

## WHERE WAS AL-BIRUN SITUATED?

ABDUL HAYEE HABIBI

“Tarīth Tolana”

Afghan Historical Society

Kabul, Afghanistan

Abu Raiḥān Mohmmad son of Ahmad al-Bīrūnī was one of the most prominent figures of Eastern Scholarship in Central Asia.

In spite of plenty of research carried about his life and works both in the eastern and western languages no research has been conducted about his native country or the city al-Birun.

It is noteworthy to say that some authors namely Shahrazuri in *Nuzhat-al-Arwah*, Ibn Abi Osaibaa'h in *Cyunal-Anba*, Abu-al-Fide in *Taqweem-al-Buldān* and Abd-al-Ghani in the *History of Persian Literature* have confused the Birun of Khowārezm with Nirun of the Sindh valley, two cities belonging to two different countries. From ancient times there has been disagreement among authors regarding Birun, the birthplace of al-Bīrūnī.

Samā'ni who died about A.D. 1166 says that Birun means outside in the Persian language, since Persian speakers say that “filān Birunist” meaning he dwells outside the city. Thus the Persian word Bīrūnī is a relative adjective for Birun.

From this it is evident that Birun was not a particular place but in Khowārezm the word was referred to those who lived outside the city. Yāqut, the author of *Mu'jam-al-Buldān* also agrees that Bīrūnī means those who lived outside the city. This reveals that Yāqut has not used the word as the name of the city.

Contrary to Samā'ni and Yāqut, Imam Ali Zaid-al-Baihaqi, a contemporary of Samā'ni has clearly written that Birun where Bīrūnī was born and raised is a clean city with lots of mysterious things. This fact states that Birun was the name of a separate city in Khowārezm.

Eastern and western scholars who have conducted research in al-Bīrūnī's life have however not done any work on Birun and its whereabouts. They have been briefly contented with that Birun was a place in Khowārezm. Saved Hassan Barnī, the Indian scholar regrets that scholars have paid little attention to Birun and have not mentioned anything about it.

Now I will present some information about the geographical situation of the city in the light of some historical facts. This city was situated in southern Khowārezm or northern Khorasan. Birun has been mentioned in an ancient geographical work of the Islamic period. The manuscript of a Persian translation of *Ashkāl-al-Ālam* related to Abu-al-Qāsim Ahmad-Al-Jaihani is present in Kabul museum. This book has been translated from Arabic into Persian by Ali son of Abd-al-Salām.

Describing the eighteenth climate and the regions of Khorāsān the author says that Birun was situated eight manzils from Busht, a city in Bādghīs region.

*Ashkāl-al-Ālam* is an ancient geographical work of the period of the Sāmānid kings of central Asia and was written before the birth and life of

al-Bīrūnī. From the description of Birun in the work of Aljaihāni it is evident that Birun was a city about eight manzils from the Busht of Khorāsān in the Samanid and Ghaznavid periods. The name was used up to the Safawid period in the sixteenth century. The Safawids of Iran were rivals of the Uzbek monarchs of Transoxiana in northern Khorāsān. Iskandar Beg Turkmān, historian during the reign of Shah Abbās, the Safavid king, in his book *Ā'lām-Arāe-Abbāsi* has several times mentioned the name of Darun fort in northern Khorāsān and the regions of Nasā, Abiward and Merv. The zail of the same work says; Isfandyar Sultan a ruler of Transoxiana went to occupy Merv, Nasa, Darun and Abiward. A messenger was sent to his brother to attack the fort of Birun.

Now we can confirm with assurity that Birun was a city in northern Khorāsān in the region of Nasā and Abiward, which at one time belonged to Khowārezm and later on to Khorāsān. A fortress existed by this name even upto the Safawid period in the sixteenth century.

This also is remarkable that al-Bīrūnī says in his work *Taṣḥīḥ Masāfi āt al-Masākin* that he was in year three hundred ninety Hijra in the Jaghur region at one side of Kabul for taking the *rasad* of the place.

Now in present days there is a region between Kabul and Ghazni by name of Jaghori and in this place a mountain Biruni is situated. Perhaps this mountain is named after al-Bīrūnī who dwelt at the Jaghur some times for his scientific researches.