

## ABU BAKR NARSHAKHI'S WORK "THE HISTORY OF BUKHARA" AS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE FOR THE TOPONYMY OF THE MIDDLE CENTURIES

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, Abu Bakr Narshakhi's work 'The History of Bukhara' is highlighted as a significant written source providing information about the toponymy, nature, and trade activities of Bukhara and the surrounding cities and villages during the 9th-12th centuries.

**Keywords:** Abu Bakr Narshakhi, Bukhara, city, village, toponymy, trade, Romitan, Varakhsha, Poykand, Nurota.

From history, it is known that Abu Bakr Narshakhi's work "The History of Bukhara" gained fame as one of the ancient treasures of Central Asian historiography. The actual name given by Narshakhi to his work is not known. Therefore, the work has been referred to by various names in handwritten manuscripts and contemporary scholarly literature, such as "Tarixi Narshakhi" (Narshakhi's history), "Tarixi Bukhoro" (Bukhara's history), "Tahqiq ul Viloyat" (Discovery of the Province), and "Axbori Bukhoro" (News about Bukhara) [1].

The name "The History of Bukhara" is currently widely used in historical literature. On the other hand, the title "The History of Narshakhi" is used because the surviving copies of the work have additional contributions, edits, and abbreviations made by individuals other than Narshakhi, making it necessary to distinguish it from Narshakhi's original version.

Abu Bakr Narshakhi's "The History of Bukhara" was written in the Arabic language in the years 943-944 (according to other sources, 948-949). Unfortunately, the complete original text of this work has not been preserved. The portion of the work that has come down to us is a shortened translation from Arabic to Persian, and it was translated by Abu Nasr Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Nasr al-Qubaviy of Fergana in the year 1128.

It is worth noting that translators have supplemented the text with new information while abbreviating it. "The History of Bukhara" consists of 36 chapters and primarily covers the history of Bukhara from the 9th to the 12th centuries. Several chapters of the book are dedicated to the foundation, names, and rulers of Bukhara. In

a specific section of the work, various places around Bukhara such as Karmana, Nur, Tavois, Iskajkat, Zandana, Vardona, Afshona, Barkat, Romitan, Varakhsha, Baykand (Poykand), Farob, and others are described, including the social, economic conditions, toponyms, ethnography, nature, trade activities, and monetary relations of the residents who lived there.

Valuable information has been provided regarding the historical toponymy of Bukhara, which was one of the ancient and old cities of its time. Specifically, despite the fact that Bukhara was situated along the banks of the Jayhun River, it was considered one of the cities of Khurasan and had many names, including Numijkat, Bumiskat, “Madinat us-sufriya” (City of Copper), and “Madinat ut-tujjor” (City of Merchants). Additionally, the name Bukhara is linked to a narration in which it is referred to as “Foxira” in Arabic and praised on the Day of Judgment for the multitude of its martyrs within the city [2:95]. It’s important to emphasize once again that valuable information has been provided about the cities and villages located within the vicinity of Bukhara in ancient times. For instance, a description of one of the ancient settlements of Navoiy province, Karmana, is as follows: “Karmana is part of the villages of Bukhara, and its water comes from the waters of Bukhara; its market joins that of Bukhara. There is also a separate village belonging to it, in which a congregational mosque is built. Karmana has had many scholars and poets. In ancient times, it was known as “Badyayn xurdak” (urn). It is four farsakhs from Bukhara to Karmana” [2:105]. Although this information is brief, it holds significant importance when studying the history, geography, economy, culture, and toponymy of Karmana during the middle centuries.

In the present day, the historical development of Romitan, which is located in the center of Bukhara Province and was established on September 29, 1926 [3], has also been of interest, particularly in the fields of craftsmanship and pottery.

“Romtin (Romitan) is a large village with a rich history, and it is older than Bukhara. In some books, this village is referred to as Bukhara. In ancient times, it served as the residence of the rulers, and after the construction of Bukhara city, the rulers stayed in this village during the winter season. Afrosiyob was built near this village. Whenever Afrosiyob came to this province, they did not stay anywhere else but in this village” [2:98].

Today, the Varakhsha Square, located within the territory of Bukhara, preserves its ancient heritage in the form of a mound, which stands at a height of 10-20 meters. In the 5th century AD, Varakhsha was considered the residence of the ancient rulers of Bukhara and was regarded as the stronghold of the Bukhar Khudat [4:26].

In Narshakhi’s work “The History of Bukhara”, Varakhsha is described as an older and well-fortified city compared to Bukhara itself. It had twelve gates and was

one of the largest and central cities within the region of Rajfandun. In this village, a market was held every fifteen days, and at the end of the year, a market was held for twenty days. The twentieth day was celebrated as Navro‘z, the New Year festival, and this was referred to as “Navro‘zi kishovarzon” or “Peasants’ navro‘z” [2:99], providing valuable information about the city’s historical significance.

One of the cities of Sog‘d, Poykand, is even older and has ancient origins dating back to antiquity. This ancient city expanded during the early centuries of the 5th to 6th centuries and evolved into a large center divided into three parts, with a total area covering 18 hectares.

In Narshakhi’s historical work, Poykand is referred to as Baykand, and it is noted for its position among the cities, having more than a thousand merchants and an entirely mercantile population. Because of this, it was called “Madina-at-tujjor” or “City of Merchants”. When Qutayba ibn Muslim conquered Poykand, he faced significant challenges, and it was described as “Jezdan qurilgan shahriston” or “The City Built with Difficulty”.

The city known as Nurota in historical records is famous for its pilgrimage sites. It is located on the “Great Silk Road” and was a stopping point not only for trade but also for travelers to quench their thirst from its refreshing springs [5].

In his work “The History of Bukhara”, Narshakhi refers to this ancient settlement as Nur. It had a significant number of merchants and was a destination for pilgrims from Bukhara and other places every year. The people of Bukhara held this practice in high regard, and those who went on a pilgrimage to Nur were considered to have gained great virtue. In other provinces, Nur was referred to as Nuri Buxoro [2:95]. The text also provides information about various aspects of Nur, including its name, nature, inhabitants, and activities.

In the study of the toponymy of the ancient and grand city of Bukhara and its surrounding villages, Abu Bakr Narshakhi’s work, “The History of Bukhara”, is considered a rare and invaluable written treasure.

This unique work was published in Paris (1892) in French, in Bukhara (1904) and Tehran (1939) in Persian, in Tashkent (1897) in Russian, in Cambridge (1954) in English, and in Tashkent (1966, 1993) in Uzbek, and in Dushanbe (1979) in Tajik.

“The History of Bukhara” is being studied today by researchers as a comprehensive source of historical, archaeological, ethnographic, and topographic materials. The research conducted using pivotal sources like “The History of Bukhara” not only enriches our understanding of historical events but also contributes to the creation of a more authentic historical narrative.

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