## به نام ایزد دانا و توانا بر همه چیز

## Some remarks on Farabi's background: Iranic (Soghdian/Persian) or Turkic(Altaic)? Goshtasp Lohraspi

This article discusses the background of Abu Nasr Farabi (872-950/951 A.D.), one of the most famous Muslim Polymaths who contributed to many fields including philosophy, music theory, logics, sociology and others. Farabi is one of the greatest figures of humanity and his background is irrelevant in terms of the heritage he left behind. Yet there has been some dispute with this regard and the most common opinion given is Iranic or Turkic. The earliest texts discussing his background were written 300+ years after Farabi (The first one mentioning him as Persian, the second as a Turk and the third one as a Persian). Due to earlier Western translation of Ibn Khalikhan (the second source describing his background), there have been some Encyclopedias and books who have not critically examined the matter.

Based on analyzing all the early evidences, we believe that Farabi was of Iranic Soghdian origin and later on when Iranic Soghdians were almost or completely erased as an ethnic group, the claim of Turkic origins and Iranic Persian origins were made.

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## **Preliminary Remarks**

According to Professor. Dimitri Gutias of Yale University:

"The sources for the life of Farabi are such as to make the reconstruction of his biography beyond a mere outline nearly impossible. The earliest and more reliable sources, i. e., those composed before the 6th/12th century, that are extant today are so few as to indicate that no one among Farabi's successors and their followers, or even unrelated scholars, undertook to write his full biography, a neglect that has to be taken into consideration in assessing his immediate impact. His fame, however, began to grow, apparently in association with and as a result of the renown of Avicenna (q.v.) who, through his explicit recommendation and endorsement of Farabi in his writings, presented himself as Farabi's successor in philosophy. When major Arabic biographers came to write comprehensive entries on Farabi in the 6th-7th/12th-13th centuries, the period of the greatest expansion of philosophical studies in Islamic lands, there was very little specific information on hand; this allowed for their acceptance of invented stories about his life which range from benign extrapolation on the basis of some known details to tendentious reconstructions and legends. Most modern biographies of the philosopher present various combinations of elements drawn at will from this concocted material

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We thus hear for the first time, from Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʿa, that Fārābī's father was a commander of the army and of Persian (fāresī) descent, to which Ebn Kallekān responded as described above. **Ultimately pointless as the quest for Fārābī's ethnic origins might be, the fact remains that we do not have sufficient evidence to decide the matter.."** (D. Gutias "Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

In this article, we try to elucidate some details about Farabi's background based on three different periods of writings as well as examining names associated with him. The first period is Farabi's writing himself. The second period is the writings of Ibn Nadeem, and Farabi's most important admirer, the Persian scientist Avicenna. The third period is those of three 13<sup>th</sup> century writers. Although D. Gutias does mention Ibn Nadeem and the 13<sup>th</sup> century biographers, there are important clues from Farabi's own writing and that of his successor, the person who was responsible for popularizing him, the Persian scientist Abu Ali ibn Sina. These

Our overall conclusion is that Farabi was likely of Iranic (Sogdian/Persian) rather than Turkic origin which are claimed by some Western sources based on the more popularized work of Ibn Khalikhan in the West. Although the author of this short article does not claim to have read all of Farabi's writing (and those that are ascribed to him), but from what is available in print and we were able to obtain, we believe it points to an Iranian background. It is important to note that we may definitely never know the answer 100%. However there have not been any critical articles on this issue except the detailed article of D. Gutias.

## Evidences from Farabi's own writing

The conclusion from Farabi's own writing is that he knew Soghdian, considered Turks to be part of the ignorant city and finally the names of most of the music modes and tones are in Persian, with the rest being Arabic (which are loan words into Persians). Farabi uses Persian words and Soghdian words in his writing, but does not use any Turkish. Given that Farabi is believed to have come to Baghdad at an early

age, Soghdian would be a peculiar language that he was familiar with. Although it is possible that he could have learned Soghdian from a Soghdian migrant in Baghdad, nevertheless what is more likely is that Soghdian was the language of his own family. Indeed he is one of the very few Islamic writers that have mentioned Soghdian and Soghdian words. Thus from Farabi's own writing, an Iranic Soghdian origin is likely.

## Kitab al-Horuf, Soghdian word and alphabet and other Languages used by Farabi

According to Professor. Gutias:

"As is well known, in his incessant efforts to differentiate between universal logical structures of thought and particular grammatical structures, Farabi has in a number of his works references and glosses in **Persian, Sogdian,** and Greek (**but no Turkish**; cf. Walzer, 1985, p. 3)" ("Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica by D. Gutias)

Thus Farabi uses Persian, Greek and Soghdian words and no Turkish words. Soghdian is the most peculiar of all the languages, since Farabi could not have learned Soghdian in Baghdad where he was said to have been raised up.

In his book the Kitab-al-Horuf, Farabi uses terms from Persian, Soghdian, Syriac and Greek. For example he compares Arabic grammar with Persian and them mentions the word "is" which in Persian is "ast", in Soghdian is "asti" and in Greek is "astin". Or he says in Arabic they add "yat" Inasaniyat" while in Persian they add "y" like the word Mardomi مردمي. Thus in a book that is written about languages and words, Farabi mentions Soghdian and Persian, but no mention of Turkish is made.

The most interesting example of Soghdian is actually the word mentioned "b iryd". In the critical edition the word is shown as:



The first letter of the following word is not present in either Arabic or Persian alphabets. Farabi mentions "Fi Soghdiyya" (In Soghdian) and then mentions the above word.

Farabi, "Kitab al-Horuf" critical edition by Muhsin Mahdi. Beirutd Institut de letters orientales, recherché. Vol. 46, Beirut (1970). Pg 111.

According to the Encyclopedia Iranica, the Chorasmian language (an Iranian language which was the closest relative of Soghdian):

"Orthography and phonology. Apart from the Arabic emphatics  $\underline{t}$ ,  $\underline{q}$ ,  $\underline{z}$ ,  $\underline{s}$ ,  $\underline{z}$  and the postvelars q,  $\underline{h}$ ,  $\hat{\cdot}$ , the pronunciation of which is unknown, it can be assumed that Chorasmian had the following consonant

phonemes: p, t, c (= ts), k; f,  $\vartheta$  (=  $\underline{t}$ ),  $\check{c}$ , x; b, d, j (= dz), g;  $\theta$  (=  $\underline{b}$ ), ' (=  $\underline{g}$ ); m, n; s,  $\check{s}$ , z,  $\check{s}$ , r, l; w, y. Beside the normal Persian additions to the Arabic alphabet,  $\theta$  was written as a three-pointed f."

The same information is mentioned in Encyclopedia of Islam under Chorasmia and the native Iranic Chorasmian scholar Biruni also uses this same three-pointed f. In the Encyclopedia of Islam, we read:

""Kutayba's invasions may have ended the old scribal tradition, but the language itself persisted, now written in the <u>Arabic alphabet</u> but with several characters modified to render the characteristic sounds of  $\underline{K}\underline{h}_{\underline{u}}$  for the labiodental fricative v or  $\beta$ "

Thus besides the usage of Soghdian words, Farabi knew how to pronounce sounds that are peculiar to Eastern Iranian languages. It may very be possible that Farabi himself modified the Arabic alphabet for Soghdian. Either way, the above word " $\beta$ ird" is probably the oldest existing word in Soghdian that is written in the Arabic alphabet and it is fitting to be written in a book called "Kitab al-Horuf" (Book of Letters).

As per the Greek and Syriac languages, Farabi learned it from his Christian cleric teacher, Yohanna b. Khaylan. They studied the works of Aristotle together. As per Persian, this was becoming a major language in Central Asia and a common lingua franca. However it is Soghdian that stands out. Given that the above sound does not exist in Arabic or Persian or Turkic, it is very interesting that Farabi creates a specific character for it.

## Farabi and the Turks place in the base city

"Alfarabi ...counts the Turks among the pleasure-seekers and citizens of the base city. ".(Arthur Hyman, "Maimonidean Studies", Published by KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1992.)

In the philosophy of Farabi there is the virtuous city which ranks the highest and then there are cities of ignorance. Farabi mentions several states including the: Excellent State/Virtuous City (Madinah al-Fadilah), the ignorant state (Madinah al-Jahiliya), the immoral state (Madinah al-Fasiqah), the misguided state (Madinah al-Dallah) and the transformed state (Madinah al-Mutabaddalah).

The cities of ignorance have several types, including the indispensable city, the progressing to the vile city, the base city and so on.

#### According to Farabi, the base city is:

"The base city or the base association is that in which citizens cooperate to enjoy sensual pleasure or imaginary pleasure (play and amusement) or both. They enjoy the pleasure of food, drink, and copulation, and strive after what is more pleasant of these, in the pursuit of pleasure alone, rather than what sustains, or is any way useful to, the body; and they do same as regards play and amusement. This city is one regarded by the citizens of the ignorant city as happy and admirable city; for they can attain the goal of this city after having acquired bare necessities and acquired wealth, and only by means of much expenditure. They regard whoever posses more

resources for play and the pleasure as the best, the happiest and most enviable man".

(Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, Nicholas J. Rengger, "International Relations in Political Thought: Texts from the Ancient Greeks to the First World War", Published by Cambridge University Press, 2002, pg 156-157).

It is sort of odd for Farabi to place Turks in the "base city" if he was a Turk. Rather, Soghdians were a cultured people who build walls around Bukhara (see the History of Bukhara edited by R.N. Frye) to keep away Turkish nomads from the major cities.

## Iranian Music modes mentioned by Farabi

The modes of music(Mugam) mentioned by Farabi have mainly Persian names with some Arabic names.

Modes of Music mentions by Farabi include:

Persian: Rahavi, Raast, Zirguleh/Zanguleh, Esfahan, Navan, Bozorg, Zir-Afkand, 'Araaq (some sources claim Persian etymology for this word while others claim Arabic)

Arabic names: Hosseyni, 'ushaaq, Hejaz, Bu-Sulayk(Abu-Sulayk), 'Araaq (some sources claim Persian etymology for this word while others claim Arabic)

The names of tones used by Farabi are also Iranian: Yek Gah, do Gah, Seh Gah, Chahar Gah, etc.

We do not see any Turkish names with regards to musical names used by Farabi.

According to S.H. Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi:

"Morever, he was a master of music theory; his Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir (The Great book on Music), known in the West as a book on Arabic music, is in reality a study of the theory of Persian music of his day as well as presenting certain great philosophical principle about music, its cosmic qualities, and its influence on the soul"

( Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Professor Mehdi Aminrazavi. "An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 1: From Zoroaster to 'Umar Khayyam", I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007.)

## Farabi and opinions of Avicenna and Ibn al-Nadeem

A glance at the works of Avicenna and Ibn al-Nadeem from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries shows that there is no mention of Farabi's ethnicity. However, Avicenna has an important quote mentioning in one sentence the word (Madinah al-Fadilah=Virtuous City), which is a phrase borrowed from Farabi while mentioning that Turks were not able to acquire virtue and are destined to be slaves by nature. Qazi Andalusi also mentions something along the same line. While Ibn Nadeem

mentions that Farabi was from a city Faryab (modern Afghanistan) in Khorasan. The information these two authors provide is close to Farabi's time and has more weight.

## Avicenna

A good deal of the fame of Farabi is due to the Persian scientist Avicenna(980-1037) who studied his works and expounded upon them.

According to D. Gutias:

"His fame, however, began to grow, apparently in association with and as a result of the renown of Avicenna (q.v.) who, through his explicit recommendation and endorsement of Farabi in his writings, presented himself as Farabī's successor in philosophy." (D. Gutias, "Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

And

"Furthermore, this report indicates two additional things: first, that there was no interest in his works in Khorasan, and perhaps in the East generally, right after his death and until the appearance of Avicenna; and second, that when Avicenna's work made philosophy a popular subject in the East, Fārābī's works were overshadowed by those of Avicenna, at least until Bayhaqī's time." ( D. Gutias, "Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

And

"Within Islam, Farabī's system was taken up by Avicenna, who further developed and refined it to create a philosophy that was to remain dominant in the East." ( D. Gutias, "Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

Thus Avicenna was very familiar with Farabi. Avicenna's father was from Balkh, a Persian speaking region (the peculiar Persian Balkhi dialect also called Zaban-e-Balkhi is recorded in Zakhira Khwarizmshahi under the name "Zaban-e-Balkh" (Balkhi tongue)) and his mother's was from Bukhara, which was Soghdian/Persian speaking at the time. His mother's name is recorded as Setareh(Persian for Star) and his father was a follower of the Ismaili sect which was popular among Iranians.

Curiously enough, just like Farabi who brings examples from other languages in his Kitab al-Horuf, there is a statement from Avicenna about the languages he knows and he only mentions Arabic and Persian. Thus unlike Farabi, it seems Avicenna did not know Soghdian but only knew Persian and Arabic according to his own testimony. The statement of Avicenna with this regard is given here from his book Ishaarat:

لكن اللغات التى نعرفها قد خلت فى عاداتها عن استعمال النفى على هذه الصورة ....فيقولون بالعربية لاشىء من ح ب... و كذلك ما بقال فى فصح لغةالفرس هيچ ح ب نيست Thus Ibn Sina states: "In the languages we know ... in Arabic it is La-shayy .. and in Persian it is Hich Nist". This sort of giving examples from other languages in order to come up with precise philosophical concepts is exactly modeled after the Kitab al-Horuf of Farabi. (Dehkhoda dictionary under Abu Ali Sina)

Avicenna not only used Persian words, but he also wrote important works in Persian, the most important of them is Encyclopedic Danshenaameyeh 'Alai, where he coins many pure Persian terms and shows that Persian is also a capable language for the expression of logic, philosophy, medicine and science.

Avicenna in the book of "The Healing: (Ash-Shifa) in Chapter 5 (Concerning the caliph and Imam: the necessity of obeying them. Remarks on politics, transactions and morals) states:

"...As for the enemies of those who oppose his laws, the legislator must decree waging war against them and destroying them, after calling on them to accept the truth. Their property and women must be declared free for the spoil. For when such property and women are not administered according to the constitution of the virtuous city, they will not bring about the good for which the property and women are sought. Rather, these would contribute to corruption and evil. Since some men have to serve others, such people must be forced to serve the people of the just city. The same applies to people not very capable of acquiring virtue. For these are slaves by nature as, for example, the Turks and Zinjis and in general those who do not grow up in noble climes where the condition for the most part are such that nations of good temperament, innate intelligence and sound minds thrive" (Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, Nicholas J. Rengger, "International Relations in Political Thought: Texts from the Ancient Greeks to the First World War", Published by Cambridge University Press, 2002, pg 156-157).

Let us look at the original Arabic of this sentence as well:

و انه لابد من ناس يخدمون الناس، فيجب ان يك.ن هؤلا يجبرون علي خدمه اهل المدينه الفاضله، و كذلك من كان من الناس بعيداً عن تلقي الفاضيله فهم عبيد٬٬ بالطبع، نثل الترك والزنح، و بالجمله الذين نشأوا في غير اقاليم الشريفه التي اكثر احوالها ان ينشأفيها حسنه الامزجه صحيحه القرايح و العقول

(J. Mashkur, Farabi and Farabi, Tehran, 1972)

Avicenna was born in Bukhara (Central Asia) which is from the same general area of Farabi (either Faryab in Afghanistan or Paryab(Farab) in modern Kazakhistan). What is interesting is that he borrows the term virtuous city from Farabi and at the same time mentions that Turks are by nature slaves and are not capable of acquiring virtue. Obviously if Farabi was a Turk, his follower Avicenna who lived only one generation after the passing away of Farabi and who was born in the area of Central Asia, and claimed to be his successor would not have made such a statement. Also as Avicenna is clear when he expresses in his book of Ishaarat, then one can also surmise that Farabi also gave examples from the languages he knew: Persian, Greek, Arabic, Syriac and Soghdian.

Among these, Soghdian would have to be Farabi's native language since Soghdian was not a major language of Baghdad like Persian and Arabic. Also his usage of a peculiar Soghdian sound shows that he was a native speaker. Soghdian would not have importance in Baghdad as did Arabic, Syrianc, Greek, and Persian. Greek and Syriac were already known as scientific languages in Baghdad and were known

by Farabi's Christian teacher Yuhanna b. Khaylan. Arabic and Persian were widely spoken, especially Persian in Central. But Soghdian, an Old Iranian language, was a language in urban centers of Central Asia and thus logically one would believe Farabi's native language.

### Ibn al-Nadeem

Ibn al-Nadeem has a Paragraph on Farabi where he states:

الكتاب: الفهرست

المؤلف: محمد بن إسحاق أبو الفرج النديم

الناشر : دار المعرفة - بيروت ، 1398 - 1978

Translation: Abu Nasr Mohammad ibn Mohammad ibn Mohammad ibn TarxAn, originally from Faryaab from the land of Khorasan".

Note it is very possible that there is scribal error between Faryab and Farab by later scribes.

#### D. Gutias states: On the other hand, D. Gutias states:

"The nesba, universally given as al-Fārābī, would indicate a place of ultimate origin in the district of Fārāb (the older Persian form Pārāb is given in Ḥodūd al-ʿālam) on the middle Syr Darya (Jaxartes). This is corroborated by the geographer Ebn Ḥawqal, a younger contemporary of Fārābī who was also somehow associated, like Fārābī later in his life, with the Hamdanid Sayf-al-Dawla, since the first edition of his famous Ṣūrat al-arzu was dedicated to that prince. Ebn Ḥawqal notes from his travels in Transoxania that Fārābī was "from" (men) the town of Vasīj in Fārāb (Esṭakkhrī does not mention Fārābī in association with Vasīj). This has been taken to mean that Fārābī himself was born there, but this need not be necessarily the case. Ebn Ḥawqal is contradicted by no less an authority than Ebn al-Nadīm, who was also a younger contemporary of Fārābī and had close personal contacts with Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, Fārābī's most successful student, from whom he received a significant amount of his information about philosophical studies for his Fehrest. Ebn al-Nadīm states (ed. Flügel p. 263 l. 9) that Fārābī's origins (aṣloho) lie in Fāryāb in Khorasan (men al-Fāryāb men arż Korāsān), that is, the town half way down the road from Marv-al-rūd to Balk. Bayhaqī in his Tatemmat Ṣewān al-ḥekma (p. 16.7) conflates the two traditions and says that Fārābī was "from Fāryāb in Turkestan."

The etymology of Farab and Faryabi however are well known and are clearly Iranian. We shall show that the name Tarxan has been used by Soghdian people and its etymology is uncertain according to linguistics. However a Turkish origin for the word has been discounted by many modern Turkologists while many modern Iranian philologists claim it as Iranian. Although the title has also been used by different groups including Iranians, Tibetians, Turkish and other peoples.

# Earliest mention of Farabi according to three 13th century writers

Three 13<sup>th</sup> century writers have given conflicting account on Farabi's background in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. By now, reliable information on Farabi was most likely lost and his figure was mixed with fairy tales and myths. However the issue of Farabi's background might have become a matter of dispute in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and thus we see three different writers from the 13<sup>th</sup> century giving explicit opinions. From the perspective of Western orientalism, the book of Ibn Khalikhan became very much popularized in the West where-as the books of Ibn Abi' Osayba and al-Shahruzi did not get the same fame and coverage.

Ibn Abi 'Osayba is the earliest of these biographers and states in his Tabaqat al-Atibba 1268):

Thus Ibn Abi 'OSayba Ibn Abi 'Osayba is the earliest of these biographers and states that Farabi is Persian.

The next tradition is by that of Ibn al-Khalikhan who claims a Turkish origin for Farabi:

«ابونصر محمدبن طرخان بن اوزلغالفارابي التركي الحكيم توفي في سنه339 سيف الدوله في اربعه من خواصه و قدناهز ثمانين سنه و دفن بظاهر دمشق خارج الباب الصغير رحمه الله تعالي و الفارابي هذه النسبه الي فاراب و تسمي هذا الزمان اطرار و قد غلب عليه هذا لاسم و هي مدينه فوق الشاش قيبه من مدينه بلاساغون و جيع اهلها علي مذهب الامام الشافعي و هي قاعده من قواعد الترك»

Finally, there is the tradition of Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Shahrazuri in his *Tarikh al-Hukama'* (history of sages) who lived in the same century (13<sup>th</sup> century) and states that Farabi was Persian:

«و كان من سلاله فارسيه»

According to D. Gutias:

"The sources from the 6th/12th century and later consist essentially of three biographical entries, all other extant reports on Fārābī being either dependent on them or even later fabrications: (1) the Syrian tradition or collection of biographical narratives on Fārābī represented by the entry by Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʿa (II, pp. 134-40), and to a lesser extent by Ebn al-Qefṭī (pp. 277-80); (2) the pro-Turkish tradition,

compiled and composed as a continuous narrative by Ebn Kallekan with the purpose of documenting a Turkish ethnic origin for Fārābī (ed. 'Abbās, V, pp. 153-57; tr. de Slane, III, pp. 307-11); and (c) the scanty and legendary Eastern tradition, represented by Zahīr-al-Dīn Bayhaqī (pp. 16-20, no. 17). Of these, the Eastern tradition of Bayhaqī (q.v.; d. 565/1169) can be discounted: the few accurate data derive from the earlier sources, whereas the added material is obviously fabricated. Ebn al-Qefțī (or the extant epitome of Zawzanī, compiled in 647/1249) actually offers a combination of the Andalusian and Syrian traditions, for he copies Sā ed for the most part and has additional material only on Fārābī's association with Sayf-al-Dawla. This leaves the Syrian and pro-Turkish traditions of the biographical entries in Ebn Abī Oşaybe a's Oyūn (final recension completed in 667/1268) and in Ebn Kallekān's Wafayāt (completed in 669/1271) respectively. These present themselves as our most extensive and detailed sources though they date a good three centuries after Fārābī's death. Ebn Abī Oṣaybe a's entry, which is the earlier one, consists of a collection and patching together of all the diverse pieces of information that were available to him in Syria at that time. It includes much legendary material, but Ebn Abī Oşaybe a also quotes Fārābī where he can. Ebn Kallekān's entry, by contrast, is a response to that of Ebn Abī Oşaybe a: the latter had mentioned at the beginning of his entry, and for the first time by any extant biographer, that Fārābī's father was of Persian descent; Ebn Kallekān's entry is completely animated by the effort to prove that Fārābī was ethnically Turkish. To this end, Ebn Kallekān first gave Fārābī an additional nesba, one he never had, al-Torkī. Abu'l-Fedā', who copied Ebn Kallekān, corrected this, and changed the word, al-Torkī "the Turk," which reads like a nesba, to the descriptive statement, wa-kāna rajolan torkīyan "he was a Turkish man" (Moktasar II, p. 104). Second, at the end of his entry, Ebn Kallekan spent considerable time giving the correct spelling and vocalization of all the names which he says are Turkish and are associated with Fārābī: the names of his alleged grand- and great-grandfather, Tarkan and Awzalaa (adding explicitly, wa-homa men asma al-tork, "these are Turkish names"), and the toponymics of his origins, Fārāb, Oṭrār, Balāsaḡūn, and Kāšḡar (the information on the toponymics is derived from Sam ani, under the nesba al-Fārābī, though Sam ānī does not refer to the philosopher).

Since almost every detail of Fārābī's life found in one source is contradicted by that in another, it will be helpful to list first those items from the documentary and earlier narrative sources which are certain and to present the dubious and legendary material on the later sources in the next section. His name was Abū Naṣr Moḥammad b. Moḥammad Fārābī, as all sources, and especially the earliest and most reliable, Mas'ūdī, agree. In the famous passage about the appearance of philosophy preserved and reported by Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a (II, p. 135 ll. 20-21), he is quoted as having said that he had studied logic with Yūḥannā b. Ḥaylān up to and including Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, i.e., according to the order of the books studied in the curriculum, Fārābī said that he studied Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*. His teacher, Yūḥannā b. Ḥaylān, was a Christian cleric who abandoned lay interests and engaged in his ecclesiastical duties, as Fārābī reports. His studies of Aristotelian logic with Yūḥannā in all probability took place in Baghdad, where Mas'ūdī tells us Yūḥannā died during the caliphate of al-Moqtader (295-320/908-32). This is further indicated by the entire approach and contents of his logical work, which is imbued with the thought world of

Alexandrian Aristotelianism as resuscitated in Baghdad by Abū Bešr Mattā and his teachers (Zimmermann, pp. lxviii-cxxxix; see also below, section on Fārābī and Greek philosophy). Fārābī apparently stayed on and worked in Baghdad. Yahyā b. 'Adī, a resident of Baghdad according to Ebn al-Qeft (p. 361 ll. 9-10), was among his students, and he composed at least two of his works for Baghdad personalities: a treatise on the validity of astrology for the Christian scholar and translator Abū Esḥāq Ebrāhīm b. 'Abd-Allāh Baḡdādī (Mahdi, 1975-76, p. 265) and his great book on music for the vizier of the caliph al-Rāzī, Abū Ja'far Moḥammad b. Qāsem Karkī (Ketāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr, pp. 30 and 35, n.1). We know that he was definitely in Baghdad until the end of the year 330/September 942. As we learn from notes in some manuscripts of his *Mabāde* 'ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāżela, he had started to compose the book in Baghdad at that time and then left and went to Syria. He took the book with him, and he finished it in Damascus the following year (331), i.e., by September 943 (cited in Fārābī's *Ketāb al-mella*, p. 79 and by Ebn Abī Oşaybe a II, pp. 138-39; tr. in Mahdi 1990, pp. 721-22). In Syria Fārābī also lived and taught for some time in Aleppo; Ebn al-Qeftī mentions that he went to Aleppo to Sayf-al-Dawla, a report that is corroborated by another manuscript note, copied by Ebn Abī Oṣaybe a (II, p. 139 II. 19-20), which says that he had dictated a commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* to Ebrāhīm b. 'Adī, a student of his in Aleppo (and Yahyā's brother). Later on Fārābī visited Egypt; the note in the manuscripts of the *Mabāde*' also informs us that he wrote the six sections (*foṣūl*) summarizing the book in Egypt in 337/July 948-June 949. He must have returned to Syria, however, soon thereafter, for we are certain of his place and date of death: Mas utiling barely five years after the fact (955-6, the date of the composition of the *Tanbīh*), says that he died in Damascus in Rajab 339 (between 14 December 950 and 12 January 951). His stay in Syria was somehow associated with Sayf-al-Dawla, though we do not know precisely how, how long, and in what capacity. Sā ed al-Andalosī, the first to report this connection, simply says (p. 54 l. 19) that Fārābī "died in Damascus in 339 under the protection (*fī kanaf*)" of Sayf-al-Dawla. Later biographers greatly embellish this association.

#### STORIES AND LEGENDS

The above is all that can be said with certainty about Fārābī's biography. The remaining reports in the later sources are dubious at best and legendary at worst, beginning with his pedigree and origins. There is confusion and uncertainty, first of all, about the names of his grandfather and great-grandfather, which are given variously by the sources. The consensus in secondary literature is to list Ṭarkān as the grandfather's name, but this is not supported by the sources, some of which do not have it at all (most of the earliest sources), while others have it as the name of the great-grandfather (*Fehrest*; Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a), and Ebn Kallekān has it as the name of the father (a discrepancy which was remarked upon by the careful Ṣafadī, I, p. 106).

Actually, it would seem none of them is right. In some manuscripts of Fārābī's works, which must reflect the reading of their ultimate archetypes from his time, his full name appears as Abū Naṣr Moḥammad b. Moḥammad al-Ṭarkānī, i.e., the element Ṭarkān appears in a *nesba* (Fārābī, *Ketāb al-mūsīqī* p. 35, note 1; *Aḥkām al-nojūm*, p. 46). This indicates that Ṭarkān was not necessarily the name of Fārābī's grandfather but rather that of a more distant relative from whom his family claimed descent (cf. Samʿānī, ed. Yamānī, IX, p. 63, s.v. the *nesba* al-Ṭarkānī). Moreover, if the name of Fārābī's grandfather was not known among his contemporaries and immediately succeeding generations, it is all the more surprising to see in the later sources the appearance of yet another name from his pedigree, Awzalaā. This appears as the name of the grandfather in Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʿa and of the great-grandfather in Ebn Kallekān. Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʿa is the first source to list this name which, as Ebn Kallekān explicitly specifies later, is so to be pronounced. In modern Turkish scholarship the pronunciation is given as Uzluā (*İA* V, p. 451), without any explanation. The first appearance of this distinctly Turkish sounding name in the later sources in the context of attempts to claim a Turkish ethnic background for Fārābī is accordingly questionable.

The *nesba*, universally given as al-Fārābī, would indicate a place of ultimate origin in the district of Fārāb (the older Persian form Pārāb is given in *Ḥodūd al-ʿālam*) on the middle Syr Darya (Jaxartes). This is corroborated by the geographer Ebn Ḥawqal, a younger contemporary of Fārābī who was also somehow associated, like Fārābī later in his life, with the Hamdanid Sayfal-Dawla, since the first edition of his famous *Ṣūrat al-arz*µ was dedicated to that prince. Ebn Ḥawqal notes from his travels in Transoxania that Fārābī was "from" (*men*) the town of Vasīj in Fārāb (Esṭakhrī does not mention Fārābī in association with Vasīj). This has been taken to mean that Fārābī himself was born there, but this need not be necessarily the case. Ebn Ḥawqal is contradicted by no less an authority than Ebn al-Nadīm, who was also a younger contemporary of Fārābī and had close personal contacts with Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, Fārābī's most successful student, from whom he received a significant amount of his information about philosophical studies for his *Fehrest*. Ebn al-Nadīm states (ed. Flügel p. 263 l. 9) that Fārābī's origins (*aṣloho*) lie in Fāryāb in Khorasan (*men al-Fāryāb men arż Ķorāsān*), that is, the town half way down the road from Marv-al-rūd to Balk. Bayhaqī in his *Tatemmat Ṣewān al-ḥekma* (p. 16.7) conflates the two traditions and says that Fārābī was "from Fāryāb in Turkestan."

These variants in the basic facts about Fārābī's origins and pedigree indicate that they were not recorded during his lifetime or soon thereafter by anyone with concrete information, but were rather based on hearsay or probable guesses. When in the 7th/13th century Fārābī's ethnic origin was made into an issue by the biographers, dogmatic statements without acknowledgment of source begin to appear. We thus hear for the first time, from Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, that Fārābī's father was a commander of the army and of Persian (fāresī)

descent, to which Ebn Kallekān responded as described above. Ultimately pointless as the quest for Fārābī's ethnic origins might be, the fact remains that we do not have sufficient evidence to decide the matter.

(D. Gutias, "Farabi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

As mentioned the oldest source on his ethnicity mentions him as Persian, the second as Turkish and the third as Persian. Thus what we can gain little from this is that the 13<sup>th</sup> century sources contradict each other and contain many legends. However Farabi's name is Muhammad ibn Muhammad also known as Abu Nasr Al-Farabi and the Nesba (title )of his grandfather was possibly Al-Tarkhani. This matches the information of Ibn Nadeem and the books that have his name.

## Etymology of Wasij, Tarkhan and Farab, Awzalagh

## Farab/Faryab

The etymology of Farab is fairly well known. According to D. Gutias:

"The nesba, universally given as al-Fārābī, would indicate a place of ultimate origin in the district of Fārāb (the older Persian form Pārāb is given in Ḥodūd al-ʿālam) on the middle Syr Darya (Jaxartes)"

The word has to do with water (Ab):

ĀBĪ, Persian term for those agricultural lands which are irrigated; unirrigated (i.e., rain-fed) fields are called *daymī* (see discussion s.v. Agriculture). Cf. also the more specialized term *fāyrāb/pāyrāb*, applied to lands irrigated by diversion of river water.

(E. Ehlers, "ĀBĪ" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

It is interesting to know that after the Turkification of Farab, the name of the place was changed to Otrar (a Turkish word). This indicates that Farabi lived before the Turkification of the area.

OTRĀR, a medieval town of Transoxania, in a rural district (*rostāq*) of the middle Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), apparently known in early Islamic times as Fārāb/Pārāb/Bārāb. The latter two forms are found in the 10th-century geographers (e.g., Moqaddasi [Maqdesi], pp. 263, 273; Ebn Ḥawqal, pp. 510-11, tr. Kramers and Wiet, II, p. 488; Ḥodud al-ʿālam, ed. Sotuda, pp. 117-18, tr. Minorsky, pp. 118-19.) It was notable as the place of origin of the famous philosopher Abu Naṣr Moḥammad Fārābi (d. 950, q.v.).

(C.E. Bosworth, "Otrar" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

#### Wasij

The name Wasij is Iranian since the sound "W" does not exist in Turkish but it is present in Persian (Tajiki, Afghani and most varities), Kurdish and Soghdian. The word is probably the same root as Persian/Pahlavi Pasij/Basij which means already built, ready. Specially, it is user as a term in warface and given the possible military background of Farabi's family, this could have been a military town of the Samanids in order to stop nomadic incursions by Altaic tribes.

#### **Awzalagh**

The etymology of Farab is fairly well known. According to D. Gutias:

"Moreover, if the name of Fārābī's grandfather was not known among his contemporaries and immediately succeeding generations, it is all the more surprising to see in the later sources the appearance of yet another name from his pedigree, Awzalaā. This appears as the name of the grandfather in Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a and of the great-grandfather in Ebn Kallekān. Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a is the first source to list this name which, as Ebn Kallekān explicitly specifies later, is so to be pronounced. In modern Turkish scholarship the pronunciation is given as Uzluā ( $\dot{I}A$  V, p. 451), without any explanation. The first appearance of this distinctly Turkish sounding name in the later sources in the context of attempts to claim a Turkish ethnic background for Fārābī is accordingly questionable. "

Thus the name Awzalagh does not appear in any manuscript or work of Farabi or even succeeding generations. Thus it is not important on what type of etymology it may have. However, the reason modern Turkish scholarship has changed it to "Uzlug" is due to the fact that the sound "Aw" which is present in Persian, Soghdian and Iranian languages is not present in Turkish. For example, the word "Awrang"(throne) in Persian. However, the words (I æg man). Ossetian Iron ævzag mean "man" in Ossetian, a language descendant of Alans which itself is in the same family of Soghdian and other Eastern Iranian languages. Since this author is not a philologist but only refers to linguistic material, it would take a linguist well aware of Iranian languages to look at this word. However such an attempt is not needed since "Awzalagh" is a later invention in Farabi's genealogy and there is no need for explaining its meaning with regards to Farabi.

#### **Tarxan**

Tarxan is an old title and we will first bring an article from a Turkish scholar describing this term and then bring opinions of well known Iranologists and Turcologists on this term. Finally we make a brief comment.

Prominent Iranologist such as Harold W. Baily, George E. Morgensteirne and Vasily Abaev consider the word to be Iranian and they note that it lacks an Altaic etymology.

Harold. W. Bailey, Indo-Scythian Studies: being Khotanese Texts, VII, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 25-41. states:

2.達干, 達官K 957, 296, 447 ta-kan, ta-kuan < d'ât-kân, d'ât-kuân, G 271 b, 139 a d'ât-kân, d'ât-kwân represents tarxan, tarqan, tarkān, tarxān (the x- being non-Turkish). It is possible to trace the base tarkor tark(h)- to Indo-European tolky- (Pokorny, 1088) 'to speak, name' used for 'to command' (as in mrau- 'to speak' for 'command' in the Saka title murunda- 'commander'). From Indo-Iranian tark- there is Old Ind. tarka- 'pondering, logic', tarkayati 'to assume, ponder'. I proposed in 1969 to connect Ossetic tärxon 'judging, counselling'. It is used in the translation of the Georgian Vep'xis t'qaosani to translate sa-vazirod 'action of a vazir ("adviser")'. Ossetic -on can come from either -ān- or- āun- (and shortened -aun), so that the title of the Sogdian Nēzuk at the time of the Arab invasion of Transoxiana, trxwn, could be allied to Ossetic.

For tarxan the spellings are Orkhon  $t^a r q^a n$ , plural  $t^a r q^a t$ , Turfan Pers.  $trx\bar{a}n$ , Khotan-Saka ttarkana, and later, when suprascript -r- was replaced by the akṣara ra, ttarakana ( $\mathcal{J}RAS$  (1939), 91), pseudo-Tokhara B 377 b 3  $tarkh\bar{a}ne$ , B 289 b 5  $\bar{a}rsl\bar{a}m$   $t\bar{a}rkh\bar{a}nem$ , Sogd. trx'n, Byzantine Greek  $\tau a\rho\chi \acute{a}\nu$ ,  $\tau a\rho\kappa \acute{a}\nu os$ ,  $\tau \epsilon\rho\kappa \acute{a}\nu os$ . <sup>68</sup> Heftal coins have TARKA, TARAKA. Mongol has d'rq'n, and Manchu darhan as part of a name. I note that tarxan is compared with Ossetic  $t\ddot{a}rxon$  in V. Abaev's Ossetic Etymological Dictionary (1979).

#### Vasily Abaev also states:

"Abaev considers this word (lacking in a Turco-Mongolian etymology), as well Old Hungarian tarchan "olim judex", borrowing from Scythians (Alans) \*tarxan "judge" -> Ossetian. Taerxon "argument, trial"; cf. the Ossete idioms taerxon kaenyn "to judge" (+ kænyn "to do") and tærxon læg "judge" (+I læg man). Iron ævzag" (Agustí Alemany, Sources on the Alans, Brill Academic Publishers, 2000. Excerpt from page 328)

Another well known Iranologist and linguist talks about "plausible Iranian origin" for words such as Xatun (which is generally taken to be Soghdian) and Tarxan in (Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne, 1892-1978, Tome I.(Textes et Memoires, Tome X). (ACTA Iranica) (Vol 1), Peeters Publishers (January 1, 1981).)

Among Turkologist, the Anatolian Turkish scholar Bilge Umar attempts to connect it with the Luvian divinity Tarkhun and makes some interesting points from Biruni, Mahmud Kashgari and Farabi:

From a letter which was written in A.D. 718 or 719 to Cerrah (sic! Jerrah), the governor of the Arab province of Khorasan (sic! Author means Caliphate province) and son of Abdallah, and according to the work of certain Arab historians, someone called Tarkhun had dominated Sogdiana at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is not very clear who was this Tarkhun. Here his name was confused with Tarkhan. Most probably, however, there was a connection between these two names. As far it is understood, Tarkhan was a title but could have been used as a name as well. In the same way, the grandfather of Farabi, the famous scholar who claimed to be both Turkish and Iranian, was called Tarkhan (sic! We believe the author means "who is claimed to be rather than who claimed to be, since such a direct claim from Farabi does not exist).

It is clear the word Tarkhan was not pure Turkish and that it was adopted into Turkish from the old language of Soghdiana. This was proved in the Turkish dictionary *Divan u Lugat it-Turk* written by Kashgarli Mahmut (sic! Turkish way of saying Mahmud Kashghari) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century(1985: 436-471).

Kashgarli Mahmut explained the word Tarkhan in the following way:

"It is a name given before the Islamic religion. It means prince (Bey, Umar) in Arghu language"

The Arghu people were the Turkish inhabitants of the Sogdiana region or in other words some of the Turkicized Sogdiana people. Kashgarli Mahmut also referred to the Sogdians who were not of Turkish origin but were Turkicized later

"Sogdak was a name of a nation who settled in Balasagun. These were of the Sogd race. Sogd lay between Bukhara and Samarqand. These people had atoped the Turkish appearance and the Turkish traditions"

The Arabic historians called Tarkhun the ruler of Samarkand or the King of Sogd (in other words Sogdiana). In the Hastun Destani (quoted by Frye *op.cit*) which concerned the capture of Bukhara by the Arabs, Tarkhun appears to be a half epic character. The epic (destan) says that he fought the Arabic commander Kuteybe (sic! Qutayba). After the Arabs left the region, he was dethroned by the Turks (or Turkicized Sogdians) who were the enemies of Arab Islam and he later killed him in prison. Only Yakubi (Yaqubi) says that he was killed by Gurek, who replaced him. Gurek dominated the region 27 years and died in A.D. 737 or 738. During his reign, Gurek had something friendly, sometimes hostile relations with the Arabs. In AD 711, during his rule, the Arab commander, Kuteybe, announced that he had promised himself to take revenge on Tarkhun. He did this no doubt, in order to restore good relations and to get the support of Tarkhun's followers. Later, the letter that was written to Cerrah (sic! Jarrah), the governor of the Arab province of Horasan (sic! Khorasan) and son of Abdullah, mentioned two sons of Tarkhuns.

Elbiruni says that Tarkhun was not a pure name. It was a title and had the same meaning as Tarkhan. It was however, in a different form. Welhausen (1902:270), who may be called a contemporary historian,

also accepted this opinion. Here the most important view is that of Frye who agreed with the Russian scholar Smirnova (quoted by Frye *op.cit*). They say that the name written as Tarkhun and read as Tarkhan by the Arabic historians should be Turkhun of the local language of Sogdiana.

What the Turkish scholar Bilge Umar has pointed out can be summarized as this. The name Tarkhun/Tarkhan was the title of the ruler of Samarqand as Biruni has noted. He also suggests that the name is not pure Turkish but came via intermediary of Soghdian. However he believes the original word could be from Luvian, which is much harder to prove.

L. Ligeti, a linguistics mentions it as a borrowed word and states: "tarxan and tegin [prince] form the wholly un-Turkish plurals tarxat and tegit" (L. Ligeti, Researches in Altaic languages, e. A. Kiadó, 1975, University of Michigan, p. 48)

G. Clauson in his famous *Etymological Dictionary of Pre-13<sup>th</sup> century Turkish* goes with the idea of Pulleyblank that it is a title which Chinese sources attribute to the nomadic Hsiung-nu (Xiongnu) people.

The Turkologist Gerhard Doerfer has denied any possibility of a relationship between the Xiongnu language and any other known language and rejected in the strongest terms any connection with Turkish or Mongolian. (Nicola Di Cosmo, "Ancient China and Its Enemies". Published by Cambridge University Press, 2004. pg 164:"Bailey on the other hand, viewed the Xiongnu as Iranian speakers, while Doerfer denied the possibility of a relationship between the Xiongnu language and any other known language and rejected in the strongest terms any connection with Turkish or Mongolian")

Janos Harmmata believes that the Xiongnu confederation consisted of 24 tribes, controlling a nomadic empire with a strong military organization, and that "their loyal tibes and kings(shan-yu) bore Iranian names and all the Hsiung-nu words noted by the Chinese can be explained from an Iranian language of the Saka type." He concludes that "it is therefore clear that the majority of Hsiung-nu tribes spoke an Eastern Iranian language"

This is also mentioned by Henryk Jankowsi (2006) who states that "the Asian Hsiung-nu were of Iranian origin and spoke an Iranian language of the Saka type"

There are other sources also that consider Altaic etymology for this word also. For example:

Richard Nelson Frye, "Tarxun-Turxun and Central Asian History", Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1/2 pp. 105-129 (1951).

We asked a prominent young linguist Prof. Ilya Yakubovich who states that like most titles Tegin, Xaghan and etc., the etymology of Tarxan is unclear and is possibly linked to the Xiongnu. However they are not Altaic. Some significant number of scholars believe that the Xiongnu was a Yenisian language.

Thus it seems there is a consensus of philologists that the term Tarxan is a loan word in Turkish much like other titles such as Xatun, Tegin, Khaqan and etc. It is notable that the oldest Turkish form of the word is "Tarqan" where-as in Soghdian and Iranian languages, it has always been Tarxan.

We also looked at the Dehkhoda dictionary and it states that "Tarxan was a title for the local rulers of Khorasan" and it means "noble".

What is certain is that a title, no matter what its etymology, can be used for a variety of people. For example the Arabic title Sultan was used by hosts of rulers like the Turkic Seljuqids. The same for the title of "Shah" being used across the Islamic world. "Melik" was used by Armenian notable. Khan is popular among Pashtuns and Punjabis and also Iranian Kurds and Bakhtiaris.

In the case of Tarxan, the title, if not of Iranian root, has been used by Iranians before and around the time of Farabi as well.

For three early attestations one can look at an early Iranian poet with this name:

"ABU'L-YANBAĞĪ 'ABBĀS B. TARĶĀN, Iranian poet, d. 230/844. He has occasionally been identified with Abu'l-'Abbās Marvazī (q.v.; d. 200/815-16; see W. Barthold, "To the Question of Early Persian Poetry," *BSOS* II, 1923, pp. 836-38). However his usual *nesba* is Samarqandī. His father's *laqab*, Tarķān, indicates a princely descent. Abu'l-Yanbağī was one of those poets, called *du'l-lesānayn*, who composed in both Arabic and Persian; and he contributed importantly to the birth of classical Persian poetry."

(Y. Richard, "ABU'L-YANBAĞĪ 'ABBĀS B. TARĶĀN", Encyclopedia Iranica)

In actuality, the oldest poet credited with Persian poetry is Abu Hafs Soghdi and is mentioned by Farabi:

"ABŪ ḤAFṢ SOĞDĪ, one of the so-called "first poets" in New Persian. The concept of "first poet," however, is simplistic; since poetry, like any stage of a language, evolves continuously and is rooted in its immediate past. The idea of "first poet" may have evolved from the lack of distinction in tadkeras between the term earliest (qadīmtarīn) and first (awwal). Nor was Abū Ḥafs the first poet who used Arabic meter in his poetry. Others had already done so, and his extant one-line fragment does not strictly conform to the norms of Arabic prosody.

Little is known about Abū Ḥafs's life; according to Fārābī (d. 329/940), quoted in *al-Mo'jam* (see bibliog.), Abū Ḥafs was a master musician who flourished in 300/912 and who developed a musical instrument called Šahrūd. "(Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Abu Hafs Sogdi" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

Indeed Farabi himself knew both Persian and Soghdian as discussed in the Kitab al-Horuf. It was during this era that large part of Central Asia was adopting Persian besides the local Iranian languages such as Soghdian and Chorasmian.

"Another factor in the evolution of Middle Persian to Persian was the geographical spread of this language in the wake of the Arab conquest. Following the path of the Arab invasion, Persian spread from its own heartlands to Central Asia (Transoxania). For their conquests, the Arabs

enlisted indigenous peoples in their armies. These local populations did not speak a standardized Persian and in many cases did not even use Persian among themselves. Nevertheless, the Persian of the time served as a *lingua franca* for these enlisted men. They were to spread this new version in the conquered provinces, from Azerbaijan to Central Asia, to the detriment of other Iranian languages or other dialects of Persian. Such was the case of Sogdian, a language belonging to an age-old culture that was largely engulfed by Persian. Thus Persian became, in due course, the court language of the first semi-independent Muslim principalities, most notably those founded in the Greater Khorasan."(CHARLES-HENRI DE FOUCHÉCOUR, "Iran: Classical Persian literature" in Encyclopedia Iranica)

Thus it is not surprising that one of the first poets in new Persian is Abu Hafs Soghdi who is also known by Farabi. Tarxun is also mentioned as the title of the ruler of Samarqand by Biruni. It is also mentioned as a ruler of Sughd al-Narshakhi's "The History of Bukhara".

The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi also mentions the Iranian ruler of the Samarqand by the Iranian name of "Bijan" and of Tarxan descent. Tarxan thus here would have to be taken as in Biruni's Tarxun, which is the title of the ruler of Samarqand.

یکی پهلوان بود گسترده کام نژادش ز طرخان و بیژن بنام نشستش به شهر سمرقند بود بران مرز جندیش بیوند بود

However, Ibn Khalikhan did not have the history or philological knowledge we have today and had wrongly assumed that due to the title (Nesba) Al-Tarxani that Farabi was Turkish. However as shown, the title's origin is not etymologically known, there is an Iranian theory for the title and in the end, a title by itself is not sufficient to decide the matter.

## Arab authors and mistaking of Iranian and Turks

It should be also noted that the term Turk was applied more as a geographical connotations for various inhabitants of Central Asia among Arab and Arabic writers. That is the term Turk at the time did not have the strict meaning of Turkic speakers today. Mongols, Tibetians, Chinese and Iranians such as Alans, Soghdians, Chorasmians, Hephtalites (the consensus now moving towards Eastern Iranian origin) have been mistaken for Turks in Arabic and even sometime Persian literature. The word "Turk" itself has not a clear etymology.

Obviously, this same mistake was not made by Iranians of Central Asia, who knew the difference well. For example, the native Iranian-Chorasmian scholar Abu Rayhan Biruni who attests that his native language is Iranian Chorasmian also states: "The people of Chorasmia are a branch of the Persian tree". And we already mentioned Avicenna who states that the Turks came from far away lands that did not produce innate intelligence and virtue. We should note that unlike Farabi which various accounts have been given in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there is no ambiguity about the Iranian origin of Biruni and Avicenna.

According to C.E. Bosworth: "Similarly such great figures as al-Farabi, al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina have been attached by over enthusiastic Turkish scholars to their race". (Clifford Edmond Bosworth, "Barbarian Incursions: The Coming of the Turks into the Islamic World." In Islamic Civilization, Edited by D. S. Richards. Oxford, 1973.)

With this regard, some of these scholars might have overlooked the fact that Biruni clearly states the people of Khwarizm are of the Persian tree and he explicitly states his native language is Iranian Chorasmian. He has provided personal names and names of months and dates in the Chorasmian Iranian language and the language has been sufficiently studied.

However, where-as Biruni and Avicenna are from Central Asia, the same was not true of Arabic writers or writers born in other areas of the Islamic world who mistook Iranians and Turks. At that time, the term Turk was not clearly defined. For example Ibn Nadeem has mentioned the Alans and Tibetians as Turks in his Al-Fihrist. Even an erudite scholar like Ibn Khaldun while disclaiming the historical validity of Yemenese-Himyar mythology states about one of the Himyar (Old Yemenese people) kings: "After that, he is said to have sent three of his sons on raids, (one) against the country of Fars, one against the country of Soghdians, one of the Turkish nations of Transoxania, and one against the country of Rum (Byzantines)."(The Muqaddimah)

According to one modern source with regards to military personal in Baghdad (some sources have stated Farabi's background was as such):

"The name Turk was given to all these troops, despite the inclusion amongst them of some elements of Iranian origin, Ferghana, Ushrusana, and Shash – places were in fact the centers were the slave material was collected together" ('Uthmān Sayyid Aḥmad Ismāʻīl Bīlī, "Prelude to the Generals", Published by Garnet & Ithaca Press, 2001.)

#### M. A. Shaban goes further:

"These new troops were the so-called "Turks". It must be said without hesitation that this is the most misleading misnomer which has led some scholars to harp *ad nauseam* on utterly unfounded interpretation of the following era, during which they unreasonably ascribe all events to Turkish domination. In fact the great majority of these troops were not Turks. It has been frequently pointed out that Arabic sources use the term Turk in a very loose manner. The Hephthalites are referred to as Turks, so are the peoples of Gurgan, Khwarizm and Sistan. Indeed, with the exception of the Soghdians, Arabic sources refer to all peoples not subjects of the Sassanian empire as Turks. In Samarra separate quarters were provided for new recruits from every locality. The group from Farghana were called after their district, and the name continued in usage because it was easy to pronounce. But such groups as the Ishtakhanjiyya, the Isbijabbiya and groups from similar localities who were in small numbers at first, were

lumped together under the general term Turks, because of the obvious difficulties the Arabs had in pronouncing such foreign names. The Khazars who also came from small localities which could not even be identified, as they were mostly nomads, were perhaps the only group that deserved to be called Turks on the ground of racial affinity. However, other groups from Transcaucasia were classed together with the Khazars under the general description."

(M.A. Shaban, "Islamic History", Cambridge University Press, v.2 1978. Page 63)

Note unlike what M.A. Shaban states, someone like Ibn Khaldun has stated the Soghdians as a "Turkish" group.

"In reference to the first two centuries of Islam, the term "Turk" as used by Arabic and Persian sources presents difficulties. The Muslim authors mean different things by the term, depending on their era, proximity to Inner Asia and knowledge of the region. It can overlap with other ethnic names (e.g. "Soghdian, Khazar, Farghanian"). (D. Pipes. Turks in Early Muslim Service — JTS, 1978, 2, 85—96.)

One Soghdian(Iranian) in particular who was mistaken for a Turk was the general Afshin. That is while two old Arabic sources mention Afshin as a Turk, it is clear to modern scholars he was a Soghdian and other sources have mentioned him as such.

Daniel Pipes states: "Although two classical sources claim him a Turk, he came from Farghana, an Iranian cultural region and was not usually considered Turkish" (D. Pipes. Turks in Early Muslim Service — JTS, 1978, 2, 85—96.)

Bernard Lewis also states: "Babak's Iranianizing Rebellion in Azerbaijan gave occasion for sentiments at the capital to harden against men who were sympathetic to the more explicitly Iranian tradition. Victor (837) over Babak was al-Afshin, who was the hereditary Persian ruler of a district beyond the Oxus, but also a masterful general for the caliph." (Bernard Lewis, "The Political Language of Islam", Published by University of Chicago Press, 1991. Pg 482)

#### And J.H. Kramer states about Oshrusana:

"Under Mamun, the country had to be conquered again and a new expedition was necessary in 207/822. On this last occasion, the Muslim army was guided by Haydar (Khedar), the son of the Afshīn Kāwūs, who on account of dynastic troubles had sought refuge in Baghdād. This time the submission was complete; Kāwūs abdicated and Haydar succeeded him, later to become one of the great nobles of the court of Baghdād under al-Mutasim, where he was known as al-Afshīn. His dynasty continued to reign until 280/893 (coin of the last ruler Sayr b. Abdallāh of 279 [892] in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg); after this date, the country became a province of the Sāmānids and ceased to have an independent existence, while the Iranian element was eventually almost entirely replaced by the Turkic." (J.H. Kramers "Usrūshana." Encyclopaedia of Islam. Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2007)

Thus modern scholars affirm Afshin was Iranian. However to Arab authors at the time, the term "Turk" did not specifically mean Altaic speakers as much as a person from the far away regions of Central Asia.

According C.E. Bosworth, "The Appearance of the Arabs in Central Asia under the Umayyads and the establishment of Islam", in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. IV: The Age of Achievement: AD 750 to the End of the Fifteenth Century, Part One: The Historical, Social and Economic Setting, edited by M. S. Asimov and C. E. Bosworth. Multiple History Series. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1998. excerpt from page 23: "Central Asia in the early seventh century, was ethnically, still largely an Iranian land whose people used various Middle Iranian languages.

C. Edmund Bosworth: "In early Islamic times Persians tended to identify all the lands to the northeast of Khorasan and lying beyond the Oxus with the region of Turan, which in the Shahnama of Ferdowsi is regarded as the land allotted to Fereydun's son Tur. The denizens of Turan were held to include the Turks, in the first four centuries of Islam essentially those nomadizing beyond the Jaxartes, and behind them the Chinese (see Kowalski; Minorsky, "Turan"). Turan thus became both an ethnic and a geographical term, but always containing ambiguities and contradictions, arising from the fact that all through Islamic times the lands immediately beyond the Oxus and along its lower reaches were the homes not of Turks but of Iranian peoples, such as the Sogdians and Khwarezmians." (C.E. Bosworth, "Central Asia: The Islamic period up to the Mongols" in Encyclopedia Iranica).

Thus one should be careful in looking at Arabic sources that were written by authors far away from Central Asia. With regards to the language and culture of the region, the work of Biruni is clear and he differentiates clearly between Iranian(Chorasmians, Persians, Soghdians) and Turks. Due to Farabi's Central Asian origin and the fact that by 13<sup>th</sup> century, a large portion of Soghdians and Chorasmians were absorbed, the 13<sup>th</sup> century writers did not know much about these ancient Iranian peoples.

## **Conclusion:**

It was noted that the earliest biography mentioning the ethnicity of Farabi were written 300 years after him. The first biography mentions Persian, the second Turkic and the third as Persian. These biographies cannot be deemed reliable and contain fanciful episodes attributed to him. Looking closer at Farabi's work and that of his successor and probably the greatest figure of the Medieval Islamic era (Avicenna), the following points were mentioned:

- 1) The etymology of Tarxan is unknown by has been used by various groups. A strong consensus exists that the term is not of Altaic origin. Whatever its origin, since it was used by many different groups, it cannot be used as an ethnic identifier as done by Ibn Khalikhan. The etymology of Farab however is clearly Iranian and that of Wasij also. As per "Awzalagh" although the "Aw" does not exist in Turkish, the actual term "Awzalagh" does not appear in any manuscript. Thus Farabi's full name is Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Tarxani based on reliable sources.
- 2) Farabi uses Soghdian, Persian, Syriac, Greek and Arabic expressions and lexicons but does not have any in Turkic. He even uses characters for special sounds in Soghdian that did not exist in Turkish and Arabic and modern Persian.

- 3) Farabi has the name of all music modes and overwhelming majority of them is Persian and none of them are Turkic. His book on music has been mistakenly attributed as a book on Arabic music. It is actually a book on Persian music of his time as mentioned by S.H. Nasr. Furthermore, S.H.Nasr and Aminrazavi while not taking sides and mentioning various conflicting sources on Farabi's background do make the point that Farabi came from a "Persianate" Environment. The Encyclopedia of Islam makes this point about the Iranian Chorasmian language and its native speaker Biruni: "The Khwārazmian language survived for several centuries to come, and so must some at least of the culture and lore of ancient Khwārazm, for it is hard to see the commanding figure of Bīrūnī, a repository of so much knowledge, appearing in a cultural vacuum". One would have to agree that the same is true with Farabi. The Soghdians unlike the Turks (see history of Bukhara) were settled people and had a long history of urban Civilization.
- 4) Farabi counts the Turks as pleasure-seekers and inhabitants of the base-city and not the virtuous city. His student, Avicenna in a direct statement borrows the word "Virtuous city" from Farabi and states: "Since some men have to serve others, such people must be forced to serve the people of the just city. The same applies to people not very capable of acquiring virtue. For these are slaves by nature as, for example, the Turks and Zinjis and in general those who do not grow up in noble climes where the condition for the most part are such that nations of good temperament, innate intelligence and sound minds thrive" It is obviously clear that Avicenna who expresses the opinion that Turks lack good temperament, innate intelligence and sound minds due to their climate was well aware of Farabi's book. He even borrowed the term virtuous city from Farabi's famous book in the statement above. Out of all the authors we mentioned, he was the closest to Farabi's period and the only one that had complete mastery over Farabi's book. Thus if Farabi was a Turk, then Avicenna would not count Turks as a people who were not very capable of acquiring virtue and a people who lacked good temperament, innate intelligence and sound minds.
- 5) Farabi came from a time when Iranian settled people such as Persians, Soghdians and Chorasmians were much more numerous. Due to their sedentary nature, large numbers of these people were displaced by nomadic incursions of Turkic tribes and today probably a large number of Turkic speakers are a mixture of these Iranians and Turco-Mongolian tribes. However at the time of Farabi, the sedentary culture of Central Asia was overwhelmingly Iranian. Unfortunately not too many authors today study history and just look at present Central Asia and make conclusions without knowing the history of Soghdians, Chorasmians and other Iranian peoples of the region. Indeed the major names like Bukhara, Samarqand, Shash (chaach) (Tashqand today) and even the word "kent" are all Iranian.
- 6) Based on these points, we believe Farabi was an Iranic Soghdian and the mixture of terminology in Baghdad where Central Asian inhabitants were called Turks as well as the assimilation of Soghdians into primarily Turkic speakers and Iranic Persian speakers was the main reason that 300 years later, Farabi's Iranian-Soghdian origin was forgotten. Thus some modern references have not done their critical research and have just mixed legends with facts based on the

popularized account of Ibn Khalikhan. It is hope that this small article is one step in correcting this situation.

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