-modern empires, the characteristics of medieval urban centres in central Asia and expressions of identity in the material record. Throughout, the multi-disciplinary approaches and long-term perspective of *Annales* historians are, in my opinion, particularly pertinent to the archaeological study of medieval central Asia, especially considering the atypical nature of the Ghūrīd polity.

Following Bulliet (1992b: 133), therefore, I view the theoretical themes discussed below as a source of “stimulating concepts” and insights, rather than a single all-encompassing theoretical paradigm. Many of the theories have been borrowed by archaeologists from other disciplines (Hodder 1987: vii; Kristiansen 2004: 85). Despite the relative lack of archaeology-specific theory, and the risk that proponents have a limited understanding of, or erroneously represent, the concepts they are borrowing (Bulliet 1992b: 131), the theoretical diversity and “productive tensions” illustrated in this chapter are a strength, rather than a weakness (Hodder 1999: 58-9).¹

¹ See also Schiffer (1988: 479) and Sherratt (1992: 139).

2.2 The nomad-urban continuum

The Ghūrīds were a mobile society, whose elite migrated between their upland summer capital at Fīrūzkūh and the lower over-wintering region of Zamīn-Dāwar, “a prosperous district on the frontier between Ghūr and Bust” (*Hudūd al-Ālam*, henceforth HĀ, tr. Minorsky 1970 [1937]: 111). Seasonally nomadic societies such as the Ghūrīds leave a variable, and at times ephemeral, archaeological imprint which is less likely to be preserved (and subsequently recognised by archaeologists) than that of more permanent sedentary societies (Hole 2004: 67). Consequently, they tend to be misrepresented in the contemporary historical sources and marginalised by modern researchers.² They should not, however, be dismissed as being literally and metaphorically peripheral to past societies and economies (Rowton 1973: 203) – in the mid-fourth / -tenth century, the nomadic population of Iran numbered roughly half a million tents, according to al-Iṣṭakhrī (cited in Rowton 1973: 205), although like many of his peers al-Iṣṭakhrī was prone to exaggerate (de Planhol 1968: 413). Given their prevalence, it is likely that nomads were an integral part the socio-economic structure of region (Lambton 1968: 204; 1973: 107-10, 124), as they were until recently in Afghanistan (Rowton 1973: 204) and Iran (Sunderland 1968: 635).³

As with so many terms, ‘nomad’ covers a multitude of flexible mobile and semi-mobile subsistence strategies and lifestyles (Cribb 2004: 15-22; Fletcher 1986: 12; Hole 1978: 130). The dichotomies between nomad and sedentist, agriculturalist and pastoralist are misleading – these commonly used socio-economic categories are rare in their pure form in pre-modern societies and should preferably be thought of as opposing ends of fluid continuums (Gilbert 1983: 106; Mohammed 1973). Similarly, the intermediate term ‘semi-nomadic’ is ill-defined and over-used (Cribb 2004: 19), while semi-sedentary implies a trajectory towards sedentism (Fletcher 2007: 166).⁴

² The study of nomads has been dominated, until relatively recently, by isolated ethnographic descriptions (see Dupree 1980b on the rich corpus of studies of modern nomads in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion), with few comparative studies considering the broader theoretical aspects of the phenomenon (Ingold 1985: 384) and their archaeological manifestations.

³ Despite the lack of census data, nomads are thought to have numbered around two million or seventeen percent of the total population of Afghanistan in the 1950s (Michel 1960: 362, fn. 7). Estimates put the number of nomadic pastoralists in Iran at the time of the 1956 census at around one million out of a total population of 20 million, with a further million being other more sedentary ‘tribally organized groups’ (Bowen-Jones 1968: 589; Sunderland 1968: 635).

⁴ Fletcher prefers the term ‘seasonal sedentism’, which is defined by Kent (1989: 2) as characterizing groups who “make seasonal trips but return to a permanent camp where they reside for the majority of the year”.

Roger Cribb (2004: 16) argues that nomadic tendencies are “manifested in varying degrees in a wide range of societies and communities”. Consequently, he proposes a broad definition:

Essentially nomadism involves the regular migration of a community together with much of *its productive base* within a single ecological niche. This may occur between different environmental zones or within a single zone (Cribb 2004: 20, italics in the original).⁵

The flexibility of, and subtle variations in, nomad strategies discussed by Cribb are evident amongst the Ghūrīds (and other medieval groups) with their mixed economy, seasonal mobility and capitals, and apparent lack of other major urban centres.⁶ The medieval “wandering capitals” in Ethiopia provide an example of another pre-modern dynasty adapting to environmental and political constraints. Their settlement system involved “residential mobility by a very large seasonal community and the short term dispersal of its occupants each year to predominantly small, permanent settlements” during the three month (June to September) wet cold season (Fletcher 1991: 405). When the ruler was absent during the dry season, “the transient capital had a greatly reduced population” (Fletcher 1991: 405).

Contemporary Western observers note that a moving capital could not reside in one location for more than four months, nor return to the same place for ten years, due to the pressures it placed on the local agrarian economy and natural supplies of firewood (Pankhurst 1979: 4). From a political point of view, the moving capital enabled the rulers to engage with subordinate elites in the topographically isolated provinces, dispense justice, ensure taxes were collected and supply their army through the appropriation of local produce (Fletcher 1991: 407).

The capitals were often large, covering around 50 km², and may have had populations of between 20,000 and 40,000 (Horvath 1969: 209; Pankhurst 1979: 3, 8), with 50,000

⁵ It is worth stating that there are significant differences between mountain, steppe and desert nomads, and those herding different types of domesticates – see Frank Hole’s criticism of Cribb’s work (originally published in 1991) for focussing on sheep and goat herders practising vertical transhumance in Anatolia and Iran, whilst largely ignoring the camel and horse Bedouin of the deserts and steppes (Hole 1992). Nomads operating in close proximity to, and ultimately ‘enclosed’ by urban civilization (Gilbert 1983: 107, following Lattimore 1962a: 487 and Rowton 1974), are also significantly different from those more separate from urban centres.

⁶ Note that in recent times the governmental centre of Shahrak was mobile, moving to Kaminj (near Djām) in winter (Kohzad 1954b: 16). For other examples of nomads using permanent structures as treasuries and refuges, see Caskel (cited in Rowton 1973: 207-9).

to 100,000 pack animals and other domesticates (Horvath 1969: 209). The core royal military camp, which could measure 3 km in circumference (Horvath 1969: 210), consisted primarily of tents arranged in a concentric pattern around the royal pavilions. In places, the royal elite occupied local permanent structures (Fletcher 1991: 407).⁷

Although a few Europeans, such as the sixteenth-century CE Venetian merchant Andrea Corsali, and local court chroniclers provide accounts of the Ethiopian “wandering capitals”, most pre-modern nomad societies were illiterate, relying on oral rather than written records.⁸ Modern researchers, therefore, often have few contemporary accounts of medieval nomad societies other than passing references made by urban-based chroniclers (Sinor 1971: 51), many of whom based their descriptions on second-hand information (Barfield 1989: 217; Betts 2006: 138; Lambton 1973: 107, 109). These accounts are inherently unreliable and biased (Wheatley 2001: 73) – as the historian Stephen Humphreys (1991: 128-9) notes: “texts are not neutral repositories of information but consciously shaped literary structures”.⁹ They often detail the threats posed by nomads and the devastating effects of their raids on urban centres and the surrounding hinterlands (Lambton 1973: 107; Rowton 1973: 201), but are largely silent as to the benefits of engaging with nomads (Lambton 1968: 204).

The stereotype of mutual misunderstanding and loathing between nomads and sedentists is perpetuated in more recent Orientalist and ethnographic accounts (Johns 1994: 2; see Thesiger 1955: 319, for example), and media reports (IRIN 2008; *inter alia*). A notable exception is the correspondence from the sixth- / twelfth-century Saldjūkid sultan Sandjar’s *dīvān* (administrative office), which refers to the people of the deserts and steppe as being the “most deserving of compassion and mercy” and states that their “trade and occupation result in an increase in prosperity and well-being, and bring benefit and riches to the people” (cited in Lambton 1973: 109). While the nomad origins of the Saldjūkids probably contribute to this more sympathetic attitude, the correspondence provides a more accurate assessment of the importance of the nomads to the urban and regional economy, and the symbiotic, if not always harmonious, relationship between the different sectors of medieval society in central Asia (Hole 1978: 134; Lattimore 1962b: 505; Mohammed 1973:

⁷ The annual progresses of Elizabeth I in England (Bryson 2010: 68-9) and the court of Charlemagne (Horvath 1969: 205) demonstrate that seasonally mobile royal courts were a feature of a wide range of pre-modern dynasties.

⁸ ‘The Secret History of the Mongols’ (tr. Onon 1990) is a notable exception.

⁹ The chronicles of Rashīd al-Dīn, for example, like those of al-Djuwaynī and al-Djūzdjānī, were written for royal patrons or generally reflect the points of view of the ruling and official classes (Morgan 1987: 8-9).

98).¹⁰

Medieval nomads were part of the reality of everyday life for those living in the urban centres, particularly in the desert oases (Lambton 1973: 109; Rowton 1973: 205). They supplied essential foodstuffs and raw materials for the manufacture of clothing, horses for the armies, and slaves for the elites and the military (Bosworth 1968b: 5; Lambton 1973: 124; Sinor 1990: 7-11; Szykiewicz 1989: 155). In return, they received agricultural and industrial products (particularly metal objects), the manufacture of which was often, but not exclusively, beyond their knowledge or capacity (Hole 1978: 147-8; Lattimore 1938: 12). Their flocks could manure agriculturalists' fallow fields (Johnson 1990: 281; Thesiger 1955: 317), while at the broader scale, nomads could add significantly to a region's economic output by exploiting rough pasture and marginal lands which had previously yielded little (Lambton 1973: 124). Nomads may also periodically adapt or abandon their mobile lifestyles and swell urban populations, as a means of buffering against lean years, disease or climatic extremes (Beck 1980; Hole 1978: 158). Eric Sunderland (1968: 655) concludes that the process of haemorrhaging surplus people was “essential for the survival of nomadic groups, and for nomadic society as such to persist” in order not to overexploit pastures.

Although co-existence was the norm of nomad-sedentary relations, numerous nomad encroachments, raids and invasions of settled lands have occurred throughout history and these short-term events (*événements* in Braudel's terms – see below) have formed the focus of numerous studies rather than the more mundane socio-economic aspects (*conjunctures*) of medieval nomads (Hole 1978: 130). Not all nomad migrations, however, had such a dramatic impact on a region as those of the Turks in Anatolia (Vryonis 1975) or the Mongols – much depended on the numbers involved (both of indigenous people and immigrants), how the land was previously being utilised, its characteristics and carrying capacity, and the attitudes of the region's rulers. The late fourth- / tenth-century migrations of Saljūqs involved tens of thousands of people, but “caused remarkably little dislocation, and certainly no more than that brought about by the movement of government troops in the late Ghaznevid period” (Lambton 1973: 113). The humanitarian aspect of such migrations is also worth recognising (Lambton 1973: 111-12)¹¹ – the nomad refugees were

¹⁰ The interdependency of sedentary state and nomads is evident from the fact that nomad empires rose and fell in tandem with Chinese ones (Barfield 1989: 9, 14), a correlation noted in the seventh / thirteenth century by Ibn Khaldūn (Cribb 2004: 58).

¹¹ Lambton cites the sixth / twelfth century account of Muḥammad Ibrāhīm of five thousand displaced Ghuzz riders and their families; see also Ibn Faḍlān's account of an encounter with a band of Oghuz in the fourth / tenth century (cited in Bosworth 1968b: 16-17).

often desperately poor, forced to move by political and/or environmental pressures on their traditional territories, and were preyed upon by bandits and thieves.

In many cases, the localized effects of nomad invasions, while often brutal and devastating, were short and merely one of the facts of life in the medieval period – Ann Lambton (1973: 115), for example, notes that “tyranny, disorder, insecurity, famine, hoarding and war” affected Iran prior to, during and after the Saldjūqīd period. Similarly, although the raids of the ill-disciplined Ghuzz in the mid-sixth / -twelfth century were highly destructive, they were merely one factor contributing to the demise of Nīshāpūr – sectarian conflict, famine, plague and an earthquake in 555 / 1160 also contributed to its inhabitants’ decision to abandon the site and build a new city at Shādyākh (Lambton 1973: 119).

At the broader political scale, several studies have attempted to assess the interaction between nomads and states / empires and to counter the stereotypes of predatory nomad savages terrorizing civilized urban centres. Bennett Bronson (1988: 203), for example, points out that “being an effective barbarian took considerably more than a warlike disposition and a sincere desire to become rich”. Although their natural equestrian and hunting skills made nomad cavalries particularly effective on the battlefield (Lattimore 1962a: 485), suggestions that the hardship and nature of the nomadic way of life engenders a natural aptitude for ruthless, military campaigns are a gross simplification (Betts 2006: 143; Sinor 1972). The Mongols, for example, placed great importance on large scale hunting as preparation for military campaigns (Allsen 2006: 209-23). Hunting taught basic military skills and courage, but also allowed the Mongols to practice coordinated manoeuvres over large areas with elusive and rapidly moving quarry (Allsen 2006: 211-12). The Mongol campaigns were also meticulously planned with accurate intelligence deemed essential to determining which states to attack and when (Lattimore 1962b: 506).

Nomads did, however, have a distinct advantage over sedentary societies in that they could raise an army more quickly and cheaply (Allsen 2006: 213; Bronson 1988: 204). The consequences of defeat were also often less serious, particularly given their negligible investment in infrastructure (Lattimore 1938: 15). The nomads’ lack of a rigid leadership and administrative structure made it harder for sedentary societies to defeat them, as their armies were prone to flee rather than engage in set battles and tended to wax and wane depending on how the campaign was proceeding (a trait that also had obvious disadvantages). Nomad troops often had expedient attitudes towards political alliances; allegiances to their brethren tended to be stronger than those to their supposed allies in sedentary societies. This pragmatism proved to be pivotal in several major battles, such as the battle of Nāb in 547 / 1152 (see Chapter 4.3.2).

The rise of medieval nomad empires is also problematic from a theoretical point of view, as they seem to represent a contradiction in terms, given nomads’ aversion to structured political control and administration (Barfield 1989: 5). To administer sedentary states effectively, the nomads had to give up being nomads – as the Chinese put it, “an empire could be conquered on horseback, but not ruled from horseback” (cited in Lattimore 1962b: 508).¹² Nomad empires also do not fit neatly into progressive historical stages – when the empire collapses, nomads tend to revert to their traditional tribal organization (Barfield 1989: 6; Lattimore 1938: 5-7). In the light of this common occurrence, Thomas Barfield argues that Inner Asian nomadic states were ‘imperial confederacies’, “autocratic and statelike in foreign affairs, but consultative and federally structured internally” (Barfield 1989: 8). He identifies a three-tiered administrative structure consisting of the imperial leader and his court, imperial governors overseeing tribes within the empire, and local tribal leaders / chieftains. Everyday life remained largely unchanged at the tribal level, but the capacity to acquire resources from outside the steppe existed, through a process of re-distribution after unified action, often in the form of raids. “When the system collapsed and local tribal leaders became autonomous, the steppe reverted to anarchy” (Barfield 1989: 8; see also Lattimore 1962b: 508-9). This flexible, volatile political structure is comparable to that of the Ghūrids (see Chapter 4.3.2).

As I have alluded, the archaeological study of nomads and pastoralists is problematic – with the exception of their tumuli or *kurgans* (Whitehouse 1996), nomad sites are notoriously ephemeral, due to the short duration of occupation (Childe 1965: 81; Gilbert 1983: 107-8). When a campsite is found, the periodic re-use of the site often results in a complex taphonomy. Nomads possess minimal material culture due to their mobility; many of the possessions they do own are organic and therefore do not preserve well, while their most valuable artefacts are often carefully curated.¹³

Frank Hole (1978) and Roger Cribb (2004), however, have done much to demonstrate that nomads do leave archaeological remains, if archaeologists have the awareness and techniques to recognise them. Hole (1978: 155) argues that the remote location of the sites makes them recognizably nomad, despite the material culture’s similarities with that of sedentists. Sites are often distant from settlements and reflect the needs of both the nomads and their herds (Hole 1978: 164-5). Concentrations of dung from corralled

¹² Similarly, for a sedentary state to conquer the steppe required settling the nomads, something that was ecologically impractical and in neither party’s interests (Hall 1991: 220).

¹³ See, however, the rare discoveries of ornate burials such as those found at Tillya Tepe, dating to the first-century CE (Ball 1982 I: 277, site 1192; Sarianidi 1985).

animals may leave distinct chemical traces in the heavily trampled soil (Hole 1978: 165; see Fig. 3:17). The seasonal use of sites may also be reflected in the archaeozoological and archaeobotanical remains, and the type of structures (Hole 1978: 162, 166). These will vary depending on whether the site is a transit or seasonal site, but structures tend to be semi-permanent, flimsily constructed and may be designed to include a textile superstructure.

Medieval examples of nomads' structures have been identified by Sören Stark and his team in the upper Argly valley system, Ustrushana in northern Tajikistan (Stark 2005; 2006a & b). By contrast, single occupation settlements and cemeteries, associated with high quality glazed wares and slag, were discovered in the neighbouring Aktangi valley system, which is less isolated and better watered (Stark 2005; 2006a & b). These sedentary sites appear to have been occupied during the Late Sāmānid or Early Ḳarākhānid periods (fourth / tenth century) to exploit local iron ore sources attested in the historical sources. The devastation of the nearby Shahristān oasis, by the Kh^wārazm-Shāh ca 609 / 1212-13 or the Mongols ca 617 1220, significantly reduced demand for iron in the region and thus prompted the abandonment of the sedentary sites, although more mobile subsistence strategies continued (Stark 2005). Stark's discoveries demonstrate the value of multi-disciplinary research using a combination of archaeological survey, small-scale excavation, and the analysis of satellite images and the historical sources in a mountainous environment similar to that inhabited by the Ghūrids (see Chapter 7.6).

2.3 Comparative studies of pre-modern states

The preceding discussion has referred in passing to societies and states in generic terms, implying that what is meant by such terms is universal, and universally understood. This is often not the case (Kristiansen 1998: 243). The geo-political landscape of central Asia in the sixth-seventh / twelfth-thirteenth centuries is comprised of various polities of differing sizes, characteristics and durations. They range from localized, independent nomadic tribes to empires spanning continents and from the short-lived to the longer lasting. Any study of the region and period, therefore, needs to be familiar with the nature of these different polities and attempt to understand how they interacted. Much of the historic-political data relevant to these issues will be presented in Chapter Four. First, however, it is essential to provide a theoretical overview of the most common types of polities that will be encountered – states and empires. I intend to do this within the context of what has been written about the Ghūrīd and other contemporary polities.

Allen Johnson and Timothy Earle (1987: 246) define true states as ... regionally organized societies whose populations number in the hundreds of thousands or millions and often are economically and ethnically diverse. Whereas chiefdoms vest leadership in generalized regional institutions, in states the increased scope of integration requires specialized regional institutions to perform special tasks of control and management.

These institutions include the military, bureaucracy and state religion. Elites are now unrelated by kinship to the populations they govern (as in the case of the Ghaznawids)¹⁴ and display their power in the conspicuous use of luxury goods and the construction of magnificent buildings (Johnson & Earle 1987: 304). As will become evident, some aspects of this definition are applicable to the Ghūrīds.

The work of the medieval historian C. E. Bosworth dominates what we know about the history of ‘pre-modern states’ in Afghanistan and neighbouring lands. Bosworth is the leading authority on the Ghaznawid dynasty (Bosworth 1963; 1977; *inter alia*) and has written much of what is known about the formative history of their successors, the Ghūrīds (Bosworth 1961). Such is the comprehensive nature of Bosworth’s studies, and the dearth of new (primarily historical) evidence, that few scholars have seriously challenged, let alone superseded, his research in the intervening half a century.¹⁵

A comprehensive re-assessment of the primary sources and historical data on the Ghaznawids, Ghūrīds and other medieval central Asian dynasties lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Several aspects of Bosworth’s portrayal of Early Islamic Ghūrīd society, however, are worthy of contemplation, if not re-consideration, particularly in the context of the theories of pre-modern states and societies.

Bosworth argues that in the fifth / eleventh century Ghūr was “a land of local chieftains, *derebeys*” (Bosworth 1961: 119, italics in the original) and a “buffer-state between the Seljuqs and the truncated Ghaznevid empire” (Bosworth 1961: 128). According to Bosworth, Ghūr was a culturally backward region isolated from the “surrounding higher civilisations” (Bosworth 1961: 125). He refers to the Early Islamic people of Ghūr as

¹⁴ See Fukuyama (2011: 132 ff) on the importance of merit rather than kinship in the appointment of the ‘civil service’, dating back to the Qin dynasty in China.

¹⁵ Most subsequent research has focussed on aspects of these polities largely unexplored by Bosworth – Amirsoleimani’s 2003 study of Ghaznawid court dress, for example. More general studies, such as those in UNESCO’s *History of Civilisations of central Asia: Volume IV* (Asimov & Bosworth 1998), if not written by Bosworth himself, refer extensively to his work. Jackson’s study of the fall of the Ghūrīd dynasty (2000a) is one of the few more recent original studies of the region’s medieval history.

“unsophisticated mountain folk” (Bosworth 1961: 133) and their society as riven with the internecine squabbles of their “petty chiefs” (Bosworth 1977: 7). The pejorative language used to describe the Ghūrid polity reflects in part the sophistication of the neighbouring Islamic dynasties which Bosworth has done so much to reveal. The limitations of the available data on the Ghūrids, which are derived more from biased historical sources than archaeological evidence, are another inhibiting factor.

The nature of the Ghūrid polity, however, is more than a semantic or classificatory quibble. As Norman Yoffee (2005: 1) points out

... it doesn't much matter what we call things, as long as we explain clearly what we mean, and as long as our categories further research, rather than force data into analytical blocks that are self-fulfilling prophecies”.

That said, Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall note (1991: 6) that it “is important to avoid the mistake of simply imposing vocabularies developed to explain the modern system on earlier systems in ways which distort analysis”.

The intermingling of terms such as ‘chieftain’ and modern political concepts such as ‘buffer-state’¹⁶ is confusing and inappropriate. The term ‘chieftain’ implies some form of broader ‘chiefdom’, defined by Elman Service (1971: 133) as

largely familistic but ... not egalitarian; it has no government but does have authority and centralized direction; there is no private property in resources or entrepreneurial market commerce, yet there is unequal control over goods and production; there are rank differences but no clear socioeconomic or political classes.

Allen Johnson and Timothy Earle differentiate between simple and complex chiefdoms, using the Bāširī of Iran as an example of the latter – “a regional chiefdom, with a number of local segments under a single paramount chief” (Johnson & Earle 1987: 238).¹⁷ Further refinement of the classificatory type is proposed by Michael Rowton (1973: 202-3) who distinguishes between various types of chiefdoms in medieval western Asia: dimorphic

¹⁶ The term *buffer-state* was first used in 1883, when describing the role of Afghanistan caught between the British and Russian empires during the ‘Great Game’ (Fazal 2004: 321; Hopkirk 1990). It implies both political and territorial unity, characteristics which are contrary to the portrayal of medieval Ghūr as a backward land of localised chieftains.

¹⁷ The Bāširī, originally studied by Barth (1964) prospered by controlling trade between a settled state and the pastoralist population in Fārs province in the south of Iran. Their territory ranged over 300 km from the arid steppe / desert near Lār to the mountains near Shīrāz (Johnson & Earle 1987: 239) – a comparable environmental range to that exploited by nomads in central Afghanistan. They numbered 16,000 people in 3,000 tents and had a population density of 3.2 people per square kilometre. Each tent household required about one hundred sheep and goats to subsist (Johnson & Earle 1987: 240).

chiefdoms which include nomads and sedentary people, tribal and non-tribal populations; feudal chiefdoms which lack the nomadic component; and tribal chiefdoms which lack the non-tribal component.

Given the humble origins of the Ghūrid polity, it is remarkable that within one hundred and fifty years of the arrival of Islam, the Ghūrids had overthrown the Ghaznawid dynasty and established their own large empire. Whether the Ghūrid polity was a loose agglomeration of chieftains, a buffer-state, a fragile ‘archaic state’ (as defined by Marcus & Feinman 1998: 4-7), or vacillated between these categories over time, needs to be clarified if we are to gain an insight into its rapid rise, far-flung military successes and subsequent precipitous collapse.

Relatively recent attempts to correlate modern political boundaries, nation states and national identity are another geo-political concept which should not be imposed on pre-modern polities without due consideration (Lewis 1998: 13; Thomas, J. 2004: 106-8; Thomas 2010a), particularly given nationalist movements’ tendencies to manipulate archaeological data (Emberling 1997: 296). National identity can transcend modern political structures and merely defines a single component of a sense of self (Lewis 1998: 18-19, 113). It often becomes blurred with other identities, based on cultural, linguistic and socio-economic factors, religion, ethnicity or gender (Emberling 1997: 304-5; Flood 2009a: 4-5, 9). National identity is also prone to misrepresentation and manipulation as nationalists homogenize the different ethnic and linguistic components of states.

Labelling a medieval central Asian polity, its inhabitants or a period Ghaznawid or Ghūrid, therefore, is a convenient short-hand, but masks a multiplicity of identities (Emberling 1997: 299; Kidd 2004: 17-20; Lewis 1998). It implies both a stable common identity and a common sense of identity that may not have existed – as Finbarr Flood (2009a: 3) has shown, pre-modern identities are just as “contingent and unstable” as modern ones. Material expressions of identity are also prone to change, depending on the context of an encounter or may be modified in subversive ways (Flood 2009a: 72, 102-3; Lewis 1998: 112; Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 480). Alka Patel (2004b: 40), for example, has demonstrated that the affiliations of medieval religious structures in the northern Indian sub-continent were “as multivalent as the identities of the communities they served”. Similarly, it is important to recognise that although some of the medieval towers and fortresses of central Afghanistan may have been constructed during the Ghūrid period to reinforce a sense of identity and territorial belonging amongst a dispersed, seasonally-nomadic society, others pre-date the Ghūrid period – their functions and symbolic meanings will have changed over time, depending on when and by whom they were occupied (see Chapter 5.3.1).

The danger in dissecting socio-political models and highlighting the inappropriate connotations of commonly used terms is that you end up with “... essentially content-free, abstract models that say little about how people lived or understood their lives” (Yoffee 2005: 6). Insights into medieval Islamic views on governance and ‘regime change’, however, can be found in the political discourses of the Salḍjūḱid vizier Niḱām al-Mulk (d. 485 / 1092) and the Ghaznawid bureaucrat Abu’l-Faḱl Bayhaḱī (385-470 / 995-1077 – Humphreys 1991: 136-47; Lindsay 2005: 19-21). These political theorists of the fifth / eleventh century unsurprisingly maintain the divine right of rulers to behave autocratically and ruthlessly. “Autocracy was based on submission and deference, and without fear, deference would soon evaporate” (Humphreys 1991: 141). As a result, medieval Islamic states were extremely fragile, due to sycophantic and conniving courtiers, the system of royal patronage and the constant threat of intrigues amongst the extended royal family and external powers (Humphreys 1991: 143-4).

Niḱām al-Mulk argues that Moslem rulers are chosen by and answerable to Allāh (cited in Lindsay 2005: 20). If they fail in their duties to provide justice and maintain order, they are liable to lose Allāh’s favour and be replaced. As James Lindsay (2005: 21) points out, the inherent weakness in this system is political legitimacy – if confidence in the ruler starts to wane, opponents can simply argue that he / she is not adequately fulfilling his / her role. Whatever misfortunes befall the realm are due to the ruler having incurred the wrath of Allāh; consequently they should be replaced. This explanation recurs in al-Djuwaynī’s assessment that the Mongol hordes were sent by Allāh to punish his subjects for their sins (*Tarikj-e Janangosha*, hereafter TJ, tr. Boyle 1997 [1958] I: 105).

More recently, Bronson has considered the role of nomads in the demise of states. He argues that the stereotype of decline, due to poor governance and corruption, presaging the fall of a state is a cliché – poor governance and corruption also characterize less ‘terminal’ phases of many states’ existences (Bronson 1988: 199). Instead, Bronson proposes a variety of other factors. Military campaigns are a major characteristic of premature territorial growth and rapid decline – depending on their success or failure, they often contribute to severe budgetary fluctuations, which line or bankrupt the state coffers (Bronson 1988: 199, 215). External factors such as nomads / ‘barbarians’ may also play a pivotal role in a state’s decline and fall (Bronson 1988: 213). Drawing the analogy of different types of predators in the animal world, Bronson proposes that the variable impact of nomads on states ranges from opportunistic scavenging to outright kills, although more commonly, the *coup de grāce* is applied by another state after nomads have severely weakened the state under attack. As Barfield (1989: 9) notes: “[w]ith the exception of the

Mongols, “nomad conquest” occurred only after the collapse of central authority within China left no government to extort”.

To survive, states needed to employ different tactics depending on the strength of their military, neighbouring states and the nomads. Annexation was often the obvious way to deal with troublesome neighbours, whether sedentary or nomadic, but injudicious expansion could greatly increase defence costs while deriving little by way of increased security and stability, or the loot that irregular armies crave (Bronson 1988: 215-16).

The study of the terminal stages of states advocated by Yoffee (1988) may not yield any particularly new revelations, but it does offer the prospect of providing a better understanding of archaic states and the inherent fragility which contributes towards their collapse (see also Eisenstadt 1988). This return to an emphasis on constituent parts and data is also characteristic of the ‘archaeology of empires’.

2.4 The ‘archaeology of empires’

States are not static entities – rulers, out of avarice, infuriation or desperation, often seek to subsume neighbouring polities under their realm, thus creating an empire. An empire, therefore, is “a territorially expansive and incorporative kind of state, involving relationships in which one state exercises control over other socio-political entities (e.g. states, chiefdoms, non-stratified societies)” (Sinopoli 1994: 160).

Rein Taagepera (1978) identifies several common characteristics in a comparative study of over one hundred empires dating back five millennia. They are often fragile political entities, many of which collapse at their near-maximum extent (Taagepera 1978: 109). Empires which expand quickly are prone to collapse rapidly, often through a process of “gradual feudalization in the course of which provinces imperceptibly gain effective sovereignty while still paying homage to the now powerless emperor” (Taagepera 1978: 113). The later ʿAbbāsīd empire provides an example of this sort of collapse (Kennedy 2006: 261 ff).

By adopting a statistical approach to studying the size and duration of empires, Taagepera (1978: 125) argues that the primacy afforded by (largely Western European) scholars to Alexander the Great’s empire and the Roman empire exceeds their relative size or durability compared to those of the Near East and China / central Asia. More recently, Carla Sinopoli (1994) has adopted a more theoretical approach, which builds on Taagepera’s study and draws in part on World Systems Theory (see below). The characteristics of empires vary considerably, depending on whether the imperial core

or more peripheral regions are being investigated. Sinopoli (1994: 162) identifies three stages of empires – expansion, consolidation and collapse – which are identifiable in the life-cycle of the Ghūrid polity (Chapter 4.3.2). As Alexander Motyl (1999: 128) points out, however, the ‘collapse’ of empires is a more subtle and complicated process, often involving a protracted combination of evolution, attrition and / or collapse. An empire’s demise is rarely as sudden, uniform and complete as it might seem (Yoffee 1988: 2); if it were so, we would expect to find fewer cases where the demise of one polity is rapidly followed by the rise of another similar one (Motyl 1999; Yoffee 2005: 137).

Sinopoli nevertheless makes a considerable contribution towards a more nuanced understanding of empires by outlining the processes and key factors which characterize each stage of the empire. These include the crucial role of charismatic imperial rulers (such as the Ghūrid sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn - ṬN, tr. Raverty 1970 [1881] I: 383-9), socio-political factors such as the co-option of local elites (through bribery / tribute, threat of force and / or marriage ties), the use of terror and ideology, and the consequences of an end to territorial expansion (Sinopoli 1994: 162-9). Each of these elements has “material consequences” (Sinopoli 1994: 169), some of which are identifiable in archaeological remains. Sinopoli, however, concludes that “the spatial scale, geographic and organizational variability, and the rapid rates of change in empires pose considerable challenges to archaeologists” (Sinopoli 1994: 173). Her work has since been applied to archaeological case studies by Roger Matthews, both in relation to ancient Mesopotamia (Matthews 2003: 127-54), and through his collaborative fieldwork in Paphlagonia, Turkey (Glatz & Matthews 2005; Matthews & Glatz 2009 a & b).

Matthews attempts to define how particular features of an empire might be represented in the archaeological and textual records (Matthews 2003: 129-31, Table 5.1). At the imperial core, for example, the anthropological feature of a large, complex, urban centre will dominate the settlement pattern (the archaeological correlate) and may contain state archives (the textual correlate). In peripheral regions, political control will often have a military dimension and thus be reflected in destruction levels, military infrastructure and hoards, with battles, correspondence between governors and the imperial centre, and troop movements being recorded in the texts. Detailed studies of peripheral regions, particularly the frontiers and borders of empires, can also elucidate issues such as identity, trade and exchange (Glatz & Matthews 2005: 49).

The value of Matthews’ approach is that it facilitates the identification and comparison of the main features of an empire; the variant life-cycles are thus easier to interpret, at least in theory. The listing of characteristics and correlates, however, is reminiscent of the

normative approach adopted by Gordon Childe (1950: 16) in his attempt to identify the characteristics of urban states; inherently, such lists cannot be exhaustive or universal.

Many of the correlates Matthews proposes are often difficult to separate from other causes, due to the complex nature of the archaeological and textual records. Matthews, therefore, highlights the unique opportunity offered by what he terms “charismatic capitals” to gain an insight into imperial ambitions (Matthews 2003: 136). ‘Charismatic capitals’, such as Sāmarrā’ (capital of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate in the third / ninth century) are single period sites founded by charismatic, visionary rulers on ‘green-field’ sites – although Djām / Fīrūzkūh was founded by one of his predecessors, the fact that Ghiyāth al-Dīn reigned for over half of the seventy-six years the site was occupied means that it can be considered the Ghūrīds’ ‘charismatic capital’. The short occupation and rapid abandonment of ‘charismatic capitals’ (generally after the demise of their founder) should make it easier to investigate how architecture and urban planning are explicitly employed to glorify the ruler and state, and how dynastic and imperial ideology is expressed through art.¹⁸ It is worth remembering, however, that the interpretation of manifestations of ideology is problematic, even if single period sites’ archaeological remains are more accessible and have greater integrity than palimpsests (Matthews 2003: 140-1).

Matthews’ multi-period field survey, however, focuses on the Roman province of Paphlagonia in north-central Turkey, rather than on the ideal of a ‘charismatic capital’. It is nevertheless worth considering in detail given the comparable nature of Matthews’ survey data and study area with those of this thesis (see Chapter 7.6.4 in particular). Paphlagonia is a transitional region nestling between the steppe of the Anatolian plateau to the south and the mountains of the Pontic region to the north (Glatz & Matthews 2005: 49). It is 100 km north of Hattuša, the second millennium BCE Hittite capital. Five seasons of fieldwork yielded 319 sites ranging in date from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Ottoman period, in an area of 8,500 km² (Matthews 2004: 200-1).

The Hittite, Roman and Byzantine periods were particularly well represented. Each of these three key periods is characterized by different types and distributions of sites. Fortified sites, which are distributed relatively evenly across the landscape, tend to date to the Hittite period. They are indicative of the region being a disputed frontier zone between

¹⁸ The converse is true at the Ghaznawīd capitals of Ghazna and Lashkar-i Bāzār, where the Ghūrīds’ archaeological legacy is much harder to distinguish from that of their predecessors (see Chapter 5.4.1-2).

the Hittite core and Kaska¹⁹ periphery, as attested by the Hittite sources (Matthews 2004: 202-5). The Romans, unlike the Hittites, were able to subdue the region and impose *Pax Romana*. Consequently, the settlement pattern is much more widespread, diverse and hierarchical with sites ranging from isolated farmsteads to small cities (Matthews 2004: 205-7). Imperial control receded during the Byzantine period when the region reverted to being a frontier zone, as Arab armies and Turk nomads advanced. Byzantine emperors regarded the region as an insignificant backwater and left to its own devices – the settlement pattern is characterised by numerous remote, small isolated mountain-top refuges (Matthews 2004: 207-10).

Matthews (2004: 200) argues that landscapes retain memories, hence the somewhat sensationalist title of his article, *Landscapes of terror and control: imperial impacts in Paphlagonia*. It is important, however, to recognise the plurality of the past – Hittite commanders and soldiers presumably felt justified in their efforts to protect their heartland and isolated cultic centres such as Nerik from the ‘menace’ of the surrounding Kaska nomads. Similarly, the secured transport, communications and supply routes the Hittites and Romans provided presumably benefited at least some sectors of society. The ‘terror’ embodied in the archaeological remains is unsubstantiated, although Glatz and Matthews (2005: 54) refer to Hittite accounts of the blinding of Kaska captives.

The fractious, volatile relationship between the Hittites and the Kaska is comparable to that between the Ghaznawids and the Ghūrids two millennia later. Like the Hittites, the Ghaznawids repeatedly campaigned in the Ghūrid heartland in the fifth / eleventh century CE (see Chapter 4.3.1). They were equally dismissive of their illiterate mountain neighbours, and were frustrated by their fractured socio-political leadership, brigandage and evasive military tactics (Bosworth 1961: 121-3; 1977: 68-9). By 545 / 1150-1, however, it was the Ghūrids who triumphed, overrunning the Ghaznawid capitals, just as the Kaska destroyed Hattuša.

The Hittite sources record a variety of diplomatic and military strategies employed in an effort to deal with “the Kaska problem” (Glatz & Matthews 2005: 50-5). In addition to military campaigns, the fortification of settlements, and the establishment of garrisons and watchtowers, the Hittites also periodically attempted diplomacy to engage elements of the Kaska, established ‘buffer-zones’ and co-opted renegade Kaska to police the frontier zone. Inducements such as specific grazing rights within the frontier zone were offered to those willing to engage with the Hittite world-order. When these efforts failed, a ‘demographic

¹⁹ The Kaska were a loosely federated group of nomadic peoples on the northern borders of the Hittite empire (Glatz & Matthews 2005: 47).

solution’ was attempted – Kaska populations were massacred or transported to other parts of the Hittite empire and colonies of Hittites established. As we shall see in Chapter 4.3.1-2, some of these strategies characterise the apparently bellicose relationship between the Ghaznawids and the Ghūrīds, although it is worth remembering that the Ghaznawid chroniclers may have neglected to record diplomatic rapprochements and concessions, prone as court historians are to emphasize the successes of their benefactors’ military campaigns (Bosworth 1961: 121).

Another way of conceptualizing the complex and completing views of the past presented by the historical sources has been outlined by Adam T. Smith. Drawing on the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Smith refers to an “archipelagic landscape” and notes “... the political landscape’s inevitable incompleteness sustains a relentless effort to fill in absent positions and re-map the imagination of the polity” (Smith 2003: 110).²⁰ This applies as much to modern historians’ attempts to fill in the landscape, as it does to those of the medieval polities. To continue the maritime metaphor, the urban centres of medieval central Asia such as Samarqand, Lashkar-i Bāzār and Ghazna constitute islands of stability (and data) within a fluctuating sea of nomadic peoples, who are harder to define and trace archaeologically (de Phanhol 1968: 415; Rowton 1973).

The concept of ‘archipelagic landscapes’ has profound implications for the representation of empires, both literally and metaphorically. Cartographers and archaeologists have a tendency to enclose empires within solid boundaries on maps, and label them according to the dominant power. Political boundaries, which are largely fixed today and key to the definition of modern nation-states, however, were much more vague, contested, changeable and porous in the past (Flood 2009a: 2; Thomas, J. 2004: 96). This rigid way of representing pre-modern empires is part of a process which fossilizes and homogenizes the past (Clarke 1978: 413-14; Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 481). It enshrines the dominance of the primary state, imposes an impression of uniformity and overlooks the reality of variable, changing patterns of accommodation, resistance and intra-polity factional competition (Brumfiel & Fox 1994; Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 483). Post-colonial theorists have demonstrated that empires’ permeable and fluctuating boundaries often enclose a myriad of ethnic groups, many of whom are far from passive subjects (Gosden 2004: 18-20; Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 481).

Solid borders also imply abrupt changes in political and social structures, and the

²⁰ Jean Aubin uses a similar maritime metaphor, describing Harāt as “an island of native power and Islamic culture in an eastern Iran where nomadism did not manage to overwhelm the old agrarian civilization” (cited in Potter 2004: 184).

material record, whereas boundaries are more likely to have been “zones of cross-cutting social networks” (Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 471) which ‘creolize’ cultures and result in a merged and blurred material record (Clarke 1978: 311-12; Flood 2009a: 9; Lattimore 1962a: 469-70; Lightfoot & Martinez 1995: 478). As Geographical Information Systems (GIS), computer animation and the internet free researchers and publishers from what can be termed the ‘paralysis of paper’, some authors, particularly those inspired by phenomenology, have criticised such Cartesian positivism and attempted more subtle representations of historical complexity (Brück 2005: 50; Gillings & Goodrick 1996). Given the possibilities of the new technologies, it is disappointing that the digital edition of *An historical atlas of Islam* (Kennedy 2002) reverts to the traditional approach of rigid borders after an animated introduction illustrating the ebbs and flows of the spread of Islam.

2.5 *Annales* School approaches and Resilience Theory

In recent years, numerous scholars have advocated a less rigid and more multi-faceted view of the past, which draws on a range of data and perspectives.²¹ Adopting an approach inspired by the *Annales* School, which attempts “a fusion of economic, social and cultural history” (Harsgor 1978: 2) by examining “quantitative trends instead of chronological narrative, structural instead of political history” (Knapp 1992b: 3), provides one potential avenue towards this goal.²²

Human relationships with the environment have been prominent throughout *Annales* research, due to the formative influence of the French human geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache. One of Vidal de la Blache’s key concepts is that of *genres de vie* (‘ways of life’ or ‘lifestyles’) which convey

... the notion of an adaptation of the physical *milieu* which is neither totally determined nor totally determinant, but gradually elaborated over the centuries in the light of the body of beliefs and values peculiar to its adherents’ *civilisation* (Lewthwaite 1988: 167, italics in the original).²³

Although the *Annales* School is far from a monolithic entity (Baker 1984: 4), it has become synonymous with the work of Fernand Braudel (Clark 1990: 177), in particular

²¹ See, for example, Hodder (2008: 196).

²² The *Annales* School is centred on the journal *Annales: economies, sociétés, civilisations* which is the successor to *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*, founded by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in 1929 (Hexter 1972: 484).

²³ Vidal de la Blache’s theories are more subtle than later derivations such as Febvre’s ‘environmental possibilism’ (Clark 1990: 182; Lewthwaite 1988: 165).

his epic study of the geo-history of the Mediterranean during the reign of Philip II of Spain (r. 1556-98 CE – Braudel 1972). Braudel argues that the challenge facing every historical study is to avoid giving unwarranted primacy to political history – in his opinion, the actions of a few members of the elite have little bearing on the “slow and powerful march of history” (Braudel 1972: 18; *contra* Clark 1990: 180; Fletcher 1992: 22; Hexter 1972: 508).

For heuristic purposes, Braudel (1972: 16) divides his study into a tripartite interpretative model consisting of:

- *structures – longue durée*: long-term, slowly changing structures such as geomorphological processes, environment and climate, which Braudel regarded as the most important factors
- *conjunctures – moyenne durée*: medium-term, socio-economic factors
- *événements – courte durée*: short-term, historical and political events

Although Braudel’s work has many merits, his emphasis on *structures* has resulted in accusations of espousing environmental determinism (Horden & Purcell 2000: 36, 41; Sanderson 1988: 277-8, *contra* Hudson 1988; Santamaria & Bailey 1984: 78).²⁴ Braudel’s interpretative model also largely ignores “routines embedded in custom and law” (Hexter 1972: 519). This oversight is curious since his predecessor and mentor Lucien Febvre did much to develop the study of *mentalités*, “the collective psychological and cultural underpinnings of social and economic history” (Burguière 2009: xi). The concept of *mentalités* is particularly useful since different sectors of society can hold their own *mentalités* (Crawford 2007: 2), rather than there being a single, unified one.

Hexter concludes that Braudel does not solve the historiographical problem he poses himself, that of “linking the durable phenomena of history with those that involve rapid change” (Hexter 1972: 533; see also Horden & Purcell 2000: 42). Part of the reason for this is the artificial nature of Braudel’s tripartite interpretative model and the arbitrary nature of its linkage to specific *durée* – what Marshall Sahlins (1991: 37) describes as “an exaggerated opposition between “structure” and “event””.²⁵ By defining each in mutually exclusive ways, it is not surprising that Braudel fails to tie them together in a cohesive synthesis (Sahlins 1991: 39). Institutions such as monarchies, for example, often result in political stability that transcends the short-term *événements*, while geological factors can result in earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that form dramatic *événements*.

Most European *Annales* historians have focused their research on medieval Europe,

²⁴ Most modern *Annales* School historians reject what Knapp (1992b: 10) terms Braudel’s “structural-ecological determinism”.

²⁵ See also Hexter (1972: 532).

where a variety of rich, but often incomplete data sources assist this form of analysis.²⁶ Despite this fact, the work of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie is relevant to the current study of medieval central Afghanistan in so far as it concerns adaptation to a marginal environment through specialized pastoralism. Le Roy Ladurie studied the Inquisition records relating to the fourteenth-century French village of Montaillou, a centre of Cathar heretics. In addition to elucidating the complex relationship between environment, economy and social structure, Le Roy Ladurie used the proceedings against twenty-eight people charged with heresy to reconstruct villagers’ perceptions of time and space, religion and magic, marriage, sexuality and death (Le Roy Ladurie 1978: xiv, Part Two).

Le Roy Ladurie (1978: 24-52) found that the *domus* (household) was the core of the social and economic life of the village. He concludes that

... the *domus* had marked tendencies towards autarchy and subsistence economy. The lack of co-operation between neighbouring villages and even between the cellular economies of individual houses in Montaillou itself is striking. This tendency produced a loyalty to house rather than parish, and thus militated against the growth of a civic sense of community (Le Roy Ladurie 1978: 354, italics in the original).

Over time, populations became concentrated in villages paired with feudal fortifications, resulting in the rise of feudal elites (Bintliff 2006: 181). As we shall see, this fragmented society and its evolution is comparable to the coalescence of myriad localized chieftains under the Shansabānīd dynasty in the Ghūrīd heartland of Afghanistan in the mid-sixth / -twelfth century.

Archaeological applications of *Annales* approaches came to the fore in the early 1990s (Bintliff 1991; Johns 1994; Knapp 1992a; see also Lewthwaite 1988) and several scholars continue to argue that they have much to offer archaeological studies of the Islamic world (Insoll 1999a: 12-13; Milwright 2010: 5). The study most relevant to this thesis is Richard Bulliet’s *Pottery styles and social status in medieval Khurasan* (Bulliet 1992a). Bulliet views the *Annales* approach less “as a set of ideas than as a revolution in the concept of historical data”, principally through the inclusive and cross-disciplinary approach it inspires (Bulliet 1992a: 75).

Bulliet compares ceramic evidence from Nīshāpūr with his 1979 demographic model

²⁶ See, however, the work of Lombard (1971; 1974; 1978) on coinage, trade in metals and metalwork, and textiles in the medieval Arab world, which Sherratt (1992: 138) describes as “among the most stimulating volumes” he has ever encountered. It is notable, however, that several specialists in the region and period are less effusive about the merits of these volumes which were published posthumously based on Lombard’s unfinished notes. Stillman (1974: 795), for example, describes Lombard’s 1971 volume as “a mine of misinformation”.

for the growth of the early Muslim community in Iran, based on detailed studies of medieval Muslim biographical dictionaries (Bulliet 1992a: 75). He hypothesizes that the large-scale urbanization that occurred from the first-fifth / seventh-eleventh centuries reflects rural-urban migration associated with conversion to Islam (Bulliet 1992a: 76). These major socio-geographic and religious upheavals contributed to three centuries of factional violence between an ‘elitist’ group (comparatively early converts to Islam) and a ‘populist’ group (later converts, many of whom were remnants of the powerful pre-Islamic rural aristocracy – Bulliet 1992a: 79).

The ceramic evidence points to a “segmented or stratified” market for pottery in the north-eastern realms of Islam, with some cosmopolitan types such as slip-painted and imitation Chinese wares having a widespread distribution and others such as the buff-painted ware being much more local (Bulliet 1992a: 78). Chronological and spatial patterns emerge within the site of Nīshāpūr itself – slip-painted and imitation Chinese wares are more abundant on earlier parts of the site, close to the citadel which historical sources cite as the centre of the first Arab settlement. The distinctively local buff-painted ware is later and more common further from the citadel (Bulliet 1992a: 80-1). Bulliet suggests that the ceramics’ different spatial distributions are the archaeological correlates (in Matthews’ terms – see above) of the factional differences he has found in the textual and biographical sources.

Bulliet concludes by assessing what the different types of ceramics might tell us about the factional groups. The slip-painted ware is characterised by beautifully executed, but difficult to read Arabic calligraphy, consisting of proverbs and blessings, but lacking an overtly religious tone. The exclusive use of Arabic, rather than Persian, points to an educated elite audience which prior to the third / ninth century dominated the non-Muslim majority and stressed unity under the government of the caliph in Baghdād. “The buff-painted ware, on the other hand, bespeaks a recrudescence of Persian visual motifs, some of them well attested in the Sassanian period” (Bulliet 1992a: 81). The hunting scenes in particular “speak specifically to the worldview of the petty aristocracy who were prominent in Nīshāpūr’s “populist” faction” (Bulliet 1992a: 81).²⁷

Bulliet tentatively suggests that the different forms found in the different wares might reflect different culinary tastes – the medieval equivalent of traditional Iranian soup dishes being consumed from buff-painted bowls and more Arab style cuisine being eaten off

²⁷ See also comparable studies of changes in ceramic production and consumption at Pella in Jordan, in the wake of the Islamic conquest (Walmsley 1994: 12-14; *inter alia*) and the subsequent “search for a new identity” (Walmsley 2008: 149).

flat plates and small sauce dishes in the slip-painted wares. Abbas Alizadeh (1997: 277), however, finds this part of Bulliet’s argument unconvincing, although he somewhat misrepresents it by equating the different ceramic and cuisine styles with variations in wealth.

Bulliet’s *Annales* approach, therefore, has little to do with Braudel’s interpretative framework and more to do with the freedom to meld historical and archaeological data. This enables him to propose speculative answers to questions previously overlooked or felt to be impossible to answer, given the deficiencies of traditional forms of historical data.²⁸

One of the reasons for the dearth of *Annales* approaches in archaeology is the need for reliable, detailed historical texts and data, whereas archaeologists often only have a “qualitatively inferior database” at their disposal (Lewthwaite 1988: 176). Another reason is the fact that Braudel’s work in particular often offers few insights into understanding long-term change (Bulliet 1992b: 131-2; Fletcher 1992: 44), although much depends on the definition of the timescales involved.

John Bintliff, among others, however, continues to argue for the persisting relevance of an *Annales* approach as a means of explaining the human past, in combination with other theories such as punctuated equilibrium (Bintliff 2006: 186). Bintliff (2006: 192) concludes: “[e]pisodes of unstructured events are irregular and unpredictable in timing, but much shorter-lived than the intervening phases of structural coherence”. Le Roy Ladurie also notes disequilibria, swings and cycles between even “the most logically composed structures” (Le Roy Ladurie 1979: 113). As Knapp (1992b: 6) points out, this structure-event-structure approach regards events “as intersections that break patterns, and as such are critical to understanding and explaining change”. This approach contrasts with Braudel’s dismissal of *événements* and offers a means of incorporating a range of short, medium and long-term factors in attempts to understand and interpret cultural change.

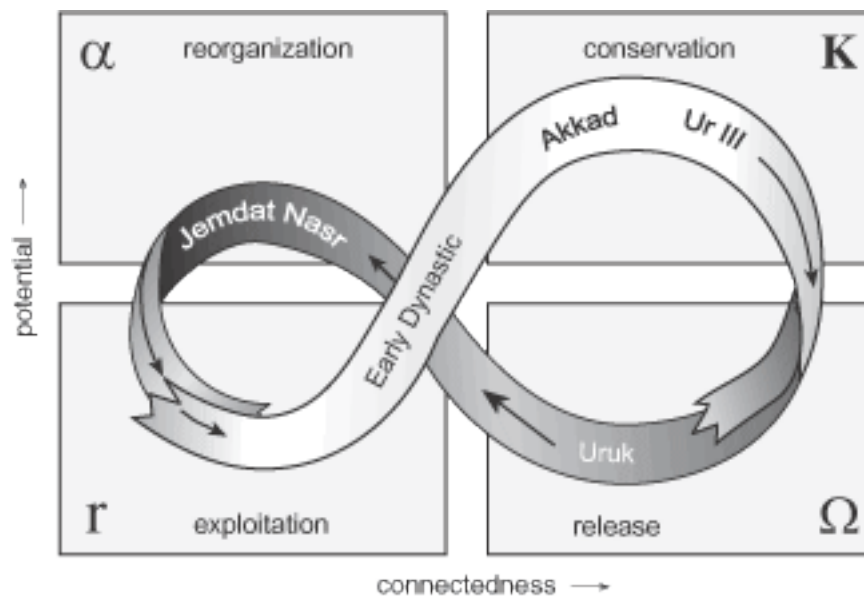
More recently, Charles Redman and Ann Kinzig (2003) have proposed that Resilience Theory provides “explanations for the source and role of change in adaptive systems”, a view supported by Alan Walmsley (2007: 146-7) with particular reference to Islamic archaeology. Originating in ecology and economics, Resilience Theory identifies four stages of an ecosystem with varying degrees of connectedness and available capital (Fig. 2:1). It is a flexible model which views change as episodic, rather than continuous and gradual, or consistently chaotic (Redman & Kinzig 2003). Change is interrelated with,

²⁸ Although Whitcomb (2003: 274) describes Bulliet’s work as “an innovative study”, he identifies “statistical and conceptual fallacies” and concludes that it “results in a facetious use of archaeological evidence by historians”.

rather than opposed to, continuity (Walmsley 2007: 147). The model can be applied at a variety of scales, each with its own forms of equilibria (Redman 2005: 71) and accepts that patterns and processes are likely to be patchy and discontinuous (Redman & Kinzig 2003).

“Destabilizing forces are important in maintaining diversity, flexibility, and opportunity, whereas stabilizing forces are important in maintaining productivity, fixed capital, and social memory” (Redman & Kinzig 2003). Small-and-fast adaptive cycles are interspersed amongst large-and-slow ones, memory being one way in which individuals and society regain stability during periods of rapid change (Redman 2005: 73).

Resilience Theory is particularly suited to archaeology because of the potential to study multiple completed cycles (Redman 2005: 70), such as the rise and fall of the Ghūrid polity and its summer capital Fīrūzkūh. This long term perspective enables the investigation of the “causes of the collapse of social and ecological systems” (Redman 2005: 71).



2:1 A stylized representation of the four ecosystem functions (r, K, Ω, and α) organized into an adaptive cycle (Redman & Kinzig 2003)

Individuals, institutions and societies that survive and prosper do so by learning from past experiences and recognising when to embrace, rather than resist, change that is inevitable (Redman & Kinzig 2003).

Central Asia during the early medieval period offers a promising geographical and temporal arena for assessing the merits of an *Annales* approach and Resilience Theory. The region consists of varied but clearly defined environmental zones, while the period saw a florescence of Islamic culture, and socio-economic life, particularly in the urban centres. A plethora of remarkable individuals and supposedly epoch-defining events occurred during

this period, thus providing *événements* against which the influences of the *conjonctures* and *structures* can be compared. Historical sources provide a narrative against which archaeological survey, excavation data and multi-disciplinary scientific analyses can be assessed, to provide an enhanced understanding of life in the Ghūrid summer capital and beyond. The loot and tribute acquired from the northern Indian sub-continent by the Ghūrids are examples of the way in which social structures can be maintained as societies “trap new energy supplies to stave off their entropic fragmentation” (Bintliff 2006: 190). This way of appropriating new energy supplies is rarely sustainable in the long-term, as the Ghūrids discovered.

2.6 The impact of Islam on medieval central Asia

Investigating the role of Islam is integral to efforts to understand medieval central Asia, although the presence and significance of other religious communities should not be overlooked.²⁹ Scholars, however, differ as to whether ‘Islamic Archaeology’ is a meaningful sub-discipline.³⁰ Timothy Insoll, a prominent advocate of ‘Islamic Archaeology’, for example, refers to the “structuring code” which results in a distinctively Muslim material culture (Insoll 1999a: 9), whereas Marcus Milwright (2010: 6) prefers a broader definition encompassing the study of aspects of the past in regions where the ruling elite has professed the faith of Islam.³¹ Jeremy Johns (2010: 1188) notes that the material culture of Muslims living beyond the *dār al-Islām* (literally the ‘house of Islam’, or Muslim lands) is excluded in this definition and counters that ultimately “the term ‘Islamic archaeology’ is nothing but a chronological and geographical label that implies little or nothing about either the material studied or the method used”. The impact of Islam, however, is evident in the built environment and material culture of medieval central Asia, and its archaeological correlates. Archaeology can also act as the independent arbitrator of historical sources which are often written from the viewpoint of a specific agenda (Walmsley 2004: 327).

2.6.1 Urban centres in medieval central Asia

References to the great urban centres of the Islamic world typically conjure images of

²⁹ See, for example, Hunter (1992), Klimkeit (1981) and Szuppe (1992: 64) on Nestorian Christians and Aharon (2008) and Lowenthal (1961) on Jewish communities in central Asia.

³⁰ See, Vernoit (1997) on the origins of ‘Islamic Archaeology’ and Petersen (2005) for an overview of recent studies, published in the issues of *Antiquity* from that year..

³¹ See below, for a comparable definition of ‘Islamic Art’ (Blair & Bloom 2003: 153).

elegant mosques and opulent palaces, bustling markets and industrious craft quarters, sprawling beyond the city’s original fortifications. These stereotypes pervade the work of several Francophone urban theorists who, affronted by the ‘pollution’ of Classical Mediterranean urban ideals, contrast the architectural expressions of oppressive religious and imperial institutions with the impoverished surrounding warrens of alleys devoid of municipal planning and services (Raymond 1994: 3-7). Although deceptively evocative and sensual, these scholarly outputs are the products of an ‘Orientalist’ tradition (Said 1978) which ignores the squalor of contemporary European urban centres and imposes a static, colonial European view of the present on the past (Raymond 1994: 7).

Some of the more recent theoretical models relating to medieval Islamic cities, however, are worth considering, given that this thesis utilizes data from major medieval Islamic urban centres and two seasons of archaeological fieldwork at the Ghūrid summer capital of Djām / Fīrūzkūh. These models have the potential to assist archaeologists in interpreting their discoveries, notwithstanding the inherent weaknesses of theoretical models (Whitcomb 2007: 24) and the limitations of the available data.

The mid-twentieth century Orientalist and normative approaches to the study of Islamic cities have now largely been abandoned in favour of ones recognising the diverse and changing nature of urban centres in the Islamic world (Bennison 2007a: 2-4; Wheatley 2001).³² Much depends upon how an urban centre or ‘city’ is defined, as well as local topographic, cultural and historical factors, as is evident from Paul Wheatley’s research which draws extensively on the work of the fourth- / tenth-century geographer al-Maḳḳdisī.³³

Al-Maḳḳdisī’s criteria for defining a city are merely the presence of a congregational mosque (*masjīd djamīʿ*) and a permanent market (*sūq* – Wheatley 2001: 75). Wheatley (2001: 58) demonstrates that the Early Islamic cities in the former Sāsānid territories documented by al-Maḳḳdisī have entirely different urban layouts to those in the Classical world. The nucleus of the city was a walled enclosure or *shahristān* (“place of power” – government enclave, known as the *madīna* in Arabic contexts), part of which was typically occupied by an elevated area, the citadel or *diz*. The populace lived below the *shahristān*’s walls in lower suburbs or *bīrūn* (*rabaḍ*), which contained major markets (*bāzār*) and were often enclosed by a wall. Gradually during the Islamic period the conceptual core of the city shifted from the *shahristān* to the principal mosque, which was often located at the main

³² See also Abu-Lughod (1989), Bonine (1979) and Lapidus (1967; 1973), *inter alia*.

³³ Wheatley avoids typological wrangles by defining a city as “any urban form” (Wheatley 2001: xvi). By detaching the term from connotations of size or origin, he is able to include much of al-Maḳḳdisī’s data which might otherwise have been inapplicable.

crossroads in the *bīrūn*. Thus, existing cities were transformed and new ones founded by the new Islamic elite (Wheatley 2001: 58).

Jere Bacharach (1991) identifies increasing separation of Muslim rulers and their subjects in the layout of medieval urban centres. Although no uniform model is apparent from the fourth / tenth to the end of the fifth / eleventh centuries, he argues that all the subsequent new administrative and political centres were physically separated from the existing Muslim urban centres (Bacharach 1991: 111). Separation was attained by distance or fortifications. By the late fifth-sixth / eleventh-twelfth centuries (essentially the Saldjūkid period), however, separation was achieved by highly symbolic vertical displacement, as rulers occupied heavily fortified citadels, similar to those inhabited by elites in earlier periods (Bacharach 1991: 112).

The Ghaznawid palaces built along the banks of the Hilmand at Lashkar-i Bāzār may be an example of the first stage of horizontal separation, although detailed first-hand information about the building activities and residences of Sultan Maḥmūd (999-1030) is negligible. The palace complex constructed by his grandson Masʿūd III (1099-1115) outside Ghazna also fits this pattern of horizontal separation (Bacharach 1991: 122). The new constructions were designed to display the new elite’s wealth, power, solidarity and superiority (Bacharach 1991: 122). It is notable that both Ghaznawid rulers appear to have shunned the existing citadel at Bust, a few kilometres to the south. Their successors, the Ghūrīds, however, built a triumphal arch at Bust rather than at Lashkar-i Bāzār. This may reflect the Ghūrīds’ desire to distance themselves symbolically from the Ghaznawid regime, as well as the devastation Ghūrīd armies wrought on the Ghaznawid imperial centres.

Bacharach’s attempts to explain the increasing separation of elites and subjects, however, do not fit the evidence from medieval Afghanistan. He suggests that the shift to elevated strongholds may be related to the fact that many of the elites during the later period were ethnically different from the urban population below (Bacharach 1991: 125). The Ghaznawids, however, had Turk origins, unlike their new subjects, and yet remained on the plain. Similarly, his proposal that the move to citadels might in some way have been linked to the shift to a more cavalry-based armies is unconvincing.

The limited applicability and usefulness of models characterizing medieval Islamic urban centres requires scholars to re-think their approach. Tim Williams’ study of Sultān Ḳalʿa in Marw highlights how a detailed exploration of open rather than built spaces – squares, courtyards, streets and gardens – can provide “a rich resource for interpreting the rhythm of the city’s daily life and the movement and social interaction of its people”

(Williams 2007: 43).³⁴ Although Galina Pugachenkova (2000: 508) argues that there is “practically nothing regular about the internal planning of the towns” in medieval Islamic central Asia, Williams (2007: 58-9) recognises a strong degree of planning in Sulṭān Ḳalʿa. This is particularly evident in the site’s infrastructure (primarily the supply of water) and the creation of regular-sized residential blocks. Much seems to have depended on whether the site was previously occupied, and whether the urban form is the realization of the political, spiritual, military and commercial ideals of new arrivals or the existing elite adopting new practices (Williams 2007: 43-4).

Williams uses the identification and mapping of distinctively Islamic building forms (including discerning between internal and external, private and public spaces – Williams 2008: 4.4, 8) across an urban space as a way of investigating urban complexity. The most obvious example of such buildings is the mosque (Williams 2008: 4.4.5), which often has distinctive features such as a prayer hall and courtyard, the *miḥrāb* (a niche in the centre of the wall oriented towards Makka – Petersen 1996: 240), and ablution facilities (Ball 2008: 116; Insoll 1999a: 31-2). A minaret may be associated with the mosque (Williams 2008: 4.4.6), although this is not always the case, nor is the building’s orientation towards Makka always precise (Elmahmudi 1997: 162; Pinder-Wilson 2001: 167, fn. 43). The size of congregational mosques can also be used as an indication of the size of the male population (Ball 2008: 116; Flood 2009a: 139; Horton 1994: 160). This correlation emphasizes the importance of MJAP’s investigation of the putative mosque to the east of the minaret at Djām (see Chapter 6.4.1).

The ascendant elite in the eastern Islamic world frequently sought to glorify their faith (and their own piety) by funding major religious building projects, albeit expressed through local media. Recent studies of medieval Muslim and Hindu contact in the northern Indian sub-continent provide detailed analyses of the material results of translation, in its broadest sense, and transculturation, “a complex process of transformation unfolding through extended contact between cultures” (Flood 2009a: 9).³⁵ The Ḳuwwat al-Islām mosque in Dilhī is one such example of architectural translation (Flood 2009a: 188, 219). Construction of this hypostyle mosque started at the end of the sixth / twelfth century, on top of the remains of a Hindu temple (Bloom & Blair 1997: 146). It incorporates columns from earlier temples which supported beams and a flat roof, a traditional Indian building

³⁴ See also Williams (2008) on the use of aerial photographs and satellite images to investigate Islamic Marw, and attempts to establish a theory and methodology for documenting interpretation and uncertainty in the imagery.

³⁵ See also Patel (2004a & b; 2009b), Talbot (1995) and Wagoner (1996), *inter alia*.

style. In ca 594 / 1198, an attempt was made to imitate the arches typical of Islamic buildings elsewhere in the *dār al-Islām*, using a corbelling technique.

As Insoll (1999b: 4) notes, an emphasis “upon sacred structures and grand architecture persists... to the detriment of research into the religion of everyday, of all the population, or popular religion and practice, and its material correlates”. This failing is not unique to Islamic archaeology. MJAP’s studies of domestic architecture at *Djām*, in conjunction with our work on the more dramatic civic structures (Chapter Six) seek to provide a broad range of insights to life in the *Ghūrid* summer capital.

2.6.2 Evidence of Islam in the material record

Much of the research into other expressions of Islam in the material culture of the period falls within the sphere of art history, highlighting the recurring value of cross-disciplinary studies. It is important to note, however, that while “some Islamic art may have been made by Muslims for purposes of the faith, much of it was not” (Blair & Bloom 2003: 152). In fact, few Muslim artisans would recognise a genre of ‘Islamic art’, which is to a large extent a construct of Western scholarly research (Blair & Bloom 2003: 153). The broad geographical and chronological coherences implied by the term rarely exist, yet the term is a “convenient misnomer” for many of the artistic remnants leftover from other better defined genres (Blair & Bloom 2003: 153).

Following Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom (2003: 153), I regard the term ‘Islamic art’ as referring to “the visual culture of a place and time when the people (or at least their leaders) espoused a particular religion”, in this case Islam. As with detailed architectural studies, art history lies below the scope of this thesis. Consequently, I will outline the interface of archaeology and art history, before considering some of the archaeological implications of attempting to relate dynastic periods with identity and their manifestations in the material culture.

Bloom and Blair (1997) structure their study of Islamic arts around four themes – the arts of buildings, books, textiles, and ‘the fire’.³⁶ They follow these four themes through three chronological sections, the second of which “Regional centres and local powers” (900-1500 CE) is most relevant to this thesis. The numerous regional centres that rose to prominence during this period often sponsored the development of their own artistic styles (see, for example, metalwork from Harāt – Flood 2009a: 105, 169-70).

³⁶ See also Ettinghausen *et al.* (2001), Pritula (2006) and Semenov (2006) on Islamic art in central Asia, Barry (2004) on figurative art and Ivanov (2006) on metalwork.

Architectural structures dating to the Ghaznawid and Ghūrid periods have been studied in detail by Robert Hillenbrand (2000) and, where relevant, will be discussed in Chapter Five.³⁷ Unfortunately, numerous factors inhibit the preservation of much of the arts of the book and the loom. A four-volume *Ḳurʿān* created by artisans from Nīshāpūr is the only artefact confidently ascribed to the patronage of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad (Flood 2009a: 94-6). Similarly, references in the historical sources to appropriate dress in court appearances (Flood 2009a: 92; ṬN, tr. Raverty 1970 [1881] I: 315) and the exchange of exquisite ‘robes of honour’ (*khilʿa*) supplement the fragments of textiles which have survived. Other glimpses of highly decorative (primarily elite) attire can be gained from depictions in book illuminations and wall paintings such as those at Lashkar-i Bāzār (Schlumberger 1952: 261-7). Textiles clearly had symbolic significance, as well as being functional and at times beautiful. ‘Robes of honour’, along with the *khutba* (Friday sermon) and *sikka* (coinage), were “central to the articulation of authority in the Islamic world” (Flood 2009a: 76). Such elite examples should not be emphasized at the expense of the more mundane – the textile industry was at the heart of medieval central Asia, and its raw materials and finished goods were traded extensively (Bloom & Blair 1997: 223).³⁸

Archaeologists, therefore, are largely left with ‘the arts of the fire’, which Bloom and Blair (1997: 249, 264-9) argue were “at their finest and most inventive during the middle period” (900-1500 CE). It is the ceramics, however, of all the Islamic arts, which provide the greatest insights into everyday, as opposed to elite lifestyles (Walmsley 1994: 11). Ceramic manufacturing techniques and themes continued from before the fourth / tenth century, but were gradually refined. Ceramic wares imitating Chinese porcelains became more common at the expense of earthenwares.³⁹ These were decorated in a multitude of ways using paints, slips, incised decoration and glazes at various stages of production (Bloom & Blair 1997: 265). Colour was added to metalwork in the form of inlays, while luxury glass vessels were decorated with gold and polychrome enamel known as *mināʿī*

³⁷ For more general studies of Islamic architecture, see Hillenbrand (1994) and Petersen (1996). Earlier regional studies include those by Crowe (1978) on central Asia and Afghanistan, Hutt and Harrow (1977) and Hutt (1978) on Iran, and Knobloch (1972) on central Asia. More recently, the splendour of the architecture and archaeology of Afghanistan has been illustrated by Ball (2008) and Knobloch (2002).

³⁸ Similarly, it is worth remembering that textiles from India were traded extensively via maritime routes during this period – see, for example, the various papers in *Ars Orientalis* 2004 34, introduced by Patel (2004c).

³⁹ Note, however, the more refined chronological patterns discerned by Bulliet at Nīshāpūr, which are discussed above.

(the Persian for enamel – Bloom & Blair 1997: 249, 265-6, 269). The Iranian city of Kāshān was a renowned centre for the production of luxury ceramics (Mason 1997a; Mason *et al.* 2001).

The vast majority of finds on archaeological sites, however, are undiagnostic ceramic body sherds (Walmsley 2008: 149). Many of these were presumably locally made, but few ceramicists working on ceramic material from Afghanistan have undertaken petrographic analyses or detailed studies of kilns, let alone provide data on the majority of their corpuses. Although Jean-Claude Gardin (1977: 80) argues that post-World War II studies have gathered enough data “to build up a tentative chronology of central Asiatic pottery”, temporal and spatial lacunae remain, including that of the current area of study.

Gold and silver artefacts other than coins are unsurprisingly rare, but cheaper copper alloy objects abound.⁴⁰ Brass artefacts, “the medieval equivalent of high-quality plastic” (Bloom & Blair 1997: 257), become increasingly common from the sixth / twelfth century onwards, due in part to the malleability and durability of the material. Inlays which imitated the appearance of objects crafted from more precious metals added to its popularity. Remarkable artefacts such as the ‘Bobrinsky bucket’, which was commissioned by a merchant in 558 / 1163 and designed by an engraver from Harāt (Blair 1985: 86), yield a wealth of data about the period. Their inscriptions often record the person who commissioned the piece, the inlayer and the recipient (Bloom & Blair 1997: 257-64). The mix of Arabic and Persian text indicates the gradually changing roles of languages and scripts.

While it is appropriate to talk of an °Abbāsīd style of art in the early part of this period, other regions and periods did not create their own distinctive material culture. As Alan Walmsley, among others, has noted: “pottery traditions are mostly unaffected by political events and dynastic changes” (Walmsley 2001: 545). It is, therefore, less meaningful to attempt to attach essentially dynastic or geo-political labels such as ‘Saldjūkid’, ‘Ghaznawid’ or ‘Ghūrid’ to material culture from later centuries (Hillenbrand 2000: 128-9). The fact that some of the ethnonyms used in the historical sources are generic, anachronistic, inconsistently applied or difficult to identify, let alone correlate with those used in other historical sources or the archaeological record further complicates the issue (Sinor 1971: 53-5). This mismatch of identity, material culture and geographic and historical labels is well known from a range of periods (Edwards *et al.* 2004: 51-2; Flood 2009a: 1-2; Walmsley 2008a: 149; Whincop 2007; 2009; Whitcomb 2003: 271; *inter alia*), and explored further in Chapter 8.2.

⁴⁰ See Walmsley (2008: 150) for a brief assessment of the importance of numismatic studies.

As at most other sites, the majority of the artefacts recovered during MJAP fieldwork at Djām consist of ‘the arts of the fire’ – primarily ceramics (see Chapter 6.4.6). Detailed analysis of a sample of the ceramics (Gascoigne 2010) has yielded important insights into the connectedness of Djām with the rest of what can be termed ‘medieval Islamic world systems’ and beyond. Similarly, the presence and distribution of diagnostic ceramics have provided information about the organisation of the site itself, and the social status and lifestyles of its inhabitants. These new insights are supplemented by data from the scientific analysis of a wide range of samples which the Afghan authorities kindly gave us permission to export and study (see Chapter 6.4.6).

2.7 Conclusions

It is evident from the discussion above that no single theoretical paradigm is universally applicable – many are more effective as critiques of earlier theories than comprehensive guides for future enlightenment. Indeed, recent studies stress the complexities and pluralities of both the past and our attempts to access it (Thomas, J. 2004: 242; *inter alia*).

In my opinion, an *Annales* approach, which contrasts short-term historical figures and events, and mid-term socio-economic structures, with longer term environmental factors, provides the study of the past with much needed perspective, while Resilience Theory offers a flexible theoretical model for the multi-scalar investigation of social, political and economic change. This is particularly important given the rapid ebb and flow of complex and polythetic polities in central Asia in the sixth-seventh / twelfth-thirteenth centuries.

Scholars, however, need to be wary of labelling the past according to modern concepts and preconceptions, such as nation states and rigid political boundaries (Clarke 1978: 413-14; Flood 2009a: 2; Thomas. J. 2004: 227). Imposing value-laden terms on the past misleads rather than illuminates – as Flood (2009a: 3) points out, medieval texts are often “more sensitive to ethnic, historical, and regional differences among the Muslims than is modern historiography, generally preferring ethnic or regional appellations to religious categories”. The fact that the distribution of a culture group is “rarely completely contiguous and continuous...” (Clarke 1978: 311-12) means that we need to think of networks rather than fixed territories with rigid borders (Flood 2009a: 8). Adam T. Smith’s concept of an ‘archipelagic landscape’ (Smith 2004: 109) is, therefore, applicable both as a way of conceptualizing medieval polities and contested landscapes, and the inevitably incomplete datasets.

The adoption of neutral terminology such as “Early Islamic” (622-1220 CE – Ball 2008:

88-94) when referring to archaeological material culture of Afghanistan and the wider region is preferable to the erroneous appellation of dynastic labels to archaeological levels, but also risks becoming equally misleading, particularly given the differing definitions and regionally varying chronological parameters of such terms – in the Levant, for example, the period from 800-1200 CE is referred to as the “Islamic High Middle Ages” by one author (Walmsley 1994: 11), while another refers to 1000-1400 CE as “Middle Islamic 1 and 2” (Whitcomb 2003: 273). These semantic differences and debates mirror long-standing scholarly wrangles over chronologies and typologies of other periods.⁴¹

One recurring theme in this thesis, and other research, is the difficulty of correlating historical documented events, stratigraphic evidence and perceptible changes in material culture. This realisation should be self-evident, yet for decades attempts to gloss over such ‘inconvenient truths’ have resulted in simplistic, misleading narratives. Recognisable changes in material culture are rarely synchronous with political change or population movements. This is particularly the case where new regimes retain existing socio-political and administrative structures as the early *Ghaznawids* did (Bosworth 1973: 9).

The site of *Djām* provides archaeologists with an opportunity to attempt to combine the narrative provided by the historical sources with archaeological survey and excavation data, and scientific analyses (Chapter Six). Each of these data sets is less than ideal – the historical sources are of variable reliability while the archaeological deposits at the site remain largely unexplored and are now severely compromised by extensive looting. It is also important to recognise that *Djām* merely provides an insight into one of the *Ghūrīds*’ major urban centres. Fieldwork at the other known sites is summarized in Chapter Five, while new sources of data have been identified through the use of Google Earth and other sources of satellite images (Chapter Seven). First, however, it is necessary to put this research in its geographical (Chapter Three) and historical (Chapter Four) contexts.

⁴¹ See, for example, the dialogue over the chronology of the Iron Age in the Levant – most recently, Finkelstein & Piasezky 2010 and Levy *et al.* 2010.