



Contribution of Khwârazmî to Mathematics and Geography

Author: Dr. N. Akmal Ayyubi
Chief Editor: Prof. Mohamed El-Gomati
Associate Editor: Dr. Salim Ayduz
Production: Savas Konur

Release Date: December 2006
Publication ID: 631

Copyright: © FSTC Limited, 2006

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

All rights, including copyright, in the content of this document are owned or controlled for these purposes by FSTC Limited. In accessing these web pages, you agree that you may only download the content for your own personal non-commercial use. You are not permitted to copy, broadcast, download, store (in any medium), transmit, show or play in public, adapt or change in any way the content of this document for any other purpose whatsoever without the prior written permission of FSTC Limited.

Material may not be copied, reproduced, republished, downloaded, posted, broadcast or transmitted in any way except for your own personal non-commercial home use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of FSTC Limited. You agree not to adapt, alter or create a derivative work from any of the material contained in this document or use it for any other purpose other than for your personal non-commercial use.

FSTC Limited has taken all reasonable care to ensure that pages published in this document and on the MuslimHeritage.com Web Site were accurate at the time of publication or last modification. Web sites are by nature experimental or constantly changing. Hence information published may be for test purposes only, may be out of date, or may be the personal opinion of the author. Readers should always verify information with the appropriate references before relying on it. The views of the authors of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of FSTC Limited.

FSTC Limited takes no responsibility for the consequences of error or for any loss or damage suffered by readers of any of the information published on any pages in this document, and such information does not form any basis of a contract with readers or users of it.

FSTC Limited

27 Turner Street, Manchester, M4 1DY, United Kingdom

Web: <http://www.fstc.co.uk> Email: info@fstc.co.uk

CONTRIBUTION OF KHWĀRAZMĪ TO MATHEMATICS AND GEOGRAPHY*

Dr. N. Akmal Ayyubi**

This article first published in Acts of the International Symposium on Ibn Turk, Khwārazmī, Fārābī, Beyrūnī and Ibn Sīnā (Ankara, 9-12 September 1985), Ankara, 1990.

Islam gave a new civilization to the Turks who carried that from its centres into China in the east, India in the south east, Russia in the north, and Anatolia in the west of Asia. The Turks who had also transmitted that civilization to Europe and Africa had themselves been deeply affected by their conversion. Islamic ideology had penetrated the social, political, juridical and educational concepts of the Turks of Medieval period and their culture was endowed by the temporal and the cultural outlook of Islam. The Turks were always great admirers of learning but as the learning in the Middle Ages was synonymous for theology, the Islamic theology soon captivated their attention. Great madrasas which correspond to our modern universities were also founded by the Turks where scholars and students were to study which was confined to Arabic rhetoric, logic, philosophy, Islamic history, hadith, fiqh, tafsir of the Qur'an as well as mathematics. The language of the instruction of those institutions was Arabic; therefore generally literature on all these branches of knowledge was produced in that language.

The Turks were also great admirers of other sciences and have distinguished themselves in nearly all branches of knowledge. They have a definite position in the history of science and their contributions are vast and their effects are also far-reaching. Even the Uygur Turks (740-1335 A.D.) of Turkistan who were advanced and enjoyed a high level of cultures and civilization had shown great interest in scientific study. It is said that an Uygur work deals with movements of the stars in relation to the sun.¹ Another Uygur work on Cosmography describes the revolutions of the stars.² But one of the greatest Turkish minds of the medieval Islamic age is Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Mūsā al-Khwārazmī (b. before 800, d. after 847) who was a mathematician, astronomer as well as a geographer and a historian. It is said that he is the author of the oldest astronomical tables, the oldest work on arithmetic and the oldest work on algebra which were translated into Latin and were used until the sixteenth century as the principal mathematical text books in European universities. Originally he belonged to Khwārazm (modern Khiwa) situated in Turkistan but all his works are in Arabic language. Therefore, he is Turk in nationality but Arab in language. He was summoned to Baghdad by Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'mun (213-833) who was himself a philosopher, a theologian and a great patron of learning. He had established his famous Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) which worked like a modern research academy. It had a large and rich library (Khizāna Kutub al-Hikma) and distinguished scholars of various faiths were assembled to produce scientific masterpieces as well as to translate faithfully nearly all the great and important ancient works of Greek, Sanskrit, Pahlawi and of other languages into Arabic. Mūsā al-Khwārazmī, according to Ibn al-Nadīm³ and Ibn al-Qiftī⁴ as is quoted by Prof.

* Note: All images in the paper were newly introduced by the editor and are not part of the original paper.

** Department of Islamic Studies Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.

¹ *Turkish Architecture*, translated by Prof. Dr. Ahmet Edip Uysal Ankara 1965, p. 2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Fihrist al-Ulūm*, edited by Flügel, volume 1, 1871, p. 274.

Dr. Aydin Sayili,⁵ was attached to (or devoted himself entirely to) Khizāna al-Hikma. It is also said that he was appointed court astronomer of Caliph Al-Ma'mun who also commissioned him to prepare abstracts from one of the Indian books entitled Surya Siddhanta which was called al-Sindhind⁶ in Arabic.⁷ Mūsā al-Khwārazmī had also translated certain Greek works⁸ into Arabic and produced his own scholarly works not only on astronomy and mathematics but also on geography and history. It was for Caliph al-Ma'mun that Al-Khwārazmī composed his astronomical treatise and dedicated his book on Algebra to that caliph.

Contribution to Mathematics

Mūsā Al-Khwārazmī is one of the greatest scientific minds of the medieval period and most important Muslim mathematician who was justly called the 'father of algebra'. He wrote the Kitāb al-Jem wa'l Tafriq bi Hisāb al-Hind also called Kitāb Hisāb al-adad al-Hindī on arithmetic in which he used Indian numerals⁹ including zero in place of depicting numbers by the letters of the alphabet and the decimal notations or numeration by position" for the first time. It deals with the four basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division as well as with both common and sexagesimal fractions and the extraction of the square root. The original Arabic text of the book is lost and its only Latin translation is available.

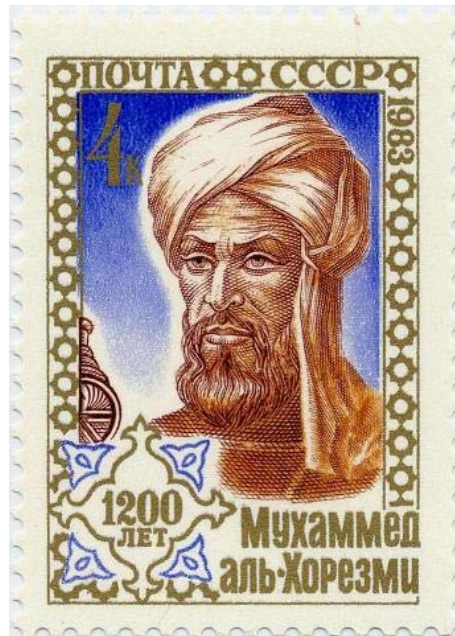


Figure 1. Mūsā Al-Khwārazmī. The drawing of Khwārizmī on the stamp. The stamp reads: Post USSR 1983, 1200 Years, Mukhammad al-Korezmi.

⁴ *Tarikh al-Hukama*, edited by Lippert, Berlin 1903 (Cairo edition, 1326 H), p. 286.

⁵ Aydin Sayili, *The Observatory in Islam*, Ankara 1960, p. 55.

⁶ Abdulhak Adnan Adivar, "Harizmi" in *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, volume 4, p. 261.

⁷ It was first introduced in Baghdad by an Indian traveller in 771 A.D. which by order of al-Mansur was translated into Arabic by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Fazāri between 796 and 806 for the first time.

⁸ Stephen and Nandy Ronart, *Concise Encyclopaedia of Arabic Civilization*, New York 1960, p. 295.

⁹ Ya'qub bin Tariq was the first Muslim to introduce Indian numbers to Arabs.

Other mathematical writings of Mūsā Al-Khwārazmī are also not known. His best known classical work on algebra is the *Kitāb al-Mukhtasar fī Hisāb al-Jabr wa'l Muqābala*. It was also translated into Latin in the Middle Ages and holds an eminent place in the history of mathematics, firstly, in the words of Galal S.A. Shawki,¹⁰ because it defined algebra as an independent discipline in mathematics, and secondly because it accelerated the introduction of the Arabic place value numbering into the West. The book is devoted to finding solutions to practical problems which Muslims encountered in daily life¹¹ concerning matters of inheritance, legacies, partition, lawsuits and commerce, with over eight hundred examples. The original work in Arabic was written in 820 A.D.¹² and was translated into Latin in the twelfth century. It is worth remarking that the term al-jabr, in the Latinized form of algebra, has found its way into the language of Europe, while the old mathematical term, algorism, is a distortion of al-Khwārazmī's name.



Figure 2. The world map of al-Idrisi., Ahmad b. Sahl Al-BALhī, *Akālīm al-buldān*, Suleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 2577.

The meaning of the Arabic word Al-Jabr is restoration by transposing negative quantities to the other side of the equation to make them positive and the term Al-Muqābala refers to the process of eliminating identical quantities from the two sides of the equation.¹³ But the best translation for *Hisāb al-Jabr wa'l-Muqābala*, according to John K. Baumgart,¹⁴ is 'the science of equations'. The algebra of Mūsā al-Khwārazmī was rhetorical in form. Al-Khwārazmī had given the rules for the solution of quadratic equations which are supported in a number of cases by geometrical proofs also. The unknown quantity, in the words of Galal S.A. Shawki, was termed the "thing" (shay) or "root" (jizr); the latter means in Arabic the origin or base, also the root of a tree, hence, the use of the expression "root of an equation" is derived from the Arabic concept.¹⁵ Mūsā al-Khwārazmī had used the Arabic word for root to denote the first degree term of a quadratic equation. Explaining in detail he says, "The following" is an example of squares equal to roots, a square is equal to 5 roots. The root of the square then is 5, and 25 forms its square, which of course

¹⁰ Galal S.A. Shawki, *Formulation and Development of Algebra by Muslim Scholars*, published in *Islamic Studies* of Islamabad, volume 23, No. 4, p. 338.

¹¹ Lancelot Hogbin, *Mathematics for the Million*, New York 1946, p. 291.

¹² Sidney G. Hocker and others, *Fundamental Concepts of Arithmetic*, 1963, p. 9.

¹³ Galal S.A. Shawki, *Formulation and Development of Algebra by Muslim Scholars* in *Islamic Studies* of Islamabad, volume 22, No. 4, p. 338.

¹⁴ *Historical topics for the Mathematics Classroom*, Washington 1969, pp. 233-4.

equals 5 of its roots."¹⁶ For the second power of a quantity he employs *māl* (wealth, property) which is also used to mean only "quantity" and *dirham* is used as unit of coinage.



Figure 3. A mathematical figure from Ali Kuscu's book Risāla al-Fathiyya fi ilmi'l-Hay'a. Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 2733.

The bases of algebra, first viewed as an independent mathematical discipline, were laid down by Mūsā al-illustated his method of solution by practical examples.¹⁷ He was quite aware of the existence of two roots of the quadratic equation, though he cared for positive, real roots only.¹⁸

His *Hisāb al-Jabr wa'l-Muqābalah* is actually on applied mathematics. Its first part discusses the equations of the first and second degrees. All his proposed problems can be reduced to one of the six standard forms. He gives rules for the solution of each of the six forms and explains how to reduce any given problem to one of these standard forms with examples.¹⁹ The second part of the book deals with practical mensuration by giving rules for finding the area of various plane figures including the circles, and for finding the volume of a number of solids including cones and pyramids. The third part concerns legacies as well as inheritance and is the longest. It consists entirely of solved problems which arise out of legacies.

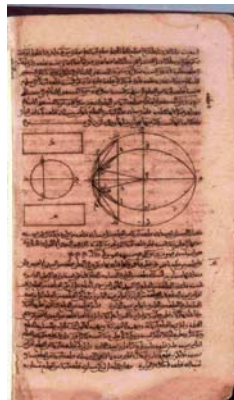


Figure 4. A sample page of Sabit b. Kurra's manuscript Kitāb fuzū'al ustuwana wa natstabiha. Sulaymaniye Library, Ayasofya 4832.

¹⁵ Islamic Studies of Islamabad, volume 23, No. 4, p. 339.

¹⁶ Philip S. Jones, "Large Roman Numerals", *The Mathematics Teacher*, volume 28, p. 261.

¹⁷ Islamic Studies of Islamabad, volume 23, No. 4, p. 351.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ G.J. Toomer, "Al-Khwārazmī", *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, volume 7, p. 359.

The mathematical works of Mūsā al-Khwārazmī were the chief text books used in European universities up to the seventeenth century. He is, in the words of ʿAli 'Abdullah Al-Daffa,²⁰ the founder of algebra and had transformed the concept of a number from its earlier arithmetic character as a fixed quantity into that, of variable element in an equation. He also found a method to solve general equations of the first and second degree in one unknown by both algebraic and geometric means.²¹ It was through his work on mathematics that the Indian system of numeration was known to the Arabs and later through its Latin translation to the people of Europe. **He synchronized Greek and Indian mathematical knowledge but was the first mathematician to distinguish clearly between algebra and geometry and gave geometrical solutions of linear and quadratic equations.**



Figure 5. A sample page of Sabit b. Kurra's manuscript Kitāb fuzū'al ustuwana wa natstabiha. Suleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 4832.

Contribution to Geography

Mūsā al-Khwārazmī had also contributed to the science of geography. As the book of Geography of Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.) was translated several times into Arabic he had a model for writing his book in this field of knowledge. His book on geography entitled Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard (Book of the image of the earth) consists almost entirely of lists of longitudes as well as latitudes of localities and gives in a tabulated form the coordinates of the places like cities, mountains, seas, rivers, islands etc. The book is arranged according to the Greek system of the seven climes (aqālim) giving contemporary data but the knowledge acquired by the other Muslims are also incorporated into it. The first section lists cities, the second, mountains (giving the coordinates of their extreme points and their orientation); the third, seas (giving the coordinates of salient point on their coastlines and a rough description of their outlines); the fourth, islands (giving the coordinates of their centres, and their length and breadth); the fifth, the central points of various

²⁰ The Muslim Contribution to Mathematics, London 1977, p. 7.

²¹ Franklin W. Kokomoor, Mathematics in Human Affairs, New York 1946, p. 172.

geographical regions; the sixth, rivers (giving their salient points and towns on them).²² This book had served as a basis for later works and stimulated geographical studies and the composition of original treatises. It is said that his Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard was also accompanied by regional maps of each of the climes and by a single world map called "al-Sūrat al-Ma'muniyya" but have been lost. It is also said that his map of the world was the first map of the heavens and the world drawn by Muslims. But the editor of the Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard Hans von Mzik, has produced only four maps. These four maps, in the words of S. Maqbul Ahmad,²³ seem to be later recessions of the original maps. But Ibrahim Shawkat²⁴ reasons that since Al-Khwārazmī wrote a brief work on geography, he did not draw a complete map of the world but confined himself to draw only the four maps as an illustration. His source of inspiration might possibly have been the mappa mundi²⁵ constructed for Caliph Al-Ma'mun by a team of geographers in which Al-Khwārazmī himself would have been included²⁶.

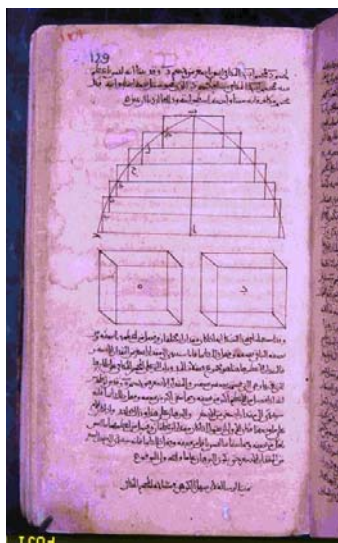


Figure 6. A sample page of Suhayl al-Kūhī's manuscript Risāla-i Abi Sahl or Fi istihraci masaha al-muhassama al-mkāfi. Suleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 4832.

The Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard depends, even if in an indirect manner, on the Geography of Ptolemy,²⁷ but in the opinion of Ibrahim Shawkat, it was based on the work of Marinus.²⁸ The book was produced under the patronage of the Caliph Al-Ma'mun in about 830 A.D. in which the towns and mountains are presented in a tabulated form, and oceans, seas, islands, countries, springs and rivers are given in a descriptive form. Again, towns, mountains, springs and rivers are described according to the climes (aqālim) to which they belong, while the description of the oceans and seas is free from the limits of these climes. Similarly islands are described under the seas and oceans to which they belong. The description of the countries is also free from the limits of the climes. Along with the geographical names of the Muslim period, a large

²² G.J. Toomer, "Al-Khwarizmi", Dictionary of Scientific Biography, volume 7, p. 361.

²³ Encyclopaedia of Islam, (new edition), volume 4.

²⁴ Khara'it Jughrafiyyi al-'Arab al-awwel, Majallet al-Ustadh of Baghdad, 1962, pp. 7-8.

²⁵ Mappa Mundi is a term used for the map of the world.

²⁶ Encyclopaedia of Islam, volume 4, p. 1078.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Tafkir al-'Arab al-Jughrafi wa'itaqat al-Yunan bihi", extract from the Journal "A l-Ustadh", Baghdad 1961.

number of ancient place names are also founded in the book but in the later portions these names rapidly begin to disappear.

The map of the world of Mūsā al-Khwārazmī called al-Sūrat al-Ma'muniyya has now been fully reconstructed by an Indian scholar, Dr. S. Razia Jafri,²⁹ on the basis of description and data given in his Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard. It is divided into 38 sections which are again sub-divided into 1740 small squares from West to East and into 1200 small squares "from South to North. Each clime (iqlīm) from West to East is again divided into seven sections. It is to be noted that the general division of the Map into climes is according to al-Khwārazmī, but the sub-division of the climes into section is done by Dr. Razia Jafri arbitrarily. In this way it is just like an Atlas. It is to be noted that the Soviet Academy of Sciences of Tajik is publishing it along with the forward and introduction of Dr. Kamal Ayni and Prof. S. Maqbul Ahmad respectively. The printing of this work is done under the supervision of Prof. M.S. Asimov who is the eminent scholar and the president of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR at Dushanbe.

Mūsā al-Khwārazmī is the author of several other books on astronomy and history. He became well known as a mathematician and it is said that he is the author of the oldest work on algebra. But the Professor of the History of Science, Dr. Aydin Sayili says in one of his research papers entitled "Turkish contribution to Science" as follows: "Abu'l Fadl 'Abdulhamid ibn Wāsi' ibn Turk was apparently the first Islamic mathematician to write a book on algebra. Indeed, he, very likely, wrote his algebra before Al-Khwārazmī wrote his. For unlike Al-Khwārazmī, he did not write an unabridged algebra, and, moreover, there is evidence that Al-Khwārazmī was still alive at about the middle of ninth century. 'Abdulhamid ibn Turk was also the author of certain books on numbers, on commercial arithmetic, and on the art of calculation, probably with the decimal system.³⁰ Now, it is not possible for me to agree or disagree with him but it is realistic to say that the works of Mūsā al-Khwārazmī on mathematics have great influence in the birth of Western Science and he is rightly called the "father of algebra" and a peerless geographer.

REFERENCES

- Adivar, Abdulhak Adnan, "Harizmi" in Islam Ansiklopedisi, volume 4, p. 261.
- Fihrist al-Ulūm, edited by Flügel, volume 1, 1871, p. 274.
- Historical topics for the Mathematics Classroom, Washington 1969.
- Hocker, Sidney G., and others, Fundamental Concepts of Arithmetic, 1963, p. 9.
- Hogbin, Lancelot, Mathematics for the Million, New York 1946, p. 291.
- Jones, Philip S., "Large Roman Numerals", The Mathematics Teacher, volume 28, p. 261.
- Khara'it Jughrafiyyi al-'Arab al-awwel, Majallet al-Ustadh of Baghdad, 1962, pp. 7-8.
- Kokomoor, Franklin W., Mathematics in Human Affairs, New York 1946.
- Ronart, Stephen and Nandy, Concise Encyclopaedia of Arabic Civilization, New York 1960, p. 295.

²⁹ One of the staff members of Aligarh Muslim University of India.

³⁰ Aydin Sayili, "Turkish Contributions to Scientific Work in Islam", *Belleten* (Turkish Historical Society), volume 43, Ankara 1979, s. 16.

Sayili, Aydin, "Turkish Contributions to Scientific Work in Islam", *Bellethen* (Turkish Historical Society), volume 43, Ankara 1979, s. 16.

Sayili, Aydin, *The Observatory in Islam*, Ankara 1960.

Shawki, Galal S.A., *Formulation and Development of Algebra by Muslim Scholars*, published in *Islamic Studies of Islamabad*, volume 23, No. 4, p. 338.

Tafkir al-⁶Arab al-Jughrafi wa'itaqat al-Yunan bihi", extract from the Journal "A I-Ustadh", Baghdad 1961.

Tarikh al-Hukama, edited by Lippert, Berlin 1903 (Cairo edition, 1326 H), p. 286.

The Muslim Contribution to Mathematics, London 1977, p. 7.

Toomer, G.J., "Al-Khwārazmī", *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, volume 7, pp. 359-361.

Turkish Architecture, translated by Prof. Dr. Ahmet Edip Uysal Ankara 1965, p. 2.

Ya'qub bin Tariq was the first Muslim to introduce Indian numbers to Arabs.