

REINSTATEMENT OF LONG-DISTANCE INTERNATIONAL TRADE AFTER THE ARAB CONQUEST: THE KHAZAR-ARAB PARTNERSHIP ON THE SILK ROAD IN THE 9-10th CENTURIES

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The article studies the new situation in international long distance trade after the emergence of new superpower — Arab Caliphate — in Eurasian overland tracks of the Great Silk Road. The stages of Arab advancement along trade routes and outcomes of their contestation with the strong tribal confederations of Turkic nomads in Central Asia and the Caucasus are highlighted. A special focus is made upon the relationship of Arabs with Khazar Turks who have endured severe clashes with strongest army of the time in the region. Khazar kingdom survived and even expanded its control over the tracks of international trade in the western part of Eurasia. The research describes the way how trade partnership between Arabs and Turks was shaped in the aftermath of military clashes. Existing scholarly views on the role of Khazar in Silk Road are reviewed and unattended evidence of Arab sources are involved to support concluding points that Khazar state managed to consolidate various actors for maintenance of international trade such as so called Rus warriors and merchants in the west of Volga, nomadic tribes in Eurasian steppes, and Jewish trading gild named ar-rahdaniyya in Arab sources. It is asserted that Khazar state since the second half of 9th century through its decline in mid 10th century not only served as transit space for goods of exporting countries but also exported goods of its own crafts and natural resources.

Keywords: Arabs, Khazars, Silk Road, Rus, ar-rahdaniyya merchants, Trans-Caspian trade

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS ON THE SILK ROAD

The existence of three major conditions was necessary for international trade to succeed in ancient and medieval times: the demand for exotic products; the availability of vehicles for their

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transportation over long distances; and safe passage for the trade caravans. The organization of long-distance trade became necessary with the advent of large states and empires, where considerable wealth was accumulated in the hands of the elite. This led to the formation of a large stratum of merchants seeking to arrange a network of commercial agents. Chinese silk, which gave its name to these ancient trade routes, was in great demand among the wealthy Romans, which is why the start of international operations along the Silk Road is considered to be the second century BCE, when a messenger of the Chinese Han empire, Zhang Qian (160-110 BCE), discovered a way to Central Asia. Mediterranean civilization had reached the Central Asian region two centuries earlier as a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great.¹ Until that time, trade operations with China in this area were just bilateral and over a limited distance. The subject of this trade was mainly precious and semi-precious stones: nephrite, lapis lazuli, and spinel.²

The supply of vehicles — pack animals — and the safety of overland trade routes was provided through the relationship with the nomadic peoples inhabiting the area from China to the Middle East and the Eastern Europe borders. In antiquity and the Middle Ages merchants had two main options for solving the dangerous transportation problem of goods: negotiating about trade with the nomadic elite and ensuring their interests; or influencing the foreign policy of relevant empires in order to establish direct political control over the highways. As these empires got stronger the trend was to expand in the direction of the trade routes. This appears to have been the motivation behind the Romans' campaigns in Caucasian Albania from the first century BCE to the second century CE.³ By the time the Arab conquests started and their military forces advanced in Central Asia, the Tang dynasty in China (618-907 CE) also experienced a time of military and political consolidation. Tang emperors came originally from steppe nomads and their foreign policy at the borders with China, especially in the western sector was actively aggressive.

Rivalry between the Abbasid Caliphate and Tang China was the determining factor for the political and cultural destiny of the peoples of Central Asia. The two empires met in a decisive battle in 751 CE on the Talas River on the border of present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where the main trade route to China passed by. Each of the contesting powers had allies among the local rulers and the Turks. The outcome of the battle was decided by Karluk Turks,

¹ Julia Lovell, *The Great Wall: China against the World, 1000 BCE - CE 2000*, (New York: Grove Press, 2007), https://books.google.az/books?id=IWS53cuiuVgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=julia+lovell+the+great+wall&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. pp. 73-74.

² S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2013). pp.41,43.

³ M.S. Gadjiyev, "Strabon o karavannoy torgovle aorsov," in "Doroga Straona "kakchast Velikogo Shelkovogoputi. Materiali mezhdunarodonoy konferentsii, Baku, 28 - 29 noyabrya2008., ed. Sh. M. Musrafayev, S.G. Klyashturny (Samarkand-Tashkent: 2009). p. 32.

who initially supported the Chinese troops, but during the battle attacked them in the rear. This was not the most grandiose battle in the history of the Arab military, but it had the most significant impact on the future of the region, since Central Asia came under the political and cultural influence of the Muslim world. Furthermore, Tang China, after the devastating revolt of An Lushan (755-763 CE), finally gave up its plans for military and political domination in Central Asia and withdrew all its troops from the region.⁴ As a result, Islam began to spread in the course of cultural interaction and reciprocal influences between Islamic and local traditions of state-building.

It is important to ask whether the Arab Caliphate was able to control and secure the trade routes to China through the vast expanses of the Eurasian steppes after the departure of the Chinese troops from Central Asia. One of the results of the Talas Battle was the growing influence of the Turkic tribes, which played an important role in the Arab-Chinese confrontation. Power, peace and security in the wilderness always depended on agreements between the leaders of the major Turkic tribal unions and influential dynasties, who were able to politically unite the warlike steppe.

For a century or so after the collapse of the Western Turkic Kaganate caused by the expansion of Tang China in Central Asia (circa 650 CE), the supreme power in the west of the Eurasian steppes became the subject of conflict among the three major political forces of the Turks: the Turgeshes, especially due to the efforts of their talented leader Sulu-Kagan; the Karluks; and the Khazars, led by representatives of the Kagan lineage of Ashina. Shortly before the Battle of Talas the Turgeshes were crushed by the Arabs, and after the death of Sulu-Kagan (738 CE) they were practically subjugated to the Caliphate. The Karluks, as we have seen, first allied with the Chinese, but then, apparently realizing that victory for the Arabs would give them more independence, virtually decided the outcome of the battle in their favor. Indeed, after the Talas battle the Karluks actually maintained relations with China, and acted as their allies in relationships with other strong Turkic unions, especially the Uighurs, who were the strongest rival of China on their borders with the nomads. In 766 CE, the Karluks took Taraz city and Suyab, the former capital of the Western Turkic Kaganate and that of the Turgesh Kaganate, consequently subjugating the lands where the Arabs and the Chinese fought with each other⁵ and where the other Turkic Oghuz tribal union had resisted them. Very little is known about their contest with the Karluks, but we can conclude that the Oghuz relocation to the lower reaches of the Syr Darya was the result of that struggle.⁶ The state of Syr-Darya Oghuzs was the forerunner of the empire of the Seljuk Turks in the Near

⁴ *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: M.E.Sharpe, 2004). pp. 38-39.

⁵ S.G. Klyashtorny and Sultanov T.I., *Gosudarstva Evraziyskikh narodov: ot drevonosti k Novomu vremeni* (Sankt-Peterburgskiy tsentr Vostokovednokh issledovaniy, 2009). pp. 132-134.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

East. However, we also know that in the early stages of their history, around the time which is in question here, Oghuz could have been under the sovereignty of a strong Khazar state. This could be an interesting topic for future Silk Road trade research .

THE STRUGGLE OF THE ARABS AND THE KHAZARS FOR CONTROL OF THE SILK ROAD

It can be asserted that the establishment of the Khazar Kaganate occurred after the famous military campaign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius against Iran (627-628 CE), in which the Western Turkic Kaganate was the closest ally of the emperor. The main forces of the Turks were, apparently, the Khazars, under the authority of the Kaganate.⁷ Shortly thereafter, the West Turkic Kaganate collapsed as a result of military pressure from Tang China, along with domestic infighting. A representative of the Ashina dynasty in the west, in the Black Sea and the Caucasus regions of the Kaganate,⁸ had obtained a chance to establish a state of his own. This was the state of the Khazars.⁹ Academic debates concerning the ethnic origins and the name of the Khazars are still ongoing. They have been considered to be Ugrians and Iranians who had been subjected to Turkization, though the predominant view still approves their Turkic origin.¹⁰

The rise of the Khazar Kaganate and the emergence of the Arab Caliphate, as we can see, were almost concurrent. Having finally crushed the Sassanid military forces at the Battle of Nahavand in 642 CE, the Arabs began to advance to the north and the east. In the north, their advancement through the South Caucasus faced fierce and well-organized resistance from the Khazars. This fighting with the strong and centralized Khazar state was intense and prolonged. Fierce confrontations from the beginning of the conflict until the end of the 8th century CE led to a military-political balance and a peace in which former rivals and enemies became partners in the lucrative international trade of the Silk Road. Stability and significant trade revenues converted the Khazars region into a powerful state, which for almost three centuries kept the northern borders of Byzantium and the Caliphate secure, preventing any incursions of nomads on the lands of their southern neighbors. Three superpowers delimited

⁷ Dunlop D.M., *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954). pp. 4-5; Ya.E. Borovski, "Vizantiyskiye, staroslavianskiye b starogruzinskiye istochniki o pokhude rusov v VII v. na Tsargrad," in *Drevnosti slavyan i Rusi* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988). p. 144; L.N. Gumilev, *Drevniye Tyur ki* (Mosva: "Klyshnikov-Komarovi Co", 1993). p. 193

⁸ Hudud Al-Alam. *The Regions of the World : A Persian Geography 372a.H.-982 CE*, trans. V.Minorsky ([London]1937). p. 162.

⁹ M.I. Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar [The History of the Khazars]* (Leningrad: Ermitazh, 1962; repr., 2002). p. 171.

¹⁰ Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies : An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*, 2 vols., *Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica* (Budapest: Akad emiai Kiad o, 1980). p. 21;

the spheres of influence in Eurasia and the Middle East at this time: the Muslim Caliphate; Christian Byzantium; and the Khazars, in which the political elite, presumably, again at the end of the 8th century CE, had converted to Judaism from the traditional Turkic belief in Tengri.

In the Arab Caliphate, this was the golden age of Harun al-Rashid (786-809). The Islamic State was powerful and united under the caliph of Baghdad as never before. A feature of the era was also a rapprochement between the Frankish empire of Charlemagne and the Arab Caliphate, as they discussed the commonality of religious values. Some researchers even admit the existence of plans to create a unified ecumenical civilization. Harun al-Rashid allegedly conceded to Charlemagne a certain amount of religious and secular authority in Jerusalem. Both powers were extremely interested in the safe trade operations between China and Western Europe, bypassing the Mediterranean sea routes controlled by the Byzantines and their allies the Venetians.¹¹

For the Arabs in the east it was time to establish peaceful contacts with neighboring political forces in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the Silk Road routes. Just as in the Caucasus during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, Arabs in Central Asia forged peaceful relationships and enlivened trade routes at the same time. At the beginning of the 9th century the Arab *ghazi*¹² Tamim ibn Bahr al-Mutawwai, having changed his combatant armor for ambassador's attire, departed to the capital of Uighur kagan on the Orkhon river in Mongolia. Most likely, the purpose of the mission was to obtain political guarantees for the passing of trade caravans from the Caspian coast to the borders of China. The dating of Tamim ibn Bahr's trip is another contentious issue in the historiography of those events. Opinions vary from the year 752 to 822, though the date does not have fundamental significance in terms of the policy shift towards peaceful trade partnership with the powerful rulers of the Turkic steppe. Nevertheless, the author of this article proposes a chronological limit of the travel dates up to year 808 CE that would place Tamim's undertaking in the last years of the reign of the same Harun al-Rashid.¹³

THE TRADE ROUTES OF THE KHAZARS

The new political situation dictated the search for new trade routes in the region. For Muslim merchants the route from China to Eastern and Western Europe via the former Sassanid

¹¹ Hussayn Askary and Pierre Beaudry, *The Abbasid Khaliphate of Harun Ar-Rashid*, (2010), http://amatterofmind.org/Pierres_PDFs/HISTORY%202/BOOK_1/7._THE_ABBASID_CALIPHATE_OF_HAROUN_AL-RASHID.pdf, pp. 5-6.

¹² Fighters for the faith, volunteered to fight on the borders of the Muslim world with non-Muslims to spread Islam.

¹³ F.M. Asadov, *Arabskiye istochniki o tyurkakh v ranneye srednevekovye* [Arab Sources about Turks in Early Middle Ages] (Baku: Elm, 1993), pp. 31-33.

possessions that had fallen under the control of the Arabs in the second half of the 7th century AD was impracticable, due to hostile relations between Byzantium and the Caliphate. Thus the Eurasian steppe became an important transit route, and caliphate efforts were directed towards the establishment of peaceful relations with peoples and states where previous attempts to gain control by force of arms had been unsuccessful. Mighty Khazars were now promising potential partners, since they could provide safe passage for convoys through the land of their dominions, though inhabited by different people. Harun al-Rashid therefore concluded a “peace and alliance” agreement with the Khazars.¹⁴

Evidence from primary source enables us to conclude that in this period the Khazars managed to create and lead the trade and political alliances that ensured the passage of goods in two main directions, primarily from Khwarazm, through the middle and lower reaches of the Volga, to the Dnieper and on to Western Europe. The initial sections of this path were established in the middle of the 6th century CE by Sogdian merchants who, being subjects and trade partners of the Great Turkic Kaganate, needed to capitalize the large amount of silk that had accumulated in the hands of the Turks as a result of the Chinese tribute.¹⁵ Iran at the time was not interested in promoting the Turkic-Sogdian merchants, as in the last third of the 6th century CE Iran had already established local production of silk. The prospect of permanent penetration by potential adversaries, the Turks and Sogdians, into the territory of his state also evoked fear in shahinshah Khosrow Anushirwan.¹⁶ For this reason, he ordered the purchase and deliberate burning of the whole batch of silk brought by the Sogdian merchant and diplomat Maniah on his mission to Iran.¹⁷ This demonstrated his intransigence in the matter of providing free access for the Turkic-Sogdian caravans through the territory subordinated to the Sassanids, and led to war between Iran and the Kaganate.¹⁸

Immediately after a failed mission in Iran in 568, Maniah was sent to Byzantium. This was virtually the first embassy of the Turks to the Byzantine Empire in the new political situation, after the defeat of Ephtalites by the formerly allied Persians and Turks. The Emperor Justin II (565-578) and the Turk envoy held detailed conversations about the situation on the borders with Iran and Byzantium. The Embassy’s objectives were fully achieved, and the

¹⁴ Ziya Bunyatov, *Azerbaijan v VII – IX vv.* (Baku: Izdatelstvo Akademiinuk Azerbaydjanskoy SSR, 1965). p. 115.

¹⁵ R.K. Kovalev, “Commerce and Caravan Routes Along Northern Silk Roads (Sixth-Ninth Centuries). Part I: The Western Sector.” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 14 (2005). p. 60.

¹⁶ Klyashtorny and Sultanov T.I., *Gosudarstva Evraziyskikh narodov: otdrevonosti k Novomu vremeni*, p. 117.

¹⁷ Menandr, “Menandra Visantiytza prodolzheniye istorii Agafiyevoy,” *Vizantoiyskiye istoriki: Deksipp, Evnapiy, Olimpodor, Malkh, Petr Patritysiy, Menandr, Kandid, Nonnos i Feofan Vizaniyets, perevdeniye s grecheskogo Spiridonom Destunisom* (Sankt-Pereburg, 1860), http://krotov.info/acts/05/marsel/ist_viz_06.htm, p. 372.

¹⁸ Gumilev, *Dreviyetyurki*. p. 45.

Byzantines sent a response mission headed by Zemarchus.¹⁹ These events can be considered as the beginning of the so-called Northern trade route from China to Europe. At the time of the Arab Caliphate, the situation was somewhat different however, since it was then necessary to bypass Byzantium and deliver the goods to Western Europe. Thus, the northern route had two main branches; one led to Byzantium through Khazar regions in the Caucasus and Crimea, and the other went through Eastern Europe to the Frankish state.

The second trade route maintained by the Khazars, traversing the South Caucasus, aimed to secure access to caliphate markets for goods exported by the Khazars themselves and other northern peoples. In the opposite direction, goods of Near East production were delivered, including silver Abbasid coins, which were highly valued in the lands of the northern peoples, who did not have their own coinage, but were constrained to pay tribute to the Khazars partly in monetary silver.²⁰

Regular trade and political contacts between the Caliphate and the states and peoples of the Silk Road gave rise to the creation of a special branch of knowledge and geographic literature. Curious Arabs were then seeking to learn not only entertaining stories about the wonders of distant countries, but also practical advice on trade routes, products and the dangers of merchants and travelers in long-haul traffic. A new genre of literature called “al-masalik wa al-mamalik”, or “the roads and possessions” emerged. The earliest work of this genre is the book by Abu al-Qasim ibn Abdallah ibn Ubaydallah Ibn Khordadbeh. It was written in the middle of the 4th CE and served as a model for the works of his followers. Ibn Khordadbeh tells us that with a tail wind one could reach the capital of the Khazars in the mouth of the Volga River from Jurjan on the South Caspian coast in 8 days by sea.²¹ This report raises the question of what were the navigable means that serviced this route and who were the experienced sailors who ventured to cross the unpredictable Caspian Sea? This question will be considered below, where the identities of the people who led the caravans on the long routes across the Eurasian steppes and the Caspian Sea will be discussed. Meanwhile, let's see what Arab sources say about the goods transported via the Khazar routes.

MERCHANDISE OF THE KHAZARS

Khazaria could ensure the collection of products of the northern peoples and the steppe nomads for international trade. The peoples inhabiting the Khazar lands were engaged in cattle

¹⁹ Menandr, “Menandra Visantiytza prodolzheniye istorii Agafiyevoy.” pp. 373, 375.

²⁰ Kovalev, “Commerce and Caravan Routes Along Northern Silk Roads (Sixth-Ninth Centuries). Part I: The Western Sector.”, p. 80

²¹ Abu al-Kasim Ubaydallah Ibn Abdallah Ibn Khordadbeh, *Kitab Al-Masalik Wa'l-Mamalik*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, editiosecunda (photomechaniceiterata) ed., *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* (Lugduni Batavorum: E.J. Brill, 1967). p. 124.

breeding, agriculture, wine production, fishing and hunting for fur-bearing animals.²² The Primary Chronicle (The Tale of Bygone Years/Povest Vremennykh Let) contained references to the tribute paid by the Eastern Slavs to the Khazars. This consisted of furs and silver coins, while there is no doubt that the “schelyaga”s mentioned in the Chronicle were silver Arab dirhams.²³ The presence of Muslim silver coins in tribute, as well as a large number of dirhams in the unearthed coin hoards of Eastern Europe point to the active participation of the population of Khazaria in trade with the Muslim world. Furs were a commodity in high demand, and thus created a special market for the Khazars. The 9th century Arab writer Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, in his recently discovered unique treatise “At-Tabassur bi-t-Tidzharā” (Reflections on trade), noted that squirrel and sable fur brought from the Khazars, were considered the best in quality.²⁴ The fame of Khazaria as a fur exporter contributed to the perception that it was only a transit territory for the supply of exotic northern commodities, which, in addition to furs, also included slaves. This point of view was based on evidence from the reliable source al-Istakhri in the following message: “The country of the Khazars produces nothing for export to distant lands, except isinglass. As for mercury,²⁵ honey, wax, silk²⁶ and fur, they get them imported”.²⁷

Al-Istakhri’s information influenced D. Dunlop’s opinion, the author of a detailed monograph about the Khazars. He believed that one of the reasons for the decline and fall of the Khazars was the lack of domestic production and natural resources. All the economic power of the state, in his opinion, was based on the military and political subordination of lands and peoples along the Silk Road routes. Consequently, in the process of gradual loss of control over the vassal provinces in the 10th century, Khazaria lost its sources of revenue and failed to create a viable economic model.²⁸ Another famous American researcher of the history of the Khazars, Thomas Noonan, strongly disagrees with this view. He has pointed to

²² Peter B. Golden et al., *The World of the Khazars : New Perspectives*, Handbook of Oriental Studies = Handbuch Der Orientalistik Section Eight, Central Asia, (Leiden ; Boston,: Brill, 2007). p. 8.

²³ S.P. Shavelev, “Slavyanskaya dan khazaram: noviye dannye k interpretatsii,” *Voprosi Istorii*, no. 10 (2003). pp. 141-142.

²⁴ Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr Al-Djahiz, “At-Tabassur Bi at-Tidjara,” *Revue de l’Academie Arabe de Damas* *XIII*(1932). pp. 335, 336.

²⁵ Zibak. The other manuscript of the work contains a different word rakik” but with similarly shaped lettering, which means slave. D. Dunlop in his translation takes the last option. And we believe that it was correct, as al-Jahiz also pointed out the slaves in the number of goods exported from the Khazars, but did not mention mercury. We just considered appropriate to put the alternative option here.

²⁶ Al-khazz. D. Dunlop, apparently by analogy with the Persian “khazz” translated as the beaver pelts.

²⁷ Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Farisi (al-ma’ruf bi al-Karkhi) Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik* (al-Kahira: Wizarat as-saqafawa al-irshad al-qaumi, 1961). p. 131.

²⁸ Dunlop D.M., *The History of the Jewish Khazars*. pp. 232-233

alternative evidence of Muslim authors regarding the export of cattle products and sheep, as well as the existence of a large number of skilled craftsmen in the Khazar capital, Itil. He also considered the artifacts of Khazar archaeology as sufficient evidence in favor of the existence of a developed handicraft production in Khazaria.²⁹ According to Noonan, the distorted view of al-Istakhri was due to the fact that he was not aware of the present state of the Khazar trade and simply replicated the information of earlier writers.³⁰

In al-Istakhri's report, there is a list of goods brought by Muslim merchants and their counterparts from the Khazars. One can see that the source of these goods could be China and the northern countries controlled by the Khazars. In contrast, al-Jahiz, in his report on goods imported from the Khazars, also lists slaves, as well as expensive craft products such as military armor and two different kinds of combat helmets. Al-Jahiz places this list of commodities in a chapter devoted to peculiarities of the goods of individual countries. It is noteworthy that this list does not include squirrel skins and other furs mentioned in the lists cited in other sections of the book.³¹ Hence the famous Arab writer believed that goods listed in this section are most characteristic of the Khazars. Interestingly, al-Istakhri himself has left some observations confirming the accuracy of the evidence of al-Jahiz. He says that Muslim children, Christians and Jews cannot be sold into slavery in the Khazar land, though this is permissible in the case of pagans.³² This can be considered as evidence of the protected position of the monotheistic religious communities within the Khazar state, as well as a proof of the correctness of al-Jahiz, who believed that the export of slaves from the Khazars was provided by the internal resources of this vast state, which was home to various ethnic groups and religious communities with different legal statuses.

MERCHANTS OF KHAZARIA

It has already been pointed out that one of the main routes controlled by the Khazars was established by Sogdian merchants. The Arab historian al-Balazuri presents evidence that Sogdian merchants had a trading town known as Sugdabil in the Caucasus. Its foundation goes back to the reign of Khosrow Anushirwan (531-579 CE),³³ or else to the time of the initiation of the new trade route. The Khazar king Joseph in his letter to Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a

²⁹ Thomas S. Noonan, "Some Observations on the Economy of the Khazar Khaganate," in *The World of the Khazars*, ed. H. Ben-Shammai and A. Rona-Tas. eds. P.B. Golden (Leiden: Brill, 2007). pp. 207-208.

³⁰ Thomas S. Noonan, "Fluctuations of the Islamic Trade with Eastern Europe During the Viking Age," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 16, no. 3/4 (1992). p. 237

³¹ Al-Djahiz, "At-Tabassur Bi at-Tidjara," p. 342.

³² Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik*. p. 131.

³³ Imamo Ahmed ibn Yahja ibn Djabir al-Beladorsi, *Liber Expugnationis Regionum* (Lugduni Batavorum: E.J. Brill, 1866). p. 195.

high-ranking dignitary at the court of the Caliph of Cordoba Abdar-Rahman III (reigned 912-969), mentions Sughd (Sugdea), or the Surozh of Slavic sources, among Khazar cities which, without much doubt, can be identified as the present Crimean city of Sudak.³⁴ No consensus exists among scholars about the founders and the population of Sughd, though the connection with the Sogdians cannot be excluded from the possible options. The Sogdians, if they had had the opportunity to continue their commercial operations with the Khazars, could have kept their trading post in the Crimea, in the border region with the Byzantine Empire.³⁵

The particulars of the trade routes in Ibn Khordadbeh's work contain a story on the global trading corporation of Jewish merchants.³⁶ Mention of these merchants is also found in other works, but the story of Ibn Khordadbeh is most detailed, and, apparently, is a comprehensive report on the activities of this corporation prepared for the Caliph's government. This, incidentally, is not the only such document that was included in the book by the author. In the available manuscripts the name of the merchants is spelled in several different ways: *al-razaniyya*, *ar-radaniyya*, *ar-radhaniyya*, *ar-rahdaniyya*. Experts on Arabic texts have proposed various etymologies of the term. The explanations suggested link the word with the trading corporation *nautarhodanici*, engaged in transportation of construction materials in the South of France (according to the Latin name of the river Rhone - Rhodanus), or with al-Razan area in Iraqi Mesopotamia. The origins of these merchants and their names were also alleged to have derived from the city of Rey in Iran.³⁷

However, Arabists argue that the relative adjective from Rayy in Arabic is al-Razi, and not al-Razani. The famous Dutch Arabist, Reinhardt Dozy, based on the lettering of the word in a handwritten book of Ibn al-Faqih (*ar-rahdaniyya*),³⁸ suggested a translation of this word from the Persian, as "knowing the way."³⁹ Joseph Marquart⁴⁰ and the Russian Orientalist B. Rozen accepted this explanation,⁴¹ though the debate continues to this day. The Azerbaijani Arabist Nailiya Velikhanova thought that these merchants were the descendants of Medina

³⁴ P.K. Kokovtsov. *Evreysko-Khazarska yaperepiska [Jewish-Khazar Correspondence]* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1932). p. 103, n. 355.

³⁵ V.V. Bartold, "Arabskiye izvestiya o rusakh," in V.V. Bartold. *Sochineniya*. v.II (1), ed. B.G. Gafurov (Moskva: Izdatelstvo Vostochnoy literatury, 1963). p. 814-815.

³⁶ Ibn Khordadbeh, *Kitab Al-Masalik Wa'l-Mamalik*. p. 153-155.

³⁷ S.Katz. *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul*, Cambridge Mass., 1937.

³⁸ *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*. Edidit M.J. de Goeje. Volume 5, Lugduni Batavorum, p. 270

³⁹ R.Dozy, Supplement, Vol I, p 562

⁴⁰ J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streifzüge; Ethnologische und Historisch Topographische Studien Zur Geschichte Des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts (Ca. 840-940)* (Leipzig.: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, T. Weicher, 1903). pp. 24, 350

⁴¹ A.A. Kunik, *Izvestiya al-Bekri i drugikh avtorov o Rusi I slavyanakh*. Ch. 2, vol. 2 (Imperatorskaya Akademiya nauk, 1903). p. 142 – «знакомыепутями» (familiar with the routes).

Jews and were dubbed “al-razaniyya” after the name of the ar-Razan village in the Arabian Peninsula.⁴² This controversy over the origin of the name is reflected in the relatively recent study by the Polish orientalist, Frantisek Kmitovicz, who did not agree that these merchants, whose trading mainly took place outside of Iran, might have been named according to the Persian language. He rather proposed an original interpretation of the origin of the name from the Latin word *veredarius* - messenger, or courier.⁴³ This interpretation could be curiously connected to the idea of the existence of the ecumenical civilization plan, which was allegedly agreed between Harun ar-Rashid and Charlemagne. However, the etymology proposed by R. Dozy seems more likely, especially in light of the fact that the merchants mentioned by Ibn Khordadbeh worked closely with the Jews, who had fled from Iran as a result of Mazdak movement events and had settled in Byzantium and the land of the Khazars.

Leather, furs, swords and slaves exported from the Nordic countries and Western Europe were the main commodities traded by Jewish merchants. Let us note that the list of these products is very close to that which sources have indicated regarding the Khazars. These products were reportedly carried both by sea and overland to India and China. Spices and incense were brought in return by the same way to markets in Byzantium and Western Europe. The chain of retail points extended from Western Europe via North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq, Iran, India and China, though it is difficult to ascertain whether any of them managed to trade from the very beginning of the route to its end and back. However, such global trade routes could not be developed without influential trading partners in the countries and states on the way. Merchants resold their goods at intermediate stations and trading and exchange points and multinational merchant communities and commercial partnerships were formed in these trading centers.

With regard to the *rahdaniyya* routes within the Khazar land the source tells: “Sometimes they choose the path outside *Rumiyya* [Byzantium - AF] in the country of Saklabs, then they follow up to the Khazar city *Khamlij*, thence to *Djurdjan* [Caspian - AF] sea and further to Balkh, Maverannahr, tuguzguz country and China”.⁴⁴ Reports of Arab authors about *rahdaniyya* merchants in Eurasia curiously intersected with the news of another mysterious category of merchants operating in this region. These people were named *rus*.⁴⁵ The story of Ibn Khordadbeh about these *rus* is wedged between the two parts of a story about *rahdaniyya*

⁴² Ibn Khordadbeh. *Knigaputeyistran* (Kitab al-Masalikwa al-Mamalik). Pervod s arabskogo, komentarii, issledovaniye, ukazateli i karti Naili Velikhanvoy (Baku: Elm, 1986). pp. 40-41.

⁴³ Franciszek Kmietowicz, “The Term of Radaniyya in the Work of Ibn Khurdadbeh,” *Folia Orientalia* (Krakow) XI (1969)(1970). pp. 169-171.

⁴⁴ Ibid. c. 155.

⁴⁵ We will not deal here with another debatable issue on who were Rus of Arab sources. However the information concerning *rus* cited and studied in this article comply with what we have known about Scandinavians rather than Slavs as being sailors and soldiers.

merchants. There is disagreement about the causes of such interpolation.

Some consider the text of the *rus* to have been added by later copyists, while others do not question the authorship of Ibn Khordadbeh. It is interesting to cite the opinion of the American Turkologist, OmelyanPritsak. He believed that the information about *rus* belongs to a later time than the evidence concerning the trade routes of *rahdaniyya* merchants. According to him, after the construction of the Khazar fortress Sarkel, in the mid-30s of the 4th century CE between the rivers Don and Volga, Jewish merchants were replaced by the *rus*, who conducted the major trading operations in this area till the end of the 9th century CE. Government clerks included information about the *rus* in a report on the trade routes of the Jewish merchants, and Ibn Khordadbeh included the combined text of that report in the second edition of his book, dated 886.⁴⁶ The current author has devoted a special article to a more detailed study of these texts of Ibn Khordadbeh.⁴⁷ The main conclusion of this study was that Ibn Khordadbeh included the passage on *rus* in the context of the story about *rahdaniyya* not by accident, but in order to present all the routes as a single system of communications, secured by the Khazars.

Ibn Khordadbeh reported that *rus* merchants traded furs and weapons (swords). Their routes were the same as the trade routes established by the Khazars: their goods were carried from remote corners of the “Saklab” country⁴⁸ up to the “Rum Sea”,⁴⁹ where they paid a fee to the Byzantines, or else they transported goods by the Don river up to Khamlij,⁵⁰ where they paid a fee to the Khazars, and then they carried on to the Caspian Sea, which they could cross and debark from any location, according to the contemporary source. However, the most likely route of delivery was to Jurjan, where cargo could be transferred onto camels and transported overland to the Middle East markets.⁵¹

The most important port in Jurjani was Abaskun, which was three days away from the capital of the province.⁵² It is here, perhaps, where the main batch of goods were brought

⁴⁶ OmeljanPritsak, “Arabic Text of the Trade Route of the Corporation of Ar-Rus in the Second Half of the Ninth Century,” *Folia Orientalia XII* (1970). pp. 243-254.

⁴⁷ F.M. Asadov. “Svedeniya arabskikh avtorov Ibn Khordadbekhai al-Masudi o transkaspiskikh torgovikh operatsiyakh khazar i rusov v IX- X vv.,” [Evidence of Arab geographers Ibn Khordadbeh and al-Masudi about transcaspiian trade operations of Khazars and Rus in IX-X centuries.] Azərbaycan Elmlər Akademiyasının Z.M.Bünyadov adına Şərqsünaslıq İnstitutu “Elmi Araşdırmalar” X (2011).

⁴⁸ Saklab - Another controversial ethnonym of Arab authors. In this case, it refers to the Black Sea lands in the north and north-east of the Byzantine borders.

⁴⁹ Ibn Khordadbeh is referring to the Black Sea.

⁵⁰ According to the prevailing view in the scholarship, Hamlij is distortion of the Turkic “Khanbalik” (khakan’s city) - “capital city”. It really could be a part of the Khazar capital Itil, in which the residence of Khakan was located.

⁵¹ Ibn Khordadbeh, *Kitab Al-Masalik Wa'l-Mamalik*. p. 154.

⁵² al-Imam Shihab ad-Din Abi Abdallah Yaqt bin Abdallah al-Hamawiar-Rumi al-Baghdadi Yaqt, *Mu'djam Al-Buldan*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1977). p.49; Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Masudi, *Muruj Adh-Dhahab Wa Ma'adin Al-Jawhar*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2005). p. 147.

on their way further east.⁵³ The Khazars and the Jewish merchants did not possess their own vessels capable of carrying out maritime transportation across the turbulent Caspian Sea.⁵⁴ Al-Masudi, who also pointed out the lack of vessels to the Khazar king and his vassals, nevertheless mentions boats (*zavarik*), which could only be used for the transportation of goods from the northern areas of the tributaries of the Volga to Itil.⁵⁵ However, V.V. Bartold does not consider this evidence as proof of the existence of shipping with the Khazars, and argues that the Khazars, who politically dominated the *rus*, considered their ships as their own.⁵⁶

Matching the information about *rus* sailing across the Caspian Sea with other evidence of sources about the trade route from Jurjan to the Khazar capital Itil suggests that the *rus* ships carried commodities belonging to other merchants as well as their own. In addition to Jewish merchants, first of all, these were Muslim merchants. If we do not have proof that *rus* from Jurjan could reach India and China, as Ibn Khordadbeh attests, then it must be concluded that the Muslim merchants used all the routes of the Silk Road. Muslim merchants and the government created very favorable conditions for the funding and technical support of long-distance international trade.

They provided the infrastructure for transshipment trade stations and a network of reliable sales agents, which allowed the use of non-cash financial and credit instruments similar to bills of exchange, even in such remote areas as the Chinese capital Khanbalik.⁵⁷ Muslim merchants settled down in the Khazar Itil. This became home to 10,000 Muslims, with 30 mosques being built, and upon payment of sales taxes Muslim merchants enjoyed full freedom of trade activity.⁵⁸ Ahmad ibn Fadlan, who in 921 CE traveled to the Bulgar ruler *eltiber*, the vassal of the Khazar Kagan, said that the affairs of the Muslims in the Khazar country were in charge of a special official who reported directly to Kagan.⁵⁹ In the 9th CE the scale of operations of Muslim merchants in Khazaria was significant. It is no wonder that Ibn Khordadbeh quoted his contemporary and friend, poet al-Buhturi, that merchants who had trading agreements concluded in Khamlij (the capital of the Khazars) enjoyed special respect in Baghdad.⁶⁰

⁵³ Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik*. p. 132.

⁵⁴ al-Masudi, *Muruj Adh-Dhahab Wa Ma'adin Al-Jawhar*, p. 146.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 143.

⁵⁶ Bartold, "Arabskiye izvestiya o rusakh", p. 832.

⁵⁷ Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Ali Al-Maqrizi, *Kitab Ighathat Al-Umma Bi-Kashf Al-Ghumma*, 2-nd ed. (Al-Qahira: Ladjnat at-Talif, Tardjamawa an-Nashr, 1957). p. 68

⁵⁸ Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik*. p. 129.

⁵⁹ Ahmed Zeki Velidi Togan, *Ibn Fadlan's Reisebericht, Abhandlungen F ur Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1939). p. 45.

⁶⁰ Ibn Khordadbeh, *Kitab Al-Masalik Wa'l-Mamalik*. p. 124.

In a very subtle observation by Max Weber, even in cases where the political elite had not been traditionally engaged in trade, the growth of trade taxes as a source of income of the ruling elite led to their gradual involvement in trade and even the tendency of monopolization of trade by tribal leaders. However, not only the supreme rulers, but also the wider privileged group were able to deal with profitable business. Thus, commercial cities rose, in which the dominant population group and merchants settled, though the involvement of the first group (the political elite) might be limited to crediting the merchants and obtaining the appropriate portion of profits from trading.⁶¹ Apparently, the direct involvement of the political elites in trade depended on the degree of homogeneity and conditions for social mobility. The Khazar capital, Itil, thus resembled a city of cohabitation between the political elite and merchants. This political elite was diverse and even multi-ethnic in the sense that under the existing strict hierarchy, and the veneration of the Supreme Hagan, heads of tribal divisions retained independence in matters of warfare, along with forms of economic activity, and even choice of religion.

Reliable evidence in this context is provided (for example) by the Albanian historian, Moses Kalankatuatsi, in his story about the ruler of the city Varachan, who was awarded the title of Alp-Ilutuer for good service to Khazar Kagan and married his daughter. Alp-Ilutuer welcomed the mission of bishop Israel, sent by the Albanian king to conclude peace with the Khazars. It is reported that this Khazar nobleman, having heeded the bishop's preaching, decided to convert to Christianity.⁶² Al-Istakhri has also recorded the story that a member of the Kagan family traded bread in the capital. However, his Muslim denomination did not allow him to take the Kagan throne, despite his dignity and the sympathy of the population.⁶³

Possession of, or access to the means of transport were essential conditions for long distance trading.⁶⁴ The historian Ibn Asam al-Kufi reported that the Khazar Kagan sent as a dowry for his daughter to the groom Yazid ibn Usayd, the Arab governor of the South Caucasus, ten thousand cobby Khazar camels, a thousand Bactrian camels and a thousand mules.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that the Khazars became known by their breed of camels, and not by chance, those Khazar camels were donated in bigger amount than any other pack animals.

⁶¹ Max Weber. "Istoriya Khozaystva," in *Istoriya Khizyaystva. Gorod / Per s nem.* Edited by I. Grevs, comments by I. Sarkitov, G. Kuchkova, *Malaya Seriya «Logia Socialis» in seria «Publikatsiitsentrafundamentalnoy»* (Moskva: "Canon-press-Ts", "KuchkovoPolye", 2001). pp. 70-71.

⁶² Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriyastrani Aluank*, transl. Sh. V. Smbatsyan (Yerevan: Matenadaran, 1984). p. 127.

⁶³ Al-Istakhri, *Al-Masalik Wa Al-Mamalik*. p. 131.

⁶⁴ Weber, "Istoriya Khozaystva", p. 190.

⁶⁵ Abu Muhammad Ahmad ibn Asam al-Kufi, *Kniga zavoyevaniy (Iz vlecheniya poi storii Azerbaydjanav VII -IX vv.)*, trans. Z.M. Bunyatov (Baku: Elm, 1981). p. 62.

The most reliable evidence regarding the direct involvement of the Khazars in commercial transactions and the formation of their merchant class is the so-called Kievan letter. This is an original document written by Khazar Jews, the inhabitants of Kiev, with a request for assistance for a member of their community who had been detained in a debtor's prison. It is clear from the text of the letter that the people who signed it were the Khazars who converted to Judaism. This is evidenced by their mixed Turkish-Jewish names, as well as their Jewish names, which conformed with extant Jewish names of Khazar kings but were not used in the traditional Middle Eastern Jewish onomastics.⁶⁶

Thus, we have seen that after the prolonged Arab-Khazar wars and the establishment of peaceful relations, the efforts of the Khazar Kaganate and the Arab Caliphate reinstated trade routes from the East to the West through the Northern Caspian terrain and laid new branches, especially the road to Western Europe. At the same time a trade route from north to south between the Khazars and the central regions of the caliphate functioned to deliver furs, slaves and products of handicraft production of the Khazar land population to the Middle East markets. A multinational merchant class emerged in the Khazar Kaganate, consisting of Jewish merchants, Muslims and the Khazars. Moreover, we can assume that the Khazars themselves, engaging in trading operations, were integrated into different trading communities according to their religious denominations.

The Khazar state was the organizer and regulatory institution both in terms of ensuring safety on trade routes and the security of merchants' rights in trade centers subservient to its territory. The capital of the Khazar Kaganate, the city of Itil, was an outstanding commercial and political center in which political power and the merchant community were settled in the 8-9th CE. It can be assumed that the relationship and the interaction of these two categories of people either had to determine the stability, or else risk the destabilization of the internal situation in the Khazar state. The reasons for the crisis in the Khazar society and state, and the explanation of its demise in the mid-tenth CE should form the basis of future research, based on a study of these relations.

⁶⁶ Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982). pp. 32, 38-39.

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