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THE KILLING OF THE KHAZAR KINGS.

BY SIR J. G. FRAZER.

AT a certain stage of social evolution not a few races appear to have been in the habit of putting their kings to death, either at the end of a fixed term, or on the failure of the king's health and strength, or simply whenever a great public calamity, such as drought or famine, had befallen the country. Among the peoples who have practised this remarkable system of limited monarchy, and have elevated regicide to the dignity of a public institution, must seemingly be numbered the Khazars or Khozars, a nation of south-eastern Russia, who in the Middle Ages maintained their independence for many centuries alike against Persia and the Byzantine Empire, carried on a busy trade between the east and the west, and repelled the wave of Mohammedan conquest, which, but for their resistance, might have deluged Europe from the south-east. It is hardly too much to say that during those dark ages when the power of Christendom sank to its lowest ebb, and the power of Islam rose to its highest pitch, Europe was protected against the swelling tide of Moslem aggression by three great mountain barriers, the Caucasus on the south-east, the Balkans in the centre, and the Pyrenees on the south-west; and that the passes which led over these ranges into the heart of the continent were guarded by three peoples, the Khazars, the Byzantine Greeks, and the Spaniards. Of these three redoubtable champions of Christendom, the Khazars have long dis-

appeared and even their name is now hardly known but to students of the bypaths of history.

Yet for some nine hundred years or more (190-1100 A.D.) this almost forgotten people played a great part in history on the borderland of Europe and Asia. Their home was in the spurs of the Caucasus and along the western shore of the Caspian, which took its name (Sea of the Khazars) from them; but at the height of their power they ruled over the whole of south-eastern Russia from the Dneiper to the middle Volga, together with the adjoining part of Asia along the eastern coast of the Caspian as far south as Astrabad. On the south their boundary never altered greatly; at times, indeed, it extended southward as far as the Cyrus and even the Araxes, but on that side the Khazars had to face the Byzantine and Persian empires and were for the most part restrained within the passes of the Caucasus. Their capital was Itil in the delta of the Volga, but they possessed other populous and civilized cities, such as Semender (Tarkhu), which was the older capital, and Sarkel, or the White Abode, on the Don. All the Khazar cities were centres of commerce. Indeed the Khazars have been described as "the Venetians of the Caspian and the Euxine, the organizers of the transit between the two basins; the universal carriers between East and West." Merchants from every nation found protection, justice, and good faith in the Khazar cities. Exiled from Constantinople, the Jews sought a home among them, developed their trade, and contended with their Mohammedan and Christian rivals for the religious allegiance of the pagan people. The reigning house accepted Judaism, apparently about the middle of the eighth century; but all faiths were equally tolerated, and every man was held amenable to the authorized code and to the official judges of the religion which he professed. At the Byzantine court the *khakan*, or sovereign of the Khazars, was held in high honour. The Emperor

Justinian Rhinotmetus took refuge with him during his banishment and married his daughter: his rival Bardanes also sought an asylum in the land of the Khazars; and in Leo IV. the grandson of a Khazar sovereign ascended the Byzantine throne.

The origin and affinities of this interesting people appear to be still disputed. Many have assigned them to the Turkish stock; others to the Ugrians or Eastern Finns; and some have even claimed them as Jews on account of their use of the Hebrew character and the profession of the Hebrew faith among them. "But their geographical position, their history, and the contemporary witness we have as to their physical character, their language, and their own national tradition, may be accepted as conclusive proof that the Khazars were an indigenous people of the Caucasus, and near akin to the Armenians and the Georgians."¹

It is very remarkable that a custom of legalized regicide should have been practised among a people so comparatively advanced and civilized as the Khazars appear to have been, and of whom it has been said that "their government was regular, settled, and well organized.

¹ As to the Khazars, see C. M. Fraehn, "Veteres memoriae Chazarorum ex Ibn-Fozzlano, Ibn-Haukale et Schems-ed-Dino Damasceno, Arabice et Latine," *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg*, viii. (1822), pp. 576-620; Klaproth, "Mémoire sur les Khazars," *Journal Asiatique*, iii. (Paris, 1823), pp. 153-160; C. D'Ohsson, *Des Peuples du Caucase* (Paris, 1828), chapitres ii. et iii. pp. 30-71; K. F. Neumann, *Die Völker des südlichen Russlands* (Leipsic, 1847), pp. 99 sqq.; P. Lyttelton Gell, s.v. "Khazars," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ninth edition, xiv. (1882), pp. 59 sq.; H. Hirschfeld, *Das Buch Al-Chazarî, aus dem arabischen des Abu-l-Hasan Jehuda Hallewi übersetzt* (Breslau, 1885), pp. xi. sqq. Mr. Lyttelton Gell's article contains a good general account of the Khazars, with references to the original authorities. The quotations in the text are made from it. The work of D'Ohsson consists of a series of extracts from the original Arab authorities, translated into French and strung together on the thread of the imaginary travels of a certain Abu-el-Cassim, whom the writer supposes to have been sent on an embassy from the Caliph to the Bulgarians of the Volga in 948 A.D.

They were not wild barbarians like the Huns and the Avars.”¹ Their case escaped me when I was collecting instances of such legalized regicide for *The Golden Bough*. My attention was first drawn to it in 1912 by Miss Barbara Freire-Marreco, who was so kind as to send me a long extract on the subject from the mediaeval Arab historian and geographer Abulfeda. Subsequently the Khazar practice of killing their sacred kings was described by Mr. Géza Roheim in an article contributed to *Man*.² But as his account seems to be based on the works of modern Hungarian historians, and the Khazar custom is probably still but little known, it may be worth while to put together those passages of mediaeval authors which describe in some detail the Khazar kings and their limited tenure of the crown. All the authors in question appear to be Arabs, or at least to have written in Arabic, but their works are accessible to the unlearned in translations, from which I borrow the following extracts. Some of the most important passages were long ago collected and edited in Arabic, with Latin translations, by C. M. Fraehn in the *Memoirs of the Academy of St. Petersburg*.³

The earliest writer to give an account of the Khazar kings from personal observation was Ahmed ibn Foszlan, Fudhlan, or Fadlan, as his name is variously spelled, who travelled through Khazaria in the year 921 or 922 A.D., at a time when the kingdom was still at the height of its power and glory. He was sent from Baghdad by the Caliph Moktadir on an embassy to the king of the Bulgarians whose dominions then lay on the Volga in central Russia, and on his return to Baghdad he described in a book all that he had observed worthy of note on his journey. His work appears to be lost, but the portion of it which

¹ Klaproth, “Mémoire sur les Khazars,” *Journal Asiatique*, iii. (Paris, 1823), p. 153.

² Géza Róheim, “Killing the Divine King,” *Man*, xv. (1915), pp. 26-28.

³ See above, p. 384 note.

relates to the Khazars was fortunately incorporated in his *Geographical Dictionary* by the Arab writer Yakut, who, after a chequered life as a slave, commercial traveller, bookseller, copyist, and author, died near Aleppo in the year 1229 A.D.¹ The following are extracts from it :

“ Ahmed, son of Fozzlan, sent as envoy of (the Caliph) Moktadir to the Slavs, related in a little book everything that he saw with his own eyes in these regions, and in that book he says that Khazar is the name of a certain country, of which the capital is called Itil. Itil is also the name of the river (Volga) which flows from Russia and Bulgaria to Khazaria. Itil is the city, Khazar is the name of the kingdom, not of the city. The city is in two parts, of which the larger is situated on the western bank of the river Itil (Volga), while the other lies on the eastern side of the river. The king resides in the western part. In their tongue he is called *Ilek* and also *Bak*. This western part extends to the length of a parasang and is surrounded by a wall, but the buildings in it are few and far between. Now their edifices are huts made of felt, with a few exceptions, which are made of mud. They have market-places and baths. Many Mohammedans are found there ; indeed there are said to be more than ten thousand of them in the town, and they have thirty mosques. The king’s palace is at a distance from the bank of the river and is built of baked bricks. No other person besides him is privileged to dwell in a house made of bricks, for the king will not suffer it. In the wall there are four gates, of which one leads to the river, and another to the desert, beyond the fields of the city.

“ Their king is a Jew, and he is said to have four thou-

¹ C. M. Fraehn, *op. cit.* p. 579 ; C. D’Ohsson, *Des Peuples du Caucase*, p. ix. ; C. Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et littéraire de la Perse et des Contrées adjacentes, extrait du Módjem-el-Bouldan de Yakout* (Paris, 1861), pp. iv. *sqq.* ; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar, 1898—Berlin, 1902), i. 227 *sq.* 479 *sq.* Ibn Fozzlan (Faḍlan) set out from Baghdad in June, 921 A.D., and reached the Bulgarian kingdom on the Volga in May, 922 A.D.

sand retainers attached to his person. The Khazars themselves, however, are Mohammedans and Christians. Idolaters are also found among them. The fewest numerically in the country are the Jews, though the king himself is of their number. The most numerous are the Mohammedans and the Christians; nevertheless the king and his retainers profess the Jewish religion. In the manners of the idolaters the most noticeable feature is that they prostrate themselves in token of reverence for each other, and observe certain sacred ordinances according to customs which differ from the religion of the Mohammedans, Jews, and Christians. The king's standing army consists of twelve thousand soldiers, of whom as soon as one is dead another is enlisted in his place, nor is their number ever diminished. Their pay is neither large nor frequent; indeed what they get is very little, and even that at long intervals, when either a war is to be waged by them or some calamity has occurred, on account of which they are mustered.

“The public revenues of the kingdom of the Khazars are derived either from the customs or from tithes levied on merchandise, and these dues, in accordance with their institutions, are levied on every highway, sea, and river. Land taxes are also collected from the inhabitants of villages and districts on every sort of food, drink, and other things, so far as is necessary.

“The king is assisted by nine judges chosen from among the Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, and idolaters. If any person takes the law of another, these judges decide his suit. Petitioners are not allowed access to the king himself; for none but these judges are admitted to his presence. But on the day of judgment an intermediary goes backward and forward between the judges and the king, informing the king of the business in hand, and reporting to the judges the king's command, which they must carry out.

“This city (Itil) has no villages. The fields of the citizens are scattered over a space of twenty parasangs, and in summer the townspeople go forth to them, sow them, and when the crops are ripe, they gather them and convey them in wagons or ships to the river or the deserts. The greater part of their food consists of rice and fish. Everything else found in their country is imported from Russia, Bulgaria, and Kūjabâ. Most of the merchants dwell in the eastern part of the city; there, too, the Mohammedans reside and the wares are stored.

“The language of the Khazars differs from the Turkish and the Persian, nor has it anything in common with the language of any people.

“The Khazars are not like the Turks. They have black hair. There are two sorts of them. The one sort are called the Kara Khazars (that is, the Black Khazars); they are of a dusky complexion verging on black, so that they might be taken for a species of Indians. The other sort are of a white complexion and remarkable for their beauty and symmetry. All the slaves found among the Khazars are idolaters, for the idolaters deem it lawful to sell their children and to carry off their fellows into slavery. Whereas the Jews and Christians, who dwell in that country, esteem it contrary to their religion to carry off people into slavery, and the Mohammedans are of the same opinion.

“Nothing is exported from the land of the Khazars to other countries, but whatever is conveyed down from it has first been imported into it, such as flour, honey, wax, and the skins of otters and other animals.

“As for the King of the Khazars, whose title is khakan, he does not show himself in public except once in every four months, when he goes forth for his diversion to his pleasancess. He is called the Great khakan, and his viceroy is called the khakan bh (?). It is the latter who leads and commands the armies, administers and superintends the affairs of state, appears in public, and conducts warlike

expeditions; it is he whom neighbouring kings obey. Every day he consults the sovereign khakan, with an assumed air of modesty, respect, and gravity. Nor may he approach him except barefoot and holding in his hand a stick, which, after saluting him, he kindles in his presence. After that he sits down with the king on his own throne to the right of the monarch. After him comes a man who is called Kender Khakan, and after him again another, who is called Chaushiari. It is the custom that the supreme and sovereign king admits nobody to an interview: nobody is admitted to him except him whom I mentioned before. The government, the punishment of the guilty, and the administration of the realm are presided over by the viceroy, the khakan bh.

“ It has been ordained by their ancestors, that when the sovereign king dies, a great palace (mausoleum) should be built for him divided into twenty chambers, and that in each chamber there should be dug a grave, the bottom of which should be paved with stones so crushed as to present the appearance of powdered antimony, while the whole is covered from above with quicklime. Under the palace flows a great river, and they make the grave above it, saying that this is done lest Satan, or man, or worm, or other creeping thing should approach it. When the King is buried, the heads of those who laid him to rest are cut off, that no man may know in which of the chambers his grave is situated. This grave of his is called Paradise, and he himself is said to have entered Paradise. Moreover, all the chambers are tapestried with cloth of gold.

“ It is customary for the king of the Khazars to have twenty-five wives, all daughters of one or other of the neighbouring kings, whom he has married with or without their consent. Further, he has sixty concubines, all remarkable for their beauty. Each one of these women dwells in a palace of her own, in a *kubbâ* (vaulted chamber) roofed with the wood of the Indian plane. About each

kubbá a tent is pitched. Every one of these damsels is attended by a eunuch, who guards her behind a curtain. Now when the king desires to take his pleasure with any of them, he sends to the eunuch, her guardian, by whom in less than the twinkling of an eye she is brought and placed in the king's bed. But the eunuch stands sentinel before the door of the royal chamber, and when the damsel is dismissed by the king, the eunuch takes her by the hand and leads her home, and does not thereafter leave her even for a moment.

“When the sovereign king rides on horseback in public, the whole army marches out to escort him in procession, but an interval of a mile is left between him and these cavalry. Nor does any of his subjects see him without falling on his face and humbly doing him reverence, and not raising his head until the king has passed by.

“Forty years are fixed for their king's reign. If he exceeds that term even by one day, his citizens and courtiers put him to death, alleging as the reason, that his mental powers are decayed and his wisdom impaired.

“A regiment sent by him on an expedition never turns its back on the enemy ; for were it to take to flight, every soldier who should return to the king would pay for it with his head. But if the officers or the viceroy run away, the king sends for them, with their wives and children, and in their presence bestows their wives and children on others, together with their beasts of burden, furniture, weapons, and houses. It sometimes happens that he cuts them through the middle and hangs up the severed parts ; sometimes he hangs them by the neck from trees. Occasionally, when he is favourably disposed to them, he makes them his grooms.”¹

Such is the account of the Khazar kings which the Arab geographer Yakut has extracted from the original narrative

¹C. M. Fraehn, “*Veteres Memoriae Chasarorum*,” etc., *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg*, viii. (1822), pp. 589-593.

of Ahmed ibn Fozzlan. In the National Library at Paris there is preserved a manuscript abridgement of Yakut's work, in which his account of the Khazars and their king is condensed into a few lines, as follows :

“Country of the Khozars, a numerous race of Turks, who dwell to the north of Babal abouab ; they are of two sorts, the one white, the other blond or red. Their houses are made of mud. They have market-places and baths. They dwell on the banks of the river Atel. Among them are many Mussulmans, Christians, Jews, and pagans. When their king has reigned more than forty years, they kill him.”¹

Further, we possess accounts of the Khazars and their kings written by two other Arab travellers and geographers of the tenth century A.D. One of these is Abul-Hasan Ali, commonly known as El Mas'údy, because he was descended in the eighth generation from Mas'úd, one of the companions of Mohammed. Born at Baghdad towards the end of the ninth century A.D., he spent a great part of his life in travel. Among the countries which he visited were India, Ceylon, China, Madagascar, and the region of the Caspian. He did not travel for gain. His motive was scientific curiosity ; he desired to see every land for himself and to observe and record everything notable in the antiquities, the history, and the manners of the peoples. His most famous book, which bears the fanciful title, *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Stones*, was begun in the year 332 of the Hegira (943-4 A.D.) and finished in the year 336 (947-8 A.D.). It has survived in an abridgement, of which there are many manuscripts in European libraries. On account of the range of his observations and his naive uncritical honesty in recording them, he has been called the

¹ M. de Guignes, “Exposition de ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable (sur la terre) et des Merveilles du Roi Tout-puissant, par Abdorraschid, fils de Saleh, fils de Nouri, surnommé Yakouti,” *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi*, iii. (Paris, 1789), p. 532.

Arab Herodotus. "The parallel, however, must be taken with great deductions. Of the *Meadows*, the work by which Mas'údy is chiefly known, by far the greater part is an historical compilation, enlivened indeed in some parts by personal recollections of places and the like, but mainly drawn from a vast mass of earlier books which are used in the common paste-and-scissors fashion of Eastern history. Even in the earlier cosmographical chapters the author's vast and miscellaneous reading, which included the Arabic translations of Ptolemy and other Greek writers, is mingled with his original observations in that ill-digested style so often characteristic of men of prodigious acquisitive power."¹

The following is El-Mas'údy's account of the Khazars and their kings :

"The nation nearest to Báb el-Abwáb are the Haïdan. They form one of the kingdoms of the Khazars. Next to Haïdan is the kingdom of the Khazars. Their metropolis was the city of Semender, which is eight days' journey from the town of Báb el-Abwáb. This city has a numerous population of Khazars, but it is no longer the capital, for when Solaïman Ben Rabí'ah el-Báhilí conquered Semender in the beginning of the Islám, the king transferred his residence to Itil, which is seven days' journey from Semender ; and since this time the kings of the Khazars reside there.

"This town (Itil) is divided into three parts, by a large river, which rises from the higher regions of the country of the Turks, and from which an arm branches off, somewhere near the country of the Targhiz (Bulgarians), and falls into the sea of Máyotis.² This town has two sides. In the

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ninth edition, xv. (Edinburgh, 1883), pp. 623 sq. ; C. D'Ohsson, *Des Peuples du Caucase*, pp. iii-viii ; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar, 1898—Berlin, 1902), i. 143-145.

² "The error that the Don is a branch of the Wolga is also met with in Byzantine authors (Klaproth)." (Translator's note.)

middle of the river is an island, in which the king resides. The palace of the king stands on the extremity of this island, and is connected by a bridge of boats with one of the two sides of the town. In this town are many Moslims and Christians, Jews and pagans. The king, his suite, [and the Khazar of his army,¹] embraced the tenets of the Jews, in the reign of er-Rashíd. To this king flock the Jews from all the Moslim districts, and from the Byzantine empire; for the emperor forced the Jews of his dominions to turn Christians, and loaded the converts with favours. The present [332, A.H.] Byzantine emperor is Armanus (Romanus II). . . .

“One of the various Pagan nations who live in his [the king of the Khazars] country are the Sekálibah (Sclavonians), and another the Rús (the Russians). They live in one of the two sides of this town: they burn the dead with their cattle, utensils, arms, and ornaments. When a man dies, his wife is burnt alive with him; but, when the wife dies, her husband is not burnt. If a bachelor dies, he is married after his death. Women are glad to be burnt; for they cannot enter into Paradise by themselves. This usage prevails also among the Hindus, as we have said. But the Hindus never burn a woman with her husband, unless it is her own wish.

“The majority of the population of this country are Moslims; for the standing army of the king consists of Moslims. They are called al-Lárisians, and come from Khowárezm; whence they emigrated at an early period, after the spreading of the Islám; on account of drought and plague which had visited their country. They are brave, good soldiers, and form the strength of the king of the Khazars in his wars. They fixed certain conditions under which they would establish themselves in his country; one of these conditions was, that they should be allowed to profess publicly the Islám; to build mosques and call out

¹“These words are left out in some copies.” (Translator’s note.)

the prayers ; and that the vizier of the kingdom should be a man of their religion and nation. The vizier there is at present from amongst them ; his name is Ahmed Ben Kuwaïh. Another condition is, that if the king of the Khazars should have a war against the Moslims, they would remain separate in his camp (observe neutrality), and not fight against a nation who profess the same religion ; but they would fight for him against any other nation. There are, at present, seven thousand horsemen of theirs, in the army of the king, armed with bows and equipped in cuirasses, helmets, and coats of mail : he has also some spearmen. In point of arms, they are like the soldiers in Moslim countries. Their supreme judges, in religious and civil matters, are Moslims.

“ In accordance with the constitution of the kingdom of the Khazars, there are nine supreme judges in the country ; two of them for the Moslims ; two for the Khazars, who follow the laws of the Pentateuch in passing sentence ; two for the Christians, who follow the laws of the gospel in their decisions ; and one for the Slavonians, Russians, and the other pagan population. The pagan judge decides after the heathen laws ; that is to say, the dictates of reason, (not revelation). If any important case comes before him, he refers to the Moslim judges, and lets them decide after the law of the Islám.

“ There is no other king in these parts who has *paid* troops, except the king of the Khazars. Every Moslim has there the name Lárísian, (although he may not be of this nation,) and it is even extended to such Russians and Slavonians as serve in the (standing) army or household of the king ; although they are pagans as we have said. But there are many Moslims in this kingdom besides the Lárísians ; they are artisans, tradespeople, and merchants, who have been attracted by the justice and security (of persons and property) afforded by the government. They have a great public mosque, the Mináret of which rises

above the royal palace ; and several private mosques, where children are instructed in reading the Korán. If the Moslims and Christians, who are there, agree, the king has no power over them.

“ El-Mas’údi says, What we have said does not refer to the king of the Khazars himself, but we mean the Khákán (*Major domus*) ; for there is a king in the country of the Khazars, besides the Khákán. He is shut up in his palace : he never makes a public procession, nor does he show himself to the nobility or the people, and he never goes out from his palace. His person is sacred, but he has nothing to do with the affairs of the state, either to command or forbid. Everything is administered by the Khákán for the king, who lives with him in the same palace. If a drought, or any other misfortune, befalls the country of the Khazars, or if a war or any other accident happens to them, the lower and higher classes of the nation run to the king, and say, ‘ The administration of this Khákán brings misfortune upon us : put him to death, or deliver him to us, that we may kill him.’ Sometimes he delivers him to them, and they put him to death ; at other times he takes charge himself of the execution ; and sometimes he has pity on him, protects him, and sets him free without doing him any harm, although he might have deserved it. I do not know whether this institution dates from ancient times, or whether it has been recently introduced. The Khákán is chosen from among the nobility by their chiefs ; but I think that the royalty of the present dynasty takes date from a remote period.”¹

Another writer of the tenth century A.D., who has described the Khazars and their kings, is the Arab traveller

¹ El-Mas’údi’s *Historical Encyclopaedia*, entitled “ *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems* ” : translated from the Arabic by Aloys Sprenger, M.D., vol. i. (London, 1841), pp. 406-411. In transcribing this passage I have taken the liberty of uniformly writing Khazars instead of Khazar, wherever the latter appears to be used by the translator in the plural sense.

and geographer Abul-Cassim Mohammed ibn Haukal or Haukali, author of a work called *Book of the Itineraries and of the Provinces*, in which he describes the Mohammedan countries on the basis of his personal researches and of the journeys which he had undertaken for the purposes of commerce. He tells us that he began his researches and travels in early youth, and that he set out from Baghdad in the year 331 of the Hegira (942-3 A.D.); but his book was not written till the year 366 of the Hegira (976-7 A.D.). A manuscript of the original work, in Arabic, is preserved in the library at Leyden, but it is said to be so faulty that the meaning is often unintelligible. The book exists also in a Persian translation, of which an English version was published by Sir William Ouseley.¹ The portions of it which describe the tribes of the Caucasus, including the Khazars, are extracted and translated into French from the Arabic manuscript at Leyden by C. D'Ohsson in his work on the peoples of the Caucasus.²

The following is the account which Ibn Haukal gives of the Khazars and their kings, as translated by Sir William Ouseley from the Persian :

“After one passes Moukan to Derbend, for two days’ journey the country is Shirwan; from that to Semender, fourteen days’ journey; and from Semender to Atel. This Atel is a certain river which comes from Rous and Bulgar. One half of this river belongs to the western side, the other to the eastern. The sovereign of Atel resides on the western side: he is styled king, and surnamed Baul. Here are many tents; and in this country there are but a few edifices of clay, such as bazars (market-places), and bathing houses. In these territories are about

¹ Ebn Haukal, *Oriental Geography*, translated by Sir William Ouseley (London, 1800), pp. ii. *sqq.*; C. M. Fraehn, “*Veteres Memoriae Chazarorum*,” *Mémoires de l’Académie des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg*, viii. (1822), p. 581; C. D’Ohsson, *Des Peuples du Caucase* (Paris, 1828), pp. viii. *sq.*

² C. D’Ohsson, *Des Peuples du Caucase*, pp. 31 *sqq.*

ten thousand Mussulmans. The king's habitation is at a distance from the shore : it is constructed of burnt bricks ; and this is the only building of such materials in all the country : they will not allow any body but the king to erect such a dwelling. The city of Atel has four gates. One of those gates faces the river ; another looks towards Iran, in the direction of the desert. The king of this country is a Jew : he has in his train four thousand Mussulmans and Khozrians (Christians), and idolaters ; but his principal people are Jews : and this king has twelve thousand soldiers in his service, of whom when one dies, another person is immediately chosen into his place ; and they have no other commander but him. And this king has under him nine magistrates or judges : these are Mussulmans, Jews, Christians, and Idolaters. The smallest in number of the inhabitants of this country are the Jews ; the greatest in number are the Mussulmans and Christians : but the king and his chief officers are Jews. There are magistrates of each religion ; and when they sit in the tribunal of justice, they are obliged to report to the king all that passes, and to bring back his answer and opinion, and to put his sentence into execution.

“ This city has not any suburbs ; but the cultivated fields and grounds extend for nearly twenty farsang. Agriculture is much practised, and the husbandmen carry the produce of their labour in boats and carriages to the city. The chief diet of this people is fish and rice : they bring honey and wax from the borders of Rous. The principal persons of Atel are Mussulmans and merchants : their language is like that of the Turks (or Tartars), and is not understood by any other nation. . . .

“ The people of Khorz are near the Turks, whom they resemble. They are of two classes ; one of blackish complexions, and such dark hair that you would suppose them to be descended from the Hindoos : the other race fair complexioned ; these sell their children ; but it is not

allowed among the Jews and the Christians to sell, or make one another slaves.

“ They bring from other countries those commodities which Khozr does not produce, such as tapestry or curtains, honey, candles, and similar articles. The people of Khozr have not materials for making garments or clothes : they therefore import them from Gurkan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Roum. Their king is styled the Khacan of Khozr.

“ When a prince is to be raised to the Khacanship, they bring him forth, and tie a piece of silk about his throat, so tight that he can scarcely draw his breath. At that moment they ask him, how long he will hold the sovereignty ? He answers, ‘ so many years.’ He then is set at liberty, and becomes Khacan of Khozr. But if he should not die before the expiration of the time he mentioned, when that space is fulfilled, they put him to death.

“ The Khacan must always be of the Imperial race. No one is allowed to approach him but on business of importance : then they prostrate themselves before him, and rub their faces on the ground, until he gives orders for their approaching him, and speaking. When a Khacan of Khozr dies, whoever passes near his tomb goes on foot, and pay his respects at the grave ; and when he is departing, must not mount on horseback, as long as the tomb is within view.

“ So absolute is the authority of this sovereign, and so implicitly are his commands obeyed, that if it seemed expedient to him that one of his nobles should die, and if he said to him, ‘ Go and kill yourself,’ the man would immediately go to his house, and kill himself accordingly. The succession to the Khacanship being thus established in the same family, when the turn of the inheritance arrives to any individual of it, he is confirmed in the dignity, though he possesses not a single dirhem. And I have heard from persons worthy of belief, that a certain young man used to sit in a little shop at the public market-place,

selling petty articles ; and that the people used to say, 'When the present Khacan shall have departed, this man will succeed to the throne.' But the young man was a Mussulman, and they give the Khacanship only to Jews.

"The Khacan has a throne and pavilion of gold : these are not allowed to any other person. The palace of the Khacan is loftier than the other edifices. . . . The language of Bulgar and of Khozr is the same."¹

In the original of Ibn Haukal's work the account of the installation of the Khozar king appears to be slightly fuller than in the Persian version. The following translation of the passage is made from Fraehn's Latin version of the Arabic original :

"When the king is dead and another is to be appointed in his room, the khakan has him brought and admonishes and exhorts him ; he declares to him both what he owes to others and what others owe to him, (that is to say,) his royal rights and duties ; he sets before him the burdens of monarchy, and the reproach of sin and crime which he will incur if, in the discharge of his office, he should fall short of his duty in the administration which he is about to undertake, or should act rashly, or show himself corrupt and unjust in the seat of judgment. Now when he is brought to be invested with the kingdom and to receive the salutations of his subjects, the khakan puts a silken cord about his neck and begins to strangle him, and when he is almost choked, they ask him how many years he desires to reign, to which he answers, 'Such and such a number of years.' Afterwards, if he dies before the expiry of the term, it is well, but if not, whenever he attains to the appointed year, he is put to death."²

¹ Ebn Haukal, *Oriental Geography*, translated by Sir William Ouseley (London, 1800), pp. 185-190.

² C. M. Fraehn, "Veteres Memoriae Chasarorum," *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale de St. Pétersbourg*, viii. (1822), p. 610.

A similar, but briefer, report of the custom is given by the Arab cosmographer, Shems-ed-din Mohammed Dimeshky; he seems to have derived his information about the Khazars from Ibn-el-Asir, who died in 1233 A.D. The passage relating to the appointment of the Khazar king runs as follows :

“ They begin to strangle the man whom they wish to make their king. When he has thus been brought to the point of death, they ask him, how many years he wishes to reign, and he answers, ‘ Such and such a number of years.’ His answer is written down and attested by witnesses. If he should live till the expiry of the set term, he is put to death.”¹

It will be observed that, whereas in the Persian version of Ibn Haukal it is the new khakan who is said to have been thus forcibly interrogated as to the length of his future reign, in the Arabic original and in Dimeshky’s account it is the new king who is subjected to this stringent interrogatory. The discrepancy betrays a certain confusion between the two personages who divided the Khazar sovereignty between them; but the analogy of similar customs elsewhere renders it practically certain that it was the sacred and nominally supreme potentate, rather than his civil and nominally subordinate colleague, whose reign was limited in this peremptory fashion.

The last notice of the Khazars, or Khozars, and their kings which I shall cite is extracted from the *Geography* of the eminent Arab historian and geographer Abulfeda, who was born at Damascus in 1273 A.D. and died in 1331 A.D. at the ancient Syrian city of Hamah (the Biblical Hamath), of which he had been for many years before his death the hereditary prince and ruler. A gallant soldier and a distinguished writer, Abulfeda appears not to have travelled very widely; hence for the materials embodied in his *Geography* he must have been in great measure dependent

¹ C. M. Fraehn, *op. cit.* pp. 582, 611.

on the works of his predecessors.¹ The description which he gives of the Khazar kingdom is clearly based, for the most part, on the accounts of Ibn Foslan (Fadlan) and Ibn Haukal. It runs as follows :

“The river Itil (Volga) traverses the country of the Russians and Bulgarians. The capital, also called Itil, is divided into two parts: the one is situated to the west of the river (on the right bank) and is the principal part; the other lies to the east. The king (of the Khozars) inhabits the western part. This king is called in their language Belek; he is also known as Bek.² This part is about a parasang long; it is surrounded by a wall, but the wall is low. The houses of the inhabitants consist of tents made of felt; only a small part is built of clay. The town includes market-places and baths. Mussulmans are to be found in it: the number of Mussulmans, they say amounts to more than ten thousand; they own about thirty mosques. The palace of the king is built at some distance from the river; it is constructed of bricks. There is no other house of bricks in the town; the king allows no man whatsoever the privilege (of building a brick house). The wall which surrounds the town is pierced by four gates, some of them facing towards the river and the others towards the country.

“The king of the Khozars is a Jew. He keeps near his person, they say, about four thousand men. Some of the Khozars are Mussulmans, others are Christians, a certain number are Jews; there are also some who worship idols. The Jews form the smallest number; the majority is composed of Mussulmans and Christians; but the king and his retinue prefers Judaism. For the rest, the manners

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ninth edition, i. (Edinburgh, 1875), pp. 60 sq.; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, ii. 44 sq.

² “Constantine Porphyrogenitus (*De administrando imperio*, part ii. cap. xlii.) employs the word *πῆχ*; it is evidently the common Turkish word *beg* or *bey*.” (Reinaud’s note.)

of the Khozars are in general the manners of the idolaters ; when they salute each other, they bow the head in token of respect. The administration of the capital is based on ancient customs, contrary to the religion of the Mussulmans, the Jews, and the Christians. The army is composed of twelve thousand men ; when one of these men dies, he is replaced by another. Their pay is small and scanty.

“ The king’s revenues arise from town dues and a tithe levied on merchandise on all the roads and every sea and river, in accordance with a system peculiar to the Khozars. He also obliges the inhabitants of the towns and country districts to furnish him with all the objects (in kind) which he needs.

“ The king chooses nine judges among the Jews, Christians, Mussulmans, and idolaters. When a suit is brought, it is these men who judge it ; the parties do not apply to the king, but to these men. When the judges are sitting, some one is charged with the duty of acting as intermediary between the king and the judges.

“ The principal food of the Khozars consists of rice and fish.

“ The merchants dwell by preference in the part of the city which is situated on the eastern bank. There, too, may be found persons who profess Islam, also there are commercial establishments. As for the western part, it is the special abode of the king, his retainers, his troops, and Khozars of distinction.

“ The language of the Khozars differs from all others. . . .

“ The Khozars do not resemble the Turks ; they have black hair, and two sorts of them are distinguished. The one sort, called Caradjours, are brown, with a complexion so dark that it verges on black ; you might take them for an Indian race : the other sort are white and perfectly beautiful. The Khozars who, in our country, are sunk in slavery, belong to the idolaters, who, unlike the Jews, the

Christians, and the Mussulmans, consider it lawful to sell their children and to sell each other.

“As to the government of the Khozars, the personage who occupies the first place bears the title of khakan of the Khozars; he ranks above the king of the Khozars; but it is from the latter that he receives his dignity. When they would appoint a khakan, they bring the person whom they have in view and draw a cord tightly round his neck; when he is on the point of choking, they say to him, ‘How long do you wish to keep this dignity?’ He answers, ‘So many years.’ If he dies before the fixed term, they trouble themselves no more about him; but if, when the time comes, he is not dead, they put him to death.

“The dignity of the khakan is reserved for persons of a certain birth. The khakan has no power to command or to forbid; only they have the greatest regard for him, and when they enter his presence, they bow the head. No one but the king may enter his house, and the king does not visit him except in extraordinary cases. When the king enters the presence of the khakan, he prostrates himself on the ground and adores him. Then he rises and waits for the khakan to allow him to approach. In critical circumstances it is customary for the khakan to come forth; but neither the Turks nor the other infidel nations of the country may see him; they are obliged to retire and avoid meeting him, out of respect for his rank. When the khakan is dead and buried, no one may pass before his tomb, except on foot and with bowed head; a rider may not remount his horse till the tomb is out of sight.

“One of the things which show the great respect of the Khozars for their king, is that sometimes the king desires the death of one of them, even one of the most powerful, and yet he does not wish to incur the responsibility for his death. Thereupon he orders the person to kill himself, and the man, going home, puts an end to his life.

“The dignity of khakan is reserved for certain families,

which exert no authority or power. When a man has been chosen to bear this title, they install him without taking account of his former condition. None are raised to the dignity of khakan but persons who profess Judaism. The golden throne and pavilion, which are to be seen among the Khozars, are reserved for the khakan; on the march, the tents of the khakan are placed above those of the king; similarly in the towns, the mansion of the khakan is higher than the mansion of the king. . . .

“The language of the Bulgarians resembles that of the Khozars.”¹

From a comparison of these accounts we gather that the Khazars at the height of their power were governed by two kings, a sacred and nominally supreme king, and a civil and nominally subordinate king, and that all real power centred in the hands of the civil king, while the nominal sovereign was little more than a venerable puppet, who lived in almost absolute seclusion, seldom showing himself in public, remaining virtually invisible to the eyes of his subjects, and yet treated with marks of the most profound respect, if not of adoration, both in his lifetime and after his death. In this system of a double kingship, with its assignment of the shadow of power to one person and the substance of it to another, we trace those features of *rois fainéants* and Mayors of the Palace, which are familiar to us in Merovingian history.² The old line of hereditary monarchs had fallen into a political dotage, and were practically superseded by a succession of vigorous ministers, who were the real masters, while they professed

¹ Aboulféda, *Géographie, traduite de l'Arabe en Français*, par M. Reinaud (Paris, 1848), ii. Première Partie, pp. 301-305.

² Compare Klaproth, “Mémoire sur les Khazars,” *Journal Asiatique*, iii. (Paris, 1823), p. 157: “*Il est donc à présumer que l'autorité des Khaghans d'origine turque s'était considérablement affaiblie dans les derniers tems de la monarchie khazare. Des espèces de maires du palais, après avoir usurpé le titre de roi, étaient devenus les véritables souverains du pays, et tenaient les Khaghans dans une dépendance absolue.*”

themselves the humble servants, of the feeble dotards on the throne. Yet in the most stringent of the limitations imposed on the nominal sovereigns we may detect a survival from a time when their ancestors were men of a stronger mould and a more masculine temper. We have seen that when a Khazar king reigned more than forty years, even by a single day, he was ruthlessly put to death, because his mental powers were supposed to be decayed and his wisdom impaired. The analogy of similar customs observed by many barbarous tribes suggests that the reason thus assigned by the Khazars for executing their kings after a fixed term of years was the true original motive. In ages of ignorance men have often believed, that the welfare of the state, and even the course of nature, are wholly dependent on the personal qualities of the king or chief who reigns over them, and that the decay of his bodily or mental powers must necessarily be accompanied or followed by a corresponding decay, not only in the commonwealth, but also in those natural resources on which mankind is dependent for their very existence. Accordingly subjects in those days took a very short way with superannuated sovereigns ; they put them to death, and raised up in their stead men who were yet in the prime of life and the full possession of all their faculties. A tightening or a relaxation, as the case might be, of the rope thus tied round the king's neck was introduced by the provision, that he might reign till some public calamity, such as dearth, drought, or defeat in war, was thought to indicate that the dreaded enfeeblement of his majesty's powers had really set in ; whereupon the constitutional remedy was at once resorted to, and the king was put to death.¹ Clearly the substitution of this rule might tend either to lengthen or to abridge the king's term of office according to his own natural abilities,

¹ Klaproth, "Mémoire sur l'identité des Thou khiu et des Hioung nou avec les Turcs," *Journal Asiatique*, viii. (Paris, 1825), p. 267. Compare W. Radloff, *Aus Sibirien* (Leipsic, 1884), i. 129.

the vigour of his constitution, and the state of the weather ; for the inclemency of the seasons is imputed by many races to the defects of their ruler and is visited upon them accordingly.

In the accounts of the Khazar monarchy which I have quoted, certain discrepancies may be noted in regard to the constitutional check which regicide furnishes to the excesses or defects of kings. According to Ibn Foszlan, the king was regularly killed at the end of a reign of forty years ; according to Ibn Haukal and Abulfeda, he was put to death at the close of a period which, on being raised to the throne, he had himself determined under circumstances not altogether favourable to mature reflexion ; and according to Mas'údy, he suffered the extreme penalty of the law whenever drought or any other public misfortune had proved his unfitness to grasp the reins of power any longer. Which of these accounts is correct we have apparently no means of deciding, perhaps all of them were true at different times ; for the Khazars may have allowed themselves a certain latitude in their application of the great principle of regicide, content with putting their effete kings out of the way, without rigidly observing a pedantic uniformity in the manner and time of taking them off.

The report which Ibn Haukal and Abulfeda give of the mode of determining the length of the king's reign finds a curious parallel, and perhaps a confirmation, in the account which Chinese historians give of the manner in which the Thou khiu, or Turks, settled how long a kakhán or prince should rule over them. " When they proclaimed a kakhán, the grandees carried him on a sheet of felt nine times in a circle, following the course of the sun ; at each circuit he was saluted by everybody. On the completion of these circuits, they mounted him on horseback and threw round his neck a piece of taffeta, with which they pinched him so tight that he almost expired. Then they slackened

it and immediately asked him how long he expected to reign. The confusion of his mind did not allow him to answer the question exactly. Nevertheless they regarded his answer as a prediction of the length of his reign."

J. G. FRAZER.
