

Ibn Khordadbeh

Abu'l-Qasim Ubaydallah ibn Abdallah ibn Khordadbeh (Arabic: ابوالقاسم عبيدالله ابن خردادبه; 820/825–913), commonly known as **Ibn Khordadbeh** (also spelled **Ibn Khurradadhbih**; ابن خرددة), was a high-ranking Persian bureaucrat and geographer in the Abbasid Caliphate.^[1] He is the author of the earliest surviving Arabic book of administrative geography.^[2]

Biography

Ibn Khordadbeh was the son of Abdallah ibn Khordadbeh, who had governed the northern Iranian region of Tabaristan under the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun (r. 813–833), and in 816/17 conquered the neighbouring region of Daylam, as well as repelled the Bavandid *ispahbadh* (ruler) Shahriyar I (r. 817–825) from the highlands of Tabaristan. Ibn Khordadbeh's grandfather was Khordadbeh, a former Zoroastrian who was convinced by the Barmakids to convert to Islam. He may have been the same person as Khordadbeh al-Razi, who had provided Abu'l-Hasan al-Mada'ini (died 843) the details regarding the flight of the last Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd III during the Arab conquest of Iran.^[3] Ibn Khordadbeh was born in 820 or 825 in the eastern province of Khurasan, but grew up in the city of Baghdad.^{[2][4]} There he received a cultivated education, and studied music with the prominent singer Ishaq al-Mawsili, a friend of his father. When Ibn Khordadbeh became of age, he was appointed as the caliphal postal and intelligence service in the central province of Jibal, and eventually in Samarra and Baghdad.^[2]

Around 870 ibn Khordadbeh wrote *Kitāb al Masālik w'al Mamālik* (*The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*) (with the second edition of the book being published in 885).^[5] In this work, ibn Khordadbeh described the various peoples and provinces of the Abbasid Caliphate. Along with maps, the book also includes descriptions of the land, people and culture of the Southern Asiatic coast as far as Brahmaputra, the Andaman Islands, peninsular Malaysia and Java.^{[6]:108} The lands of Tang China, Unified Silla (Korea) and Japan are referenced within his work.^[7] He was also one of the earliest Muslim writers to record Viking trade to the east: 'merchants called *Rus* traded in the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, transporting their merchandise by camel as far as Baghdad.^[8]

Ibn Khordadbeh clearly mentions Waqwaq twice: *East of China are the lands of Waqwaq, which are so rich in gold that the inhabitants make the chains for their dogs and the collars for their monkeys of this metal. They manufacture tunics woven with gold. Excellent ebony wood is found there. And again: Gold and ebony are exported from Waqwaq.*^[9]

Claudius Ptolemy, Greek and Pre-Islamic Iranian history have clear influence on the work.^[10]

Ibn Khordadbeh	
Born	820/825 <div>Khurasan, Abbasid Caliphate</div>
Died	913
Notable works	<i>Book of Roads and Kingdoms</i>
Relatives	Abdallah ibn Khordadbeh (father)



The Abbasid Caliphate in c. 850

It is one of the few surviving sources that describes Jewish merchants known as Radhanites.

Khordadbeh wrote other books. He wrote around 8–9 other books on many subjects such as "descriptive geography" (the book *Kitāb al Masālik w'al Mamālik*), "etiquettes of listening to music", "Persian genealogy", cooking", "drinking", "astral patterns", "boon-companions", "world history", "music and musical instruments". The book on music had the title *Kitāb al-lahw wa-l-malahi* which is on musical matters of pre-Islamic Iran.^[2]^[10]

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In Nomine Jassa

Nos enim Poloni tres deos habuimus, scilicet Lada, Nya,
lassa

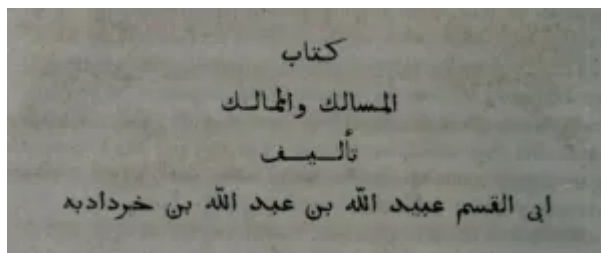


The Slavs of Ibn Khurradādhbih (or Ibn Khordadbeh)

by torino / October 30, 2016 / 2 Comments

We have previously touched upon the work of the Persian spymaster and geographer **Abu'l-Qasim Ubaydallah ibn Abdallah Ibn Khurradadhbih** or **Ibn Khordadbeh** (circa 820 – circa 911) in the context of Radhanite and Rus traders. But we did not include all the “Slavic” references made by this author. Here we complete the Slavic excerpts from his Book of Roads and Countries (or The Book of Roads and Provinces) or, as it is also known, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa l-mamālik*. Ibn Khordadbeh was the son of a governor and general of the Abbasids (the Abdallah referred to above) and the grandson of a Khorasani convert from Zoroastrianism (the Khurradadhbih referred to above).

The first “scientific” Western edition of this work were de Meynard’s (1865) and M.J. de Goeje’s Classic Editions (1889).



I

Quibla of the inhabitants of all lands

The inhabitants of Armenia, Adarbajjan, Baghdad, Was it, Qufa, al-Mada’in, Basra, Hulwan, ad-Dinawar, Nahawand, Hamadan, Isbahan, ar-Rajj, Tabaristan, all of Khurassan, the country of al-Hazar and Quasmir in India orient themselves during prayers towards this wall Quaba, in which there are its doors. [Along the horizon,] this wall stretches from the North Pole towards the left up until the middle of the East.

II

Titles of the kings of the Earth

The King of Iraq, whose commonly called Quisra, [was called] Sahansah, the King of ar-Rum, commonly referred to as Quaisar [Caesar], is called Basil, the kings of the Turks, at -Tubat and al-Hazar [are] all [called] Haqan [khagan/khan] with the exception of the King al-Harluh, who they call Gabgujah. The King as-Sin [is called] Bagbur. They are all descendants of Afaridun. The greatest king of India [is called] Balhara which means the “king of kings”. The other rulers of India include: Gaba, king al-Taqa, king al-Gurz, Gaba and Rahma and king Qamrub. King az-Zabag [is called] al-Fungab, the king of Nubia [is called] Qabil, the king of Abissinia [is called] an-Nagasi, the king of the islands of the Eastern Sea [is called] al-Maharag, **king as-Saqalib [of the Slavs] [is called] Qnaz [knyaz].**



III

Rumiya, Burgan, the **countries of as-Saqalib [of the Slavs]** and al-Abar [lie] to the north of al-Andalus.

IV (35)

From the Western Sea there come **Slavic**, Byzantine [ar-Rum], Frankish and Langobard eunuchs, as well as Byzantine and Andalusian slave women and beaver pelts and other furs. From among the fragrances [they bring] *al-mama* and from medicines – mastic. From the depths of that sea near Francia they harvest *bussed* which is commonly called corral.

V

As regards the sea located beyond **the Slav country**, there lies at its shore a city called Tulija. No ship sails that sea nor any boat and nothing is brought from it either.

VI

Thereafter comes Abidus at the strait. From there lies the road to the Strait of Constantinople [i.e., Bosphorus]. This is the sea that is also called Buntus [the Pontus]. It lies to the side of the Khazar Sea.

VII

The distance of the entire Strait, from the Khazar Sea to the Syrian Sea is 320 miles. There sail through it [i.e., the the Strait of Bosphorus] ships from the islands of the Khazar Sea and those parts and there sail it upwards [in the other direction, ships] coming from the Syrian Sea towards al-Qustantinija [Constantinople].

Muslim ibn Abi Muslim al-Garmi says, we are told, that there are fourteen Byzantine provinces, which their king gave to his lieutenants to rule. Of these three are beyond the Strait. The first of these is the province Tafla. This is the province of al-Qustantinija [Constantinople]. On its east side it borders on the Strait all the way till its end at the Syrian Sea; on the west side its border is the wall that runs from the Khazar to the Syrian Sea and whose length one travels in four days. – which wall is two days' journey from al-Qustantinija [Constantinople]; on the south side the Syrian Sea forms its border; on the north side, the Khazar Sea.

The second province that lies beyond this one, is the Taraqian province. Its boundary on the east side is the wall, on the south side the Maqadun province, on the west side the Burgan country, on the north the Khazar Sea. Its length is fifteen days' journey, its width is three days' [journey]. There are nine castles there.

The third province is the Maqadun province. Its boundary on the east side is the wall, on the south side the Syrian Sea, on the West side the **country of the Slavs** and on the north, Burgan. Its length is fifteen days' journey, its width is five days' [journey]. There are three castles there.

IX (76)

In ar-Rum [Byzantine Empire] there are 12 *batriqs* whose number neither decreases nor increases. Six of them reside at al-Qustantinija [Constantinople] at the side of ar-Tagiy [the tyrant] and six in the other provinces: *batriq* of Ammuria, *batriq* of Anqira [Ankara], *batriq* of Armenia, *batriq* of Taraquiya which lies beyond al-Qustantinija [Constantinople] in the direction of Burgan, *batriq* of Siquilya [Sicily] which is a great island as well as a great kingdom that lies opposite from Ifriqiya

[Africa], *batriq* of Sardinia [Sardinia]. This last one [last *batriq*] is the master of all the islands in the sea.

X (87)

[A traveler] leaves [the caliphate] through the *Darb-as Salam* [the safety gate] and stops at al-Ullaqj, next at ar-Rahwa, next at ar-Gawzat, next at **al-Gardaquib** [this is clearly a Slavic name related to *gard*], next at ***Hisn as-Saqaliba*** [the stronghold of the Slavs]*, next at al-Budandun.**

VII. THE VALE OF BOZANTI (PODANDOS).

In descending the glen described above as leading down to the Vale of Bozanti, the road is bordered on the right by the Anasha-Dagh, 6000 feet in height. The road which leads down that narrow glen from the Tekir summit keeps to the west bank of a small stream which rises close behind Ibrahim Pasha's lines; but between 65 and 66 kilometres from Tarsus it crosses to the right bank and reaches Aiva-Bey-Khan. The descent is extremely steep for more than 2 miles before reaching this khan. Immediately after leaving the khan the road crosses again to the left bank of the stream, then leaves it 3 miles further on, and goes over some hills, rising 200 feet, and again descending to the Vale of Podandos, still called Bozanti.†

High on the mountain, overlooking the Vale of Bozanti (Podandos), is Anasha-Kalesi, described by Langlois as a Byzantine fortress, built of black marble. Its wonderful situation, and Langlois's account of the material, make it seem more like a castle of the Arabian Nights than a real fortress. Its history can be traced from the eighth century onwards. It was called by the Arabs Hisn Assakaliba, the Slavonian castle, because a garrison of Slavonians was planted on those mountain slopes and glens. These seem to have been the Slavonians who deserted by thousands from the Byzantine side in the seventh century. In the eighth and ninth centuries the castle was taken and retaken

* My estimate of the height of Tekir summit was 4240 (allowing it 80 feet above Tekir Khan) in 1891, and 4300 in 1902. Major Bennet and Colonel Stewart (who was afterwards with Gordon in Khartum) agree in allowing 4300; Ainsworth has 3812; Oberhummer 4607 (with the same allowance as in my estimate). My estimates depend on aneroids lent by the Society.

† There must have been an ancient by-form Pozandos. Compare Nadiandos-Nazianzos ('Hist. Geogr.', p. 348), Ariandos-Arianzos, etc.

* Various locations have been proposed such as Anasha-Kalesi (near Bozanti (Podandos) in Idlib). Another possibility is the Cappadocian *Hasin* which was also mentioned by Ibn al-stir and Ibn

Haldun which lay in the Cappadocian lands that fell to the Arabs of Harun al-Rashid in 806. This appears to be a location either of Slavic settlers resettled there by the Byzantines (from Europe) or refugees/deserters from the Byzantine army (in which case the city would likely be in Arab territory). The *Hisn as-Saqaliba* seems different from the *madinat as-Saqaliba* (the city of the Slavs) which appears in the works of **al-Ya'qubi** and the later **al-Ṭabarī**.

** Or al-Badandun – likely the Byzantine Podandos/Podendos, i.e., Bozanti.

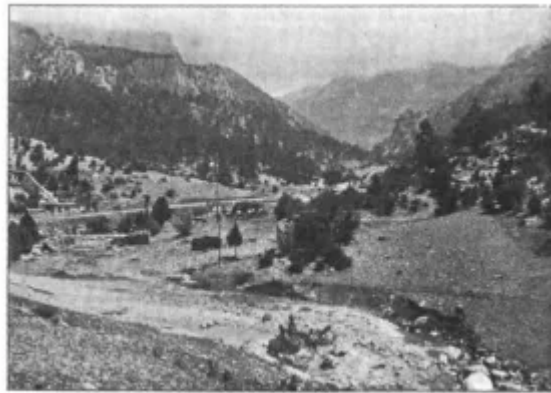


FIG. 3.—THE VALE OF PODANDUS (BOZANTI).

XI

Al-Garbi [meaning the North] is a country in the north... It is here that you find Armenia, Adarbaygan, ar-Rajj, **Dumawand** [today's **Demawend**]... Therein lies too Tabaristan... Here you find [the people] of al-Babr, at-Tajalasan, al-Hazar [the Khazars], al-Lan, **as-Saqalib [the Slavs]*** and al-Abar [the Avars].

* agreement with Masudi.

XII (100)

The provinces Arran, Gurzan [Georgia was overran by the Arabs in the 7th and the Khazars in the 8th century] and as-Sisagan belonged to the kingdom of al-Hazar [the Khazars].

XIII

The city of Samandar beyond al-Ban and the lands beyond it is in the hands of the Khazars.

XIV (106)

The road between Gurgan [*Jurjan*] [Hyrcania or Verkâna] and Hamlih [*Khamlij*], a city of Khazaria is a northern road and it is for this reason that I mention it here. From Gurgan [*Jurjan*] to Hamlih [*Khamlij*] which lies on a river* that flows down from the country **as-Saqaliba [of the Slavs]** and comes into the Gurgan [*Jurjan*] [or Caspian] Sea, are eight days' [journey] by sea if the wind holds. And these are the cities of Khazaria: Hamlih [*Khamlij*], Balangar and al-Bayda. As al-Buhturi says: 'There is greatness which he added in Iraqn to what he had been given in Hamlih [*Khamlij*] or Langar.' Beyond al-Bab there is the king of Suwar**, king al-Lachs***, the king al-Lan, the king Filan, king al-Maqat, and the 'Master of the Throne' – the city of Samandar is also there. This is the end of information about al-Garbi, the land of the north.



* The river is Volga. The country of the Slavs refers either to Volga–Kama Bulgars who may have spoken Slavic at that point or to the country of the Novgorod Slavs or Ilmen Slavs close to whose territory were the Valdai Hills with the source of the Volga.

** Old Turkic name of the Khazars (also in Ibn al-Faqih north of Derbend). Masudi knows it as Sabir. Moses Khorenatsi has Savir between Semender and the River Atil or Volga (also capital of the Khazars). The Savir state fell to the Avars in 558 and later it was reconstituted as a Khazar principality.

*** Perhaps the Lezgc tribes of southern Dagestan.

XV (119)

The routes of the Jewish merchants called al-Radhaniya [Radhanites]

for this section – [see here](#)

The routes of the Rus merchants

for this section – [see here](#)

The overland routes of the al-Radhaniya

for this section – [see here](#)



A coin struck by Ibn Khurradadhbih's governor father

XVI (180)

The inhabited Earth is divided into four parts:

Aruta [Europe] which contains al-Andalus [Spain], **as-Saqalib [Slavonia]**, ar-Rum [Byzantine Empire], Firanga [Frankish Kingdom] and Tamga [Tangier] all the way to the border of Misr [Egypt].

Lubija which contains: Misr [Egypt], al-Qulzum, al-Habasa [Abyssinia], Berber [country], the country surrounding it and the Southern Sea...

Itjufija which contains Tihama, Yeman, Sind, India and China.

Isqutiya which contains Armenia, Khurassan, Turks and Khazars.

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2 thoughts on “The Slavs of Ibn Khurradādhbih (or Ibn Khordadbeh)”



MACIEJ P.

November 2, 2016 at 2:12 pm

The most important thing what said Ibn Khurradādhbih is: "The routes of the Rus merchants are as follows; the Rus, one of the Saqaliba people..." and "... There [Baghdad] Slavic speaking eunuchs interpret for them [Rus]." How You said Ibn Khurradādhbih is the earliest source from Arab sources and therefore the most reliable.

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DEJAN

January 27, 2022 at 6:57 am

I must add Sklavinians are the Macedonians of today the country of the Slavonians is Macedonia

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JOURNAL ARTICLE

The Routes of the Radanites

L. Rabinowitz

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THE ROUTES OF THE RADANITES

By L. RABINOWITZ, London

AMONG the many steps taken by Abdal-malik (691–705), the fifth of the Ommayad Caliphs for the organisation and good government of his rapidly extending realm was the institution of a regular post-service from Damascus to the provincial capitals. It was destined primarily for government despatches, but generally it was of use for ease of communications. The postmasters were charged with the task of informing the caliphs of all important news in their respective countries.¹

The institution remained, and more than a century after his death² Aboul Kassim Obaidallah Ibn Khordadbeh, son of the Governor of Taharistan, and Postmaster General to the Caliphate of Baghdad, wrote his *Book of Ways*³ in which occurs the famous and oft-quoted passage⁴ about the Jewish merchants called the Radanites who, in his time, journeyed by four separate and distinct routes from Western Europe to China and back in pursuit of their

¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 13th ed. art. Caliphate Vol. 5, p. 33.

² Adler gives the date 817, Roth 847 (see later), while Baron *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* Vol. 1, p. 324 gives 870.

³ First noticed by A. Sprenger in "Some passages on the early commerce of the Arabs," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 14. Part 11. 2. 1844 p. 519, then by Reinaud in his *Introduction to the Geography of Aboulfeda* 1. p. lxxviii. First translated by C. Barbier de Meynaud in *Journal Asiatique*, Paris 1865 pp. 512 ff. Also De Goeje, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, Leyden, 1889 Vol. VI. p. 114.

⁴ E. g. Joseph Jacobs, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation*, Philadelphia 1919, pp. 194–204. Elkan Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, London 1930, pp. 2 and 3. C. Roth, *Jewish Contributions to Civilisation*, London 1936 pp. 217–8. Comp. also: W. Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant*

2 Vols. 2nd. ed. Leipzig 1936. Vol. 1. pp. 30, 125. G. Caro, *Social- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden* Frankfurt, 1924 Vol. 1. pp. 126-7.
251

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