

The Existing Monuments or "Chronology" of al-Biruni, Tenth Century

al-Biruni was a Persian scholar best known for his works in mathematics. He was also a noted geographer and historian, as the following passage offering a description of previous civilizations suggests.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL Praise be to God who is high above all things, and blessings be on Mohammed, the elected, the best of all created beings, and on his family, the guides of righteousness and truth. One of the exquisite plans in God's management of the affairs of his creation, one of the glorious benefits which he has bestowed upon the entirety of his creatures, is that categorical decree of his, not to leave in his world any period without a just guide, whom he constitutes as a protector for his creatures, with whom to take refuge in unfortunate and sorrowful cases and accidents, and upon whom to devolve their affairs, when they seem indissolubly perplexed, so that the order of the world should rest upon — and its existence be supported by — his genius. And this decree (that the affairs of mankind should be governed by a prophet) has been settled upon them as a religious duty, and has been linked together with the obedience toward God, and the obedience toward his prophet, through which alone a reward in future life may be obtained — in accordance with the word of him, who is truth and justice — and his word is judgment and decree, "O ye believers, obey God, and obey the prophets, and those among yourselves who are invested with the command." ERA OF THE CREATION.— The first and most famous of the beginnings of antiquity is the fact of the creation of mankind. But among those who have a book of divine revelation, such as the Jews, Christians, Magians, and their various sects, there exists such a difference of opinion as to the nature of this fact, and as to the question how to date from it, the like of which is not allowable for eras. Everything, the knowledge of which is connected with creation and with the history of bygone generations, is mixed up with falsifications and myths, because it belongs to a far remote age; because a long interval separates us therefrom, and because the student is incapable of keeping it in memory, and of fixing it (so as to preserve it from confusion). God says: "Have they not got the stories about those who were before them? None but God knows them." (Surahix, 71.) Therefore it is becoming not to admit any account of a similar subject, if it is not attested by a book, the correctness of which is relied upon, or by a tradition, for which the conditions of authenticity, according to the prevalent opinion, furnish grounds of proof. If we now first consider this era, we find a considerable divergence of opinion regarding it among these nations. For the Persians and Magians think that the duration of the world is 12,000 years, corresponding to the number of signs in the zodiac and of the months; and that Zoroaster, the founder of their law, thought that of those there had passed, till the time of his appearance, 3,000 years, intercalated with the day-quarters, for he himself had made their computation, and had taken into account that defect, which had accrued to them on account of the day-quarters, till the time when

they were intercalated and made to agree with real time. From his appearance to the beginning of the Aera Alexandri, they count 258 years; therefore they count from the beginning of the world to Alexander 3,258 years. However, if we compute the years from the creation of Gayo-marth, whom they hold to be the first man, and sum up the years of the reign of each of his successors — for the rule of Iran remained with his descendants without interruption — this number is, for the time till Alexander, the sum total of 3,354 years. So the specification of the single items of the addition does not agree with the sum total. A section of the Persians is of the opinion that those past 3,000 years which we have mentioned are to be counted from the creation of Gayomarth; because, before that, already six thousand years had elapsed — a time during which the celestial globe stood motionless, the natures (of created beings) did not interchange, the elements did not mix — during which there was no growth, and no decay, and the earth was not cultivated. Thereupon, when the celestial globe was set a-going, the first man came into existence on the equator, so that part of him in longitudinal direction was on the north, and part south of the line. The animals were reproduced, and mankind commenced to reproduce their own species and to multiply; the atoms of the elements mixed, so as to give rise to growth and decay; the earth was cultivated, and the world was arranged in conformity with fixed forms. The Jews and Christians differ widely on this subject; for, according to the doctrine of the Jews, the time between Adam and Alexander is 3,448 years, whilst, according to the Christian doctrine it is 5,180 years. The Christians reproach the Jews with having diminished the number of years with the view of making the appearance of Jesus fall into the fourth millennium in the middle of the seven millennia, which are, according to their view, the time of the duration of the world, so as not to coincide with that time at which, as the prophets after Moses had prophesied, the birth of Jesus from a pure virgin at the end of time, was to take place.

ERA OF THE DELUGE.— The next following era is the era of the great deluge, in which everything perished at the time of Noah. Here, too, there is such a difference of opinions, and such a confusion, that you have no chance of deciding as to the correctness of the matter, and do not even feel inclined to investigate thoroughly its historical truth. The reason is, in the first instance, the difference regarding the period between the Aera Adami and the Deluge, which we have mentioned already; and secondly, that difference, which we shall have to mention, regarding the period between the Deluge and the Aera Alexandri. For the Jews derive from the Torah, and the following books, for this latter period 1,792 years, whilst the Christians derive from their Torah for the same period 2,938 years.

The Persians, and the great mass of the Magians, deny the Deluge altogether; they believe that the rule of the world has remained with them without any interruption ever since Gayomarth Gilshah, who was, according to them, the first man. In denying the Deluge, the Indians, Chinese, and the various nations of the East, concur with them. Some, however, of the Persians admit the fact of the Deluge, but they describe it in a different way from what it is described in the books of the prophets. They say, a partial deluge occurred in Syria and the West at the time of Tahmurath, but it did not extend over the whole of the then civilized world, and only a few nations were drowned in it; it did not extend beyond the peak of Hulwan, and did not reach the empires of the East. Further, they relate, that the inhabitants of the West, when they were warned by their sages, constructed buildings of the kind of the two pyramids that have been built in Egypt, saying: "If the disaster comes from heaven, we shall go into them; if it comes from the

earth, we shall ascend above them." People are of opinion that the traces of the water of the Deluge, and the efforts of the waves, are still visible on these two pyramids half-way up, above which the water did not rise. Another report says, that Joseph had made them a magazine where he deposited the bread and victuals for the years of drought. It is related that Tahmurath on receiving the warning of the Deluge — 231 years before the Deluge — ordered his people to select a place of good air and soil in his realm. Now they did not find a place that answered better to this description than Ispahan. Thereupon, he ordered all scientific books to be preserved for posterity and to be buried in a part of that place least exposed to obnoxious influences. In favor of this report we may state that in our time in Jay, the city of Ispahan, there have been discovered hills, which, on being excavated, disclosed houses, filled with many loads of that tree-bark with which arrows and shields are covered, and which is called Tuz, bearing inscriptions, of which no one was able to say what they are and what they mean. These discrepancies in their reports inspire doubts in the student, and make him inclined to believe what is related in some books, that Gayomarth was not the first man, but that he was Gomer ben Yaphet ben Noah, that he was a prince to whom a long life was given, that he settled on the Mount Dumbawand, where he founded an empire, and that finally his power became very great, whilst mankind was still living in elementary conditions, similar to those at the time of creation and of the first stage of the development of the world. Then he, and some of his children, took control of the guidance of the world. Toward the end of his life, he became tyrannical, and called himself Adam, saying: "If anybody calls me by another name than this, I shall cut off his head."

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