
CONFERENCE ARTICLE**Toponymic And Topographical Features Of Medieval Settlements In The Chach Oasis****Sharofiddin MAMATOV**

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Abstract: This article examines the toponymy and topography of settlements in the Chach Oasis during the 9th–12th centuries. Based on medieval written sources, it analyzes the historical names, locations, and development of towns and villages, with particular attention to Turkic and Sogdian toponyms.

Keywords: Chach Oasis, medieval settlements, toponymy, topography, Turkic toponyms, Sogdian toponyms, Chirchik, Ohangaron.

Introduction

The Chach Oasis was one of the important historical and cultural regions of medieval Central Asia, distinguished by its developed network of towns and rural settlements. During the 9th–12th centuries, the growth of settlements was closely associated with favorable geographical conditions, water resources, irrigation systems, agriculture, craftsmanship, and regional trade. Medieval Arabic and Persian geographical sources provide valuable information about numerous towns and villages located in the Chirchik, Ohangaron (Ilak), and Chatkal areas. The study of their historical topography and toponymy makes it possible to reconstruct the settlement system of the Chach Oasis and to identify Sogdian and Turkic elements reflected in local place names. Therefore, the analysis of medieval settlements and their toponyms is important for understanding the historical geography and socio-economic development of the Chach Oasis.

Discussion and results. The Chach Oasis is located in the lower basin of the Syr Darya. The Chirchik and Ohangaron rivers, which originate in the western foothills of the Tien Shan (Tangritagh) Mountains in the eastern and northeastern parts of the oasis, are among the major water sources of the Middle Syr Darya region. During the Early Middle Ages, the Chirchik River, known as Parak or the “Turk River,” originated in the Chatkal Range of the Western Tien Shan, while the Ohangaron River, known as the Ilak River, originated somewhat farther south, in the Qurama Range of the Western Tien Shan. Both rivers are tributaries of the Syr Darya and flow into it. Ancient settlements in the Chach Oasis emerged along the banks of these rivers, and some of them developed into major cities during the final centuries of the first millennium BCE. Among the largest were the “City of Chach” in the Chirchik River basin and Kharashket (Qanqa) in the lower reaches of the Ohangaron River[1].

As in the pre-Islamic period, the Chach Oasis continued to be known several centuries later, during the High Middle Ages, as a region containing numerous towns and villages of varying sizes. This was particularly the case during the periods of Arab rule in Central Asia (mid-8th to early 9th centuries), the Samanids (819–999), and the Qarakhanids (960–1212). The oasis, initially referred to in Chinese chronicles as Shi, Shi-guo (“Stone State”), and Zheshe (Chach), was described by the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang (629–645) as follows: “The country of Zheshe has a circumference of 1,000 li (500 km), and its western border reaches the Ye River (Syr Darya). The country is narrow from east to west and broad from north to south. The fertility of its soil and its climatic conditions are similar to those of the country of

Nuchijian (Nuchket–Chimkent). It has about ten towns, each governed by its own ruler. There is no single supreme ruler. As vassals, they are subject to the Tujue (Turkic Khaganate).”[2].

This account is particularly noteworthy because it indicates that the Chach Oasis already contained approximately ten towns during the Early Middle Ages, each governed by its own ruler. At that time, most of the principalities in the Syr Darya basin, such as Fergana, Khujand, Otrar, and Isfijab (Sayram), had only two or three towns, while the Fergana Valley had approximately five or six. It is therefore significant that Chach, located within the same river basin, had almost twice as many towns. The information recorded in the Chinese chronicles is also confirmed by Arab-Persian sources written three to four centuries later. Among the Muslim geographers who left relatively detailed accounts of the region, al-Istakhri described Shash (Chach) in his 10th-century work *Kitab al-Mamalik wa al-Masalik* (“The Book of Countries and Routes”) as follows: “Shash and Ilak extend over a distance of two by three days’ journey. They contain many villages with buildings and pulpits, while their plains abound in pastures and greenery. The gates, walls, rabads, quhandizs, and rivers of the towns of Shash and Ilak are interconnected.”[3].

This account indicates that the Chach Oasis comprised two political-administrative regions known as Shash (Chach) and Ilak. Each town in the oasis was surrounded by an outer defensive wall and contained a rabad, the quarter inhabited by craftsmen and merchants, as well as a quhandiz (citadel), which served as the administrative center. In addition, each town in Chach was situated along a water source, such as a river, stream, or irrigation canal. Dozens of villages were located around each town, and during the High Middle Ages such settlements had their own minbar (congregational mosque) and imarat (building or administrative structure).

The towns and villages of the Chach Oasis attracted the attention of Arab and Persian geographers because of their cultivated lands, pastures, and overall prosperity. On the one hand, Muslim authors were impressed by the oasis’s extensive plains, cultivated fields, and irrigation networks, while on the other hand, they were struck by the lush natural environment of its mountain foothills. Other versions of al-Istakhri’s work provide a somewhat more detailed description of the oasis: “In all of Khurasan and Transoxiana, there is no region with such an extensive area, abundant waters, and numerous villages. One of its boundaries is the valley of Shash, which flows toward the Small Sea of Khwarazm; another is Bab al-Hadid in the Qalas steppe, with its pastures between Shash and Isbijab; and another consists of the mountains belonging to the administrative

territory of Shash, except for the cultivated lands adjoining the mountains. The remaining areas are separate localities, with one boundary extending as far as Vinkard, a Christian village. Shash lies on a plain. Within this continuously cultivated territory there are neither mountains nor elevated areas. It constitutes the largest frontier toward the lands of the Turks. Its spacious buildings are constructed of rammed earth. Water flows through almost every courtyard. Entirely covered with greenery, it is one of the most beautiful places in Transoxiana. Its principal town is Binkat.”[4].

This account indicates that the Chach Oasis possessed diverse natural conditions, including plains with settlements, mountainous and foothill areas with settlements, as well as pastures and steppes. Al-Istakhri described the boundaries of the Chach Oasis as extending northward to Bab al-Hadid, meaning the “Iron Gate,” in the Qalas (Keles) steppe toward Isfijab (Sayram). Another boundary was the “Valley of Chach,” that is, the Syr Darya River, which flowed toward the “Sea of Khwarazm” (the Aral Sea), while the remaining boundaries adjoined mountainous areas.

When al-Istakhri wrote of Chach that “its spacious buildings are constructed of rammed earth, and water flows through almost every courtyard,” he appears to have been referring to the houses of the inhabitants of the oasis’s towns and villages. Indeed, numerous streams originating in the Chatkal and Qurama ranges of the Western Tien Shan, which sustained life in the Chach Oasis, supplied water to dozens of settlements in the foothills. Flowing through residential areas, these streams contributed to the formation of major rivers such as the Chirchik and Ohangaron. As they crossed the hilly terrain of the oasis and reached the plains, they created favorable conditions for irrigated agriculture in dozens of towns and villages.

On the eve of the Islamic period and during the High Middle Ages, dozens of towns and large villages existed in the Chirchik River basin. These settlements were initially mentioned in Chinese chronicles and later in written sources in Sogdian, Arabic, and Persian. The Chirchik River basin consisted of several geographical zones. In its upper reaches, namely the mountainous part of the oasis, there were dozens of settlements, including such major localities as Nahnah (Nanay), Ardlankent (Burchmulla), Satbaghva (Bog’iston), Khumbarak (Khumson), Kalashijak (Sijjak), Soyliq, Kurol (Kuzol-Gijol), Ghazak (Ghazal, Ghazalkent), and Kabarna (Kavardon).

Farnkat (Parkent), already known at that time as a major settlement, was situated in the northeastern part of the oasis, somewhat south of the main Chirchik River basin. The villages surrounding Parkent and those located farther east in narrow mountain valleys, including Suqoq, Zarkent, Sanginak, Nevich, Navdak, and Namdanak, were also major settlements as early as the Early Middle Ages. Although these villages, along with several others, are mentioned by name in medieval written sources, it is evident that they had emerged considerably earlier. The Sogdian and Turkic character of dozens of village names around Parkent further supports this view. This group may also include such small towns near Parkent as Baghvikas and Abradkas, whose names have not survived to the present day.

In addition, northeast of Parkent, along the upper reaches of the Parkentsoy, which originates in the Western Tien Shan Mountains, settlements situated along streams between Kumushkon in the foothills and Parkent, including the villages of Hisorak and Changi, were likewise among the settlements of the Chirchik River basin.

Although the names of Parkent and the surrounding villages are of ancient Sogdian and Old Turkic origin, only some of them are recorded in Arabic and Persian written sources: Farnkat – Parkent and Namadvanek – Nomdanak. In this regard, the names of the villages of Suqoq, Sanginak, Nevich, and Navdak, situated along the Suqoqsoy and Qizilsoy watercourses—the former originating somewhat south of Parkentsoy, in the Qizilsoy

section of the Chatkal Nature Reserve—are almost entirely absent from the works of Arab and Persian geographers of the High Middle Ages. Among these settlements, only the village of Nomdanak is mentioned in al-Muqaddasi’s 10th-century work *Ahsan al-Ta’asim fi Ma’rifat al-Aqalim* (“The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions”), where its name appears in the form Namadvanek[5].

Among the Arab and Persian geographers, Ibn Hawqal was one of the authors who left extensive and relatively detailed information about settlements in the oases of Central Asia. In his work *Surat al-Ard* (“The Image of the Earth”), he also provides information on the Chach Oasis. The names of towns and villages in Chach recorded by Ibn Hawqal largely correspond to the place names mentioned by other geographers. At the same time, certain variations can be observed in the names of some settlements, apparently resulting from the interchange or misplacement of diacritical dots in Arabic script. Ibn Hawqal lists the settlements of al-Shash, that is, those located in the Chirchik River basin, as follows: Binkat, Danfaghonkat, Jinonjkat, Najokat, Banokat, Kharashkat, Ustibayghu, Ardlonkat, Khudaynkat, Kankrok, Kalashjik, Barkanda, Bannoj, Jabuzan, Varduk, Kabarna, Badronk, Nujkat, Bazak, Abradkat, Baghunkat, Barkush, Khatunkat, Jabghukat, Farankat, Kadok, and Takolik[6].

The researchers who prepared the scholarly edition of *Surat al-Ard* identify some of these settlements with the following towns and villages that have survived to the present day: Binkat – Tashkent; Danfaghonkat – Yoghontepa (Yangiyol); Jinonjkat – Chinonchkat (Chinaz); Najokat – Ulja (located near the confluence of the Chirchik River with the Syr Darya, close to the village of Qolganchirchik); Banokat – Shohrukhiya (Sharqiya); Kharashkat – Qanqa (Oqqorgon District); Barkush – Pargos (Pargostepa); and others[7].

The middle and lower reaches of the Chirchik River basin consisted primarily of hilly and plain areas and included major urban centers such as the “City of Chach” (referred to in Arabic sources as *Madinat al-Shash*) and Binkat. The towns (or fortified settlements) of Jabghukat and Khatunkat, situated in the upper and middle reaches of the river basin, were located northeast of these major cities[8].

Another of the most densely populated parts of the Chach Oasis was the Ilak (Ohangaron) Valley. Ibn Hawqal lists the major settlements of this region as follows: Tunkat, Sakokat, Bonjkhaskh, Nukat, Boloyon (Yolopon), Tukkat, Arbilakh, Namudligh, Khumrak, Biskat, Kuhisim, Dahkat, Khash, and Kharkonkat[9].

Researchers identify some of these settlements in the Ohangaron Oasis with the following towns and villages: Tunkat – Imloq (a village located 15 km northeast of the city of Olmaliq); Sakokat – a settlement near the village of Uvait, southeast of present-day To’ytepa (Nurafshon), on the right bank of the Ohangaron River; Kuhisim – a settlement on the right bank of the Ohangaron River, near the Lashkarak and Loyak streams in the Western Tien Shan, where the headwaters of the river originate; Bonjkhaskh – Jumushqazitepa (southeast of To’ytepa [Nurafshon], near the village of Anhor); Nukat – Navkat (the village of Unjikat near the confluence of the Chirchik River with the Syr Darya); Biskat – Piskent; Dahkat – Dukentsoy (between the Angren and Ohangaron mountains); and Khash – Khos (near the city of Bekobod or near the village of Jumabozor in the Middle Chirchik District)[10].

The northeasternmost part of the Chach Oasis—the mountainous region of the Western Tien Shan (Tangritagh) ranges referred to in written sources as “Jidghil” and “Chatkal”—provides important historical evidence for understanding the character of major settlements and villages of varying sizes in the Chach Oasis on the eve of the Islamic period and during the High Middle Ages. This region bordered the Chirchik Oasis to the southwest, the Parkent Oasis to the south, Olabuqa adjoining the Fergana Valley to the east, the Talas Valley (present-day Kyrgyzstan) to the northeast, Taraz to the north, and the Isfijab–

Sayram oases (present-day Kazakhstan) to the northwest.

Written information concerning the Chatkal Oasis is primarily found in Arabic and Persian geographical works dating to the High Middle Ages (9th–12th centuries). According to these sources, the population of the region lived in dozens of villages, and horticulture, agriculture, and animal husbandry played leading roles in their economic life. The 10th-century work *Hudud al-'Alam* refers to this mountainous region as "Jadghal" and "Chatqal" and mentions such major settlements as Ardlonkas (Burchmulla), Kalashijak (Sijjak), Khambarak/Khumbarak (Khumson), Nakhnoh (Nanay), and Satbaghva (Bog'iston).[11]. These settlements were situated among the mountains, along streams flowing down from the mountain slopes. The work provides the following description: "Ardlonkas, Kalashijak, Khambarak, Nakhnoh, and Satbaghva are small towns located close to one another, with extensive cultivated lands and abundant running water. Ardlonkas is the principal town of these settlements." [12]. A number of Arab and Persian geographers mention Ardonkas (Ardlonkat) as a town and administrative center of the Chatkal Oasis. Al-Istakhri writes in his work: "Jidghil is the name of a town, also called Ardlankat. There is no other town in that territory." [13].

It should be noted that in *Hudud al-'Alam*, "Jadghal" is described as a mountainous district (*nahiya*) of the Fergana Valley, whereas information contained in other geographical works indicates that this territory belonged to Chach. *Hudud al-'Alam* also lists several major settlements located near the Chatkal Oasis and described as towns, principal settlements, or large villages. These include Ghazak (Ghazal, Ghazalkent), [14] Qarjokas (Khojakent) on the left bank of the Chirchik River, and the small town of Tarkus/Pargus (present-day Pargos-tepa) on the right bank of the Chirchik. [15]. Somewhat farther west of the Chatkal Oasis, on the right bank of the Chirchik River, there was a major settlement known as Sobliq (Soyliq). Its location corresponds to the present-day village of Soyliq, situated near the villages of Chimboyliq and Khandoyliq in Bostanliq District. [16] In his 10th-century work *Kitab Surat al-Ard*, Ibn Hawqal refers to the mountains situated northeast of the land of Shash as the "Sobliq Mountains." [17] This toponym is recorded in al-Istakhri's work in the form *Sofligh*. [18].

Although these towns, principal settlements, and villages in the Chirchik River basin of the Chach Oasis are mentioned in 10th-century written sources, most of them were major settlements dating back to the Early Middle Ages, particularly to the period of the Turkic Khaganate. Their inhabitants were known for horticulture, agriculture, and horse breeding. This is also confirmed by the description in *Hudud al-'Alam* of such major settlements as Kurol/Kijol (present-day G'ijol), Ghazak/Ghazal (Ghazalkent), Hayvol (Qayroqsoy), Varzul, Kabarna (Kavardon), and Baghrovanak, which were situated along the banks of the Chirchik River, southwest of the Chatkal Oasis. The source emphasizes that they were "small towns located close to one another; they have extensive cultivated lands, and horses are raised there." [19].

The Chirchik River and the streams and tributaries that form its headwaters constituted the principal sources of water for the population of the Chatkal Oasis, and access to water was a fundamental factor underlying the emergence of villages and towns in the region. *Hudud al-'Alam* emphasizes this point as follows: "The Parak (Chirchik) River originates on the slopes of the Khallukh (Qarluk) Mountains (the Chatkal Range), flows southward, and passes through the territory of Chach." [20] It is noteworthy that almost all authors who provided information about Chach paid particular attention to this geographical and hydrological feature of the oasis.

Al-Istakhri provides the following account in his work: "There is another river in Shash, called the Turk River, which flows into the valley. One of its branches originates in Biskam and another in Jidghil (Chatkal). Its principal source lies in the land of the Khazlaj (Qarluk) Turks, and it flows into the Shash Valley near

the town of Najakat." [21]. The population of the major settlements located in the valleys of the Chatkal mountain range and in the upper reaches of the Chirchik River basin consisted of Turkic- and Sogdian-speaking communities. This is also reflected in the toponymy of the Chach Oasis during this period. Among its major place names, Parak-Turk (Chirchik), Jadghal-Chatkal, Soyliq, and Ardlonkas (Arslonkent) are of Turkic origin, whereas Nakhnoh (Nanay), Khambarak (Khumson), Pargus, Qarjokas, and several others are of Sogdian origin [22].

Thus, during the pre-Islamic period and the High Middle Ages, the Chatkal Oasis contained dozens of settlements of varying sizes, many of which served as stopping points along narrow mountain caravan routes connecting the Chach Oasis with the Talas Valley. The town of Ardlonkat (Burchmulla) was the principal economic and political center of the region and functioned as an administrative center for the surrounding population. At the same time, major settlements in the Chatkal Oasis, such as Sijjak (Kalashijak), Nanay (Nakhnoh), Bog'iston (Satbaghva), and Khumson (Khumbarak), as well as the inhabitants of towns, principal settlements, and large villages in the neighboring Chirchik Oasis, including Ghazalkent, G'ijol (Kijal), and Soyliq, maintained close economic and cultural relations with this region.

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