

## Historical Geography and Cultural History of the Region Al-Shash in the Work “Mu’jam Al-Shuyukh” by Abu Sa’ad Al-Sam’ani

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### Abstract

This article is dedicated to research of Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani (12<sup>th</sup> c. AD)’s “al-Muntakhab min “Mu’jam al-Shuyukh” (“Selection from “the Collection of Scholars”), in particular, its parts on the historical geography and cultural history of al-Shash region. The book contains valuable information about cities and towns as well as about medieval intellectuals, traditionalists, historians, writers and poets lived in the region of al-Shash during the period of 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

**Keywords:** “Al-Muntakhab min “Mu’jam al-Shuyukh”, Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani, Marw, al-Shash, Ilak, Binkat, Bariskat, Ghannadj, Kharashkat, at-Tarsus, Tunkat, al-Ruzbar, faqihs (judges), muhaddiths (narrators), mufasssirs (interpreters), mukri’s (reciters).

### Introduction

In the middle ages Central Asia was considered as one of the most important cultural centers of the Muslim world and produced a number of highly qualified scientists and thinkers on various spheres of science. Abu Sa’ad ‘Abd al Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam’ani is also included here. Al-Sam’ani was born and grew up in the largest trade and craft center of East, Marw, an important trade route between Europe and China. Marw was the capital of the Eastern Saljuq empire in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and under the reign of sultan Sanjar. During the rule of the Saljuq dynasty, a sharp rise was observed in cultural life of Khurasan. 10 famous libraries at that time were situated in Marw, two of them was owned by the family of al-Sam’ani. In this libraries scholars throughout the Muslim world involved in Islamic sciences.

The Seljuk period was marked by a significant rise of trade relations, industry and urban development, science and culture. State policy paid special attention to the *madrasah* building. According to variety of sources, we have information about several of that *madrasahs* were situated in Marw<sup>1</sup>.

Abu Sa’ad ‘Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam’ani (506 – 562/1113 – 1167) was a member of the oldest Marvel dynasty who was engaged in Islamic sciences for several

decades, and was famous in the whole Muslim world. The family of al-Sam’ani had its historical-traditional school, taught scholars of that period who came to Marw from different regions of Khurasan and Ma wara’ an-nahr. We can come across the information about Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani in a lot of historical-biographical dictionaries and sources<sup>2</sup>. For instance, information about him can be found in the works of such authors as Ibn Khallikan, al-Zakhabī, al-Subki, Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Safadi and Haji Khalifa.

Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani was educated on the basis of the customs of his time and travelled much according to the family tradition. He travelled for long years in Khurasan, Ma wara’ an-nahr, Iraq, Hijaz, Syria and Tabaristan and lived in Baghdad 8 years<sup>3</sup>. Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani was familiar with a lot of leading scholars and traditionalists of his time and they were in contact with each other.

In 538/1143-44 Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani returned to Marw and taught students at his *madrasah* named “al-‘Amidiya”. During 1153 – 1160 he travelled around the cities of Ma wara’ an-nahr. Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani

<sup>1</sup> Kamaliddinov Sh.S. “Kitab al-ansab” Abu Sa’da Abd al-Karima ibn Muxammada as-Sam’ani kak istochnik po istorii i istorii kulturi Sredney Azii. Tashkent: Fan, 1993. s. 9. (Kamaliddin Sh.S. “Kitab al-ansab” by Abu Sa’ad ‘Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam’ani as a source on the history and stories of Culture of the Central Asia. Tashkent: Fan 1993. – p. 9.)

<sup>2</sup> المنتخب من معجم شيوخ الإمام الحافظ أبي سعد عبد الكريم بن محمد بن منصور السمعاني. (Abu Sa’ad ‘Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam’ani. Selection from the Collection of Scholars. Riyadh: 1996. - p. 69.)

<sup>3</sup> أبو نصر علي بن هبة الله بن جعفر بن ماکولا. الإكمال في رفع الإرتياب عن المؤلف. (Abu Nasr Ali ibn Hibatullah bin Jaafar bin Makola. Completion in raising suspicion for recombinant and in different names and nicknames and lineages. Beirut, Lebanon: 1990. – p. 244.)

mentioned more than 150 of his teachers in different parts of Central Asia.

Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani was busy with the analysis of the materials collected during his trips and writing of his works as well as educating in his *madrasah*. We are aware of his more than 50 works in the field of al-Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), hadith collecting, philology, Arabic grammar and lexicology, history and geography. Unfortunately, a large part of Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani's works didn't preserved up to our time, and we know them only through the extractions from them preserved in the works of other medieval authors<sup>4</sup>.

As an example, we can point out the works by Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani that we have nowadays, are "Kitab al-Ansab" being kept in 6 copies in various funds of the world, a single manuscript of "al-Takhbir fi-l-Mu'jam al-Kabir" stored in the library of Damascus, "Adab al-impla' wa-l-istimla'" preserved in 2 copies and published in Leiden in 1952, "Fada'il al-Sham", "Adab al-Qadi", "Al-lsfar 'an hukm al-asfar" and "Zail Tarikh Baghdad"<sup>5</sup>.

In this article I researched the data of the work "Al-Muntakhab min *Mu'jam al-Shuyukh*" (المنتخب من معجم الشيوخ) ("Selection from "the Collection of Scholars") by Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani on the historical geography of Tashkent oasis, and cultural history – historians, philosophers, thinkers and hadith transmitters lived in this area in 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

The work "Al-Muntakhab min *Mu'jam al-Shuyukh*" in which gathered precious information about more than thousand people famous with their knowledge on al-Qur'an, Fiqh and Hadith, copied by scribes again and again and come down to us without losing its value. There is unique copy of the work stored in the Library of Sultan Ahmet III in Istanbul under No. 2953. This copy is one of the most valuable manuscripts, it was copied in 647/1249-50 by *katib* 'Ibad Allah Abu Bakr ibn Abd al-Kafi ibn 'Uthman al-Harithi in Naskh. It consists of 299 pages, each page has 21 lines<sup>6</sup>.

Information in this article is based on the text of "Al-Muntakhab min *Mu'jam al-Shuyukh*" published in 4 volumes in 1996 in al-Riyadh by a group of Arab scholars

led by famous archivist and scholar Muwaffaq ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Qadir.

The work gives reference about 1446 scholars of the medieval Islamic world, more than 600 of them were from Central Asia, about 40 – from the region of al-Shash.

According to al-Sam'ani, region of al-Shash (الشاش) located behind the Saykhun river on the border of the Turks, it was one of the largest regions in the East. In the work he mentioned 14 place-names related to al-Shash. It should be noted, that al-Sam'ani didn't divide them into cities of Ilak and al-Shash, he stated that the towns and villages of Ilak also belonged to al-Shash region.

Al-Sam'ani mentioned Binkat (بنكت) as a capital of the province of al-Shash in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. According to Yaqut and al-Istakhri, the tower was located in the inner city, Rabad was surrounded by a *farsakh* long wall<sup>7</sup>. According to Ibn Hawqal, there was Rabad out of *madina* (the city of Binkat), and the Rabad had wall around it. There were three gates at the wall of *madina*. In the Rabad, there were plenty of gardens, more than necessary ditches and separate buildings<sup>8</sup>.

In the region of al-Shah al-Sam'ani mentioned 6 cities and a village besides the capital:

Boriskat (بارسكت) – one of the cities of al-Shash;

Ghannoj (غانج) – the edge city of al-Shash, this information is stressed by geographers of 10<sup>th</sup> century, especially by Yaqut. According to Ibn Hawqal, the city situated between Turk and Ilak rivers, on the west side of Ilak road;

Nubakht (نوبخت) or Najokat (نجاكت) – the city bordered with Ferghana<sup>9</sup>. Ibn Hawqal noted the city as Najokat (نجاكت);

Kharashkat (خرشكت) – one of the cities of al-Shash. According to the size, it was the second of the region. It located between Sogd and al-Shash on the way of the *caravan*, one of the largest shopping centers. According to Ibn Hawqal Kharashkat located a *farsakh* long from Banokat which was at the river al-Shash and 9 *farsakh* long from Binkat<sup>10</sup>;

<sup>4</sup> Krachkovskiy I.Yu. Arabskaya geograficheskaya literatura. Izbrannye sochineniya v 6 tt. Tom 4. M. – L.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1957. s. 315. (Krachkovsky I.Y. Arabic geographical literature Selected works in 6 vols Volume 4. M. - L.: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1957. - p 315...)

<sup>5</sup> Kamaliddinov Sh.S. "Kitab al-ansab" Abu Sa'da Abd al-Karima ibn Muxammada as-Sam'ani kak istochnik po istorii i istorii kulturi Sredney Azii. Tashkent: Fan, 1993. s. 12-14. (Kamaliddin Sh.S. "Kitab al-ansab" by Abu Sa'ad 'Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam'ani as a source on the history and stories of Culture of the Central Asia. Tashkent: Fan 1993. – p. 12-14.)

<sup>6</sup> المنتخب من معجم شيوخ الامام الحافظ ابي سعد عبد الكريم بن محمد بن منصور السمعاني. ص. 74. الرياض. 1417هـ-1996م. (Abu Sa'ad 'Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam'ani. Selection from the Collection of Scholars. Riyadh: 1996. - p. 74.)

<sup>7</sup> Abu Ishak al-Farisi al-Istakhri. Viae regnorum descriptio ditiois moslemicae / Ed. M.J. de Goeje. Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum (BGA), pars 1. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1967. p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Buryakov Yu.F. Istoricheskaya topografiya drevnix gorodov Tashkentskogo oazisa (Istoriko-arxeologicheskii ocherk Chacha i Ilaka). Tashkent: Fan, 1975. s. 68. (Buriakov Y.F. Historical topography of ancient cities of Tashkent oasis (Historical and Archaeological Sketch of Chach and Ilaq). Tashkent: Fan, 1975. – p. 68.)

<sup>9</sup> المنتخب من معجم شيوخ الامام الحافظ ابي سعد عبد الكريم بن محمد بن منصور السمعاني. ص. 841. الرياض. 1417هـ-1996م. (Abu Sa'ad 'Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam'ani. Selection from the Collection of Scholars. Riyadh: 1996. – p. 841.)

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Haukal, Abu-I-Kasim an-Nasibi, Opus geographicum / Ed. M.J. de Goeje. BGA, pars 2. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1967. p. 510, 522.

Shakhakh (شخاخ) – one of the villages belonging to the province of al-Shash. Yaqut also stated this information;

Koson (كاسان) – the city beyond the region of al-Shash. There was a large castle.

Ilak (إلاق), according to al-Sam'ani, it was a city or district 10 *farsakhs* long from the region of al-Shash. This city was stated that it was on the border with Ferghana. This city was very beautiful and clean. The length of the cultivated lands in the oasis was 2 *farsakhs*. There were gold and silver mines in mountains. Towns and villages were rich with water. Many scholars and imams emerged from here. It is important to know Tunkat (تونكت) as a capital of the city. In other places al-Sam'ani described Tunkat as one of the villages of al-Shash. According to Ibn Hawqal, the distance between Binkat and Tunkat was 8 *farsakh*. This city was smaller than the half of Binkat and there was a rabat near the river Ilak around it. Beruni noted the name of city as Tun Kat<sup>11</sup>.

Al-Sam'ani recorded 7 names of places of Ilak. 5 of them are cities, one district and village:

Biskat (بسكت) – one of the famous cities of al-Shash. According to Istakhri, Biskat belonged to Ilak. Ibn Hawqal stated Biskat was between Barak and Ilak rivers, and as one of cities located on the west-side of Ilak road. Al-Mukaddasi noted this city as Sikat<sup>12</sup>;

Zakhkat (ذخكت) – located in the territory of Ruzbor city<sup>13</sup>. It located behind the river Sayhun and al-Shash. Al-Istakhri considered that it was a city of Ilak and called it as Dakhkas (دخكت). Al-Mukaddasi mentioned this city as Adakhkas. The name of this city is Dahkat in the work by Ibn Hawqal. The city located between the rivers al-Shash and Ilak, and between Khash and Tukkat;

Ar-Ruzbor (الروذبار) – situated in the upper part of al-Shash, a district behind the river Sayhun. According to Yaqut, there was so called village.

Tuzidj (توذيچ) – a village in ar-Ruzbor district. It located behind the river Sayhun;

Khumrak (خمرک) – one of the cities of al-Shash. Yaqut also noted that the city belonged to al-Shash. According to al-Istakhri, Khumrak was the city of Ilak. According to Ibn

Hawqal, Khumrak was also situated between the rivers Barak and Ilak, on the west-side of Ilak road<sup>14</sup>;

Shovkat (شاوكت) – one of the cities of al-Shash. Yaqut and al-Mukaddasi called the city as Shavakas (شوكت), while al-Istakhri recorded it as Sakakas (سكاكث).

As we stated before, Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani in his work "*Al-Muntakhab min Mu'jam al-shuyukh*" gave information about 40 scientists of the ancient cities and villages of al-Shash region. There is not only information about scientists and their research activities, but valuable opinions and comments are given about the location of the village or city they lived in, the culture and history of the area. Here we will speak about some of the scientists: A poet and writer Abu Said Haysam bin Kulayb al-Shashi, al-Binkati; great *faqih* (Islamic jurist) Abu Rabi Tahir bin Abdullah al-Ilaki; *faqih* Abu Abdullah Mohammed bin Dawud al-Ilaki; Maulana Abu Salama Nasr bin Mohammed al-Shashi, al-Ilaki, as-Sufi; *maulana* Abu Ahmed al-Shashi, al-Boriskati; a master of Arabic and Nahw, writer Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Ahmed al-Borobi; *maulana* and merchant traveler Abu Lais Nasr bin Hasan at-Tunkati; *maulana* Abu Saeed Sa'ad bin Abdulrahman al-Kharashkati; a great *imam* Abu Nasr Ahmad bin Othman az-Zakhkati; a master of the hadith Abu Mohammed Ja'far bin Shuaib al-Shashi; a leader of world's *imams* on *tafseer*, hadith and fiqh Abu Bakr Mohammed bin Ali al-Kaffol al-Shashi; a vigorous *faqih* Abu Musa Harun bin Humaid al-Shashi; *maulana* Abu Ali Hasan bin Sahib al-Shashi; imam-preacher Abul-Qasim Abdulvahid bin Abdulrahman al-Shashi; linguist Abu Ibrahim Ishaq bin Ibrahim al-Farabi; *maulana* Abu Hassan Ali bin Abdullah at-Tarsusi; *kadi* Abu Nasr Ahmed bin Sulaiman al-Kasaani and others.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that "*Al-Muntakhab min Mu'jam al-shuyukh*" by Abu Sa'ad al-Sam'ani provides valuable information about Central Asia, including al-Shash, its history, culture, historical geography, the location of the cities and Toponymy until the Mongol invasion. It should be noted that the author mentioned plenty of the place names which did not exist in other works. Al-Sam'ani gave specific information about historical geography of towns and villages of ancient al-Shash region. This shows that the author was not only aware of the towns of al-Shash but also had information about the surrounding villages.

As noted above, "*Al-Muntakhab min Mu'jam al-shuyukh*" is actually a biographical novel of the historical personalities and highlights the life of scientists and leaders. Focusing on the activities of scientists who engaged in Islamic religious knowledge, the author covered valuable data about the Central Asian historians, writers and scientists.

<sup>11</sup> Buryakov Yu.F. Istoricheskaya topografiya drevnix gorodov Tashkentskogo oazisa (Istoriko-arxeologicheskiy ocherk Chacha i Ilaka). Tashkent: Fan, 1975. s. 110-112. (Buriakov Y.F. Historical topography of ancient cities of Tashkent oasis (Historical and Archaeological Sketch of Chach and Ilaq). Tashkent: Fan, 1975. – p. 110-112.)

<sup>12</sup> al-Moqaddasi. Descriptio imperii Moslemici / Ed. M.J. de Goeje. BGA, pars 3. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1967. p. 265.

<sup>13</sup> المنتخب من معجم شيوخ الامام الحافظ ابي سعد عبد الكريم بن محمد بن منصور السمعاني. 1065. الرياض. 1417هـ-1996م. (Abu Sa'ad 'Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Sam'ani. Selection from the Collection of Scholars. Riyadh: 1996. – p. 1065.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Haukal, Abu-I-Kasim an-Nasibi, Opus geographicum / Ed. M.J. de Goeje. BGA, pars 2. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1967. p. 523.

Thereby, “*Al-Muntakhab min Mu’jam al-shuyukh*” by Abu Sa’ad al-Sam’ani is a valuable resource about the history of culture, historical geography and history of al-Shash region. Combining the unique data, this work served as a historical source for the works of a lot of authors in the next phases of the Middle ages. Noted above, the chapters of this work about the history of Ma wara’ an-nahr, especially, al-Shash region have not been studied by these days. This is the importance of the work in studying the history of the Central Asia. Taking into account the peculiarities of the written names and their location, this work can serve as an important source on historical geography of the region of al-Shash, because some of the names in this work were not recorded in other written sources.

“*Al-Muntakhab min Mu’jam al-shuyukh*” is a reflection which gives evidence of thousands of scholars who was a cornerstone for the world of science in the Islamic world, and it can be used by professionals, dealing with the knowledge of hadith, fiqh, Islamic studies, history, geography, architecture, archeology, ethnography and linguistics, along with a wide range of readers.

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