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The Arab Geographer Al-Muqaddasi's Reports on the 10th Century Qabq

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Abstract. This paper provides information on the 10th century Qabq history on the basis of translation, commentary and comparative analysis of excerpts in relation to the history of Caucasian peoples from the Arabic geographical works *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm* (*The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions*) of al-Muqaddasī who undertook in a period of twenty years a series of journeys throughout the Muslim world. For this study al-Muqaddasī's work might be considered as a valuable source because it contains information on the eastern Caucasus (Dagestan, in particular) like: the characteristics of cities, religious trends, distance between various settlements of the region etc. Moreover, I compared some reports on Qabq by al-Muqaddasī and al-Istakhri's *Kitab masalik al-mamalik* ("Book of Kingdoms' Roads") in order to find out whether the origin of the material is the same for both authors. Also, I noted that N.A. Karaulov's translation of fragments from al-Muqaddasī's work on the history of Caucasus people which contains not just stylistic flaws and interpretational errors, but some fragments are missing from the Arabic texts. The results of this research can further the source study in writing the medieval history of Caucasus.

Keywords: al-Muqaddasī, Medieval history of Dagestan, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, *Kitab at-tanbih wa-l-ishraf*, Arabic geography, Islamic historiography, source study, Caucasus

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Сведения арабского географа ал-Мукаддаси о Кабке в X в.

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Аннотация. В исследовании приводятся сведения по истории Кабка X в. на основе перевода, комментирования и сравнительного анализа выдержек, относящихся к истории народов Кавказа, из арабского географического сочинения أحسن التقاسيم في معرفة الأقاليم Ахсан ат-такасим фи ма'рифат ал-акалим («Наилучшее разделение распознавания регионов») ал-Мукаддаси, который путешествовал в течении двадцати лет, побывал почти во всех мусульманских странах. Для данного исследования сочинение ал-Мукаддаси интересно тем, что в нем есть сведения о Восточном Кавказе (Дагестане в частности) — характеристика особенностей городов, господствующие религиозные направления, расстояние между различными населенными пунктами региона и др. Кроме того, впервые выполнено сопоставление сведений о Кабке сочинения ал-Мукаддаси и сочинения ал-Истахри Китаб *масалик ал-мамалик* («Книга путей государств»), чтобы выяснить, едино ли происхождение материала у обоих авторов. При этом мы отмечаем, что перевод фрагментов из арабских текстов ал-Мукаддаси о народах Кавказа Н.А. Караулова содержит интерпретационные недостатки, а некоторые фрагменты из арабских текстов отсутствуют. Научная значимость данной работы определяется тем, что ее материалы могут быть использованы в процессе дальнейших источниковедческих исследований, при написании средневековой истории Кавказа.

Ключевые слова: Ал-Мукаддаси, средневековая история Дагестана, Ахсан ат-такасим фи ма'рифат ал-акалим, арабская география, мусульманская историография, источниковедение, Кавказ

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Introduction

The tenth century is a period of the further rise of Muslim culture. It is rich with distinct fundamental works in various fields such as Arabic history, geography, poetry, medicine, etc. Moreover, this period of time saw the increasingly growing number of researchers and, most importantly for us, among them we find those who traveled to the regions of the Eastern Caucasus, including such as al-Maqaḍḍasī. He was one of the distinguished representatives of Arabic geography, who continued the tradition of al-Balkhī, al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal in composing the Atlas of Islam.

The purpose of the article is to highlight the information on the history of Qabq in the 10th century on the basis of translation, commentary and comparative analysis of excerpts from the work أحسن التقاسيم في معرفة الأقاليم *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions) by al-Maqaḍḍasī

related to the history of Caucasian peoples. In addition, this paper, for the first time in Russian historiography, compares the information about Qabq in al-Maḡaddasī's work and al-Istakhri's work *Kitab masalik wal-mamalik* ("Book of Kingdoms' and Roads") in order to find out whether the origin of the material in the works of both authors is the same. Al-Maḡaddasī's work is interesting for this study because it contains information about the Eastern Caucasus (Dagestan, particularly) — description of the cities, prevailing religious views, distances between different settlements of the region, etc. Information about the cities of Caucasus, such as Bab al-Abwab, Samandar, Sheki, Kabala, etc., is also found in the geographical works of al-Istakhri, but al-Maḡaddasī presents other details about these cities.

Biographical information on the Muslim geographer al-Maḡaddasī and historiography

Al-Maḡaddasī was a scholar, geographer, and traveler of the second half of the 10th century, but relatively little information has been preserved about him. Still, some important biographical details about him are available. Shamsuddin Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Abu Bakr al-Banna ash-Shamī, and is known by the *nisba* al-Muḡaddasi. The exact date of his birth and death is not certain, and refers approximately between 335y.h./946 and 381y.h./991 [1, p. 145]. It is known that he was born in Jerusalem, as evidenced by his *nisba*. He himself reports that his grandfather Abu Bakr al-Banna was a respected architect and is known for building a seaport in the city of Akka at the request of Ibn Tulun (835–884). Having received a good education from an early age, and having made pilgrimages to Mecca at the age of twenty, al-Maḡaddasī determined to pursue the study of geography. To this end he traveled for twenty years, visiting almost all Muslim countries except Andalusia, Sind and Sistan. As a result of a combination of traditional description of geographical information by Muslim authors with his rich life experience made him to stand out. According to the French orientalist A. Miquel, al-Muḡaddasi appears before us like Ibn Khordadbeh as a geographer, Qudama b. Ja'far as a politician, Ibn Faqih as a narrator, Ibn Hawqal and al-Ya'qubi as a sailor, merchant and traveler [2. P. 462–293].

Al-Maḡaddasī's work is divided into two volumes. After a large introduction, which contains a variety of general geographical, terminological, methodological, and autobiographical information, he explains that the entire inhabited earth is divided into seven climates *iqḷīm*. Then he gives a general overview of the Muslim countries which are divided into fourteen climates *al-aqālīm* that existed at that time such as: Jazira, Iraq, Akur, Sham, Misr, Maghrib, Mashriq, Daylam, Rihab, Jibal, Harasan, Fars, Kerman, and Sind. Here he also applies the geographical term *iqḷīm*, but in a different sense, namely, as a country or a region. Al-Maḡaddasī is based, first and foremost, on his own observations and tried as much as possible to organize his material, thus to give same type information on each region. His

work gives a high form of Arabic prose language which had been developed by that time in the field of historical and geographical literature [3, pp.211-218]. His *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm* consists of such parts as:

a) General geographical and climatic description of a region; b) Administrative division of a region; c) Location of government buildings, mosques, neighborhoods and markets as well as the architecture of a particular city; d) Coinage system, peculiarities of weight measures, tax system, etc. Thus, all the information reported by al-Muqaddasi provides extremely important material for the geography, architecture, topography, history, economy and culture of the Caliphate. The geography of al-Muqaddasi is completely original and depends little on the works of his predecessors [4, p. 137].

In *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* geography is paired with history, ethnography, and linguistics. Al-Muqaddasi quoted excerpts from the texts of his predecessors and indicated the source of information. In a similar way his personal impressions are shaped: “I saw”, “I heard”, “I was present”, “I asked”.

It should be noted that al-Muqaddasi’s work itself existed in two editions, the first of which is dated in 375 y.h., and the second, more complete, was finished in 378 y.h./988. Both editions have a differences in content, one of them focused on the Samanid dynasty in Bukhara, and the other on the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt [5]. For the first time in Europe, the work of al-Muqaddasi was conducted into scientific circle in the second half of the 19th century by the German orientalist A. Sprenger. It should also be emphasized that the edition of *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* that completed in 378 y.h. exists in two manuscripts kept in Istanbul and Berlin. The Dutch orientalist M. de Goeje who prepared al-Muqaddasi’s work on the basis of the Berlin manuscript published in the third volume of the *Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum* series in 1877.

In our study, we used the Leiden edition published in 1906 [6] to analyze the information about Qabq in al-Muqaddasi’s work *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*.

As to information on Qabq, and the Caucasus in general, al-Muqaddasi reported it in the following chapters — *iqḷīm ad-Daylam*; and *iqḷīm ar-Rihab*.

Excerpts from *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm* on Caucasus, Armenia and Azerbaijan were translated into Russian by N.A. Karaulov in 1908 [7], his version of translation is already outdated, and some fragments from the abovementioned Arabic text are missing. The excerpts on the Central Asia and neighboring regions were translated by S.L. Volin in 1939 [8]; on African peoples living to the south of the Sahara were translated by L.E. Kubbel in 1965 [9]. We know the translation from al-Muqaddasi’s work chapters “*iqḷīm ad-Daylam*” [Caspian region of Iran] and “*iqḷīm ar-Rihab*” [South Caucasus region] was made by V.M. Beilis in 1994 [10]. An introduction, commentary, indexes, map, and table to this translation were given by N.I. Serikov. Also al-Muqaddasi’s information on the Khazar country was translated by T. Kalinina in 2015 [11].

al-Muqaddasi on Qabq

Valuable information for our study on Qabq in 846 is found in al-Muqaddasi's work which should be considered as a slightly edited report by Ibn Khordadbeh, the latter was personally told by a Muslim traveler, merchant and polyglot Sallam at-Tarjuman. According to Ibn Khordadbeh, Sallam knew thirty languages [12, p. 63–70]. Sallam described his travel observations in a document prepared for the Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far Harun al-Wasik b. Mu'tasim, who ruled from 842 to 847, and also he narrated it in a public lecture.

“The fact that al-Wasik Billah [Caliph], after seeing a dream that the wall erected by Zulqarnayn between [us] and Yajuj and Majuj [Gog and Magog] had opened, turned to me and said: Go and see it with your own eyes and give me [reliable] information about it! [In addition, long before Sallam] al-Wasik sent the astronomer Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi (d. 850) [with instructions] to Tarkhan — the ruler of Khazars.¹ [To this end the Caliph] selected fifty men for me²[for the expedition], and rewarded me with 50 thousand dinars,³ and granted for my “fine for murder” [compensation to be paid by the perpetrator of a crime committed unintentionally] ten thousand dirhams, and ordered that each person accompanying me [in this expedition] should be given one thousand dirhams and sustenance for the period of one year. And he also provided me with two hundred mules to carry provisions and water.⁴ And we set out [on a trip] from Samarra (In the text *سرمن رأى* Surra-man-ra) with a letter from al-Wasik to the ruler of Arminiyya Ishaq b. Ismai'l,⁵ who resided in Tiflis, so that he [Ishaq] would extend us all necessary assistance [to proceed on their journey]. And Ishaq wrote [a letter] about us to the ruler of Sarir, and the ruler of Sarir wrote [a letter] about us to the ruler of Alan, and he [he ruler of Alan] wrote [a letter] about us to Filan-Shah, and the latter wrote [a letter] about us to Tarkhan — the ruler of the Khazars. And we stayed with him [Tarkhan] for days and nights until he send five guides with us ... “. [6, p. 362].

In N. Karaulov's translation of al-Muqaddasi's text this fragment is missing. As to the historical person Zulqarnayn (this word in Arabic stands for: “one with two horns — the righteous”), whose name is mentioned in the Quran, it is little known. He conquered large territories in Europe and Asia and everywhere he established the laws of Allah and preached faith in one God. The Quran describes that he opposed to the wild tribes known as Yajuj and Majuj, who were doing wickedness to other

¹ Ibn Khordadbeh didn't give this information.

² Ibn Khordadbeh added to this: "strong and young men".

³ Ibn Khordadbeh mentioned as "five thousand dinars."

⁴ Ibn Khordadbeh continued the text as following: "and also a felt hat, leather to cover [the body], furs and a chariot".

⁵ Ishaq b. Ismail b. Shu'ayb was the ruler of Tiflis who declared his separation from the Abbasid Caliphate. He was married to the daughter of the king of Sarir. Ishaq was defeated by the Caliphate troops under the commander Buga and executed in 853.

people. Zulqarnayn built a wall between the two mountains and filled the gaps between the blocks with molten iron [13].

Al-Maqaddasī devoted the whole chapter to the ar-Rihab region. He is the only geographer who calls the region of the Eastern Caucasus by the word ar-Rihab instead of Arminiyya. He divided this region into three parts: Arran, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Before enumerating the settlements of this region al-Maqaddasī proceeds to its description.

Thus, first and foremost, he writes that this region *iqḷīm* is distinct for abundance of fruits and vineyards, clean cities, forests and rivers; and for the fact that there are mountains [with the apiary itself] and plains [arable land], valleys [where sheep can graze]. Therefore, on the basis of this, it is called as ar-Rihab, because there was no other [suitable] name for the region other than this one. In addition, our author provides information on this [Caucasian region] that there were crops, cathedral mosques, *ribats* [Muslim border outposts] for the *Ghazies* [fighters for the sake of Islam], fortresses and markets, the local followers of *Ahl Sunnah wal Jama'a*, persons who have eloquence, entrepreneurs etc. [6, p. 373].

We will not give a full description of the localities of ar-Rihab, but will limit ourselves to their enumeration. For example, al-Muqaddasi writes that there are fifteen *madina* cities near the administrative center of the Barza'a district *kasaba*:

Tiflis *تفليس*; Qal'a Hhunan ⁶ *القلعة خنان* “is [a city] without a fortress, which is located on a plain near Mount Lakzan *لكزان*”; Shamkur *شمکور*; Ganja *جنزة*; Bardijj *برديج*; Shemakhi *الشماخية*; Shirwan *شروان* — is “a large city on a plain through which directly runs a river, and its houses are constructed from stones. And the cathedral mosque (*jami'*) is located amid the markets”;⁷ Baku *باکوه*; Shabaran *الشابران* — “is a city without a fortress which is populated predominantly by Christians”; Derbent *باب الأبواب*; Abkhan *الابخان* — “is a flourishing place like other cities of this area”; Kabala *قبلة* — “outside of this fortified city runs the river, and its cathedral mosque is located on the urban hillside”; Sheki *شکی* — “is [a city] on a plain with a predominantly Christian population, and its cathedral mosque is located in the Muslim marketplace”;⁸ Malazert *ملازکرد* — “is a fortified city with many *minbirs* [preachers' pulpits] and gardens, and its cathedral mosque is located on the outskirts of the marketplace”; Tublan *تبلا* — “is a clean city controlled by Muslims, where their number consists of 500 houses, but most of its population consists of Christians” [6, p. 376].

⁶ Karaulov provided incomplete name of "Qal'a".

⁷ In Karaulov's version written: "Sharwan is a big city on the plain; its buildings are stone; the cathedral mosque is on the square; it is crossed by a river".

⁸ In Karaulov's version written: "Sheki is on the plain; most of the inhabitants are Christians, and the cathedral mosque in the square is Muslim."

⁹ In Karaulov's version written: "In Tebla there are 500 houses in Muslim hands, and the greater part of the inhabitants are Christians; the area is flourishing."

If we compare this passage from al-Muqaddasi's text with a similar passage from al-Istakhri's work, it is evident that there is no match with the number of cities, namely: al-Muqaddasi gave 15 names whereas al-Istakhri listed 12 names. Al-Istakhri didn't mention such cities as Baku, Malazkert, Tublan. It is noteworthy that those localities which both authors listed in their texts are differed in their spelling. Thus, al-Muqaddasi reported as Abkhan whereas al-Istakhri reported as Abkhaz respectively [14, p.112].

Here the use of the word *minbar* instead of *jami*' referring to the city is not metonymy. The *minbar* was associated with the Friday *khutba* sermon, which was an important political significance since the advent of Islam. It is a symbol not only of religious but also of political-administrative authority. As to the classification of localities, al-Muqaddasi, like all Muslim geographers, distinguished cities according to their administrative importance. He divided all cities into three categories: *misr*, *kasaba* and *madina*. It should be noted that al-Muqaddasi's classification is conditional and does not exclude changes in assigning cities to one or another category [4, p. 164].

With regard to *kasaba* *لاتل* al-Mukaddasi also gives a list of cities associated with the influence of the Khazar capital such as: Bulgar *بلغار*, Samandar *سمندر*, Suvar *سوار*, Begand Kaishva *بغند قيشوى*, Baida *البيضاء*, Hamlidzh *خمليج* and Balandjar *بلنجر*. It is further stated that:

“Samandar is a large seaside city lying between the Khazar river [Sulak or Terek ?] and Bab al-Abwab. Their [citizens] houses [are built in the form of] a large tent, where most of the inhabitants are Christians. They are quiet people and like [to show hospitality] to strangers, but they engage in theft. This city [in its territorial size] is more extensive than Khazar [the city of the same name in Khazaria]. They [the population of Samandar] have many orchards and vineyards; their houses are constructed from wooden beams interlaced with reeds, which have pointed roofs. They have many mosques there...” [6, p. 361]. In N. Karaulov's translation of this fragment from al-Muqaddasi's text is missing.

The description of the cities doesn't correspond with both reports neither stylistically nor quantitatively. Thus, al-Istakhri narrated: “The city of Bab al-Abwab lies on the sea shore, in its center there is a marina for ships. Between this marina and the sea two retaining walls were built which overlook the sea, thus the passage for ships along this [route to Derbent] becomes narrower. [Moreover, this [sea] passage is made crooked, and its front part is stretched with a chain, thus no [any] ship can leave or enter it without an instruction *amr* to do so. Both retaining walls are made from stone and lead. [The city of] Bab al-Abwab lies on the Tabaristan [Caspian] Sea shore. As to its [size] the city exceeds [the city of] Ardabil [in the north-west of Iran], and they [the citizens of Derbent] have a lot of crops there, but little fruits, except what is brought to them from adjacent districts” [14, p. 110].

According to al-Muqaddasi: “Bab al-Abwab [lies] on [the coastal part of] the Khazar Sea, which is fortified by a retaining wall [from military campaigns] carried

out by the Khazars. [The city has] three *abwab* gates: the main gate is called *Bab al-Kabir*, the small gate is called *Bab al-Saghir*, and the last gate at the seaside is locked, which [at the moment] is not open. [In addition] there are several gates that are located [along the retaining wall] near the sea on one side and the Islamic [lands] on the other. On this wall, which stretches from the mountains to the sea, there are towers that house mosques and military forces. Around the cathedral mosque there are [the city] markets, next to it there is a spring with fresh water. [In Derbent] buildings constructed from stone. Their [citizens] houses [look] good, and have a water supply ...”¹⁰. [6, p. 376].

Describing some cities in the eastern Caucasus al-Muqaddasi highlighted Derbent: “Among the wonders of al-Bab is its fortress with a chain, which built from stone ashlar, similar to the one in Sur and Akka [a city in Sham]” [6, p. 380]. Besides, he described such cities as Malazkert, Tublan, Qal’a Hhunan that al-Istakhri’s work didn’t have. It is noteworthy that the prevailing notion of a city in the Muslim world was as an administrative center. It is reflected in the Arabic word *madina* which is derived from *dana* — “to judge” — a place where the court is held i.e. the administrative centre.

As for the distances between the given localities both authors reported differently. For example, in al-Muqaddasi’s work the distance: “From Barza’a to Bardij is a daytime journey [40. km]; then to Shemakha is two daytime journey [80. km]; then to Sharwan is three daytime journey [120. km]; then to Abkhaz [in the text Abkhan *الابخان*] is two daytime journey [80. km]: then to Jisr Samur is two daytime journey [80. km] and then to Bab al-Abwab is three daytime journey [120]” [6, p. 381]. [6, p. 381]. Whereas in al-Istakhri’s report the distance: “From Barza’a to Bardij and Bab al-Abwab is 18 *farsakhs* [108. km]; from Abkhaz to Jisr Samur is 12 *farsakhs* [72. km]; and from Jisr Samur to Bab al-Abwab is 20 *farsakhs* [120. km]” [14, p.112-1133]. Only this information on distances we can compare as it is reported by both authors.

Despite the fact that al-Maqaddasī’s information on distances between the eastern Caucasus cities have been many times used by researchers, no one has compared al-Maqaddasī’s data with a real distance on the ground.

The real distance between Jisr Samur and Bab al-Abwab is difficult to determine because Jisr Samur is not identified and localized. The distances between Barza’a and Bab al-Abwab can be determined according to their localization. The distance from Barda to Derbent on the ground according to the electronic map is approximately 546 km. Of course, the distance between Barza’a and Bab al-Abwab given by al-Maqaddasī is not the same as what al-Istakhri reported. The latter noted that the distance between both localities is 108 km, if we take into account that the average

¹⁰In Karaulov’s version written: “... The wall stretches from the mountains to the sea, and there are towers on the wall; there is a mosque in the town; sentries guard it; the cathedral mosque is in the middle of the square; there are springs in the town; the inhabitants’ buildings are made of stone; their houses are made of wood; they also have running water”.

daytime journey is equal to 38–40 km, which equals to 520 km in total. This suggests that unlike his predecessor al-Maḡaddasī's reports are more accurate.

Hereinafter we will not refer to the differences between al-Maḡaddasī's and al-Istakhri's information on the eastern Caucasus, because any more al-Maḡaddasī's reports on Qabq are not available.

Conclusion

Thus, al-Maḡaddasī's information on the eastern Caucasus localities and distances between them which are described in a daytime journey are more accurate than al-Istakhri's reports. There is no doubt that in his work al-Maḡaddasī gives information based on the results from his personal travels. Also, he described these localities in great detail. His method of distinguishing a city by functioning of a cathedral mosque is based on his perception of it, first and foremost, as an administrative center. This is the basic principle behind al-Maḡaddasī's approach to judge a number of cities in different regions of the Caucasus. In general, al-Maḡaddasī's work is devoted to describe countries in the Muslim world. His long-term travel observations and insights that had been collected were compared to the reports from Arabic historical and geographical works, the latter were subjected to his severe criticism, thus, formed the basis for his work entitled *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*.

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