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## Tamim ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghurs

Вторник, февраля 2, 2016. Научное направление: [Исторические науки](#)

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**Abstract:** One of the main and most tempting problems for a student of Arab geographers is the analysis of their excursions into the little-explored regions on the periphery of the Islamic world, such as Eastern Europe, Central Asia, China, and India. It is a well-known fact that these geographers, intent on Space, are often negligent of Time. On a XVI century, Turkish map I have found a phantom of America stretched into the shape of a newborn moon, whereas the wastes of Siberia were still marked as the haunts of the traditional Gog and Magog. Thus, too, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the classical period of Arab geography, the scholars felt no compunction in plagiarizing one another, or borrowing from some ancient source data bearing no relation to the contemporary conditions.

**Keywords:** Tamim ibn Bahr, Journey, Uyghurs, Turks, Barskoon, Kharakhorin.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the tenth century King Daltum of "common origin" still figured among the rulers of India, although this name referred to Dharmapala, the ruler of Bengal about a.d. 800 .

Much spade-work in this field has been done by de Gooje, Tomaschek, V. Barthold, and J. Marquart. A lucky discovery of a more recent date enables us to reassess the report of another early Muslim traveller, Tamim b. Bahr al-Muttawwi'.

It is a well known fact that I. Faqih owed much to I. Khurdadbeh's work,<sup>1</sup> and it is likely that the original I. Khurdadbeh did much more honour to Tamim than might be suggested by his text published in BGA, vi, 1889, in which only isolated sentences of Tamim are quoted, without acknowledgment. Yaqut (i, 841 ; iv, 823) quotes Tamim through I. Faqih, but he omits the second part of the report.

Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani was a 8th-century Persian historian and geographer, famous for his Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan («Concise Book of Lands»).

At the end of the XIX century in the Mosque library of the Imam Ali ar-Rida in Mashhad was found a manuscript of 212 large-format pages. In 1939 S.L. Wolin published a small piece of information of Mashhad manuscript about the Turks entitled «The story of the Guzji and rain-stones».

Since we know that Tamim b. Bahr went to tuguzguzs Khakan, the answer to the question of when the journey took place and what was the end point of the route has been discussed for a long time, may clarify who were called the tuguzguz in the Arab sources.

About tuguzguz Hakan Tamim gives the following information:

1. Hakan was son in law of the Chinese emperor.
2. Chinese emperor paid him tribute in 500 thousand pieces of silk,
3. The capital of tuguzguz had a golden tent.
4. Tuguzguz were Manichaean.
5. Right from the capital tuguzguz lived Turks, not mixed with other people, and ahead located China.

He said: The countries of Turks are tuguzguz, their country is the largest between the turkic, bordered with china and tibet, karluk, kimaki, guzzes, djikia, pechenegs, baskhish, azkshik, kipchaks and kyrgyz.

### II. TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT BY V.MINORSKY

1. Tamim b. Bahr al-Muttawwi' reports that their (i.e. the Turks') country is very cold and one can travel in it (only) during six months of the year. He says that he journeyed to the country of the Tughuzghuzian khaqan on relay horses (band) which the khaqan sent him and that he was travelling three stages (sikap) in a day-and-a-night, travelling as hard and as fast as he could. He journeyed twenty days in steppes (barari) where there were springs and grass (kala) but no villages or towns: only the men of the relay service (<ashab al-sikap) living in tents. And he was carrying with him twenty days' provisions. This because he knew the affairs of that country (madina),<sup>1</sup> and that the distance was twenty days along the steppes with (only) wells and grass. And then, after that, he travelled twenty days among villages lying closely together and cultivated tracts ('imarat). The people, all of them, or most of them, were Turks, and among them were fire-worshippers professing the Magian religion, and Zindiqs. After all these days he arrived at the king's town.

2. He reports that this is a great town, rich in agriculture and surrounded by rustaq full of cultivation and villages lying close together. The town has twelve iron gates of huge size. The town is populous and tlickly crowded and has markets and various trades (tijarat). Among its population, the Zindiq religion prevails.

3. He mentioned that he estimated how far it was (thence) to the country al-§ in and .Iie understood it was a distance of 300 farsakhs, and he added: "I think it is (even) more than that."

4. He reports: "to the right (south) of the town<sup>1</sup> of the king of the Toghuzghuz are the (lands) of the Turks with whom no one else mixes; to its left, the lands of the Kimak; and straight ahead, the country al-Sin."

5. He says that from (a distance of) five farsakhs before he arrived in the town (of the khaqan) he caught sight of a tent belonging to the king, (made) of gold. (It stands) on the flat top (sath) of his castle and can hold (tasa') 100 men.

6. He records that the khaqan, king of the Toghuzghuz, is related by marriage (mukhain) to the king of China (al-Sin), and the latter is sending him yearly 500,000 (pieces of) silk (firid < Pers. parand).

7. He also reports that between Upper Nushajan ('Barskhan) and al-Shash (Tashkent)—via Taraz—there are forty stages (marhala) for caravans, but he who journeys on horse-back ('ala dabba) and by himself, crosses that distance in a month.

8. He says that in Upper Nushajan there are four large towns and four small. He estimated the number of warriors in one town lying on the bank of a lake (which is) there and put them at about 20,000 fully armed horse. There is no one stronger than they among all the Turkish tribes. When they gather for war with the Kharlukh, they are a hundred and the Kharlukh a thousand, and thus they come out (yakhrujuna) in all their wars.

9. He reports that this lake is like a square-shaped pond and around it are high mountains, with all kinds of trees in them. He says: "and here are traces of an ancient town. I could not find among the Turks anyone knowing its story: who built it, who were its people and when it became ruined?" "On the site of it he inspected a river which crosses it. One cannot reach its (sic) bottom here: "and I saw in it various sea-creatures (haywdnd) which I had not seen before. And I also saw birds the like of which I had not seen in any of the countries." He says: "The people of al-Nushajan and others from neighbouring towns and villages circumbulate (the site) once a year in the spring and they do this as a kind of religious rite ('umran). He says: water enters (the lake) from the direction (ndhiya) of Tibet in 150 streams (nahr), large and small, and also from the direction of the Toghuzghuz and Kimak.

10. He says that its (?) length is a journey of forty days on camels, but a horseman can cover (the distance) in a month if he rides hard (idha jadda fd-sayr).

11. He says that he found the king of the Toghuzghuz when (he travelled) to him encamped in the neighbourhood of his town and he estimated his army, around his tents (saradiq)—to say nothing of the others (duna gliayrihim)— and it was some 12,000 strong. He says: and after (besides ?) these (there are) seventeen chieftains (qd'id), each having 13,000, and between each two chieftains there are offices (or military posts), consisting of tents. The chieftains jointly with those who are with them in the offices ("military posts ?) form a circle round the army ('askar). In this circle there is a gap (gaps ?) to the size of four gates (opening) towards the army. He says: and all the animals (horses) of the king and the army (reading: al-jaysh for al-jayyd) pasture (lar'd) between the tents of the king and the places occupied by the chieftains, and not one animal escapes outside the camp (al-'askar).

12. And we asked him about the road to the Kftnak (and he said): from Taraz (one travels) to two villages called K.wak.b which are flourishing and populous. Their distance from Taraz is seven farsakhs, and from this place (to the residence) of the king of the Kimak a hard rider carrying his provisions travels eighty days. These deserts, steppes, and plains are vast and abound in grass and wells, and in them are the pastures of the Kimaks. He says that he travelled that way and found the king and his army in tents, and in his neighbourhood were villages and cultivated tracts (Hmdrdl). The king travels from one place to another following the grass. His animals are numerous and with tiny hooves ("daq'at al-hawdfir). He reckoned those in the army and found they were some 20,000 horse.

13. Abul-Fadl al-Vasjirdi [sic] reports that twice in the days of (Harun) al-Rashid [786-809] the king of the Toghuzghuz [sic] led an army against the king of China (al-Sin).<sup>1</sup> But it is (also) said to have been in the days of al-Mahdi [775-785]. This (?) campaign took place between Surushana and nearer to (ild) Samarqand. The governor of Samarqand fought him on several occasions and some of the fighting was heavy. (God) granted victory to the ruler (sahib) of Samarqand over him and he defeated him and killed many of his companions. It is said that he had 600,000 (warriors), horse and foot, of people of China. The Muslims took an enormous booty and captured some people whose children are those who fabricate in Samarqand good paper and various kinds of arms and implements. These are produced only in Samarqand of all the towns of Khorasan [sic].

14. And of the wonders of the country of the Turks are some pebbles they have, with which they bring down rain, snow, cold, etc., as they wish. The story of these pebbles in their possession is well known and widely spread and no Turk denies it. And these (pebbles) are especially in the possession of the king of the Toghuzghuz 2 and no other of their kings possesses them.

15. Abu 'Abdillah al-Husayn b. Ustadhuya told me from Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. al-Hasan, from Hisham b. Lohrasp al-Sa'ib (?) al-Kalbi, from Ibn 'Abbas [sic], as follows: Abraham, who he in peace, did not marry except Sarah, until she died (Gen. 20-1), and then he married a woman from original Arabs called Qantura (Gen. 25, 1: Keturah) bint Maqtur. And they started travelling until they settled in a place in Khorasan where they multiplied and under this name (?) they subjugated all those who resisted them. Their story reached the Khazar who were descended from the son of Japhet, son of Noah. They betook themselves to them and made a pact with them and intermarried with them. Some of them stayed with them and the remainder returned to their country.

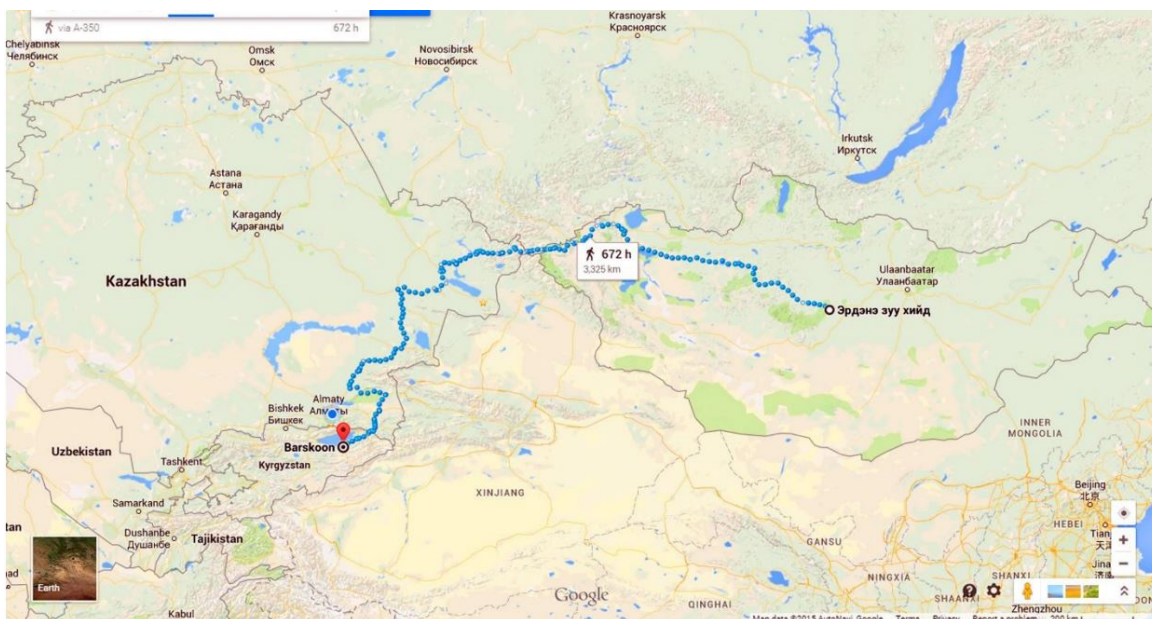
### III. DISTANCES

In these source we can see the measure as farsah, Sikak. The parasang is a historical Iranian unit of itinerant distance comparable to the European league. In 1920, Kenneth Mason of the Royal Geographical Society adduced that the parasang used in Xenophon's Babylonian travel accounts was equal to only 2.4 miles (3.9 km). More recently, «[empirical tests] reckoning ten stades to the English mile (1.609 km), and three miles to the parasang (4.827 km) have given excellent results in practice. Whatever the basis of calculation, theoretical values for the stade and the parasang must be sought which do not greatly exceed [those] estimates.

According to the source he spent six farsahs a day to get the destination. In the following map we can track his route using the google map. But we have to take in consideration that google gives the shortest route for modern geography with borders between countries. If we keep in mind that traveler headed to the North up to the Kimeks country and took a rest for a winter then moved down to the East, then we can get a clear route of his journey. Length of the journey is between 672 to 804 hours according to google 24 hours a day. Here we have to consider that a day he probably spent 12 hours on way and slept for 8 hours and the other 4 hours he spent to get food and take a nap. Then he should spent around 28 to 33.5 days without sleeping.

№ 1 Map / № 2 Map





**IV. CONCLUSION**

And to conclude : the statement that "straight ahead" of the Toghuzghuz capital lay the town (balad) of China, at a distance of 300 farsakhs (circa 18000 km.), "or more", suggests that Tamim did not visit China and that here he spoke from hearsay. Strictly speaking, this distance might apply to both Uyghur capitals. In fact Gardizi describes a road from Chlnanjath (Khocho, Turfan) to the T'ang capital, Khumdan, i.e. Ch'ang-an-fu, the distance being sixty-six days, or circa 2,000 km. On the other hand, the distance between the Orkhon capital and Ch'ang-an-fu is about 1,650-1,700 km., as the crow flies, and fits into Tamim's scheme.

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2. Masalih, but, more likely, this is but a vulgar spelling for Inasulih "military posts": on such confusion see de Gooje, BOA., iv, 282.
3. Islamic Desk Reference — Page 147 by E. J. Donzel.
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