

# Abu Rayhan Biruni and His “India”

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**Annotation.** This article focuses on the history, unique culture and traditions of the Indian people, described in the works of Abu Rayhan Biruni "Athar al-Baqiyah", "Tafhim" and "India", which are primary sources on the history of India. It analyzes and classifies information collected from the scientific literature on the works of Abu Rayhan Biruni.

**Key words and expressions:** Abu Rayhan Biruni, Yakut al-Hamavi, scientific heritage, translations, study, described, indologist, “Chronology”, “India”, “Astronomy”, “Fihrist”, scholar - encyclopaedist, Khwarezm, Kyat.

Since ancient times, the peoples of Central Asia and the Middle East have always lived in close proximity; this may be the reason for their similarity in culture and religion. To date, the works of Abu Rayhan Biruni on the history, ethnography, chronology, toponymy, calendars, holidays and religious events of the above-mentioned peoples occupy one of the main places in research works.

The famous encyclopaedist scientist Abu Rayhan Biruni was born in Central Asia, and more specifically Khwarezm\*<sup>1</sup>. Biruni, conducted research work in various scientific aspects, and mentioned the names of his 113 works in his "Fihrist" (1035-1036). 70 of them belong to astronomy, 20 - mathematics, 12 - geography and geodesy, 3 - mineralogy and 4 - cartography. After that, he still lived 13 years and wrote another 50 works [B. Turaev, 2011, 21-22.]. The total number of these works is 163. But, according to the Pakistani scientist N. A. Baluch, the number of Biruni's works was more than 180 [N. A. Baloch, 1973, 68.]. Unfortunately, only 33 of these works have survived to our time [O'rta asrlar

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<sup>1</sup> Region on the Amu Darya river delta in western Central Asia.

Sharqining mashhur olim va mutafakkirlari, 2014, 33.]. As an encyclopaedist scholar, Biruni worked equally fruitfully in the field of astronomy, geography, mineralogy, ethnography, poetry, etc. He is one of those great scientists who did not divide people by nationality, religion and social origin [N. Komilov, 1999, 24.].

The full name of the scientist is Abu Rayhan Muhammad bin Ahmad Biruni (973-1048). According to many Muslim sources of the 10th – 13th centuries (Yakut al-Hamavi etc.) he was born in Khwarezm, in his capital city Kath of the Khwarezmshah era - Afreghids. Before starting to write one of his most famous works, which have come down to our days, - “Kitab tahrir ma l-l-Hind min macula makbula fi-l'akl ay marzula” (“The book containing an explanation of the teachings belonging to the Indians, acceptable by reason or rejected by “India”) [Abu Rayhan Biruni, 1963,7.], Biruni thoroughly and thoroughly studied the science, culture and lifestyle of the Indian people.

In the early and middle ages, India was not a distant country beyond the seas for the countries of Central Asia, but was a neighboring state for these countries. In the large cities of Central Asia there have always been large makhallas (neighbourhoods) where Indian merchants lived. As Ptolemy (II century) and Arrian (II century) wrote, even in the BC era in India, in the Sinda River basin, there were large territories where Central Asian Sakas and Sogdians lived. This was due to the domestic and foreign policy of the Kushan state that existed in the I-IV centuries. Thus, for these historical reasons, Biruni was engaged in the study of Indian peoples.

The first data related to Indians are cited in such works as “Al-Asar al-Bakiyya min al-Qurun al-Khaliya” (“Monuments of past generations” or “Chronology”) [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 2014, 36.], “Kitab at-tafhim li'avail Sina'at at-tanjim” (“Science of the Stars” or “Astronomy”) [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1975, 7.] and “Al-Kanun al-Mas'udi” (“Canon Masud”) [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1973, 7.]. When studying the history of Indians Biruni, collected information about these

people before the trip to India, which are reflected in his previous “India” writings.

### 1. “Chronology”

Abu Rayhan Biruni in his work “Chronology” dedicated to the ruler (emir) Dzhurdzhan (Pre-Caspian lands) Shams al-Mo'ali Ghaboos ibn Wushmgir tells about history, chronology, ethnography, toponymy, calendars, holidays and holy days of the peoples living in Southern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and India from ancient times to the XI century. This work was written in the period from 1000 to 1003 [P. G. Bulgakov, 1972, 98]. Before writing the work, the scientist, besides Arabic and Persian, knew Hebrew, Syriac and Ancient Greek, and also knew Khwarezm, Sogdian, Turkic and other local languages. He studied Greek from the “room” of an egg who lived in Khwarezm, and Sanskrit language from Indian merchants, who also lived in Khwarezm. The significance of the historical works of scholars who lived before Biruni written in these languages is determined in this work. He gave the names of 69 authors from regions such as Central Asia, Iran, India, Arab countries, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome, and also gave comments on their works. Most of the sources used by Biruni have not reached our days, but only their mention in the “Chronology” increases its value.

Consequently, the first data related to the Indian peoples are given in this study, when Biruni was not yet in India, had not yet studied deeply Indian scientific traditions, but darker, this book tells about the calendars and moon sites of Indians living in Central Asia.

Information about the Indians described in this work is given in the following chapters:

**Chapter II.** Here Biruni writes that Indians used four kinds of time intervals [Abu Rayhan Biruni, 2014, 68.].

**Chapters III and V.** These chapters describe the methods of the Indian people to determine the day and night, the month from which the year begins and the names of the Indian months. All these data are given in comparison with those of other peoples [Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 1968, 103; Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 2006,

117; Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 1973.76; Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 1965, 269; International Seminar on Abu-Rayhan Al -Biruni, 2018.65.]. However, in these chapters he leaves open some questions and comments on it like this: “As for the months of other Indian peoples, Chinese, Tibetans, Turks, Khazars, Ethiopians, Zinjas, although we have established the names of some of them, we refrain from mentioning them until we can get to know them all, because according to the method we followed, it is not appropriate to add to the undoubted doubtful and to the known unknown” [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 2014, 141.]. And he gives his clarifications on these issues to his work “India”.

**Chapter VIII.** In this chapter, Biruni tells about the first Buddha, and the transmigration of souls, and immediately after that he begins to write about the Greeks, and Zeus. We observe this method in the work “India”.

**Chapter XIII.** Here he reads about “Zige” Sindhind, in which it was written about a big holiday similar to the Persian Mihridzhan. Holidays of Indian peoples are fully described in the work of “India” [Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 1965, 427].

**Chapter XXI.** In this chapter, we find information about the moon phases, stops, and much more concerning the Indians.

In some cases, when the information is very important, but doubtful, Biruni encourages the reader to be attentive to this data [A.J. Sharipov, 1973, 96-97].

## 2. "Astronomy"

The book “Astronomy” was written by Abu Rayhan Biruni at the end of 1029. This work is encyclopedic in nature and consists of eight chapters, five hundred thirty questions and answers. This work is dedicated to the Khwarezm student Rayhan, the daughter of al-Hassan. In "Astronomy" there is also information about the Indian peoples.

**In Chapter IV, “Geography,” in the section “Climates, Countries and Cities,”** in response to the question “What is the dome of the Earth?”, A high place is mentioned, called Lanka, Mount Meru, a meridian connecting Lanka and Meru,

which passes through the city of Ujjain in the kingdom of Malawa, the fortress of Ruhitak, the Tanishar plain, [Jamuna region], and the snowy mountains separating India from the land of the Turks [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1975, 113]. This is also stated in the “Canon of Mas‘ud” [Abu Rayhon Beruniy, 1973, 368]. Based on this information, we can conclude that India was separated from the Turkic peoples only mountains and they were considered the border between them.

Astronomy also lists the names of weeks and months, telling that Indians called the days of the month the names of their demons and angels [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1975, 129-131].



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### **3. "India"**

This work was written in 1030. After the events of 1017, that is, after the capture of Khwarezm, Sultan Mahmud Ghazni takes Beruni to Ghazna. In addition to Khwarezm, Sultan Mahmud made more than once military campaigns (17 times) to India, as a result of which he drove many Indian captives into ghazna. Biruni was forced to accompany Mahmud Ghazni in his Indian campaigns. A long stay in India allows the scientist to study its history, culture, science and traditions of the Indian people.

Enumeration of all the difficulties Biruni concludes with the following words: “The ways of coming to the studied topic turned out to be very difficult for me, in spite of my strong attachment to it, which I was completely alone in my time. I did not stint spending as much as possible all my strength and resources on finding them, searching for those who knew the places where they were hidden. Who else besides me, had what got into my inheritance? ... I thank Allah for giving me enough” [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1963, 7.].

Biruni expressed tolerance and he had a rationalistic approach to every issue, he used logical thinking. He was free from the limitations of national, religious, and racial prejudice. He wrote carefully about every nation with facts. The breadth of his outlook in each area, the explanation of his conclusions quickly attracted the attention of the reader. In each line Biruni was honest, fair, unbiased. That is why every work of a great thinker, including “India,” is a heritage monument for those interested in this area.

Biruni describes the history of India: “But then Islam came, the Persian state perished, and the Indians alienation increased even more as a result of the Muslims’ conquest in their country, when Muhammad ibn al-Qasim ibn al-Munabbih entered Sindh land and conquered the cities of Bahmanva and

Mulustkhan, called the first al-Mansur, and the second - Ma'murah, penetrated deep into India to the city of Kanauj, trampled on the land of al-Qandahar and on the way back - the borders of Kashmir, then fighting people with his old and faith, except for those who voluntarily agreed to apply [to the new religion]. All this has sown hatred in their hearts, although after Muhammad Ibn al-Qasim Ibn al-Munabbih, not a single Muslim conqueror went further than the redistribution of Kabul and the Al-Sind River until the days of the Turkic rule, when they seized Gaznas in the Samanid era and the power passed to Nasr al-Din Sebuktegin. The latter chose [his deed] a war [against the infidels], and hence his nickname. In order to weaken the limits of India, he built for his successors those roads along which Yamin ad-Daula Makhmud went hiking for more than thirty years, may Allah have mercy on both of them [i.e. Sebuktegin and Mahmud]! Using these roads, Mahmud destroyed the prosperity of the Indians and performed such miracles in their country, because of which they [as if] turned into scattered dust and spread rumor. As a result, their scattered remnants continue to be very alienated and shun Muslims; moreover, because of all this, their sciences ceased to exist in the conquered part of the country and retired to places where someone else's hand could not overtake them - to Kashmir, Benares and other similar places [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1963, 67.]. The work of Beruni is used as a source in the book "History of India" in the Middle Ages [N.K. Sinha, A.C. Banerjee, 1954, 84].

In the work "India" Biruni quoted excerpts from many Indian works, narratives, which he saw with his own eyes, which did not reach today. The scientist compared them with Greek works and commented.

Biruni, in order to study India, completely continued the oral questions. The knowledge of astrology was very popular among Indians because their religion is connected with this science.

Biruni writes: "I will talk about the content of the chapter "Brahma-siddihont", because this content is useful for learning different knowledge," and quotes 24 chapters of this book (Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1963, 126.). Then he names

the names of scientists, Praddiyumna, Sangahil, Divokar, Parishvara, Sorasvat, Purivon, Devakeritti and Prithudak-Svomindir and others” [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1963, 129.]

A long stay in India allows a scientist to study the Indian people, their history, culture and science. Having studied the Sanskrit language of the Indians, he translated several ancient Greek works (Ptolemy's Euclidean Basics and Almagest) into this language and created his work on astrolabe (a measuring astronomical instrument).

In his works, Biruni appears not only a great scholar, but also a humanist, a fighter against racial and religious prejudices. Despite the fact that he is fully associated with Mahmud Ghazni, he sharply condemns his religious fanaticism, because of which the cultural values of India are destroyed [Abu Rayhan Beruni, 1963, 68.]. His critical attitude towards influential people also deserves attention.

Biruni in his works honestly indicates the source of information. which of them were taken, and which he himself investigated. His information about the Indians, given in his "India", deserves great confidence.

#### Conclusion:

1. Such a great book as “India” is not dedicated to any person, although according to the traditions of that time it was supposed to devote the work to its patron.

2. The worldview, historical thinking and research methods of Biruni had content, orientation and uniqueness, which strongly distinguished his work from the writings of the authors of antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

3. After the conquest of Mahmud of Ghazni, an unknown country was discovered, about which Arab-Muslim scholars, historians, geographers, and diplomats had not previously known. It was located in India, in the areas of Punjab and Kashmir, cities like Nandna, Multan, Kanufya, Mathura, Somnath [P.G. Bulgakov, 1972,134; U.I. Karimov, 1973, 26.], Nahur, Ujjain [Biruni, 1963,79.]

4. Biruni, studying the cultural heritage of India, created a remarkable work

called "India", which contains information about Indian philosophy, history, science, geography, ethnic composition of the population, their customs, castes and religious beliefs. Biruni is rightfully one of first Indian scientists, and his "India" is the primary source for early medieval India.

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