

Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek,
Julia Katschnig (eds.)

Central Asia on Display

Proceedings of the
VII. Conference of the European Society
for Central Asian Studies

Wiener Zentralasien Studien
Vienna Central Asian Studies
Bd. 1

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3.5. Some Evidence on the History and Language of the Arabs of Central Asia

Guram Chikovani

After the Islamic conquests in Syria and Palestine, the Arabs spent fifteen years on wars of conquest in Iran. In 651 they conquered Marv, a rich city which was famous for its culture at that time.

According to the Arabic traditions in the well-known works by Yāqūt (*Kitāb mu'ğam al-buldān*) and *The History of Bukhara* by Naršahī, the Prophet Muhammad charged his followers to conquer Central Asia, reminding them that it was a Muslim's sacred and honourable duty to conquer Maverannahr (Maverannahr is the same as Arabic *Mā warā'an-nahr* ("that which is beyond the river, on its other side").

At that time, Maverannahr was divided into numerous independent kingdoms, the rulers of which bore titles different from one another – Khorezmshah (ruler of Khorezm), Bukharkhodat (ruler of Bukhara), Maghuia (ruler of Marv), Bikhan (ruler of Abiverd), Termezshah (ruler of Termez) etc.

It should be noted that Central Asia was one of the world's richest regions in that period. After capturing Marv the Arabs decided to conquer the rest of the region. They wished to occupy the fertile lands of Soghdia as well as Tokharistan, Chaganian (the lands of Surkhardaria) and Khorezm.

In pursuit of this aim, the Arab commander to Bukhara, Sa'īd ibn ʿOthmān, organised a military campaign against the cities of Soghdia in 676.

Sa'īd took 30,000 captives from Bukhara to Medina, who in due course became assimilated with the Arabs. They had been engaged in farming in Medina and, according to the report by the 9th century Arab historian Balādurī, the captives from Bukhara were employed on irrigation systems.

According to ĩabari's evidence, the Arab rulers of Khorasan organized military campaigns into the territory of Maverannahr in the spring, returning to Marv in winter. In 704 Quteiba ibn Muslim was appointed as viceroy of Khorasan and gradually conquered Maverannahr and brought it under Arab rule. He belonged to the Arabic tribe of Bāhila and therefore promoted the interests of the Arabs from his tribe.

The decision to conquer Maverannahr was taken towards the end of the rule of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. By that time, the military power of the Caliphate had been strengthened and the way was paved for military operations to be carried out. The ruler of Khorasan Quteiba ibn Muslim with his military talent, persistence and mercilessness was deemed a suitable person to extend the frontiers of the Caliphate. Before conquering Maverannahr, Quteiba subdued Balkh in 705 and moved to Maverannahr in 706.

Of interest here is Quteiba's capture of the city of Peikend, which along with Samarkand was a major city of Central Asia. It was an important emporium, well fortified and famous for its riches.

In 709, Quteiba went on to capture Bukhara and to subjugate it to the Arabs. When Quteiba together with his numerous troops approached Bukhara, the defenders of the city appealed for help to the inhabitants of Soghdia. A bloody battle took place and

Quteiba promised 100 *dirhāms* to anyone who would bring him an enemy's head. He built a pyramid out of the warriors' chopped heads and terrified the defenders of the city with his cruelty. The population of Bukhara failed to hold out against such pressure and finally surrendered. After this, according to Tabarī, Quteiba subjugated Soghdia, took the members of the royal family as hostages and imposed a yearly tax.

The defenders of the Soghdia fortress did not forgive King Tarkhun for their conquest by the Arabs and dethroned him. Gurak, who succeeded him, was known for his caution and led a double policy in his relationship with the Arabs. Outwardly, he accepted Islam and obeyed the Caliph, yet at the same time, he held talks with Chinese commanders in an effort to drive the Arabs out of Central Asia.

In 719, Quteiba attacked the Kingdom of Shouman situated in the upper current of the Amudarya, which did not recognize the supreme authority of the Caliphate. Having subjugated Shouman, Quteiba moved on to Nesefer and Kesh (this was the campaign to Qashqadarya, Nesefer is the same as Qarshi, whereas Kesh is present-day Shahrisabz). Quteiba subdued the Qashqadarya region with his numerous troops and then went on to fortify his position in the neighbourhood of Nesefer.

In this way, the major cities of Central Asia gradually came under Arab influence. In 712 Quteiba conquered Khorezm, a rich country whose population adopted Islam and later took part in the Islamic wars of conquest. Turbulence inside the country contributed to its easy conquest, and Quteiba took advantage of the revolt directed against the Khorezmshah organised by his brother. Quteiba helped the Khorezmshah to maintain the throne but imposed a peace treaty upon him that was, in effect, a submission. Quteiba dealt cruelly with the rebels and the Khorezmshah granted him 10,000 cattle for his assistance.

After subjugating Khorezm, and encouraged by his victory, Quteiba began a major military operation against Samarkand. He spread a rumour that he intended to return to Marv but, in fact, he moved to Samarkand accompanied by the troops of the Khorezmshah and the Bukharkhodat.

The siege of Samarkand lasted for a month. The inhabitants of Soghdia appealed for help to the King of Shash, the Ikhshid of Fergana and the Turkish Qaghan. They wrote that the fall of Soghdia would not augur well for anyone. "If the Arabs conquered Soghdia, their turn would come too". Fergana and Shash therefore sent some auxiliary troops, but Quteiba learnt about this, cut off their course and killed everyone. After this, the Arabs breached the city wall using ballistae and burst unto Samarkand. Despite strong resistance, the city fell and, according to Tabarī's evidence, Quteiba looted it without mercy destroying buildings, burning temples and melting the gold and silver sculptures of the gods worshipped there. The plundered gold amounted to 50,000 miscalls (1 miscall = 4.7 grams) and Quteiba imposed a yearly tax on the population in addition to demanding 30,000 soldiers for military service.

As was noted above, the Arabs successfully used ballistae to breach the walls of the besieged city. For instance, in the letter sent by Gurek (ruler of Soghdia) to the emperor of China, it is noted that in 712 the Arabs used 300 ballistae to destroy the walls of Samarkand.

As a result of Quteiba's campaign, Central Asia became almost entirely subordinated to Arab rule. The Qashqadarya region, Zarafshan, Khorezm and other major regions were brought under the influence of the Arabs and the introduction of Islam into the newly conquered regions was successfully continued. Quteiba attached great importance to the Islamisation of Central Asia and, later, *Arab* and *Muslim* became practically synonymous terms in Soghdia. The Arab influence on Central Asia was further strengthened as a result of the introduction of Islam and the Muslim way of life found its way into the region.

Before its conversion to Islam, Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion in Central Asia (although there were also adherents of Christianity and Buddhism). After the conquest, all religions other than Islam were proclaimed false doctrines and were persecuted. Zoroastrian literature, as well as the secular literature of the peoples of Maverannahr (which had centuries-old traditions) was destroyed, with Soghdian written sources being almost completely ruined.

The Caliphate took a number of measures in order to ensure the successful introduction of Islam into the region. Muslims were granted certain privileges and, at first, those who converted to Islam were even paid money. The fact that the converts were exempted from *Jiziah* and *Kharajah*, also contributed to the introduction of Islam. This rule, however, did not always hold. Jarrāh ibn ʿAbdullāh, for instance, who was appointed viceroy in Khorasan during the rule of Caliph ʿOmar II (717-720) supported tax collection whether or not the local population had converted to Islam. However, after hearing of the discontent of the local population of Central Asia with Jarrāh ibn ʿAbdullāh's policy, Caliph ʿOmar II transferred him from Khorasan in 719, to rule Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In 1933, an expedition of the Russian Academy of Science discovered documents in the Soghdian language written on leather and wood, in a fortress located in Zarafshan – more precisely on a mountain in Tajikistan named Magi. Chinese documents with inscriptions made on cotton, as well as one inscription made on leather, were also found there.

The latter, dating back to 717-719, was studied by the eminent Russian Arab scholar Acad. I.I. Krachkovski. In these documents mention is made of the ruler of Soghdi, Ikhshid (Ikhshid is a Soghdian term) Tarkhun, his two sons, Jarrāh ibn ʿAbdullāh (already known to us), and Sulaymān ibn Abusarr, also a ruler of Soghdi and the ruler of Pianjikent Divashtich. The document is in the form of a letter from Divashtich addressed to Jarrāh ibn ʿAbdullāh, in which the author reminds him of the fate of the two sons of ruler of Soghdia. The Arab viceroy at the court of Sulaymān ibn Abusarr kept the two sons of Tarkhun in captivity, intending to appoint one of the brothers, being of pro-Arabic orientation, to be the future ruler of Soghdia.

As regards Divashtich, according to Tabarī he was the *dehqān* of Samarkand and ruler of Pianjikend and, in 722, headed the national liberation movement in Soghdia. Arab sources contain information on the battle of the troops of Sulaymān ibn Abusarr and Divashtich in the neighbourhood of the mountain fortress called Abargar. The battle ended with a victory for the Arab commander Harash, and Divashtich surrendered the fortress to him and was eventually put to death.

The rule of Nasr ibn Sayyār (738-748) in Khorasan and Maverannahr, was an important stage in the Arab dominance of Central Asia. By that time, the Arabs had conquered Central Asia completely and the islamisation of this large region was complete.

Nasr ibn Sayyār belonged to the Arabic tribe of the Mudarī and the previous ruler, Quteiba ibn Muslim, thought highly of him. According to Tabarī, Quteiba often trusted the Arab army to Nasr ibn Sayyār in critical battles and, in 705, granted him a large settlement as a reward for his military success. During the rule of Nasr ibn Sayyār, Khorasan and Maverannahr developed and flourished.

Nasr ibn Sayyār succeeded in winning the allegiance of the *dehqāns* and strengthened his position. He rendered economic assistance to loyal local grandees who converted to Islam and granted them various privileges. He also encouraged the local population to marry Arabs, setting himself an example by marrying the Bukharkhodat's daughter. During his reign, the ruling Arab elite gradually became related and intermixed with the elite of Soghdia, Khorezm and Bactria.

The above-mentioned discussion attests to the existence of groups of Arab warriors introducing Islam at the turn of the 8th century in Bukhara and the Qashqadaria region. As regards the settlement of the Arabs in this region, mention should be made of the important evidence of al-Istakhrī, according to whom an Arab settlement named "Naukad Quraish" existed in the 9th century in the neighbourhood of Nakhshab (present-day Qarshi) which points to the Arabic origin of its inhabitants.

It is noteworthy that, even today, the majority of the Qarshi Arabs regard themselves as Quraish Arabs, which provides the ground for an oral tradition (obtained by us in the kishlak Jeinau), according to which the ancestors of the Qarshi Arabs presently living in this *kishlak*, serve as a link with the Arabs who settled in Central Asia in the 7th-10th centuries. Thus, the fact of Arab migration to the Qashqadaria region of Central Asia and their link to the Arabs inhabiting this region today may be considered reliable, especially when supported with linguistic evidence of Central Asian Arabic.

As a result of the study of this question we arrived at the conclusion that the history of the Bukharan and Qashqadaria Arabs of Central Asia is linked with two chronologically different waves of Arab migration:

- I. The settlement of the direct ancestors of the Qashqadaria Arabs in this region might have taken place in the 7th-10th centuries, which follows from the arguments given below:
 - a) The inhabitants of the kishlak Jeinau have presented an oral tradition about the settlement of their ancestors here in the first centuries of the Hijra;
 - b) Historical sources attest to the existence of the Arabs in the Qashqadaria region and in Central Asia in 7th-10th centuries;
 - c) The Arabs living in present-day Qashqadaria and those who settled there in the 7th-10th centuries are related (see the very important evidence of al-Istakhrī concerning the settlement of Quraish Arabs in this region in early times and at present).
 - d) Linguistic comparison of the Qashqadarian and Bukhara dialects proves that the Qashqadaria dialect is the older one and bears more resemblance to Classical Arabic, which

may be explained by the long geographic and linguistic isolation of the Qashqadaria Arabs from the Arabic world.

II. The direct ancestors of the Bukharan Arabs may have settled in the present-day Gizhduvan region in the 14th century. This can be assumed on the basis of the following:

- a) According to oral tradition, the ancestors of the Bukharan Arabs were settled in Central Asia by Tamerlan;
- b) Linguistic analysis of the Bukhara dialect reveals some dialectical phenomena common to Arabic dialects not attested in literary sources until the 14th century.

During dialectological expeditions to Central Asia in November 2000, my fellow researchers and myself obtained new folkloric and ethnographic material along with linguistic material. As a result of the expedition, the fact of the preservation of the Arabic speech in the Bukhara region, the kishlaks of Shokhanbeg and Chagdare, was established, as it was already pointed out by Acad. G. Tsereteli in the 1930s.

There is also a third kishlak – Labrud – where a part of the population speaks Arabic, these being the Arabs who migrated from Jāgarī to Labrud. As regards the Arabs of Shokhanbeg and Chagdare, they have lived in these kishlaks since early times. As a result of expeditions conducted in the 1930s in the Bukhara region, attention mainly focused on the kishlaks Jāgarī and Arab Khāna, as it was thought that sufficient dialectological material could be obtained in these two kishlaks. At present Shokhanbeg, Chagdare and to a certain extent Labrud, can be added to these kishlaks.

The vernacular of Chagdare is largely influenced by Tajiki. There are two districts here: 1) Jāfa Rabāt (the district of the Arabs) and 2) Tojikān (the district of the Tajiks). The population in the Arabs district speak mainly Arabic. Here valuable material has been found from the viewpoint of the Semitic-Indo-European linguistic contacts, which demonstrates that the influence of Tajiki on the Arabic dialect there has been significant.

Shokhanbeg is several kilometres away from Jāgarī. The speech of the Arabs living there is characterized by certain peculiarities, which differentiates it from the vernacular of the Arabs in Jāgarī and Arab Khāna. More than 100 place names in Bukhara, Samarkand and Qashqadaria are linked to the Arabs, for example, Arab Khāna (several tens), Arabān, Arab sarāi, Arab rabāt, Rabāti arab, Tazī, Naukad Qureish, Kakhilai (the latter, according to a tradition, derives from the name of the Southern Arabic tribe “Qahtān”) and others.

The Arabic place names found in the Bukhara and Samarkand regions are mainly related to the term *Arab* (Arabān, Arab sarāi, Arab rabāt, Rabāti arab etc.), whereas the place names in the Qashqadaria region are based on the names of Arabic tribes: Naukad Qureish, Kakhilai and Tazī. This shows that the older wave of Arab migration into the Qashqadaria region can be compared with Bukhara, as “Arab” place names are found in Central Asia mainly only after the 13th century. In earlier periods, the names of Arabic tribes were used to denote the Arabs, e.g. the people of the tribe of Tayy.

During the expedition, ethnographic material indicating the settlement of the Arabs in the Qashqadaria region in early times was also obtained. The Arab women of Qash-


qadaria, unlike those of Bukhara, wear decorative gold rings on their noses, foreheads and nostrils. According to the traditions researched by us, these rings approximate to Hagar's decoration.

According to the story, Sarah, out of jealousy, decided to make Hagar look ugly and ordered her to put a ring in her nose. Far from making Hagar look ugly, the ring made her even more beautiful. After this Sarah demanded that Hagar wear a ring on her forehead too. She was confident that this time she would in fact make Hagar look frightful, but when Hagar came out of her tent with the ring the next day, she looked very beautiful. In despair, Sarah ordered Hagar to put a ring on her nostril this time, which beautified Hagar even more – Abraham was even more charmed with Hagar wearing the rings than without them.

Later, Arab women followed Hagar's example. Rings on their noses, foreheads and nostrils turned into decorations, a tradition that is preserved by Qashqadaria Arab women today. This tradition of decoration, place names denoting Arabic tribes and clothing testify to the oldest and Arabs to the neighbourhood of Qarshi.

3.5.1. References

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Despite its geostrategic importance and its easier accessibility since the dissolvent of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has nevertheless remained a white spot on the map of western scholarship and public awareness.

Bringing together papers presented at the VII ESCAS-Conference, this volume aims to shed light on the historical, political, cultural and socio-economic development of this region. Scholars from within and outside Central Asia discuss a wide range of topics, covering historical processes and events on the one hand and present developments of regional and global concern on the other.

Mag. Julia Katschnig studied Social Anthropology, Journalism, Spanish and French at the University of Vienna.

Asst. Prof. Mag. Dr. Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek received an MA in Sociology and Political Sciences and a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology, Turkology and Islamic Studies from the University of Vienna. Currently she acts as the chair person of ESCAS.

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ISBN 3-8258-8309-4



3825883094

(270413)

Central Asia on Display (Wiener
Zentralasien Studien/Vienna
Central Asian Studies)