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## On the Christian settlement of Urgut

*...there ought to be local intellectuals well familiar with suburbs of Urgut and Qara-tube who could establish the location of the Christian settlement. It would be interesting to survey this locality; in case any traces of the once flourished Christianity show up, it would be imperative to take care of these antiquities.*

W. W. Barthold, 'On the Christian settlement of Wazkerd', *Turkestan Gazette* № 21 (1894).<sup>1</sup>

In 1894, while compiling the Register of historical sites of Turkestan, W. Barthold came across the problem of the location of the Christian monastery, described by two Xth-century Arab geographers with all much precision as was possible for a mediaeval author. "Now I am convinced that one should read *Shawdar*... and that hereby is intended the mountain range straight to the south of Samarkand, in the foothills of which are situated the towns of Qara-tube and Urgut" [Barthold IV:110].

In his subsequent works Barthold did not either change or develop his point of view: "The location of the Christian settlement is described in much detail in Ibn Hawqal's story, the exact translation of which I published in the *Turkestan Gazette* in 1894". The scholar adds: "The name of the settlement has not been established yet. De Goeje believes it is *wzkrd* (Wazkerd), but also supplies the readings *wrkwd* and *zrdkrd*" [*ibid.*, fn. 11].

From thence *Wazkerd* made its way into all works on the subject, but *without this footnote*.

Six years later Viatkin writes in *Russian Turkestan*: "Below we will quote the place concerning Wazkerd from the excellent work by Mr W. Barthold, "Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion" which appeared in the second half of this year. ...Anyway, if a more or less precise location of Wazd (Wizd) could be located, then investigation of this location and excavations could be started with great deal of certainty that this is indeed the Wazkerd of Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal" [Viatkin 1900].

After that a cross-reference to Viatkin<sup>2</sup> appears in the editor's comment to another of Barthold's works: "Viatkin identifies this Christian settlement with the present-day Qinghir near Urgut" [Barthold 1921:145]. This was another turn in a vicious circle which has still not been broken out of to this day.

In 1996 I proposed that Wazkerd is a corrupt transcription of Urgut which emerged in the process of copying of the MSS of al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal [Savchenko 1996:337].

Since the publication my argument has acquired supporters [Naymark 2001:84; Baumer 2005:173-174] and opponents [Grenet/de la Vaissière 2002:161-163, Lurje 2004:178].

The latter base their arguments on a new reading of line 15 of the Mugh document V-18 (Devashtich's letter to Afshun, khuv of Khakhsar). That line has the word which Livshits considered to be a personal name *w'skrt* [Livshits 1962:123-126]. According to Grenet and de la Vaissière,

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<sup>1</sup> = [Barthold IV: 110].

<sup>2</sup> in this case, to his another work – [Viatkin 1902].

palaeography would suggest that *wyztkrt* is most likely a place-name. The authors relate it to the place-name Wazd/Wizd quoted by al-Sam‘ani and by two XVIth century *waqf* documents. On these grounds they conclude: “Wizdgird is mentioned in Islamic sources under two forms which stem from the Sogd. form here rediscovered: al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal use Wazgird, while Sam‘ani and XVIth-century *waqf* documents use Wizd or Wazd”. This led Lurje to declare: “since *wyztkrt* has been identified in the Sogdian text, the early Islamic *Wazkarda* receives most reliable corroboration and further changes to it become impossible”.

Below I intend to prove that: a) the spelling of *wzkrd* was invented by the Leiden-based editor as a last resort to make sense of the expectedly unfamiliar Central Asian toponymy<sup>3</sup>; b) the reading “Wazkerd” was accidentally brought into use by Barthold during his first visit to Turkestan at the age of 27; c) *wyztkrt* of the Mugh document V-18 is a fuller and an earlier form of Wazd/Wizd<sup>4</sup>, which place-name is indeed quoted by the sources, but has nothing to do with the name of Urgut. My arguments are as follows:

1. The idea that al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal write *Wazgird* is wrong.<sup>5</sup> In different MSS of their writings the word in question is spelled in different ways, Khawqal *F: wrkwd; L: wrkwdh; O: zrdkrd*; Istakhri *B: wrkrd; D: wrkwdh; E: zrkrd*. In a footnote to the edition of al-Istakhri, de Goeje writes: “Perhaps one should read *zrkrd*”, while in the edited text of Ibn Hawqal the spelling *wzkrd* is given without any hint to its provenance, *contrary to all other spellings*. This makes me conclude that the form *wzkrd*, *not attested by any single MS*, is the editor’s learned guess.

2. There could have been haplology, by which Lurje unsuccessfully tries to explain *wīztkrt* → *wzkrd*, had similar syllables followed one another (*syllabication* ← *syllabification*; *a’vous vu?* ← *avez-vous vu?*).

3. De-etymologisation could have taken place were it not the vocalism of the Iranian [Oriental Toponymy:167] and Armenian [Kapantsian 1940:102-103] analogies, which allows for reconstruction of the initial form as *wīzt/da/akert/d* with the inserted vowel needed to ease the three-consonant cluster and thus makes de-etymologisation unnecessary.

4. Phonetic de-etymologisation would have resulted in (or would have been the result of) a semantic de-etymologisation. In this case we would have to allow for the following: first *wyztkrt* (the VIIIth-century form attested by the Mugh document) loses *t/d* and becomes *wzkrd* (Xth-century form attested by Ibn Hawqal/al-Istakri), only to recover its previous form later, of *wāzd/wīzd* (XII-th century form attested by al-Sam‘ani). The likelihood of such event is minimal.

5. Grenet/de la Vaissière and Lurje fail to explain the disappearance of the long vowel in the postulated change *wīztkrt* → *wzkrd*.

I believe the arguments set out above show the error of my opponents’ confidence in two “facts”: a) that there exists some “reading, commonly accepted since de Goeje”, which I chose to replace by an amendment of my own composition, and b) that the re-examined Mugh document confirms the “accepted reading”, thereby disproving my [alleged] amendment.

In fact, the following can be stated: a) de Goeje gives *six* variant forms of the word in question, of which *three* clearly read as “Urgut” *with no amendments whatsoever*; b) the transformation *wrkwd* → *wzkrd* is commonplace from the point of view of Arabic handwriting,<sup>6</sup> while the opposite (*r* → *w*) is far less probable; c) the Mugh document actually *confirms* my point of view, since it substantiates the

<sup>3</sup> He frankly admits himself: “Nam plus semel doctus Arabs falsam lectionem praetulit. Valde autem accrevit annotatio eo quod plures hujus libri in Oriente recensiones circumferebantur, quarum diversitas mihi non videbatur negligenda”, *Praefatio* to the 1870 edition of al-Istakhri, pp. VII-VIII.

<sup>4</sup> Since the place-name is written *Wāzd* and *Wīzd* in Arabic sources, the pronunciation was presumably *Wēzd*. I am grateful to Prof. N. Sims-Williams who drew my attention to this fact.

<sup>5</sup> To say nothing of the forced form of *Wāzgird* [Grenet/de la Vaissière 2002:161].

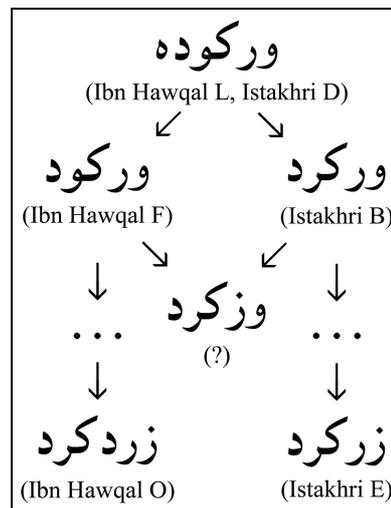
<sup>6</sup> Of many examples of such kind listed by Prof. O. Bolshakov in his talk “On Some Peculiarities of Arabic Orthography” (conference held at the Institute for Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg in November, 2004), I will cite just one: *al-Ran* ← *Alwan* (*Alban*, i.e. Albania Caucasia).

form of Wazd/Wizd as distinct from Urgut and unrelated to it. I do not doubt the correctness of Viatkin's identification of Wazd/Wizd with the present-day Qinghir or that there has never been any monastery there, at least a Christian one (see my detailed argument in [Savchenko 2005]).

I believe that the corruption of the text in the process of its copying scribe by scribe took place in the order shown; it is the fullest form, appearing twice, which is the original one: *Warkūda*, which was gradually corrupted beyond all recognition, to be discovered in the Church documents in due course.

I have already attempted to establish the etymology of the first syllable of this Iranian toponym which was first written down in Arabic [Savchenko 1996:337].<sup>7</sup> The rest of it may derive from Sogd. *kt*, *kt'k* 'house' (Pers., Taj. *kad*, *kada*) ← Old Iran. *\*kata-* (from *\*kan* 'dig' or *\*kat* 'cover') ← Indo-Europ. *\*ket-*, *\*kot-* 'living quarters', with the following parallels: Shughni *čid*, Rushani *čod*, Oroshor and Bartangi *čōd*, Sarikoli *čed* – 'house', Afghani *kota* – 'house, room', Wakhi *kut* – 'roof', Munji *kut* – 'premises, room', Ossetian *kxt* – 'stable', Yaghnobi *kat*, Yazgulem *kūd*, Parthian *kdg*, Khotano-Saka *kata* – 'covered place; house', with special attention to the sought long vowel in Bartangi and Oroshor.<sup>8</sup>

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The field work carried out in 2004 has shown that the search for the forgotten monastery should soon be over [Savchenko 2005]. Neither the available data nor common sense allow that in the Urgut area (i.e. the Shawdar mountains in the south of Samarkand) there once were *two* Christian monasteries, one described by the Arab geographers, and the other unnoticed.

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<sup>7</sup> "And (you) make that fence (War) as long as a horse race along all the four sides. Bring there seeds of animals, cattle, men, dogs and flaming fires colour red..." *Videvdat* 2:25 [Zaleman 1880:179-180].

<sup>8</sup> Wanji *čawgad* – "hen-house", Yazgulem *türkud*, Wanji *torgod* – "top/upper house", Yazgulem *xqwürkūd* – "Sun's house", Darvazi *sixkad/sikad* (*six/si* – unclear, *kad* – house). I am grateful to Dr Kh. Kurbanov who allowed me to use the materials for his forthcoming etymological dictionary of the Pamir languages and dialects.

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