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A universal spirit in the world

The Courier

A universal genius
in Central Asia
a thousand years ago

AL-BIRUNI

astronomer
historian
botanist
pharmacologist
geologist
poet
philosopher
mathematician
geographer
humanist





Ancient splendours of Ghazni

Ghazni (in present-day Afghanistan) was one of Islam's most splendid cities in the 10th century. It was the capital and cradle of the Ghaznavid dynasty which rose from the frontiers of Mesopotamia to the Chinese frontiers. At Ghazni, the great Muslim scientist and philosopher, Ibn al-Haytham, died in the year 1037 until his death about 1048 A.D. Here he wrote some of his most famous works, including his encyclopaedia on optics. The Mongol invasion of 1221 destroyed Ghazni, leaving only two minarets and a palace tower in ruins. This star-shaped tower of burnt brick, 40 metres high and decorated with Arabic inscriptions, is the sole of rem of the minarets. It was once topped by a cylindrical upper tower (see also page 18).

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