

“Taqwim al-Buldan” by Abu al-Fida as a Source on Medieval Geography of Khwarazm and Transoxiana

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Abstract

A detailed study of the work of Abu al-Fida “Taqwim al-Buldan” will make it possible to better understand the peculiarities of the Central Asian region at that time, which determines the relevance of this research. The purpose of the article is to study and analyse the data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana in the work “Taqwim al-Buldan”. Various methods were used in the study: historical-critical, comparative, descriptive, critical analysis method, content analysis method, discourse analysis method. In the course of the research, it was concluded that Abu al-Fida gives a list of 7 cities and villages in the description of Khwarazm as well as 42 settlements in Transoxiana. In his description, Abu al-Fida pays special attention to gardens, minerals, fortifications, cathedral mosques, as well as the state of science in cities. Speaking about the population of Khwarazm and Transoxiana, Abu al-Fida pays attention to the religion of the inhabitants of these cities. He identifies Mongols, who at that time controlled Central Asia, as non-Muslims, expressing a certain regret that the cities of Central Asia, which were dominated by Muslims, are now dominated by pagans. The practical significance of the article lies in the fact that the introduction into scientific circulation of the study of data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana in the work “Taqwim al-Buldan” will allow better understanding the medieval Islamic scholars of the Central Asian region, and, in this regard, the article can be used for further research of this problem.

Keywords: Islamic World, Cathedral Mosques, Central Asia, Political Power, Mongol Empire

Introduction

The geographical work of the Syrian scholar and emir Abu al-Fida “Taqwim al-Buldan” (“A Sketch of the Countries”), compiled by him between 1316 and 1321, is a kind of reference book on countries known to the Islamic world in the Middle Ages. Part of his work concerns Central Asia, among other things, the last two chapters of the book are devoted to Khwarazm and Transoxiana.¹ The territory of Central Asia is one of the points of contact between the ancient civilizations of East and West.² The artery of the Great Silk Road that crossed Eurasia passed here.³ Ancient cities with a peculiar culture arose along it. At the time of compiling “Taqwim al-Buldan”, Central Asia was under the rule of the Mongols, being part of the vast expanse of the Mongol Empire.⁴ The ancient cities of Khwarazm and Transoxiana were then cosmopolitan, they were inhabited by people of different nations and religions.⁵ The work “Taqwim al-Buldan” is a valuable source of information about the peculiarities of the specified region, the state of cities, natural conditions, as well as the people who inhabited Khwarazm and Transoxiana at that time. Thus, the introduction into wide scientific circulation of the sections of

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¹ Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان). *Travel Guide through the Old World* (Dar Sader, 2010), 49.

² Roza Nurtazina and Arman Toktushakov, “Internal Migration in Central Asia: Social Risks (Case Studies of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan),” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 18, no. 4 (2017): 46-56; Aleks Trushaj, “Vanished Civilisation Hidden Treasure Theories Analysis,” *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review* 3, no. 1 (2024): 25-33.

³ Nabijon Rakhimov, “Syrdarya: The River Route in the Silk Road Communication System,” *Historian (Muarrih)* 2, no. 30 (2022): 126-34.

⁴ Alua Ibrayeva et al., “The Legal Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan: New Priorities and Succession,” *World Applied Sciences Journal* 29, no. 8 (2014): 1071-4.

⁵ Tynysbek Kongyratbay, “Once Again about the Epic Heritage of KORKuT,” *Eposovedenie* 1, no. 2 (2022): 28-39; Tynysbek Kongyratbay, “The Ethnic Character of the Kazakh Epic Koblandy Batyr,” *Eposovedenie* 1, no. 1 (2023): 61-71.

“Taqwim al-Buldan” dedicated to Khwarazm and Transoxiana, as an important source on the geography of Central Asia of that time, indicates the relevance of this research.

Speaking about the study of this issue, it is worth saying that the researchers who addressed the designated problem usually avoided the Central Asian aspect of “Taqwim al-Buldan”. There are few specialized scientific articles devoted to this topic. One of them is the paper of U. Zhuzbayeva and B. Batyrkhan⁶ dedicated to the geography of Khwarazm, as well as the information that Abu al-Fida provides about this land. Other researchers only vaguely touched on this topic, speaking either about the characteristic of “Taqwim al-Buldan” in general, or about other regions mentioned in the book. Among such studies, the paper of T. Kokozov et al.⁷ dedicated to the scientists of the Fergana Valley is worth mentioning. The authors of this book mention the information provided by Abu al-Fida about Fergana. The article by Z. Nasab⁸ is devoted to comparing the data provided by Abu al-Fida and another Islamic scholar, Hafizi Abru, although this paper focuses more on the latter, as well as on data on the territory of modern Iran. Among the researchers of “Taqwim al-Buldan” of recent years, one can also mention I. Konovalova,⁹ who analyses the work of Abu al-Fida, in particular, data on the countries of Eastern Europe. “Taqwim al-Buldan”, as a valuable geographical work of its time, is mentioned in the scientific publication of A. Butar-Butar.¹⁰

The sections of “Taqwim al-Buldan” dedicated to both Khwarazm and Transoxiana have not yet been subjected to deep scientific analysis as a valuable source on the medieval geography of Central Asia. It should be noted that the work of Abu al-Fida still remains relatively little known in scientific circles in the post-Soviet space. Its introduction into scientific circulation as a source on the geography of Khwarazm and Transoxiana in the 1st half of the 14th century represents the scientific novelty of the article.

The objective of this study is to analyze the data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana presented in “Taqwim al-Buldan” by Abu al-Fida. The research tasks include providing a general description of the work as a historical source and identifying the unique and valuable geographical data concerning these regions. The study employs historical-critical, comparative, and descriptive methods to examine the strengths and limitations of Abu al-Fida’s approach. The findings indicate that while “Taqwim al-Buldan” is an important source, it relies heavily on secondary data, and some of the geographical descriptions may be inaccurate or incomplete.

Materials and Methods

General scientific and special methods of historiographical and textual research were used in the process of writing the article, in particular the descriptive method, the critical analysis method, as well as the historical-critical method, the discourse analysis method, the content analysis method. By means of the descriptive method, which is one of the fundamental methods of scientific cognition, a general description of “Taqwim al-Buldan” as a historical source was presented, as well as important data that the scientist provided about Khwarazm and Transoxiana was identified. Through the collection of primary data and medieval geography of Khwarazm and Transoxiana, factual material on this topic was presented. In addition, as a result of using the descriptive method, the peculiarities of the era when Abu al-Fida lived were identified, and the context in which his work was created was studied.

With the help of a comparative method, the data provided by the scientist about Khwarazm and Transoxiana was compared with the known data about the region, and it was also studied how unique Abu al-Fida information is in its kind, and how much it represents a compilation from sources used by the author during writing his geographical work. The comparative method helped to understand what is common and different in the geographical work of Abu al-Fida and similar works of other scientists of that time, to which the former referred.

⁶ Uldanay Zhuzbayeva and Bolatbek Batyrkhan, “Historical Geography of the Khorezm Region in the Work of Abu al-Fida ‘Taqwim al-Buldan’,” *Bulletin of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan* 5, no. 387 (2020): 312-8.

⁷ Tohirjon Kokozov et al., *Cradle of Great Thinkers Aksikent or Scientists of Fergana* (Navruz, 2020), 74.

⁸ Zahra Nasab, *Hafez Abru’s Geography and Taqvim al-Buldan. Abu al-Fida Writing: Comparative Study* (Times Books, 2014), 69.

⁹ Iryna Konovalova, “Eastern Europe in the Geographical Work of Abu Al-Fida: Personal Experience and the Burden of Tradition,” *Quaestio Rossica* 10, no. 3 (2022): 1043-56.

¹⁰ Arwin Butar-Butar, *Esai-Esai. Astronomi Islam* (UMSU Press, 2020), 47.

The authors critically analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Abu al-Fida’s work, particularly in terms of its reliance on secondary sources and the occasional inaccuracies in the descriptions of certain regions. For instance, the writer discusses the limitations of the data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana and how the information was sometimes misclassified. With the help of the historical-critical method, which is one of the special and most frequently used methods of historical research, an analysis of a geographical work was made through the prism of the context, in which it was created. used in the analysis of Abu al-Fida’s biography and his geographical work. The writer critically examines historical sources, particularly by comparing the data provided by Abu al-Fida with the historical context of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. For example, the description of Gurganj and other cities of Khwarazm is contextualized in relation to the period before the Mongol conquest, reflecting the author’s historical perspective on the region.

The use of the discourse analysis method made it possible to study the political, economic, cultural aspects of the era, in which the author created the text under study. Through discourse analysis, the importance of the influence of external factors on the author of the text was determined and the peculiarities of the Abu al-Fida’s descriptions of countries and cities were understood. The indicated method was used to determine which factors the author of the text attached more or less importance to. Using content analysis, it was possible to obtain quantitative and qualitative data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana provided by Abu al-Fida in “Taqwim al-Buldan”. By using this method, quantitative data were obtained on the peculiarities and characteristics of the areas described by the author, which, in turn, made it possible to study the medieval geography of Khwarazm and Transoxiana in the era of Mongol domination in more depth.

Results

Biography of Abu al-Fida

One of the little-known until recently historical sources on the geography of the Islamic world of the first half of the 14th century is “Taqwim al-Buldan” by Abu al-Fida. Its author was a multifaceted figure – a scholar, geographer, historian, as well as a political and military leader who played a significant role in his homeland. Abu al-Fida was born in Damascus in 1273. His given name was Ismail, while the name “Abu al-Fida” (meaning “father of redemption”) was an honorary nickname. Additionally, he bore the title al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad (“The Sovereign Returned to Allah”).¹¹ He belonged to the younger branch of the noble and historically renowned Ayyubid dynasty, which had Kurdish origins. His ancestor was Shāhanshāh ibn Ayyūb, the younger brother of Salah ad-Din, the founder of the Ayyubid state, which included the territories of Egypt, Syria, and Arabia.

By the time of Abu al-Fida’s birth, the Ayyubids had lost their dominant political position, and Egypt, Syria, and Arabia were under Mamluk rule.¹² As a young man, Abu al-Fida served the Mamluks, distinguishing himself in battles against the Crusaders, who were finally expelled from Asia. As a reward for his loyal service, Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad appointed him governor of the Syrian city of Hama in 1310, and in 1312, he became its sovereign ruler, a position he held until his death in 1331. After his death, his son al-Afdal Muhammad inherited power in Hama.¹³ During his rule, Abu al-Fida actively engaged in scientific work, authoring several significant works on history, geography, mathematics, law, and medicine.¹⁴ His most extensive geographical work, “Taqwim al-Buldan”, was written between 1316 and 1321.

¹¹ Kononova, “Eastern Europe in the Geographical Work of Abu Al-Fida,” 1043-56.

¹² Frederic Bauden and Malika Dekkiche, *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Brill, 2019), 74; Elona Limaj, “Female Political Discourse in the Albanian Parliament in Democracy and Communism,” *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum* 20, no. 1 (2023): 177-95; Yuliia Kaluzhynska and Denys Miroshnichenko, “Archival Policy as a Tool for Ensuring Access to Information and Preservation of Cultural Heritage,” *Society. Document. Communication* 9, no. 3 (2024): 32-44.

¹³ Joseph Reinaud and William MacGuckin de Slane, *Geography of Aboulfeda: Arabic Text* (Imprimerie Royale, 1840), 48.

¹⁴ Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان), *Travel Guide through the Old World*, 51; Vasyl Lytvyn et al., “The Linguometric Approach for Co-Authoring Author’s Style Definition,” in *Proceedings of the 2018 IEEE 4th International Symposium on Wireless Systems within the International Conferences on Intelligent Data Acquisition and Advanced Computing Systems, IDAACS-SWS 2018* (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 2018), 29-34; Gulzhan Shashkina et al., “Flower Representations in the Lyrics of A.A. Fet,” *Open Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2025): 20250047.

Overview of “Taqwim al-Buldan”

“Taqwim al-Buldan” is a fundamental geographical work of the early 14th century that serves as an encyclopedic source of knowledge on the countries known to the Islamic world at the time. Written between 1316 and 1321, it consists of two volumes with a total of 505 sheets, systematically detailing various regions, their cities, natural features, and inhabitants. Abu al-Fida structured the book methodically, beginning with general geographical concepts before transitioning to specific descriptions of individual regions.

The first volume includes an introductory section followed by seven chapters. In the introduction, Abu al-Fida provides a general overview of the world as it was understood in the 14th century, discussing natural elements such as seas, mountains, rivers, and lakes. He offers insight into the classification of climates, a framework widely used by Islamic geographers to categorize different regions of the world. The subsequent chapters of the first volume focus on specific geographical areas. The first chapter is dedicated to Arabia, which was considered the heart of the Islamic world. The second chapter describes Egypt, a region of significant political and economic influence at the time. The following three chapters focus on the Maghreb, Trans-Saharan Africa, and Spain, detailing the major cities, landscapes, and trade routes within these areas. The final two chapters of the first volume cover the lands of Western and Eastern Europe as well as the Great Steppe, demonstrating Abu al-Fida’s extensive knowledge of regions beyond the core of the Islamic world.

The second volume of “Taqwim al-Buldan” is even more extensive, comprising 21 chapters dedicated to different geographical regions. The book systematically moves from west to east, covering areas such as Mesopotamia, Iraq, Persia, Central Asia, India, China, and the lands of the East Sea. The last two chapters are of particular importance as they focus on Khwarazm and Transoxiana, two regions of great historical and cultural significance.

A key characteristic of “Taqwim al-Buldan” is its reliance on previous geographical works rather than direct observation. Unlike some of his predecessors, Abu al-Fida did not personally visit many of the regions he described. Instead, he synthesized information from earlier scholars, including Yaqut al-Hamawi, Ibn Khordadbeh, Ibn Hawqal, Ibn al-Faqih, Ibn Said, Ibn Khaldun, and al-Dimashqi. These sources provided Abu al-Fida with detailed geographical and historical data, which he organized into a structured format, making his work one of the most comprehensive geographical references of its time.¹⁵

Each chapter in “Taqwim al-Buldan” follows a consistent structure. The author begins with a general overview of the country or region, highlighting its main geographical and climatic characteristics. Following this, he provides specific information on the cities and settlements, listing them in a tabular format.¹⁶ The tables are arranged according to the Arabic tradition, from right to left, and include multiple columns with different types of information (Figure 1). The first column contains the serial number of the entry, the second lists the name of the city, and the third provides references to the works of previous scholars from whom the information was obtained. Additional columns include geographical coordinates, climate classification, and variations in the spelling of place names.¹⁷ The final column contains supplementary details about geographical landmarks such as rivers, mountains, and notable features of the region.¹⁸

¹⁵ Gholamali Adel et al., *Historical Sources of the Islamic World. Selected Entries from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Islamic Book Trust, 2018).

¹⁶ Eric Mercier, “Meridians of Reference and Mathematical Geography in the Medieval Muslim West (9-16 Centuries),” *e-Perimetreion* 15, no. 2 (2020): 98-113.

¹⁷ Toyirjon Matyaqubov, “The Importance of Castles in the Socio-Economic Relations of Khorezm in the Period of Affrights,” *Colloquium-Journal* 13, no. 65 (2020): 105-8.

¹⁸ Abdukahor Saidov, “Relations of the Mongols with Maverannahr,” *Historian (Muarrih)* 3, no. 27 (2021): 15-21.

Figure 1: Table of cities of Khwarazm in the work “Taqwim al-Buldan”

مقار الحصاد	الاسماء	اسماء المقول	الطاس والمصرون من الاقاليم العرفية وهو						ضمط الاسماء
			خوارزم						
			الطول	العرض		الاقليم للفرقي	الاقليم العرق	من	
د	د	د							
١	كركج الكبرى	اطوال وقانون	١	١	١	من	خوارزم	من المشترك بضم الكاف ويكون الرأه المعلة ثم كافي ثانيه والى (١) ونون ساطفة وقى آخرها جم وبنقي فيها ساشكاي ويقال لها بالعرق لهرجانية	
٢	كركج الصغرى	اطوال وقانون	١	١	١	من	خوارزم	من المشترك بضم الكاف ويكون الرأه المعلة ثم كافي ثانيه والى (١) ونون ساطفة وقى آخرها جم وبنقي فيها ساشكاي ويقال لها بالعرق لهرجانية	
٣	كان	اطوال وقانون	١	١	١	من	خوارزم	من المشترك بضم الكاف ويكون الرأه المعلة ثم كافي ثانيه والى (١) ونون ساطفة وقى آخرها جم وبنقي فيها ساشكاي ويقال لها بالعرق لهرجانية	
٤	زخشش	اطوال وقانون	١	١	١	من	خوارزم	من المشترك بضم الكاف ويكون الرأه المعلة ثم كافي ثانيه والى (١) ونون ساطفة وقى آخرها جم وبنقي فيها ساشكاي ويقال لها بالعرق لهرجانية	
٥	فارس	اطوال وقانون	١	١	١	من	خوارزم	من المشترك بضم الكاف ويكون الرأه المعلة ثم كافي ثانيه والى (١) ونون ساطفة وقى آخرها جم وبنقي فيها ساشكاي ويقال لها بالعرق لهرجانية	

Source: Reinaud and MacGuckin de Slane, *Geography of Aboulfeda: Arabic Text*¹⁹

An example of this systematic approach can be seen in Abu al-Fida’s description of Gurganj, the capital of Khwarazm. He provides detailed coordinates and references to previous sources that mention the city’s historical and economic significance. Such descriptions reflect the scholarly rigor of “Taqwim al-Buldan”, making it an invaluable resource for historians studying the geography of the Islamic world in the medieval period.²⁰

While the work provides an extensive account of many regions, it is important to note that Abu al-Fida occasionally includes information that is not entirely accurate. Some cities listed in certain regions do not geographically belong to them, suggesting that Abu al-Fida was reliant on sometimes outdated or misclassified sources. Despite this, “Taqwim al-Buldan” remains an essential text for understanding medieval Islamic geographical knowledge, illustrating how scholars of the time perceived the world and compiled information into systematic reference works.

Analysis of Geographical Representation of Khwarazm and Transoxiana in “Taqwim al-Buldan”

“Taqwim al-Buldan” is an important work in the history of Islamic geography, but it is fundamentally a compilation rather than a record of firsthand observations. Abu al-Fida relied on earlier sources to construct his descriptions, and this is particularly evident in his treatment of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. His information about these regions is drawn almost entirely from earlier scholars such as Yaqut al-Hamawi, Ibn Khordadbeh, and Ibn Hawqal, rather than from his own travels or direct interactions with these lands.²¹ As a result, while his work provides a valuable synthesis of existing knowledge, it does not offer new or firsthand insights into the regions he describes. The chapter on Khwarazm in “Taqwim al-Buldan” is relatively brief, listing only seven towns: Great Gurganj, Jurjani (Small Gurganj), Kath (modern Beruni), Zamakhshar, Hazorasp, Dargan, and Farap. Abu al-Fida describes Khwarazm as one of the coldest regions in the world, emphasizing that the Amu Darya River freezes in winter and that the area is surrounded by deserts. These observations align with historical descriptions of the region’s harsh climate and geographical isolation. However, the brevity of the chapter suggests that Abu al-Fida had limited information on Khwarazm compared to other regions.²²

¹⁹ Reinaud and MacGuckin de Slane, *Geography of Aboulfeda: Arabic Text*, 56.

²⁰ Adel et al., *Historical Sources of the Islamic World. Selected Entries from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (Islamic Book Trust, 2018).

²¹ Sansizbay Kalmuratov, “The Historiography of Studying the History of Archaeological Monuments Located in the Northern Part of the Republic of Karakalpakstan,” *Science and Innovation* 1, no. 6 (2022): 285-7.

²² Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان). *Travel Guide through the Old World*, 53.

The description of Khwarazm's capital, Gurganj, in "Taqwim al-Buldan" illustrates Abu al-Fida's approach to geographical documentation. He provides coordinates (84° 1' longitude, 42° 57' latitude), classifies it in the Fifth Climate, and cites earlier works such as al-Atwal, Canon, and Moshtarik. He notes that Great Gurganj, the capital of the Khwarazm-Shahs before the Mongol conquest, was a prosperous trade center in 1219 (616 AH), located on the edge of the Oxus (Amu Darya).²³ Abu al-Fida did not personally visit Khwarazm or Transoxiana, relying instead on sources like "Al-Mushtarik" and "Mujam al-Buldan" by Yaqut al-Hamawi, as well as works of Ibn Haukal, Ibn Khordadbeh, Ibn al-Faqih, and Ibn Khaldun. His descriptions, including geographical coordinates, are compilations from these sources rather than firsthand observations. The chapter of "Taqwim al-Buldan" dedicated to Khwarazm is small. The author mentions 7 towns and villages of this geographical region: Great Gurganj, Jurjani (Small Gurganj), as well as Kath (modern Beruni), Zamakhshar, Hazorasp, Dargan, Farap. Among the general remarks about Khwarazm at the beginning of the chapter, Abu al-Fida states that it is "one of the coldest countries that exist in the world". The author says that the Amu Darya River, on which Khwarazm is located, freezes in winter. Abu al-Fida also notes that Khwarazm is "surrounded on all sides by desert".²⁴

The chapter on Transoxiana is much larger in volume. In addition to Transoxiana, it is also dedicated to "the part of Turkestan associated with Transoxiana". At the beginning of the chapter, Abu al-Fida gives a fairly detailed description of the country, and then proceeds to describe the cities. He refers 42 cities to Transoxiana. It is worth noting that the author mistakenly includes some cities in this list that are not directly related to Transoxiana and Turkestan, such as the capital of the Yuan Empire Khanbaliq (modern Beijing) and the old capital of Mongolia, Karakorum. In total, the list of populated places of Transoxiana in "Taqwim al-Buldan" is as follows: Bukhara, Pandzsakent, Jand, al-Tawawis, Paykend, Karminyag, Dabussyag, Nasaf, Kash, Ishtixon, Samarkand, Koshanyag, Arbinjan, Farab (Otrar), Zamin, Shash, Banakat, Ilaq, Isfijab, Osrushan, Taraz, Sabat, Shalji, Khujand, Shaukat, Osbanikat, Kokand, Tonkat, Akhsikent, Kasan, Balasagun, Timrid, Vashjird, Fergana, Koba, Vakhsh, Saganyan, Shuman, Kashgar, Hotan, Khanbaliq, Karakorum.²⁵ From the above list, it can be understood that Abu al-Fida included the territories belonging to the modern states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and also partly China and Mongolia to the geographical region of Transoxiana (between the Syr Darya and Amu Darya).²⁶ In the description of Transoxiana, Abu al-Fida follows from the northwest to the southeast, going from Bukhara to Samarkand, further to the Ferghana Valley and ending with Kashgaria. In the above list of cities, one can recognize both the existing cities, such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Otrar, Khujand, and the cities that have disappeared from the world map, some of which, like Koshanyag, Vashjirid, Saganyan, are difficult to identify.²⁷

Speaking about the general characteristics of Transoxiana, Abu al-Fida reports that there are "hard-to-reach high mountains, where there is a strong cold" in this region.²⁸ He also talks about the fortress around Bukhara, emphasizes the beauty of the gardens near Samarkand and the wealth of neighbouring agricultural land. "These gardens are filled with inexhaustible life", says Abu al-Fida. "Behind the orchards, fields are cultivated on the sides, and behind these fields are pastures for flocks. Of all the countries given by God to man, this is the most pleasant, here the trees are the most beautiful". Among the important natural objects of Transoxiana, Abu al-Fida mentions a cave, in which ammonium salt is mined: "Steam collects in it... This steam is deposited in layers and forms ammonium salt. No one can safely enter this cave because of the heat prevailing there, unless they put on felt and quickly go for salt". Among other minerals of the region, Abu al-Fida mentions gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, turquoise, coal, which are mined in the mountains near Fergana.²⁹

In describing cities and towns, Abu al-Fida reports on fortifications that once made up the power of cities, but were destroyed during the Mongol conquest. In particular, this concerns the fortifications in the Bukhara region. Speaking about Arbinjan, the author of "Taqwim al-Buldan" claims that the destruction of this city dates back to the era of the Khwarazm-Shahs. Abu al-Fida also mentions the cities' cathedral mosques, inns, markets, gardens and canals. The author pays special attention to the

²³ Matyayubov, "The Importance of Castles in the Socio-Economic Relations of Khorezm," 105-8.

²⁴ Saidov, "Relations of the Mongols with Maverannahr," 15-21.

²⁵ Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان). *Travel Guide through the Old World*, 54.

²⁶ Kalmuratov, "The Historiography of Studying the History of Archaeological Monuments," 285-7.

²⁷ Ahmed Renima et al., *The Islamic Golden Age: A Story of the Triumph of the Islamic Civilization* (Springer, 2016), 11.

²⁸ Ashleigh Haruda et al., "The Earliest Domestic Cat on the Silk Road," *Scientific Reports* 10, no. 1 (2020): 11241.

²⁹ Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان). *Travel Guide through the Old World*, 54.

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development of science in cities, emphasizing that one city or another, such as Nasaf, “was home to many scientists”. In some cases, Abu al-Fida indicates the names of the sages known to him, who were natives of these cities. As written in “Taqwim al-Buldan”, “Lobab says about Jikil that this is a Turkic city near Taraz, and that Abu Muhammad Abd ar-Rahman ibn Yahya, who was a preacher in Samarkand, was born there... The above preacher died in 516 AH”. Speaking about the cities of the Fergana Valley, Abu al-Fida reports: “Some scientists were born here, such as Nasr ibn al-Hasan, ibn al-Qasim at-Tonkati, who went to the West and settled in Spain”.³⁰

Reporting on the settlements of Transoxiana, Abu al-Fida periodically emphasizes their predominantly Turkic population. He usually talks about this if the Turks who lived there were not Muslims. About the city of Taraz, for example, Abu al-Fida reports that it is “a place of trade between Turks and Muslims.” At the same time, reporting on the settlement of Shalji, located not far from Taraz, the author says: “This is a Turkic city, the population of which is Muslims,” apparently wanting to emphasize that the local Turkic population had already converted to Islam. Based on the fact that the Mongolian elite, which had power in Central Asia at the beginning of the XIV century, remained largely pagan, Abu al-Fida, describing the cities of Transoxiana, says with some regret: “Earlier these cities belonged to the Muslims, but in our time, they are in the hands of the Tatars”.³¹

A significant aspect of “Taqwim al-Buldan” is its emphasis on the cultural and intellectual life of the cities it describes. Abu al-Fida highlights the presence of scholars and centers of learning in several cities, particularly in Nasaf, which he describes as having been home to many renowned scholars. He also notes the linguistic and religious characteristics of the region, emphasizing that some cities were predominantly Turkic-speaking and that Islam had become deeply rooted in many of these areas. In some cases, he expresses concern about regions that had fallen under Mongol rule, noting that certain cities had once been Islamic but were now under Tatar control. The compilation nature of “Taqwim al-Buldan” means that its descriptions must be critically evaluated within the context of medieval geographical knowledge. While it serves as a valuable reference work, it reflects the limitations of secondhand information and the challenges of compiling knowledge from multiple sources. Nevertheless, it remains an essential text for understanding how medieval Islamic scholars perceived the world and categorized geographical information.

“Taqwim al-Buldan” is a significant contribution to medieval Islamic geography, providing a systematic and detailed account of various regions, including Khwarazm and Transoxiana. While it does not offer original observations, it serves as an important synthesis of earlier geographical knowledge, helping to preserve and transmit information about the medieval world. Despite occasional inaccuracies, its structured approach, extensive referencing, and methodical organization make it an invaluable historical source for scholars studying the geography and intellectual traditions of the Islamic world.

Discussion

European scholars have long been interested in Abu al-Fida’s geographical work, “Taqwim al-Buldan”. The first editions and translations of its fragments appeared in the mid-17th century, with notable publications in London in 1650, followed by editions in Oxford, Leipzig, and Gottingen in the 18th century. However, the first comprehensive scholarly edition was produced by French Orientalists.³² Silvestre de Sacy initiated the full academic publication in 1834, and in collaboration with M. Hamaker, the first complete facsimile edition was published in Paris in 1840. This edition included a critical introduction by J. Reinaud and W. MacGuckin de Slane,³³ who also translated “Taqwim al-Buldan” into French, with the full text published in 1848. This remains the only classic European edition of the work.

³⁰ Abi al-Fida, *Taqwim Al-Buldan* (تقويم البلدان). *Travel Guide through the Old World*, 56.

³¹ Bulat Kumekov and Raikhan Kumekova, *Arab Geographers and Travellers of the 9th-12th Centuries* (Dike-Press, 2010), 49.

³² Edmond Lorot, *Review of the Bordah or the Awakening of the Soul* (Lulu, 2016), 84.

³³ Reinaud and MacGuckin de Slane, *Geography of Aboulfeda: Arabic Text*, 58.

S. Bekmuradov³⁴ highlights a critical shift in the scholarly reception of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” after the 19th-century editions. He argues that the work of Abu al-Fida gradually faded from academic attention, in part because it was seen as a compilation rather than an original contribution to geographical thought. This perception led many scholars to overlook its value, especially as the focus shifted toward the works of other geographers who were seen as more innovative. This decline in interest is significant because, while “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” may have been regarded as a secondary source due to its compilation nature, it remains an important historical document for understanding the medieval Islamic world's geographical and intellectual landscape. Author's assessment underscores a broader issue within the academic community: works that compile existing knowledge are often undervalued compared to original contributions, even when they provide crucial insights into the synthesis of geographical data. Our research builds on S. Bekmuradov's critique by actively re-engaging with “*Taqwim al-Buldan*”, not just as a compilation, but as a key source that reflects the intellectual context of its time. By examining the geographical data regarding Khwarazm and Transoxiana, we aim to restore the scholarly value of Abu al-Fida's work, offering a deeper understanding of how medieval Islamic scholars synthesized and transmitted geographical knowledge. This approach helps fill the gap that author identifies, demonstrating the continued relevance of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” in contemporary studies of medieval geography.

I. Konovalova³⁵ examines Abu al-Fida's depiction of Eastern Europe, noting the inaccuracies in geographical coordinates. Author points out that Abu al-Fida often presented multiple astronomical locations without verifying their accuracy, reflecting a lack of attention to the reliability of his sources. This critique highlights a key limitation in past studies: they did not fully address “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” as a compilation rather than an original work. While earlier scholars valued its encyclopedic nature, they overlooked how its reliance on other sources impacted its accuracy. Our research builds on this by offering a more critical understanding of Abu al-Fida's method of compiling geographical knowledge, addressing both the strengths and limitations of his work and providing a deeper appreciation of its role in medieval Islamic geography.

The article by U. Zhuzbayeva and B. Batyrkhan³⁶ is worth noting among those papers that examine the data of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” about Khwarazm and Transoxiana. In it, the authors analysed the description of Khwarazm in the corresponding chapter of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*”. The messages of Abu al-Fida are compared with the general context of the development of Khwarazm at the indicated time and the history of this region before the invasion of the Mongols. As the authors of the article state, the work of Abu al-Fida “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” is an important scientific heritage for the formation of the historical physical geography, economic and social geography of Khwarazm. At the time of Abu al-Fida, Khwarazm was a rich and cultural region with developed agriculture, handicrafts and trade. The cities of the Khwarazm region were formed near the rivers, because they were important for the economy and life.³⁷ Outside the cities, fortifications were built from high walls. Trade relations have developed with neighbouring countries.³⁸

The study of T. Kokozov et al.,³⁹ which examines Abu al-Fida's contributions to the geographical understanding of the Fergana Valley, underscores the relevance of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” as an essential source for studying the region. Abu al-Fida's description of Akhsikath, an ancient city located on the northern coast of the Syr Darya, as well as his precise recording of its geographical coordinates, demonstrates the value of his work in mapping the Fergana Valley. Authors contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation by reinforcing the idea that Abu al-Fida's geographical data, while valuable, require careful analysis due to the compilation nature of his work.

³⁴ Sandjar Bekmuradov, “The Importance of Islam in the Legitimacy of Chigatoy Ulusi Sdministration,” *Oriental Renaissance: Innovative, Educational, Natural and Social Sciences* 1, no. 5 (2021): 708-20.

³⁵ Konovalova, “Eastern Europe in the Geographical Work of Abu Al-Fida,” 1043-56.

³⁶ Zhuzbayeva and Batyrkhan, “Historical Geography of the Khorezm Region in the Work of Abu al-Fida,” 312-8.

³⁷ Jakub Kubiczek et al., “Perspective of Created Value in Consumer Choice: Comparison of Economic and Ecological Dimensions,” *SAGE Open* 14, no. 1 (2024).

³⁸ Julie Abril, “Culture: An Alternative Variable to Race in Criminology,” *Dialogues in Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2025): 47-62.

³⁹ Kokozov et al., *Cradle of Great Thinkers Aksikent or Scientists of Fergana*, 79.

At the same time, the article by Z. Nasab,⁴⁰ which compares Abu al-Fida’s data with those of Hafiz-i Abru, offers a broader understanding of medieval Islamic geography. However, Nasab’s focus on Hafiz-i Abru rather than “Taqwim al-Buldan” means that the comparative study of Abu al-Fida’s work receives limited attention. This is a notable limitation in the existing literature while “Taqwim al-Buldan” is acknowledged as a valuable source, its role in shaping geographical knowledge, particularly concerning Khwarazm and Transoxiana, is often underemphasized. Our research directly engages with this gap by focusing specifically on the geographical data in “Taqwim al-Buldan” related to Khwarazm and Transoxiana. While previous studies recognize Abu al-Fida’s importance as a geographer, they fail to fully evaluate the implications of his compilation method and its impact on the accuracy and reliability of his descriptions.

The research by J. Van Steenberghe and U. Vermeulen⁴¹ offers a focused analysis of “Taqwim al-Buldan”, examining its significance as a geographical source for understanding the Mamluk era, particularly in the context of Mamluk Egypt and Syria. While the study provides valuable insights into Abu al-Fida’s work, it primarily concentrates on the regions under Mamluk control and does not address other areas described in “Taqwim al-Buldan”, such as Khwarazm and Transoxiana. This limitation means that the broader geographical contributions of Abu al-Fida remain somewhat underexplored in their analysis.

In contrast, S. Zaimche’s⁴² review of Islamic geography acknowledges Abu al-Fida as one of the leading geographers of the medieval Islamic world, but it does not engage deeply with “Taqwim al-Buldan” specifically. Instead, it presents Abu al-Fida as part of a broader historical and intellectual context. Similarly, E. Mercier’s⁴³ article on the understanding of geography and astronomy in medieval Islamic science mentions “Taqwim al-Buldan” as a significant geographical work, highlighting its role in indicating the geographical location of various places. This study does not offer a detailed analysis of the regions beyond those directly associated with the Mamluks or delve into the specific geographical data of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. Our research addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the regions of Khwarazm and Transoxiana in “Taqwim al-Buldan”. While previous studies have tended to focus on particular areas or aspects of Abu al-Fida’s work, our analysis examines the broader geographical scope of “Taqwim al-Buldan” and contextualizes its data within the intellectual framework of medieval Islamic geography.

A. Salman and S. Mohammed⁴⁴ examines the role of public state services for merchants in the Islamic East, focusing on the data provided by “Taqwim al-Buldan” by Abu al-Fida. The work offers an analysis of how Abu al-Fida’s geographical text reflects the administrative and economic conditions of the Islamic East, particularly concerning the services provided to merchants. This study provides valuable insights into the socio-economic structures of the period, utilizing “Taqwim al-Buldan” as a source for understanding the functioning of state services in medieval Islamic cities. Also, A. Salman and S. Mohammed⁴⁵ explore the public state services for merchants, but in relation to *Masalik al-Ibsar fi Mamlik al-Amsar* by Ibn Fadl Allah al-Amri. Their focus is on the urban administration and infrastructure in Islamic cities during the 14th century, with particular attention to the commercial and trade networks. When compared to our research, which focuses specifically on the geographical aspects of “Taqwim al-Buldan” and its depiction of Khwarazm and Transoxiana, both studies contribute to a broader understanding of the role of state services in medieval Islamic society, though from different angles. Our research complements these studies by providing a geographical lens on the same regions, thus offering a more holistic view of the interconnectedness of geography, economy, and state services.

H. Härke and I. Arzhantseva⁴⁶ focus on the archaeological and historical aspects of early medieval towns in the Syr-Darya Delta, highlighting their role as crossroads for cultural and trade interactions. Their work provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural context of these settlements but does not

⁴⁰ Nasab, *Hafez Abru’s Geography and Taqwim al-Buldan*, 75.

⁴¹ Van Steenberghe, Jo and Vermeulen, Urbain, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras* (Peeters, 2005), 24.

⁴² Salah Zaimche, *Introduction to Muslim Geography* (FSTC Limited, 2001), 32.

⁴³ Mercier, “Meridians of Reference and Mathematical Geography in the Medieval Muslim West,” 98-113.

⁴⁴ Amer Salman and Saddam Mohammed, “Public State Services for Merchants in the Islamic East in the Book ‘Taqwim al-Buldan’ by Abu al-Fida,” *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2023): 10732-40.

⁴⁵ Amer Salman and Saddam Mohammed, “Public State Services for Merchants in the Islamic East in the Book *Masalik al-Ibsar fi Mamlik al-Amsar* by Ibn Fadl Allah al-Amri, who Died 749 AH/1349 AD,” *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2025): 10732.

⁴⁶ Heinrich Härke and Irina Arzhantseva, “Interfaces and Crossroads, Contexts and Communications: Early Medieval Towns in the Syr-Darya Delta (Kazakhstan),” *Journal of Urban Archaeology* 3, no. 1 (2021): 51-63.

directly engage with geographical sources. In contrast, our research complements their work by incorporating the geographical data from “*Taqwim al-Buldan*”, which offers a broader intellectual and geographical framework for understanding the same regions, particularly Khwarazm and Transoxiana. While authors focus on the material culture and urban development, our study emphasizes the intellectual geography provided by Abu al-Fida, offering a deeper understanding of how medieval Islamic scholars viewed these towns in the context of regional and global networks. By combining archaeological findings with geographical data, our research fills a gap in the existing scholarship, providing a more holistic view of the early medieval urban landscape in Central Asia.

From the foregoing, we can draw a general conclusion that after the publications and studies of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” in the 19th century, there were practically no new editions and detailed studies of the geographical work of Abu al-Fida. There are almost no deep studies of the information provided by Abu al-Fida about the lands of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. In many respects, this attitude of scientists is explained by the fact that the work of Abu al-Fida was a compilation from the information of other geographers and travellers of that time. However, it should not be denied that not all of the sources used by Abu al-Fida when compiling “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” have survived intact to our time. Therefore, the work of Abu al-Fida is of undoubted interest in terms of studying medieval geography, in particular the lands and cities of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. In addition to the information that the Syrian geographer provides about these countries, “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” gives understanding of what was of primary interest in describing the countries for the scientists of the Islamic world of that time.

Conclusions

The work of the Syrian scholar, political and military figure Abu al-Fida “*Taqwim al-Buldan*”, written at the beginning of the 14th century, covers a description of various geographical regions known to scholars of the Islamic world, from Spain in the west to China in east. The work is divided into chapters, each of which is devoted to a specific geographical region. Each chapter, in turn, is divided into a descriptive part and tables, in which Abu al-Fida provides a list of cities and towns of the respective countries, indicating their geographical coordinates and characteristic features. The last two chapters of “*Taqwim al-Buldan*” are devoted to the Central Asian regions of Khwarazm and Transoxiana. The work of Abu al-Fida is largely a compilation. The author did not personally visit Khwarazm and Transoxiana. In describing these lands, he used the works of other geographers and travellers, whom he refers to in his work.

Abu al-Fida gives a list of 7 cities and villages in the description of Khwarazm and of 42 settlements in Transoxiana. In his description of these countries, he pays special attention to the gardens located in the area of certain cities, minerals mined in those regions, fortifications, cathedral mosques, as well as the state of science in cities. Usually, Abu al-Fida indicates the names of scientists known to him who were natives of the cities described. Speaking about the population of Khwarazm and Transoxiana, the author pays attention to the religion of the inhabitants of these cities. He periodically distinguishes between Turks and Muslims. He identifies the Mongols, who at that time controlled Central Asia, as non-Muslim Tatars, expressing a certain regret that the cities of Central Asia, which were dominated by Muslims, are now dominated by pagans.

In conclusion, it should be noted that a detailed in-depth study of the Abu al-Fida’s data on Khwarazm and Transoxiana is still waiting for its researcher. The scientific novelty of this article lies in the fact that until now, in the designated context, the work of Abu al-Fida has practically not been studied. The study of the work “*Taqwim al-Buldan*”, as a source on the geography of Khwarazm and Transoxiana, will provide an opportunity to understand the ideas about Central Asia from medieval Islamic scholars. Thus, this article can be used for further research of the designated problem, which determines its practical significance.

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