

Dr. Simone Cristoforetti

University of Venice "Ca' Foscari" (Università degli Studi di Venezia "Ca' Foscari")

Department of Eurasian Studies (Dip. di Studi Eurasiatici)

E-mail to: cristoforetti@unive.it

### Calendars in Narshakhî's *Ta'rikh-i Bukhârâ*<sup>#</sup>.

Before the *jalâlî* reform (1076-1079 A.D.) the solar calendar of the Iranian tradition was based on the vague solar year of three hundred and sixty-five days, with months of thirty days each, plus a period of five days, the Epagomenae (P. *Andargâh*, *Panja-yi duzdîda*; Ar. *Khamsa al-mustaraqqa*). This is still the case today for some Zoroastrians. It is well known (the fact is recorded in Bîrûnî's *Âthâr al-bâqiya*<sup>1</sup>), that between the "internal" form of the Iranian calendar and the "peripheral" one - such as the Sogdian, the Corasmian and the Armenian - encountered by the Arabs in the seventh century - between the two forms of the Iranian calendar in the late Sasanid Age - there was a difference of five days. So that the year of the "peripheral" form started five days later than the year of the "internal" one. No doubt, a second Nawrûz, or Great Nawrûz, on the sixth day of the first month of the "internal" calendar, only in agreement with the New Year of the "peripheral" form, and the splitting in two - always with a five-day lapse - of other "internal" festivals, provide strong evidence of an identical original pattern, eventually modified by a mere "internal" reform. The above-mentioned five-day gap concerned the initial eight months, and it disappeared thereafter as the *Andargâh* (occurring between the eight and the ninth month in the calendar's "internal" form only) compensated with its five days for the original discrepancy.

At the beginning of the eleventh century (1006 A.D.) - the time of the so-called Buwayhid reform - the difference between the two calendars was extended to the entire year<sup>2</sup>. This occurred with the shift in the "internal" calendar of *Andargâh*'s position from the end of eighth month to the end of the year.

---

<sup>#</sup> Paper presented at the International Conference "The Bukhara oasis. Antiquity and Middle Ages" (Bukhara, sept. 26th-27th 2003). Forthcoming.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 233-234 of Abû al-Rayhân Muh.ammad b. Ah.mad al-Bîrûnî al-Khuwârazmî, *al-Âthâr al-bâqiya* <in *al-qurûn al-khâliya*, ed. E. Sachau, Leipzig, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 12-13 of my "Una premessa un po' più ampia dell'usato", in *L'Onagro Maestro. Miscellanea di fuochi accesi per Gianroberto Scarcia in occasione del suo LXX sadè*, Venezia, 2004, pp. 9-15.

The numerous hypotheses attempting to explain the above-mentioned discrepancy<sup>3</sup> are not subject of discussion here. Some of them are Bîrûnî's, and the most interesting one concerns the celebration of King Jam's Return. Thus, since the Nawrûz is the festival of King Jam's Departure for the heavens, the following fifth day, i.e. the sixth day of the first month of the "internal" calendar corresponding to New Year's day in the "peripheral" one, could be the festival of the Return of the King. Bîrûnî says: "They [the Sogdians] did so for no other reason but this, that they honoured their kings to such a degree that they would not do the same things which the kings did. They preferred to use as new-year that moment when Jam returned successful, whilst the kings preferred as new-year that moment when Jam started" or "(set out)"<sup>4</sup>.

#### BIRUNI'S TEXT

In other words, in order to illustrate the difference between Persian and Traxoxianic calendars, Bîrûnî recorded "an opinion" of his time: the "Sogdians", respectful to *their kings*, did not venture "to act" - i.e. "to celebrate" - in the same way as the kings, so they waited five more days. They did not celebrate Nawrûz at Jam's Departure, but on his Return on the sixth day of the first month of the "internal" form of the calendar. But this is not a coherent explication: in any case, Jam left on a day, which should be the true or "normal" Nawrûz in the opinion of "their kings". In this way, Bîrûnî provides no real explanation for the five-day delay of the first month of the Sogdian (or "peripheral") calendar compared to the "internal" one: he only demonstrates the plausibility of the existence (in Sogdiana, but not in accordance with the Sogdian "kings") of a second Nawrûz for Jam's Return in the light of a well-known episode of mythology, that is the end of King Jam's journey on the sixth day of the year. Yet, if in comparison with the "internal" calendar the Sogdian year starts five days later at Jam's Departure, its Nawrûz must fall on the day others (i.e. Iranians following the "internal" calendar) considered to be the day of Jam's Return. Therefore, this "opinion", reported by Bîrûnî, could be a simplistic interpretation of the Sogdian delay as expressed by a follower of the "internal" calendar. Eventually, Bîrûnî's explanation could mean that the

---

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 37-68 and 102-142 of my *Forme "neopersiane" del calendario "zoroastriano" tra Iran e Transoxiana*, (*Eurasiatica*. Quaderni del Dipartimento di Studi Eurasiatici dell'Università degli Studi Ca' Foscari di Venezia, n. 64), Venezia, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See Bîrûnî's *Âthâr al-bâqiya*, p. 233 [p. 220 of its english translation].

so-called Sogdian calendar can simply be the sophisticated calendar of some scrupulous categories of Sogdian people. Certainly, it does not justify the position of Sogdian Epagomenae, which in fact correspond to 1-5 Farwardîn (1st month) of the “internal” calendar. Of course, it is still open to debate whether the “kings” of text are really the local rulers as the term *mulûk* suggest, or Bîrûnî meant of *mulûk*, the Great Kings of the Kayanid tradition. But I think that some lexical considerations can exclude this possibility.

In a note to his translation of Narshakhî’s *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*<sup>5</sup>, Frye, albeit rather fleetingly, formulated the hypothesis that a short passage of this text is somehow related to the vexata quaestio of the above-mentioned discrepancy. In fact it mentions two New Year’s days<sup>6</sup> at five-day intervals: “We have here probably the distinction between the Sogdian calendar and the Persian calendar together with the five days epagomenae”. But I think that this passage of Narshakhî’s work has nothing to do with *this* issue. The related passage of the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ* is clearly about the Sogdian celebration or a celebration in Sogdiana of a *sixth* day of the first month, (a month beginning after a five-day period added to the normal market-time’s interval and closing the year, that can only be the local Epagomenae), honoured by some people at least. At any rate the passage gives us some interesting calendrical information about the important village of Warakhsha - or, in some manuscripts, Rajfundûn - in the zone of Bukhârâ:

#### NARSHAKHI’S TEXT

Frye translates this as: “[...] every (year) for fifteen days there is a market in this village, but when the market is at the end of the *year* [*italic added*] they hold it for twenty days. The twenty-first day is the New Year’s day, and they call it the New Year’s day of the farmers [*kashâwarzân*]. The farmers of Bukhara reckon from that (day) and count from it. The New Year’s day of the Magians is five days later”<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See p. 118 of R. N. Frye’s translation of the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ* (*The History of Bukara*, Cambridge, U.S.A., 1954), n. 90.

<sup>6</sup> The mention of Nawrûz appears only twice in Narshakhî’s text: see pp. 18 and 23 of the quoted Frye’s translation, or pp. 16 and 21 of Ch. Schefer’s edition of the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*, Paris, 1892. In both cases, the New Year’s day is not the main object of the narration, but it is only mentioned incidentally.

<sup>7</sup> See Abû-bakr Muhammad binni Ja’far Narshakhî, *Ta’rihi Buhero*, ed. N. Kasymov, Dushanbe, 1979, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 18 of Frye’s translation of the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*.

To translate in this way, he must add the word *sâl* (“year”) after *har* and translate *wa cûn* with “but when”. But we should first of all ask ourselves which kind of year was the “year” added by the scholar. On the basis of what Frye wrote in his note, the text speaks about the solar year of the ancient Iranian tradition in conformity with the well-known variants. However, to make sense of Frye’s translation - which speaks about an *annual* market of fifteen days, that *sometimes* came at the end of the year and was extended by five days - we must assume a relation between heterogeneous calendars. The “year” added by Frye must be a *lunar* year. In this way, when a market linked to lunar terms followed the end of the traditional solar year, it was prolonged by five days to coincide with the solar New Year’s eve. We can easily calculate that this exceptional situation could take place approximately every thirty-three solar tropical years.

Now, the words of the text surely concern a solar year, because Nawrûz followed the last market, prolonged to comprehend the Epagomenae. If nothing is emended and the text is read as it is, we have:

“... there was market every fifteen days and the last market of the year would last twenty days...” (i.e. ... market on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month, market on the first day of the twelfth month, market on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month prolonged until the end of the year).

Therefore, if the text speaks about a periodical market (every fifteen days) of unspecified length, the one at the end of the year was a twenty-day market ending with Nawrûz’s eve. It is possible that the exceptional length of the twenty-day market at the end of the year involving the “normality” of one annual fifteen-day market led Frye to interpret the passage of the text in his own way.

For the reader the immediate impression is that both the calendar styles are represented in the text: the Andargâh of the solar calendar used in the Bukhârâ region was after the twelfth month (in the Sogdian style), but this was a calendar with two (Persian style) Nawrûz. Consequently, it seems that the textual information is related to a period subsequent the shift of Andargâh from the end of eighth month to the end of the year in the “internal” form of Iranian calendar. In this case, the information concerns a Transoxiana that had completely assimilated the form of the new calendar with the two Nawrûz at five-day intervals, with the exception of the local Magians’ opposition. Indeed, even if it was a return to the original structure of the Iranian year, the above-mentioned shift of Andargâh involved the stabilisation of the five-day discrepancy between the “internal” and the “peripheral” calendars’ forms. Moreover, Bîrûnî informs

us in his *Qânûn*<sup>9</sup> that the Magians of Khurâsân were not satisfied with this transfer of the Andargâh, and we can find some dissatisfaction or uncertainty of some of the Magians of Khurâsân also in the *Rivâyat-i Frâysrôj* (1008 A.D.). In one of the four *pursi*[n] of this text we can see the “[...] rare occurrence of a conflict between Mazdaeans of Khurâsân and an official (*sûltânîk*) of Baghdad who had enforced an intercalation in the calendar, one Abû Mans.ûr (?) who was obviously a Muslim”<sup>10</sup>. In short, we can find here a religious opposition to certain traditional environments of Khurâsân. (It is worth noting that Bîrûnî speaks of *hum*, “they”, and not of “Magians” when he introduces the motive of King Jam’s Return, and when he does speak of Magians he demonstrates their dissatisfaction with the beginning of the year).

If the “internal” calendar form had been adopted in Sogdiana, the Andargâh of the Magians would have coincided with the first five days of the first month of the Farmers. Consequently, these Magians would have been included among the people who were celebrating Jam’s Departure on Nawrûz, while the Farmers on the “Nawrûz of the Magians” day would have been celebrating Jam’s Return too. But for this hypothesis on information subsequent to the 1006 A.D. we must accept the fact that Narshakhî’s text (332 H., 943 A.D.) was in some way interpolated. If so, it is more plausible that such an interpolation took place in Muh.ammad b. Zufar b. <Umar’s summary of the text (574 H., 1178 A.D.), in which the influence of other unknown sources can be found<sup>11</sup>, rather than in the first Persian translation (522 H., 1128 A.D.) by Abû Nas.r Ah.mad b. Muh.ammad Qubâwî, who explicitly claims - if we can to trust the literal meaning of these words - to have merely *omitted* some of the superfluous and boring parts. Besides, it is conceivable that calendar “innovations” need time to be widely accepted.

Bîrûnî speaks of two categories - the Kings and the Sogdians. Narshakhî speaks of two classes and their respective different Nawrûz with reference to the opposition between two Nawrûz - testified above in *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*. These are not defined as “the Small” and “the Great” Nawrûz according to the “normal” (“internal”) version, but are linked with two social classes, i.e. the Farmers and the Magians. Bîrûnî speaks of two classes and clarifies the reason of their different Nawrûz. Now, in Bîrûnî’s passage, the

<sup>9</sup> See p. 76 of Abû al-Rayh.ân Muh.ammad b. Ah.mad al-Bîrûnî, *Kitâb al-qânûn al-Mas<ûdî*, vol. I, Hyderabad 1373/1954.

<sup>10</sup> See J. de Menasce, “Zoroastrian literature after the Muslim conquest”, p. 553, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. IV, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 543-565. With regard to this point, we can not fail to mention M. Boyce’s hypothesis on the Khurâsânian provenance of the Indian Parsee based on the position of the Epagomenae in their calendar.

<sup>11</sup> See Frye’s translation of the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*, p. XII, p. XVIII nn. 11-13 and pp. 3-4.

unidentified class opposed to the Kings (i.e. opposed to the class called “the Farmers” in Narshakhî’s passage) “would not do the same things which the kings did”. Did the *kashâwarzân* of *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ* act like Bîrûnî’s *mulûk* (“kings”)? It is highly plausible that the two terms - namely, the Arabic *mulûk* in Bîrûnî’s text and the Persian *kashâwarzân* in Narshakhî’s text - could be two different developments within the semantic area of an identical Iranian term. Undoubtedly, a term conveying both meanings is *dihqân* (pl. *dihqânân* / *dahâqîn*). That is a Neo-Persian arabicized term frequently used to indicate Iranian sedentary peoples vis-à-vis to the nomadic (Arabic or Turk) tribes. In a sapiential context, instead, it defines the “old wise men”. But both our initial texts were written in Arabic. Probably the original Arabic term used by Narshakhî was *dahâqîn*, a term commonly applicable to the grand landowners, who represented the local aristocracy of Xth Century A.D.

In Bîrûnî’s work, *mulûk* is likely to be more appropriate for the well-known concept conveyed by the term *dihqân*, namely “great landowner”, “governor of a state”, “prince”, as testified in *H.udûd al-‘âlam*<sup>12</sup> precisely in Transoxiana. However, Qubâwî, in the evolved conditions of the Saljuq times society, would rather read in the term *dahâqîn* a social class strongly linked to Iranian values, the sedentary farming *kashâwarzân* in contrast with the nomadic element. In this case, we have no longer any interpolation in Narshakhî’s text and the duplication of Nawrûz is a fact proper to Sogdiana that can very well be mythologically explained by Bîrûnî’s text.

Frye in his translation of *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ*’s passage would have simply mixed things up just like Bîrûnî, who explained the repetition of Nawrûz festival with the existence of a structural five-day discrepancy between the “internal” and “peripheral” form of the Iranian calendar.

To sum up the data regarding the Nawrûz of Sogdiana, we are conformed with either 1) a post-Buwayhid historical report (involving interpolation in the *Ta’rîkh-i Bukhârâ* text), which, incidentally, gives an account of some occurrences of Nawrûz; or 2) an early reference to the celebration of King Jam’s Return as New Year’s day, enlightened by Bîrûnî’s pseudo-explanation of the five-day delay of the Sogdian calendar.

From the first account we can deduce two kinds of factors: a) many Sogdian people conformed to the “internal” tradition, celebrating Nawrûz on the first Farwardîn of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. p. 117 (n. 63) and p. 356 of *H.udûd al-‘âlam. The regions of the world*, tr. by V. Minorsky, London, 1937, and p. 266 of his “Addenda” to that work, in *Bulletin of the Oriental and African Society*, XVII-2 (1957).

“internal” (new) version of the Iranian calendar; b) others (i.e. the unsatisfied Magians of Khurâsân in Bîrûnî’s *Qânûn*) did not accept that “innovation”.

On the whole, we can exclude the presence in the examined text of references to “the distinction between the Sogdian calendar and the Persian calendar”: the Andargâh was located after the twelfth month prolonging the last market for both the Farmers and Magians in the text, and a five-day discrepancy pertaining to the opposition between “internal” and “peripheral” calendars involves the position of Nawrûz but there is not a similar discrepancy in the position of the Andargâh.