THE RULE OF THE AFRIGHID DYNASTY AND THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY MEDIEVAL KHWARAZM

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21623755

Abstract: This article provides a scholarly analysis of the political, socio-economic, and cultural development of the Afrighid dynasty that ruled Khorezm during the early Middle Ages. The study examines the system of governance, urban development processes, the expansion of irrigated agriculture, and the role of Khorezm in regional and international trade networks. Special attention is paid to the political relations of the Afrighids with the Hephthalites, the Turkic Khaganate, and the Arab Caliphate based on historical sources and modern academic research.

Keywords: Afrighid dynasty, Abu Rayhan Biruni, Varzamariyids, Burgut-Qala, Uy-Qala, Qumbosgan-Qala, G. Boboyorov, A. Otxojayev, R. Nematov, M. Rajapov.

Introduction

The Afrighid dynasty, also known as the Varzamariy dynasty, was the ruling dynasty of the Khwarazmshahs that governed Khwarazm from the beginning of the 4th century CE until the end of the 10th century CE. The founder of the dynasty was Afrigh, who, in 305 CE, transferred his capital to the ancient city of Kath in Khwarazm. The city of Kath was restored, and the king commissioned the construction of a new royal palace. Beginning in 305 CE, the Afrighid rulers of Khwarazm minted silver coins. The obverse of these coins featured the portrait of the ruler, while the reverse depicted a mounted horseman. The minting of silver coinage strengthened both domestic and international trade relations. The rulers bore the title "Khwarazmshah."During the Afrighid period, irrigated agriculture, handicrafts, animal husbandry, trade and commerce, science, and the arts—particularly sculpture—reached a high level of development in Khwarazm. The region preserved its political independence during the periods of the Chionites, Kidarites, Hephthalites, and the Turkic Khaganate. Khwarazm also maintained diplomatic relations with the Byzantine Empire and the Turks.The renowned scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni recorded the names of twenty-two Khwarazmshahs belonging to the Afrighid dynasty. The capital of the Khwarazmian state was initially Topraq-Qala, but after 305 CE it became the city of Kath (Kos).During the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, Khwarazm experienced significant economic and cultural prosperity, marked by the construction of major irrigation canals, new cities, and fortified settlements. Handicrafts, art, and both domestic and international trade flourished. In the 4th–8th centuries CE, Khwarazm entered another period of remarkable development. Architectural complexes such as Burgut-Qala, Uy-Qala, and Qumbosgan-Qala were constructed during this era. Khwarazm's strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes connecting the Volga (Itil) region with Central Asia, Mongolia, China, and Iran played a crucial role in its economic and cultural prosperity. In 712 CE, Khwarazm was conquered by the Arabs. Qutayba ibn Muslim, the Umayyad governor of Khurasan, ordered the execution and exile of many scholars who had preserved the historical literature and cultural heritage of Khwarazm. As a result, very few written historical sources dating to the pre-Arab conquest period have survived.

T/r	Afrig'iylar sulolasi vakillari (Milodiy 305-995 y.)
1	Afrig'
2	Bag'ra
3	Saxxasan
4	Azhajamuq
5	Azkajavar I
6	Saxr I
7	Tovush
8	Xamgari
9	Bo'zgar
10	Arsamux
11	Saxr II
12	Sabri
13	Azkajavar II
14	Azhajamuq II
15	Shovshafar
16	Turksabosa
17	Abdulloh
18	Mansur ibn Abdulloh
19	Iroq ibn Mansur
20	Muhammad
21	Ahmad ibn Iroq
22	Abu Abdulloh Muhammad ibn Ahmad

Literature Review

The Afrighid dynasty ruled the region of Khwarazm, located within the territories of present-day Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and parts of Kazakhstan, from 305 to 995 CE. Chronologically, the period of Afrighid rule was highly complex, coinciding with the emergence and expansion of several major political powers, including the Sasanian Empire, the Hephthalites, the Turkic Khaganate, the Arab Caliphate, the Tahirids, and the Samanids. The question of whether the Afrighids were vassals of the Sasanians or the Hephthalites remains unresolved. However, written and archaeological evidence demonstrates that the dynasty was politically and economically subordinate to the Turkic Khaganate, the Arab Caliphate, the Tahirid, and the Samanid states at different stages of its history. The historiography of the Afrighid dynasty encompasses several major research directions, including the dynasty's origin and ethnic affiliation; its political status under the Hephthalites, the Turkic Khaganate, the Arab Caliphate, and the Samanids; its internal administration and methods of governance; the stages of its economic, social, and cultural development; and the causes of its decline.Both national and international scholarship has examined various aspects of the Afrighid dynasty, including its origin, the political status of Khwarazm during the Hephthalite and Turkic periods, the role of Khwarazm within the Arab Caliphate, and the emergence of the Al-i Iraq (Iraq family) under Samanid patronage.At present, there are differing interpretations regarding the origin of the Afrighid dynasty. Although Uzbek historiography recognizes the dynasty as a historical reality that ruled Khwarazm for nearly seven centuries (305–995 CE), a number of foreign scholars question its historical existence,

regarding it either as a legendary dynasty or as a genealogical construction created by the Al-i Iraq family to legitimize its political authority.

Existing scholarly interpretations of the Afrighids can generally be divided into three groups:

1. The Afrighids as an Iranian dynasty;
2. The Afrighids as a Turkic dynasty;
3. The Afrighids as a legendary or fictitious dynasty.

In Western and Iranian historiography, the Afrighids are generally regarded as an Iranian dynasty based on linguistic, epigraphic, and religious evidence. This interpretation has become the dominant view in international scholarship. In contrast, Uzbek historiography, particularly the studies of G. Boboyorov, has proposed that several of the twenty-two rulers listed by Abu Rayhan al-Biruni bear names of Turkic origin. Based on linguistic analysis, Boboyorov argues that the dynasty may have had a Turkic ethnic background. Some Turkish scholars, however, maintain that the rulers mentioned in al-Biruni's list did not all belong to a single dynasty. They argue that the Al-i Iraq family, established with the support of the Samanids, linked its genealogy to the more ancient Afrighid dynasty in order to strengthen its political legitimacy, a common practice in the medieval Islamic world.

The review of the available literature demonstrates that scholarly opinions concerning the ethnic origin of the Afrighids remain diverse, and no universally accepted interpretation has yet emerged.Specialized studies devoted to the political, social, and economic life of the Afrighids during the period of their dependence on the Western Turkic Khaganate are still lacking. This issue has generally been addressed only briefly within broader studies of the early medieval history of Central Asia. Nevertheless, the political status of the Afrighids during the Western Turkic period has been discussed in detail by G. Boboyorov, A. Otakhojayev, R. Ne'matov, and M. Rajapov. Based on archaeological evidence, written sources, and the conclusions presented in previous studies, it may be argued that the Hephthalites and later the Turkic Khaganate, which dominated Turan during the fifth and sixth centuries, encountered little resistance from the local population. Furthermore, the continuous minting of Afrighid coinage from the Kushan period through the era of the Turkic Khaganate suggests that the relationship between the imperial authorities and local rulers remained largely unchanged. Political dependence appears to have been expressed primarily through the payment of tribute, while local rulers retained considerable autonomy in internal administration. During the Umayyad Caliphate, several governors and military commanders were appointed to administer Khwarazm. In contrast, the Abbasids largely refrained from interfering in local governance. No historical sources record the appointment of governors or military officials to Khwarazm between 750 and 821 CE. This suggests that while the Afrighids' domestic and foreign policies were considerably restricted under the Umayyads, their political autonomy increased during the Abbasid period. An important example is the commercial and diplomatic missions dispatched by Shawshafar to China in 751, 753, and 755 CE. Modern historiography contains very limited research on the socio-economic and political history of Khwarazm during the Tahirid and Samanid periods. Apart from a small number of studies, little attention has been devoted to this subject. Scholars such as J. Heravi, A. Özbayraktar, M. Fedorov, and Sh. Ismoilov have only briefly discussed the political status of Khwarazm during these periods.

Discussion

Even before becoming an independent state, Khwarazm was one of the leading regions within the Kangju (Qang) state. During the third–second centuries BCE, the Kangju state expanded its political influence and drove the Dahae tribes out of the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. From that period onward, Khwarazm also lost its independence, while the Dahae migrated to the territory of Khurasan. Despite its incorporation into the Kangju state, whose population was predominantly

nomadic, Khwarazm continued to flourish as one of its principal economic and cultural centers due to its advanced economy and rich cultural heritage. The long-standing traditions of irrigated agriculture enabled the expansion of cultivated lands, the further development of irrigation networks, and the establishment of new fortresses, castles, and urban settlements.

The Arab geographer al-Istakhri, writing around 930–933 CE, listed thirteen cities of Khwarazm, including Khwarazm (Kath/Kas), Dargan, Hazorasp, Khiva, Khushmisan, Ardakhushmisan, Safardiz, Nuzbar, Kardaronkhos, Kardar, Barategin, Mazminiya, and Jurjaniya (Gurganj). Later, the Arab scholar al-Maqdisi, who visited Khwarazm in 985 CE, recorded that the oasis contained thirty-two cities. He identified settlements located on both banks of the Amu Darya. On the right bank were Kas, Gardman, Oykhon, Arzakhiva, Nukfag, Kardar, Mizdahqan, Jashira, Sadvar, Zardukh, Barategin, and Madkaminiya. On the left bank, he mentioned Jurjaniya (Gurganj), Nuzvar, Zamakhshar, Ruzund, Vazarmand, Vaskakhankas, Rakhushmisan, Madamisan, Khiva, Kardaronkhos, Hazorasp, Jigarband, Jaz, Dargan, Jit, Little Jurjaniya, Second Jit, Sadvar, Masasan, Kardar, and Andarstan.

Historical sources also refer to a number of settlements situated along the roads leading to Khwarazm, including Shurakhan, Khas, Nuzkat, Darson, Juvikan, Amir, Barabsar, and Vardara. The expansion of urban centers was one of the principal indicators of the country's overall economic development, reflecting the strengthening and widening of Khwarazm's commercial relations with the surrounding steppe regions as well as with distant countries.As in earlier centuries, Khwarazmian merchants maintained active trade with the nomadic peoples inhabiting present-day Turkmenistan and Western Kazakhstan, as well as with the Volga-Khazar region (later known as the Dasht-i Qipchaq), Volga Bulgaria, and the vast Slavic territories of Eastern Europe. As early as the tenth century, commercial relations with these regions had become well established. Describing Khwarazm and its inhabitants, al-Istakhri wrote:

"Khwarazm is a fertile city (madina) with abundant food and fruits, although it lacks walnuts. Cotton and woolen products are manufactured here in large quantities and exported to distant lands. The distinguishing characteristics of its inhabitants are their wealth and their aspiration for courage and bravery."

Al-Istakhri further noted that *"the distinguishing characteristics of the inhabitants are their wealth and their aspiration for courage and bravery."* The anonymous author of Hudud al-'Alam, written at the end of the tenth century, described the city of Kath as follows:

"The city possesses great wealth. Pillow covers, qavima garments, silk textiles, felt products, black tents (yurts), and rukhbin (a type of cheese) are produced here."

Another medieval Persian historian, Zakariya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini, described the urban structure of Khwarazmian cities:

"Within every city there was another smaller fortified town. The central part of this inner town was called the kuhandiz (citadel). These inner settlements were known as the shahristan, or in Arabic, madinat al-sughra (the small city). They were enclosed by defensive walls with several gates. Surrounding the shahristan was the larger city, known as madinat al-kubra, which was likewise protected by walls and gates. Beyond the outer city lay vineyards, orchards, and cultivated agricultural fields."

Historical sources also preserve extensive information concerning other commercial centers of Khwarazm. The Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan, who visited Khwarazm in 922 CE, described Ardakhushmisan as follows:

"The markets of Ardakhushmisan are crowded, and its inhabitants are prosperous. It is a large city situated between Kath and Gurganj on the banks of the Amu Darya and can be reached by river."

Similarly, the author of Hudud al-'Alam referred to Ardakhushmisan as *"a gathering place for merchants."* Both al-Istakhri and al-Maqdisi identified Ardakhushmisan as the third largest city of

Khwarazm after Kath (Kos) and Gurganj. According to al-Istakhri, the journey from Kath to Jurjaniya (Gurganj) required approximately three days, whereas Ardakhushmisan was only one day's travel from Kath. Al-Maqdisi likewise recorded that the distance from Khiva to Rakhushmisan (Ardakhushmisan) was about 30–40 km. According to Hamdallah Qazwini and Haji Khalfa, the distance between Gurganj and Ardakhushmisan measured fourteen farsakhs (approximately 84–112 km). An important trade route connecting Hazorasp and Gurganj also passed through Ardakhushmisan while bypassing Khiva. The distance between Hazorasp and Ardakhushmisan was estimated at sixteen farsakhs.Archaeological investigations conducted at the Voyangan site, identified with ancient Ardakhushmisan, fully confirm the information preserved in written sources and demonstrate that the city functioned as one of the major commercial and craft-production centers of medieval Khwarazm. By the third century CE, the development of Khwarazmian fortress-cities followed different trajectories. While some urban centers remained continuously inhabited for several centuries, others experienced relatively short periods of occupation due to natural environmental changes. For example, Guldursun Fortress, constructed along the Qirq Qiz Canal, gradually lost its population because of water shortages. Consequently, the once-flourishing settlement declined and eventually lost its former significance. Likewise, Qizilqala yielded its leading position to the newly established and rapidly developing city of Topraq-Qala, while Jildiq-Qala emerged in place of Ayaz-Qala. These developments further enhanced the importance of Topraq-Qala as the principal political and administrative center of the oasis. Competition for water resources between Ayaz-Qala and Topraq-Qala became increasingly intense. According to historical tradition, the representatives of Topraq-Qala, led by the determined ruler Afrigh and the emerging Afrighid dynasty, ultimately prevailed. As a result, Ayaz-Qala was abandoned, whereas Topraq-Qala continued its rapid growth and political ascendancy. During the first to fourth centuries CE, not only were new fortifications constructed, but many earlier defensive structures were also extensively renovated.

In some cases, earlier fortress walls were completely enclosed by newly constructed defensive walls, as observed at Hazorasp, Devkesgan, and Topraq-Qala in Khiva, among other sites. In other cases, additional brick masonry was added to the lower level of the firing galleries, as seen at Little Qirqqiz-Qala, Oqshaxon-Qala, and Gavur-Qala on Mount Sultan Uvays. As a result, the point at which projectiles struck the fortifications shifted from the lower to the upper level of the defensive walls. This transition to fortifications with elevated and reinforced foundations marked the second major stage in the evolution of the military architecture of ancient Khwarazm. Although the general layout of these fortifications remained similar to that of the Kangju period, their architectural characteristics changed considerably: the foundations were raised, and the defensive walls were constructed in a more vertical form. Beginning in the third century CE, Khwarazm, which possessed a long-standing tradition of independent statehood, sought to free itself from political dependence by strengthening its economy and consolidating its resources. Taking advantage of the weakening of the Kangju state, several large landed estates, led by local landowning elites, began to establish independent or semi-independent principalities within their territories. Under these circumstances, the unification of these principalities became a political necessity. This movement toward political independence was led by the local dynasty headed by Afrigh. The Afrighids gradually brought the various principalities under their authority, thereby establishing a new ruling dynasty. They consolidated their control over the oasis regions on the western part of the right bank of the Amu Darya, while Topraq-Qala served as the dynastic and administrative center. Scholars continue to debate whether Topraq-Qala functioned as the official capital of the state or whether another city held that status. Most researchers, including S. P. Tolstov, regard the site as the royal residence from which the rulers administered the kingdom. It is likely that its permanent inhabitants consisted primarily of members of the aristocracy, royal attendants, and military guards. The absence of market areas and artisans' quarters within the settlement further supports this interpretation.The palace complex and the written documents discovered at Topraq-Qala

clearly demonstrate that the site represents an exceptional monument of ancient Khwarazmian civilization. It embodies the social organization and statehood of ancient Khwarazm, reflecting the intensive labor of craftsmen and workers, the remarkable achievements of its architects, and the refined artistic traditions of its creators. As such, Topraq-Qala remains one of the most significant archaeological and historical monuments of early Khwarazm.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Afrighid dynasty was a significant political power that established enduring traditions of statehood in the history of Khwarazm. Their long-lasting rule was sustained by a flexible system of political governance, an economy based on irrigated agriculture, and a well-developed urban network. The historical experience of the Afrighids provides valuable insight into the development of early medieval statehood in Central Asia and remains of considerable importance for understanding the region's political, economic, and cultural evolution.

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