

Analysis of Written Sources About the Khorezm Oasis During the Western Turkic Khaganate

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Abstract: This article analyzes the reflection of the history of the Khorezm oasis in written sources in the early Middle Ages, in particular, during the period of the Western Turkic Khaganate. The study comparatively studies sources in Greek (Byzantine), Chinese, Armenian, Arabic and Persian languages, as well as linguistic, toponomic, epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological materials. The study reveals the scientific significance of various sources in elucidating the political position of Khorezm within the Turkic Khaganate, its interregional relations and ethnocultural processes. Also, based on written sources and monuments of material culture, existing views on the socio-political and cultural development of the Khorezm oasis in the 6th-8th centuries are analyzed, their mutual coherence and some controversial aspects are shown.

Keywords: Khorezm, Western Turkic Khaganate, early Middle Ages, written sources, Byzantine sources, Chinese chronicles, Arab-Persian sources, numismatics, archeology, ethnocultural processes.

Introduction: Since the formation of the Turkic Khaganate, a number of factors have created the basis for the rulers to wage almost continuous wars of conquest. The main factor is that most of the nomadic tribes of the eastern steppes of Eurasia have united under the rule of the Turks. This situation guaranteed them a share of the spoils of victory obtained from participating in the conquests. At the same time, they settled along the caravan routes connecting East Turkestan, the Chu-Talas range and the oasis states of Central Asia, and received additional income from the collection of trade duties, tribute in the form of valuable goods and agricultural products, or from forced exchange with the settled population[1]. Deep ties with Sogdian merchants were another motivating factor in the mass migrations of the nomadic population living in the eastern steppe regions to the West and in the active foreign policy of the Turkic rulers[2]. For the first time in history, numerous nomadic and sedentary peoples from the mainly Asian part of the Eurasian steppe united on the borders of the Turkic Empire[3]. The population of previously

independent settled agricultural regions under the Turkish protectorate had the opportunity to profit from the revival of international trade, the growth of crafts and agriculture, while the nomadic population gained a reliable economic base. Finally, the success of the Turkic khaganate's policy of conquest was also facilitated by the international situation: namely, at this time China was politically fragmented and the mutual hostility between Iran and Byzantium was escalating.

It was within this vast system of the Turkic Empire that the Khorezm oasis was one of the regions that held a special place.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are, with some exceptions, sufficient written sources and archaeological finds from this period to illuminate the history of the Khorezm oasis in the early Middle Ages, more precisely, in the 5th-8th centuries AD. Written sources are mainly in Greek, Chinese, Arabic and Persian, and there are also some in ancient Khorezmian and Sogdian languages. Some of these sources date back to the early Middle Ages, while others date back to the high Middle Ages, that is, the

9th-12th centuries. Archaeological sources are enriched with urban remains, ceramic and metal objects, numismatic materials and other finds from those periods.

Analyzing the results of research conducted on the basis of sources currently in scientific circulation, their positive aspects, and existing scientific shortcomings, written sources on the history of the Khorezm oasis during the period of the Western Turkic Khaganate can be divided into the following categories according to their linguistic characteristics:

I. Greek (Byzantine) sources. During the research, Greek sources were written in the environment of the Byzantine Empire, and the works of authors such as Theophylact Simocatta and Menander provide brief information on the history of Khorezm. Byzantine sources record the opinions of the ambassadors of the Turkish Khaganate who went to Byzantium in 568 that the Hephthalites were completely defeated and the territories under their control passed under the control of Byzantium[4].

II. Sources written in Chinese. Chinese chronicles from the early Middle Ages, such as the Bei-shu ("History of the Northern Dynasty"), the Sui-shu ("History of the Sui Dynasty"), and the Tan-shu ("History of the Tan Dynasty"), contain information about almost all the oasis principalities of Central Asia, including the Khorezm principality[5]. This territory, mentioned in these annals as Kholisimi (Khorezm), Khoshun, means that it was the most remote region of the region. In particular, the Tan-shu annals contain the following information about the settled principalities in Central Asia: "An (Bukhara), Sao (Kabudon), Shi (Choch), Mi (Maymurg), He (Kushonia / Kattakurgan), Khoshun (Khorezm), Maodi (Bitik), Shishi (Kesh). The rulers [of these principalities] are called "nine families / clans" from generation to generation, and all [of their principalities] have the surname (family name) of Zhaowu"[6] and from these sentences it is clear that the representatives of the ruling dynasty in Khorezm had a common ethnic origin with a number of dynasties of the region.

III. Armenian-language sources. Although there is only a brief information, Armenian-language sources written in the early Middle Ages play an important role in shedding light on the history of our region before the introduction of Islam. According to the information provided in one of the Armenian sources, "Ashkharatsuyts", it was established that Khorezm and the territories adjacent to it from the north, in particular, the territories of the Lower Amu Darya, Aral Sea and Lower Syr Darya basins, were part of the Turkic Khaganate. The information provided can be

recognized as an important source in clarifying the political and geographical significance of the Khorezm oasis in the Middle Ages. Especially during the period of the Turkic Khaganate, when analyzing the expansion of regional borders and the relations of Khorezm with neighboring regions, written sources such as "Ashkharatsuyts" provide valuable evidence: "Scythia, that is, Apakhtark, which is the (country of) the Turks, begins at Etil (the Volga River) and reaches Emavan (Pamir or Himalayas), from where it extends to the country of the Chins. 44 peoples live in Scythia: Sogdians, Tocharians, Ephthalites and other peoples with barbaric names"[7].

From the information in Armenian sources, it can be understood that under the terms "Scythia", "Turkestan" and "Land of the Turks" Armenian authors meant the Turkic Khaganate. Special emphasis is placed on the fact that within this state the Sogdians, Tokharians, Hephthalites and a number of other ethnic groups lived in vassal status. It is known that the Itil River (Volga) was called so in ancient and medieval Turkic sources.

IV. Sources written in Arabic and Persian. The history of Khorezm in the early Middle Ages, especially on the eve of Islam, is mainly contained in Arabic sources - Abu Ja'far at-Tabari's "Tarih arsul walmuluk" ("History of Prophets and Rulers", 9th century), Abu Hanifa ad-Dinowari's "Kitab akhbor-at-tiwal" ("Book of Long Stories", 9th century), Ahmad al-Balozuri's "Futuh al-buldan" ("Conquest of Countries", 9th century), geographer Abu Abdullah al-Muqaddasi's "Ahsan at-taqasim fi ma'rifat al-aqolim" ("A Good Guide to the Study of Climates", 10th century) and other historical works[8], which are analyzed in a major article by the Turkish A.N. Qurat entitled "Qutayba ibn Muslim's Conquest of Transoxiana and Khorezm"[9].

Among the historical works written in Arabic, the work "Osar ul-baqiya" ("Monuments of Past Peoples") by Abu Rayhan Beruni (973-1048) occupies a special place. Among the scientists of the Soviet era, researchers such as S.P. Tolstov, Y.A. Yakubovsky, and Y. Gulyamov sought to substantiate the veracity of the historical information presented in Beruni's works using archaeological evidence. In their research, special attention was paid to determining the harmony between written sources and material finds[10]. E.E. Nerazik and V.A. Livshits, based on the results of archaeological excavations in Tuproqqala and Toqqal, criticized Beruni's concept of periodization of Khorezm history. In their opinion, the sequence of historical periods put forward by Beruni does not always correspond to the existing archaeological layers. At the same time, scientists such as B.I. Weinberg, M. Fedorov, A. Kuznetsov and Y.A. Armarchuk, who

conducted research based on numismatic materials, showed that there were contradictions between the information about the Afrygian dynasty described in Beruni's work and the chronological evidence based on coins, and expressed doubts about their reliability[11].

The information that serves as a written source for the history of the Khorezm oasis in the early Middle Ages is linguistic, toponymic and epigraphic materials. The ancient Khorezm words cited in the written information in Arabic and Persian languages of the developed Middle Ages indicate that they belong to Iranian languages both in appearance and meaning. In several dozen ceramic inscriptions with ancient Khorezm writing based on the Aramaic alphabet found in the remains of ancient cities dating back to the time of the Arab Caliphate invasion in the Khorezm oasis and adjacent areas[12], as well as in dozens of types of copper and silver coins belonging to the Afrogid dynasty, various words and phrases, names and titles reflect, on the one hand, linguistic features characteristic of Eastern Iranian languages, and on the other hand, linguistic features peculiar to Khorezm itself[13].

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on the principles of historicity, objectivity and systematicity. Comparative-historical, source studies and historiographical methods were used to cover the topic. Written sources in Greek, Chinese, Armenian, Arabic and Persian, as well as archaeological, numismatic and linguistic materials were analyzed in a comparative manner.

RESULTS

Analyses show that in the early Middle Ages, the Khorezm oasis was one of the important political and cultural regions within the Western Turkic Khaganate. Written sources in Greek, Chinese, Armenian, Arabic, and Persian have preserved valuable information about Khorezm's interregional relations, diplomatic status, and relations with the Turkic Khaganate. In particular, Byzantine and Chinese sources indicate the role of the Khorezm rulers in international relations and their active participation in political processes in the region.

A name similar to the name of one of the rulers of Khorezm in the period before the establishment of Islam, Turkasabas, mentioned by Abu Rayhan Beruni, appears in Greek sources as one of the princes of the Turkic Khaganate in the form of Turksanf. O.I. Smirnova, who studied this information, suggested that the lexical meaning of the name Turkasabas is "the owner of the Turkic army", and noted that such a name is associated with the political influence of the Turks in Khorezm. Unlike this researcher, some researchers argue that the original name of Turksanf, mentioned in

Greek sources as the son of Istami Yabgu, was "Turk shad" (Turkish prince) in the ancient Turkic language, and that he was the son of Istami Khagan[14]. This historical-linguistic analysis allows us to further explore the relationship between the Khorezm oasis and the Turkic Khaganate.

The French researcher A. Remusat, relying on Chinese written sources, examines the issue of the origin of the rulers of Khorezm and suggests their connection with the "Zhaowu" dynasty. He also paid special attention to the economic and political relations of Khorezm with China during the Han, Wei and Sui dynasties. At the same time, the scientist, while assessing the role and importance of Chinese sources in scientific research, also touched upon some problems that arose in the process of their translation. In particular, he highlighted the problems of different interpretations of some geographical names in translations into Western languages, and the fact that translations in this area have not yet been fully completed[15].

As part of their study of the history of the Turkic Khaganate, A. Atakhojaev and G. Boboyorov, while covering the political and cultural processes of Khorezm in the early medieval period, focused on certain issues, relying on the translations made by A. Remusat and N.Y. Bichurin, as well as the research of O.I. Smirnova. In particular, they conducted a consistent analysis of the term "Zhawou" mentioned in Chinese sources and the name "Jamuk" found in Arabic written traditions[16]. However, some scientific works by T. Matyokubov and A. Ruzimov, as well as the section entitled "Khorezm in the Early Middle Ages" of "History of Uzbekistan" (Volume XI), published in 2023, show a limited approach to this issue. In particular, A. Atakhojayev, K. Masharipov and M. Abdullayev only mention some information from Chinese sources on the medieval history of Khorezm, which is given in "Tanshu"[17]. Also, while analyzing Zoroastrianism in the Khorezm oasis, A. Atakhojayev also touched upon the political and cultural processes in the oasis[18].

The Khorezm scholar Abul Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Umar al-Khwarizmi az-Zamakhshari (1075-1144) cites hundreds of ancient Khorezm words in his work "Muqaddimatul-adab", based on which we can see that in the pre-Muslim era, the majority of Khorezmians spoke one of the branches of Iranian languages[19]. The Arab traveler Ahmad ibn Fadlan (10th century) traveled through Khorezm to the peoples of the north, especially among the various Turkic peoples, and wrote that the language of the Khorezm people at that time was quite different, emphasizing that the language of the people of the Kerdar region, neighboring the Khorezm people from the north, was different from theirs[20]. Based on some

similarities in the names of days, months, and years in the ancient Khorezm and Sogdian calendars cited by Beruni, it is determined that there are similarities between both languages, but also certain differences[21].

Based on the evidence that the inhabitants of the Khorezm oasis had their own language - a dialect - in the early Middle Ages, it is possible to have certain ideas about the cultural processes that took place in the oasis at that time, based on toponyms[22]. Hundreds of ancient Khorezm place names, both in medieval written sources and in the names of modern settlements, are clear evidence of this. In addition to the main name of the Khorezm oasis, "Khorezm", it is noteworthy that the words Gurganch (Urganch), Khivak (Khiva), Khazorasp, Pitnak, Kat (Kot), Kardaronkhos, Gandimakon, Angarik, Bezganik, Knik, Pishkanik, Rafanik, etc., both in the Middle Ages and today[23] are found as old toponyms of the oasis and are included in the list of words specific to the ancient Khorezm language.

Thus, through such linguistic sources, the culture of the inhabitants of the Khorezm oasis in the early Middle Ages was dominated by features characteristic of the eastern Iranian peoples. In addition, the oasis was also inhabited by Turkic peoples, who were referred to by ethnic terms such as Oghuz and Kojat.

In studying the socio-political and cultural life of the Khorezm oasis of this period, coins minted by the Khorezmshah-Afrighians in the early Middle Ages serve as a special source. Full information about this can be found in the Russian-language monograph "Ancient Khorezm Coins"[24] by numismatist B.I. Weinberg. In this study, the oldest coins from the history of ancient Khorezm were analyzed, which were divided into groups A, B, V, and G. The subject of this study is precisely the coins belonging to group G, which were minted mainly during the time of the Afrogyids, in the 8th century. Pre-Islamic Khorezm coins were also discussed in the studies of S.P. Tolstov[25]. In addition, Khorezm coins of this period are included in the studies of E.V. Rtveladze, Y.V. Zeymal, D.V. Biryukov to one degree or another. If we give an example of the role of coins as a source, the coins minted during the reigns of Azkajuvar-Chagon, Shavat, Savshafan, Azkajuvar-Abdullah, who ruled after 712, were analyzed in the work of B.I. Weinberg, and the inscriptions, titles, images, stamps and a number of other symbolic signs on the coins are closely related to the socio-political and ethno-cultural situation of that period[26].

Ceramics also have a special place among archaeological materials as a source for the socio-economic and cultural life of the Khorezm oasis in the

early Middle Ages. Archaeological materials found in the Khorezm oasis can also be divided into two groups: 1) finds directly related to the Khaganate; 2) finds related to the Khaganate period. Although researchers emphasize that, unlike the Tashkent, Fergana and Samarkand regions, coins and ancient Turkic inscriptions are not found among the finds characteristic of the material culture of the Turkic Khaganate in the Khorezm oasis, the Tok-Kala ostodons and other finds confirm the existence of close cultural ties of those times. The Tok-Kala find, made of clay and depicting a mourning ceremony, depicts a group of people around a deceased person lying on his back, scratching their faces with knives, bleeding, and tearing their hair, mourning, and a similar scene is found in a number of archaeological finds. For example, in the Panjikent palace wall paintings, painted in the 7th-8th centuries, there are images of a deceased person lying on his back and people scratching their faces with knives, tearing their hair, and mourning around him, and a number of researchers equate these images with the mourning ceremony typical of the ancient Turks[27].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an acquaintance with the sources related to Khorezm in the early Middle Ages, including during the period of the Western Turkic Khaganate, shows that in those times the Khorezm region, which was one of the oasis principalities in Central Asia, occupied a unique place in its socio-political and cultural life. Located in an important strategic area due to its natural and geographical location, Khorezm adjoined Sassanid Iran on the one hand in the southwest, and the territories of the Turkic Khaganate on the other hand in the north and northeast, and its political and economic life was closely connected with other oases of the region. Through these connections, the Khorezm people enriched their culture and played an important role in international trade routes. Therefore, Khorezm retained its importance as an integral part of the history of Central Asia during that period.

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