



SOGDIANA II. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

SOGDIANA

ii. Historical Geography

For physical geography, see [CENTRAL ASIA i](#); for the cities or regions within Sogdiana, see relevant articles (e.g., [Bukhara](#), [Samarqand](#), [Keš](#), [Košāniya](#), [Panjikant](#), etc.); for maps, see [Figure 1](#); de la Vaissière, esp. map 5; and Bregel, esp. p. 25.

The earliest records of the name of Sogdiana (Soḡd) are found in the [Avesta](#) (*Vendīdād*, 1.4; *Yašt* 10.14; the by-name of Sogdian lands in the Avesta is Gauua-, which probably survives in He prefecture in Chinese sources [see below; Tremblay] and modern Ġusar, lit. “head of Gauua” on the eastern edge of the flatland part of Zeravshan, see Steblin-Kamenski), whose date of composition remains disputable, and in Achaemenid inscriptions (as Suguda or Sugd; DB1.16; XPh 21) of the 6th century BCE onwards as well as the Greek records of [Herodotus](#) (Sugdianē; largely following Hecateus) and [Ctesias](#). However, they only mention it as a country, along the same lines as [Bactria](#) and the [Saka](#) tribes, Margiana, [Chorasmia](#), Areia/[Aria](#), etc. It is clear that Sogdiana was located in the northeast of Iran, but it is only possible to deduce further details from the later texts. It is not clear whether Sogdiana ever formed a separate satrapy; at the time of Alexander’s invasion, it seemed to



represent a part of the Bactrian satrapy (see Bernard, p. 26; Briant, pp. 743-54). The name Sogdianus, probably related to Sogdiana in some way, appears as name of an Achaemenid king for a day in 423 BCE (see Schmitt, p. 272-76). The fortifications of the towns Naḵšab and Keš as well as probably the localities Amainakāna (Mink) and perhaps Kum in the Hissar range in northwest Tajikistan are mentioned in the recently discovered Aramaic documents from Afghanistan, dating back to the late Achaemenid and early Macedonian time (see Shaked, pp. 1528-30).

Alexander the Great spent the years 330-327 BCE capturing Transoxian lands. The position of many towns mentioned by historians of Alexander ([Arrian](#), [Curtius](#)) and minor texts (Metz Epitome gives many additional details about these events) can be established on the basis of linguistic, geographical, and archeological considerations. Thus Maracandais identified with Samarqand (Arrian, 3.30 ff.; Curtius, 7.610 ff.); Gazaca with modern Ghazandarak (medieval Ġazaq; Eṣṭakri, p. 344; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 503; Moqaddasi, pp. 49, 265); Cyra Eschata (Cyropolis) with medieval and modern Kurkat, both located to the southwest of [Khujand](#) (Ḳojand) on the Syr Darya (Tanais, Jaxartes), which is commonly taken to correspond to Alexandria Eschata; and Xenippa with medieval Naḵšab (with metathesis, see Sims-Williams, apud Grenet, p. 210, n. 40), modern Qarši. The position of the “Rocks” of the Sogdian insurgents probably corresponds to the high natural plateau near the Baysun pass. The exact routes taken by Alexander, his companions, and his enemies, however, remains to a certain extent controversial (see Grenet and Rapin; Rtveladze, Rapin, 2004; P’iankov, 2004; Rapin et al.). Alexander’s historians (e.g., Arrian, 6, 16) and Eratosthenes (quoted by Strabo, 11.8.8) inform us that Sogdiana borders Bactria on the Oxus River ([Āmu Daryā](#), q.v., probably with the Waḵš as its upper course, otherwise only the middle course of the Āmu Daryā between Kerki [Atamyrat] and Čārjuy [formerly [Āmol](#), now Türkmenabat], towns in present-day Turkmenistan, was intended) and Scythian tribes on the Jaxartes.

In Ptolemy’s geography (2nd century CE), the picture appears to be very complicated due to the amalgamation of earlier traditions and almost contemporary observations. On the one hand, we learn a number of identifiable place-names (Cholbēsena with Holbok, not far from present day [Kulāb](#), 6.12.5; Phratrua with Farabr opposite Āmol, 6.11.9; Astacana with Eṣṭiḵan to the west of Samarqand, Ptol., *Geog.*, 6.12.5, 6.11.9, 6.11.8) and river names (Dargomanēs with the Dargam near Samarqand; Baskatis with the



Pskem in the Tashkent oasis; Ptol., *Geog.*, 6.11.2, 4; 6.12.3); but, on the other hand, the position of many places is distorted (e.g., Maracanda/Samarqand is located in Bactria, and Alexandria Eschata is separated from the Jaxartes; Ptol. *Geog.*, 6.11.9, 6.12.6; for various attempts to explain the origins of these confusions, see P'iankov, 1997; idem, 2004; Rapin). Some additional information can be gathered from other geographical texts and maps of classical tradition, especially those of Pliny the Elder, Pomponius Mela, anonymous *Tabula Peutingeria* (where Antiochia Tarmata, i.e., Termed, is shown), and the Ravenna anonymous (see also Tomaschek, Kretschmer, Markwart, 1946).

The Chinese sources mention Sogdiana for the first time as the land sending its tribute around 116 BCE (*Shiji*), but the form given there as well as in *Hou Hanshu* and a record on an embassy from Kangjiu and other Central Asian lands, which was recently discovered in the vicinity of Dunhuang (see Wang), is ambiguous (*Suxie*, 𐰽𐰺 reconstructed as **sah-gleats* for Han-time pronunciation, see Hulsewé and Loewe, p. 130, n. 320; old pronunciations are based on Karlgren). In *Hou Hanshu* (the description can be dated to 125 CE), **Su-yi* (Old Chinese *sjuk-djuk*) is mentioned as a subordinate kingdom of Kangjiu; in *Weishu* and *Beishi* (events of 4th-6th centuries), *Suishu* (589-618), and particularly in *Tangshu* and related texts (especially the memoirs of Xuanzang), the Sogdian lands are described in much detail (see Chavannes, pp. 132-47; Shiratori, passim; Miller, pp. 12-13; Maliavkin, pp. 64, 221-24; Stark, passim, for commented translations of relevant chapters). The Chinese perceived Sogdiana not as a unitary state but rather as a federation of cantons of “*hu*” (𐰽) barbarians (i.e., a settled Iranian population), which were governed by princes of the Zhaowu (𐰽𐰺, Sogdian *Čmwk*; see Yoshida, 2003) clan. The most important ruler resided in Samarqand, which was named Kang (𐰽) and considered to be a continuation of the ancient Kangjiu state. Other lands of the “*hu* of nine houses of Zhaowu” (the contents of “nine” here is not explained, but cf. “Soğd of Seven Nests” in the Middle-Persian tradition, on which see Kia; cf. also Yoshida, in *EIr* online ed.) were also given one-syllable names: so Māymorġ (to the east of Samarqand, including Panjikant?) was called Mi (𐰽); *Osrushana* (the region of Ura-tyube), the northern part of Samarqand oasis and its northwestern part around Eštikan were called Cao (𐰽, eastern, central and western respectively); further west, around Karminiya and modern Navoi, on the middle Zarafshan, He (𐰽) was located; the Bukhara oasis was called An (𐰽, after ancient Anxi [the transcription of Aršak], “Parthia”), and the upper part of the Bukhara oasis was the “Minor An”;



Paykand was Bi (𐰽, *pjit*); Keš on the Kaška Daryā was Shi (𐰽) and Naḵšab below Keš was called Minor Shi or Nasebo (𐰽𐰽). These one-syllable denominations were also applied by the imperial administration as surnames of Sogdians (“*hu*”), who lived in China and are attested even in Sogdian texts composed in the Far East (*x’n* for Kang and *’n* for An; see Henning, 1948, p. 603 n. 2; Yoshida, *Rev. DTS*, pp. 366-67). The territories adjoining Sogdiana, namely Shi (𐰽, Čāč, Tashkent oasis), Mu or Wu-di (𐰽; 𐰽𐰽 *muwk*, *məwh-dih*, Āmol, modern Čarjuy [Türkmenabat] on the Āmu Daryā), Wu-na-he (𐰽𐰽𐰽 *’ō-nah-yat*, probably *Wana-yar, a Sogdian mis-translation of Parthian Kar-kōh, modern Kerki on the Āmu Daryā, see Lurje, forthcoming), Huoxin (𐰽𐰽, *xwa’-zim*, Chorasmia) were also sometimes included in the Zhaowu confederation according to the Chinese histories. In the travel-report of Xuanzang, who passed through Central Asia in 630, all the territory between Suye (𐰽𐰽, Suyāb in the Ču valley, to the East of modern Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan) and the “Iron Gates” mountain pass between Keš and Termez is called Suli, and it is said to have one and the same language and culture. The Chinese records of this time supply us also with transcriptions of a number of local place-names (mostly identifiable ones), reliable accounts on distances between cities, descriptions of rivers, mountains, remarks on the economy, religions of Sogdian lands and their political organization (including the names of a number of rulers and their embassies to the imperial court). The “houses of Zhaowu,” that is, minor principalities of Sogdiana, had a certain degree of independence; some of them at least had their own coinage.

Although Sogdian compositions dedicated to geography known so far are limited to two fragments of a “list of nations” (ed. Henning, 1940, pp. 8-11, of 23 words; Kudara, Sundermann, and Yoshida, p. 143, which is even worse preserved), a certain number of place-names can be extracted from surviving texts; they are, however, most commonly represented in the form of ethnic adjectives that were used as a kind of surname (the largest amount of such names is found among the Upper Indus inscriptions; see Sims-Williams, 1992); a number of place-names is attested in the Mt. Mugh documents, where the toponymy of the upper part of the Zarafšān valley is represented particularly well (see Smirnova, 1960). The recently discovered fragments of archaic Sogdian inscriptions at Kultobe in the Southern Kazakhstan (3rd cent. CE at the latest) mention the rulers (*mr’y*) of Samarqand, Keš, Naḵšab, Bukhara (called Nawak-mētān) and the army-leader of the people of Čāč (Tashkent); they probably indicate the confederative organization of Sogdiana already at this early stage (see Sims-Williams and Grenet). Certain information on



Transoxiana can be gleaned from Pahlavi texts (see Markwart, 1938, pp. 137-64; Daryaei, with literature).

The most detailed description of Sogdian lands are found in the Arabic and Persian geographical texts of pre-Mongol times (on which see Barthold, 1968, and Bolshakov for urban settlements). The geographical treatises of *Ebn Kordāqbeh*, Qodāma, Ya'qubi, Moqaddasi, *Ebn Ḥawqal*, *Eṣṭakri*, the anonymous Persian geography *Hodud al-ālam*, as well as the geographical and biographical dictionaries of Sam'āni and Yāqut, the local histories by Naršaḳi and Nasafi, and many other texts, provide us with several hundreds of geographical names from the basins of the Zarafšān and Kaška Daryā, mostly Sogdian in origin. According to these texts, the Zarafšān, which was called the river of Ṣoḡd, originated in the mountains of middle Bottam (i.e., the Pamir-Alai massive) in the territory of Borḡar (pre-modern Falḡar, today Ayni), and having passed through the lake Jey or Daryāža (Iskander-Kul?), entered the region of Samarqand, which consisted of twelve districts: Bonjikaṭ (Panjikant), Waraḡsar ("head of the dam," where the canals of the Samarqand oasis separated), Māymorḡ (around modern Urgut), Sanjarfaḡān, Darḡam (along the Dargam canal), and Abḡar (around modern Juma) were located to the south of the river, while Yārkaṭ, Burnamaḍ (in the direction of Osrušana), Bozmājan, Kabōdanjkaṭ, Waḍār, and Marzbān were to the north (*Eṣṭakri*, p. 319 ff; Moqaddasi, p. 266; *Ebn Hawqal*, p. 498).

Downstream, the districts Eṣṭiḳan and Kušāniya were located, further on the towns Dabusiya and Karminiya (around modern Navoiy, already reckoned within the Bukhara oasis); the next station, Ṭawāwis (Peacocks [city], the older name being Arqud), was inside the rampart, which was surrounding the Bukharan oasis and is known today as Kampir-duwol; fifteen districts of Bukhara were located within it and seven districts outside. Among the most important places in Bukhara oasis one can mention Rāmiṭana, Chinese Alanmi, its pre-Islamic capital; Wardāna, which was once governed by a separate ruler, the Wardān-ḳodāt, both located in the northern part of the oasis; Waraḳša to the west, a countryside residence of Boḳār-ḳodāt (*Naršaḳi*, p. 24), where the famous artistic remains were found; and the merchant city of Paykand to the southwest, outside the wall, which enjoyed a certain extent of autonomy. The capital of the oasis was more precisely called Numejkaṭ, and *Naršaḳi* informs us that it was a newer foundation than some other towns and villages of the oasis (*Naršaḳi* tr. Frye pp. 16, 17); noteworthy is that the Sogdian *pxw'r* (as well as Bactrian *bōxaro*) functions as an adjective from which



**pwx'r'kh* / *Boḳārā* seems to be a derived noun.

The Kaška Daryā valley (now Qashqadaryo; for the most up-to-date description, see Kamaliddinov) was divided into two regions: Keš (today Shahrīsabz) on its upper course and Nasaf (Naḳšab, modern Qarši) below. The former had sixteen districts (not easily identifiable); most prominent are *Ḳozār*, modern Gozar to the south, mountainous *Siām* to the east, and the Iron Gates (Dar-e Āhanin), which led towards *Termeḍ*, around modern Darband. In the district of Nasaf, the large villages were *Kasba*, which led towards Bukhara, and *Basda* on the road to Kar-kuh (Kerki); *Nowḡad Qorayš* (new town of the Qorayš tribe) was located half-way between Keš and Nasaf.

In the above mentioned texts of Islamic times we can observe the shrinking of the concept of Soghdiana. The Transoxian regions of *Farḡāna*, *Ḳ'ārazm* (Chorasmia) and the lands on the Oxus confluents, *Čāč* and *Ilāq* (modern Tashkent oasis), or even *Osrušana* (*Ostrušana* around Ura-tyube and Jizak) are never considered part of Soghdiana by Islamic authors. It is only the somewhat misleading passage of *Ya'qubi* which includes Keš and Nasaf in *Soḡd* (p. 293; but cf. *Ebn Ḥawqal*, pp. 474-75; *Eṣṭakri*, pp. 286-88, 316); the opinion that Bukhara is part of Soghdiana is mentioned by *Ebn Ḥawqal* (p. 492) and *Eṣṭakri* (p. 316) and indirectly implied by *Biruni* (pp. 220 ff., cf. *Barthold[-Bosworth]*, p. 773), while this opinion is severely criticized by *Moḡaddasi* (p. 269, cf. *Smirnova*, 1963, p. 23). *Yāqut* (III, p. 394) mentions the existence of two Soghdianas, one that of *Samarḡand* and another that of Bukhara, quoting a certain *Ḥāzemi* (probably the confident of the Samanid vizier *Bal'ami*; see *Sam'āni*, IV, p. 1047). The majority of the early Islamic authors, including those named above, equate *Soḡd* with *Samarḡand* oasis and the middle *Zarafšān* valley. However, *Sam'āni*, the author of *Ḥodud al-ālam* (ed. *Sotuda*, p. 43, tr., *Minorsky*, p. 63), on one occasion *Nasafi* (p. 438), and sometimes *Moḡaddasi* (pp. 269, 279-80) use the word *Soḡd* only for the middle course of the *Zarafšān* between the *Samarḡand* and Bukhara oases, that is, the area of *Karminiya*, *Dabusiya*, *Rabenjan*, and *Košāniya* with *Eṣṭiḡan* as its center. Subsequently, the sources of Timurid times mention only *Soḡod-e Kalān* (Greater *Soḡod*) and *Soḡod-e Ḳordor Nim-soḡod* (Minor *Soḡod*, or *Semi-soḡod*) as two cantons, one to the north of *Miyankal*, and another on this island (*Waqf-nāmas* [acts for pious foundations] of *Ḳ'āja Aḥrār* and his heirs of 1470, 1480, 1482, 1489, in *Chekhovich*, ed., as doc. 5, 7, 8, 10; *Samariya*, p. 56). Later on, *Soḡod-e Ḳord* was renamed *Āfarinkent*, while *Soḡod-e Kalān* (called *Sugut*) was still in use in early colonial times (*Vyatkin*, p. 57-69).



The name of Sogdiana appears in several minor place-names of recent time (like Soğd near Wobkent to the north of Bukhara, the birthplace of the historian **Aḥmad Dāneš** (Doneš), Soğduin Yaghnob (see Klimchitsky; Livshits, p. 80);). In 2000, the Khujandor Leninobod (Leninābād) province of Tajikistan was renamed Soğd province (Viloyati Suğd), which is of course an artificial denomination.

Several locations in medieval Eurasia bear names similar to Sogdiana and were probably founded as Sogdian colonies. The most famous, although contradictory, one is Sogdaia, modern Sudak in the Crimea, another Soğdabil in Georgia (see La Vaissière, pp. 241 ff). Soğd, under the rule of a certain Bektegin in the 12th century Persian history *Mojmal al-tawārik wa'l-qeşaş* (p. 323), corresponds to five villages of Sogdians that belong to Bektegin and are located in the cold mountains of Toğozğoz country (i.e., in the eastern part of Tienshan) according to the *Ḥodud al-‘ālam* (ed. Sotuda, p. 77, tr. Minorsky, p. 95 and comm., p. 274); *Sywyk-stn* (lit. “land, place of Sogdians”) in the Sogdian version of an epitaph of 579 CE of Wirkak found in Xian (line 7; ed. Yoshida, 2005) can mean either Sogdiana itself or a Sogdian colony in the Chinese city of Guzang or Xian. Certain Suğuta Viṃṃsa is mentioned in Doc. 82 from Niya (southern rim of Tarim basin), dated to the first quarter of 4th century, probably means “Sogdian village” (Boyer et al, p. 31); the place-name Bonosogoligo in Bactria in the document S of probably 703 A.D. (Sims-Williams, 2000, I, pp. 94-95) probably means “Sogdian estate” (noteworthy is that Farnagad, native of that place, has a Sogdian rather than Bactrian name).

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