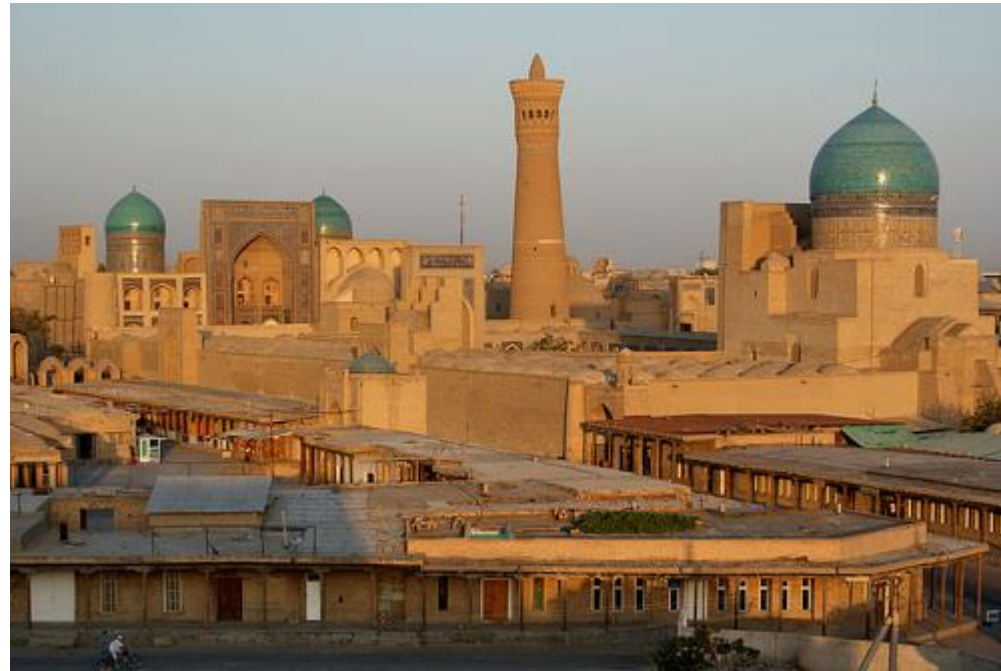


BUKHARA



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- At the outset there are several general points to be made about city chronicles in the Eastern Islamic World. First, in medieval times the books usually were presented, if not commissioned by, a ruler, an amir, or to a minister of the government, or occasionally even to a rich and influential person. The nineteenth and twentieth century city histories, however, were not presented to anyone but for the most part were written because of pride in the city or the desire to record or to exalt the names of a few leading families in the town. Second, many local histories, both old and more recent, give lists of visitors to ziyarets or local shrines while others are in search of roots, the reconstruction of family lines and identity relationships. After the Mongol conquests, most city histories concentrate on the 'ulama' or local religious leaders and rarely do political or other figures appear in them. From all of this, the natural conclusion is that for the writers of local chronicles, history simply meant biography. One might even go further in the suggestion that, just as in fine arts, we find individual biography in the west, so collective biography is the hallmark of the East.



- The Persian translation of an original Arabic history of the town of Bukhara is one of a genre of literature found in the eastern part of the Islamic world, especially popular in Iran and Central Asia. The fact that it was emended several times and translated is a good indication of its popularity. The Arabic text of Narshaki, however, because of information in it other than concerning Muslim notables, seems to have been different from similar histories of other towns, unless we suppose that the epitomizer of his book, or the translator into Persian, added entire sections or some information not found in the Arabic, thus changing the original text. In any case, in view of the many manuscripts preserved of Narshaki's history, although most are from the nineteenth century, we may presume that this book was indeed well liked and deserving to be called a monument of Central Asian literature for that reason.
- Who was Narshaki and what is the textual history and the contents of his book? And why was his work different from comparable books such as the histories of Nishapur and Isfahan? Unfortunately, because of the paucity of sources, the first question cannot be answered, but we may attempt to answer the other two.



- Although the origin of the name of the city is not explained in the chapter on the names of Bukhara, Narshaki does give traditions about the merits of the city which, however, are found in other sources as well. There are two suggestions about the name of the city. One is Bukhara is derived from an unattested Bactrian word for vihara or Buddhist monastery bohero (written boioro), since Bactria was the home of Iranian Buddhism. Another theory has the name derived from Sogdian (Christian) fwq'r, meaning 'fortunate, blessed' which corresponds to Narshaki's appellative fakhire 'glorious, distinguished.' In this regard, it should be mentioned that Bukhara never became a Buddhist center as did Bactria, although the inhabitants of the oasis probably were as tolerant of Buddhism as they were of other religions. Like Samarqand, the Bukharans were primarily traders as well as famous craftsmen and weavers. Especially famous in the trade was the cloth known as Zandaniji, so named after the village of Zandana in the Bukharan oasis where it was first woven. Narshaki says that this cloth was exported to Iraq, India and elsewhere.



- Although other sources, especially Tabari, gives accounts of the Arab invasion and conquest of the oasis of Bukhara, Narshaki's book is the most detailed, as is his account of the religious rebellion of the followers of Muqanna' after the establishment of the Abbasid Khaliphate, most likely because people in his village of Narshak preserved stories about Muqanna' who had received support in this village. Likewise, the account of the Shi'ite uprising in Bukhara at the fall of the Umayyads, and its suppression at the order of Abu Muslim is detailed and reveals the support given to the Abbasids by the local ruler of Bukhara against the Shi'ites who probably represented the lower classes in the city.



- Archaeological excavations have revealed that the settlement on the site of latter-day Bukhara became part of the Kushan state as early as the 2nd millennium BC. In the 4th century it was incorporated into the Ephtalite state. Before the Arab conquest Bukhara was one of the largest cities of central Asia, owing its prosperity to its site on a rich oasis and at the crossroads of ancient trade routes. It became a major cultural centre of the Caliphate of Baghdad in 709, and in 892 the capital of the independent Samanid Kingdom. A time of great economic growth came to an end with the sack of the city in 1220 by the Mongol horde of Genghis Khan.

