

Greater Khorasan

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Preface

The region of Greater Khorasan, with its shifting and ambiguous geographic definitions, has been poorly studied in comparison with many other parts of the Sassanian and Islamic worlds. The seminal work of Barthold¹, the masterful reviews undertaken and edited by the sadly recently departed Richard Frye², the important collected works in the *Cambridge history of Iran* series³, and the more recent contributions in the UNESCO Central Asian series⁴, all provide some very useful wider context; but there have been little recent published work collating the important archaeological work that is taking place across this disparate region. This makes the volume particularly welcome.

Khorasan is often portrayed as being on the north-east fringe of the civilised world. In many ways this characterisation has placed it at the periphery of events and thus historical narratives. However, it played a dynamic, arguably central, role in the Sassanian and Islamic world. During much of its existence it formed a frontier to the lands to the east; but more importantly it was the arena for permeable interaction to the east (Central Asia and China) and the south-east (South Asia – modern day Pakistan and India). This dynamic location ensured that it played a crucial role in the fortunes of the wider empires it existed within: the disastrous end of the Sassanian Empire was entwined with Khorasan, both the sapping wars to the east and the ultimate death of the last king, Yazdegerd III. It also occupied a vital place in the history of the early Islamic state. Twice within a century movements from this region overthrew the established regimes of the central Islamic lands: the Abbasid revolution and Ma'mun defeat of his brother in the civil war. Furthermore, its relationship to the empires and polities to the east was crucial to the formation and integrity

1 Barthold, V V (1898) *Turkestan v èpokhu mongol'skago nashestviiâ* [Turkestan down to the Mongol invasion]. St. Peterburg: Akademiia Nauk.

2 Frye, R N (ed) (1975) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Frye, R N (1996) *The Heritage of Central Asia. From Antiquity to the Turkish expansion*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

3 Especially, Boyle, J A (ed) (1968) *The Cambridge history of Iran. Volume 5, The Saljuq and Mongol periods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4 History of Civilizations of Central Asia, 5 vols, the most relevant being: Litvinsky, B A (ed) (1996) *History of Civilizations of Central Asia. Volume III. The crossroads of civilizations: A.D. 250 to 750*. Paris: UNESCO; Asimov, M S & Bosworth, C E (eds) (1998) *History of Civilizations of Central Asia. Volume IV. The age of achievement: AD 750 to the end of the Fifteenth Century. Part One: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting*. Paris: UNESCO; Asimov, M S & Bosworth, C E (eds) (2000) *History of Civilizations of Central Asia. Volume IV. The age of achievement: AD 750 to the end of the Fifteenth Century. Part Two: The achievements*. Paris: UNESCO.

of the Islamic world: and its role in the trade between east and west (and north and south⁵) was fundamental to the long shadow that the Silk Roads had on world culture.

The complexity of the region is also evident. The geographic, geomorphological and environmental character of the region is extremely diverse, encompassing desert areas, major fertile river deltas and oases, deeply incised rivers, high mountain ranges, valley systems and plateaus. It is refreshing to see the attention paid to exploring aspects of this context within the volume.

I hope that this volume represents the start of a flow of publications relating to the vital work that is currently being undertaken in Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This work deserves far wider attention. *Der Islam* is to be congratulated in publishing these collected papers and Rocco Rante deserves great credit for drawing these together.

Tim Williams, *Institute of Archaeology, UCL*

5 For example, see Rtveldadze, E V (2012) *Velikii indiiskii put' [The Great Indian Road: from the history of the most important trade routes of Eurasia]*. St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia.

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David Durand-Guédy

Pre-Mongol Khurasan. A Historical Introduction

Regions have a history. That of Khurasan is marked more than others by the Mongol conquest. In the early 13th century, armies commanded by Genghis Khan caused destruction on an unprecedented scale. Human casualties, although difficult to assess accurately from the chronicles, were without doubt considerable. Merv, the capital of the Arabs then the Saljuqs, but also Nishapur and Balkh were irretrievably ruined. The retrospective illusion makes it difficult to grasp what this territory now divided between four countries (Iran, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan) was in the pre-Mongol era: one of the main cradles of the Islamic civilization. It is no coincidence if many of the leading scholars of Islamic history have worked, exclusively or not, on pre-Mongol Khurasan. After the golden age of Orientalism (with Barbier de Maynard's "Tableau littéraire du Khorassan" and van Sloten's *De Opkomst Der Abbasiden in Chorasán*), Vladimir Barthold wrote his groundbreaking thesis on *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, whose fourth English edition is still an important reference work. Hamilton Gibb, future co-editor of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, had also started his scholarly life by working on the *Arab Conquests in Central Asia*. Vladimir Minorsky delivered his *opus magnum* by commenting on the *Hudud al-'alam*, a 10th century geography written in today north-western Afghanistan. Edmund Bosworth established himself with his book on the Ghaznavids. Richard Bulliet used the facsimile of *The Histories of Nishapur* published by Frye in 1965 as the basis for his influential *Patricians of Nishapur* on the structure and role of the urban elites. Khurasan is also the specialism of Jürgen Paul whose researches are renewing our understanding of local power. Needless to say that introducing in a few words such an historical subject as my friend Rocco Rante invited me to is an impossible challenge. I will merely recall a few names and dates which may, perhaps, be useful to the reader of this volume, and allude to some researches published after the two relevant volumes of the *Cambridge History of Iran* (Boyle 1968, Frye 1975).

But before this, let me introduce briefly the lands we are talking of. The province of Khurasan created by the Sasanids was a set of plains, plateaus and mountains between the Great Central Desert of Iran (*Dasht-i kavir*) in the southwest, the Central Afghan Mountains in the southeast, the Amu Darya River and the Qara-Qum desert in the north. Since the Sasanian period, four cities have kept dominating the province, forming a diamond shape a little stretched east-

ward: Nishapur, Merv, Balkh, Herat. While their relative importance was to evolve (especially with the rise of Nishapur), their overall domination remained unchallenged until the 12th-13th centuries, as is well illustrated by the fact that Saljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092) founded madrasas only in these four cities in Khurasan. Each of them stands out for the excellence of its site (in terms of agricultural potential) and by its privileged location on one or two key trade axes. Merv (*Marw-i Shahijan*, “the Royal Merv”), capital of ancient Margiana, was a “gift of the Murghab River”, which brings water into the heart of the desert, and also a necessary step on the section of the great transcontinental trade route coming from Inner Asia. Herat, the capital of ancient Areia, is situated in the valley of the Hari Rud when it leaves the mountain, and thus also controls the north-south road to the rich province of Sistan. Balkh, the capital of ancient Bactria, was installed on a fertile plain between the Amu Darya and the foothills of the Central Afghan Mountains (Tukharistan); it controlled access to the Afghan passes and therefore the route to India. As for Nishapur, it was founded by the Sasanid Shapur I (d. 272 AD) on the south side of the Binalud Mountains and it overlooks the rich plain of Bayhaq. At a lower level, a network of medium-sized cities occupied the other fertile plains, like Marw-i Rud and Faryab (in the Juzjan), Zawzan (in the Khwaf) or Nisa. Beyond lies the margins: Ghur, a mountainous territory which remained out of reach for the outside rulers; Badakhshan, enclosed in the upper valley of the Amu Darya; Gurgan (the old Hyrcania) in the lowlands and mountainous area east of the Caspian sea; finally Quhistan which buffers the *Dasht-i kavir*. Let us take care however not to imagine the latter as a sealed border: while the main access route to Khurasan from western Iran run along the Alburz Mountains via Qumis, the road via Tabas and Quhistan was also an important commercial axis (it was that followed by the Arab conquerors, and later by the caravan which brought Nasir-i Khusraw back home).

The history of Khurasan between the 7th and the 13th centuries is the history of a marginal region becoming a centre and then again a margin. Its very name (literally Khurasan means “the land of the rising sun”) hints at its marginal position vis-à-vis the centre of the Sasanian Empire, which was first in Fars, then in Iraq. The most striking effect of the Arab conquest was the unification of territories which had been previously divided: Merv and Nishapur (previously Sasanian territory), but also Badghis and Tukharistan (Hephtalite territory), and beyond the Amu Darya Transoxiana (Sogdian territory). The Islamic province of Khurasan incorporated Badghis and Tukharistan, and even at some periods Transoxiana (which explains why Bukhara and Samarqand are included in the ‘Greater Khurasan’ sometimes mentioned in scholarship). This being said, will focus on Khurasan *sensu stricto*.

Here as elsewhere, the Arab conquerors maintained the petty rulers (like, possibly, the maliks of Juzjan who patronized the author of the *Hudud al-'alam*) and also the landowning elites: (*dihqans*) who played a key role of intermediary between the government and the local community (Paul 1996). But unlike other provinces, Khurasan also saw the massive installation of Arab settlers, perhaps as many as 250,000 (Daniel 1979), which reflects both its strategic importance as well as its potential wealth. Logically the conversion of the local populations to Islam began there earlier (Bulliet 1979). Through its economic weight as well as the influence of the descendants of Arab settlers and their clients, Khurasan was at the heart of political struggles at the imperial level. Forcing the point, we could say that the “Abbasid Revolution” (Shaban 1970) was a revolution of Khurasan (the key moment being the capture of Merv by Abu Muslim in 748) for Khurasan. The importance of the province for the Abbasid state can be seen in the role of the *abna' al-dawla* and the *khurasaniyya* in the army (Kennedy 2001: chap. 4), in the control of the vizierate until 803 by the Barmakids, a family from Balkh (Sourdel 1960), or in the many trips made the caliphs in the province (Harun al-Rashid died in Tus, his son al-Ma'mun reigned mainly from Merv, and if the eighth Imam of the Duodeciman Shiis 'Ali b. al-Rida is buried in Mashhad, “the place of [his] martyrdom”, it is because he was accompanying al-Ma'mun who made him his successor). The Abbasid state had two bases, the Sawad (“the lands behind Baghdad”) and Khurasan. With their capital in the former, its main objective in the 9th century was to prevent the autonomist tendency of the second. However after the *fitna* between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, the dream of a strong centralized Abbasid state was over. The Tahirid governors based in Nishapur became de facto autonomous in 820 after they ceased to send to Baghdad the revenues of the province (Daniel 1979). In 873 the Saffarids, local rulers from Sistan, began to conquer Khurasan, but after long struggle they were pushed back by the Samanids, local rulers of Transoxania. The Abbasids had backed the Samanids, but eventually the latter created an independent state spanning Transoxania and Khurasan.

The 10th century was for Khurasan undoubtedly the “Golden Age” (Frye 1975). This is the product of three phenomena that Richard Bulliet, throughout his researches, has integrated into a convincing model: mass conversion (Bulliet 1979), which explains the disappearance of anti-Islam revolts which marked the 8th century; the “cotton boom”, that is to say, agricultural development in rural areas (esp. through the culture of cotton on the *mawat*, i.e. “dead lands”, developed by the digging of *qanats*, i.e. subterranean canals) which stimulated the development of the textile industry (Bulliet 2010); and lastly urbanization, fed by the previous two phenomena, and which transformed a city like Nishapur, sparsely populated at the beginning of the conquest, into a metropolis of

200,000 inhabitants dominating a hinterland maybe as densely populated as 14th century Tuscany (Bulliet 1994 and 2010).

The year 1000 marked the beginning of a new era characterized by the key role played by Turkic pastoral nomads. In itself pressure exerted by the peoples of Central Asia on Khurasan was not new: the struggle between Iran and Turan which is the main theme of Firdawsi's *Shahnama* (completed in 1010) echoes the struggles which opposed the Sasanids their eastern neighbors. The Arab conquests and the influx of *ghazis* (warriors for the faith) in Central Asia had exerted pressure on the steppe, but the movement was reversed with the arrival of the Qarluq nomads in Semirech'e (south of today Kazakhstan) in the 8th century and the subsequent displacement of the Oghuz westward. The Samanids, who had benefited greatly from the lucrative trade of Turkish slaves from the steppe, were eventually defeated by the steppe. The pressure exerted by the nomads on Khurasan can be broken down into four steps. First step, the Qarakhanids (Muslim Turkic rulers backed by the Qarluqs) conquered Transoxiana and destroyed the Samanid state in 999. Khurasan was recovered by a Turkish general of the Samanids, Sebük Tegin, who founded a dynasty at Ghazna. But busy conquering India, his successors the Ghaznavids neglected Khurasan and in particular its northwestern border. Second step, the Saljuqs (leader of the nomadic Oghuz) took advantage of this situation to settle in Khurasan and eventually ousted the Ghaznavids in 1040. The consequences of the Saljuq domination in Khurasan were complex. On the one hand, Khurasan was clearly not neglected by the Saljuqs. Merv regained its status of capital, and it was thanks to the support of the local elites (tired of financing the Ghaznavid military) that the Saljuqs were able to take control of large cities (Bosworth 1973; Paul 2000). From the beginning, the Saljuqs relied on Khurasani secretaries to rule their territories, the most famous of them being Hasan of Tus, better known as Nizam al-Mulk. Thanks to them, the hegemonic ambitions of Khurasan in gestation since the eighth century were realized. Seen from Isfahan, western Iran's main city, the Saljuq conquest could appear thus as a Khurasani domination (not only did the Khurasanis controlled the central apparatus but they were given the key local functions) (Durand-Guédy 2010). In the early centuries of Islam, Khurasani contributions to the Muslim civilization had already been considerable with the Hanafi *fiqh* (mostly developed in Transoxiana) and hadith collections. During the Saljuq period, the influence of Khurasan was translated also into other fields: the spread of Persian as a language of culture (a status it first acquired at the Samanid court), of Asha'ism (a theology born in Iraq but whose stronghold was in Nishapur; Gilliot 2002), of mysticism in the form of Sufism (Chabbi 1997), and, last but not least, of the madrasas (an institution that existed in Khurasan from the 10th century and which spread to the west along the Khurasani 'ula-

mas). The life and thought of Abu Hamid Ghazali, the Tus-born author of the *Revivification of the Religious Sciences*, embodies this influence. On the other hand, the Saljuq period also marked the decline of the province. According to Bulliet, the capacity of production of the countryside reached its maximum and by the 11th century the cities went into crisis. The role of the Saljuqs in this decline still remains to be elucidated. But what is clear is that far from being the Iranized rulers sometimes described, their lifestyle on the one hand, their relationship with the Turkmen nomads installed in Dihistan, Gurgan and Tukharistan on the other hand show a picture more complicated (Durand-Guédy 2011). Contacts between nomads and sedentary peoples could be profitable, as evidenced by the rise of the commercial ‘hub’ of Shahristana, near Nisa, but eventually the pressure exerted by the former, pressure probably fueled by a dynamic demography about which we are not informed as well as movements in the steppe that followed the arrival of the Qara Khitay in 1134, throw off the balance.

The third stage was reached in 1153 when Oghuz nomads captured the Saljuq sultan Sanjar and looted Khurasan. What is important is not the nomadic ‘surge’ as such, but the inability of the Saljuq state to recover. This collapse reveals as much as it accelerated the dissolution of the social pact on which it was founded, and nowhere is this dissolution more visible than in the intense factionalism which, under the guise of fighting between *madhhabs*, undermined the urban societies, in particular that of Nishapur. From 1160, Khurasan fell under the control of the Khwarazmshahs, epigons of the Saljuqs, but in 1220, and this is the fourth and final step, they were swept aside by the Mongols of Genghis Khan. The intensity of ravages they caused in Khurasan made irreversible the changes already visible from the second half of the 12th century. What had been the most prosperous region of early Islamic Iran became in “*ulusid*” geopolitics (Fragner 1999, 2001) a disputed frontier between the *ulus* Chaghatai and the *ulus* Hülegü.

Just before the coming of the Mongols, the future author of the *Mu‘jam al-buldan* and *Muj‘am al-udaba’*, the celebrated Yaqut al-Rumi, travelled from Syria to Khurasan to study in the rich libraries of Merv, Nishapur and other cities. He was one of the last to have seen the Khurasan *d’avant*. In the early 20th century, Herzfeld exhumed it in *Der Islam* with his famous “Denkmalsgeographische Studien”. It is to the credit of the archaeologists brought together in this volume of the same journal to provide us with a much clearer picture of this lost world.

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Rocco Rante

“Khorasan Proper” and “Greater Khorasan” within a politico-cultural framework

Abstract: Meaning “the place where the sun rises”, Khorasan indicated a vast territory towards the East, which changed its form through the centuries. Probably born in the 6th century, Khorasan was a Sassanid geographical and administrative entity, regrouping the ancient Parthia, Margiana and a part of Arya. Later, beginning with the Ma'mun caliphate, under the Tahirid government, the region expanded, including also the Balkh region until Badakhshan to the East, a part of Qumis to the West, Quhistan to the South and the areas until Oxus River to the North. This political and also cultural expansion gave to this territory the appellation of Greater Khorasan. The peculiarities of this region are observable in different fields, of which it has been here opened only some-one.

Keywords: Khorasan Proper, Greater Khorasan, urban, culture, Transoxiana.

The aim of this article is to increase knowledge of the region of Khorasan, through its geographical and cultural frontiers, concerning which there is still little information. This is not oriented to repeat an exclusively historical study about the regional extension of Khorasan, knowing the difficulty of fixing it into an unbending territorial framework, since some previous authoritative scholars such as Marquart (1901; 1931), Herzfeld (1921), Le Strange (1930) or Daniel (1979) and others have already done this.

This essay will consider and discuss the already known data concerning the geographical extension of Khorasan, from the pre-Islamic period to the Islamic one, and complete them with some of the latest archaeological discoveries in the region concerning urban development and material culture. It also will propose the different forms of the region of Khorasan, in diverse periods, thus slightly revisiting the region of Khorasan as identified by Le Strange.

As was precisely proposed by Pourshariati, through Bulliet's suggestion (1998, pp. 43–44, n. 3–4), Khorasan could be divided into “Inner Khorasan” and “Outer Khorasan”, which I prefer to call “Khorasan Proper” and “Greater Khorasan”, the former having a stronger geographical ambiguity.¹ The bounda-

¹ In fact, I disagree with some of Pourshariati's geographical limitations, estimating them too inflexible for a territory which changed during the centuries.

ries of these two “Khorasanian extensions”, transformed through the centuries, depended on different factors: political, economical and cultural. I believe that these premises are good substrata from which to begin the analysis.

Historiography of Khorasan

Meaning “the place where the sun rises” or “the Eastern Land”, Khorasan could often be associated with a territorial entity more than an administrative one. Considered by the Sassanids one of the four quarters of the Empire, that of the East, it was traditionally divided into four administrative provinces:² Nishapur, Herat, Merv and Balkh (fig. 1).³ Considering, according to the recent discoveries (Rante and Collinet 2013), that Nishapur was born during the end of the 4th century AD and that Balkh was effectively not under Sassanid administration before the 6th century (Gyselen 1989, p. 88; Gyselen 2003, pp. 165–166), Khorasan, as it has been understood until now, should be concretely considered as a large quarter of the Sassanid Empire from the mid 6th century AD. In any case, since the Sassanid occupation of eastern Iran was *de facto* ephemeral (Gyselen 2003, p. 166) and the eastern Sassanid administrative centres were probably much greater than four,⁴ it is still hard today to have a concrete idea of the boundaries of eastern Sassanid Khorasan. Moreover, if an administrative Khorasanian entity had existed before the 6th century, its eastern boundaries probably corresponded to the Murghab.⁵ It is, nevertheless, interesting to point out that Moses of Khorene (5th century AD) exposing the Oriental Sassanid quarter mentions several Oxus sites, as well as Tirmidh and probably Bukhara (Diz-i Awaza?) and Paykend (Diz-i Roin?) (Marquart 1901, p. 108 n. 2).

Regarding the frontiers of western Khorasan, from the Mesopotamian Sassanid centre Khorasan could have been popularly intended to start from Rayy, or

² Concerning the division of the Sassanid Empire, see R. Gyselen (1989) and concerning specifically the eastern provinces, see R. Gyselen (2003).

³ The geographical map presents cities in an anachronistic way, to have different points of reference through the epochs.

⁴ See Marquart 1931, pp. 8–13.

⁵ The written documents at our disposal concerning the toponym of Khorasan almost all belong to the Islamic period, above all from the 9th century. If Harmatta’s interpretation (1996, p. 376) of a Chinese text of the T’ang Shu, Wu-san T’ê-ch’in Shai (*Horsan Tegin Shahi*) is accepted, Khorasan, under the Hephtalite form *Horsan*, could be found at the beginning of the 8th century (“Tegin king of Khorasan”). The toponym is also mentioned elsewhere, by Jesusdenah, bishop of Basra, and dated to the end 8th century (Chabot 1896, pp. 245, 265), as well as in the Arbela Chronicle (concerning the authenticity of this source, see Jullien 2001).

from Hamadhan (Herzfeld 1921, p. 108), eastwards to the “place where the sun rises”, as it was during the medieval period. It seems more probable instead that the limits of western Khorasan could have corresponded to the “whole Abarshahr” (Gyselen 1989, p. 85). It is therefore probable that at the Sassanid epoch Khorasan excluded Rayy and some other provinces mentioned in later historical sources. Qumis, often associated with the Gurgan region (Gyselen 1989, p. 84), was probably the western frontier of the Abarshahr region. The problem is that the “whole Abarshahr” remains hard to circumscribe today. The Sassanid extension of this region could correspond, as attested by Marquart (1901, p. 74)⁶, to the area where the Aparni originally settled, corresponding to the area of Tejend.⁷ Concerning the South, the large Iranian deserts and Seistan could have been the limits of Khorasan.

Lastly, Herzfeld described the limits of Khorasan during the last part of the Sassanid period (fig. 2)⁸: “Eastern Tehran in the “Caspian Gates” begins the eastern parts of the Alborz Mountains, south-eastern corner of the Caspian Sea, today’s Russian-Persian border at Atrek, the Trans-Caspian railway to about Lutfabad; after a line through the desert, including the oases of Merv and Tadjand, until to the Amu Darya at Karki, the Amu Darya itself to about Hazrat Imam, then west from Badakhshan to South into the Hindükush mountains, thence to the western bending of Hindükush and continues along its western, south past Herat, a salt lake on the Afghan-Persian border, through Kohistan south Khaf and Turshiz and on the northern edge the great Dasht-i Kavir desert to the starting point back to the Caspian Gates” (Herzfeld 1921, p. 109).

During the Arab invasion, Khorasan seems to correspond to an abstract geographical entity. The Arab armies did not limit their conquest to the boundaries of Sassanid Khorasan, but rapidly passed the Oxus through the Kara Kum and advanced through Sogdiana towards the north-east, to be stopped later on the Talas River in around 750 AD. It is thus probable that the meaning of Khorasan was adopted in this new larger political context. This could certainly also explain the chaotic administration of the first years of Arab occupation (Daniel 1979, p. 19). At that time, the administrative framework pointed out by a Pahlavi source

⁶ See also Lecoq 1986.

⁷ Later mentioned by al-Ya’qubi as being Tabasain (the gate of Khorasan; see also al-Baladhuri, Hitti 1924, p. 677), Kuhistan, Nisa, Abiverd, Abrashahr (Nishapur), Jam, Bakharz, Tus, Zuzan and Isparain.

⁸ Regarding this historiographical synthesis of Herzfeld published in 1921, I have tried to outline Herzfeld’s profile, preferring to use an original map of that period of the London Geographical Institute (1920).

(dated to the Abbasid time) saw Khorasan divided into twelve capitals (Marquart 1931, pp. 8–13): Samarkand, Navarak, an unnamed city of Khorezm, Marw al-Rudh, Merv, Herat, Bushanj (Pushang), Tus, Nishapur, Qayin, Gurgan and Qumis. The province west of Qumis seems to have probably been attached to Iraq. This area, between Mesopotamia and Khorasan, was the military outpost to subdue the Eastern lands.

Despite the former geographical limitation, which looks furthermore to be an indication of the conquered countries, it seems in any case that at the time of the Arab invasion, between the second half of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century, the real north-eastern and the western boundaries of Khorasan were respectively the Oxus River and Qumis. This is not so strange considering that at that time the administration was left to the Iranians. The southern ones were Seistan and Kerman provinces, obviously not included in Khorasan.

Regarding the eastern frontier, at the time of the conquest its limits would still have been ephemeral. In fact, even if its reign was destroyed and its people dispersed between south-eastern Iran and Afghanistan, the territory of Haytal is still mentioned at the time of the Muslim conquest and after.⁹

Therefore, in my opinion the frontiers proposed by Herzfeld would be a good geographical framework of Khorasan between the end of the 7th and 8th centuries, although with strong doubts concerning Badakhshan.

In the Islamic period, one of the first descriptions of the territory of Khorasan is that of the geographer al-Ya'qubi, in the 9th century. In his *Historiae* (I, 201) Ya'qubi relates of the Isbahbadh of Khorasan: 1. Nishapur, 2. Herat, 3. Merv, 4. Marw-i Rudh, 5. Pariyab, 6. Taliqan, 7. Balkh, 8. Bukhara, 9. Badhghes, 10. Baward (Abiverd), 11. Ghartchistan, 12. Tus, 13. Sarakhs, 14. Gurgan.¹⁰ Concerning Ya'qubi's list, Herzfeld has no doubt as to the error of No. 8, "Bukhara", which according to him seems to be too isolated amongst the other more homogenous geographic centres. Although Bukhara geographically is *de facto* outside Khorasan, the recent archaeological researches on the Bukhara Oasis carried out by the Joint Franco-Uzbek Archaeological Mission¹¹ show the very strong influence Khorasan on the whole Bukhara Oasis, in the political and cultural con-

⁹ Maqdisi relates the Oxus River as being the frontier between the Haytal and Khorasan (Miquel 1963, p. 286 n. 8; Bosworth 1984, p. 20).

¹⁰ See also Herzfeld 1921, p. 108.

¹¹ This archaeological mission is in cooperation with the Fond Forum, the Archaeological Institute of Samarkand, the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the LA3M (CNRS, UMR 7298).

texts, so that Bukhara would seem well located in Ya‘qubi’s list. The same author in *Kitab al-Buldan*, relating about Balkh, moreover defines the region extended from Rayy to Ferghana, and identifies its centre in Balkh:¹² between Rayy and Balkh there are thirty days, as extending between Balkh and Ferghana (Wiet 1937, p. 101; see also Adle, p. 98 in this volume). Towards the east there is Turkestan, which surrounds Khorasan and Seistan. The western boundary was Qumis: “of which Damghan was the first city of Khorasan” (Wiet 1937, p. 80). He seems also mention Tabaristan in Khorasan; the sovereign defined it as “*ispahbad of Khorasan*” in his epistolary with the Caliphs Ma‘mun and Mu‘tasim (Wiet 1937, p. 81).

During the latter part of the 9th century, Abu Hanifa Dinawari,¹³ relating the political and geographical situation of late antiquity and early medieval eastern territories in his *Akhbar al-Tiwal*, located the city of Amuya, or Amul (Amol), in Khorasan, on the western side of the Oxus (Dinawari 1990, p. 367). He thus also included in this region the area between the Merv Oasis and the Oxus.¹⁴ It seems, additionally, that Dinawari excludes Bukhara from the boundaries of Khorasan (Dinawari 1990, pp. 66, 55, 86, 78). Concerning the western frontiers, Dinawari (1990, p. 90) seems include Qumis and Gurgan in Khorasan.¹⁵

In the same century, al-Baladhuri proposed a geographical framework of Khorasan which is totally different from those mentioned above. He also included within the frontiers of Khorasan Khorezm, Tokharistan, Seistan and Transoxiana (Barbier de Meynard 1861, p. 199). According to al-Yaqut’s commentary, all these countries were mentioned because they were under the authority of the governor of Khorasan, while remaining outside the regional limits of Khorasan.¹⁶

In the 9th century, except for the western and southern ones, the eastern and the north-eastern limits are difficult to understand and delimit. The historical sources report different geographical shapes of Khorasan, sometimes expanding it up to the frontiers with China and the Turkic people.

Nonetheless Khorasan at that epoch constituted a well-established political entity due to the advent of the Tahirid dynasty in 821 AD. Without taking away

12 Is it possible that Ya‘qubi, even if later, did refer to the Barmakids’ government of Khorasan from Balkh, which had taken power for a very short time?

13 In my opinion the local history of Dinawari seems to be the more accredited historical report of this time.

14 Regarding this matter, see the article of Paul Wordsworth in this volume.

15 This affirmation seems to be contradictory with the following one relating of Bistam as governor of Khurasan, Qumis, Gurgan and Tabaristan (Dinawari 1990, p. 93), listed separately.

16 However, al-Baladhuri did not draw up any official geographical list of the countries included within Khorasan. See also Herzfeld 1921, pp. 108–109.

the merit of the unification of Khorasan and the *Ma warra' al-Nahr* to the Samanid dynasty (Bosworth 1975, pp. 90 – 135; 1984, p. 42), already present into Transoxiana, the Tahirids had the merit to have extended their sovereignty to a part of Transoxiana, which was still not completely Islamised. The recent archaeological discoveries in the Bukhara Oasis, more precisely in Paykend, show the presence of coins (*fels*) minted in Bukhara under the political Aegis of the Tahirids. These coins have been found in two 9th century habitats, in the Shahrestan 1 and 2, and in the pottery quarter, always in well-delineated layers. These coins are dated to 826 AD (Tahla ibn Tahir, Bukhara), 845 – 855 AD (Tahir ibn Abdallah, Bukhara), 867 AD (Muhammad ibn Tahir, Bukhara) and the mid 9th century, of which the inscription was very damaged. Some Tahirid coins (*dirhams*) minted in Samarkand, fewer than in Bukhara, were also found. These coins bore the name of Talhal ibn Tahir. Much rarer are Tahirid coins minted eastwards from Samarkand. Only very few seem to have been minted in Chach and only under the name of Abd 'Allah ibn Tahir, 241H/855 AD.¹⁷ Regarding the boundaries of western Khorasan, at the beginning of the al-Ma'mun caliphate, the Tahirids of Nishapur also minted coins in Rayy (Muhammadiyah) (Miles 1938, no. 111a, 112a) under the name of Talhal ibn Tahir. After his death (828 AD), no coins bore a Tahirid name,¹⁸ even if numismatics have interpreted some of them as been from the Tahirid mint.¹⁹ The limited above-mentioned numismatic data suggest that during the short time of Talhal ibn Tahir's government, Rayy would have been under Tahirid political control. A very small number of coins were minted in Seistan.

The largest extension of Tahirid power, and thus the largest extension phase of the culture of Khorasan, was established in the 8th century under the Tahirid dynasty, perhaps more precisely during the short reign of Talhal ibn Tahir.

Later, in the 10th century, the Samanid dynasty carried out the “official” unification of Khorasan and Transoxiana. They created, from the new capital Bukhara, an area of interexchange between the Far East (China and the Turkic people) of the Islamic lands and the boundaries of western Khorasan, which at that period corresponded to the Buyyid territories.

17 Concerning these, no archaeological data have been found: no true provenance, nor archaeological context.

18 At least among the archaeological finds of Erich Schmidt in the 1930s.

19 Even if the coins interpreted as being Tahirid are many more than these mentioned, I have only taken into consideration the coins effectively minted in Rayy and bearing the name of one of the Tahirids.

Concerning the frontiers of Khorasan, in the middle of the 10th century Ibn Hawqal located the boundaries of north-eastern Khorasan at the Oxus River, the Eastern ones in Badakhshan, of which the city of Djirm should have been the eastern limit (Wiet 1937, p. 102; Barthold 1981, p. 66)²⁰, and the western ones, as before, in Damghan (Kramers et Wiet 1964, pp. 413–416). The Southern limit is the Seistan province. Mas’udi (Pellat 1962, 312) fixes the Kushan region, which would at least correspond to Tokharistan, between Khorasan and China,²¹ later identifying the mine of Pangshir in Khorasan (Pellat 1962, 455).

Later, al-Yaqut locates Khorasan within the boundaries of Iraq, “Thokharistan, Ghaznah, Sedjestan and Kerman” (Barbier de Meynard 1861, p. 198). He definitely excluded Transoxiana and Khorezm.

From the Sassanid epoch, Khorasan has been a vast territory joining the Iranian cultures with the Far East and India as well as Mesopotamia and the Near East. Being at the beginning a territory issued by different ancient regions and provinces, its frontiers have always been hard to understand because often the historical reports were often contradictory. It concerns above all the eastern and western boundaries; instead, even if amply discussed, the north-eastern and the southern ones were more or less definitive: the Oxus, Seistan and the Great Iranian Deserts. The limits proposed by Herzfeld (fig. 2) corresponding to the end part of the Sassanid period seem to be likely, although in the light of the recent researches, as previously explained, I would suggest situating the eastern boundaries in the Murghab River.

The relatively short period concerning the Arab conquest and the Umayyad dynasty, as previously said, appears too instable to fix Khorasan within a rigid form. This territory would be constituted of all conquered regions eastwards from the province of Rayy, of which I would establish the eastern limit in Damghan province. At that period, *Ma warra’ al-Nahr* depended on Merv, political and military platform for the Eastern Lands.

Le Strange (1966, map 1), who realised the map of the Abbasid Caliphate provinces, which remains useful today, left the eastern part of Khorasan without frontiers. Moreover, concerning the western and the north-western boundaries, he left Qumis,²² Tabaristan, Gurgan, and Quhistan outside Khorasan. Although Tabaristan, Qumis and Gurgan could be situated outside the western frontiers

20 Both authors called the city Djirm, in Ya’qubi, or Jarm, in Barthold, the frontier with Tibet. I locate this limit around the city of Fayzabad (Barthold 1981, p. 66).

21 Regarding Kushana and the relations with the other populations and territories in Central Asia, see also Frye 1966, pp. 244–247.

22 Concerning this province, see Gyselen 1989, p. 53; Schwarz 1969, p. 809ff.

of Khorasan, at least in the second half of the 8th century, from the 9th century a part of Qumis and Gurgan could be integrated into the boundaries of Khorasan,²³ making Damghan the Door of Khorasan.²⁴ The eastern boundaries could be situated in the province of Badakhshan, around the city of Fayzabad, where a solid mountain range rises up as natural border and goes down to reach the main ranges of the Hindu Kush.

During the 10th century,²⁵ when Khorasan and Transoxiana were under the control of the Samanids, according to Ibn Hawqal the western boundaries of Khorasan remained at Qumis, near or in Damghan. The eastern ones excluded Ghur from the 9th century limits, even if Bamiyan seems to be within the frontiers of Khorasan (Kramers and Wiet 1964, p. 416). The south was bordered by Seistan; Quhistan was inside the perimeter of Khorasan. Concerning the north-eastern boundaries, even if at that time Samanids ruled over Khorasan and Transoxiana thus making it almost a unique territory, the limit of Khorasan proper continued to be the Oxus, again separating two historically independent regions, which however were from the advent of Islam culturally, and in part politically, united.²⁶

The historiographical elements brought to light show how arduous is to define a territory, from the 6th until the 10th centuries, which from its origin was indeterminate and whose toponym indicates “land where the sun rises”. However, from the 6th century Khorasan seems to have been constituted of an original nucleus, or “Proper Khorasan”, which I tentatively located within the Merv oasis, Herat, Zuzan, following the eastern border of the Iranian Deserts to the south-eastern corner of the Caspian Sea, excluding thus a large part of Qumis, but including the province of Gurgan following the shape of the Great Wall, which in the light of the recent researches is dated to the 5th-6th centuries (fig. 3). From this nucleus the limits expanded during the Islamic period, firstly including Balkh and its province, the whole of Quhistan, a part of ancient Hyrcania until the Atrek River and the desert zones between the Merv oasis and the Oxus, which

²³ Regarding it, see Bosworth 1986, p. 378.

²⁴ I believe that each frontier limit should have been a city, or an urban agglomeration. It is in my opinion less probable to find an important frontier in rural areas or in caravanserais, unless these latter were of very important dimensions or better integrated in urbanised zones.

²⁵ See Frye 1975, Map 3.

²⁶ This historical moment was focused on the conquest and the stabilisation of the east, as well as the Islamisation of the whole *Ma warra' al-Nahr*.

has been a very natural frontier over the centuries.²⁷ A large part of the Zarafshan valley, in Transoxiana, including the Bukhara and Samarkand Oases, has been an area of major influences of Khorasan (fig. 4).

The standing of this first nucleus of Khorasan, which became Greater Khorasan, is certainly to be sought in its geographical position at the centre of such different lands as Central Asia, China, India, Western Iran and Mesopotamia. This geographical situation formed out of this territory a crossroads through which travelled peoples, cultures, ideas and influences. There is little doubt that the designation of “Greater Khorasan” is traceable in the Islamic period, during the Abbasid period, more precisely beginning with the Tahirid’s several decades of government, in the 9th century, even if somebody would fix it during the Abu Muslim’s leadership. The follow century and the Samanid control contributed to increase and reinforce it.

Urban peculiarities of Khorasan?

This historiographical framework fixed, the temptation is strong to establish “species from Khorasan” regarding urban and material cultural development. In a rigorous comparative study concerning the urban features in Khorasan, at this state of archaeological researches it is too hard and perilous to try to find similitudes within the cities of Khorasan, because of the paucity of archaeological data. Several studies have tried to group urban characteristics and find common origins, but the cities wholly studied are too poor to have a well-constituted group of urban data available to be compared, although several interesting hypotheses have been emitted and these may inspire future archaeological works. Yes, in a general framework it is possible to differentiate western and eastern Iranian urban features in different and precise chronological backgrounds; the urban plans of the Irano-Mesopotamian cities being often differently constituted than those of the eastern side of the Iranian deserts. Concerning the eastern Iranian cities, unfortunately it is not yet possible to completely compare the urban entities each other, above all because the archaeological data at our disposal are incomplete for each period.

In the framework of “Khorasan Proper”, Merv is basically constituted of an Achaemenid oval city to the north, Erk Kala, and a later Seleucid quadrangular

²⁷ See also A. Miquel translating Ibn Hawqal (1967, p. 377) relating the lands enclosing Khorasan as Tokharistan, Bamiyan mounts, Tus and Quhistan.

walled city, Gyaur Kala, added to the South.²⁸ Although the Parthians and the Sassanids developed Merv as major trade, military, political and administrative centre, they did not make major alterations to the urban plan, of which the whole large size corresponds to around 352 ha (William 2007, p. 44). Concerning Herat (around 200 ha), which would have the closest geometrical form to the former, there are not yet enough archaeological data of the whole site to propose a serious comparison with the other cities. Thanks to the Germano-Afghan archaeological mission directed by Ute Franke,²⁹ the chronology of the Qohandez as well as the Qale-e Ikhtyaruddin is now known, corresponding to the pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid epochs. The chronology of the large square lower city is still unknown, even if a Sassanid origin has been proposed (Grenet 1996, p. 379) besides through comparisons with the also hypothetical Sassanid origin of the Bactres ramparts (Bactres II)³⁰ (Le Berre and Schlumberger 1964, pp. 82–84, 87–89; Grenet 1996, 381).

It is thus in my opinion still hazardous to engage a deep discussion on finding a possible original “Sassanid urban model” in this area, beginning from the models like Herat, Balkh and Merv, which certainly are inevitably linked by very close urban features, but probably issued in different periods.³¹

Nishapur (17.6 ha; fig. 5) (Rante and Collinet 2013), founded at the end of the 4th century AD, presents close topographical characteristics, but in a very smaller scale, with the previous “empire creations”. The urban feature of Nishapur would belong to a larger group of cities born between Khorasan and Transoxiana, of which the urban constitution and spatial scale were already adopted between the end of the 4th³² and the 5th century AD, and even before according to Kiani’s surveys (1982a; see also Sauer *et al.* 2013). Like Nishapur, of which the urban surface (citadel and shahrestan) more or less corresponds to that of Paykend (14 ha, citadel and shahrestan), both founded in the 4th century, other small-medium size fortified cities also called “Qal‘a-villages” (Gaube 2008, p. 176) have been observed in the area of “Khorasan Proper”, of which the surveys and excavations have sometimes brought to light chronologies as ancient as the

28 Concerning Merv, see Hermann 1999 and the related previous bibliography indicated, Williams 2007, pp. 42–62.

29 See the article in this volume.

30 The monetary atelier of Balkh is active, moreover, from the second half of the 6th century (Gyselen 2003, pp. 165–166, fig. 5), this region being previously under an ephemeral Sassanid control.

31 Regarding this matter, see Rante, “Urban Topographies of Persia and Central Asia”, 2015a.

32 In Transoxiana, more precisely in the Bukhara Oasis, the foundation of Paykend (citadel and Shahrestan 1) has been reviewed to the 4th century AD.

Parthian and Sassanid periods (Pugachenkova 1958, Kiani 1982a/b):³³ Qal‘a Kharabeh (56.25 ha; fig. 6), Qal‘a Gug (49 ha; fig. 7), Qal‘a Yasaqi (25 ha) and Qal‘a Sultan ‘Ali (60 ha),³⁴ Abiverd (45 ha), Kyrk Tepe (12.3 ha; fig. 8), or even smaller like Khosrow Kala (6.5 ha; fig. 9) and Akcha Tepe (1.2 ha).

The aim here is not to find an original “model of Khorasan” of small-medium size cities composed of a citadel and a quadrangular lower city (or shahrestan), because as previously noticed archaeological data are too poor,³⁵ but the enquiry concerning this kind of small-medium urban agglomerations should not be limited to only the Transoxiana urban development³⁶ (Grenet 1996, p. 383; Gaube 2008, p. 176).

It is undeniable that a well-conceived urban form³⁷ of small-medium size with the above-mentioned characteristics is common in “Khorasan Proper” during the pre-Islamic time. Could it be possible that these regions produced autochthon urban models subsequently to an economical³⁸ and urban increase observed even before the 5th century? It has been observed, in fact, that from the Parthian period numerous fortified cities grew up in this region, testifying a clear defensive need on another urban model.³⁹ The archaeological elements are still poor, but the few data at our disposal could perhaps help to re-orient the future investigations.

Between the 6th and the 7th centuries, the very dynamic economical and demographical development in Sogdiana engendered the construction of further urban entities, always protected by a defensive wall, like for example Paykend and Romitan⁴⁰ in the Bukhara Oasis. This economical and urban dynamic

33 I consider here the city surrounded by ramparts, which would correspond to the ancient urban nucleus. Regarding Pugachenkova 1958, some of her chronological conclusions have been revisited.

34 See Rante 2008, pp. 205–207. I take advantage of this occasion to correct a print error (Rante 2008, p. 206) concerning the area of Qal‘a Gug which corresponds to 49 ha.

35 It could also be added that the square urban form of the city with the citadel on the northern side could be also found in Rayy, whose confirmed origin attest to its construction in the Iron Age (Rante, *Rayy*, 2015b).

36 For Transoxiana see, amongst others, Pugachenkova 1965.

37 No references to the inner urban tissue have been carried out here because the data are much more poor and sparse.

38 The recent researches on geomorphology in the Bukhara Oasis attest to a hydrological and agricultural increase already before the 4th-5th centuries.

39 Concerning this see Rante 2013, pp. 235–237.

40 Concerning Romitan, the recent researches, even if at a preliminary state, have brought to light a shahrestan 2 erected some time later, but certainly during the pre-Islamic era.

seems to be absent in Khorasan in this period, probably because of the gradual decline of the Sassanid Empire.

After the Arab conquest, the territorial and social occupation of Khorasan and its cities took place more or less peacefully, because of the interest of the lords of Khorasan in retaining their traditional positions in the city or in the provinces (Daniel 1979, p. 19). The Arab conquerors thus firstly occupied the territory militarily, leaving the administration to the Iranians but obliging them to pay tribute. Then, at the arrival of Arab communities, from the end of the 7th and the 8th centuries they were obliged to reorganize their urban politic and administration as well as the urban plans of the cities.

On this, the dynamic was common. The Arab settlers would have occupied the inner city, except in some cases,⁴¹ and more or less everywhere in the areas beyond the ancient urban nucleus, establishing well-constituted suburbs (Rabad). The dynamic of urban development from the pre-Islamic core to a more extensive early Islamic city is a common feature of Iranian urban history (Kennedy 2007, p. 107), and in the 9th century, under the Tahirid government, in “Khorasan Proper” the urban centres, in an early time unsupported by ramparts,⁴² grew up much more than elsewhere.⁴³

Ceramic types of Khorasan

From the point of view of material culture the horizon is much more vast, and some traits of Khorasan could be observable in different fields like, for example, architecture,⁴⁴ metalwork,⁴⁵ and the large sphere of iconography. Here I will only address the recent outcomes concerning pottery. The recent researches in some of the main cities of Khorasan brought to light during the last part of the Sassanid epoch, beginning thus from the 6th century, the pottery production in Nishapur, ancient Hyrcania, part of Qumis province and Merv, except for some details, is very close (Rante and Collinet 2013, pp. 196–199, 206). At the present

41 The recent excavations in Romitan, in the Bukhara Oasis, seem to show an absence of early Islamic layers in the most ancient part of the city, which instead are all situated in the different tepe of the Rabad.

42 Nishapur probably presents an exception, if we consider the large first Tahirid military settlement in Shadyakh surrounded by a wall, even if it should not be considered as urban agglomeration.

43 See also Bulliet 1994, p. 77.

44 See among others, Pugachenkova 1972.

45 See especially Allan 1979 and 1982.

state of researches, Herat would be an exception, the pottery production presenting some different characteristics. It is nevertheless noticeable that we still do not have at our disposal enough material of that period coming from Herat. This almost homogeneous cultural nucleus would correspond to “Khorasan Proper”, and does not find true closeness outside it (Rante and Collinet 2013, pp. 205–206). Moreover, green/turquoise glazed ceramics belonging to this period have been also observed in the Gurgan Plain, Tureng Tepe as well in Nishapur.⁴⁶

From the 9th century, the political situation in Khorasan with the Tahirid government involved an increase in production and a development of techniques, as well as a growth of trade within and outside Khorasan, a cultural phenomenon corresponding to what we call “Greater Khorasan”. At that epoch it was possible to observe a political and cultural rapprochement between the original nucleus of Khorasan and the eastern and north-eastern cities and regions, like first of all Balkh and Bukhara, but also the Samarkand, Tashkent and Karchi oases, rather than the western and southern sides of Khorasan. Despite the poor archaeological data concerning this period, the unglazed and glazed pottery productions seem to confirm close similarities within “Khorasan Proper”, and show some similarities in Balkh, Herat,⁴⁷ Paykend (Rante, Raimkulov and Adilov 2011 and 2012), Bukhara (Nekrasova 1999, pp. 41, 43) and Samarkand (Shishkina and Pavchinskaja 1992, p. 52). In this case, the ceramic type called “Buffware” would represent Khorasan’s own “specie”, exported and probably produced in all of Greater Khorasan.

Later, the advent of the Samanids reinforced the links between the different main cities of Greater Khorasan and determined a cultural homogeneity in it, as well as sometimes outside it.

Conclusion

In the light of the archaeological and historical researches about Khorasan, at present it is possible to propose some historiographical elements. The territory of Khorasan could be assumed to fall into two chronologically separated parts: “Khorasan Proper” and “Greater Khorasan”. The former corresponds to the original nucleus of Khorasan, the latter to its political and cultural standing.

⁴⁶ Some glazed pottery seems to have also been found in Balkh, from the 4th century, and in the late 8th century in Rayy.

⁴⁷ See Rante and Collinet 2013, p. 200.

According to the previous discussion and thanks to the recent archaeological discoveries, “Khorasan Proper” would date to the 6th century AD and be included in an area corresponding to the Merv oasis, Herat, Zuzan, following the eastern border of the Iranian Deserts to the south-eastern corner of the Caspian Sea, a part of Qumis (probably east of Damghan), but including the province of Gurgan following the shape of the Great Wall.⁴⁸

Beginning from the 9th century, this ancient nucleus expanded politically and culturally under the Tahirid government, according to the recent discoveries, thus slightly revisiting Le Strange’s boundaries of Khorasan. It rapidly spread eastwards to include the regions of Balkh and Badakhshan, north-eastwards until the areas of the Oxus, southwards to the Quhistan, until the boundaries of Seistan and the Iranian deserts, west and north-westwards to include a part of Qumis, and the province of Gurgan.

Through these premises, the boundaries of Khorasan should have been firstly defined by a chronological division, which gives us a major understanding of the development of Khorasan through time; then giving more precisions about its eastern and western sides.

In the context of a “specie of Khorasan”, urban, architectural or more generally cultural matters should be considered firstly beginning from the ancient nucleus through the 6th until the 10th century, in which the cities like Merv, Nishapur, Herat, Abiverd and Gurgan and also all the small-size fortified cities, could present “characteristics of Khorasan” for different features. This has been suggested in urban development, where the perhaps autochthonous growth of different urban models could be appreciated in this area certainly before the 5th century AD.

A development of material culture has also been observed, especially from the 9th century. At that period, thanks to their political autonomy and economical independence,⁴⁹ the Tahirids kept resources from Greater Khorasan for Khorasan and *Khorasani* needs. This authentic regional politic, especially during the Talhal’s government, increased the cultural standing of Khorasan over the surrounding regions. This is noticeable above all in Transoxiana, where *in primis* the Bukhara oasis shows, through the recent discoveries, a culture very close to that of Khorasan.

The future archaeological discoveries will certainly give further and more precise elements about this region. At the state of the present researches it is

⁴⁸ The Oxus could have probably also been the north-eastern frontier of Khorasan in the Sassanid period, but there are too few data to confirm or infirm it.

⁴⁹ On this matter, see Daniel 1979, p. 198.

nevertheless possible to glimpse a well defined “region of Khorasan”, with its several main characteristics, which evolved through the centuries to reach with the Tahirids a better defined “cultural space of Khorasan”, later called Greater Khorasan.

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