



Article

# Beruni on The Holidays of Khorezmsk People

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**Abstract:** This article examines the historical formation and development of national holidays in the Khorezm oasis by conducting a comparative analysis of Abu Rayhan Beruni's renowned work "Monuments Left by Ancient Peoples" and other written historical sources. The study seeks to highlight how traditional celebrations in Khorezm originated, evolved, and became culturally significant within the broader historical and social context. Special attention is given to Beruni's documentation of ancient customs, which is critically compared with contemporary scholarly interpretations and historical literature. By integrating classical narratives with modern academic perspectives, the article offers new insights into the transformation and continuity of national holiday traditions in the region. The analysis also considers different historiographical approaches and emerging viewpoints in order to draw well-founded conclusions about the role of holidays in reflecting collective identity, social cohesion, and historical memory. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Khorezm oasis's rich cultural heritage and its connection to the broader legacy of Central Asian civilizations.

**Keywords:** People's Holidays, Beruni, "Osor Ul-Boqiya," Ferdowsi, "Shahnameh," Omar Khayyam, "Navro'znoma," Kashgari, Navruz

## 1. Introduction

Abu Rayhan Beruni's work "Chronology of Ancient Nations" is one of the most comprehensive scientific and cultural works of its time and is an important source for the study of representatives of history, astronomy, geography, ethnography, and other fields[1]. In his works, Beruni conducted serious scientific analyses of ancient peoples, their customs, holidays, and cultural heritage. In particular, in this work, the scholar also touched upon the history of his homeland, the national customs and traditions of the Khorezmians, holidays, and folk games, providing valuable information. At the same time, the scholar provides information not only about the holidays of the Islamic period, but also about pre-Islamic holidays preserved in the spiritual life of the Khorezmians.

At the beginning of the first millennium BC, Zoroastrianism was widespread in Central Asia. It developed on the basis of ancient beliefs, including mitraism (sun worship). During the period of Zoroastrianism, the system of holidays of our ancestors was formed. In this, such holidays as Navruz, Mehrjon, Sada, and Angom were of particular importance. They reflect the contradictions between good and evil, light and darkness, heat and cold, death and life, and in the customs of this period, such spiritual and human qualities as goodness, kindness, generosity, dignity, and humanity began to be valued. Interestingly, the penetration of Islam into Central Asia did not completely eradicate the spiritual and moral qualities associated with Zoroastrianism from the spiritual life of the peoples of Central Asia. On the contrary, many pre-Islamic values,

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firmly established in the lives of local peoples, have been assimilated into Islamic traditions.

### Literatur Review

Although Abu Rayhan Beruni's work "Monuments of Ancient Peoples" has been studied by a large number of researchers, the topic of the history of folk holidays and national games held in the Khorezm oasis since ancient times, reflected in it, is one of the most pressing and practically unexplored problems.

Throughout the world, the number of studies and articles devoted to the analysis of this work of Biruni exceeds one hundred. From this perspective, in this article, we will analyze Beruni's work only on the most fundamental research.

More detailed information about the life and work of Beruni can be found in the works of such researchers as G.P. Bulgakov, Kh.U. Sadykov, I.V. Timofeev, S.Kh. Sirozhiddinov, G.P. Matviyevskaya, B.A. Rosenfeld, M.M. Rozhanskaya, K. Sokolovskaya and others.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The article uses such methods of scientific research as systematization, historical-comparative analysis, generalization of historical data, and the principle of objectivity.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The work of the great encyclopedic scholar Abu Rayhan Beruni, who lived in the 10th-11th centuries, "Chronology of Ancient Nations" ("Osor ul-boqiya") is of great importance in the study of ancient holidays of the peoples living in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. In this work, Al-Biruni provides invaluable historical and cultural information about the famous days, holidays, and customs in the calendars of ancient Iranians, Khorezmians, Sogdians, Romans, Jews, Syrians, Christians, Indians, and others. This work also contains interesting observations about the annual calendar holidays of the peoples of Central Asia, including Khorezm and Sogd, during the Zoroastrian period.

Beruni also specifically addresses the Khorezmian holiday, noting that they were accustomed to holding the following holidays: "In the month of Navsarji, the beginning of the year (Navruz); on the 1st day of the month of Kh-r-vdod, Arijo-suvon (the holiday of putting on warm clothes, opening); on the 15th day of the month of Chiri - Ajor (the holiday of warming up by fire at the end of autumn); A-x-sh-r-v-i-r - the 1st day of the month - F-b-r-i-x or F-a-r-u-b-a (the day when the kings of Khorezm went to the outskirts of the city with the arrival of cold weather and defended it from the side); The 1st day of the month of Umri - Azdokandkhvor (the day when people gather around hearths in houses where fire is lit when it gets cold and they bake fatty bread); 13th day - Chiri-ruj (mid-year); "Night of Mina" on the 15th of the month of Rome (a holiday commemorating a woman who died in the cold at night in early spring); The 4th day of the month of Isfandarmoji - Hajj, the 10th day - Vaxshangom (Day of Water Worship); The 20th day is the holiday of Inga (the day of building houses close to each other).

Beruni divided the holidays of the Khorezmians into two types.

1. Dedicated to natural phenomena: the holiday of the beginning of the year (Navruz), the festival of the crucifixion, the festival of warming at the bonfire, the day of baking fatty bread, the Night of Mina, etc.
2. Religious rites (in the pre-Islamic period), the day when food is placed in the graves of spirits, etc.

It is known that the Zoroastrian calendar was used in Iran, Sogdia, and Khorezm before the Common Era. Each month in the seasons had its own holidays and celebrated days. For example, "Farvardin moh - the beginning of summer, tir moh - the beginning of

autumn, mehr moh - the beginning of winter, diy moh - the beginning of spring. Among their months, there were days (Eid) used according to the four seasons," - noted Beruni[2].

In his work "Monuments of Ancient Peoples," Al-Biruni dwells extensively on customs and holidays dedicated to water. One such custom is that during spring and summer holidays, people sprinkle water on each other so that there will be abundant water and more harvest this year. Regarding this, Biruni writes: "On this day (i.e., on the day of Navruz), people rise at dawn and go to the canals and ponds. Often they face flowing waters and pour water over them to be blessed and to ward off calamities."

Another ancient custom dedicated to water has even risen to the level of a holiday. It was held on certain summer days when people went to swim in rivers and bodies of water. In particular, according to Beruni, the people of Khorezm celebrated a holiday called Vakhshangom on the 1st day of the month of Ispandormoji. This holiday is dedicated to the waters of Vakhsh and Jayhun.

According to Beruni's work, on this day people went to the Jayhun River to swim. Also, Beruni speaks about the Eid of the Iranians, which is similar to the customs of Khorezm: "The inhabitants of Amul go to the Caspian Sea on this day, play in the water all day, and dive." [3]

Another major holiday celebrated in autumn was Mehrjon (or Mehrgoh, in Khorezm - Chiri-ruj, in Sogdians - Nimsarda).

The word Mehrjon means "love of the soul," as well as "sun."

According to Beruni, "Just as the Sun and Moon are the two eyes of the heavens, so Navruz and Mehrjon are the two eyes of time." Because Navruz was a holiday celebrated in spring when day and night coincided, and Mehrjon in autumn.

On the day of Navruz, the revival of nature begins, and by the day of Mehrjon, the process of plant growth is completed.

Beruni, comparing these two holidays, cites a half-joking anecdote: "Just as a group of people knew autumn more than spring, they knew the beloved more than Navruz. To prove this, when Alexander asked Aristotle which of the two days was better, he replied: "O king, in spring insects begin to appear, and in autumn they disappear. Therefore, in this respect, autumn is better than spring."

Just as there are small and large "Navruz" in spring, on the 16th day of the month of Umri (Mehrmoh), the celebration of the Little Mehrjan and on the 21st day of the Great Mehrjan was held. The festival of Mehrjan was celebrated throughout the month by the kings and the inhabitants of the city of Iran. Just like Navruz, five days are allocated for people of different social classes during Mehrjon celebrations.

After the Mehrjon holiday, people began preparing for winter. "In the kingdoms of Khorasan, it was customary to give autumn and winter clothing to cavalry on this day."

The Khorezmians celebrated it on the 12th day of the month of Umrah and called it Chiri-ruj. Al-Biruni emphasizes that the people of Khorezm "praise this holiday just as the Iranians honor the Mehrgan."

According to Beruni, the main holiday is the spring New Year, which is known in most regions as Navruz. Unlike Islamic holidays, the holiday is always celebrated at the same time, which is the spring equinox according to the solar calendar[4].

The New Year holiday was not national and even unofficial among the agricultural population (although it was also celebrated by livestock breeders). Navruz is a holiday of the revival of nature not only in Iran, but also in Central Asia. Even in the Muslim era, these holidays did not lose their significance[5].

Beruni also specifically addresses the Khorezmian festival, noting that they were accustomed to holding the following festivals:

The Khorezmians had holidays, which they venerated before Islam, saying: "The great and noble God commanded the Khorezmians to honor them." They also celebrate other days remaining from those before them. Now there are no pagans left, only a group that is not firm in their religion, does not recognize the superficial aspects of their religion and does not verify its truth and meaning. Even this group celebrates Eid not according to the places given to the months, but according to the distances between them. As for their days and holidays that are not related to religions, these are:

"Novsorji." The first day of this month is the holiday of the beginning of the year (Navruz), that is, as we mentioned, the new day;

A-r-d-v-sh-t. They didn't say anything about this month.

H-r-v-dot. The first day of this month is called Ariyasuvon. This day came before Islam when the weather was extremely hot. Therefore, this is actually "arijxos chuzon." Its translation is "Now comes out of the garment," meaning "the time to be naked and uncover." However, in our time, sesame and the (seeds) to be sown with it coincide with the sowing time and are strictly scheduled for this time.

Chiri. The fifteenth day of this month is Ajgar, which means "firewood" and "flame." This happened in the old days, when in autumn, due to the change in weather, it was necessary to warm oneself by the fire. In our time, it's midsummer. After counting seventy days from this (holiday), they begin to sow winter wheat.

H-m-d-d. They haven't said anything about this month.

A-x-sh-r-v-i-r-i. The first day of this month is called f-g'-b-r-i-x. It is said that this is actually f-a-g'-r-u-b-a, which means "the time of the king's departure," because at such times, due to the heat and cold, the kings of Khorezm would go to the outskirts of the city and winter there, driving the Oghuz Turks from their borders and protecting the surroundings of their countries from them.

Life. The first day of this month is azdokandxvor, meaning "day of eating fatty bread." On this day, the people of Khorezm enter their homes from the cold, gather around the hearths where fires are lit, and eat fatty bread. The thirteenth day of this month is Eid al-Fitr. They venerate this holiday as Iranians venerate the mihragon. Also, the twenty-first day is Eid called ramruz.

Yonox-v-n. They haven't said anything about this month.

Adu. They haven't said anything about this month either.

Rome-j-d. The fifteenth of this month is called nam-x-b. It is said that this is a "minch exhib," which was changed to make it easier to pronounce (Rim-j-d) due to its frequent use (in languages). Its translation means "Night of Mina." According to some (of the Khwarezmians), Mina was a woman from among their kings and nobles, who went outside the palace at night in silk clothes while intoxicated. It was spring. He fell outside the castle. His sleep prevailed, and when he fell asleep, the cold of that night struck him and he died. People marveled at how cold could kill a person on such a spring night, turning this phenomenon into a story of something extraordinary and untimely. In our time, it comes before the day (spring time), and the common people celebrate this holiday in the middle of winter[6].

On that day and the days surrounding it, the Khorezmians use steaming and incandescent medicines, and to ward off the harm of jinns and evil spirits, they emit incense and cook food. This measure is done for the sake of vigilance and caution, and it is necessary if something is added to it by carnal reasons (i.e., causes affecting the soul), that is, prohibitions, spells, or prayers. Although they were few in number, the most virtuous of the Jolinus and similar sages acknowledged and granted them permission after seeing the effects of prohibitions, spells, and prayers. Furthermore, it would be even more useful to seek help in these matters from the state of luminaries, such as "happy times" and the "chosen forms" mentioned for such times. Caution requires us not to show kindness to

those who, in order to make these things meaningless and false, can present nothing but mockery and a twisted smile. The great philosophers and scholars have acknowledged the claims about jinns and devils. For example, Aristotle compared them to air and fire and called them "people." Also, Yahya an-Nahwi (Arabic philosopher and linguist. Others also described jinns and devils as evil spirits who, after being separated from their bodies, were forbidden to go to their originals due to their ignorance of the truth and confusion[7].

A-x-m-n. They haven't said anything about this month.

Ispandormaji. The fourth day of this month is called x e j. Its translation is "to stand." The tenth day of this month is Eid, called vakhshangom. The name of an angel appointed to the waters of Vakhsh, especially the Jayhun River. The twentieth day is called i n c h a. This means "close houses."

After these, Khorezmians also have holidays that are necessary in religious customs. There are six such holidays.

1. B-n-x-jo-chi-rid. This is the eleventh day of Novsorji. The common people attributed this to the month of Novsorji and called it novsorgikoniq, because this holiday comes in this month.
2. M-i-s-s-x-n-rid. This is the first day of the month of Chiri, also known as Khovardminik, or "Pumpkin Festival." It is also called ajg'orminik in relation to ajg'or, because this holiday is fifteen days before ajg'or.
3. M-z-i-an-rid. This is the fifteenth day of the month of Hamdad. This is also called a-n-j-m-r-z-conic.
4. It is called Mis-z-r-m-i-rid. This is the fifteenth day of the month of life. This is also called chir-r-v-ch-conic.
5. R i m j is the first day of the month and is known as k-j-z-r-i-konik.
6. A-r-s-min-rid is known by the conical name a-r-s-m-i-n-d. This is the first day of the month a-x-m-n.

In the last five days of the month of Ispandarmaji and the additional five days that follow, the Khorezmians perform the ritual performed by the Iranians on the days of Farvardijan and bring food to the tombs in honor of the spirits[8].

If we talk about the reason for the introduction of Navruz, it consists in the fact that the Sun has two revolutions, one of which is as follows: The Sun returns every three hundred sixty-five days at a quarter of the day when it rises to the first minute of the sign of Hamal, and this period decreases every year.

Kings have a custom: at the beginning of the year, they must give fatwas for good deeds, set dates, and hold certain ceremonies for pleasure. Whoever celebrates Navruz will be happy and live in comfort until the next Navruz. This custom was established by scholars for kings.

The month of Farvardin "Farvardin" is a Pahlavi word and its meaning is exactly paradise, and this month is the beginning of plant growth. This month belongs to the constellation of the Libra. Therefore, from the beginning to the end of this month, the sun will be in this constellation[9].

Navruz is a holiday of the Middle East, Central Asia, including the Uzbek people, with an ancient and long history.

...Navruz corresponds to the beginning of the month of Farvardin according to the old solar calendar. This day was called "Little Navruz" and from this day everything in nature was considered to belong to Hamal.

Some say that Navruz is the first of the six days when God created creation. Just as the Sun and Moon are the two eyes of the heavens, Navruz and Mehrjan are the two eyes of time.[10]

...Some Iranian scholars say, "The reason this day is called Navruz is that Sabit emerged during the Tahmuras period. When Jamshid became king, he renewed the



religion (of the pagans), and the day this was done was called "Navruz" - the new day...[11].

"200 years before the time of Alexander, the Persians celebrate the New Year, which is on the day of the spring equinox"[12].

The ancient calendar of our ancestors began with Navruz. The origins of this beautiful and great holiday are based on the polytheistic concepts of our ancient ancestors, including their beliefs in the Universe, Sun, and Earth. 4-5 thousand years ago, our ancestors considered the Sun to be the greatest force, the source of life, light, and heat, and held special rituals dedicated to it. Thus, mitraism - sun worship - began to form, and on its basis, fire worship. Zoroastrians considered fire to be the earthly particle of the sun - its child, and during winter and early spring rituals, they would light large bonfires to "push away" winter's cold with its help and "call" spring[13]. These rituals formed the basis for the formation of various spring holidays. Spring holidays, which occupied an important place in the life of the working people, marked the beginning of a new labor season. It should be especially noted that spring celebrations have existed among all peoples since ancient times. As a result of the spread of peoples around the world, spring festivals spread to all regions, and later these traditions were organized in various norms and forms among all peoples. In many peoples, the traditions of observing winter and welcoming spring have become the largest holidays.

There are many legends and myths about the origin of "Navruz." For example, during the Zoroastrian era, there was a belief that the god of goodness, Ahura Mazda (Hurmuz), ruled in spring and summer, and the god of evil, Ahriman, in autumn and winter. The first day of spring was celebrated as a sacred date when the god of good triumphed over the god of evil. This date coincided with "Navruz"[14].

According to another ancient legend, the day when Adam and Eve first met was recognized as the "Navruz" holiday.

In Firdawsi's "Shahnameh," the appearance of the new year ("Navruz") is associated with the name of Shah Jamshid. In order to do good to people, Jamshid teaches them professions, makes weapons by melting iron, weaves clothes by spinning thread, builds bathhouses, houses, palaces, reveals the secrets of medicine, builds ships, and builds gardens. Finally, on the day when Jamshid's affairs prosper and bear fruit, he builds himself a throne and ascends to heaven on it[15].

Alisher Navoi also states in his work "History of the Persian Realm" that he invented the great Navruz at the end of Jamshid's great discoveries[16].

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that folk games did not arise spontaneously, but on the basis of necessity. Due to the fact that their emergence and formation took place at different stages, there is an attempt to substantiate them in connection with mythological views. Another aspect of the issue is that over time, folk games have become an important component of people's lives, passed down from ancestors to descendants, and adapted to the times. Moreover, when studying the issue of the formation of folk games, it is necessary to take into account that the natural-geographical location of the population is one of the important factors, since it is connected with the objects, details, location, and natural conditions involved in the game. All religions in the world have their own unique holidays. Holidays play an invaluable role in the development and expansion of every religion.

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