



Religion and religious communities in Khorezm (10-11th centuries)

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Abstract. Khorezm is a crucial region in the history of Central Asia, particularly during the early Middle Ages. The activities of the dynasties that ruled this area are significant for understanding the history of the entire East. During this period, the peoples of Central Asia, who were experiencing Islamization, developed a new culture influenced by the Turkic tribes from the north. This emerging culture later contributed to the development of the entire Middle East and the Turkic states. From the beginning of the 9th century, the Turkic Oghuz tribes located in northern Central Asia began to penetrate the southern regions of the Aral Sea and the Amu Darya delta for trade and sometimes military reasons. During this period, representatives of several religious views and groups, besides Islam, lived in the territory of the Afrighids and Mamunids states. This article analyzes the religious and spiritual image of the historical Khorezm region in the 10th-11th centuries, the attitude towards the various religions in this region, and their interaction based on sources. In particular, information is provided about the arrival of Islam in the Khorezm oasis, its spread in the 10th-11th centuries, and its impact on cultural life. In addition, the article provides information about the religions that coexist with Islam in the oasis, including Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Tengrism, and ideas of tolerance.

Key words: Mamunids, Zoroastrianism, Tengrism, Kharijites, Mu'tazilism, Paganism.

Öz. Harezmi, Orta Asya tarihinde, özellikle de erken Orta Çağ'da önemli bir bölgedir. Bu bölgeyi yöneten hanedanların faaliyetleri, tüm Doğu'nun tarihini anlamak için önemlidir. Bu dönemde, İslamlaşmayı deneyimleyen Orta Asya halkları, kuzeyden gelen Türk kabilelerinden etkilenen yeni bir kültür geliştirdiler. Bu ortaya çıkan kültür daha sonra tüm Orta Doğu'nun ve Türk devletlerinin gelişimine katkıda bulundu. 9. yüzyılın başlarından itibaren Orta Asya'nın kuzeyinde yer alan Türk Oğuz boyları, ticari ve bazen de askeri nedenlerle Aral Gölü'nün güney bölgelerine ve Amu Derya deltasına nüfuz etmeye başlamışlardır. Bu dönemde bölgede var olan Afrigli ve Memunli devletlerinin topraklarında İslam'ın yanı sıra bir takım dini görüş ve grupların temsilcileri de yaşıyordu. Bu makale, tarihi Harezmi bölgesinin 10-11. yüzyıllardaki dini ve manevi imajını, bu bölgede var olan çeşitli dinlere yönelik tutumu ve bunların etkileşimini kaynaklara dayalı olarak incelemektedir. Özellikle İslamiyet'in Harezmi vahasına gelişi, 10-11. yüzyıllarda yayılması ve kültürel hayata etkisi hakkında bilgiler verilmektedir. Ayrıca makalede, vahada İslam'la birlikte yaşayan Hristiyanlık, Yahudilik, Zerdüştlük, Tengricilik ve hoşgörü fikirleri gibi dinler hakkında da bilgi verilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Memuniler, Zerdüştlük, Tengricilik, Hariciler, Mutezilelik, Paganizm.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 7th century, a large, centralized, and influential Muslim state emerged on the Arabian Peninsula, leading to the political unification of the Arabs under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of a new religious doctrine. Soon, the Arabs united under the banner of Islam and began to threaten neighboring countries. The Islamic army, consisting of Arab and non-Arab peoples, reached the region of Merv in 665, established itself there, and began to conquer the territories north and east of the city. The first major Arab campaigns into the Transoxiana region began in 671. Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad was the first to march across the Amu Darya, capturing Paikand and Bukhara, and returning with great booty. In 676, Said b. Uthman launched an attack on Bukhara and Sogdiana (Xoji Ismatulloh, 2005, p. 56).

Qutayba ibn Muslim, the emir of Khorasan, led the conquests of the Transoxiana. During this period, the caliph's emir in Khorasan ruled from Merv, first over Khorasan and then over Transoxiana.

The religion spread slowly throughout Central Asia during the 8th century, but by the 9th century, a large portion of the population had converted to Islam. Abu Ja'far al-Tabari records that in his work "History of Tabari" Qutayba traveled to Khorezm in 93 (711 AD), where he helped a ruler named Chaghan to fight his opponents and occupy the country. B.I. Weinberg states that after Qutayba left Khorezm, Chagan was killed due to an uprising by the local population. As a result, Qutayba's second campaign against Khorezm began in 713 (Vaynberg, 1977, p. 91). In his work, Beruni, while providing information about this campaign, says, "Qutayba killed and destroyed those who knew the Khorezm script well, studied their legend and traditions, and taught their knowledge to others" (Biruni, 1968, p. 72). So, the Arabs are carrying out this event intending to destroy Zoroastrianism and other religious beliefs and traditions that the Khorezmians have long believed in and replacing them with Islamic religious laws and regulations. During the reign of the Khorezmshahs, the majority of the oasis population undoubtedly believed in Islam. Because in the 10th century, the culture, language, science, and urban construction traditions of Khorezm were fully consistent with Islamic traditions.

1. The spread of Islam and sects during the Mamunids period

Some sources report that the Khorezmians during this period were exemplary Muslims, with most of them seriously engaged in jurisprudence and the study of the Quran. For example, in his work "Ahsan al-taqasim", al-Maqdisi noted that the Khorezmians living in the city of Nisa in Khorasan recited the Quran well, recited the call to prayer twice a day, and at the same time fought many wars with the local townspeople (*Materiali po istorii turkmen i Turkmenii*, 1939, p. 201). During the reign of the Khorezmshah Mamunids, the population that believed in Islam was divided into several groups, most of which adhered to the Sunni sect. During this period, in addition to the Sunni sect, there were groups of Islam in Khorezm such as Shia, Shafi'ism², and Ismailism³. For example, Ibn Fadlan, the ambassador of the Arab caliph, notes that in Khorezm, unlike other Abbasid territories, traditions inherited from the Umayyads prevail, and that the residents of the village of Ardeku, which belongs to Jurjania, mention Hazrat Ali after every prayer (Ibn Fadlan, 1995, p. 30).

During this period, in Khorezm, in addition to the Sunni sect of Islam, some groups belonged to the Shiite. Even researcher A. Uzbayraktar notes that in the 80s of the 10th century, Ma'mun bin Muhammad responded positively to a letter of invitation sent by the Fatimid ruler, who believed in the Shiite sect, to convert to Shiism and recognize him as the supreme ruler (Özbayraktar, 2021, p. 46). However, this does not mean that the Khorezmshah himself believed in this sect. Because, contrary to this idea, according to the notes of the aforementioned Arab historian and traveler Ibn Fadlan, most of the Khorezmians were accustomed to emphasizing that they were far from Hazrat Ali in every prayer (Ibn Fadlan, 1995, p. 30). That is, while the majority of Khorezmians are Sunni Muslims, they emphasize in every prayer that they do not believe in other Islamic sects existing in the region. In a country where the majority

² The founder of the sect is Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Idris Shafi'i. The mujtahid scholar worked in 767-820 and died in Egypt. Imam Shafi'i, having summarized his knowledge, combined fiqh sources such as the Holy Quran, Sunnah, the sayings of the Companions, analogy, opinion, and ijma, and issued rulings based on them, creating his own unique direction. The Shafi'i ideology, founded by Imam Shafi'i, spread to almost all Arab Muslim countries in the late 8th and 9th centuries. This sect is used by a number of countries as one of the official schools of thought.

³ A religious movement that emerged in the Arab Caliphate in the mid-8th century as part of Shiism and spread widely in the Near and Middle East in the 10th and 11th centuries. The formation of the Ismailism movement is associated with the intensification of conflicts and popular uprisings in the Arab Caliphate. Since some Shiite supporters had a certain degree of agreement with the Abbasids, who had taken over the throne of the caliphate, a group of Shiites who intended to continue the fight against the Abbasids gathered around Ismail, the eldest son of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. Imam Ja'far deposed Ismail and appointed his younger son, Musa al-Kazim, as his successor. Dissatisfied with this, Ismail's supporters recognized his son Muhammad b. Ismail as the imam after his death (in 762). At the end of the 9th century, Ismailism had established itself as an independent religious sect. They formed secret societies or organizations that represented the interests of specific groups. During this period, under the influence of Greek philosophy, Neoplatonism, Neopythagoreanism, Christian Gnosticism, and other movements, the complex religious and philosophical system of Ismailism was formed. Their teachings are primarily divided into two: zahiri (external) and batini (internal) teachings.

of the population is Sunni Muslim, it is unlikely that the rulers would believe in another sect of Islam. Otherwise, the population's discontent with the ruler would increase and undermine the foundations of the state. Many such examples can be cited from different periods of Uzbekistan's history. For example, Ibn al-Athir's "Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh" contains the following information in the section on events that occurred in 965: "... For this reason, except for the ruler, all the Khazar people became Muslims and, with the help of the Khorezmians, drove out the Turks. After that, the Khazar Khagan also converted to Islam" (İbn ul-Asir, 1991, p. 486). Moreover, when Babur conquered the city of Samarkand for the third time at the beginning of the 16th century, the majority of the population opposed him. Because to capture the city, he relied on the army of Ismail Safavid, the main patron of the Shiite sect at that time. Concluding from the above examples, it can be said that due to the diverse religious beliefs existing in the region in the 10th century, the policies of the rulers of Khorezm gave great importance to the ideas of religious tolerance. The Arab historian al-Maqdisi, while providing information about the Islamic sects spread in the region, states that the people of Khorezm are mainly Sunni Muslims, that the majority of them adhere to the Hanafi ideology, and that in the cities of Khorezm outside Jurjania, there are Kharijites, Mu'tazilism, Shiites, and Shafi'is (Al-Makdisi, 1991, p. 277). Another account of Islamic sects in Khorezm is provided by Abu Fazl Bayhaqi. According to him, after the Mamunids were overthrown in Khorezm in 1017, Mahmud of Ghaznavi attacked and occupied Jurjania. His first act in Khorezm was to destroy the Batinid group that existed in Jurjania (Abul Fazl Bayhaqi, 2020, p. 29).

In general, during the reign of the Mamunid Khorezmshahs, there was a strong sense of tolerance not only towards Islam but also towards other religions. There is information that scientific institutions such as "Dar al-hikmah wal-ma'arif" established in the palace of Khorezmshah, where along with Muslim, scholars belonging to the Christian religion such as Abu Khair Hammor and Abu Sahl Masihi were also hired (Özbayraktar, 2023, p. 398-425). The reason for this can be attributed to the desire of the region's population to adapt to Islamic culture while preserving their traditions, which have been practiced for thousands of years. That is, it can be argued that the population tried to adapt their customs and traditions to the Islamic religion and choose the most alternative sects of religion while preserving their customs as much as possible. As evidence of this idea, it can be shown that part of the population of Khiva supported the Shafi'i sect until the 13th century, and then began to adhere to the Hanafi ideology (Özaydin, 1997, p. 219).

According to A. Uzbayraktar, the Mamunid rulers supported both Hanafi and Shafi'i sects. For example, the minister Sahli, who served the Mamunids, asked the Khorezmian Qadi⁴ Hububi, to create a work dedicated to the Hanafi and Shafi'i sects of Islam. In addition, Shiite scholar Abul Husayn ibn al-Labban from Baghdad visited the court of the Khorezmshah Ma'mun ibn Ma'mun and the Khorezmshah received him with pleasure (Özbayraktar, 2021, p. 97).

We can say that the Khorezmshah was quite tolerant not only towards people who followed different sects of Islam but also towards other religions. There is frequent information that in the 10th century, communities of Christians, Jews, pagans, and Tangrists lived in the territory of Khorezm, and that scholars who believed in these religions also served in the palace of the Khorezmshah. A. Uzbayraktar also noted that during the Mamunids period, the maturidi⁵ and ashari⁶ ideology were also widespread among the people of Khorezm, who were under the influence Hanafi and Shafi'i ideology (Özbayraktar, 2021, p. 98).

2. The spread of Christianity in Khorezm

During the reign of the Khorezmshah Mamunids, among the various religious communities living in Khorezm, there was also a Christian community, and as noted above, many Christian scholars worked in the Khorezmshah's palace such as Abu Khair Hammor and Abu Sahl al-Masihi. The first information about Christian communities living in Khorezm can be considered the mention of the name "Khvalis" in the list of bishops of the Metropolitanate of Doros (Crimea) (Tolstov, 1946, p. 90). This name of Khorezm is mentioned in most Russian sources and in Muhammad Al-Khwarizmi's work "Kitabi Surati al-Arz" (Book on the Image of the Earth). This work notes that "Khvalis is Khorezm" (Xasanov, 2024, p. 79).

4

Qadi – a Muslim judge

⁵ Moturidianism (الماتريدية) – One of the main Sunni schools of Islamic doctrine, it was developed in the 9th-10th centuries by the Central Asian scholar of faith, jurist, and scholastic theologian Abu Mansur al-Maturudi (870-944). Al-Maturidi systematized and organized the existing theological Islamic beliefs among the Hanafi Muslim theologians of Balkh and Mawara al-nahr under a single systematic school of theology (kalam). He based his interpretation of the holy books of Islam on the Sunnah and the lives of the Companions. There is no difference in the fundamentals of the faith of Imam Moturudi and Imam Ash'ari, with some disagreements occurring only on issues related to the origin of regional branches. In Maturidiyya, people believed that although each person's fate is determined by God, they are responsible for their own actions. According to Moturidiyya, man is created for exams. At the same time, they must pass the tests of fate and strive to find the right path. He emphasizes that every decision he makes throughout his life is up to him.

⁶ Ash'arism (الأشعرية) – A branch of theology in Islam, one of the sects of Sunnism. Its founder was Abu Hasan Ash'ari (873-935). Ash'arism, like Maturidism and Salafism, is a doctrine that used intelligence and idea together equally in the early Islam period. According to him, believing in religion without understanding it and its logic it is not faith. Later, intelligence was brought to the forefront, and it was emphasized that it would never contradict idea. That is, according to the doctrine, everything is permissible for Allah and it should not be limited by various laws. It is known that in later periods, famous scholars such as Fakhriddin Razi, Atamalik Juvaini, Imam Ghazali, Said Nursi, and Bayzawi believed in this doctrine.

The Metropolitanate of Doros is subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and was established to unite Christian communities in the Khazar Khaganate and adjacent territories (including Khorezm) and engage in missionary activities. Archaeological research conducted in the Mizdahkan region suggests that Christian communities began to settle here in the late 7th century (Yagodin- Xodjayov, 1970, p. 172). Also, the discovery in 1988 of a silver coin of Khorezmshah Savshafan in the area of the modern city of Kislovodsk in the North Caucasus confirms that Khorezm had long had contacts with areas under the influence of the Byzantine Empire (Masharipov, 2016, p. 116). In addition, in 1997, a gold coin of the Byzantine emperor Augustus Tiberius (698-705) was found in the Kuyukkala region of Northern Khorezm (Mambetullaev, 1999, p. 29-30).

The Arab traveller and historian Maqdisi notes that there was a smaller Christian community in Khorezm than there were Jews (Al-Makdisi, 1991, p.277). Thus, the Christian community continued to live in this area even after the Arabs conquered Khorezm. According to Ibn Fadlan, the Abbasid Caliph Muqtadīr bestowed the territory of Ardakhushmīsan, which was subordinate to Jurjania, on his minister Ibn Furāt in return for his loyal service. It is reported that during the time the region was governed by this minister, the Christian Maliki community here was led by a Christian priest named Fazl ibn Musa (İbn Fadlan, 1995, p.68).

In most medieval sources the Christian community living in Khorezm was divided into three main groups: the Malikis, Nestorians, and Jacobites (Seleznev, 2011, p. 37-38).

According to Abu Rayhan Beruni, who had direct contact with the Christians of Khorezm, the Christians took the name "Meliki" because the Byzantium ruler and his people were of this sect. There were no other Christian groups living in Byzantium (Biruni, 1968, p. 320). The Maliki Christians were Greek in origin. This information is confirmed by Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's account that in his youth he learned from a neighbor the Greek names of some plants and wrote them down. In addition, historical sources record that the "Festival of the Rose" (Eid al-Ward - "عيد الورد"), which commemorates the gift of a red rose by Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, to Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also celebrated in Khorezm (Orazshahedov, 2018, p. 204). Archaeologist S. P. Tolstov says the following about the name of this holiday and the manner of its celebration: *"This New Year's holiday celebrated in Khorezm is called "Kalendas" or "Kalandas". During this holiday, children go from house to house singing "kalandas-kalandas". We believe this word comes from Latin"* (Aşırov, 2005, p. 62).

The emergence of the Maliki sect is linked to the decisions made by an international council of high-ranking clerics responsible for important religious matters. The Council of

Chalcedon was convened in 451 and determined that Jesus Christ embodies both divine and human qualities. Following this, all Christians in Egypt and Syria who supported the emperor's views were referred to as "Melikians" (derived from the Syriac word for "king"). These individuals were primarily Arabized people from the Middle East, and religious services were conducted in Greek. The Byzantine emperors supported this movement from the 5th century onward to promote Christianity in the East. They played an essential role in helping the Melikians reach Central Asia, particularly Khorezm, by navigating through Khazar territory (Xasanov, 2024, p. 79).

To spread Christianity, missionaries traveled to Central Asia via trade caravans, promoting their religion in key cities along these trade routes. Notably, the central cities of Mizdahkan and Jurjania were significant in this effort. Archaeological research in the Mizdahkan area has uncovered eight ossuaries featuring the image of a Christian cross. This particular cross differs from standard Christian designs; it has leaves at the ends that expand outward. A.Y. Borisov identifies it as a Syriac-type cross, while D. Talbot describes it as a Nestorian-style cross. In contrast, researcher M.M. Khasanov classifies it as a Byzantine-style cross (Xasanov, 2024, p. 81). Some coins from the Khorezmshah Savshafan, feature a cross mark on their reverse side. A similar cross design is present on certain coins issued by Khorezmshah Askajuwar-Abdullah. In 1991, a hoard of these coins was discovered in the Shavat district of the Khorezm region in Uzbekistan (Iz istorii drevnix kultov Sredney Azii. Xristianstvo, 1994, p. 51-52). Additionally, it is noteworthy that one of the silver coins minted by Khorezmshah Ali ibn Ma'mun from the Mamunid dynasty showcases a Byzantine-style cross. This particular coin was found in 1905 in the village of Kresheniy Baran, located in the Spasskovo District of the Kazan Governorate in the Russian Empire (Markov, 1909, p. 87).

In general, most Muslim authors emphasize that the Malikis were descended from Byzantine Greeks. In particular, in 820, Abdullah Hashimi writes: "*... the Malikis – these are the Byzantians Greek. The Nestorian sect of Christians is a group close to the Muslims*" (Xasanov, 2024, p. 80). That is, representatives of the Nestorian sect of Christianity lived mainly in the areas of Syria, Iraq, and Khorasan, and they were originally Christianized Arabs (Biruni, 1968, p. 320).

Another sect of Christianity that emerged in Central Asia is associated with the name of its founder, Nestorianism, Patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius (428-431). His followers were anathema at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and began to be considered heretics. According to the content of the doctrine, Jesus was an ordinary human child, in whom the spirit of divinity

was not concentrated. Later, as a result of the Holy Spirit being poured into him, he became a Christian. In this respect, the teachings of this sect differed from the Orthodox (Chalcedonian) faith. After the Council of Ephesus, Nestorianism spread eastward, merging with the independent Persian Christian church in Iran in 424. This merger occurred in 486, and its next destination was the city of Merv in Central Asia (Xasanov, 2024, p. 82).

Based on archaeological research, the remains of a Nestorian church dating back to the 5th-6th centuries have been discovered in the vicinity of Kharobai Kushuk, 15 km north of the ruins of Merv, on the ancient trade route leading to Khorezm (Pugachenkova, 1958, p. 128). In addition, archaeological research has proven that a monastery and a metropolitanate also operated in this area (Xasanov, 2024, p. 83).

S.P. Tolstov claims that Christianity came to Khorezm through Eastern Europe. As evidence of this, he cites the "Kalandas" holiday, which we mentioned above (Tolstov, 1946, p. 90). From this, it can be concluded that, unlike the Maliki Christians, the Nestorian sect of Christians entered Central Asia through the territories of Syria and Iran. In addition, Ibn Hawqal reported that Christian monasteries operated in villages near the city of Samarkand, where Iraqi Christians lived (Kamoliddin, 2021, p. 46). That is, this sect of Christianity, under the auspices of the Persian Church, penetrated the city of Merv in southern Central Asia, and then to the Sogdian region and Khorezm, which were considered the largest centers in the region. Even by the 13th century, Khorezm's multi-ethnic and multi-religious population groups were preserved. This can be seen in the work of the Italian traveler Plano Carpini. He gives the following information about the Mongol attack on old Urgench: *"They attacked the city called Ornas (Urgench). This city is very diverse, because there are many Christians living there, including Khazars, Rus, Alans, and others, as well as Saracens (Muslims). The Saracens⁷ have dominion over the city"* (Tolstov, 1946, p. 90).

The spread of Christianity in Central Asia, particularly in Khorezm, should not be attributed solely to the efforts of missionaries. Khorezm served as a transit region that connected Eastern Europe and the Khazar Khaganate with Sogdiana and China to the east. This strategic location allowed Khorezm to play a significant role in the political dynamics among these regions. For example, in the second half of the 6th century, the Greek ambassador Zemarkh was sent to the Turkic khaganate. During his return journey, he brought with him representatives of the Turks and people known as Khaliats. The Byzantine historian Menander noted that these

⁷ Saracen – A Muslim: In the Middle Ages, the term was used to describe anyone who practiced Islam, including Arabs and Turks.

Khaliats were the same people referred to as the "Khvalis" (Veselovskiy, 1877, p. 18-19). Also in 568, Khagan Istami sent his ambassadors to the Greeks, who also reached the Byzantine emperor through Khorezm and the north of the Caspian Sea (Iz istorii drevnix kultov Sredney Azii. Xristianstvo, 1994, p. 23). This diplomatic exchange led to the establishment of a trade route between the territories of Sogdia and Byzantium, which passed through the North Caucasus (Xasanov, 2024, p. 82). The trade route clearly passed through the territory of Khorezm. These political and economic connections facilitated the steady influx of Christianity into Khorezm from both the north and south, starting in the 6th century. Such developments also led to the construction of Christian monasteries and churches in the region, as well as the emergence of Christian settlements. For instance, Beruni mentions in his work that there were Greeks living in several areas near Khorezm. *"The metropolitan of the Malikis of Khorasan resides in Merv... In Islamic countries, the "catholic" of the Malikis resides in Baghdad. He is under the authority of the patriarch of Antioch... On the fifth day of the month of Shubat, they commemorate the Catholicos Sis, who first brought Christianity to Khorasan"* (Biruni, 1968, p. 324-327).

This information suggests that during the 10th and 11th centuries, several regions surrounding Khorezm were inhabited by individuals belonging to various Christian sects. These people were not only involved in religious outreach in these areas but also served in various capacities, including in the court of the Khorezmshah.

3. The roots of Judaism in Khorezm

In the 10th-11th centuries, the region was home to many nationalities and religions, including followers of Judaism, one of the divine religions. The historian Maqdisi mainly indicated Khorezm and Khorasan as the areas of residence of followers of Judaism in Central Asia (Al-Makdisi, 1991, p. 277). It is known that Khorezm, and especially its capital, Jurjania, was located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, due to strong trade and economic ties with the Khazar state, Judaism was introduced along with Christianity (Demiroğlu, 2017, p. 141-150). Interestingly, some historical sources, while describing Khorezm's close political ties with the Khazar and Bulgar regions, attempt to portray it as one of the main centers of Judaism. For example, Yakut Hamavi's work "Mu'jam al-buldan" provides information that one of the four sons of Isaac, the grandson of the prophet Abraham, one of the main figures in Jewish doctrine, was named Khorezm (al-Hamawi, 1977, 395). In the legend referenced in the work regarding Khorezm, the names of the brothers are listed as "Khazar, Yazar, Bulsur, and Fil,"

which translates to "Khazar, Bulgar, and Khorezm." The author likely aimed to highlight the strong, friendly relations that existed between these groups from ancient times and to emphasize the significant role that Judaism played in the Khorezm region. This perspective is supported by S.P. Tolstov, who draws on information from the Arab historian Ibn Al-Qalbi. Tolstov indicates that the brothers Fil and Khorezm are closely related to other groups, such as the Khazars and Bulgars, and that they share a genealogical link to the Jewish prophet Isaac (Tolstov, 1948, p. 228). In addition, the Arab traveler and historian Maqdisi notes that there was a smaller Christian community in Khorezm than there were Jews (Al-Makdisi, 1991, p. 277). This indicates that even after the Arabs conquered the Khorezm territory, Jewish communities still remained in the region. It is likely that these communities were situated near major trading centers in Khorezm, such as Jurjaniya and Kath, given their significant roles in trade relations with Eastern Europe and the Khazar Khaganate. Additionally, like the Khorezmians, Khazar merchants probably established trading colonies in these areas. Just as Judaism spread from these cities to the oasis region, Islam also propagated to Southern Siberia and the Volga region through Khorezm.

However, there is very little information available about the Jewish population in Khorezm during the 10th century. Later, following the Mongol invasion, sources report the presence of one hundred Christian homes and one hundred Jewish homes in the city of Gurganj (Fadl Allah al-Umari, 2010, p. 157).

According to S.P. Tolstov, in 712, the Khorezm Shah Askadjuvar was killed by Khorezmian people for asking for help from the Arabs. After that, the Arabs in Khorezm mainly fought against the Jews (Tolstov, 1948, p. 228). In the introduction to this article, we mentioned that according to Abu Rayhan Beruni, Qutayba executed everyone who was literate during his campaign in Khorezm (Biruni, 1968, p. 72). The historian Tabari refers to the Khorezmians who suffered this massacre as "khabr." According to S.P. Tolstov, the Arabic term "khabr" means "news," but it can also refer to a Jewish scholar or priest (Tolstov, 1948, p. 226). If we believe this information, Qutayba was actually fighting not against the rebellious Khorezmians, but against the Jews who supported Khurzad. Perhaps these Jewish scholars were Khurzad's ideologists or authors of his ideology. Qutayba orders the execution of 4,000 captives who rebelled, led by Khurzad. He did not stop there, but destroys all historical literature, documents, and temples related to the ancient culture of Khorezm. In general, if the information given by S.P. Tolstov above is correct, it is understandable why Qutayba did this. Because we know from most literature that there was a fierce struggle between Muslims and Jews from the very

beginning of the emergence and spread of Islam. After all, 4,000 prisoners killed is a very large number, and there is no information about such atrocities being committed in any region during the Arab campaign in Central Asia.

According to researcher B. Abdirimov, after these events, a group of Khorezmians, including supporters of Khurzad, migrated northwest to the territories of the Khazar Khanate due to this civil war and the massacre of the Arabs (Abdirimov, 2021, p. 20). The "Al-Larsiya" army, formed there from Khorezmians, also had a significant impact on the political life of the region (Belyaeva-Bubenko, 2018, p. 12). The timing of these events aligns with the reign of Bulan, the founder of the dynasty that led the Khazars to convert to Judaism, which spanned from 712 to 730. Some historians suggest that these events took place during a period of dynastic change in the Khazar state. It is believed that Bulan, the founder of the new dynasty, formed an alliance with a group of people who migrated from Khorezm and seized the throne. In fact, the army composed of Khorezmians became the backbone of the Khazar army and played a significant role in the state's internal politics. This influence is also evident in the fact that the army that captured the city of Tbilisi in 764 was led by the Khorezmian commander Rastar Khan (Tolstov, 1948, p. 226). The migration of the Khorezmians to these regions significantly contributed to the Khazars' conversion to Judaism. The political connections between Khorezm and the Khazars extended beyond this. During the 10th and early 11th centuries, the early representatives of the Mamunid dynasty of Khorezmshahs actively involved themselves in the political affairs of these areas. Historical records, including Russian chronicles, emphasize that in the latter part of the 10th century, the Khazar Khaganate was weakening, and as a result, following Russian attacks on their central cities, some nobles from the Khazar people fled across the Caspian Sea to Khorezm, eventually settling in the Mangyshlak region (Tolstov, 1948, p. 254). This may also explain the revival of Jewish communities in Khorezm.

4. Elements of Zoroastrianism and other beliefs in Khorezm in the 10th-11th centuries

The people of Khorezm practiced Zoroastrianism and lived according to its laws for thousands of years before Islam arrived in the region. In 2012, archaeological research conducted at the Khumbuztepa monument in the southern Khorezm region revealed the remains of the oldest altar⁹ in Central Asia, dating back to the 5th century BC (Baratov-Sadullayev, 2012, p. 33-42). This information proves that Zoroastrianism has existed in Khorezm since

⁹ Altar – It comes from the Latin word "altare", meaning "high place". It is also related to the Latin word "adolere", meaning "place of fire". Here, the place where a sacred fire is constantly burning in a temple is referred to.

ancient times. In general, the history of cults related to fire in Khorezm dates back to an extremely long time. In 1939, the Janbas 4 settlement, considered the oldest settlement in Khorezm, was discovered 1.5 kilometers south of the Janbas Qala monument (Tolstov, 1948 b, p. 50). This monument dates back to the Neolithic period, specifically the 4th to 3rd millennium BC. Scientific evidence suggests that a large family lived in the area. Notably, a layer of clean ash was discovered in a 1x1 meter pit located in the center of the settlement, along with the remains of small bonfires or hearths found nearby. These small fires were primarily used for cooking and providing warmth on cold nights. This conclusion is supported by various pottery vessels and animal bones discovered around the small bonfires (Altman, 1948, p. 81-85). However, a layer of clean ash found in a large depression in the center indicates that a sacred fire was constantly burning here.

It is clear that such customs were well preserved during the reign of the Khorezmshah Mamunids, who ruled in the 10th century. Abu Rayhan Beruni described the Khorezmians who lived at that time as follows: *"...the Khorezmians are people who do not pay attention to studying and propagating their religion. They are outwardly Muslim, but they celebrate their holidays secretly"* (Biruni, 1968, p. 283). During this period, many people in Khorezm practiced their religion in secret, even though the majority of the population identified as Muslim. Nonetheless, Zoroastrian elements were still evident in their customs, behaviors, and way of life. For instance, the traveler and ambassador of the caliph, Ibn Fadlan, describes the hospitality of the people of Jurjania as follows: *"When someone from the Jurjani people wants to invite a friend to his house, he says, 'Come to my house and we'll talk. Because there's a fire in my house.'"* (İbn Fadlan, 1995, p. 82). This information demonstrates how well Zoroastrian traditions were preserved among the Muslim population of Khorezm in the 10th century. Additionally, the burial structures related to the burial rites of the Khorezm population, which have survived to this day, mirror the ossuaries used by the Zoroastrians. These structures are built above ground, primarily functioning to keep the corpse separate from the pure soil. Since the Zoroastrian religion views the body of a deceased person as a source of desecration to sacred earth, only the bones of the deceased are stored in ossuaries. Archaeological research has shown that this method of body disposal was adopted by the Muslims of Khorezm starting in the 10th century (Rahimov, 2023, p. 149). In other words, through this evidence, it can be seen that when Islam entered the Khorezm oasis, the population tried to adapt to the new religion while preserving their ancient traditions.

Due to the establishment of trade relations with the Oghuz people living on the northern and western shores of the Aral Sea and in the regions of Southern Siberia, and regular neighborly relations with them, elements of pantheism, considered to be the beliefs of ancient Turkic tribes, also entered the oasis. The traveler and historian Ibn Fadlan, who traveled from Jurjania to the Bulgar state, only mentions that he was a Turkish guide during his journey, not a Muslim, but an Oghuz who worshipped the Gok Tengri (Özbayraktar, 2021, p. 99).

During this period, we can observe the ongoing attempts by the Oghuz tribes to invade the territory of Khorezm. The Khorezmians provided the Oghuz Turkic tribes with agricultural products, textiles, and various handicrafts, while the Oghuz traded livestock, metals, and slaves with the Khorezmians. As a result, Khorezm became a significant market for the Oghuz. Evidence of this relationship can be found in the work "Hudud al-Alam", the author of which remains unknown. It states, "Oghuz is the gate of Turkestan. It is the market and commercial center of the Turks, Turkestan, Transoxiana, and the Khazar" (Ishoqov, 2008, p. 22). Relations between the Khorezmians and neighboring tribes have often varied, sometimes being peaceful and at other times escalating into wars. To protect themselves from attacks by Turkic tribes from the north, the Khorezmians constructed numerous fortresses along their borders. This system of fortifications encompassed the entire Khorezm oasis and the main populated cities, providing refuge for people and their livestock during enemy invasions. According to Al-Biruni, the Khorezmshah Afrighid rulers initiated campaigns each spring to ward off potential Oghuz attacks in the border regions (Biruni, 1968, p. 284). From this information, we can draw some conclusions about the emergence of the historical melody of the Khorezm people today called "Khan Chiqar" ("Exiting of the Khan"). The entry of Turkic tribes from the north into Khorezm in the 10th century for various purposes not only brought elements of theistic religion to this region, but also accelerated the process of Turkification of the population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that during the 10th century, numerous religious movements, sects, and groups coexisted in the Khorezm region alongside Islam. The spiritual identity of the people living in this oasis area during the 10th and 11th centuries was shaped by the region's natural conditions, economic and political connections, as well as long-standing traditions inherited from the past. Each territory under the control of the Khorezm state was inhabited by people who practiced specific religions based on their geographical location. The ancient customs and traditions that have survived in the region are primarily rooted in

Zoroastrianism. In some settlements along trade routes, elements of shamanism and Tengrism from primitive religions can still be observed.

Based on the above information, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Although the majority of the Khorezm population in the 10th and 11th centuries practiced Islam, elements of Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and other religious beliefs were also present.

- Various religious beliefs were introduced to the region through trade relations along the Silk Road.

- Representatives of different Islamic sects, including Ismailism, Shafi'ism, Mu'tazilites, and Hanafiism, coexisted in the region at that time.

- The first traces of Christianity began to spread to the region in the 7th century, with the Melikid sect entering from the north through the Khazar Khaganate and the Nestorian sect arriving from the south through Iran.

- Judaism was also present during the early introduction of Islam and similarly saw a sharp decline after the Arab Caliphate's conquest of Khorezm, though it continues to exist in a limited form.

- Zoroastrianism, one of the ancient religions of the Khorezm people, was well preserved even after the advent of Islam, with the number of adherents remaining significant until the 12th and 13th centuries.

- A small portion of the population in the region practiced Tengrism, mainly in the Aral Sea areas and some large cities. These ancient beliefs were mainly transmitted by representatives of the nomadic Oghuz tribes.

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