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**IBN RUSTA AND BAKRĪ ON THE OSSETIANS
AND THE APKHAZ**

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Ibn Rusta in *Kitāb al-'a'lāq al-naḥḥiyya* mentions two peoples, the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwġr*, inhabiting the mountain region bordering on the land of the Khazars. In discussing the location of these peoples he observes, "The Khazar country is a vast land, one of whose sides adjoins a huge mountain, and this is the mountain at the farthest end of which live the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwġr*, and this mountain stretches to the land of Tiflīs."¹ Similar statements, with varying forms of the second name, may be found in the works of other, later writers: 'Awfī ("The land of the Khazar is a long and broad realm, and on one side is a great mountain, and from the limit of the mountain two types of Turk come down, one people of which are called *Ṭwlās* and the other one *Kwġr*, and this mountain adjoins the land of Tiflīs"), Šukrullāh b. Šihāb ("And in the middle of the Pecheneg and the Khazar is a long and broad realm, and on one side is a great mountain, and at the [limit] of that realm two types of Turk come down, one is called *Ṭwlās* and one *Krġrh*"),² and the anonymous *Hudūd al-'ālam* ("ṬŪLĀS, LŪGH.R (?), two regions of (az) the Khazar (country). The people are warlike and have great numbers of arms") (MINORSKY 162).

In the first of these two names Marquart has identified the element *-ās* as *Ās(i)*, which appears to have been the self-designation of the Alans, or perhaps of a prominent subgroup of the Alans. This name is attested in the *Jas-i* of the Old Russian chronicles, and it replaces *al-Lān* (and its various alternative spellings) in later (Mongol-period) Muslim sources to designate the Alans. In Ossetian, the modern descendent of the language of the Alans, the term *As(s)y* refers to the region of the Balkar in the north Caucasus, inhabited by the Ossetians before the advent of the present Turkic-speaking population. Other toponyms based upon this name, coming from areas formerly occupied by the Alans, include *Jászberény* in central Hungary, *Iași* in eastern Romania, and, perhaps, *Astraxan* at the mouth of the Volga. By Marquart's reading, therefore, the *Ṭwl-ās* were a specific group among the Alans; the structure of their name

calls to mind the tribe of the *Dxsās*, said by Ibn Rusta to be the noblest tribe of the Alans. This name has been emended by Minorsky to **Rxsās* and read **Ruxs-ās* ("Light-Ās" – cf. Ossetian *ruxs* 'light' < Iran. **rauxšna-*), a form conspicuously reminiscent of the name of the *Roxolanoi* of the Greek and Latin authors (MINORSKY 445 fn. 5).

In the first element of the name *Ṭwlās* Marquart attempted to find *Dula*, the name given to an Alan prince in an early Magyar chronicle (MARQUART 172). A more plausible interpretation, however, is that of Minorsky, who sees in *Ṭwl-* the name of the *Tual-tä*, the Ossetian tribe inhabiting the Ardon River valley, whose name has often been misused as a general cover term for the Ossetians living south of the Caucasus range (MINORSKY 457).

It is Minorsky's view that this interpretation of the *Ṭwlās* may be reconciled with Ibn Rusta's geography by bearing in mind that the term "mountain" in Arabic (*jabal*) or Persian (*kūh*) may refer to either a single peak or to a mountain range. He therefore suggests that the *jabal* in question, which marks the edge of the Khazar domain, must be the Caucasus range. Once the Arabs took control of Albania and occupied Derbent (Bāb al-'Abwāb), the mountains came to form the southern limit of Khazar power. Since the Khazars were based at the eastern end of Caucasia, the mountain's "farthest end" (*'aqṣā-hu*) to which Ibn Rusta refers should be the western end of the range, on the Black Sea.

The name of the people paired with the *Ṭwlās*, as has been seen above, shows a good deal of variation among the sources: *Lwgr* (Ibn Rusta, *Ḥudūd al-'ālam*), *Kwgr* (کوغر, 'Awfī), *Krg̃r* (کرجر, Šukrullāh). Marquart reads these as distortions of **wğz*, **Awğaz*, which he takes to be a variant of *'bxāz*, *Apkhaz*, the well-known people settled on the Black Sea coast, whose name was frequently extended in medieval Muslim sources to refer to Western Georgia in general. In this case, however, Minorsky believes that the reference is to the *Apkhaz sensu stricto*, basing this belief on the account of Bakrī which we will address shortly. This interpretation of Ibn Rusta's account, therefore, appears to locate the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwgr* at the western end of the Caucasus, to the west of the Georgians of the Tbilisi region.

There are problems with this reading, however. Most important is that, although it is clear that the ancestors of the Ossetians formerly lived much further to the west than their descendants do, the modern *Tual* group is not found in the west at all, but in the central highlands of the Caucasus, to the north of the central pass. Abaev, challenging the use of the name *Tual* by early Ossetianists to refer to the southern Ossetians, describes their territory in the following terms:

...Vs. Miller writes in the "Osetinskie ètjudy": "Tual is spoken by the southern communities, the Tuals, i.e. the Ossetians on the far side of the Caucasus, adjoining the Georgians." If one is to call "Tuals" those for whom the Ossetians themselves use the name, then Vs. Miller's claim is fundamentally mistaken: the Tuals live not on the far side, but on this side, of the "Caucasus", i.e. the mountain range, and, of course, nowhere do they border upon the Georgians. The name "Tuals" is used primarily of the inhabitants of the upper mountain regions of Northern Ossetia in the highlands of the River Ardon, beginning from the Kassar ravine up to the mountain range... (ABAEV 495)

Whether or not the Tual live south of the Caucasus, it is out of the question that they should be found in the far west, and thus there is no obvious reason that they should have been associated so closely with the Apkhaz by Ibn Rusta and the other writers.

No less problematical is Ibn Rusta's insistence on connecting these two peoples with the edge of the Khazar domain. Although the western extent of Khazar power in northern Caucasia is not documented, it clearly never reached as far west as the regions associated with the Abkhaz. While it may be argued that it is possible to read Ibn Rusta in such a way that it is the "mountain" which is contiguous to the Khazars and not the peoples themselves, there is no question that the *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* lists the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwġr* as provinces subject to the Khazars. Minorsky admits to some puzzlement at this problem in his commentary to the *Ḥudūd*.

... [Ibn Rusta] only says that at the farthest end of the mountain near which lay the Khazar land, lived the *Ṭulās* and *Lugh.r*, whereas our author [i.e., the author of the *Ḥudūd* – DT] makes of the latter "two districts of the Khazar". It is true that in the seventh century the Khazars penetrated down to Tiflis through the central Caucasian pass but the western Caucasus was hardly ever under Khazar sway. Our author's mistake may be somehow connected with the frequent confusion of *Khazar* with *جرز Jurz* "Georgians". I.R.'s detail on the mountain "stretching to the land (*bilād*) of Tiflis" is perhaps a hint of some mention of the Jurz in the original source. (MINORSKY 457)

The clearest evidence which has been adduced in support of the equation of the *Lwġr* and the Apkhaz is to be found in Bakrī's *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālīk*. His account contains a passage which is a close analogue to Ibn Rusta's description of the Khazar frontier: at the end of the Khazar realm is a great mountain, at the far end of which lies the land of Tiflīs, beyond which is Armenia. Ibn Rusta's *Ṭwlās* and *Lwġr* are absent at this point in Bakrī's text. In his chapter on the Magyar, however, Bakrī adds a note on two mountain peo-

ples who have been taken to be the same as the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwgr* of the other writers.

... One border of the Magyar land reaches the land of the Romans, and at the end of their region in the vicinity of the steppe is a mountain inhabited by a people called *اين*, who possess horses and cattle and fields... Beneath this mountain on the shore of the sea is a people called *اوغونه* who are Christians and border upon the lands of Islam belonging to the lands of Tiflis. It is the beginning of the region of Armenia. This mountain stretches to the land of Bāb al-'Abwāb and reaches the land of the Khazars.... (MARQUART 31, 173).

Marquart claims that the *اين* and the *اوغونه* of Bakrī are to be equated with the *Ṭwlās* and the *Lwgr*, respectively. He therefore maintains that the former name is to be read as a corruption of the name *اسی* *Ās*, which we have seen above in the compound *Tual-ās*. This emendation entails taking the *yā'* to be originally the tooth of a *sīn*, and the final *nūn* to be its tail; the pointing, one must assume, is all secondary. He therefore believes that the *'yn* are not the Ossetians but the Alans, well known as a major power in the central Caucasus.

He deals with *اوغونه* *'wgwnh* similarly, emending this form to *اوغزيه* **'wgzyh*, i.e., **Awgāz-iyya* (*Apkhaz-iyya*), with the suffix *-iyya*, a familiar gentilitic formant. Bakrī thus provides the important statement that the **Awgāz-iyya* (*=*Awgāz*) lived on the coast. The Alans (i.e., the *'yn*), if they are to be closely connected with the **Awgāz(iyya)*, as Marquart's reading of Bakrī would have it, must once again be located far to the west of the present territory of the Tuals (MARQUART 172-6).

Minorsky does not disagree with Marquart's interpretation of the *'wgwnh* as the *Apkhaz*, but he does challenge the reading of *'yn* as **Ās*.

Although the forms **D.khs-Ās* and *Ṭwl.-Ās* occur already in Ibn Rusta as the names of special tribes, the pure form *Ās* as referring to the *Alāns* in general appears only in Mongol times. Moreover Bakrī's description of the *اين* lacks the characteristic features of the *Alān*. Even the combination of *اين* with the **Aughaziya* suggests that Bakrī has in view the particular clan corresponding to *Ṭwlās*... (MINORSKY 458)

We can find difficulties with both this interpretation and Marquart's, since, as we have noted above, they both compel us to locate the *Ṭwlās/'yn* and the *Lwgr/'wgwnh* in the far west, rather than in central Caucasia as our knowledge of the present position of the Tual Ossetians would dictate. Under the circumstances, I would like to suggest going back to re-read Ibn Rusta, keeping in mind both Minorsky's very attractive equation of the *Ṭwlās* with the Tual Ossetians and their present location on the Ardon River north of the center of the Caucasian range.

We may note first of all that this location places them quite close to where we must assume lay the western limit of Khazar domination. We know that the sphere of the Khazars' influence ended somewhere in the central Caucasus, even if the precise location is not defined in the material available. The *Hudūd al-'ālam*, we have seen, states that the Tual were a province of the Khazar, and, since we have no reason to doubt it in this point, we can assume that the Tual were, at least at some point in their history, subordinated or allied to Khazar power, perhaps as vassals in charge of the Khazar frontier.

The crux of the geography of Ibn Rusta's account lies in correctly identifying the "great mountain" at the end of the Khazar realm. Both Marquart and Minorsky assumed that this must be a reference to the Caucasus range, which formed the southern limit of the Khazars. This reading, we have seen, forces us to place the Tual, incorrectly, far to the west of where they should be located, since the "furthest end" of the range could only be the end furthest from the Khazars.

Must we assume that the "great mountain" to which Ibn Rusta refers must be the Caucasus, however? If we begin by trusting the equation of the *Ṭwlās* and the Tual, and assuming that the Tual lived at the time at roughly the same place that we find them today, we find that we have another option in reading this passage: *jabal* here does not mean "mountain range" but "mountain", and the "great mountain" in question is not the Caucasus as a whole but the highest peak in the central Caucasus, Mount Qazbeg. With a height of 5,047 meters, Qazbeg is clearly a *jabal 'aḍīm*, and its location relative to the Tual Ossetians accords well with Ibn Rusta's description, since the Ardon River valley, where the Tuals are centered, lies directly to the west of the mountain, at its "furthest end" from the point of view of one travelling from the Khazar lands in the east.

Interpreting Ibn Rusta's mountain as Qazbeg enables us to revise our understanding of the nature of this passage. Rather than finding in the text a hodge-podge of Ossetians, Apkhaz, and Georgians, thrown together with no apparent comprehension of the proper geography involved, I think that we have in Ibn Rusta's account a quite faithful description of what a traveller would have encountered if he were to journey through the eastern Caucasus at that time. Setting off from the Khazar heartland on the Caspian coast, the traveller seeking the lands of Islam would have two possible routes across the Caucasus. Either he could head south along the coast to Bāb al-'Abwāb and, beyond it, Albania and Azerbaijan, or he could head west through northern Caucasia. If he followed the latter route, he would reach the limit of Khazar power, we would suggest, in the vicinity of Qazbeg and the pass leading southward. Beyond Qazbeg – i.e., to the west – lay the lands of the Tual Os-

setians. Turning south, however, brings him to the Darial Pass (Bāb al-lān, the modern Krestovyy pereval), beyond which he found Transcaucasia and the road heading southward to Tbilisi, probably tracing a route similar to that of the modern Georgian Military Highway.

I suggest, therefore, that in light of the fact that Ibn Rusta pinpoints the Tuals quite clearly in the central Caucasus we should not interpret the *Lwġr/Kwġr/Krġr* as the Apkhaz of the far west, since the geography of this reading of the text brings us nowhere near that area. The equation of this people with the Apkhaz, as we have seen, poses major problems if we assume that the *Ṭwlās* occupied the same territory that they do today: why do Ibn Rusta and the other writers so consistently make a link between the central Caucasian Tual and a people separated from them by half the length of the Caucasus? Why, moreover, would the *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* claim that the Apkhaz are a province of the Khazars? If we allow ourselves some slight freedom to interpret the various forms of the name provided by the sources, we can easily arrive at a name which we could expect to find associated with the Tual, namely that of the *Digor* or Western Ossetians.

The paleographical interpretation of *Lwġr* (etc.) as **Dġ(w)r* poses no major problems. In the initial *kaf* of 'Awfī's *كوغر Kwġr* and Šukrullāh's *كرغر Krġr* we may have a remnant of an earlier *dāl*, and the initial *lām* of Ibn Rusta's *لوغر Lwġr* may represent a trace of an earlier Arabic definite article. Perhaps the name in the original source had the form **دغور *Dġwr*, or perhaps **الدغور *al-Dġwr*; the emendations which we would have to make in either case are certainly no more major than those which Marquart and Minorsky assume in order to find the hypothetical **wġz*. We are also, incidentally, no longer obliged to posit an alternative form for a name well attested under the familiar shape *'bxāz*.

We find the major objection to this reading of *Lwġr* (etc.) in Bakrī's description of the *'wġwnh*, where it is made clear that the latter people live on the coast. We should point out, however, that we have no real reason whatsoever to assume *a priori* that the two names *Lwġr* and *'wġwnh* actually refer to the same people. Even if we accept the assumption of Marquart and Minorsky that the *Ṭwlās* and the *'yn* are identical, we are hardly compelled to make a similar assumption about the names accompanying each of these. When all is said and done, we know only that the people called *'wġwnh* by Bakrī were Christians, lived on the coast, and were near the Georgians. Perhaps the name is indeed to be equated with that of the Apkhaz, whether the Abkhaz proper or the western Georgians who were given that name by the medieval geographers.

On the other hand, the possibility that the term *'wġwnh* referred to the Digor Ossetians cannot be ruled out. The present geographical location of the

Digor does not render this possibility impossible, since it is clear that the Ossetians formerly extended much further west than the limits of their present distribution. The oldest known inscription in Ossetian, dating from the eleventh or twelfth century, was found on the Zelenčuk River, in the Karačai-Čerkesskaya Autonomous Oblast' of the RFSFR, and Abaev has produced a good number of toponyms showing that there was a significant Ossetian presence throughout much of the Kuban valley (ABAEV 271-90), and the *Ḥudūd al-ālam* describes the territory of the Circassians as "a land of the Alan on the coast of the Gurz [i.e., Black] Sea" (MINORSKY 161). These facts imply that the ancestors of the Ossetians held sway over territory a great deal to the west of the land which they presently occupy.

Whatever the proper reading of *'wǧwnh* may be, I would like to suggest that the identity of the people accompanying them in the account of Bakrī is much less problematical. We have seen that Marquart wished to see in the *این* *'yn* an alternate name for the Alans, and recommended emending the form in the text to **'s*. Minorsky objected to this interpretation by indicating that this people must be the same as the one to which Ibn Rusta gave the name *Ṭwlās*, the Tual tribe of the Ossetians, but he did not address the question of the name *'yn* which Bakrī provides. A simple way of reconciling Ibn Rusta's *Ṭwlās* with Bakrī's *'yn* is to make the minor emendation of replacing *nūn* with *rā*'. The resulting *ایر* **'yr* would be an obvious way of rendering the Ossetian self-designation *Ir*, used today by the Tual as well as by the other East Ossetians. The appearance of **'yr* in the place of *Ṭwlās* would thus be a case of identifying the same group at different levels of reference: *Ṭwlās* represents the more immediate, tribal designation of the people in question, while **'yr* represents their broader, ethnic affiliations. This differentiation of levels may have been conditioned by oppositions existing within each text, if our conjectures about the different natures of the *Lwǧr* vs. the *'wǧwnh* are justified. It would make sense to find a tribal designation used to distinguish this people from the Digor but an ethnic term used when they are juxtaposed to the non-Ossetian Apkhaz.

The accounts by Ibn Rusta and Bakrī which we have been examining each provide us with an intriguing connection between the Ossetians of their day and the Ossetians of ours. If our interpretation of Bakrī is correct, we find that a certain group of Ossetians in the middle ages, just like their descendents in the twentieth century, are identified simultaneously as *Tual* and as *Ir*. In the case of Ibn Rusta's text, our revised interpretation of the geography involved has made it clear that the Tual Ossetians of the tenth century lived in virtually the exact spot that today's Tual inhabit, the Ardon River valley just to the west of Mount Qazbeg. The continuity across time which these texts indicate in the case of a small people like the Ossetians, confined, so to speak, to the margi-

nalía of history, thus stands in striking contrast to the ephemerality of the major powers like the Arabs, the Khazars, and the Alans, on whose account the maps are drawn.

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NOTES

¹ "... wa-bilādu l-xazari bilādun 'arīdatun yattaşilu bi'ihdā janabātihā jabalun 'ađīmūn wa-huwwa llađī yanzilu fi 'aqşāhu ṭwlās wa-lwğ wa-yamuddu hāđā l-jabalu 'ilā bilādi ti-flisa..." (Ibn RUSTA 139).

² Šukrullāh: "...wa-miyāna-yi bajanak wa-xazar wilāyatist ṭawīl wa-'arīd wa-bar yak ṭarfi kūhī ast buzurg wa-dar bayānān-i ān wilāyat dū naw' turk firod āyand yakī rā ṭwlās wa-yakī rā krğh xvānand..."; 'Awfī: bilād-i xazar wilāyati-yi ṭawīl wa-'arīd ast wa-bar yak ṭarf o kūhīst buzurg wa-az pāyān-i kūh dū naw' turk fāro āyand ki yak qawm rā ṭwlās xvānand wa-dīgarī rā kwğ wa-īn kūh ba-zamīn-i ti-flīs paywasta ast..." Unfortunately, neither of these texts is available to me. I have presented here the passages as they are found in Marquart (173, fn. 3).