

## **The Coins of Khorezmshah in the Treasure of the Vikings**

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**Abstract:** The Great Silk Road has long served as an economic, cultural, and political bridge of communication between the East and the West. The regions of our country, which are located at the crossroads of this road, have, of course, established ties with the peoples of the East and the West since ancient times. In this article, we will try to cover the extremely little-studied history of Khorezm in the 10th century from an economic and numismatic point of view. In this regard, we will focus on the trade relations of Khorezm with the countries of Eastern and Northern Europe through the northern road of the Great Silk Road in the middle of the 10th century and the history of the coin of Khorezmshah Ahmad ibn Muhammad in the Swedish Museum of History.

**Key words:** Royal Coins Cabinet, Sweden History Museum, Afrighids, Vikings, Varangians, Bulgar Khanate, Khazar Khanate, Caliph, Coins, Mamunids, Treasure.

### **Introduction**

It has been a half century since the Scandinavian peninsula in northern Europe proved to be a treasure trove of coins struck with Kufic script. During this time, similar treasures were found not only in Scandinavia, but also in northwestern Russia, Poland, the upper reaches of the Volga River, Central Europe, the Baltic Sea island of Gotland, and even the east coast of the British Isles. Such treasures certainly did not go so far by chance. Treasures are especially found in areas where Vikings were active who known in Russian and European sources as the Varangians in the 10th century AD. Interestingly, the main part of the composition of such treasures are Central Asian silver coins. We can explain this idea with three different assumptions:

- Samanids, which at that time ruled in Central Asia, was at the center of the great Silk Road, and Khorezm, part of the Samanid state was an absolute leader in trade with the northern regions;
- In the 9th-10th century AD, the silver coin of Samanids rose to the level of international money, rather than the Samanid gold coin, and was transported to various countries across the Silk Road;
- In the tenth century, silver mines in the territory of the Samanid state were actively operating, and this mined raw material supplied not only the Samanid state, but the whole of Eastern Europe.

### **The main results and findings**

The treasures of coins containing the Samanid coin were found mainly in southern Sweden and the island of Gotland, many treasures are also found in Western Russia, the Kazan region, and the middle reaches of the Volga River. In addition, such treasures are found in the Chekhova region in western Poland and even in England. Even today, such Islamic coins are regularly found in Sweden and neighboring European countries, and this is regularly covered in various forms of the press.

From the treasures found in many parts of Northern and Eastern Europe, it can be seen that the Samanid state was the most important silver raw material base of the Vikings. But it should also not be forgotten that in addition to the Samanids, they had several trading partners who supplied silver. For example, silver coins of the Byzantine empire and Abbasid caliphs made up the majority of the treasures, while the coins of the Khorezmshahs were also few among them.

### **Methodology and resources**

This topic is significant due to the fact that the history of Khorezm is almost unstudied and there are very few sources related to this period. For this reason, it is necessary to study the economic and political processes in Khorezm in the 10th century not only with the help of manuscripts but also with the help of archeological findings. The scientific significance of the finding is further enhanced by the fact that the findings of this period are found in countries thousands of kilometers away from Khorezm. Three silver coins of Khorezmshah Ahmad ibn Muhammad that found during the archeological excavations in Sweden in the early twentieth century, were used to expound this topic. These coins are now preserved in the Royal Coins Collection of the Swedish Museum of History.

The works of Northern European researchers are widely used in the study of the subject. These works are mainly in the form of articles and are devoted to the trade relations of the Vikings and their relations with the eastern countries. Oriental sources were also used to investigate the subject. As mentioned above, this article is written based on the history of the arrival to Sweden of silver coins that minted in the 10th century in Khorezm. Unfortunately, the coins of this period are almost non-existent in the museum of Uzbekistan. However, while some of the coins that went abroad for various reasons are kept in museums of foreign countries and, most of them are kept in private collections. For this reason, the electronic database of coins on the Internet was widely used in the creation of this article.

The method of analysis and synthesis was widely used in writing this article. The data collected in the study were grouped and analyzed in terms of content and period. In the first phase of the study, information about the coin of Ahmad ibn Muhammad was collected. In order to gather information about the coins, contacted with Florant Audi who is the head of the Department of “ The Viking Age and Medieval Coins” of the Swedish Museum of History, and took photographs of the coins. Then the data about the economic and political processes of the 10th century in Khorezm are collected from a variety of sources. The method of comparative analysis of the research was also used in the study of information from Eastern and Western sources. On this basis, the correspondence of the collected information to the inscriptions on the coin, and the political reasons for the appearance of these inscriptions on the coin, were examined.

### **The Vikings trade with eastern countries**

The Vikings began their travels east in the ninth century and soon set up trade along the river, all over Western Russia. They came to these areas in small groups for commercial purposes, not for colonial purposes, and established their own outlets. Here they became acquainted with the Muslim world with an example of high culture through the Khazar khanate. Ibn Fadlan, who was sent as an ambassador of the Arab caliph to the Khazar and Bulgar khanates in the first quarter of the 10th century, gave some information about the trade activities of the Vikings. According to him, the Vikings mainly sold slaves and leather goods. They were exchanged for various goods brought from the east. The rarest of these goods was silver. Also, the elegant silk fabrics of the east were highly valued. In fact, most of the eastern states known to them were called the "silk homeland". One of such states was Khorezm. Khorezm and Viking merchants first met in the middle reaches of the Volga River in the mid-900s in. There are also reports that around the 880s, the Vikings reach the Caspian Sea via the Volga River, crossed it, and reached the city of Jurjan, which belonged to the state of the Ziyarids in the southeast of the sea. It is possible that the Vikings discovered the Lower Volga region for themselves shortly before these voyages. But, the Khorezmians were acquainted with these lands a long ago, and the lower and middle reaches of the Volga River had become their trade areas. However, very few coins were found in these areas which belonging to the local Afrigids who ruled in Khorezm during this period. Because at that time the coins of the Samanids and the Abbasid caliphs were dominant in international trade. In addition, at the beginning of the 10th century, the state of Khorezmshahs was officially part of the Samanid state, and Khorezmian traders used Samanids coins in international trade.

At that time, the state of the Bulgar Khanate was located in the territory of the middle Volga River and southern Kazan. This state had trade relations with Khorezmians in the east and Vikings in the west. This state was the border area of the Islamic world, and trade with the Northern tribes and states was carried out on the territory of Bulghar Khanate. It follows that although the Viking and Khorezmian traders traveled to other regions for commercial purposes but, the territory of the Bulgar Khanate was the area where trade relations took place between them. The main raw materials in trade relations between the Khorezmians and the Vikings were slaves and leather goods. In his memoirs, Ibn Fadlan states that the main commodity bought by the Samanids were slaves, who were mainly Turks and mainly served to increase the number of troops. Indeed, we can later see that in both countries, the main

administration had passed into the hands of military leaders whose origins were Turkish slaves. We can also see that Alp Tegin, the founder of the Ghaznavid state which one of the new states that emerged in Central Asia and Iran, was also a Turkish slave of the Samanid rulers and later conquered the environs of Ghazni.

Now back to the main content of our topic. Following the above considerations, the question arises as to whether the Khorezmshahs coin was used in trade with the Vikings. Definitely used! As mentioned above, the Abbasid and Samanid coins make up the vast majority of the Kufic coin treasures found in the Northern European regions. However, among them there are Sassanids, Byzantines and, to lesser extent, silver coins of Khorezm. One of them is a silver coin of Khorezmshah Ahmad ibn Muhammad.

### **Political situation in Khorezm in the 10th century**

Before touching on Ahmad ibn Muhammad's coin, let us consider the political situation in Khorezm at that time. At that time, Khorezm was ruled by a local Afrighid dynasty which referred to by many historians as the "Banu Iraq" dynasty. When Ismail Somoni, the ruler of Bukhara, conquered this area in 896, he appointed Iraq or Araq ibn Mansur as Khorezmshah in the same year. However, researchers claim that he ascended the throne of Khorezm in 893 AD, based on the coins which minted with image of a horse by Iraq bin Mansur in 280 AH. After the death of Ismail Somoni in 295 AH (907 AD), political instability began in the Samanid government after revolts in various parts of the country. In this situation, Iraq ibn Mansur had the opportunity to achieve independence. However, we do not have complete information about the exact history of this period. However, any of the coins minted by Iraq ibn Mansur and known to science today, none of his coins mention him as Khorezmshah. Instead, he minted coins in Arabic with the title *مولى امير المومنين* (Mawla Amir al-Muminin), meaning "Servant of the Commander of the Faithful.



**Pic 1. Coin of Iraq bin Mansur. Mint in Khorezm. 280 AH**

Nor is it known how long this ruler ruled. As mentioned above, Ibn Fadlan, who was ambassador of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir (908-932) and send to the Bulgarian state, stated that when he arrived in Kat in 921 (309 AH), Muhammad, the son of Iraq ibn Mansur was Khorezmshah. This ruler was the uncle of the mathematician Abu Nasr ibn Iraq who was the mentor of the famous Khorezm scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni. That is, he was the son of Ali ibn Iraq, the brother of Muhammad ibn Iraq. Very little is known about this ruler, not even the coins minted by him have been found until this day. However, for some unknown reason, Ibn al-Athir states that in 943 AD (332 AH) a man named Abdullah bin Ashkam, not Ahmad, the

son of Muhammad, ascended the throne of Khorezmshah. So it is clear that Muhammad bin Iraq ruled until 943 AD. But, Beruni did not include Abdullah bin Ashkam in the list of 22 rulers of Khorezm. According to the situation, Abdullah bin Ashkam seized the throne arbitrarily and rebelled against the Samanid rule. Later, when Nuh bin Nasr sent an army against him, he fled. After that, Abu Said Ahmad, son of Muhammad, who was held hostage in the Samanid capital, was enthroned as Khorezmshah. There is no definite information about the year of Ahmad ibn Muhammad's accession to the throne. However, Biruni gave some information about him in his work "Asar ul-Baqiya" (The Chronology of Ancient Nations). According to Biruni, after he ascended the throne, he reformed the Khorezm calendar to coincide with the local Khorezmian holiday Ajghar in mid-July. According to Biruni, this happened 1270 years after the era of Alexander, in 959 AD, and Ahmad began to think about it 7 years ago, when he returned from Bukhara. From this we can conclude that Abu Said Ahmad ascended the throne in 952 AD. However, the difference between this ruler and his ancestors is that the ruler is inscribed on his coins with the title "Khorezmshah". On this basis, we can conclude that during this period Khorezm operated independently from the Samanids.

#### **Ahmad bin Muhammad's coin which found in the Vikings hoard**



**Pic 2. Coin of Ahmad bin Muhammad. Mint in Khorezm. 959 AD. SMH 16840. Swedish History museum**

As we noted at the beginning of our article, Khorezm was an absolute leader in trade with the northern regions in the 10th century. Therefore, it is natural to find Khorezm coins in the northern regions. Russian researcher Mikhail Feodorov gave a brief information in his article "The Khwarazmshahs of Banu Iraq (4th/10th century)" about 3 silver dirham coins of Khorezmshah Ahmad bin Muhammad in his article "The Khwarazmshahs of Banu Iraq (4th/10th century)" which kept in the Swedish Museum of History. We do not know exactly from which treasure these coins were found and when they were found but, there is no doubt that they were found in Swedish territory. This is because these coins are kept under the numbers SMH 9136, SMH 17529 and SMH 16184 in the Royal Coins Cabinet of the

Museum of Economics collection of the Swedish Museum of History. All three of Ahmad bin Muhammad's coins kept in the Swedish Museum of History were minted in Khorezm in about the year the Khorezm calendar was reformed, in 348 AH (959 or 960 AD). The texts on the coin are arranged in the following order.

Obverse	Reverse	Center
لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له	الله محمد رسول الله احمد بن محمد خوارزم شاه	
بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بجوارزم سنة ثمانين و اربعو..." الله الأمر من قبل ومن بعد ويؤمنذ يفرح المؤمنون	محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون	The inner marginal circle the outer marginal circle

In the center of the obverse of the coin there is an inscription "لا اله الا \ الله وحده \ لا شريك له" which means "there is no god but Allah, He is One and He has no partner". Around these words another sentence is written in two lines in Arabic language and with Kufic inscription. In the inner circle of this inscription, "بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بجوارزم سنة ثمانين و اربعو... " that is, "with the name of Allah, this dirham was minted in Khorezm in ...48". The words "three hundred" of the number 348 were not written in this sentence. Along the outer circle of the obverse of the coin this sentence was written "الله الأمر من قبل ومن بعد ويؤمنذ يفرح المؤمنون" which is in the 4<sup>th</sup> verse of the Surah ar-Rum in Holy Quran. That means "The whole matter rests with Allah before and after victory. And on that day the believers will rejoice".

On the reverse of the coin, in the center, the sentence "الله محمد رسول الله احمد بن محمد" was written. This sentence means "Allah. Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Ahmad bin Muhammad Khorezmshah". Along the circle, on the reverse of the coin this sentence was written. "محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون" that means, "Muhammad the Messenger of Allah has sent him with true guidance and the religion of truth, making it prevail over all others, even to the dismay of the polytheists". This sentence from the 33<sup>th</sup> verse the at-Tawbah or from the 9<sup>th</sup> verse of the surah as-Saf of the Quran. But, the sentence is not written in the meaning of these verses of the Quran. The sentence written on the coin was changed the beginning of the sentence in the above verses of the Quran, that is, "هو الذي ارسل رسوله...", which means "He sent his messenger ...". The full text of these verses of the Quran is as follows: "هو الذي ارسل رسوله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون" which means "He is the one who sent his messenger with true guidance and the religion of truth, making it prevail over all others, even to the dismay of the polytheists".

There have been changes in the size of the coins due to corrosion and various erosions that have occurred over the years. For example, the SMH 9136 coin kept in the Swedish Museum of History weighs 3.85 gr and has a diameter of 30 mm, while the SMH 16184 coin weighs 3.28 gr and has a diameter of 29 mm. The coin number SMH 17529 has survived in

fragmentary form. So the original dimensions of this coin are also very close to the dimensions of this coin.

In general, the coin was clearly copied from the Samanids coin. From his style to his handwriting, it is almost the same. However, it should be noted that the coin is the first coin with the title of Khorezmshah in the Arabic script. It is also the first coin inscribed with verses from the Quran.

### **Conclusion**

As noted in the introductory part of the article, Khorezm has been engaged in more active trade relations in the northern road of the Great Silk Road since the early Middle Ages. It was not even affected by the conquest of the Arabs and the invasion of the Samanids. Ibn Fadlan, who came to Khorezm in the 10th century, described the economic life of the region and, noting that Khorezm exported dried fish, leather goods, livestock and bows to the north. It is obvious that Khorezm has also developed to produce many export-oriented products. In addition, the fact that both capitals of Khorezm are located on trade routes has increased the economic potential of the region. We can see this in the fact that two Arab geographers, Al-Istakhri and Al-Maqdisi, who visited Central Asia almost half a century apart, noted a sharp increase in the number of cities in Khorezm during this period. Naturally, the Khorezmian merchants who traded in the northern regions used the silver coins of their state along with the Samanids silver coins. After 40-50 years from these events, the Khorezmians, completely free from the Samanid slavery, and began to use local Mamunids silver coin in the international trade. We can also understand this from the thousands of coins of the Mamunids in the Bilyar treasury which was founded in the territory of Southern Russia.

In general, to date, much research has been conducted in the region on this period in the world, but accurate and complete information about the history of this period remains extremely scarce. Therefore, our historical research in this area is also ongoing.

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