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SOGDIANA III. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

SOGDIANA

iii. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Sogdiana, an Iranian-speaking region in Central Asia, stretches from the rivers Āmu Daryā in the south to the Syr Daryā in the north, with its heart in the valleys of the Zarafšān and the Kaška Daryā. But this description, appropriate for the early period, varied over time. Sogdiana ceded to Bactriana (see BACTRIA), the right bank of the upper course of the Āmu Daryā as far as Termez, while Sogdian colonial expansion in the north during the Early Middle Ages led a Chinese pilgrim in the mid-seventh century to define Sogdiana as the entire region stretching from Lake Issyk Kul in eastern Kyrgyzstan to the Āmu Daryā (Xuanzang, tr. p. 26). After the ninth century, the name Soḡd/al-Ṣoḡd was restricted to the rural area between Samarkand and Bukhara (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 492; on Sogdian geography, see Barthold).

Pre-Achaemenid period. Before the arrival of Iranian peoples in Central Asia, Sogdiana had already experienced at least two urban phases. The first was at Sarazm (4th-3rd m. BCE), a town of some 100 hectares has been excavated, where both irrigation agriculture and metallurgy were practiced (Isakov). It has been possible to demonstrate the magnitude of links with the civilization of the Oxus as well as with more distant regions, such as Baluchistan. The

second phase began in at least the 15th century BCE at Kök Tepe, on the Bulungur canal north of the Zarafšān River, where the earliest archeological material appears to go back to the Bronze Age, and which persisted throughout the Iron Age, until the arrival from the north of the Iranian-speaking populations that were to become the Sogdian group. It declined with the rise of Samarkand (Rapin, 2007). Pre-Achaemenid Sogdiana is recalled in the Younger Avesta (chap. 1 of the *Vidēvdād*, q.v.) under the name Gava and said to be inhabited by the Sogdians.

Achaemenid period. Cyrus the Great (see CYRUS iii) conquered Sogdiana in about 540 BCE. He advanced as far as the Syr Darya, where he established the town of Kyrèschata (Cyropolis), the farthest extent of the Persian empire to the northeast, identified with the site of Kurkath. Samarkand probably received its first major fortifications under the Achaemenids (Bernard, pp. 334-37). Sogdiana was thenceforth integrated into the Achaemenid empire as a distant frontier province (Briant, pp. 764-74, tr. pp. 743-54) and remained as such until its conquest by Alexander the Great, beginning in 329 BCE. No satrap for Sogdiana is known, and the recently discovered Aramaic documents from Bactriana confirm what was already known from the satrapy lists, namely that Sogdiana was governed from Bactra (Shaked). The region provided contingents of soldiers to the Achaemenid kings, along with laborers and semiprecious stones (lapis lazuli and carnelian or garnet) for the palace workshops (Vallat; La Vaissière, 2005, pp. 18-19). It participated in the integration of the populations and customs of the empire, and deported populations were settled there (as the Branchids; see Briant, p. 447). More than a millennium after the fall of the empire, in the seventh century CE, the administrative formulary inherited from Babylonia “Babylone” continued to be used in Sogdiana (Sims-Williams, 1991). Around the beginning of the era, the Sogdian script developed out of the Aramaic alphabet (Gharib, 1995, p. xxviii). The script of Bukhara remained very similar to that of Parthia (Livshits, Kaufman, and D’yakonov).

As for its economy, Sogdiana at the time constituted the northern frontier of the sedentary world and was in constant contact with the nomads of the steppe. Sogdian society was an agricultural one based on the irrigation of very fertile loess soil. The name of one of its major canals, the Dargom in Uzbekstan, belongs to the Old Iranian linguistic stratum, and large-scale irrigation may go back to the second millennium BCE. The rivers arising in the southern and eastern mountains provided the necessary water. The nomads

built their kurgans around the oases and their economic exchanges, products of animal husbandry for products of the earth, seem to have been significant.

Greek period. It was difficult for Alexander to conquer Sogdiana, which was held by the satrap of Bactra, Bessos), who, after assassinating Darius III, proclaimed himself king of kings, and then by Spitamenes, a Sogdian noble allied with the Saka and the Massagetae. The accounts of the conquest raise problems of historical geography (e.g., identification of the Sogdian and Bactrian Rocks and of Nautaca; see Grenet and Rapin, 2001) and allow us to appreciate the role of the nomads, but they have little to say on Sogdiana proper. The generals who succeeded Alexander kept control of the region until 247 BCE. Afterwards the Greco-Bactrian rulers, who were descendants of local Greek colonists, asserted their independence and, if we can go by the circulation of coins, held all of Sogdiana until approximately 140-130 BCE (Grenet, 2004, pp. 1056-58). The Greeks provided Sogdiana with its first real coinage, because Achaemenid darics are almost entirely absent from Sogdiana. Certain types of Greek coins remained in use in Sogdiana in degraded form until the 5th century CE (Zeimal, 1983; Rtveladze, 1984). Archeologically, the walls of Samarkand show clear signs of Greek rebuilding (Bernard) and millet granaries for the Greek garrison have been found on the acropolis (see SAMARQAND i. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY.)

Kangju. The next five hundred years of Sogdian history are extremely obscure. There is basically no information on Sogdiana concerning this period other than what is related in the Chinese sources (Shiratori; initial description, unnamed, in the *Shiji*, 123.3174, tr. Watson, p. 245; then under the rubric Kangju *Hanshu*, 96A.3891-4, tr. Hulsewé, pp. 123-31; *Hou Hanshu*, 88.2922, tr. Chavannes, 1907). Around 160-130 BCE, the region was crisscrossed by various waves of migratory nomads from the north, whether they were Iranian-speaking Saka or the Yuezhi from within China. Beginning in the first century BCE, most of Sogdiana was included in a larger nomadic state, centered on the middle Syr Darya, namely Kangju. On the other hand, the Yuezhi principalities and then the Kushan empire incorporated the southeast part of Sogdiana (south of the Hissar mountains), which thereafter left the Sogdian sphere and was attached to Bactria. Small-scale Sogdian commerce then developed in imitation of the larger-ranging merchants operating farther south, in Bactria (see SOGDIAN TRADE). The economic activity seems to have been limited to agriculture while artistic activity has been deemed rather mediocre (Grenet, 1996). The Kangju state appears to have evolved fairly

quickly into a confederation and the Chinese texts allude to the petty kingdoms that formed some of its subdivisions, including Suye, or Sogdiana (*Hanshu*, 96A.3894). This confederational organization has recently been confirmed with the discovery at Kultobe in Kazakhstan of a dedicatory Sogdian inscription, dated to the 1st-3rd centuries CE, of a fortress alluding to military operations of the principal towns of Sogdiana against the nomads in the north (Sims-Williams and Grenet, 2006; Sims-Williams et al., 2009). We do not have a good idea of how to interpret the inscription of the Sasanian king Šāpur I (r. 241-71) on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam in Fars, which gives the limits of his empire as Keš, Sughd, Čāč. At the end of the period, urban hierarchies had developed in Sogdiana. In the south in the valley of Kaška Daryā River, Nasaf was dominant (site of Erkurgan; Sulejmanov), while in the north near Syr Darya the town of Kanka had that distinction (Buriakov, 1982; idem, 1991). Between them, Samarkand was reduced to a third of the area of 220 hectares that it had occupied in the Greek period (Grenet, 1996). The oasis of Bukhara no longer seems to have been organized around a central town, although Paykent (Paikend) already existed (*Gorodishche Paykend*; on Paykent see the excavation reports *Raskopki v Paykende* since 2000).

The nomad invasions. Several texts, Chinese and Byzantine, independently attest to the arrival of a wave of Eastern invaders in Central Asia in the second half of the fourth century. They were politically connected with the Huns (see XIONGNU), who were attacking Europe at the same time (La Vaissière, 2005b). Several dynasties or tribal groups succeeded each other at the head of this nomadic agglomeration, most notably the Chionites, the Kidarites (after 437) and the Hephthalites in Sogdiana (whether after 479 or 509 is not known; La Vaissière, 2007). As for the archaeology, in the fourth century, we can observe the appearance of some new features that we can legitimately assign to this political upheaval. Integration of sedentary peoples and local nomads, who had been living together right on the edges of the oases, appears to have come to an end. On the other hand, alongside local forms that continued in use, a decorated ceramic appears in the archeological strata of this period that in the preceding period was characteristic of the Syr Darya region, suggesting that populations from the Syr Darya had had to seek refuge in Sogdiana from the pressure of the nomads, or they had come here to a land under cultivation that a depleted population had partly abandoned, and they brought their pottery with them (Buriakov, 1991). Kanka declined.

Agricultural and urban development. Thanks to these refugees, following the

initial destruction, Sogdiana undeniably underwent a major surge in agriculture in the fifth and sixth centuries and the population grew noticeably. South of Samarkand, more than 75 percent of the sites date to this period, and many of them were later abandoned. Within the marshy valley of the Zarafšān, the region of Eštiḵan was populated and the land was put to use. The same thing happened at the oasis of Nasaf (Sulejmanov, pp. 83-86, "Erkurgan"). The western edge of the oasis of Bukhara, following the advance of the desert in the first centuries CE, was conquered by irrigation in the sixth century to an extent of 22 km (Shishkin, pp. 19-31). Thus, within a century and a half, Sogdiana very rapidly became a heavily populated world, whose population was to share in the conquest of agricultural land carved out of the steppe and marshes or reclaimed from the desert.

At the same time, the urban network was radically changed by the creation of new towns, often on older sites, in the valley of the Zarafšān, Bukhara, and Paykent; and Panjikant developed on the Hippodamian plan (rectangular enclosures, grid of straight streets). The fourth to sixth centuries mark the apogee of Nasaf "Erkurgan," which, at 150 hectares, was without doubt the largest town in Sogdiana at the beginning of the fifth century.

This growth has been studied primarily at Samarqand and later at Panjikant. At Panjikant, some 50 km east of Samarqand and host to some of the most significant archeological excavations in Sogdiana, the town, established in the middle of the fifth century, outgrew its urban design very quickly and its walls proved to be too confining. A new line of fortifications, which departed from the original rectangular plan, was built at the end of the century to include the suburbs, so that the enclosed area grew from 8 to 13.5 hectares. The town continued to expand, although at a less constant rate, until the end of the seventh century, when a small marketplace appeared outside the walls to the northeast and a neighborhood of workshops were built to the south (Raspopova, 1990; on the recent excavations see Marshak and Raspopova, 1999-2006). At Samarqand, the town boasted an elevated citadel and a line of interior walls in the second half or the end of the fifth century; a century later, the entire plateau had already been reoccupied and new walls enclosing 218 hectares were built in place of the earlier walls (Shishkina; Belenitskiĭ, Bentovich, and Bol'shakov, p. 220; Grenet, 1996; idem, 2004). Samarkand then profited from a still greater wall protecting part of the oasis "oasis," 20 sq km in all. At Paykent, located at the other end of the valley of Zarafšān, a wall enclosing a 330 sq m on a side demarcated a town of 11 hectares close to the

ancient citadel (Semenov, 2002). Accordingly, Sogdiana became the main center of agricultural wealth "agriculture" and population in Central Asia during this period.

The Bactrian heritage. In contrast to the impoverished artistic culture of the previous period, the afore-mentioned Sogdian urban development was matched by artistic development connected through several features with Bactria of the fourth and first half of the fifth centuries. The earliest murals at Panjikant strongly resemble the latest paintings at Delbarjin, in Bactria (Marshak, in Azarpay, p. 50). Architecture and urban planning also received a great impetus and imitated Bactrian models (Grenet, 1996; Semenov, 1996). Finally, Bactrian toponyms, notably that of the town of Košāniya (q.v.), located between Bukhara and Samarqand, appear in Sogdiana. This influence may be attributed to the possible presence of Bactrian refugees as well as the migration of craftsmen to Sogdiana under Kidarite power, which for a time united the two regions before being driven out of the south. The urban elites that emerged at the time in Sogdiana inherited refined tastes and lifestyles, which had long been developing in India and the Kushan empire, and which lasted throughout the Kushano-Sasanian period.

Northward expansion. One consequence of the dynamic Sogdian economy was an expansion of Sogdian territory toward the north and, in the fifth century, the diffusion of Sogdian culture in the region of Čāč. Coinage, iconography, and literate culture thenceforth connected this region with Sogdiana (Rtveladze, 2006; Filanovich, 1983; idem, 1991; Buriakov, 1982; idem, 1991).

The influence of Sogdian culture was even greater in Semirechye, a town located in the northeast of Čāč. In fact, the initial urbanization of the foothills of the Tianshan as far as Lake Issyk Kul "Issyk Kul" were undertaken by Sogdians not before the sixth century (Baypakov, 1986, idem, 1992). However, this process was quite different from what is observed in Čāč, as it involved a process of colonization "colonies" and expansion of sedentary "sédentaires" and urban "urbain" cultures toward the north. Naršaḵi provides the political explanation for the establishment of the town of Jamukat (Naršaḵi, p. 9, tr. p. 7). According to him, the Sogdian colonization "colonies" of Semirechye was surely an aristocratic initiative "noblesse sogdienne". Excavations at Suyāb (present day Ak-Beshim) and Navāket (present day Krasnaya Rechka in Kyrgyzstan) reveal the growth of towns around a castle built on the Sogdian plan, but the history of the development of these towns is not yet well understood. At Navāket, the town is remarkable for the size of its long walls,

which mark out a territory of 20 sq km (as at Samarqand), within which can be found remains of irrigation systems and the ruins of the town itself, covering an area of 100 hectares (*Krasnaya Rechka i Burana*, pp. 69 ff.). The population appears to have included, from the start, merchants, farmers, and warriors. Nothing in the commercial practices of the period can explain the succession of stages at such close intervals. The choices of location show that they were initially agricultural settlements by landowners setting up estates on virgin land.

Sogdians and Turks. When the Hephthalite empire was partitioned by the Sasanians and Turks in 560, Sogdiana passed under the control of the Turks and remained so for a century and a half, for some of the time nominally, but in general the control was fairly direct when it was wielded from Semirechye, where the Western Turk khagans (*ḵāqān*) and their successors On Ok (lit. Ten Arrows) and Türgesh were settled. Tang China, after defeating the first Turk empire in the middle of the seventh century, also claimed suzerainty over Sogdiana. While it was able to take control over Semiryechye, its armies never reached beyond Tashkent in the south. Thereupon there arose a real Sogdo-Turkic fusion especially on the elite level, brought about by means of intermarriage, mutual adoption of each other's customs, hybrid iconography, etc. What we are able to observe in the sixth and seventh centuries at least is the creation of a mid civilization, at any rate among the ruling classes.

The Sogdian contributions to the Turkic empire were significant. First and foremost is incontestably the writing. In fact, the Sogdian alphabet gradually adapted to Turkic phonology, was used throughout Turkic and then Uyghur history to write Turkic texts. To this day, the Mongol and Manchu alphabets are distant descendants of the Sogdian alphabet. Moreover, the earliest texts of the Turkic empire were written in Sogdian, beginning in the last quarter of the sixth century, such as the inscription from Bugut, the oldest known one (Kliashtorny and Livshits; 1972, Bazin 1975). The role of the Sogdians in the Turkic empire was not restricted to the heights of the state. The Sogdians were numerous in the eastern Turkic empire, which was centered in Mongolia. They then expanded into all the major towns of eastern Asia (see East Iranians in China; La Vaissière, 2005a, pp. 199-224).

Political and social organization. Sogdiana of the sixth to eighth centuries is well known from Chinese descriptions, Sogdian documents from Mount Mugh (the archives of the king of Panjikant, hidden in 722; see MOUNT MUGH; Livshits, 1962; Bogoliubov and Smirnova, 1963; Grenet and La Vaissière), and

Arabic narratives of the conquest. While Samarkand was certainly the largest town and its princes claimed the title of king (*malek*, *ek̲šid*) beginning in the second half of the seventh century, it was surrounded by many independent principalities that sent ambassadors of their own to the Chinese court (e.g.,Panjikant, Kabuḏān, Bukhara, Keš, Eštiḵan), and at times bore the princely title of Afšin (corresponding to the ideogram *MRʾY*) as names. They also struck coins (Smirnova, 1981; Zeimal, 1983; idem, 1996). These principalities grouped themselves under many lords (*xuf*). Amongst these princes the king in Samarkand was no more than *primus inter pares*, and the dynastic successions are especially unclear (on the name *Zhaowu* given to them by the Chinese texts see, Yoshida, 2003). The urban population seems to have ercised real political power, as at Paykent, city of merchants, where no aristocracy has come to light, and at Panjikant or Čāč as well. It is in the name of the community (*nāf*) that the bridge at Panjikant is leased, and it is in the name of the *nāf* that some coins are struck at Čāč. The fields, on the other hand, in contrast to all of mercantile and commercial life, seem to be under the absolute control of the *xuf* (Yakubov). The *xuf* sent their ground rent home to town where they had establishments of their own and supported a significant population of craftsmen and merchants (Raspopova, 1990 ; idem, 1993).

Culture and religion. Sogdian culture is poorly known. The only major corpus of Sogdian texts discovered in Sogdiana, those from Mount Mugh, are not literary. The sole literary text we have is a fragment of the legend of Rostam in Sogdian, found in China (Sims-Williams, 1976, pp. 54-61). But the iconography is incomparably richer. At Panjikant, a very large number of wall paintings have been found, which are supplemented by discoveries at Varaḵša, Samarkand, and Šahrestān. Three genres are known: divine, with very elaborate representations of the many Sogdian gods, which borrow many features from the Indian iconographic tradition; heroic, with cycles of epic combat, including Rostam but also other heroes of whom all knowledge is lost; and lastly fables, with images from the *Panchatantra* (Marshak and Raspopova, 1987; idem, 1990; Marshak, 2002). There was also a political painting (Compareti and La Vaissière). Sogdian silverwork fills out this rich iconography (Marschak, 1986).

As for religion, Sogdiana, located beyond the sphere of influence of the Zoroastrian church of Iran, was dominated by an unreformed version of Zoroastrianism, in which Ahuramazda would never achieve primacy, and

where the multiplicity of gods of Mazdaism persisted (regarding funerary practices, see Grenet, 1984). The chief god appears to have been Nana, inherited from Babylon (Grenet and Marshak). Visually, Sogdian religion, lacking the fire altars and unadorned temples of Iran, seemed so different from Zoroastrianism to contemporary Chinese eyes that they considered them two different religions. At Panjikant, there are also traces of Nestorian Christianity and Buddhism. While there were Sogdian Buddhist missionnaries beginning in the third century in the emigré Sogdian communities, it appears that it was not until later (sixth century?) that Buddhism was established in Sogdiana. Manicheism was spread in China beginning in the sixth century by Sogdians (La Vaissière, 2005c).

Arab conquest. After several raids with no lasting consequences in the seventh century, the Arab armies led by Qotayba b. Moslem undertook the systematic conquest of Sogdiana beginning in 705. Samarkand fell in 712 (Gibb). The defeat of Sogdian insurgents in 722 (the taking of Khojent and Mount Mugh) marks the end of the first stage, which brought Arab power as far as the Syr Darya (Grenet and La Vaissière). There followed two much more difficult decades, during which the entire conquered area was sometimes lost again before the governor of Khorasan, Naṣr b. Sayyār, managed to establish peace with the Sogdian aristocracy and their Türgesh allies. Abu Moslem Ḵorāsāni finally put a brutal end, by decimation, to the last vain hopes of independence (Karev, 2002). However, the situation had not been stabilized; many simultaneous revolts broke out throughout the Iranian east, in Sogdiana notably including that of the rebel Hāšem b. Ḥakim, known as al-Moqannaʿ (Sadighi,p. 163-186; Naršaḵi, pp. 89-104, tr. pp. 65-76; Barthold, pp. 199-200; Browne, I, pp. 318-23). The situation did not finally stabilize until after the revolt of Rāfeʿ b. Layṯ, a descendant of Naṣr b. Sayyār, at Samarkand during the ninth century and especially the enlistment by al-Maʾmun and then al-Moʿtaṣem of the Sogdian aristocracy into the service of the caliphs (La Vaissière, 2007b).

Loss of Sogdian identity. The loss of Sogdian identity, or rather its melding with the Persian-speaking Islamic world, seems to have been quite rapid overall, but it differed according to social stratum. Islamic sources tend to overestimate the speed and extent of conversions, and we have good reason to doubt, for example, the accuracy of the lists of mosques or traditionalists offered in the *Ketāb fi ḏekr ʿolamāʾ Samarkand* of al-Nasafi which purports to portray a local society that was already widely Islamized in the eighth century,

shortly after the conquest (Weinberger; Paul). The purpose was to emphasize the religious fervor of the town, especially as concerns Bukhara, and historical reality was very likely quite different. Thus, at Panjikant, even though the town had been occupied since the 760s, not one mosque has ever been found. At Samarkand, the earliest mosque known to archaeology dates to 770. Arab power invested in major construction in the town (Karev, 2000), but there is no doubt that, in the century and a half after the conquest, there was a considerable impetus on urban Sogdian society toward Islam. Thus, Ṭabari (III, pp. 1308-313) describes the proceedings brought against Afšin, the king of Ošrusana (on this region, see Buriakov and Gricina, pp. 90-185), who represented the old Sogdian noble and military caste, which exhibits the reality as well as the limitations of cultural assimilation of the Sogdian nobility into the Islamic world. These nobles, who still retained a preponderance of Sogdian cultural codes, were sometimes only Muslims on the surface, but politically had definitively joined the Islamic side. Thereafter, and in the Samanid period, elite culture seems to have fallen back onto a common East Iranian stock (legends such as those of Rostam and Alexander…) and preserved only a very, very few specifically Sogdian elements. The religious iconography, the most spectacular and best known feature of the old religion, had totally disappeared.

Things were quite different, however, in the countryside and mountains. Certain Tajik agrarian rites can be understood thanks to the religious paintings at Panjikant (Marshak and Raspopova, 1987; idem, 1990). Certain practices in modern Tajikistan reprise rituals attested in Chinese sources for pre-Islamic Sogdiana (placing honey on the lips of newborns and a coin in their hand: cf. Chavannes, 1903, p. 134).

Switch to Persian language. It is possible to get some idea of the date when Sogdian ceased to be spoken by the elite classes. In the last third of the tenth century, Moqaddasi provides interesting evidence in his analysis of the languages of Transoxiana: “The language of al-Sughd is unique to it and is approximated by the languages of the rural districts of Bukhārā, which are quite varied, but understood among them; and I witnessed the venerable Imām, Muḥammad ibn al-Fadhl speaking in it often” (Moqaddasi, pp. 335-36; tr., p. 296). Abu Rayḥān Biruni, who wrote at the beginning of the eleventh century, was able still to meet scholars who could read it; he might even have been able to read it himself, since several times in his own works he cites books by magi of Sogdiana and even gives several Sogdian words (e.g., Biruni,

tr., I, pp. 260-61). The change took place later in the Sogdian colonies, since the latest Sogdian texts, some graffiti, come from the early eleventh century near Talas. Maḥmud Kāšḡari provides valuable information on the assimilation of the Sogdian inhabitants of Semirechye. He writes, in particular, "those who have two languages and who mix with the populace of the cities have a certain slurring (*rekka*) in their utterances, for example, Sogdāq, Känčāk and Argu. The people of Balāsagān speak both Soghdian and Turkic. The same is true of the people of Ṭarāz (Talas) and the people of Madinat al-Bayżāʾ (Esbijāb; Kāšḡari, tr., pp. 83-84). Furthermore, Sogdian remained a liturgical language in Chorasmia and Semiryechye (until the 12th cent?) (La Vaissière 2005a, p. 330). At Turfan, assimilation to the Turkic-speaking population was already well advanced by the end of the tenth century (Sims-Williams and Hamilton, p. 10). It appears that until at least the fifteenth century, the local micro-toponymy between Samarkand and Bukhara, the Sughd of the tenth-century geographers, was still Sogdian (Lurje, p. 244).

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