

KHWARIZM**E. E. Nerazik and P. G. Bulgakov***Contents**

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* See [Map 5](#).

Part One

HISTORY AND CULTURE OF KHWARIZM

(*E. E. Nerazik*)

Uncertain early history

The period from the late third to the eighth century was a very complex one in the history of Khwarizm (Chorasmia). It was marked initially by the decline and fall of the huge Kushan Empire, the rule of the Hephthalites in Central Asia and their conflict with the Sasanians, while the close of the period coincides with the Arab conquest of the entire region. The area's development over these centuries was determined by two basic factors: the growth of feudal relations and outside invasions.

There is as yet no irrefutable evidence that Khwarizm became part of the Kushan state. Opponents of this theory commonly cite as evidence of the country's independence the appearance of a local overstrike on Kushan coins in circulation in the territory of Khwarizm.¹ They further maintain that the wealth of archaeological material cannot properly be taken as reflecting close links between Khwarizm and the Kushans, mainly because of the almost complete lack of any tangible vestige of Buddhism, which had been propagated in the lands conquered by the Kushans, particularly Tokharistan (Bactria). It should be noted, however, that not all the Kushan coins found in Khwarizm are overstruck; and investigation of the material and spiritual culture of the population in the early centuries of the Christian era points to some Indo-Buddhist connections.² However, influence in the field of art is not necessarily determined by conquest; it may emerge and spread through cultural and historical contact. Only if fresh data are amassed will it be possible to settle this vexed question. It is noteworthy that Toprak-kala (see also pages 213–17), an outstanding architectural group and grandiose dynastic centre, was built in the second century of the Christian era. This was undoubtedly a very significant event, and Tolstov is perhaps correct

¹ Masson, 1966, pp. 82–3; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 87–9.

² Tolstov, 1948a, p. 201.

in believing that the palace was built to mark the liberation of Khwarizm from dependence on the Kushans and in ascribing the appearance of a local overstrike on Kushan coins to that very period.³

In the early fourth century, Afrig came to power in Khwarizm after founding a new era, according to al-Biruni who lists 22 rulers of the dynasty founded by Afrig.⁴ Numismatic evidence, third-century material from the archives of the Toprak-kala palace and inscriptions on the ossuaries from Tok-kala (seventh and eighth centuries) (Fig. 1), however, have significantly rectified this account. First, the notion of the Afrig era must be rejected, since it has been established beyond doubt that the Khwarizmian era, reflected in dates in the above-mentioned documentary material, began in the first century.⁵ Furthermore, only certain names of rulers from al-Biruni's list tally with those found on coins,⁶ a discrepancy believed to be the result of his lack of reliable information on the pre-Islamic Khwarizmian dynasty.⁷ It is thought, however, that the discrepancy will prove to be less important as more numismatic evidence is accumulated.

Particular uncertainty surrounds the second half of the third century and the fourth century, a period which saw the appearance of many small copper coins and various seals. This seems to reflect a trend towards the political isolation of individual parts of Khwarizm.⁸ Between the last third of the third century (which corresponds to the reign of King Vazamar, possibly a usurper of the Khwarizmian throne)⁹ and the end of the seventh century there are no satisfactorily dated coin series; indeed, there is a gap in the coinage.¹⁰ It is important to note that the period in question corresponds to the time of the Sasanians' eastward campaigns, Khwarizm being recorded as one of the countries they conquered. Thus, according to the Arab historian al-Tabari, Ardashir I seized Balkh, Merv and Khwarizm as far as the extreme limits of Khurasan.¹¹ However, the inscription of Shapur I on the Ka'be of Zoroaster at Naqsh-i Rostam, which lists the realms conquered by him, makes no mention of Khwarizm.¹² At the same time, numismatic and archaeological evidence suggests that Khwarizm was in some way dependent on the Sasanians. We may nevertheless question Henning's view that the country was totally subjugated for a considerable period.¹³

³ Tolstov, 1984b, p. 16.

⁴ Biruni, 1957, p. 48.

⁵ Henning, 1965, p. 169; Livshits, 1968, p. 440; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 77–80.

⁶ Livshits, 1968, pp. 442–4; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 80–2.

⁷ Gudkova and Livshits, 1967, p. 10.

⁸ Tolstov, 1948a, p. 183.

⁹ See Tolstov, 1962, p. 225; Vaynberg, 1977, p. 97.

¹⁰ Henning, 1965, p. 170; Livshits, 1968, p. 443.

¹¹ Nöldeke, Tabari, 1973, pp. 17–18.

¹² Sprengling, 1953, pp. 7, 14; Lukonin, 1969, pp. 62, 126.

¹³ Henning, 1965, pp. 169–70.



FIG. 1. Tok-kala. Painted ossuary. (Photo: © Vladimir Terebenin.)

We cannot rule out the possibility that Khwarizm was part of the state of the Türks in the sixth and seventh centuries, though relations between the Khwarizmians and the Türks are as yet obscure.

The only events in Khwarizm about which the sources are comparatively clear are those that occurred at the time of the campaigns of conquest led by the Arab general Qutaiba b. Muslim (see below ‘The Arab conquest’.).



FIG. 2. Coin from Khwarizm (sixth century?). Bronze.

Social structure and administration

Between the fourth and the sixth century the cities of Khwarizm underwent a marked decline, with a cut-back in the irrigation network. This is usually blamed on a socio-economic depression, the scale of which is unclear, though it was more pronounced on the periphery of the country. It may have been at least partly the result of invasions by nomadic tribes at the time of the great migration of peoples, when the outlying areas were undoubtedly overrun. Furthermore, the country's internal situation must have been affected by the abovementioned events of political history. The seventh and eighth centuries, however, saw some stability and even a measure of economic and cultural progress.

We can only guess at the political and administrative organization of Khwarizm. There is some numismatic evidence of the existence of independent local rulers in the seventh and eighth centuries. For example, coins have come to light from the Kerder region of the lower valley of the Amu Darya (Oxus). That territory had been taken over by settlers from Khwarizm and by immigrants from the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) regions and its rulers succeeded in usurping the throne of the *Khwarizmshah* on several occasions. The 'king of Khamjird' seems to have ruled in northern Khwarizm. There is also a theory that Khamjird and Urgench were one and the same place.¹⁴

The monetary reform carried out in Khwarizm at some point in the fifth, sixth or seventh century led to the minting of new types of coins (Fig. 2) with a different value, and with the ideogram *MR'Y MLK'* (lord king) instead of the earlier *MLK'* (king).¹⁵ What prompted the reform is unclear, but it may have reflected the desire of the *Khwarizmshah* to consolidate



FIG. 3. Berkut-kala. Castle of fifth–seventh century (eastern Khwarizm). Aerial view.

¹⁴ Vaynberg, 1977, p. 99.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 59–65.

his power over the other rulers. Al-Tabari mentions them when referring, in connection with the events of 711–712 (see pages 229 et seq.), to kings and *dihqāns* (lords). Clearly some hierarchical order or rule may be indicated by the coinage of the seventh century, which bears the Khwarizmian inscription *ḥwt'w* (lord) accompanying the portrait of the ruler, with the ideogram *MR'Y MLK'* on the reverse. Some authorities believe that the terms *MLK'*, *MR'Y* and $\gamma w \beta w$ in narrative sources and on Sogdian coinage of the seventh and eighth centuries also indicate three degrees in the local hierarchy.¹⁶ In the Sogdian documents from Mount Mug, however, *MR'Y* (equivalent to $\gamma w \beta w$ or *xwt'w*) is the title assumed both by Divashtich (the ruler of Panjikent) himself and by his underlings.¹⁷ At the same time, the entire nobility of Iran of lower rank than the king bore the title of 'lord'.¹⁸ Nevertheless there can be little doubt about the general hierarchical structure of Khwarizmian society in the seventh and eighth centuries. Of particular significance is the archaeological evidence concerning Khwarizm's oasis settlements which sprang up along the major canals around the urban centres.

The structure of the towns varied: the old towns founded in antiquity on the major trading routes continued to exist, still with a rectangular grid layout and fortified walls and towers; but new towns often sprang up by the walls of the castles of powerful feudal lords, reflecting the prevalent trend in the development of medieval towns. One example was the small town of Berkut-kala (Fig. 3): it was composed of two parts, one containing buildings occupied by craftsmen, around a market square, and the other entirely taken up with housing.¹⁹ Another example is the vast complex of buildings (Fig. 4) at the foot of the fortress Ayaz-kala 2 (Fig. 5): here, in the fifth to the seventh century (and probably even before), a beautiful palace of the *Khwarizmshahs* emerged and a town developed near by (Fig. 6). Little is known about the appearance of the old towns. According to Arab authors, Madinat al-Fir, the capital of Khwarizm, was the country's largest and most strongly fortified town, the historian al-Baladhuri even comparing it to Samarkand.²⁰ It consisted of three parts surrounded by a moat:²¹ the al-Fir citadel, the old town and the new part. In the tenth century, when the old town and the citadel had been almost destroyed by the Amu Darya, the new part grew into a town known at the time as Kath.

Hazarasp was one of the country's main towns, according to Bal^cami.²² Small-scale excavations there have revealed portions of strongly fortified walls and a large citadel

¹⁶ Smirnova, 1963, p. 31.

¹⁷ Livshits, 1962, p. 50.

¹⁸ Harmatta, 1957, p. 303; Lukonin, 1961, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ Nerazik, 1966, p. 109.

²⁰ Al-Baladhuri, 1924, p. 188.

²¹ Bolshakov, 1973, p. 171.

²² Balcami, 1874, p. 176.

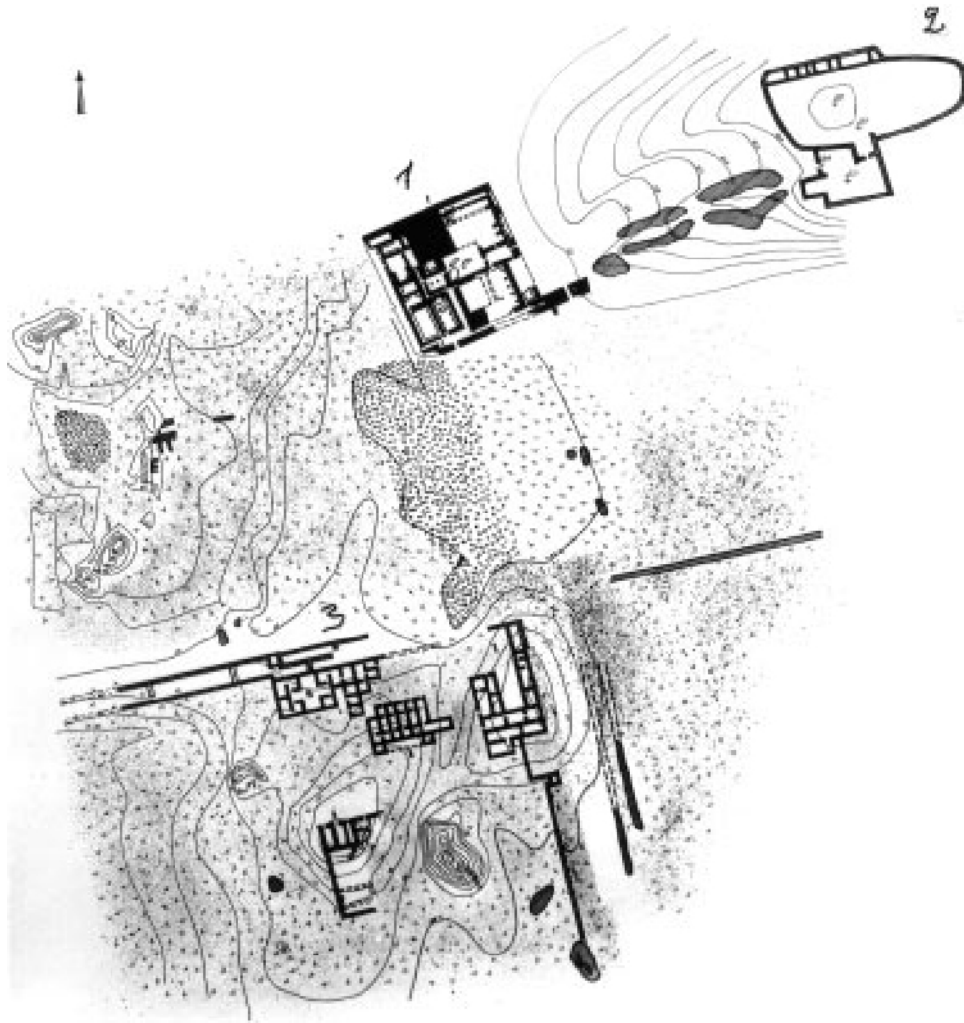


FIG. 4. Early Middle Ages complex near Ayaz-kala 2 (fifth–seventh century). 1: palace; 2: Ayaz-kala 2; 3: dwellings.

may have existed in an angle of the town. It should be noted that Toprak-kala was a royal residence, a town specially built to serve a number of palaces, around which it lay (Figs. 7–9). The layout of the town, which covered 17.5 ha, was marked by great regularity throughout its existence (second to sixth century). The town of Kerder, the centre of an independent domain, was laid out just as regularly as Toprak-kala, a fact which appears to reflect centralized urbanization. The Kerder settlements cannot be called towns in the full sense of the word, however. Surrounded by a primitive outer enclosure in the form of an embankment, and sometimes lacking outer walls, they arose spontaneously as a result of the settlement of the nomadic and semi-nomadic population around a central fortification. The largest of them was Kuyuk-kala (41 ha), on whose territory have been found two ruined citadels belonging to different periods, vestiges of yurts and meagre traces of the handicrafts that were developed in the area, mainly by Khwarizmians.



FIG. 5. Ayaz-kala 2. Fortified complex.



FIG. 6. Ayaz-kala 2. Palace near the fortified complex.



FIG. 7. Toprak-kala. General view. (Photo: © Vladimir Terebenin.)

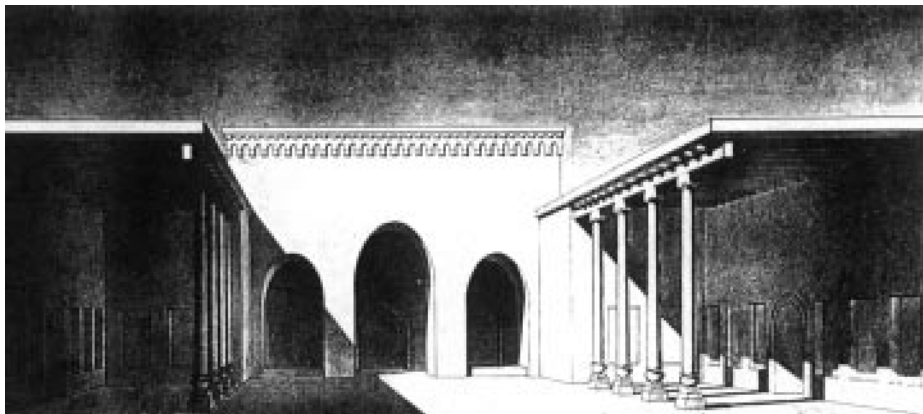


FIG. 8. Toprak-kala. Reconstruction of the palace by Y. A. Rapoport.

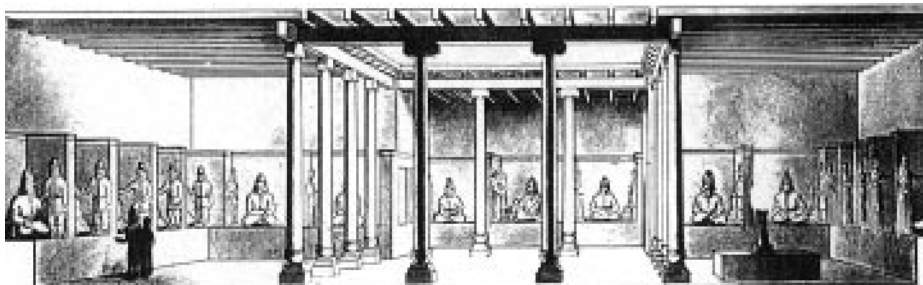


FIG. 9. Toprak-kala. Reconstruction of the interior of the palace by Y. A. Rapoport.

In the agricultural oases of Khwarizm, groups of farmsteads lay along canals at whose outlets stood well-fortified castles. This reflects the hierarchical structure of a feudal society. The rural (and seemingly the urban) population lived in large patriarchal families spanning three generations. Well-to-do families of the third century (whose houses were the *BYT* of the Toprak-kala documents) employed many slaves, slavery then being patriarchal in character in the opinion of Livshits (Fig. 10). The house records use the term *xrytk*, meaning ‘purchased’.²³ Here also, as in Sogdiana, there may have been slaves in debt bondage.²⁴ In inscriptions on ossuaries of the seventh and eighth centuries, where we find the same large kinship groups, the term ‘Hunnaniik’ (son of a Hun) occurs; it is an indication of yet another significant source of slaves – prisoners of war. These inscriptions include information on polygamy (which was common in wealthy families),²⁵ while the Toprak-kala documents also refer to concubines.²⁶ In the service of the wealthy there were also *kedivars* (dependent persons or clients), who had become landless peasant members of the community.

Judging by excavations of dwelling-houses, ordinary farm labourers also lived in the large patriarchal families that made up rural communes. Some communities of this kind lived in the agricultural territory provided by an oasis, whose population may have attained 4–5,000. Indirect evidence of the communal way of life can be deduced from such names of Khwarizmians as *Xwānθačak* (‘possessed of good share’), *βāγδārak* (‘holding a share’) or (‘owning a garden’).²⁷ Each commune was a fairly closed world, based on a natural economy. In the oases, cereals, vegetables, cultivated crops and fine-fibre cotton were grown. Home trades and crafts (potting, iron founding and smithery) almost satisfied the needs of the rural inhabitants.²⁸ After a short burst of activity in the third century, monetary circulation was not further developed until the seventh and eighth centuries, but the bulk of the coins still came from the castles. Silver and copper coins were in circulation; their face value and weight were approximately the same as other drachms of the time.

With the accumulation of written and archaeological evidence concerning Khwarizm in the seventh and eighth centuries, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Sogdian and Khwarizmian societies developed along similar lines. It is important in this connection that the three Sogdian social groups (*ηβ*), according to the documents from Mount Mug, included the tradespeople (*γw’ky*) in addition to the nobility (*’rtkr*) and the workmen

²³ Livshits, 1984, p. 267.

²⁴ Livshits, 1962, pp. 35–6.

²⁵ Gudkova and Livshits, 1967, p. 14.

²⁶ Livshits, 1984, p. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 269, 272.

²⁸ Nerazik, 1966, pp. 100–8.



FIG. 10. Toprak-kala palace. Written document on wood giving the list of men living in the house of 'Harak'. (Room no. 90.)

(*k'rykr*).²⁹ The merchant class also seems to have played an important part in the socio economic life of Khwarizm. Indeed, the Chinese chronicle the *T'ang shu* [Annals of the T'ang Dynasty] makes special reference to Khwarizmian merchants journeying afar in ox-drawn carts, which seem to have been a feature of the country.³⁰

Trading relations with the regions of the Aral Sea and the northwest Caspian area, together with the Volga and Ural regions, were extremely important for Khwarizm's economy from the fourth to the eighth century. This trend in trading relations played a definite role in establishing Khwarizmian culture. Its influence was particularly marked in the periods of the political predominance of Kerder (see above), and was felt, for example, in the interior layout of dwellings and the forms and ornamentation of ceramics. Overall, the culture of Khwarizm was the product of a complex interaction between, on the one hand, dominant, profoundly traditional local elements and, on the other, those brought by an immigrant population and arising from the country's historical and cultural contacts.

²⁹ Livshits, 1962, p. 37.

³⁰ Bichurin, 1950, pp. 315–16.

While possessing a distinctive character and identity, Khwarizmian culture followed the course of development common to all artistic canons and forms elsewhere in the Early Middle Ages in Central Asia.

Art, architecture, religion and language

In the second half of the third century the unique complex of Toprak-kala was still in existence, embodying the highest achievements of the architects, painters and sculptors of Khwarizm (Figs. 11 and 12). Dynastic ceremonies were held in its many sanctuaries, which were sumptuously adorned with numerous paintings, coloured bas-reliefs and alabaster and clay sculpture in the round. The artistic traditions and the construction and architectural methods of the builders of the palace date back to antiquity. In the period from the fourth to the eighth century, private fortifications became widespread, and the castles of the aristocracy, with their mighty walls and towers, drawbridges, secret staircases and other structures, studded the countryside. That period saw the beginnings of the major types of popular dwellings and a number of public buildings of the Khwarizmian Middle Ages. At the same time, in view of the spread of polychrome subject paintings in the seventh and eighth centuries in other regions of Central Asia, the absence of monumental pictorial art in Khwarizm of the Early Middle Ages is striking. Although we know of nothing so far



FIG. 11. Toprak-kala palace. Drawing from a mural painting. Woman with a thread. (Room no. 85.)



FIG. 12. Toprak-kala palace. Drawing from the head of a statue in painted clay. (Room no. 36.)

except painted ossuaries, the situation may change as more towns are excavated.³¹ The applied arts are best represented in the form of engraving, toreutics and so on.

On the brink of the Early Middle Ages in Khwarizm, traces of religious ideas that date back to remote antiquity, heathen agrarian cults and worship of the natural elements are frequently found. The kinds of deities which are apparent from the Khwarizmian names found in the Toprak-kala written documents – the water deity Vakhsh, the sun god Mithra, the fire deity and the god of the wind Vayu – could only have emerged in the context of ancient beliefs.³² The traces of the Zoroastrian calendar in this material and the pantheon of deities that is constantly found in the art, together with the rituals of worship, make this system of beliefs comparable to the Avestan pantheon,³³ although there are marked differences. By the end of the third century, the earlier anthropomorphic representations of the deities had almost completely disappeared; fine plastic art was dying out, and statuary ossuaries were replaced by simple stone boxes. These changes are ascribed to the influence of orthodox Iranian Zoroastrianism, which banned idolatry. Finds of statuettes of idols,

³¹ In fact, many fragments of subject paintings have been discovered during excavations of the palace of Ayaz-kala 2, but it is only after restoration that their meaning will become clear.

³² Livshits, 1984, pp. 264–5, 272.

³³ Livshits, 1984, pp. 264–5, 272; Rapoport, 1971.

however, particularly in strata from the fourth to the sixth century, testify to the vitality of heathen cults among the ordinary people of Khwarizm. The isolated terracotta figurines are quite different in form, their features bearing a strong resemblance to those of the stone idols of the steppe. They were introduced by the nomads living on the periphery of Khwarizm, perhaps at the time of the Türk campaigns.

The ancient pantheon seems to have been preserved from the fourth to the eighth century, if sometimes in a barely perceptible symbolic form. For example, the four-armed goddess on seals and silver dishes (Fig. 13) is seen as the ancient goddess Anahita, the goddess of fertility and the aqueous element, which brings felicity,³⁴ while the statuettes of horses and riders symbolize Mithra, whose cult was closely linked to the figure of Siyavush. This legendary ancestor of the Khwarizmian dynasty was also represented in the form of a horseman on the reverse of coins and on seals, and was the hero of a variety of ceremonies which were part of the great ritual cycle of New Year (*Nowruz*) celebrations.³⁵

A complex interlacing of different religious beliefs, principally ancestor worship, can be observed in the burial ceremonies of the people, who placed the cleaned bones of their dead in ossuaries, which were then deposited in burial chambers or interred. Images on the ossuaries depicted both a real scene of mourning for the dead person and a number of ritual scenes showing the passing of the deceased, which were also part of the New Year cycle (Fig. 14).³⁶

A major role in the system of religious beliefs was played by fire worship, which is extensively attested archaeologically. Fire sanctuaries in the form of small, single-chambered cupola-shaped towers have been discovered in the oases of east-bank Khwarizm (Fig. 15). One of these, dating back to the fourth century, is the oldest domed structure in Central Asia. Toprak-kala boasted a fire temple; and, as Rapoport rightly observes, the social stratification of the population was reflected in religious differentiations, for the townspeople worshipped in a temple unlike that used by the lords of the citadel and the palace.³⁷ The town's fire temple consisted of a small chain of chambers connected by a broad axial thoroughfare. The temple of Hvarna (*xvarenah* or *farn*, the personification of power and material prosperity) was similar to the fire temple; richly decorated rams' horns symbolizing Hvarna were worshipped in it.³⁸

No significant traces have been found of foreign religions in at that time. There is no indisputable evidence that Buddhism was commonly practised in Khwarizm, as distinct

³⁴ Tolstov, 1948a, p. 201.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 200–3.

³⁶ Gudkova, 1964, pp. 95–100; Yagodin and Khojaiov, 1970, pp. 138–42.

³⁷ Rapoport, 1984, p. 296.

³⁸ Nerazik, 1982, pp. 52–4, 146.



FIG. 13. Silver dish. (Photo: © Vladimir Terebenin.)



FIG. 14. Tok-kala. Drawing from a painting on an ossuary in alabaster with a mourning scene (end seventh century).

from other regions of Central Asia. On the other hand, the presence of Christian communities in the country can be surmised.³⁹ A burial chamber apparently belonging to such a

³⁹ Tolstov, 1948a, pp. 227–8.



FIG. 15. Oasis of Yakke-Parsan (eastern Khwarizm). Single-chambered cupola-shaped room with remains of an altar.

community has been discovered in the necropolis of Gyaur-kala.⁴⁰ An independent ruler portrayed on a coin with a Nestorian cross on the crown was evidently a Christian.⁴¹

As archaeological work proceeds, increasing information is coming to light about the language of the people of Khwarizm in the period covering the third to the eighth century. Apart from inscriptions on coins and dishes, we now know of over 100 inscriptions on ossuaries, dozens of documents on skin and wood from Toprak-kala and 2 documents from Yakke-Parsan (eighth century). It has been established that the Khwarizmian language was related to the East Iranian group, while the writing was based on the Aramaic script. The inscriptions record dates of the Khwarizmian era, forms of greeting, proper names, terminology reflecting patrilineal kinship, and the names of the 12 months and of 18 days (out of 30), which may enable us to fill in some gaps in al-Biruni's data concerning the Khwarizmian calendar.

⁴⁰ Yagodin and Khojaiov, 1970, pp. 146–51.

⁴¹ See Vaynberg, 1977, Table XXIX, 4.

Part Two

AL-BIRUNI ON KHWARIZM

(P. G. Bulgakov)

The Khwarizmian calendar

Information on the history and culture of Khwarizm is given in the works of Abu Raihan al-Biruni, the learned Khwarizmian encyclopaedist who lived from 973 to 1048. His main source was the oral information of authorities on ancient traditions who were still alive when he was in Khwarizm, but he was also well versed in the historical literature which had been compiled by his time. In his work the *Kitāb al-āthār al-bāqiya* [Chronology of Ancient Nations], known to modern scholars as the *Chronology* and written c. 1000–1003, al-Biruni gives information about the Khwarizmian calendar which is still the most detailed and comprehensive account we possess.⁴²

Analysis of this information has established that the calendar was based on the so-called New Avestan Calendar,⁴³ but in time had taken on certain characteristics of its own. The Khwarizmian solar calendar consisted of 12 months, each of which had its own name⁴⁴ and consisted of 30 days, each of which also had a name. Five extra days were added to the end of the last (i.e. the 12th) month. These extra days did not have their own names, but were called by the same names as the first 5 days of the month. In this way, the Khwarizmian calendar consisted of 365 days. The additional 6 hours were not taken into account, and there was no leap year to correct this. The official names of the months and days given below are taken from Livshits' study.⁴⁵

⁴² Biruni, 1957, pp. 62–3.

⁴³ See Bickerman's study of the Zoroastrian calendar (Bickerman, 1967, pp. 197–207).

⁴⁴ Al-Biruni gives two variations of the names of most months, one of which was the official name used by the Zoroastrian priesthood, and the other the name in everyday use.

⁴⁵ Livshits, 1970, pp. 167–9. More exact forms suggested by Livshits are given in brackets.

MONTHS

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| I. <i>r v r ĵ n'</i> | VII. <i>'w m r y ('m r y)</i> |
| II. <i>'r d w š t</i> | VIII. <i>y'n'x n (y'b'x n)</i> |
| III. <i>h r w d' d</i> | IX. <i>'r w</i> |
| IV. <i>ĵ y r y</i> | X. <i>r y m z d</i> |
| V. <i>h m d' d</i> | XI. <i>'š m n ('h m n)</i> |
| VI. <i>'x š r y w r y</i> | XII. <i>x š w m</i> |

DAYS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>r y m ž d (r y m z d)</i> | 16. <i>f y γ</i> |
| 2. <i>'z m y n ('h m y n)</i> | 17. <i>'s r w f</i> |
| 3. <i>'r d w š t</i> | 18. <i>r š n</i> |
| 4. <i>'x š r y w r y</i> | 19. <i>r w r ĵ n</i> |
| 5. <i>'s b n d' r m ĵ y</i> | 20. <i>'r θ γ n</i> |
| 6. <i>h r w d' d</i> | 21. <i>r' m</i> |
| 7. <i>h m d' d</i> | 22. <i>w' δ</i> |
| 8. <i>δ d w</i> | 23. <i>= 8, 15</i> |
| 9. <i>'r w</i> | 24. <i>d y n y (δ y n or δ y y)</i> |
| 10. <i>y' n' x n (y' b' x n)</i> | 25. <i>'r ĵ w x y</i> |
| 11. <i>'x y r</i> | 26. <i>'š t' δ ('š t' d)</i> |
| 12. <i>m' h (m' x)</i> | 27. <i>'s m' n</i> |
| 13. <i>ĵ y r y</i> | 28. <i>z' t (= z ā t ?)</i> |
| 14. <i>γ w š t</i> | 29. <i>m r s b n d</i> |
| 15. <i>= 8</i> | 30. <i>'w n r γ</i> |

As Livshits remarks, apart from occasional copyists' mistakes, al-Biruni's information is extremely accurate, and the names he gives for the months and days of the Khwarizmian calendar are in almost complete accordance with the inscriptions of the Tok-kala ossuaries.⁴⁶

The Khwarizmian calendar came into being at the beginning of the Christian era and officially remained in use until Khwarizm was incorporated into the caliphate in the eighth century, when a system of chronology reckoning from the hegira was adopted at the time of the introduction of Islam. However, the people of Khwarizm continued to use the local calendar at least until the end of the tenth century. Its disadvantage was that, because there was no provision for the leap year, the beginning of the Khwarizmian months changed constantly from one time of the year to another. For this reason, according to al-Biruni, in 960 the *Khwarizmshah*, Abu Sa'id Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Iraq, introduced a reform to make the beginning of the Khwarizmian months coincide with the fixed days of the Julian calendar.⁴⁷

Khwarizmian eras

In his *Chronology*, al-Biruni also mentions three Khwarizmian eras: the first beginning with the settlement of the country, which supposedly took place 980 years before the time of Alexander the Great (i.e. 1290 B.C.);⁴⁸ the second starting with the arrival of Siyavush in Khwarizm and the beginning of the reign of Kai Khusrau, 92 years after the settlement of the country; and the third beginning with the reign of the *Khwarizmshah* Afrig, who is said to have built a castle near Madinat al-Fir (Kath), the ancient capital of Khwarizm.⁴⁹ While it is generally agreed that the first two eras are legendary, certain scholars regard Afrig and his era as historical.⁵⁰ The genealogical list of the *Khwarizmshahs* of the 'Afrigid' dynasty given by al-Biruni would seem to support the authenticity of his information. For the period from 306 to the middle of the eighth century, this list is as follows:⁵¹

Afrig. Bagra. Sahhasak. Askajamuk (I). Azkajwar (I). Sahr (I). Shaush. Hamgari or Hangari. Buzgar. Arsamuh. Sahr (II). Sabri. Azkajwar (II). Askajamuk (II). Sawashfan.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁷ Biruni, 1957, pp. 262–3.

⁴⁸ It should be borne in mind that al-Biruni takes the year 310 B.C., not 312, as the beginning of the Seleucid era ('the era of Alexander'). Thus he dates the second year of the reign of Justinian I as the year 838 of the era of Alexander; and he counts the year 1191 of the era of Alexander as the year 267 from the hegira, and the year 1194 of the era of Alexander as the year 270 from the hegira (Biruni, 1966, pp. 96, 128).

⁴⁹ Biruni, 1957, pp. 47–8.

⁵⁰ Tolstov, 1948b, pp. 10–11, 191–2.

⁵¹ Biruni, 1957, p. 48; Livshits, 1970, pp. 165–6, and his transliteration; Vaynberg, 1977, p. 83.

⁵² Continuing this list, al-Biruni names a further seven *Khwarizmshahs*, the last of whom, Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad, was killed in 995.

So far, however, there is no confirmation of the use of a chronology based on the era of Afrig and attempts to read his name on Khwarizmian coins have proved unsuccessful.⁵³ The archaeological material discovered in the last few decades – in particular, the archive of Toprak-kala and the Tok-kala ossuary inscriptions – in conjunction with the time scale of the Tok-kala culture have allowed us to establish that an official chronology existed in Khwarizm, but it was based on another age, for which we have no written sources. According to Henning and Livshits, it began in the 10s or 20s A.D., and according to Vaynberg in the 40s or early 50s.⁵⁴ Thus, as was noted by Bartold,⁵⁵ al-Biruni's information cannot be regarded as reliable in its totality.

The genealogical list of *Khwarizmshahs* given by al-Biruni is also unreliable for the period up to the beginning of the eighth century. Of the early rulers, only the names of Azkajwar and Sawashfan are confirmed by Khwarizmian coins. The name of Arsamuh is also confirmed, but coins struck in his reign (no later than the end of the third century) do not coincide chronologically with his reign as given by al-Biruni.⁵⁶ Moreover, the names of the 13 *Khwarizmshahs* who reigned before Azkajwar as given on coins of Khwarizm are completely different from those given by al-Biruni.⁵⁷ The presence on most coins of the traditional *tamgha* (symbol or mark) for the period between the middle of the first century and the end of the eighth, and also the image of a horseman, give grounds for belief that there was a firmly established dynasty in Khwarizm during that period. However, there is no justification for calling it the 'Afrigid' dynasty.

Religious beliefs

The religion of ancient Khwarizm was a local version of Zoroastrianism mixed with pagan beliefs. In his *Chronology*, al-Biruni mentions traditions concerning the time and place of Zarathustra's (Zoroaster's) activities.⁵⁸ Until recently little was known of al-Biruni's other work, the *Al-Qanūn al-Mas'ūdi* [Canon of Mas'udi] (written over 30 years after the *Chronology*), because it had not been translated. In it al-Biruni reconsiders the date suggested in his *Chronology* for the beginning of the prophetic activities of Zarathustra – he now gives the year 276 before the Seleucid age ('the age of Alexander') or 1218 of the age of Yazdgird III, which was counted from the year A.D. 632.⁵⁹ Bearing in mind

⁵³ Livshits, 1970, p. 167.

⁵⁴ Henning, 1965, pp. 158–69; Livshits, 1970, pp. 163–5; Vaynberg, 1977, p. 79.

⁵⁵ Bartold, 1965, p. 545.

⁵⁶ The first third of the seventh century (Biruni, 1957, p. 48); Livshits, 1970, pp. 166–7; Vaynberg, 1977, p. 81.

⁵⁷ Vaynberg, 1977, p. 81.

⁵⁸ Biruni, 1957, pp. 24, 205–6.

⁵⁹ Biruni, 1973, pp. 114, 148.

that al-Biruni believed that 310 B.C. was the beginning of the Seleucid age, not 312, and considering the dating according to the era of Yazdgird, we may conclude that, according to al-Biruni's latest information, Zarathustra began his activities not in 570 but in 586 B.C. If this is so, and if Zarathustra was then 42 years old, as tradition has it, then he was born 108 years before the reign of Darius I. Thus al-Biruni's data are evidence against (and not for) attributing the activities of Zarathustra to the time of Darius I and his father.

Al-Biruni informs us that certain Zoroastrian texts in the Khwarizmian language were destroyed as a result of the Arab conquest.⁶⁰ However, Zoroastrianism was not a legally established state religion in Khwarizm, as it was in Iran, and therefore did not follow strict canons. Both from al-Biruni's information and from archaeological evidence, it is clear that Zoroastrianism had a special character in Khwarizm, where it coexisted with survivals from earlier beliefs and local cults. Some of the manifestations of these were shared by pre-Islamic Sughd.

Animistic notions such as the belief in jinns and in good and evil spirits survived in Khwarizm right up to al-Biruni's time (tenth to eleventh century). The cult of Vakhsh – the tutelary spirit of the element of water, especially of the Amu Darya – was a survival of early animism. As al-Biruni tells us, the Khwarizmian feast of Vakhsh was celebrated on the tenth day of the last (i.e. the twelfth) month of the year.⁶¹ The link between the name of this spirit and the Amu Darya still survives in the name of the River Vakhsh, a tributary of the Panj, the upper reaches of the Amu Darya. There was a widespread belief in spirits, which were no longer associated with the elements or with plants and animals. Most were regarded as hostile to human beings. Smoke, steam and the smell of food were used to ward them off, as were certain types of ritual food prepared on set days, for example bread baked with fat on the first day of the seventh month of each year.⁶²

The feasts of the New Year (the first day of the first month) and Chiri-Ruj (the thirteenth day of the seventh month), which coincided with the days of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, were linked with the cult of nature, its death and revival. The beginning of the year marked the awakening and development of life-giving forces, while the autumn feast was its antithesis, and marked the time after which these forces faded away and died.⁶³

The cult of the dead or of ancestors was observed with great respect in Khwarizm. According to al-Biruni, it was the Khwarizmian custom to place food in the burial chambers on the last five days of the twelfth month and five additional days of the New Year.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Biruni, 1957, pp. 48, 63.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 258.

⁶² Ibid., p. 257.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 224, 234, 256, 257.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

This ritual of ‘feeding’ the ancestors was apparently linked with the belief that the fertility of the fields could be secured with the help of higher forces.⁶⁵

In his *Chronology*, al-Biruni describes the rituals observed by the Sogdians in memory of Siyavush, a legendary divine king who supposedly died as a result of being slandered at the height of his prosperity. It can be assumed that the same customs also existed in Khwarizm, as one of the legendary Khwarizmian ages was dated from the arrival of Siyavush in the country.⁶⁶ The commemoration of Siyavush, which was accompanied by sacrifices, was closely linked to the cult of the dead and to hopes of obtaining prosperity both on earth and after death.⁶⁷ It is possible that all the dead were honoured collectively in the form of Siyavush.⁶⁸ In the opinion of Tolstov, Siyavush was also venerated as the Central Asian god of dying and reviving vegetation.⁶⁹ The day of the ritual commemoration of the legendary Khwarizmian Queen Mina (who froze to death in warm weather), which was observed on the fifteenth day of the tenth month, was apparently also connected with the cult of the dead.⁷⁰

Khwarizmian Zoroastrianism differed substantially from the canonical Iranian form in its burial rites. Whereas in Iran the bones of the dead were entombed in niches carved in rock or in vaulted burial chambers,⁷¹ the Khwarizmiens used ossuaries. According to Rapoport, the sources of the ossuary ritual should be sought not in Zoroastrian dogma, but in earlier beliefs.⁷² The earliest statuary ossuaries, which were anthropomorphic and unacceptable to orthodox Zoroastrianism, were clearly a survival of ancient idolatry. The Khwarizmiens continued to use them from the second century B.C. or slightly earlier until the third century A.D., when they were superseded by stone boxes as a result of the growing influence of Zoroastrian dogma in Khwarizm.⁷³ Canonical Zoroastrianism forbade the mourning of the dead. In Khwarizm, however, as in Sogdiana, this ritual existed, as can be seen from the paintings on the Tok-kala ossuaries (see [Fig. 1](#)).⁷⁴

As for other religions, Buddhism probably never reached Khwarizm since there is no evidence of its having left substantial traces in the region. There was a community of Melkite Christians, whose clergy were under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Merv.

⁶⁵ Rapoport, 1971, p. 115.

⁶⁶ Bartold, 1971, p. 83.

⁶⁷ D'yakonov, 1951, pp. 34–43.

⁶⁸ Rapoport, 1971, p. 83.

⁶⁹ Tolstov, 1948a, pp. 202–4; 1948b, pp. 83–7; Gafurov, 1972, pp. 284–5.

⁷⁰ Biruni, 1957, p. 257.

⁷¹ Herzfeld, 1935, p. 39; 1941, pp. 217–18.

⁷² Rapoport, 1971, pp. 5, 18, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–1.

⁷⁴ Gudkova, 1964, pp. 95–102.

Among the Melkite feast days celebrated in Khwarizm, al-Biruni mentions the feast of roses, which were brought to church on 4 May (*Ayyar*) every year.⁷⁵

Al-Biruni's *Chronology* is the only source of information about the existence of certain secular holidays in pre-Islamic Khwarizm. In connection with the agricultural calendar, the first day of the third month was observed as the beginning of the sowing season for sesame and some other crops.⁷⁶ The fifth day of the fourth month was also kept as a feast; the Khwarizmians counted seventy days from that date, and then began sowing the winter wheat.⁷⁷ The feast celebrated on the first day of the sixth month had its roots in their former nomadic way of life: according to tradition, at that time (which in the past had coincided with the beginning of the cold season), the kings of Khwarizm used to leave their summer quarters and go out onto the steppe to protect their lands from nomadic raids.⁷⁸

In ancient and early medieval Khwarizm, astronomical observations were made for both religious and practical purposes. Archaeological data give grounds for believing that as early as the second and third centuries B.C., a great temple stood on the site of the ruins of Koy-Krylgan-kala. It was built where an ancient mausoleum had stood, and was used both as a burial place and as a centre of the cult of the dead and of the stars.⁷⁹ Observations were concentrated mainly on the sun and the moon, both because they were the most highly venerated in Zoroastrianism and because of their role in measuring time. The ancient Khwarizmians were familiar with eclipses of the sun and moon (the 'houses' of the moon), and were therefore able to determine and correct the times of the seasons and thus the calendar system as a whole. In his *Chronology*, al-Biruni gives the Khwarizmian names for all the 12 signs of the Zodiac, the 28 'houses' of the moon (the groups of stars in which the moon 'stands' on each of the 28 days of the lunar month) and also the names of the Sun, Moon, Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Mercury.⁸⁰ He observes that the Khwarizmians knew more about many constellations than the pre-Islamic Arabs did, and gives a number of examples.⁸¹

The Arab conquest

The Arab conquest of Khwarizm and the country's subsequent conversion to Islam provoked a crisis in the indigenous culture. The first attempt by the Arabs to conquer Khwarizm

⁷⁵ Biruni, 1957, pp. 318, 326.

⁷⁶ Biruni, 1957, p. 256.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 256–7.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

⁷⁹ 'Koy-Krylgan-Kala', 1967, pp. 235–6, 253–64.

⁸⁰ Biruni, 1957, pp. 187–8, 261.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 259.

came at the very end of the seventh century. Umayya b. ^cAbdallah, the Arab governor of Khurasan (693–697), after capturing the capital city of Kath (which he held for a time), forced the *Khwarizmshah* to sign a treaty recognizing the power of the caliphate. Immediately after the departure of the Arab forces, however, this treaty was abrogated.⁸² The attempts of Yazid b. al-Muhallab, another governor of Khurasan (702–705), to take possession of Khwarizm were equally unsuccessful⁸³ and it was not until 711–712 that his successor, Qutaiba b. Muslim, succeeded in doing so, by exploiting the civil war that was raging in the country.

According to al-Baladhuri, Khurrazad, the younger brother of the reigning *Khwarizmshah*, raised a revolt against his brother, became *de facto* ruler, took the law into his own hands and robbed the local nobles. As the *Khwarizmshah* could not withstand Khurrazad, he sent messengers secretly to Qutaiba b. Muslim, who was in Merv. The *Khwarizmshah* agreed to pay tribute to Qutaiba and to recognize the power of the caliphate on condition that he remained lord of Khwarizm and that Qutaiba deliver him from Khurrazad's oppression. Qutaiba agreed and sent his brother, ^cAbd al-Rahman b. Muslim, against Khurrazad. He was victorious in the battle and Khurrazad was killed. ^cAbd al-Rahman publicly executed the 4,000 prisoners he took.⁸⁴

Al-Tabari, and later Bal^cami and Ibn al-Athir, tell us that in addition to Khurrazad the *Khwarizmshah* had another sworn enemy, a certain King Khamjird.⁸⁵ According to the combined information provided by these historians, the sequence of events is as follows. In the year 93 A.H. (A.D. 712), a *Khwarizmshah* by the name of Jigan (or Chigan)⁸⁶ was faced with his younger brother Khurrazad's open flouting of his authority and with an even more powerful enemy, King Khamjird. Without informing anyone, he turned for help to Qutaiba b. Muslim, who was then in Merv. As a sign that he recognized the power of the caliphate, the *Khwarizmshah* sent Qutaiba the golden keys to the three main cities of

⁸² Al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 426.

⁸³ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 417; al-Tabari, 1881–89, pp. 1142–3.

⁸⁴ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, pp. 420–1.

⁸⁵ The term *malik Khamjird* is understood by some scholars (Tolstov, Vyazigin) as 'King Khamdzhard' (Khamdzhard) and by others (Bartold, Vaynberg) as 'the king of Khamjird'. The title *The Conquest of Khamjird* in Ibn al-Athir's *Chronicle* suggests that Khamjird was a toponym. Vaynberg, basing his opinion on one of the editions of Bal^cami's work in which Gurganj appears instead of Khamjird, considers that it is the same town. The fact that Khamjird is not mentioned in other sources can be explained, according to Vaynberg's hypothesis, by the fact that the town's old name is replaced by its new one (Ibn al-Athir, 1301 A.H., p. 273; *Istoriya Turkmenskoy SSR*, 1957, pp. 163–4; Tolstov, 1948b, p. 225; Bartold, 1965, p. 546; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 98–9).

⁸⁶ Only Bal^cami gives this name and in the manuscripts of his work kept in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences it is spelt in different ways. As well as the most common form, there are others which are graphically close to them (Bal^cami, MS 33, p. 359 a; MS 4226, p. 371 b; MS 6095, pp. 368 b–369 a; MS 7466, pp. 273 b–274 b; MS 11273, p. 459 b).

Khwarizm. Qutaiba set out with his forces from Merv, ostensibly on a campaign against Sogdiana. Rumours to this effect were also spread by the *Khwarizmshah* to put those who favoured war with the Arabs off their guard. When Qutaiba unexpectedly appeared with his army in Hazarasp, the *Khwarizmshah* advised his entourage not to resist, in view of the obvious superiority of the Arab forces. The *Khwarizmshah* concluded a treaty with Qutaiba according to which he gave him 10,000 head of livestock, money and other property, on condition that Qutaiba would advance against King Khamjird. Qutaiba accepted these conditions. His brother, °Abd al-Rahman b. Muslim, won a victory over the ruler of Khamjird, and the latter was killed. °Abd al-Rahman took 4,000 prisoners, whom Qutaiba ordered to be executed. Then Qutaiba captured Khurrazad and his henchmen and handed them over to the *Khwarizmshah*, who had them executed.⁸⁷

Having achieved his aims in Khwarizm, Qutaiba besieged and took Samarkand in the same year, 93 A.H. (A.D. 712); during this campaign the people of Khwarizm revolted and killed the *Khwarizmshah*, who had betrayed their country. When Qutaiba returned from Sogdiana, he dismissed Ilyas b. °Abdallah b. °Amr, his commissioner in Khwarizm, for failing to take action and sent °Abdallah b. Muslim to replace him. Although the latter maintained his authority for a time, revolt soon broke out again and was not suppressed until al-Mughir b. °Abdallah, another of Qutaiba's generals, was sent there with his forces. It was then, according to al-Biruni, that Khwarizm was sacked by barbarians; as a result, many objects of cultural value were destroyed, including Khwarizmian manuscripts.⁸⁸

It is reasonable to assume that there are considerable gaps in the medieval historians' account of the violent events which took place in Khwarizm in 712. Coins of the *Khwarizmshah* Azkajwar II have been found overstruck by the types of a certain Khusrau, who only reigned for a short time.⁸⁹ The most likely explanation is that Khusrau was put in power by the Khwarizmians when they revolted and overthrew Jigan. Then, after Qutaiba had suppressed the rising, he put a member of the old ruling dynasty, Askajamuk II, the son of Azkajwar II, on the throne.⁹⁰

The absence of the name of Jigan (Chigan) on Khwarizmian coins and in the genealogical list of *Khwarizmshahs* given by al-Biruni has given rise to two hypotheses. According to the first, Jigan was a usurper, who unsuccessfully tried to consolidate his power with the help of the Arab conquerors,⁹¹ but who ruled for such a short period that he did not have time to issue his own coinage. According to the second hypothesis, the one most widely held by scholars, Jigan is an etymologically obscure nickname of the

⁸⁷ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, pp. 1236–9; Bal'ami, MS 4226, pp. 371 b–372 a; Ibn al-Athir, 1301 A.H., pp. 273–4.

⁸⁸ Biruni, 1957, pp. 48, 63.

⁸⁹ Henning, 1965, pp. 168, 175; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 78–9.

⁹⁰ Biruni, 1957, p. 48; Gudkova and Livshits, 1967, p. 6; Livshits, 1970, p. 164.

⁹¹ Gudkova, 1964, pp. 120–1.

Khwarizmshah

Azkajwar II, the father of Askajamuk II.⁹² The available data do not yet allow the issue to be settled.

Early Arab rule in Khwarizm was unstable. In 110 A.H. (A.D. 728) a rising supported by neighbouring Türk tribes broke out in the north of the country, in the town of Kerder and the area around it, but it was suppressed in the same year.⁹³ From then on, the political situation was somewhat more stable. Members of the ancient dynasty continued to reign over Khwarizm as vassals of the caliphate with limited rights until 995, when the last of them was executed by the amir of Urgench, who united the entire country under his rule.

⁹² Gudkova and Livshits, 1967, p. 6; Vaynberg, 1977, pp. 81, 91–3. Rtveladze has given his reasons for objecting to Vaynberg's theory that there was a dynastic link between Jigan and Chaganiyan (Rtveladze, 1980, pp. 51–8).

⁹³ Al-Tabari, 1881–89, p. 1525.