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978-1-108-05584-0 - The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians:

The Muhammadan Period: Volume 2

Henry Miers Elliot Edited by John Dowson

Excerpt

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HISTORIANS OF INDIA.

I.

TARÍKHU-L HIND

OF

ABU' RÍHÁN AL BÍRÚNÍ.

ABU' RÍHÁN¹ MUHAMMAD BIN AHMAD AL BÍRÚNÍ AL KHWÁR-IZMÍ, was born² about A.H. 360, A.D. 970-1. He was an astronomer, geometrician, historian, and logician. He was so

¹ Raihán would be more correct, according to the Kámús. In Brigg's *Firishṭa* (p. 113), the name is strangely perverted into "Anvury Khán."

² The place of his birth is disputed. His earliest biographer is Shahrazúrí, who, in his *Tawárikh-i Hukamá*, written shortly after Bírúní's death, says that he was born at Bírún, in Sind, "a beautiful city full of excellent and marvellous things." He has been followed by Hájí Khalfa, by Ibn Abú Ussaibiah, and by Abú-l Fidá, on the authority of Ibn Sa'id. M. Reinaud also states that he was a Sindian. Yet, where is this city of Bírún in Sind? There is a Nírún, or Nírún Kot, near the site of the present city of Haidarábád, corresponding in position with the Bírún indicated by Abú-l Fidá, which probably has had its first letter altered by a transposition of the vowel point. But M. Reinaud (p. 195) is distinct in condemning Capt. McMurdo and other English writers who, following Idrisí, read Nírún for Bírún. Abú-l Fidá's reading cannot be disputed, for he not only gives, but describes the nature of, the diacritical point, and all that can be said against him is that he never was in India, and that he derived his information from others. (See Vol. I. Appx. p. 396.) In the *Kitábu-l Ansáb* by Sam'ání, a book of very great authority, written A.H. 562, A.D. 1166, Bírúní is derived from the Persian, and made to apply to any one born out of Khwárizm. Some authorities distinctly assert that he was born at Bírún, a town of Khwárizm, but I know not if the existence of such a town has been established. Bírúní in his Indian Geography takes little notice of Sind, and says nothing of his birthplace. [The passage quoted from the "Quarterly Review," (*infra* p. 3) seems to decide the question, for Bírúní is there said to be a native of Khwárizm, and the whole tenor of the article confirms the statement.]

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studious that Shamsu-d dín Muhammad Shahrazúrí, his earliest biographer, tells us “he never had a pen out of his hand, nor his eye ever off a book, and his thoughts were always directed to his studies, with the exception of two days in the year, namely Nauroz [New Year’s day at the vernal equinox], and Mihrján [the autumnal equinox], when he was occupied, according to the command of the Prophet, in procuring the necessaries of life on such a moderate scale as to afford him bare sustenance and clothing.” [As a logician he obtained the sobriquet of “*Muhakkik*” or “the exact,” on account of the rigorous precision of his deductions].¹

[Abú-l Fazl Baihakí who lived about half a century after Al Bírúní, says, “Bú Ríhán was beyond comparison, superior to every man of his time in the art of composition, in scholarlike accomplishments, and in knowledge of geometry and philosophy. He had, moreover, a most rigid regard for truth ;” and Rashídu-d dín, in referring to the great writer from whom he has borrowed so much, says “The Master Abú Ríhán al Bírúní excelled all his cotemporaries in the sciences of philosophy, mathematics, and geometry. He entered the service of Mahmúd bin Subuktigín, and in the course of his service he spent a long time in Hindustán and learned the language of the country. Several of the provinces of India were visited by him. He was on friendly terms with many of the great and noble of that country, and so acquired an intimate knowledge of their books of philosophy, religion, and belief. The best and most excellent of all their books upon the arts and sciences is one resembling the work of Shaikh Raís Abú ’Alí ibn Siná (Avicenna). It is called *Bátakal*, or in Arabic *Bátajal* ; this book he translated into Arabic. From this work also he extracted a great deal which he made use of in his *Kánún Mas’údi*, a work upon mathematics and geometry, named after the Sultán Mas’úd. All that the sages of India have said about numbers, ages, and eras (*tawárikh*), has been exactly given by Abú Ríhán in his translation of the *Bátakal*.”]

¹ *Mémoire sur l’Inde*, p. 29.

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He was indebted to the Sultán of Khwárizm for the opportunity of visiting India, for he was appointed by him to accompany the embassies which he sent to Mahmúd of Ghazní. Al Farábí and Abú-l Khair joined one of these embassies, but the famous Avicenna, who was invited to accompany them, refused to go, being, as it is hinted, averse to enter into controversy with Abú Rihán, with whom he differed on many points of science, and whose logical powers he feared to encounter. [On the invitation of Mahmúd, Abú Rihán entered into his service, an invitation which Avicenna declined. It was in the suite of Mahmúd and of his son Mas'úd that] Abú Rihán travelled into India, and he is reported to have staid forty years there; but if we may judge from some errors that he has committed in his geographical description of the country, such as placing Thánesar in the Doáb, it would appear that he never travelled to the east of Lahore.¹ Abú Rihán died in A.H. 430, A.D. 1038-9.

He wrote many works, and is said to have executed several translations from the Greek, and to have epitomised the *Almagest* of Ptolemy. His works are stated to have exceeded a camel-load, insomuch that it was supposed by devout Muhammadans that he received divine aid in his compositions. Those most spoken of are astronomical tables, a treatise on precious stones, one on *Materia Medica*, an introduction to astrology, a treatise on chronology, and the famous *Kánúnu-l Mas'údí*, an astronomical and geographical work frequently cited by Abú-l Fidá, especially in his tables of Lat. and Long. For this last work he received from the Emperor Mas'úd an elephant-load of silver, which, however, he returned to the Royal Treasury, "a proceeding contrary to human nature," according to the testimony of Shahrázúrí.

[An accomplished writer in a late number of the "Quarterly Review," observes: "Abú Rihán a native of the country (of Khwárizm) was the only early Arab writer who investigated the antiquities of the East in a true spirit of historical criticism," and he proceeds to give some examples of his knowledge of ancient

¹ See note Vol. I. p. 353.

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technical chronology which are of the highest importance in establishing the early civilization of the Arian race. According to this reviewer, Abú Ríhán says, "the solar calendar of Khwárizm, was the most perfect scheme for measuring time with which he was acquainted, and it was maintained by the astronomers of that country, that both the solar and the lunar zodiacs had originated with them; the divisions of the signs in their systems being far more regular than those adopted by the Greeks or Arabs. * * * Another statement of Abú Ríhán's asserts that the Khwárizmians dated originally from an epoch anterior by 980 years to the era of the Seleucidæ (equal to B.C. 1304), a date which agrees pretty accurately with the period assigned by our best scholars to the invention of the Jyotisha or Indian calendar."¹ This most curious and interesting information, for which we are indebted to the writer in the "Quarterly," raises higher than ever the reputation of Abú Ríhán, and must intensify the desire so long felt for a complete translation of his extant works.]

The names of his writings are given in full by Reiske in the Supplement to the *Bibl. Or.* on the authority of Abú Ussaibiah. The work by which he is best known, and which to the cultivator of Indian history is the most important, of all his works is the *Tárikhu-l Hind* in Arabic. A manuscript of this work, or of a portion of it, is in the Imperial Library, Paris (*Fonds Ducaurroy*, No. 22), and from this MS. M. Reinaud extracted two chapters which he published in the *Journal Asiatique*, and separately in his "*Fragments Arabes et Persans inédits relatifs à l'Inde antérieurement au xi. siècle de l'ère Chrétienne.*" [The work, according to M. Reinaud, was written in India in 1031 A.D., and he observes upon it—"Cet écrit est un tableau de l'état littéraire et scientifique de la presqu'île, au moment où les armées musulmanes y pénétrèrent pour la première fois. On y voit successivement apparaître les principaux travaux littéraires, philosophiques et astronomiques des Indiens, le tableau de leurs ères, la manière

¹ "Quarterly Review," No. 240, p. 490.

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dont ils comptaient les jours, les mois, les années et les cycles.”¹ Sir H. Rawlinson possesses a MS. of a part of Al Bírúní’s works,]² and there is a manuscript of some portions thereof mentioned by M. Hænel as existing in the Library of the Arsenal at Paris. This MS. appears to be the one noticed by D’Herbelot in the article *Athar*, [and to be the same as that “which was formerly much referred to by M. Quatremère under the title ‘Athár el Bákieh.’”³] The *Tārikhu-l Hind* is not known at all in India, and M. Reinaud states that it is not mentioned in any of the bibliographical works in Arabic which have come under his observation. It will be seen hereafter that Abú-l Fazl Baihakí attributes to him another work, “A History of Khwárizm,” which is noticed by M. Fraehn in his catalogue.⁴

The *Tārikhu-l Hind* treats of the literature and science of the Indians at the commencement of the eleventh century, It does not bear the name of the author, but we learn from it, that he accompanied Mahmúd of Ghazní; that he resided many years in India, chiefly, in all probability, in the Panjáb, studied the Sanskrit language, translated into it some works from the Arabic, and translated from it two treatises into Arabic. This statement is confirmed by Abú-l Faraj, in his “Catalogue of Ancient and Modern Authors.” Bírúní says, towards the end of his preface, “I have translated into Arabic two Indian works, one discusses the origin and quality of things which exist, and is entitled Sankhya, the other is known under the title of Patanjali,⁵ which treats of the deliverance of the soul from the trammels of the body. These two works contain the chief principles of the Indian creed.”⁶

Neither the original nor the translation of this work [presumed

¹ [*Mém. sur l’Inde* p. 30.]

² [This fact, and the general character of the article in the “Review,” which probably no one else in Europe could have written, afford sufficient indication of the writer, Sir H. Rawlinson.]

³ [“Quarterly Review,” No. 240, p. 490, note; *Mém. sur l’Inde*, p. 30.]

⁴ *Indications Bibl.* p. 28.

⁵ [See Note, next page.]

⁶ Reinaud’s *Fragments*, p. xiii.

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to be that] of Patanjali has descended to us ; but as M. Reinaud observes, the declaration quoted in the preceding paragraph serves to indicate the author of the *Tārikhu-l Hind*, which other circumstances would have rendered extremely probable. Rashīdu-d dīn, in his history, quotes as one of the works to which he is indebted for his information, an Arabic version of “the Bātakal,” made by Al-Bīrūnī.¹ Binākitī also mentions this translation of the

¹ [The Sanskrit work translated by Abū Rihān has, upon this identification made by Reinaud, been unhesitatingly believed to have been the production of the sage Patanjali, a well-known philosopher and Vedic commentator and grammarian (Müller's Sanskrit Lit. p. 235.) The description given of that work by Abū Rihān accords very well with the sage's writings; but the specimens which we have of the work in the published fragments of Al Bīrūnī, and in their reproduction by Rashīdu-d dīn are of a very different character. The latter writer says it was a book upon the arts and sciences, containing all that the sages of India have written about numbers, ages, and eras, and accordingly we find the book cited upon questions of chronology and geography. In the Extract printed by M. Reinaud, the word is given distinctly as “Bātanjali,” but I have not found it so written in any of the MSS. of the Jāmi'u-t Tawārikh or of Binākitī. The MS. of the E. I. Library says “the name of the book is باسکل which in Arabic they write باسجل In the passage translated and printed in Vol. I. p. 44, it is written باسکل and in another باسجل The Lucknow MS. has باسکل and باسجل The Arabic MS. is equally explicit and says—

ولفظه باسجل معربة وأصلها باتكل

“The word Bātajal is the Arabic form of what in the original is Bātakal.” (Judging from analogy there is but one letter between the *alif* and the *jim*, for the *t* is so found written in words about which there can be no doubt, as *تعمير*) Here we have the remarkable fact that the Arabic form of the name (Bātajal or Bātanjal) is more like the presumed Sanskrit original (Patanjali) than the word Bātakal or Bātankal, which is given as the exact or nearest transcription of that original word. Mr. Morley found the word written Bānatakāl or Bātanakāl in two manuscripts of Binākitī (Jour. R. A. S. VI. 26). In the R. As. Soc.'s copy of Binākitī it is written باسکل A Persian note prefixed to the MS. No. 16 of the R. As. Society, and translated by Dr. Duncan Forbes, says, “After Abū Rihān had made thorough proficiency in the sciences of the Indian philosophers, he translated from the Indian language into the Arabic tongue, the book of Pātankal, or Pātanjal [باسکل] which is a collection of all the sciences, and one of the most valuable works of the sages of Hind. * * * To this work he gave the name of Pātanjal, [پاتانجل] a copy of which he carried away with him.”—(Forbes, Jour. R.A.S. VI. p. 38.) This note would seem to have been drawn from Rashīdu-d dīn's notice of Abū Rihān above quoted—and the spelling of the name of the book is identically the

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work, and says that Bírúní included the translation in the *Kánúnu-l Mas'údí*,¹ but a close examination of the *Kánún* does not confirm this, for there is nothing special about India in the work.

The two chapters of his work, edited by M. Reinaud, relate to the eras and geography of India. Like the Chinese travels of Fa-hian and Hwen Tsang, they establish another fixed epoch to which we can refer for the determination of several points relating to the chronology of this country. We learn from them that the *Harivansa Purána*, which the most accomplished orientalist have hitherto ascribed to a period not anterior to the eleventh century, was already quoted in Bírúní's time as a standard authority, and that the epoch of the composition of the five *Siddhántas* no longer admits of question, and thus the theories of Anquetil du Perron and Bentley are demolished for ever.²

The extract from the *Tárikhu-l Hind* given below is of great historical interest. The succession of the last princes of Kábul

same as in the MS. of the E. I. Library. It thus appears very questionable whether the sage Patanjali is really the author referred to, but at any rate it is certain that no Sanskrit work bearing his name has yet been discovered which at all corresponds to the book used by Abú Rihán. If a guess may be ventured on, the final syllable *kal* is possibly the Sanskrit *kála*, "time."]

¹ M. Reinaud (p. 97) says of this work that "unfortunately it has not come down to us." It appears to have escaped him that nearly the entire first volume exists in the Bodleian Library, collated with the autograph of the author, and dated as far back as A.D. 1083. The contents of that volume are given in Drs. Nicoll's and Pusey's Catalogue. In the notes to that article the learned Doctors have surely taken very unnecessary trouble to write elaborate remarks upon *Arín* أرین, which can be no other place than Ujain, in Malwa, which by Biláduri (Vol. I. p. 126), and the early Arabic authors was written *أزین* as being more in conformity with Ptolemy, who calls it by the name of *ᾠζην*. [There is a copy of the *Kánúnu-l Mas'údí* among Sir H. Elliot's MSS.]

² Compare Reinaud's *Fragments, Mém. sur l'Inde*, p. 29-239, and *Abou-l Fedá*, I. xc. v.; Sprenger's *Mas'údí*, p. 154; Casiri, *Biblioth. Arabico-Hispana*, Tom. i. p. 322; D'Herbelot, *Bibl. Or.* Tom. i. pp. 46, 407, 496, and Tom. iv. pp. 697, 722. Greg. Abulfaragii *Hist. Dynast.* p. 229; Wüstenfeld, *Abulfedæ Tab. Geogr.* p. 77; *Biographie Univ.* s. v. De Rossi, *Dizionario Storico degli Autori Arabi*, s. v. Nicoll and Pusey, *Bodl. Cod. MSS. Or. Cat. Arab.* pp. 263, 360-363, 552; Flügel, *De Interpretibus*, No. 76. Wüstenfeld, *Arabische Aerzte*, No. 129; *As. Res.* vi. 537, ix. 195; *Rampoldi*, v. 510, vi. 535; *Gemälde-saal*, iv. 160; *Mod. Univ. Hist.* II. 457.

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given there, though not in accordance with the statements of Mírkhond and other Persian historians, yet, being dependent on the contemporary testimony of Bírúní, is of course more trustworthy than that of subsequent compilers, and is moreover confirmed by the *Jámi'u-t Tawárikh*. With respect to this table of succession, the ingenuity of the French editor induced him to surmise that it probably represented a series of Bráhmañ princes who succeeded in subverting a Buddhist dynasty of Turks, and to whom should be attributed certain coins of a peculiar type which numismatists had previously some difficulty in assigning to their true masters. M. A. Longpérier has confirmed this opinion by certain arguments, which have been printed as an appendix to M. Reinaud's work, and he has been ably followed by Mr. E. Thomas, B.C.S., who has published a paper in the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,"¹ respecting the proper attribution of this series. The result is that we are able to trace Bráhmañ kings of Kábul to the beginning of the tenth century, about A.D. 920, and thus clear up the mist which enveloped a whole century of the Indian annals previous to Mahmúd's invasion.²

In the same paper Mr. Thomas observes that the word Hamíra, so long supposed to be a proper name, and so eagerly sought for among the Hindú kings of India, proves to be an abbreviation of the full title of the Khalif of Baghdád,—*Amíru-l Múmínín*,—continued by the Muhammadans in this curtailed form from the Arabic reverses of their own Ghazní money, when they adopted the style of coin found current in the countries they had subdued. "The abbreviation of the full titles of the Khalif into Śrí Hamíra will be seen," says Mr. Thomas, "to be necessary, as the space occupied by the device did not admit of the introduction of many more Hindi letters of the size it was the custom to employ." But this supposed abbreviation is disproved by examining the gold coins of Muhammad Ghorí, on one of

¹ Vol. ix. p. 194; [see also his *Prinsep*, I. 331.]

² See note in Appendix on "The Hindu Kings of Kábul."

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which, in the possession of General Cunningham, Śrī Hamír is ascribed as the title of the king, not of the Khalif. The legend on one side only (not on two sides) is *Śrī Hamír Muhammad Sámi*. On the copper coins Śrī Hamír is on the reverse, but the purport of the expression is fully shown by the position it occupies on the gold coins. Amír is used by Baihakí as equivalent to Sultán, and that is no doubt the use of it in all these places. The legend of Śrī Samant Deo on many of this series of coins, upon which so much stress is laid, as indicative of Samant's power as one of the chief founders of the dynasty, does not seem to have reference to that prince, but to be an honorary title assumed by the reigning prince, meaning the "fortunate warrior;" otherwise it certainly would not have been stamped on the coins of Prithí Ráj, who lived 250 years later, and was not, like Samant, a Bráhmaṇ, but a Chauháṇ Rájput, and proud of his lineage.¹

EXTRACT.²

Kábul was formerly governed by princes of the Turkish race. It is said that they were originally from Tibet. The first of them, who was named Barhtigín, dwelt, when he arrived at Kábul, in a cave, in which no one could enter except by crawling on all fours. The cave contained a spring, and he provided himself therein with food for some days. This cave is now well known by the name of Bakar, and is entered by those persons who wish to obtain the blessing which a visit to it is supposed to confer, and bring out some of the water, not without much difficulty. Groups of peasants used to labour near the entrance of the cave. Such a thing (as remaining in the cave without food)

¹ [See Mr. Thomas' reply to this, *Prinsep* I. 331, and "Jour. R. A. S." xvii. 170; extracts from which will be found in the Appendix to this volume.

² [Sir H. Elliot himself prepared this Extract for the press from M. Reinaud's French version, comparing that as he went on with the Arabic text. The Editor has made no alteration in the translation, except the substitution of "Barhtigín" for "Barkatzúr," as the name appeared in the first edition. In Sir H. Elliot's draft translation the word is written "Barhatgín," but the copyist or printer read "Barkatzúr," as an ignorant person might well do.]

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could not be practised without the connivance of some one. The people who were in league with Barhtigín engaged the peasants to labour without ceasing, relieving each other night and day, by which it happened that the place was constantly surrounded. After some days, Barhtigín came all of a sudden out of the cave,¹ and the men who were near the entrance saw him appear as one just born, clothed as a Turk, with a tunic, cap, boots, and armed from head to foot. He was looked upon as a wondrous person, and destined for empire. So he rendered himself master of the kingdom of Kábul, which continued in his family for sixty generations.

The Indians attach little importance to the sequence of events, and neglect to record the dates of the reigns of their kings. When they are embarrassed, they are silent. I will here mention what I have heard some people of the country say. It is true, according to what I have heard, that the succession of these reigns was written on a piece of silk, which was found in the fortress of Nagarkot. I vehemently desired to read this writing, but different circumstances prevented me.

Among the number of these kings was Kanak,² who founded the Vihár at Pesháwar, which bears his name. It is said that the Rái of Kanauj offered to this prince, among other presents, a piece of cloth of excellent texture, and of a new kind, of which Kanak wished to make a dress. But the tailor refused to make up the garment, saying, "I see the figure of a human foot, and notwithstanding all my endeavours, still the foot will come be-

¹ He seems to have imposed upon the credulous people by the same means which are even now practised in the west of India. Lieut. Boileau in his "*Personal Narrative of a Tour in Rajwarra*," and Capt. Osborne in his "*Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*," gives an account of a man who allowed himself to be interred for a month. The former is circumstantial in his account, and seems to yield faith to the statement of his narrators. It is not improbable that the ancients alluded to this practice when they spoke of Indians who lived without food, and in caves. Aulus Gellius speaks of them as "gentem, apud extrema Indiæ nullo cibatu vescentem." *Noct. Att.* ix. 4. See also Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* iii. 45; Ctesia, *Indic. Excerpt.* xxiii.; Grote's *Greece*, III. 113.

² [See Reinaud, *Mém. sur l'Inde*, p. 73; Thomas' *Prinsep*, Index, Kanishka; see Cunningham, "Jour. Ben. As. Soc. Vol. xxiii.]