

# The Silk Road

Volume 4 Number 2

Winter 2006-2007

"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"

## In This Issue

- News from ancient Afghanistan.....5
- Prof. Tarzi's 2006 excavations at Bamiyan .....10
- A visit to the region of historic Balkh..... 27
- A new interpretation of the Afrasiab murals.....32
- Mapping Buddhist sites in Western Tibet .....43
- Han lacquerware in Xiongnu graves.....48
- Ming-Timurid relations as recorded in Chinese sources .....54
- Hunting hounds along the Silk Road.....60
- An interview with Kyrgyz epic singers.....65

## Next Issue

- A focus on food along the Silk Roads, with articles by Terrie Chrones, Darra Goldstein, Paul Buell, Debra McCown, Dru Gladney and Nancy Chen....
- The latest on Xiongnu archaeology
- Trade routes in Anatolia  
..... and more

## About

*The Silk Road* is a semi-annual publication of the Silkroad Foundation. *The Silk Road* can also be viewed on-line at <<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org>>. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or contributions. Guidelines for contributors may be found in Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2004) on the website.

The Silkroad Foundation  
P.O. Box 2275  
Saratoga, CA. 95070

Editor: Daniel C. Waugh  
[dwaugh@u.washington.edu](mailto:dwaugh@u.washington.edu)

© 2007 Silkroad Foundation  
© 2007 by authors of individual articles and holders of copyright, as specified, to individual images.

## From the Editor

Rather than attempt to comment here on every article in this issue of our journal, let me share with you some thoughts inspired by reading two important new books which are closely related to certain of our contributions. In the first volume, *Royal Nauruz in Samarkand*, the eminent scholar Prof. Frantz Grenet begins his essay with the statement: 'A positive side to the so-called 'Ambassador's painting' at Samarkand is that we shall never fully understand it...This means that research on this painting will never stop and this is excellent news, as this research had many repercussions on the knowledge of Sogdian history and art' (p. 43). Indeed, as most of our articles in *The Silk Road* this time remind us, we live in a world of new discoveries, if one marked by sad reminders of what has been lost or is under the threat of destruction or theft. Were we to second-guess history, we might ask, for example, what if the bulldozer in 1965 had not torn off the top of the hall with the 'Ambassador's painting?' Would it eventually have been properly excavated with enough more intact to answer some of the now unanswerable questions which are inviting such ingenious solutions as the one proposed below by Matteo Compareti, who organized the conference in which Grenet and the other experts participated?

The conference reports in *Royal Nauruz* are fascinating reading in part precisely because the authors do not always (and probably never will) agree on some of the most important issues. Was the hall with the mural part of a palace or

part of an elite but non-royal residence? What is depicted? Is the whole iconography connected with celebration of Nauruz? Is it abstract and symbolic or rather related to a very specific political situation? Is the Chinese scene on the north wall a specific depiction of court culture in China or simply emblematic of a Chinese princess's having been sent off as a bride to Central Asia? It is certainly interesting that at least one contributor (Markus Mode) explicitly disagrees with the premise about Nauruz which is embodied in the volume's title. While the consensus dating for the paintings now has been narrowed to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, scholars cannot agree whether we might be looking at the late 640s or, say, the early 660s. Each choice has some plausible arguments in its favor. Or, take the Sogdian inscriptions on the murals, published in a new reading in this volume by Vladimir Livshits. When were they written? Do they record merely formulae and interpretation of the imagery by those who could not have witnessed the scene it depicts?

One can readily obtain a visual impression of the scholarly disagreements by comparing the various reconstructions of the murals on the west wall of the hall, the wall that arguably held the central imagery, since it faced the entrance to the room. Since only the lower part of the wall survived the ravages of time and the bulldozer, within certain limits imposed by the rest of the imagery, the scholar is free to imagine what was in the upper register. A number of key issues are at play here. One basic and

---

perhaps somewhat surprising one is that most of the interpretations which have been advanced are based on an imperfect publication of the surviving evidence. As Irina Arzhantseva and Olga Inevatkina note in their paper, the earliest drawings of the paintings contained many errors and omitted significant detail. The more precise drawings undertaken during restoration work in 1978 have remained largely unknown and still need to be properly and fully published. The two scholars document the value of those 1978 drawings with a number of examples (and, one might add, the volume as a whole is valuable for its extensive illustration).

As presumably any of the specialists should admit, the challenges of 'reconstruction,' which perforce involves interpretation, and other kinds of analysis based on that which has been reconstructed embody some real dangers. For example, François Ory's explanation for his reconstruction drawings (see Figs. 1-3, p. 91) should give everyone pause. A lot of his detail derives from his reading of the other justly famous set of Sogdian paintings, those at Panjikent. Yet, as Étienne de la Vaissière pointedly notes (p. 153; he is commenting on Boris Marshak's interpretation of the murals, not on Ory's reconstruction), 'The painting of Samarkand is not that of Panjikent.' Might one not respond to de la Vaissière, who seems to prefer for the west wall imagery a variant where the upper register is based on a relief on a Sogdian funeral couch from China (see his fig. 3, p. 158), that 'The painting of Samarkand is not Sogdian carved reliefs from China'? Is the key and now lost image in the upper register the Goddess Nana, the Sogdian ruler Varkhuman, or the Turk *khaghan* or some alternative configuration of the last two? Choose one and a whole skein of alternative reasoning unravels.

Part of the challenge here is to balance the inventiveness of modern scholars in finding analogies and sources for the imagery with the realities of the preserved evidence and what to moderns are the opaque world views and knowledge of the creators of the paintings. I think no one nowadays would err on the side of underestimating the complexities of Sogdian culture, which embraced Iranian, Central Asian, Indian and other elements. Indeed, what meticulous scholarship is determining is how widespread certain motifs seem to have been, even if they have survived to this day in scattered locations only in isolated and fragmentary examples. Might there not be a danger though of imposing a rationality and system on the Samarkand paintings which they do not merit? And might there not be a danger of exaggerating the complexities? The late Boris Marshak's contribution to this volume (which has been dedicated to his memory) is noteworthy for his opening admission that he had been wrong in some of his earlier analysis and for his insistence that too many of the other interpretive schemes are at odds with the archaeological evidence from Sogdiana, evidence which most would agree he knew better than any other person. While of course he may not be right, Marshak shows what I would call a salutary skepticism, for example, in regard to reading too much out of the Sogdian inscriptions on the paintings. It is worth remembering one basic rule of argument, which is that the chain of evidence is only as strong as each of its links. I think part of what Marshak is getting at is that tendency to want to construct an edifice of 'proof' mainly out of unproven assumptions, at least some of which end up becoming 'accepted fact.'

It is hard to know how we may respond to this volume when we re-examine it in five or ten years, but I think there is a reasonable

bet that the articles in it which will hold up best with time are those which are the narrowest in their focus on specific details: Etsuko Kageyama's careful comparison of details of coiffure and garments of the Chinese women with recently discovered depictions in early Tang tombs; Valentina Raspopova's examination of weaponry with her interesting observations on the fact that to a degree the artists did not always match weapons to the ethnicity of the individuals in the paintings; the previously mentioned article by Arzhantseva and Inevatkina; and Alix Barbet's technical study of the painting technique. That said, Grenet surely is right about the stimulation provided by the uncertainty concerning what we know. That stimulation is abundantly evident in Matteo Compareti's article which we publish below: if his conclusion would be accepted, it could indeed help to explain some of the puzzling details of the 'Ambassador's painting.'

While a volume such as *Royal Nauruz* is a landmark publication pulling together both what is known and what is hypothesized and posing questions for future research, the volume indirectly suggests another kind of desideratum for the success of that research. Extensive as the literature now is on the Samarkand paintings (and, of course, many of the other important bodies of material unearthed along the Silk Road), much of it is not readily accessible. Markus Mode and the Franco-Uzbek Archaeological Mission headed by Frantz Grenet are to be commended for their publication of materials on the Internet. Imagine the benefit were they to coordinate efforts and begin systematically to post to one or the other website digital copies of the scholarly literature that is often published in books or journals unavailable in most libraries. Surely it is in the interest of everyone that permissions be

---

obtained for copyrighted and uncopyrighted material to be reproduced in electronic form. That would truly be, to use Grenet's words, 'excellent news.'

If the Samarkand murals have in certain ways been 'well known' and preserved starting with their discovery over a quarter century ago, the excavations at Bamiyan and surveys in southern Tibet reported on in this issue may be news to many and highlight the ongoing threats to the preservation of cultural artifacts. The threats come from various directions — illegal excavation, deliberate destruction for religious or other reasons, indifference, the pressures of 'modern development.' In too many places — be they in the Middle East, Latin America, or Southeast Asia — there is no adequate security even at sites which have long been recognized as having substantial historical value. It is hard to know where the balance lies between discovery and charting of new sites (as is being done in the project reported on by Karl Ryavec in Tibet) and protection. As the Sichuan archaeologist Huo Wei noted in a presentation I heard on this Tibetan material a year ago, when the archaeologists returned to at least one of the sites a year after the first discovery, the looters had already been at work.

When we think back over the history of archaeology on the Silk Road, there is, of course, the well-flogged issue of whether the 'foreign devils' should be castigated for carting off to Europe so many objects, defacing Buddhist cave sites, etc. There also are the unintended consequences of excavations such as Aurel Stein's, where once the word got around locally about the possible value of the artifacts, local entrepreneurs went to work on what had been covered up and left behind. By the time C. P. Skrine, the British Consul in Kashgar in 1922-24 arrived in Khotan, he could purchase sizeable chunks of Buddhist murals from a shop that

was stocked with them. Skrine reported how one of these 'excavators,' looking for objects to sell, entered a previously unknown small temple in the desert only to have the walls and their murals disintegrate around him.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to come up with a balance sheet here regarding whether the world would have more or less of the evidence of historic remains had not many of them been removed by outsiders whose motives may have been altruistic and scholarly or imperialistic. We cannot know, for example, whether the remains at Kizyl or Miran would have been better preserved for posterity had the German expeditions in the first instance, and Stein in the second never been there. Even though now, unlike then, proper legal frameworks are in place to protect cultural patrimony and prevent it from being illegally removed, enforcement is lax.

Such controversies plague the issue of the antiquities of Afghanistan, where since 1922, with a hiatus in the Civil War and Taliban years, the Delegation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) has so fruitfully worked. Perhaps more would have been left for future generations to discover had material excavated prior to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century not ended up in the Kabul Museum for the shelling of the Afghan Civil War and the iconoclastic Taliban to destroy. But who was to know? The world knows the grievous tale about the wanton destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. The world should know and support better the resumption of serious archaeological investigations in Afghanistan. Would that there also be some way to check the inroads made by ongoing illegal excavations, whose pits pockmark the landscapes of many of the better known sites. Field work by DAFA at Bamiyan, now headed by Zemaryalai Tarzi, is already advancing substantially what we know about that former royal

residence and Buddhist monastic center, beyond what we knew while the Buddhas still stood. Read Professor Tarzi's report below: although phrased very cautiously, it encourages us to think that even more significant results may soon emerge.

This brings me to the second book about which I promised to write here: *Afghanistan: the Rediscovered Treasures*, the catalogue for a remarkable exhibition at the Musée Guimet in Paris until April 30 (which then will travel to the United States). The treasures begin chronologically with the Fullol hoard, which dates from about four millennia ago. The largest portion of the objects come from the much later sites: Ai Khanum on the Amu Darya, Tillia Tepe, and Begram. Many years of the French-directed excavations under DAFA were devoted to Ai Khanum and Begram. A Soviet-Afghan team headed by Victor Sarianidi and Zemaryalai Tarzi, excavated the spectacular hoard of gold from Tillia Tepe in the late 1970s just prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A well-illustrated catalogue of the Tillia Tepe finds appeared in Russian in 1983. Until the objects from these various excavations resurfaced in 2003, they had been assumed lost during the Civil War and period of Taliban rule. In fact they had been locked away safely in vaults of the Central Bank. The exhibition provides a rare opportunity to see these treasures and to support the reconstruction of the Kabul Museum, which will benefit from the proceeds of the tour.

Apart from its superb illustration in color of 228 objects and numerous historic photographs and drawings from the excavations, the catalogue contains a number of valuable essays, starting with that by Omar Khan Massoudy, the Director of the National Museum in Kabul, laying out the recent and tragic history of his institution and its collections. Several of the leading French specialists — Pierre

---

Cambon, Jean-François Jarrige (who is also Director of the Musée Guimet), Paul Bernard and Véronique Schiltz — bring readers up to date on the significance of the four major excavations and the objects they uncovered. The finds at Fullol, discussed by Jarrige, are important as evidence concerning the 'Bactro-Margiana' cultural complex of ca. 2200-1800 BCE, which connects to the better-known centers of culture in Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley. Bernard reviews the importance of Ai Khanum as an outpost of Hellenic culture. Visitors to the exhibition will have the opportunity to see the well-known inscription commemorating the visit there by Clearchos, a disciple of Aristotle, and quoting the Delphic code of civic conduct. Véronique Schiltz's essay on the Tillia Tepe finds, discusses the yet unresolved issues of their chronology and places the objects in the context of other early nomad art. A appendix by Thomas Calligaro on the technical analysis of the jewels set into the Tillia Tepe gold demonstrates the broad geographical sweep encompassed by the trade networks, from northeast Africa to Tibet and Ceylon to the Baltic. And Chambon waxes lyrical about the eclecticism and artistic imagination of the steppe nomads ('un monde nomade éclectique et ouvert, qui joue de la curiosité pour des mondes différents et cultive la beauté,' p. 296). Not that we need to be reminded, but this is precisely what we expect in the 'crossroads' of civilizations which later would produce an analogous syncretism of cultures depicted in the paintings of Afrasiab.

In the most substantial of the essays, Chambon reviews carefully the arguments about the chronology of the Begram finds. Here we seem to have a conundrum equivalent to that regarding the paintings at Afrasiab, where there is much scholarly disagreement and apparently little likelihood in the

near future of a definitive solution. Among his many interesting observations are ones on the degree to which some of the results of the French excavations were inadequately or incompletely published. He concludes that there is a cultural unity in the finds at Begram, Tillia Tepe and Sirkap (one of the most important settlements at Taxila in northern Pakistan), with a strong indication that the Begram 'treasure' is thereby pre-Kushan in date, either 'Indo-Greek' or Parthian. While there are some early indications of Buddhism, this is not yet the era of the refined development of Gandharan Buddhist art under the Kushans. The Begram ivories, with their stylistic diversity and enthusiastic evocations of the pleasures of life are well known. There are bronzes of striking refinement. The glass is nothing short of miraculous — enameled beakers with their scenes of the hunt, fish-shaped flagons, two cobalt blue blown glass vases...

I would like to think that in my lifetime I might visit a restored Kabul Museum and see these treasures there, under conditions which might ensure that they be preserved safely to educate new generations of Afghans about the wonders of their heritage. As it is, the objects are arguably better known in the West than in their original home. The 'News from Ancient Afghanistan,' to quote the title of Nicholas Sims-Williams' article below, in fact can be surprisingly good. That there can even be such an exhibition now in Paris is, I suppose, some reason for hope in the face of the grim realities which, alas, are regular features in the news from *modern* Afghanistan.

Daniel Waugh  
dwaugh@u.washington.edu

## References

*Afghanistan: les trésors retrouvés. Collections du musée national de Kaboul.* Pierre Cambon and Jean-

François Jarrige, eds. Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006.

Matteo Compareti and Étienne de la Vaissière, eds. *Royal Nauruz in Samarkand: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Venice on the Pre-Islamic Paintings at Afrasiab.* *Revista degli studi orientali*, N. S., Vol. LXXVIII, Suppl. no. 1. Pisa; Roma: Accademia editoriale, 2006.

## Note

1. See Skrine's field diary, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, MSS EurF 154/39, p. 47, April 4, 1924, under the heading 'New stupa found by Abbas Khan at Khadalik.'

---

## A Hundred Years of Dunhuang, 1907-2007

An international conference co-sponsored by The British Academy, The British Museum and The British Library, will be held at all three venues, Thursday 17 to Saturday 19 May 2007.

In May 1907, the Daoist caretaker of the Dunhuang Buddhist caves in northwest China revealed to Aurel Stein FBA a hidden library in Cave 17. The library had been sealed a thousand years earlier and was packed with documents, manuscripts and paintings. This discovery revolutionised 'oriental studies' throughout the world in the early 20th century. In this centenary year we seek (1) to reflect on the discovery and (2) to review its impact on 'oriental studies,' including the writing and re-writing of history and (3) to discuss directions for the future. The rich finds from Dunhuang have implications beyond 'oriental studies' and need to be understood as part of world culture. Details of the program may be found at <<http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2007/dunhuang/prog.html>>, where there is a link to a pre-registration form.



---

# News from Ancient Afghanistan

**Nicholas Sims-Williams**  
*SOAS, University of London*

Years of war and instability have led to profound damage to Afghanistan's cultural heritage, with the accidental or deliberate destruction of ancient monuments and works of art, the looting of the Kabul museum and the pillaging of sites such as Ai Khanum by treasure-seekers. At the same time, a huge number of remarkable and important antiquities have come to light, some no doubt as the result of unofficial digging, others perhaps chance finds resulting from the displacement of peoples to remote mountain refuges. These discoveries include documents from all periods of Afghan history, of which I would like to mention a few outstanding examples (in approximately chronological order):

- A group of nearly fifty Aramaic documents from the archive of the last Achaemenian satrap of Bactria, ca. 353-324 BCE. The documents date from the reigns of Artaxerxes III, Darius III, and Alexander the Great — who is referred to exactly as if he were a legitimate successor of the Achaemenids. This discovery was made public by Shaul Shaked in recent lectures in Paris (Shaked 2004); an edition by Shaked and Joseph Naveh is in press.
- An administrative document in Greek, a tax receipt dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Graeco-Bactrian king Antimakhos I, perhaps equivalent to 170 BCE. This document, supposedly found at Sangcharak in north central Afghanistan and now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was first published in 1994 and most recently edited by Claude Rapin (1996).<sup>1</sup>
- An acrostic inscription from the Kandahar region in Greek verse

with Homeric allusions (Bernard et al. 2004). This inscription of about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE tells the life-story of Sophytos son of Naratos, who lost his fortune and then made another as a merchant in distant lands before returning home to the delight of his friends. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this inscription is that the author of these highly sophisticated Greek verses seems to have been of Indian ancestry, as his name and patronymic suggest.

- Next in chronological order (15 CE) is a Kharoshti reliquary inscription of Vijayamitra, king of Apraca in NW India, which contains a synchronism between the Azes era, usually identified with the Vikrama era of 58/57 BCE,<sup>2</sup> and a previously unknown 'Indo-Greek era' beginning 128 years earlier (Salomon 2005). According to Richard Salomon many well-known inscriptions with dates in the 200s and 300s can plausibly be assigned to this era of 186/5 BCE. On this reckoning, for example, the trilingual Dasht-i Nawur inscription of Vima I, the grandfather of Kanishka I, may be dated to about 93 CE.
- Though the document itself is not a new discovery, I must mention here a Sanskrit astrological text, the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujiddhvaja, which also contains a synchronism, this time between the Saka era of 78 CE and the Kushan era. According to the interpretation recently proposed by Harry Falk (2001; 2004), the synchronism establishes that the famous 'era of Kanishka' began in 127 CE. If this is accepted, it must rank as one of the most important of recent discoveries, since the date of Kanishka is a

fundamental point in the chronology of ancient Afghanistan and India.

- The Bactrian inscription of Rabatak, discovered in 1993 and first published by Joe Cribb and myself in 1996,<sup>3</sup> which describes events of the first year of Kanishka and traces his genealogy back to his great-grandfather Kujula Kadphises.
- A group of about 150 Bactrian documents from northern Afghanistan, which date from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (to be discussed below).
- The Bactrian inscription of Tang-i Safedak (Lee and Sims-Williams 2003), which recounts the foundation — or re-foundation — of a stupa in Yakaolang district, Bamiyan province, probably in 714 CE, demonstrating the persistence of Buddhism in Afghanistan well into the Islamic period.
- Finally, I may mention a group of Arabic administrative documents, chiefly tax records, dated between 138 and 160 AH (= 755-777 CE). These documents, which will soon be published by Geoffrey Khan of Cambridge University, mention some of the same families and individuals as the latest Bactrian documents and seem to form part of the same archive.

I do not have time today to talk about all of these new documents, which cover almost all periods of Afghan history from the Achaemenian period to early Islamic times. Instead, I shall restrict myself to those that I know best, the Bactrian letters and documents which have come to light during the past fifteen years and which appear to have been written in northern Afghanistan during the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. I first reported on these discoveries in 1996, in a paper published in various forms in English, French, Russian and Japanese.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the number of Bactrian documents has continued to rise and now stands at more than 150. These

documents are written in a cursive script derived from Greek, mostly on parchment or leather, occasionally on cloth or wood. Apart from a couple of Buddhist texts, the find consists of legal documents, letters, and economic documents. Many of them are dated according to an era whose starting-point was almost certainly the accession of Ardashir I, the first emperor of the Sasanian dynasty of Iran, in 223 CE.<sup>5</sup>

Although we have no reliable information on the discovery of the Bactrian documents, it seems from their contents that most of them derive from just one or two sources. In previous presentations I have described in some detail those which appear to come from the kingdom of Rōb (now Rui) in the northern Hindukush, some of which were written in places which can be identified: Rob itself; Samingan; Malr or Madr; Kah (modern Kahmard); and Warnu, which may correspond to modern Qunduz, mediaeval Warwaliz [Fig. 1].<sup>6</sup> On this occasion I would like to concentrate on a group of seven or eight recently-discovered documents which originate in a slightly different area, the province of Gōzgān (Gūzgān, Jūzjān), to the northwest of Rob.<sup>7</sup> These are all legal documents: a deed of sale, a loan contract, a deed of gift, a receipt, and several documents regarding the settlement of disputes. Both in their physical form and in their formulation they are very similar to documents of the same type from the kingdom of Rob. Almost all of them refer to the rulers of Guzgan and to places in Guzgan; all but one are dated, and the dates fall within a period of 65 years beginning in the year 436 of the local era, i.e. 658/9 CE.

Luckily we possess a number of other sources for the history and geography of Guzgan during this period. Amongst the geographical works one must give pride of place to the *Hudūd al-'Ālam* 'The Regions of the World,' a Persian work of the late 10th century,

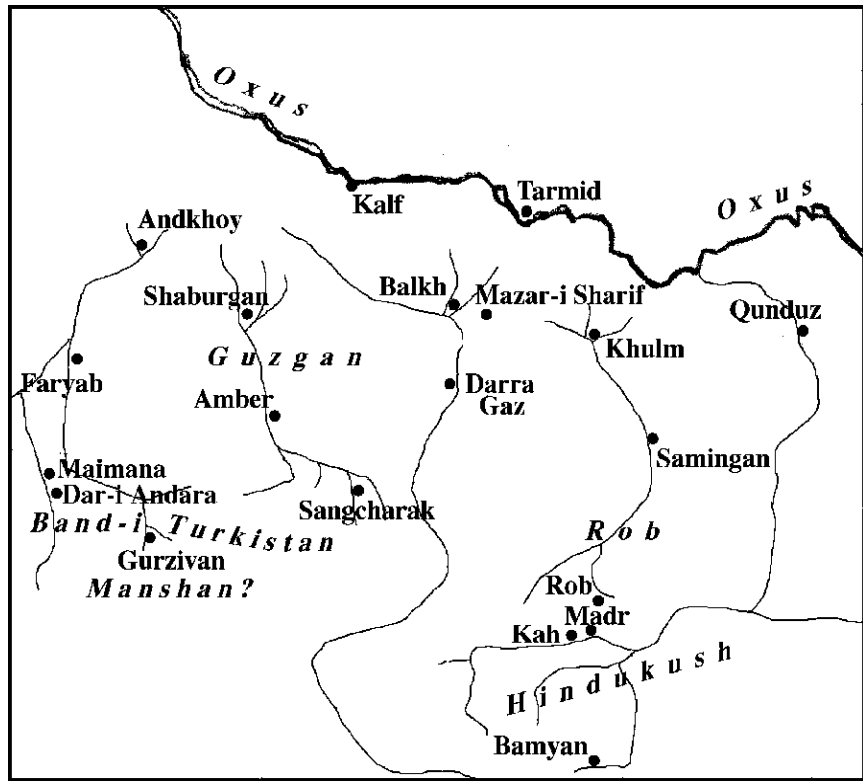


Fig. 1. Northern Afghanistan

which was written at the behest of a ruler of Guzgan. As Edmund Bosworth has written (in Minorsky 1970, p. viii), the anonymous author of this book 'was essentially an armchair geographer,' but 'the description of Guzgan and its dependencies ..., the one section of the book which must depend on personal observation and experience' is exceptionally detailed and authoritative. Another important source is the history of Tabari, who recounts various episodes in the history of Guzgan, some of them in considerable detail. Tabari's account of Guzgan begins with the first Arab invasion in the year 32 of the hijra, i.e. 652/3 CE, just a few years before the earliest of this group of Bactrian documents. Chinese sources too preserve some relevant information, since Guzgan came under the nominal suzerainty of the Tang dynasty after the final defeat of the Western Turks in the late 650s. Finally, we have at least one other source which is actually contemporary with these

documents: a series of coins bearing Bactrian legends which include the name and titles of a ruler named 'Zhudad Gozgan, king of Gar'; they also name the city of Amber, presumably as a mint-town [Fig. 2, next page].

The city of Amber, nowadays Sar-i Pul, is well known from Islamic sources. One of the new Bactrian documents, a poorly-preserved loan-contract, was written in Amber [Fig. 3, next page]. Both the lender and the borrower are identified as 'market-traders of Amber,' which fits well with the description of Amber in the *Hudud* as a 'residence of merchants and the market of Balkh.'

Another of our documents contains the statement that it was written 'in Sozargan, in Kalf, in the city which they call Astof, in the presence of the god Waksh, the king of gods, whom they worship in Stof.' I cannot identify the names Sozargan and Astof, but it seems likely that Kalf is the Kalif or Kelif of the Islamic geographers.



Fig. 2. Coin of Zhulad Gozgan, King of Gar (obverse and reverse).  
Photo copyright © 2007 Nicholas Sims-Williams.

Kalif lay on the River Oxus, which formed the northern border of Guzgan; it was an important crossing-point, since it lay on the road from Balkh to Bukhara and Nasaf. Nowadays the principal settlement named Kelif is that on the north bank, in Turkmenistan, but there is also a village named Kelif or Kelif on the Afghan side. In mediaeval times Kalif was counted as occupying both banks of the Oxus, being likened to Baghdad in this respect.

No less than five of our documents were written either in Gaz or in Lizg. These seem to be, in effect, two designations for the same place. Probably Lizg, which means 'the fortress,' was originally an epithet used to describe a city whose proper name was Gaz. A couple of documents provide some details which may help to locate the fortress of Gaz. One is said to have been written 'in Gaz, at Wanindan, the court of the fortress,' which suggests that the ruler of Guzgan may have held court at Gaz.

Another refers to 'Gaz, in the district of Andar.' The *Hudud* gives the name Dar-i Andara to a military camp where the ruler of Guzgan had his residence; it is described as being at the foot of the mountains, close to the town of Jahudhan (modern Maymana). If the name Dar-i Andara means 'the court of Andara,' it may well be the place which once bore the name Gaz and which our documents refer to as 'the court of the fortress' ... 'in the district of Andar.'<sup>8</sup>

I turn now from the place-names mentioned in our documents to the personal names

and titles, in particular, those of the rulers of Guzgan.

At least three rulers of Guzgan are named in the documents: Kanag Gozgan, Skag Gozgan and Yan Gozagan. I take it that Kanag, Skag and Yan are the personal names of the ruler and that the name of the country, Goz(a)gan, is here used as a kind of family or dynastic name for its rulers. A similar usage is attested in Tabari, who (unfortunately for us) never names the ruler of Guzgan but refers to him only as 'al-Juzjani' or 'al-Juzjan b. al-Juzjan.'

Kanag Gozgan is mentioned in the earliest document, a purchase-contract dated in 658/9 CE, in which both the vendors and the purchasers are described as 'servants of Kanag Gozgan.' The name of Skag Gozgan occurs in a document of 674/5, which specifies the payment of a fine for breach of contract to 'the treasury of Skag Gozgan.' Finally, the name of Yan Gozagan is found in the very last document of this group, dated in 722/3. This is a declaration intended to settle a dispute between a number of persons who are all described as 'inhabitants of Lizag' and 'servants of Yan Gozagan, king of Gar.'

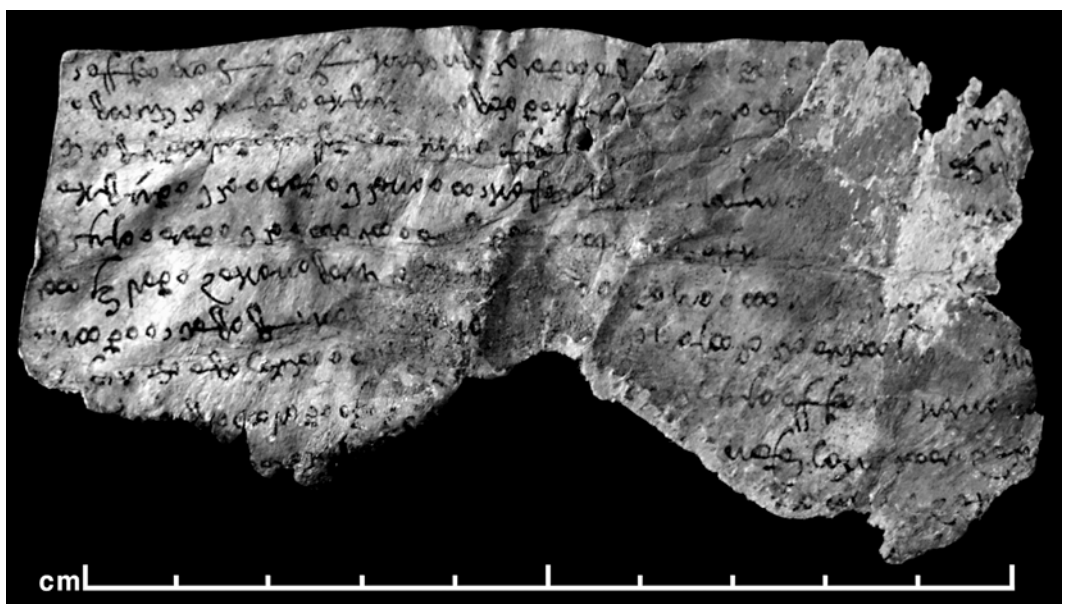


Fig. 3. Bactrian loan-contract written in Amber (Sar-i Pul).  
Photograph copyright © 2007 Nicholas Sims-Williams.



---

The significance of the title 'king of Gar' is obscure. I have not been able to identify a specific place named Gar; possibly it is merely the Bactrian word for 'mountain.' The same title reappears on the coins mentioned earlier, which bear the name of yet another member of this dynasty: 'Zhulad Gozgan, king of Gar' or 'king of the mountain country.' These coins bears dates in Pahlavi, but they are practically illegible. Doubts about the era used add a further element of uncertainty, so that we cannot at present be sure of Zhulad's place in the sequence of rulers. As it happens, the name Zhulad Gozgan also occurs in a document of 705/6, a deed of gift issued by the 'lord of Lizg' in favour of three brothers, 'Babay, Abgas and Zhulad Gozgan, sons of Kanag,' whom he describes as 'my own servants.' It is not very likely that the three brothers are the sons of Kanag Gozgan, the ruler named 47 years earlier in the document of 658/9. Even if they were, one would hardly expect that Zhulad, the last-named and therefore presumably the youngest of the three, would have become king. It seems more likely that this Zhulad and his father Kanag belong to later generations and perhaps to a junior branch of the royal family and that they were named after their illustrious forebears, the rulers Kanag Gozgan and Zhulad Gozgan.

To judge by their names, the kings of this dynasty were of Iranian stock. Although they seem to have ruled Guzman without interruption throughout the period covered by our documents, it is clear that they did not wield absolute power. During the early part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Guzman was tributary to the *khaghan* of the Western Turks. This must still have been the case at the time of the earliest document, a purchase-contract dated in 658/9, which refers specifically to the 'khaghan's tax.' No such tax is mentioned in the other documents, all of which date from the period after the Western Turks

were finally defeated by the Tang at the very end of the 650s. However, China was too far away for the Tang to exercise effective power in this region, and our documents do not contain any direct reference to the Chinese. So far as I can see, the only trace of Chinese influence is to be found a receipt which ends with the phrase 'this is your *tsak* [𐰽𐰺𐰭],' using a Chinese word for 'document' ([𐰽𐰺𐰭]ce/*chai* [Early Middle Chinese — *tʂəijk/tʂe:jk* ]) in a context where earlier documents of the same type use the native Bactrian word *tsirg* '(proof of) receipt.'

The real nature of political power in this region is clarified by a letter to the Chinese emperor preserved in an 11<sup>th</sup> century encyclopaedia. The author of the letter was a Turkish prince named Puluo, a younger brother of the hereditary ruler of Tokharistan, who had his principal residence at Qunduz, to the east of Balkh. Puluo was sent to live at the Tang court in 705. In this letter, which was written in 718, he mentions the king of Guzman as one of the '212 kings of various kingdoms, governors and prefects' who recognized the authority of his brother, the ruler of Tokharistan; at the same time he emphasizes the loyalty of his brother to the Tang. This state of affairs is described as having existed since the time of his grandfather, that is, one may presume, during the sixty years or so since the Chinese destroyed the power of the Western Turks and incorporated their dominions into their own administrative framework: 'Since the time of my grandfather and my father up to that of the present ruler, the kings of Tokharistan have always been the overlords of these various countries ... The rulers of Tokharistan, from several generations ago up to the present, have been sincerely devoted to the great Tang dynasty; they have come constantly to pay homage and to bring tribute.'

A Bactrian document dated in 692/3 CE refers to two noblemen

or officials with Turkish names and titles. One is named as 'Ser the Turk, *tudun* of Gaz,' the other as 'lord Magatur Bukla.' It is interesting to note that the title *tudun* is that given by the *khaghan* of the Western Turks to the officer whom he sent to oversee the local rulers who had submitted to him and to control the payment of taxes. In the light of Puluo's letter one might guess that the *tudun* here carries out a similar function on behalf of the ruler of Tokharistan, the immediate overlord of the rulers of Guzman. Even more interesting is the name of 'Lord Magatur Bukla.' Magatur is no doubt a variant of the Turkish *baghatur*, attested as a personal name and later as a term for a 'hero' or 'warrior,' the source of Persian *bahādur* and Russian *bogatyř*. As for Bukla [βοκολαυο], I am grateful to Yutaka Yoshida for the very plausible suggestion that this name may be identified with the name transcribed into Chinese as Puluo (僕羅 [Early Middle Chinese *bawk-la* ]). As Prof. Yoshida points out, it is even possible that the Bukla in the Bactrian document of 692/3 is the very same person as the Turkish prince who arrived in China thirteen years later, the author of the letter to the Chinese emperor.

The historical information preserved in the Bactrian documents is of course fragmentary, but I hope that these few examples will be enough to demonstrate that they contain fascinating and important information, which can be supplemented and elucidated with the help of historical and geographical literature in Chinese, Persian and other languages. Together with the Aramaic, Greek and Arabic documents from Afghanistan which I referred to at the beginning of this paper, not to mention data from archaeology, numismatics, art history and other disciplines, they promise to make possible a substantially new synthesis of the early history of Afghanistan.



---

[This article is part of a lecture given at the University of Washington (Seattle) on November 10, 2005, in a series co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and the Simpson Center for the Humanities, with additional support from several of the university's departments. References have been updated.]

## About the Author

**Nicholas Sims-Williams** is currently Research Professor of Iranian and Central Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His main interest is the medieval languages of Eastern Iran and Central Asia, especially Sogdian and Bactrian, and the history of their speakers. He has just completed the second volume of his edition of the recently-discovered Bactrian documents (to appear in 2007), and is now working on a project on Bactrian chronology.

## References

Bernard et al. 2004  
Paul Bernard, Georges-Jean Pinault & Georges Rougemont. "Deux nouvelles inscriptions grecques de l'Asie centrale." *Journal des savants*, 2004/2: 227-356.

de Blois forthcoming  
François de Blois. "Du nouveau sur la chronologie bactrienne post-hellénistique: l'ère de 223/224 ap. J.-C." To appear in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, séance du 2 juin 2006.

Cribb 2005  
Joe Cribb. "The Greek kingdom of Bactria, its coinage and its collapse." In: Osmund Bopearachchi and Marie-Françoise Bousac, eds. *Afghanistan: Ancien carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest*. Turnhout (Belgium), 2005: 207-25.

Falk 2001  
Harry Falk. "The yuga of Sphujiddhvaja and the era of the Kusânas." *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, 7 (2001): 121-36.

Falk 2004  
Harry Falk. "The Kaniska era in Gupta records." *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, 10 (2004): 167-76.

Lee and Sims-Williams 2003  
Jonathan Lee and Nicholas Sims-Williams. "The antiquities and inscription of Tang-i Safedak." *Silk Road Art & Archaeology*, 9 (2003): 159-84.

Minorsky 1970  
Vladimir Minorsky. *Hudûd al-'Âlam*, 2nd ed. Clifford E. Bosworth, ed. London, 1970.

Rapin 1996  
Claude Rapin. "Nouvelles observations sur le parchemin gréco-bactrien d'Asangôrna." *Topoi* 6 (1996): 458-69.

Salomon 2005  
Richard Salomon. "The Indo-Greek era of 186/5 B.C. in a Buddhist reliquary inscription." In: Osmund Bopearachchi and Marie-Françoise Bousac, eds. *Afghanistan: Ancien carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest*. Turnhout (Belgium), 2005: 359-401.

Sims-Williams 1997a  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. *New light on ancient Afghanistan: the decipherment of Bactrian*. London, 1997.

Sims-Williams 1997b  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "Nouveaux documents sur l'histoire et la langue de la Bactriane." *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, 1996 [1997]: 633-54.

Sims-Williams 1997c  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "Novye baktriiskie dokumenty." *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 1997/3: 3-10.

Sims-Williams 1997d  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "New finds from ancient Afghanistan" (in

Japanese). *Oriente*, 16 (1997): 3-17.

Sims-Williams 1998  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "Further notes on the Bactrian inscription of Rabatak." In: *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies, Part 1, Old and Middle Iranian Studies*. Wiesbaden, 1998: 79-92.

Sims-Williams 2001  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. *Bactrian documents from northern Afghanistan I: Legal and economic documents*. Oxford, 2000 [2001]. (Vol. II: Letters and Buddhist Texts, forthcoming 2007.)

Sims-Williams 2004  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "Nouveaux documents bactriens du Guzgan." *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2002 [2004]: 1047-58.

Sims-Williams 2005  
Nicholas Sims-Williams. "Bactrian legal documents from 7th- and 8th-century Guzgan." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 15 (2001 [2005]): 9-29.

Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996  
Nicholas Sims-Williams and Joe Cribb. "A new Bactrian inscription of Kanishka the Great." *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, 4 ([1995-]1996): 75-142.

Shaked 2004  
Shaul Shaked. *Le satrape de Bactriane et son gouverneur: Documents araméens du IVe s. avant notre ère provenant de Bactriane*. Paris, 2004.

## Notes

1. For references to the earlier editions see Rapin 1996, 458 n. 1.
2. For a different view see Cribb 2005, 213-14.
3. Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996; revised edition in Sims-Williams 1998. In 2003 I finally had the opportunity to visit Kabul and to

examine the inscription with my own eyes; as a result, a third edition is now in preparation.

4. Sims-Williams 1997a-d; see also <http://www.gengo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~hkum/bactrian.html>. Sims-Williams 2001 is the first volume of a comprehensive edition of the documents.

5. This important point has been established by François de Blois (see de Blois forthcoming).

6. I previously accepted the alternative identification of Warnu (Greek Aornos) as Khulm, but the newly-discovered Aramaic documents name both Khulm and Warnu, almost certainly implying that they are different cities.

7. This group of documents is now edited and translated in Sims-Williams 2005. For a more detailed version of the following discussion see Sims-Williams 2004 (in French), but the dates of the documents given there now need to be corrected.

8. Some other indications might lead one to seek Gaz further to the east, in the mountains to the south of Balkh. Sources from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries mention here a valley and a village called Darra Gaz, which may be identical with the Gazzah or Jazzah of early Islamic sources. Jazzah is frequently mentioned in Tabari's account of the events of the year 119 of the hijra (i.e. 737 CE), when the Turgesh *khaghan* was defeated in battle by Asad b. 'Abdallâh. From Tabari it appears that Jazzah was a fortified place with a garrison; it was counted as belonging to Juzjan, but it is clear from the itineraries of the combatants that it lay in the extreme east of Juzjan, close to Balkh. It seems unlikely to me that such an outlying fortress would have been a major administrative centre, or that the ruler of Guzgan would have held court there; but I have to admit that this is the only place within the confines of Guzgan which is definitely known to have borne the name of Gaz.

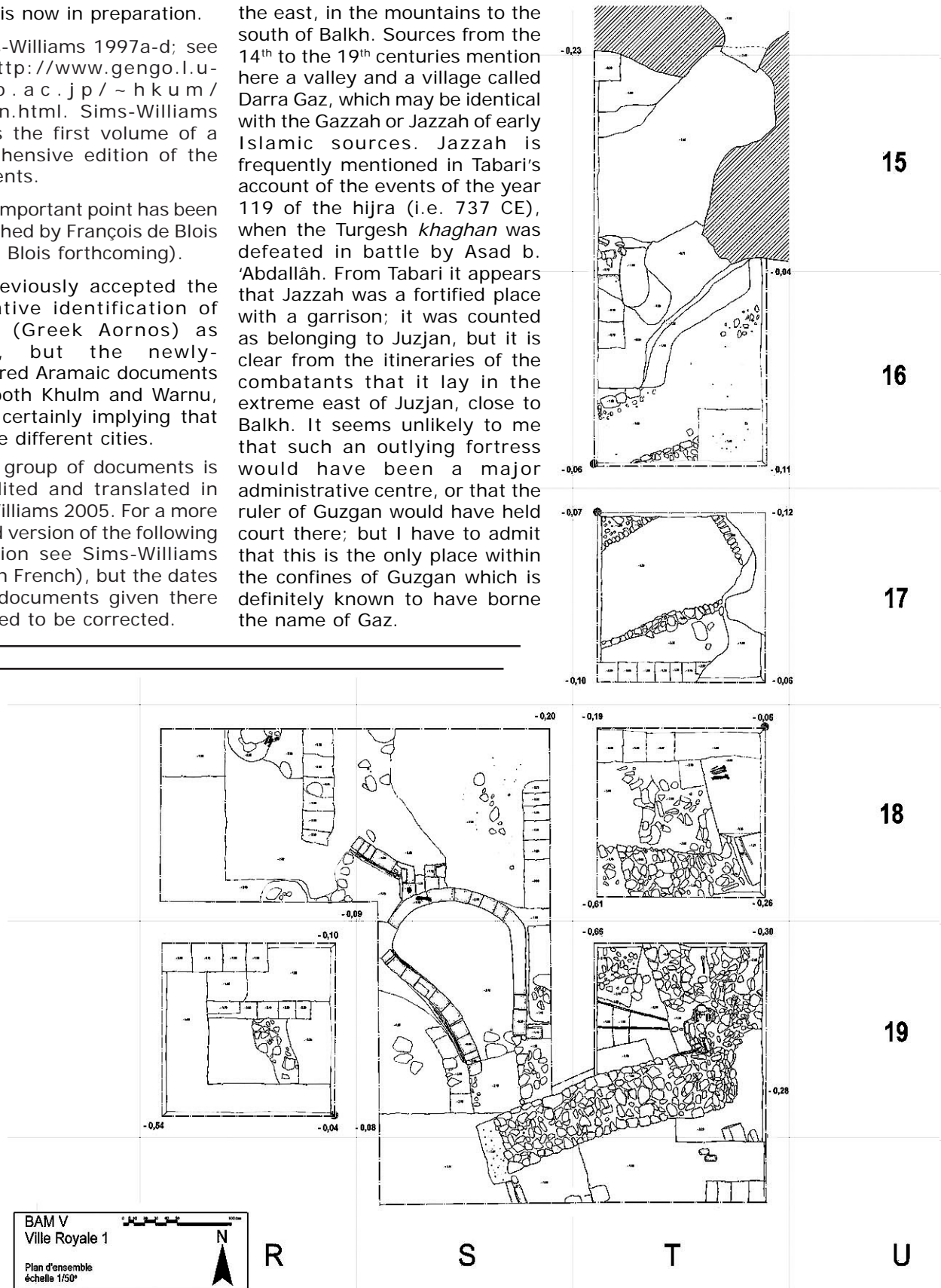


Fig. 1. Bamiyan VR1= Royal City site no.1, overall plan of excavations. Copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

# Bamiyan 2006: The Fifth Excavation Campaign of Prof. Tarzi's Mission

**Zemaryalai Tarzi**

*The Marc Bloch II University, Strasbourg*

This was the fifth consecutive year that I led the French survey and excavation mission at Bamiyan. We have to excavate in unusual and difficult conditions due to the fact that we work on private property rented for the purpose of excavation but restored to its original cultivated state at the end of each archaeological season. Another significant reason why we may not be able to complete our plans is the necessity of often having to circumvent houses, walls, gardens and, most of the time, irrigation systems. Recognizing the incoherence shown in the drawings of the site, I decided in 2006 to excavate the monuments separately, even though I may later attempt to link their relationships to one another in a larger context. Amongst the monuments I chose are the chapel (sanctuary) found around Stupa no. 2 on the 'Eastern Monastery' site (MO in the text), and Stupa no. 1, which is the largest in Bamiyan and measures approximately 30 m on each side. We are just in the beginning phases of exploration of the other sites such as MR (Monastery of the ancient or former king), VR1 (Royal City site no. 1) and VR2 (Royal City site no. 2). The results will produce significant information on the history and archaeology of Bamiyan.

## Choice of Sites

We have proceeded on the following sites, from West to East in the Bamiyan Valley, as part of a plan established in 2001:

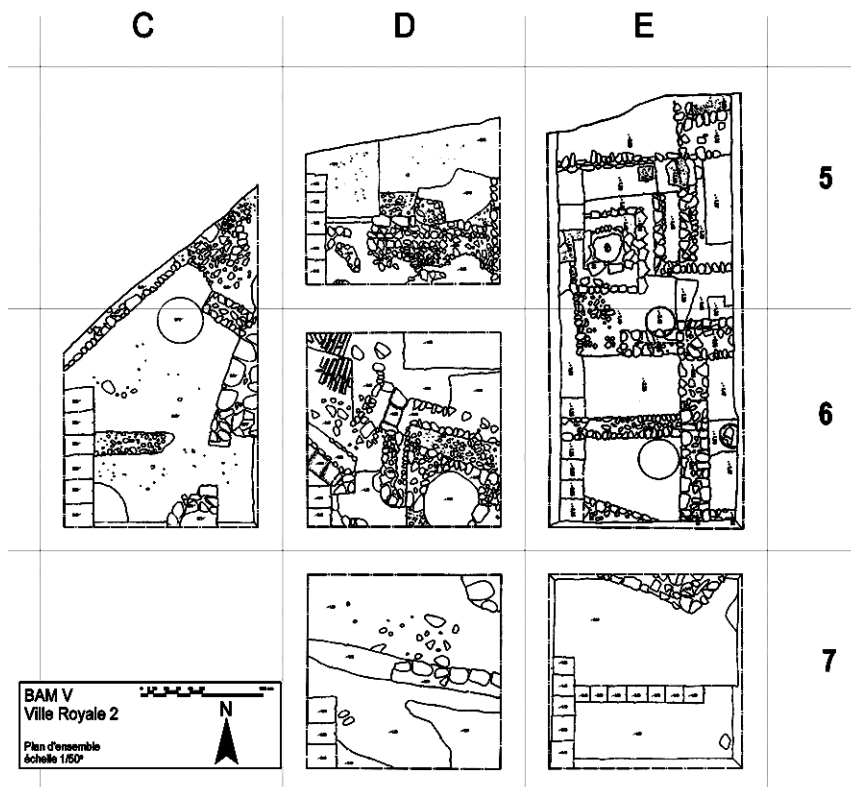
*I. The Royal City site no. 1 = VR1 (1<sup>st</sup> campaign of excavations) [Fig. 1, facing page]*

The site is located on the right side (north) of the Kabul-Band-e-Amir road where the Valley of Tchehelsotun emerges and more precisely at the western extremity of the ancient Bamiyan bazaar, today in ruins. As we anticipated, we could note how the cave architecture of the ancient city progressively gave way to built architecture. In 2006 we opened the site. In 2007 we will build on the success of the first season and continue our work there.

*II. The Royal City site no. 2 = VR2 (1<sup>st</sup> campaign of excavations) [Fig. 2]*

The site is located to the west of the niche of the 55 m Buddha statue, almost at the foot of the cliff itself. There we unearthed a remarkable ensemble of glass-blowing or glazing workshops. Next year we will investigate this site further as well as sectors within the royal city or its neighboring sectors.

We owe to Alfred Foucher (1923, 1925, 1942-1947) the initial identification of the Bamiyan royal city, notwithstanding subsequent and unfounded contrary propositions made by M. L. Carter (1985). Furthermore, as indicated by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (Julien 1853, Beal 1983, Watters 1904 and Pelliot in Godard et al. 1928), the royal city, Bamiyan's capital, was built up against the cliff and crossed the valley. Its wall was 6-7 li long. Today the ruins indeed still abut the Great Cliff and spread east to west from Sorkh Qol (west of the



*Fig. 2. Bamiyan VR2 = Royal City site no. 2, excavation plan for the northern part of the site. Copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.*





Fig. 3. Bamiyan, MO = site of Eastern Monastery, excavation site 2005-2006.  
Copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

large 55 m Buddha) to the west of Sang Tchaspan. In this way the city was built on both slopes of the Tchehelsotun valley. Our excavations, although as yet limited in scope, have added significantly to our knowledge of the city.

*III. The Monastery of the preceding king = MR (The 2<sup>nd</sup> campaign of excavations did not take place because of landmines.)*

We ran a series of surveys in 2005 (1<sup>st</sup> campaign) while moving around without apparent danger. However in 2006 this site, located between the two dynamited Buddha statues, had been entirely and deliberately littered with landmines, as indicated by several hundred white and red rocks. Where did the mines suddenly come from? The question remains curiously unanswered. In 2007, we will excavate there (2<sup>nd</sup> campaign) according to our pre-established plan.

*IV. The Eastern Monastery = MO (5<sup>th</sup> campaign) [Figs. 3, 10]*

We have been excavating on this site since 2002 (Tarzi 2003, 2004 a-c, 2005). It is located to the south of the eastern part of the Great Cliff and to the southeast of the niche of the 38

m Buddha. In 2006 we opened four sites, extended our excavations around the chapel of Stupa no. 2, freed Stupa no. 4, unearthed the northern side of the Great Stupa no. 1, and began excavations in the 'clover field' to the northwest of Stupa no. 1, practically at the foot of the Great Cliff.



Fig. 4. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 1 (VR 1), excavations on the southern side of the site, view from the northwest towards the southeast. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



**Site I. The Excavations of VR1**  
[Fig. 4, facing page]

Our goal was to excavate a pre-Islamic part of the Bamiyan royal city at the limit of the cave and open air built habitat. We had a very complicated negotiation with the owner of the chosen emplacement, an ancient *serail* (this word designates a caravan serail, not a Turkish palace reserved to women), located to the west of the ancient and now destroyed bazaar. Thanks to the support of the Bamiyan Government and of the national security we were able to come to an agreement. We excavated a dozen squares 4m x 4m. We began with square T15 by grotto A, to the north, and squares T16-T19 to the south. The site was enlarged to the west with squares R18, S18, R19, S19 and the beginning of squares S20 and T20.

From north to south, it was very interesting to observe in the ruins the transformation of cave habitats into built habitats. One can note that the *serail*, probably established around the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, revealed a more or less level terrain of which the archaeological layers T15, T16 and T17 were in chaos. We found a broad mix of Turk pre-Islamic (6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Ghurid (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries) ceramics, and some Ghaznavid, Khwarazmshahi and modern ceramics. Further to the south the stratigraphy becomes more logical.

Without going into too much detail one can observe that there are three distinct periods. The first is Turk pre-Islamic, just prior to the Ghaznevid; the second period — of the Ghaznevids and the Khwarazmshahs — is short, and the site for a time was abandoned. The most flourishing Muslim period for this site followed, that of the Ghurids, who established their second capital at Bamiyan. Following the Mongol hiatus — the brutal passage of Chingis Khan and the near total destruction of all habitats, as seen in the layers



Fig. 5. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 2 (VR 2), view of the northern part of the excavations from the Great Cliff. Copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

of ashes in the excavations — Bamiyan became a township of no importance and was repeatedly occupied by invaders from all over. In squares S19, T18 and T19 we found the corner section of the base of a fortification. There is plenty of documentation for the study of this Muslim period of Bamiyan (Baker and Allchin 1991; Barthold 1913, 1977; Bosworth 1961, 1965, 1973, 1996; Elliot 1867-1877; Gardin 1957, etc). However more research in depth should be done. While our contribution has produced some satisfying results, the excavation of this site is not finished.

The excavated area may well encompass the Bamiyan ceramic studios, judging from the finds of a significant number of small clay rods used by potters in their kilns. Our knowledge of ceramics at Bamiyan had previously been limited to a series of ceramic shards, most found on the surface, with the exception of some found through the surveys on the sites of Zohak and Gholghola cities. The research undertaken prior to ours was the work of famous specialists, Gardin (1957), Gardin and Lyonnet (1987, and in Le Berre et al. 1987b) and finally Baker and Allchin (1991), but should, however, be confirmed now through excavations such as ours. We hope that our

excavations will shed more definitive light on the subject, in view of our discovery of a beautiful and significant series of ceramics. In addition, we found in the Muslim layers a large number of funerary pits (containing bones from bodies which had been left exposed to the air) that had been inserted in the constructions or against the walls. As Charles Masson had already noticed in the region of Jalalabad and as we had also noted in several of our excavations in Hadda, the practice of inhumation of bodies increasingly becomes the norm in Afghanistan following the Mongol period (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries).

**Site II. The Excavations of VR2**  
[Fig. 5]

The location of this site is to the west of the niche of the 55 m Buddha by Sorkh Qol, practically at the foot of the cliff. We chose this location in the hope of finding the fortified walls of the pre-Islamic city of Bamiyan. We were close. Instead of finding the southern face of the fortified wall, we discovered constructions built against it. A careful study of our 1967 photographs shows that this area was used as a cultivated field, irrigated by a canal which is dry today. A few years later it became a pond or reservoir. The layer of



Fig. 6. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 2 (VR 2), general view of the glass or ceramics workshop. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

loess (pure clay) at the bottom of the pond is visible in our trenches. We excavated in two places: A, the first sector, to the north and at the immediate south of the fortified wall; B, the second sector to the southwest of the first emplacement of a tower also visible in our 1967 photograph.

#### A - Glass workshops (?) [Figs. 6, 7]

In this sector we excavated eight 4m x4m squares, C5-C7, D5-D7 and E5-E7. The chronology remains the same as for VR1. However the positioning of the structures does not change: they superimpose one another from the end of the Turk period until the end of the Ghurid period. Two large ensembles were excavated. Because all of the constructions have not yet been fully unearthed it is difficult to establish the relationship of one to the other. Nevertheless we are certain that here is an ensemble of workshops where the kilns (vertical), such as small size *tandoors*, most likely served as smithies or hearths

rather than ceramic kilns. We found a grinding device *in situ*, with a fixed (inferior) circular millstone and a mobile superior millstone. The floor with its remains of glass paste (*pâte de verre*) and glass shards originating from the making of vases suggest that these were workshops for glass manufacture. There were as well two ovens or smithies and two storage pits.

Until now no serious study has been done regarding the industry of glassmaking during the Muslim period in Afghanistan and specifically in Bamiyan. Readers may wish to refer to my research (Tarzi 2001, 97-99) concerning this craft in northwestern India and its relationship with China and the Muslim world.

#### B – The Sorkh Qol tower

Based on my own recollections and 1967 photographs, the two Sorkh Qol towers reminded me of sites in Chinese Turkestan. I thought then they might belong to the fortifications of the royal city, the pre-Islamic capital of Bamiyan. Since these two towers now have been destroyed, I wanted to find their locations in order to excavate their foundations and establish their relationship to the wall that connected them. Nothing is left of the first tower located to the northwest. Its materials were totally reprocessed for the construction of a house which is now inhabited. The site of the second tower, larger than the first and further to the southeast, remains unoccupied. We were told by the inhabitants that, prior to its final destruction, all

that was left were the west and south walls and the southwest corner of this tower, which had obviously been built on a square plan. In addition, during its long period of abandonment, it had been used to store hay and food for cattle; its plan had undergone such degradation that it had almost become circular. A further complication for this investigation is the fact Sorkh Qol is located in the path of streams which flow into the valley on the weather's whim. Thus, as we observed, a major storm of 2005 had devastated the irrigation channels in the area.

The raw bricks fallen from the two walls had the following dimensions: 38x20x6 cm, 33x20x6 cm, 31x19x6 cm, 27x20x6 cm. We discovered that the foundations of the tower were placed on a sandy ground in which we found many glazed shards dating from the Muslim period. Near the eastern part of the tower deeper excavations (1.40 m) unearthed only the foundation seat of a wall, aligned northeast to southwest, 0.70 m in width, cut in its center by the foundation seat of a second wall, itself positioned east-west and 0.40 m in width. The two walls formed angles of 25° and 65°. At the same level of these walls but further to the northwest of our excavation, we discovered a more or less rectangular tiled gutter. It is probable that we are in the courtyard of a large construction. Unfortunately, given



Fig. 7. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 2 (VR 2), glass workshop, detail, showing lower part of a millstone. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.





Fig. 8. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Gallery A9. Clay molding with polychrome, representing a sitting Buddha in meditation. H 43 cm, W 29 cm at shoulder. Inv. no. BAM. V.06.1. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi

rapid erosion due to the streams, excavations in 2007 may bring only minor results.

#### Site IV. The Excavations at MO

Since 2002 we have been excavating the site of the Eastern Monastery referred to in our text as MO. At the end of each excavation campaign we re-bury the remains on site under several meters of soil. The first two weeks of excavations at MO were devoted to the costly and difficult task of reopening squares previously excavated. We enlarged Gallery A9 in which we had previously found many sculptures, largely composed of clay moldings with polychrome intact. Our discoveries this year however were more modest than in previous years: a clay statue representing a sitting Buddha in meditation [Fig. 8], the bottom part of a standing clay statue [Fig. 9] *in situ*, and many more fragments. Our efforts here were concentrated on the restoration of previously un-earthed moldings too fragile to be moved. We asked the DAFA

(Delegation d'Archéologie Française en Afghanistan) to send us their restoration expert to demonstrate the use of new polymerized glass-based products for the consolidation of clay. In the same central sector of Massif A, we expanded our excavation squares around Stupa no. 2 in order to acquire a good and easy read of the chapel's plan that surrounds it. First we had to unearth the western side of the stupa and pursue excavations on the northwestern sides. During this series of excavations we discovered a clay votive stupa to the west (Stupa no. 5), two other clay votive stupas (Stupas nos. 6-7), and a series of benches on which presumably had stood 22 large clay Buddha statues. Of this number, 14 pairs of feet and 5



Fig. 9. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO). Bottom part of clay Buddha statue along W wall of Gallery A9. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

isolated feet are preserved *in situ*; some are preserved to the knees.

Chapel A (= Caitya A), around Stupa no. 2 [Figs. 10; 11, 12 next page]

In order for us to acquire a better understanding of the architecture



Fig. 10. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO). Detail of excavation plan, showing Caitya A. Copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



Fig. 11. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Gallery A9. View of chapel (caitya) from E with Stupa no.2 in its center. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



Fig. 12. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), NE corner of courtyard of Stupa no.2, with pairs of feet on benches. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

of the site and ensembles in the Bamiyan Valley, we first studied this monastic complex — a caitya, a sort of a large cruciform chapel placed in a square plan — separately from its surrounding context of the other constructions of the MO. This large caitya was communicating with Gallery A9 to the east, which in turn gave access to a similar yet probably smaller complex that had in its center Stupa no. 4 (see below). To the north, it communicated with other galleries and corridors. To the south, it was delimited by an attached portico where we found significant traces of fire (cf. 2005 report). Excavation of the MO1 square gave us more precise information on the western wall of this ensemble.

Caitya A is surrounded by four walls, 2.15 m thick. At each of the

four corners is a cell 3,50m x 3,50m square (cells N, NE, SW, SE). A corridor parallel to the 'enclosing' wall joined each cell to the next one. These four corner cells and their communicating corridors had their inner sides defined by enormous blocks of masonry similar to the double towers of the Tall-i Takht fortifications (Stronach 1978) and the Nee Royal city (Ghirshman 1946). These double massifs were also reinforced by the corners of the caitya's central courtyard. The

width of the corridor was reduced at the level of the masonry blocks, thus creating large pilasters against the enclosing wall. We did not find any traces of fire or a significant amount of compacted clay on the floor of the corridor(s) or of the four corner cells, which brings us to conclude that their covering was not made out of wood. In this case one can suppose that each of the four corner cells was roofed by a cupola resting on squinches and the corridors by barrel vaults.

The nearly square central courtyard measured 9.50 m on a side. In its center is Stupa no. 2, also with a square plan and measuring 5.25 m. Therefore the circumambulation path (*pradak-sinaptha*) did not exceed 2.20 m in width.

In the middle of each side of the courtyards each arm of the 'cross' is a structure like an 'iwān' opening on Stupa no. 2 (iwān N, S, E and W). Logic would suggest that each of these iwāns be covered with a barrel vault. However signs of fire at the level where there were niches to support beams and joists prove that each iwān was covered with a wooden roof and had an attached portico. The Pradak-sinapatha around Stupa no. 2 initially had a schist or slated limestone tiled floor, which subsequently was covered with a



Fig. 13. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no. 2 from SW. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



layer of lime stucco, as also was Stupa no. 2. Finally, probably between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the floor was completely covered by a layer of clay which has retained the traces of fire.

*Stupa no. 2* [Fig. 13, facing page]

In 2005 we excavated three sides of this stupa. Two (east and south) were unearthed completely and the north partially. In 2006 we completed excavation of the monument. Its form and its stucco coating links it to the stupas of Gandhara and more specifically of Hadda, the location of the first stupa to be found to the north of the Hindu Kush. It consists of a platform on a plinth, a torus, scotia or cavetto of the 'classical' type of Hadda, and on each side, seven pilasters, two of which are located at the corners. Each pilaster is on a molded base composed of a plinth, a torus, and cavetto or hollow molding. The shafts of the pilasters are without any decoration. The capitals are of the Corinthian type with a row of polylobed acanthus leaves hanging on the abacus [Fig. 14].



*Fig. 14. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), one of the pilasters of stupa no. 2. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.*

In the lower levels then, there is no difference from the Gandhara



*Fig. 15. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), a part of the excavated relics from Stupa no. 2. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.*

stupas. At the upper level though, there is something new: on each side of the stupa are three relatively deep niches on top of molded bases, flanked by pilasters or columns whose circular, molded bases are like ionic bases. The few architectonic elements still left on this row are very interesting indeed, but will require further investigation in order to give a complete description.

Despite the deterioration of its exterior, Stupa no. 2 had not been disturbed by illegal excavation in the past. So we excavated its center vertically, in the hope of discovering a reliquary and its relics. We were absolutely surprised at the finds. In the southeastern corner of the stupa, within the compact masonry, about 0.50 cm from the top of the edifice, we found a bronze bell, a bronze earring with screw and chiseled rings and a thin gold circular plaque in the shape of a ring [Fig. 15]. At the same depth towards the northwest, we discovered ivory beads, fine stones and gems, and further to the west we found 5 more bronze rings, one of which seems to be a ring with a bulge for a bezel, a small bronze coin, etc. Our discoveries ceased at about 1.60 cm, almost at the ground level of Stupa no. 2. At that level we also found several fragments of very small gold petals and a small and very thin bronze coin broken into several

unidentifiable fragments. We might interpret these findings in the following way. It may be that the persons in charge of the restoration of this stupa, between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, left the relics in disarray. Such has been noted previously, for example in Butkara (Facenna 1980-1981), where relics were divided and placed behind the niches of a monument instead of inside a reliquary. This was exactly the case with our Stupa no. 4 to which we shall return later. In conclusion I should note that, while we attempted to reach a deeper floor such as that attained in A6 in 2003, we excavated Stupa no. 2 only to a depth of 550 cm. As our workers became increasingly endangered in the narrowing trench of the excavation, we had to cease our activities.

*Stupas nos. 3, 5-7, around Stupa no. 2*

*Stupa no. 3* [Fig. 16]

Stupa no. 3 was partially unearthed last year in the eastern



*Fig. 16. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), NW corner of votive Stupa no. 3, detail. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.*

'iwan' or arm of the cross of Chapel A. In 2006 we unearthed its eastern side and its eastern and northern stairs. It is a miniaturized clay votive stupa, preserved on two levels only, since it was partially crushed due to the collapse of the walls and the roof. Its plan is square, but with its four stairs and their landings it has a cruciform shape. In some places it preserves its entire painted relief decoration, little columns, modillions etc. Its north-south length measures 196 cm and its east-west length measures 199 cm. Our stupa resembles the clay votive stupas of Tape Sardar at Ghazni (Taddei 1985). There is a difference, however, in that the stupa in Bamiyan is not placed in a lotus flower as is the stupa at Ghazni. Stupa no. 3 of Bamiyan is similar to the stupas of the kind represented on the baked clay plaques of Kashmir (Kak 1933) and the painted murals of the Bamiyan grottos. Prof. Taddei had dated the second period of Tape Sardar from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE (Taddei 1968). The destruction of Bamiyan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE is historically attested. It is therefore reasonable to date the construction of Stupa no. 3 of the MO of Bamiyan between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century CE.

#### Stupa no. 5 [Fig. 17]

This stupa is the twin of Stupa no. 3, almost of the same dimensions, better preserved in its form but less so in its miniaturized relief decoration. It is to be noted that some panels on the façade were adorned with images: seated figures in a nimbus at the lower level and standing figures in a nimbus at the upper level, possibly images of the Buddha in miniature and made in the pure tradition of the Bamiyan artistic school.

#### Stupas nos. 6 and 7 [Fig. 18]

These two clay votive stupas were built on an irregular square plan. One side of the square measures approximately 115 cm. Two levels



Fig. 17. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), clay votive Stupa No. 5, located W of Stupa no. 2. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



Fig. 18. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), clay votive Stupas nos. 6 and 7, located N of Stupa no. 2. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

were preserved; the higher levels, as with Stupas nos. 3 and 5, were completely crushed by the collapse of the walls and roofs. Their lower levels consist of a platform on a plinth and an unadorned scotia. Their upper levels have the beginning of a square body adorned by pilasters which have disintegrated. This type of stupa is often found in Hadda where it is usually stuccoed.

#### Stupa no. 4 [Fig. 19]

We anticipated we would find a stupa in this location (squares NE B20 and NE C20). In order to reach it we had to demolish a wall separating two fields. With the consent of the fields' owners, MM. Bahauddin and Khan Mohammad we proceeded without damaging a very old poplar tree. We were disappointed with the results of the excavation because the stupa had been extensively plundered in the past. Was this act of vandalism, dating probably from the Ghurid period, due to the salvaging of the construction stone or the limestone coating, or was this systematic destruction aimed at recovering the reliquary hidden



Fig. 19. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no. 4. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.





Fig. 20. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no. 4. Reliquary in the shape of a small globular pot. H 5.7 cm, Dia. 5.5 cm. Inv. no. BAM, V.06-187. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

behind the niches of the monument? Indeed, in confirmation of our second hypothesis, we found at 200 cm a reliquary [Fig. 20]. This little reliquary — a small globular pot, 7 cm high with a 5.5 cm maximum



Fig. 21. Contents of the reliquary BAM, V.06-187: beads, agate, ivory and two small pearls. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

diameter — contained 5 beads, 2 of which were totally decomposed marine pearls and one of which was an ochre-orange soft stone in a disk shape with a hole in its center [Fig. 21]. The lid sealing the relics was made of a type of decomposed mastic; we will know more about

its origin when the results come back from the laboratory.

#### Stupa no. 1 (western survey)

This survey was done differently from our usual square pattern. The goal was to find the north-west corner of the Great Stupa no. 1 in order to get the exact measurement of one side of the square plan for this monument. We established that the northern side measures 29-30 m. This very large survey of more than 10 m in length improves our understanding of this monument and the site of MO [Fig. 22]. In addition the excavation revealed the western landing of the northern stairs of the stupa [Fig. 23]. Two other discoveries should be noted:

- It looks as though in its first state of decoration the stupa had a stucco coating.
- It is also important to explain why around the base of the stupa there is a considerable thickness in the layer left by the fire. This layer is composed of burnt clay fragments, burnt wood and many iron or bronze



Fig. 23. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no.1, the west landing of the northern stairs of the stupa. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

Fig. 22. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no. 1, large survey to the northwest of the monument. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.



Fig. 24. Bamiyan Eastern Monastery (MO), Stupa no. 1: traces of fire, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

fragments [Fig. 24]. It is quite possible that Stupa no. 1 was encircled by a wooden railing (*vedika* or *pado-vedika*) supported in some places by clay masonry.

#### *Northwest Sector (excavations in the clover field)*

For several years I wanted to open a site that would extend the northern limits of the MO to the north and at the foot of the Great Cliff. Reaching an agreement with the owners took a long time, but we eventually were able to open the site on August 13<sup>th</sup>. Our guest of honor, Roland Bezenval, Director of the DAFA, broke the ground with the first shovelful of dirt. It became a very large survey, 25m x 2.5m, that crossed the field south to north. Due to the collapse of the cliff in the northern part of the survey, there one has to go at least 7 m deep to obtain results. Given the size of the task we will have to pursue the operation in 2007.

### **The Chronology**

#### *The pre-Islamic period*

In 2003 and 2004 we discovered the two great periods of Bamiyan around Stupa no. 1 (BN, BS, BW and A6 and A8). I had initially estimated the first period to be of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. However, thanks to the discovery in 2004 of ceramics and of an Indian coin

date corresponded to that of the construction of the 55 m Buddha statue and with the restoration of the ensemble of the 38 m Buddha statue. It is to this second period that I attribute the realization and extension of the 'Eastern Monastery' (MO), in which we hope to find the 1000-foot-long reclining Buddha statue mentioned by Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. The carbon 14 analysis of vegetal and animal fibers from the coating of the 38 m Buddha statue done by the German team in charge of the protection of the fragments of the two large statues supports my proposed dating, viz.: the second great period of Bamiyan begins in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. When we reach the level of the fire of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, I will ask the Germans for more analysis. What is certain is that the moldings unearthed in Gallery A9 date from before the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. I have carried out a careful comparison with the clay moldings of Hadda on the site of Tape Shotor (Tarzi 1976) and of Tape Sardar in Ghazni — excavated by my colleagues and friends Profs. Maurizio Taddei (1968, 1981, 1985) and Giovanni Verardi (1981, 1989). Based on stylistic and technical criteria in the analysis of the pre-molded clay curls, I am able to date these to the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Because the history of Central Asia is yet inadequately known and no dates are absolutely

with a hill and three arches, the date can be pushed back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (Rapson 1908; Allan 1936; Mitchiner 1976). I dated the second period to the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE in my first thesis on Bamiyan (Tarzi 1977). This

certain we have to proceed with caution when attempting to explain a chronological hypothesis. The only written information available to us is in the Chinese and Muslim sources that shed some light on the second great period of Bamiyan. It is our excavation data which enable us to determine the first great period and place it between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, with the possibility that we can extend this period back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. Of particular interest in this chronology is to learn what caused a general degradation involving the profanation of many statues. One could attribute this destruction to the Sasanians in the time of Shapur or to the Hephthalites.

We know for certain that the hiatus between the first and second periods is rather large and translates into an accumulation of soil and embankment 1 m – 1.5 m thick. Also certain is that the second great period of Bamiyan corresponds to its seizure by the western Turks. Indeed whether the central power at Bamiyan is Hephthalite or local (Tajik), politics of Central Asia at the time were governed by the Western Turks, the same ones who asked Xuanzang to go through Balkh and Bamiyan, two cities that were not on the initial itinerary of the Chinese pilgrim.

#### *The ceramics and chronological precision*

The study of the ceramics we excavated remains to be done. Yet the discovery of shards found in the site of MO along its long wall V, in survey N (north), has already produced valuable information (Tarzi 2005). These pre-Islamic ceramics, which we will detail later, consist of two lots: one from the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and another from the 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Indeed it is to Ya'qub bin Laith as-Saffar in 871 CE that I attribute the end of life at the MO, the destruction of Bamiyan in general



and of the statues and their temples. Further study of the first group of ceramics needs to be done. The second lot is composed of shards generally similar to the ones found by Le Berre in the fortified castles of the Hindukush and published by Jean-Claude Gardin and Bertille Lyonnet (in Le Berre 1987a, b) and Piers Baker (1991).

It is with too much caution that these ceramics are termed 'turco-hephthalite' and attributed both to the Hephthalites and the Turks. Hephthalite ceramics, generally made in the Kushan tradition, are difficult to identify. In some regions they seem to be inspired by the Kushano-Sasanids, and in some cases can be included in the Begram III group (Kuwayama 1991). In Hadda, for example, nothing allows us to distinguish between the Kushan and Hephthalite ceramics. On the other hand, there the Turk ceramics are obvious and specific. These hand-made ceramics have been very well analyzed by Gardin and Lyonnet, both from the standpoint of techniques of shaping and polishing and the use of under-glazes, and from the standpoint of the symbols and motifs in the painted designs, which reflect a connection with the peoples of the steppes. These ceramics appear at a later date (second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE) at a time when the Hephthalites



Fig. 25. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 2 (VR 2), Turk ceramic (BAM. V. 06. "tower"—140 cm). Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

had been politically undermined by the fleeting coalition of the Sasanians and Western Turks [Fig. 25]. However, in our research regarding Bamiyan in particular and more generally Central Asia to the northwest of India, we find a discrepancy between the hand-made Turk ceramics and the dozen or so surviving issues of Hephthalite coinage.

We do not yet have definitive answers regarding the Hephthalites and their art. However, there is no reason to doubt the well founded hypotheses of my colleagues Roman Ghirshman (1948), Robert Göbl (1967) and Shoshin Kuwayama (1989, 2002). We should continue to study closely the Hephthalites taking into consideration the Tape Sardar (Ghazni) Italian excavations, the 2004 and 2005 Afghan excavations at Khwadja Safa and Tape Narendj in Kabul, and my own excavations in Hadda. To these we should add the DAFA excavations at Tape Alghata near the village of Dadal (Myadan-Wardak province) and my excavations in Bamiyan. Sadly there has also been a series of illegal excavation in Khawar, Messe Aynak of Logar or Khord in Kabul, and many other sites. Our duty is to provide documentation so that specialists will be able to study and interpret our database objectively. Until our future excavations uncover Hephthalite coins we will continue to attribute the pre-Islamic art of Bamiyan to the post-Kushan period, including the Kidarites, Hephthalites and Turks.

#### The Islamic Period

##### The ceramic and numismatic evidence

##### A. Ceramics

The transition between the pre-Islamic and Islamic period is representative of the history of the Bamiyan Valley. One should take into account the writings of

historians such as Yaqubi and Tabari, who describe the gradual shift from one religion to another among the local population. Such study is necessary to understand why we find in our excavations Turk ceramics of the early Islamic period. Despite attacks by the Samanids and the Ghaznevids, several Sardars (Sar = lords, wrongly labeled by the Arabs as Sher) managed to stand up to them and remain loyal to their religion, Buddhism, until 987 CE. This is probably why the ceramics of Bamiyan during the Samanid and Ghaznevid periods occupy a modest place [Fig. 26] among our finds. On the other hand the Ghurid period is amply represented in its ceramic forms



Fig. 26. Bamiyan Royal City site no. 1 (VR 1), ceramic with painted geometric and vegetal decoration in relief in the Muslim layers (12<sup>th</sup> century CE?) (BAM. V. 06. MS18). Photograph copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

and their new decorations, all of which are very important regarding the history of the region [Figs. 27-29, next page]. Once more thanks to historical texts, especially the *Tabakat-i Nasiri* of Dzuzdjani (Dzuzdjani 1963-1964; Raverty 1881), and studies by Bosworth (1961) and Barthold (1977), we learn that Bamiyan served as a capital for the Shansabani kings of Ghur, starting with Fakhr al-Din Mas'ud (1163 CE) and ending with Djalal al-Din 'Ali (1213 CE) and 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad. We know that the city of Gholghola also served as capital. The royal Ghurid city extended over a kilometer from the south where today's Bamiyan



Fig. 27. BAM.V.06.MS20-160 cm.

**Bamiyan Royal City site no. 1 (VR 1), ceramics with polychrome of the Muslim period.** Photographs copyright © 2006 DAFA; Zemaryalai Tarzi.

Fig. 28. BAM.V.06.MS20-160 cm (12<sup>th</sup> century CE?).



airport is to the edge of the plateau on the north and was called Tape Almas. Gholghola was its citadel. This city and its citadel were taken first by the Khwarazmshahs (1215 CE) and later by Chingis Khan.

According to Gardin (1957), the Khwarazmshahi and Ghurid ceramics originating from Gholghola city were the product of an imported Iranian workshop, whose brief duration lasted from approximately 1175 into the 13th century CE. As Gardin also noted, these ceramics were not limited



Fig. 29. BAM.V.06.MS20-160 cm (12<sup>th</sup> century CE?).

to the city of Gholghola. We have to investigate further why there is such an abundance of Muslim ceramics in Bamiyan on several levels and in many places in the valley. Once we finish our photo processing for the excavations of 2006, we will be able to tackle this question more seriously.

#### B. Numismatic evidence

To date we have not cleaned the coins we found. In 2006 we found no Greek or Kushan coins. We found several thin Muslim bronze coins

probably from the Ghaznevid period, a few Ghurid coins, and even a few from the modern period such as the reign of the former king of Afghanistan Mohammad Zaher Shah al Motawakelellalah.

#### Conclusion

It is a challenge to draw a conclusion from this scientific patchwork without being able to include carbon 14 analysis or other laboratory test results. Thanks to the discovery of ceramics and

coins in our excavations of 2003-2005, we know that the beginning of Bamiyan was around the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. The discovery of a bronze coin depicting the image of a Greco-Bactrian king (first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) is very important despite the fact that it was not found in the earliest layers of Bamiyan. Further investigations will be necessary. Our excavations, especially of the Turk ceramics, have shed light on the end of the Buddhist period of the valley around the 9<sup>th</sup> century and on the relationship between this pre-Islamic period and the beginning of the Islamic period. One can say that this phase of archaeological uncertainty concerning the transition between the two great periods is a reflection of the history of Bamiyan, when its Buddhist sovereigns converted to Islam and its monuments devoted to the cult of Sakyamuni were brutally destroyed by Ya'qub bin Laith as-Saffar in the 9th century CE. Nonetheless, Buddhism would last still until the Ghaznevid period.

Further study of the Muslim ceramics and the study of the numismatic evidence will enable us to establish more precise dates. We have found so far Ghaznevid, Khwarazmshahi and Ghurid coins dating from the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE right up to the abandonment and destruction of the site by Chingis Khan. Once we have cleaned these coins it will be possible to date with more

---

precision the stratigraphy, which will then make possible the use of the glazed ceramics as an indispensable tool in identifying the archaeological layers we encounter in Bamiyan.

### About the Author

Born in 1939 in Kabul, Professor **Zemaryalai Tarzi** completed his studies under the supervision of Professor Daniel Schlumberger, in the process obtaining three PhDs. From 1973 to 1979, he was Director General of Archaeology and Preservation of Historical Monuments of Afghanistan. He later directed the excavations in Bamiyan and Hadda on the sites of Tape Shotor and Tape Tope Kalan. Exiled to France in 1979, he is currently Professor of Eastern Archaeology at the Marc Bloch II University of Strasbourg, France, and will go to Kabul University in early March 2007 to teach their archaeology Master's students in Farsi. He is Director for the French Archaeological Missions for the Surveys and Excavations of Bamiyan, the mission having been co-funded by the National Geographic Society since 2004. Prof. Tarzi is the author of some seventy-five articles and books. He is also President for the Association for the Protection of Afghan Archaeology, Inc. (San Francisco, California), whose managing director and founder is his daughter Nadia Tarzi. For more information please contact [info@apaa.info](mailto:info@apaa.info) and/or visit <http://www.apaa.info>.

### References

Allan 1936  
John Allan. *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*. London: British Museum, 1936 (reprinted 1967).  
Allchin 1972  
F. Raymond Allchin. "A cruciform reliquary from Shaikhan Dheri." In: Pratapaditya Pal, ed. *Aspects of Indian Art. Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles*

*County Museum of Art, October, 1970*. Leiden: Brill, 1972: 1-26.

Allchin and Hammond 1978  
F. Raymond Allchin and Norman Hammond, eds. *The Archaeology of Afghanistan from Earliest Times to the Timurid period*. London; New York: Academic Press, 1978.

Abu al-Fazl 1939  
Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak. The A'in-i Akbari [by] Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami. Henry Blochmann, tr. Douglas C. Phillott, ed. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised. Bibliotheca Indica, N.S., Work no. 61, Vol. 1. Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1939.

Ball 1982  
Warwick Ball, avec la collaboration de Jean-Claude Gardin. *Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan. Catalogue des sites archéologiques d'Afghanistan*. 2 tt. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1982.

Baker and Allchin 1991  
Piers H. B. Baker and F. Raymond Allchin. *Shar-i Zohak and the History of the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan*. Ancient India and Iran Trust Series, No. 1. Oxford: BAR, 1991.

Barthold 1913  
Wilhelm Barthold (V. V. Bartol'd). "Bamiyan." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1913): 643-4.

Barthold 1977  
Wilhelm Barthold (V. V. Bartol'd). *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, N. S., 5 (1<sup>e</sup> ed. 1928), London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1977 (reprint of revised and expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1968; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1928).

Barthold and Allchin 1960  
Wilhelm Barthold and F. Raymond Allchin. "Bamiyan." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1960): 1009-1010.

Barthoux 1930  
Jules J. Barthoux. *Les fouilles de Hadda*. T. 3. *Figures et figurines,*

*album photographique*. Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan [Mém. DAFA], 4. Paris: G. van Oest, 1930.

Beal 1983  
Samuel Beal, tr. *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Translated from the Chinese of Hsien Tsiang AD 629. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1983 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1884).

Beal 1888  
Samuel Beal, tr. *Life of Hsien-tsiang by the Shamans Hwui li and Yen-tsung, with a preface containing an account of the works of I-Tsing*. London: Trübner, 1888.

Breshna 1972  
A. G. Breshna. "A Glance at the History of Fine Arts in Afghanistan." *Afghanistan* 25/3 (1972): 11-21.

Bivar 1971  
A. D. H. Bivar. "Hayatila." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., Vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1971): 303-304

Bivar 1998  
A. D. H. Bivar. "The Sasanian Princes at Bamiyan." in: Vesta S. Curtis, et al. eds. *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia: New Light on the Parthians and Sasanian Empires*. London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 1998: 103-110.

Bosworth 1961  
Clifford E. Bosworth. "The early Islamic history of Ghur." *Central Asiatic Journal*, 6 (1961): 116-133.

Bosworth 1965  
Clifford E. Bosworth. "Ghurids." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., Vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1965): 1099-1104.

Bosworth 1973  
Clifford E. Bosworth. *The Ghaznavids, Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994-1040*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beirut, 1973 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1963).

Bosworth 1996  
Clifford E. Bosworth. *Les dynasties*



- musulmanes*, trad. de Yves Thoraval. Paris, 1996 (original ed.: *The Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Handbook*. Edinburgh, 1967)
- Carter 1985  
M. L. Carter. "Hsüan-tsang and the Colossal Buddhas at Bamiyan." In: A. K. Narain, ed. *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*. New Delhi: Kanak, 1985: 117-125
- Chavannes 1903  
Edouard Chavannes. *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux*. Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1903
- Dupree 1958  
Louis Dupree. *Shamshir Ghar: Historic Cave Site in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan*. Anthropological Papers of The American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 46, pt. 2. New York, 1958.
- Dupree and Kolb 1972  
Louis Dupree and Charles C. Kolb. "Ceramics from Aq Kupruk, Darra-i-Kur and Hazar Gusfand." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, N.S., 62/4 (1972): 33-42 (reprinted in *Afghanistan*, 27/4 (1974): 45-69).
- Dupree 1967  
Nancy Hatch Dupree. *The Valley of Bamiyan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Kabul: Afghan Tourist Organization, 1967.
- Dzuzdjani 1963-1964  
Dzuzdjani. *Tabakat-i Nasiri*. New ed. by Abd al-Hayy Habibi. 2 vols. Kabul, 1342-43/1963-64.
- Elliot 1869  
Henry M. Elliot. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. John Dowson, ed. 8 vols. London: Trübner, 1867-1877.
- Faccenna 1980-1981  
Domenico Faccenna. *Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan) 1956-1962*. Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo Oriente, Centro studi e scavi archeologici in Asia, Reports and memoirs, Vol. 3, pts. 1-3. Rome: IsMEO, 1980. Vol. 3, pts. 4-5/2. Rome: IsMEO, 1981.
- Foucher 1923  
Alfred Foucher. "Rapport A. Foucher" [A letter addressed to E. Senant about the antiquities of Bamiyan]. *Journal Asiatique*, avril-juin 1923: 354-368.
- Foucher 1925  
Alfred Foucher. "Notes sur l'itinéraire de Hiuan-tsang en Afghanistan." In: *Etudes Asiatiques publiées à l'occasion du vingt-cinquième anniversaire de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient par ses membres et ses collaborateurs*. T. I. Publications de l'École française d'Extrême Orient, t. 19. Paris: G. Van Oest, 1925: 257-284.
- Foucher 1942-1947  
Alfred Foucher. *La vieille Route de l'Inde de Bactres à Taxila*. 2 tt. Mém. DAFA, 1. Paris: Les Éditions d'art et d'histoire, 1942-1947.
- Fussmann 1974  
Gérard Fussman. "Nouvelle découverte à Bamiyan." *Afghanistan*, 27/2 (1974): 57-73.
- Gardin 1957  
Jean-Claude Gardin. "La poterie de Bamiyan." *Ras Orientalis*, 2 (1957): 227-245.
- Gardin and Lyonnet 1987  
Jean-Claude Gardin and Bertille Lyonnet. "Céramique et Chronologie." In: *Le Berre* 1987a: 96-120.
- Hambis 1967  
Louis Hambis, ed. *Mission Paul Pelliot*. T. III. *Douldour-Aqour et Soubachi*, Planches. Paris, 1967.
- Ghirshman 1946  
Roman Ghirshman. *Begram. Recherches archéologiques et historiques sur les Kouchans*. Mém. DAFA, 12. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1946.
- Ghirshman 1948  
Roman Ghirshman. *Les Chionites-Hephtalites*. Mém. DAFA, 13. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1948.
- Göbl 1967  
Robert Göbl. *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien*, 4 vols., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967.
- Godard et al. 1928  
André Godard, Y. Godard, and Joseph Hackin. *Les antiquités bouddhiques de Bamiyan*. Mém. DAFA, 2. Paris; Bruxelles: G. van Oest, 1928
- Hackin and Carl 1933  
Joseph Hackin and Jean Carl. *Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Bamiyan*. Mém. DAFA, 3. Paris: G. van Oest, 1933.
- Hackin et al. 1959  
Joseph Hackin, Jean Carl and Jacques Meunié. *Diverses recherches archéologiques en Afghanistan (1933-1940)*. Mém. DAFA, 8. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959.
- Higuchi 1983  
Takayasu Higuchi. *Bamiyan: Afuganisutan ni okeru Bukkyo sekkutsu jiin no bijutsu kokogakuteki chosa, 1970-1978-nen* (in Japanese; *Bamiyan: Art and Archaeological Researches on the Buddhist Cave Temples in Afghanistan 1970-1978*). 4 vols. Kyoto: Dohosha, 1983-1984; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2001.
- IsMEO activities 1972  
[IsMEO activities]. "Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan." *East and West (Rome)*, 22/3-4 (1972): 379-384.
- Julien 1853  
Stanislas Julien. *Histoire de la vie de Hiouen-thsang et de ses voyages dans l'Inde depuis l'an 629 jusqu'en 645, par Hœi-li et Yen-thsong, suivie de documents et d'éclaircissements géographiques tirés de la relation originale de Hiouen-thsang*. Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1853.
- Julien 1857-1858  
Stanislas Julien. *Mémoires sur les contrées occidentales, traduit du sanscrit en chinois, en l'an 648 par Hiouen-thsang, et du chinois*

- en français par M. Stanislas Julien*, 2 tt. *Voyages des pèlerins bouddhistes*, II-III. Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1857-1858.
- Kak 1933  
 Ram Chandra Kak. *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*. London: India Society, 1933.
- Klimburg-Salter 1989  
 Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter. *The Kingdom of Bamiyan: Buddhist Art and Culture of the Hindu Kush*. Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, Dipartimento di studi asiatici; Rome: Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1989.
- Kohzad 1953  
 Ahmed Ali Kohzad. "The Most Ancient Temple in Bamiyan." *Afghanistan*, 7/2 (1953): 12-17; translation of "Qadim tarin macbade Bamiyan." *Aryana*, 2/6 (1944-1945): 20-26.
- Kuwayama 1987  
 Shoshin Kuwayama. "Literary Evidence for Dating the Colossi in Bamiyan." In: Gherardo Gnoli and Lionello Lanciotti, eds. *Orientalia: Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*. 3 vols. Serie oriental Roma, 56. Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1985, Vol. 2: 703-727.
- Kuwayama 1989  
 Shoshin Kuwayama. "The Hephthalites in Tokharistan and Nordwest India." *Zinbun: Annals of the Institute of Research in Humanities* (Kyoto University), 24 (1989): 83-134.
- Kuwayama 1991  
 Shoshin Kuwayama. "The Horizon of Begram III and Beyond: A Chronological Interpretation of the Evidence for Monuments in the Kapisi-Kabul-Ghazni Region." *East and West* (Rome), 41/1-4 (1991): 79-120.
- Kuwayama 2002  
 Shoshin Kuwayama. *Across the Hindukush of First Millennium: A Collection of the Papers*. Kyoto, 2002.
- Le Berre 1987a  
 Marc Le Berre, M. *Les monuments pré-islamiques de l'Hindukush central*. Avec la collaboration de Henri Marchal et une contribution de Jean-Claude Gardin et Bertille Lyonnet. Mém. DAFA, 24. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987.
- Le Berre et al. 1987b  
 Marc Le Berre, Jean Claude Gardin et Bertille Lyonnet. "Données archéologiques inédites sur l'histoire de Bamiyan (Afghanistan)." In: Gherardo Gnoli and Lionello Lanciotti, eds. *Orientalia: Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*. 3 vols. Serie oriental Roma, 56. Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1985, Vol. 2: 775-785.
- Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971  
 Boris A. Litvinskii and Tamara I. Zeimal'. *Adzhina-Tepa. Arkhitektura, zhivopis', skul'ptura*. Moscow: Izd-vo. Iskusstvo, 1971.
- Mitchiner 1976  
 Michael Mitchiner. *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*. Vol. 9. *Greeks, Sakas and Their Contemporaries in Central and Southern India: Indo-Parthian, Western Satraps, Chutus, Abhiras, Satavahanas*. London: Hawkins, 1976.
- Miyaji 1973  
 Akira Miyaji. "La scène de Parinirvana dans la grotte F à Bamiyan." *Journal of the Nagoya University Faculty of Letters*, 9 (1973): 51-73.
- Miyaji 1978  
 Akira Miyaji. "The Parinirvana scenes of Bamiyan: an iconographical analysis." In: Takayasu Higuchi, ed. *Japan-Afghanistan Joint Archaeological Survey in 1976*. Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1978: 17-31.
- Mustamandi 1969  
 Shahibye Mustamandi. "Nouvelles fouilles à Hadda (1966-7) par l'Institut Afghan d'Archéologie." *Arts Asiatiques*, 20 (1969): 15-36.
- Rapson 1908  
 Edward James Rapson. *Catalogue of the Coins of the Andhra Dynasty, the Western Ksatrapas, the Traikutaka Dynasty and the "Bodhi" Dynasty*. London: The British Museum, 1908.
- Raverty 1881  
 Henry G. Raverty, tr. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A general history of the Muhammadan dynasties of Asia, including Hindustan; from A. H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the irruption of the infidel Mughals into Islam, by Minhaj-ud-din, Abu-'Umar-i-'Usman*. 2 vols. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1881.
- Rowland 1938  
 Benjamin Rowland, Jr. *The Wall-Paintings of India, Central Asia and Ceylon: A Comparative Study*. Boston: Merrymount Press, 1938.
- Rowland 1947a  
 Benjamin Rowland, Jr. "The Colossal Buddhas at Bamiyan." *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 15 (1974): 62-73.
- Rowland 1947b  
 Benjamin Rowland, Jr. "Studies in the Buddhist Art of Bamiyan, the Bodhisattva of group E." In: K. Baratha Iyer, ed. *Art and Thought, issued in honour of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday*. London: Luzac, 1947: 46-52.
- Scerrato 1960  
 Umberto Scerrato. "A Short note on Some Recently Discovered Buddhist Grottoes near Bamiyan, Afghanistan." *East and West* (Rome), 11/2-3 (1960): 94-120.
- Schlumberger et al. 1964  
 Daniel Schlumberger, Bruno Dagens, and Marc Le Berre. *Monuments préislamiques d'Afghanistan*. Mém. DAFA, 19. Paris: G. Klincksieck, 1964.
- Spuler 1952  
 Bertold Spuler. *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit: Politik, Kultur, Verwaltung und öffentliches Leben zwischen der arabischen und der seldschukischen Eroberung, 633*

- bis 1055. Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1952.
- Stronach 1978  
David Stronach. *Pasargadae: A Report on the Excavations Conducted by the British Institute of Persian Studies from 1961 to 1963*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon press, 1978.
- Taddei 1968  
Maurizio Taddei. "Tapa Sardar: First Preliminary Report." *East and West* (Rome), 18/1-2 (1968): 109-124.
- Taddei 1985  
Maurizio Taddei. "Clay Stupas and Thrones at Tapa Sardar, Ghazni (Afghanistan)." *Zinbun: Memoirs of the Research Institute for Humanistic Studies* (Kyoto University), 20 (1985): 17-32.
- Taddei and Verardi 1978  
Maurizio Taddei, and Giovanni Verardi. "Tapa Sardar: Second Preliminary Report." *East and West* (Rome), 28/1-4 (1978): 33-135.
- Taddei and Verardi 1981  
Maurizio Taddei, and Giovanni Verardi. "Buddhist Sculptures from Tapa Sardar, Ghazni (Afghanistan)." *La parola del passato. Rivista di studi antichi* (Naples), fasc. CXCIX (1981): 251-266.
- Tarzi 1976a  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Hadda à la lumière des trois dernières campagnes de fouilles de Tapa-é-Shotor (1974-1976)." *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, Séances de l'année 1976, juillet-octobre* (Paris): 381-410.
- Tarzi 1976b  
Zemaryalai Tarzi, ed. Zaryab. "Bamiyan, and Where is the Sleeping Buddha?" *Aryana* (Afghanistan Republic), Summer 1976: 30-33.
- Tarzi 1977  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. *L'architecture et le décor rupestre des grottes de Bamiyan*, 2 tt. Bibliothèque du Centre de recherches sur l'Asie centrale et la Haute-Asie, 1. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1977.
- Tarzi 1988a  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Bamiyan." *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Vol. 3 (Paris, 1988): 225-26.
- Tarzi 1988b  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Bamian. ii. History and Monuments." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 3, fasc. 6 (London; New York: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1988; 1989 ed. as complete volume): 658-660.
- Tarzi 1997  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. (1997), "Préservation des sites de Hadda: monastères bouddhiques de Tape Shotor et de Tape Tope Kalan." *Mari, Annales de Recherche Interdisciplinaires*, 8 (1997): 207-222.
- Tarzi 2001  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. *Relation entre les villes et les monastères au nord-ouest de l'Inde: le cas de Kâbol*. Thèse d'habilitation, 2 tt. Strasbourg, 2001.
- Tarzi 2003  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Bamiyan: Professor Tarzi's Survey and Excavation Archaeological Mission, 2003." *The Silk Road*, 1/2 (2003): 37-39.
- Tarzi 2004a  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Recent Archaeological Investigation of the French team at the Bamiyan Site." In: *Protecting the World Heritage Site of Bamiyan, Messages from the Field: International Symposium*. Tokyo, 2004: 16-17.
- Tarzi 2004b  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "'Kaweshhaye tazae bastanshenasi dar Bamiyan' et sa traduction en allemand: 'Bamians Buddhistische Denkmäler und neue Ausgrabungen.'" *Andescha*, 16, Jänner 2004: 3-8, 60-68.
- Tarzi 2004c  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "La mission archéologique à Bamiyan en 2003." *Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan* 104, mars 2004: 20-21.
- Tarzi 2005  
Zemaryalai Tarzi. "Les fouilles de la mission archéologique française à Bamiyan sous la direction de Z. Tarzi." In: *L'art d'Afghanistan de la préhistoire à nos jours: nouvelles données, actes d'une journée d'étude, UNESCO, 11 mars 2005*. V. and A. Marigo, eds. Paris: Centre de recherches et d'études documentaires sur l'Afghanistan, 2005: 95-124.
- Verardi 1983  
Giovanni Verardi. "Osservazioni sulla coroplastica di epoca kusana nel nord-ovest e in Afghanistan in relazione al materiale di Tapa Sardar, seguite da una precisazione sulla natura e la data delle sculture di Ushkur." *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale* (Naples), 43 (1983): 479-504.
- Watters 1904  
Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, 629-645 A.D.* Thomas W. Rhys Davids and Stephen W. Bushell, eds. 2 vols. Oriental Translation Fund, N. S., 14-15. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904-1905; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New Delhi, 1996.



# Balkh and the Plains of Turkestan

Frank Harold

University of Washington, Seattle

Photographs by Ruth Harold

If I had to choose a single place to represent all the glories and calamities of Central Asia, I would pick the oasis of Balkh in northern Afghanistan. Balkh was old long before Alexander captured it, and over the course of 2500 years has seen more than a score of conquerors come and pass on. The Arabs, impressed by Balkh's antiquity and wealth, called it Umm-al-belad, the mother of cities. When the Silk Road was the chief artery of commerce between East and West, Balkh was second to none. But then came Chingis Khan, who wreaked upon it the utter devastation that has made the Mongols' name a byword for barbarism. Balkh never fully recovered, and eventually faded into a village; the seat of government shifted to scruffy but vigorous Mazar-i Sharif, site of a revered shrine. What the visitor comes to see in Balkh is chiefly the melting walls of the old city, enclosing a vast field of rubble and wreckage; it is a place of memories rather than monuments. But for those who savor the melancholy pleasure of ruins, there is no more evocative site between Xian and Trebizond.

Why here, on the drab plains of Turkestan between the Hindu Kush mountains and the river Amu Darya (Oxus)? At one level, geography holds the key. Balkh sits on an alluvial fan built up by the Balkab River, well suited to irrigation. The region called Bactria in ancient times was renowned for its grapes, oranges, water lilies and later sugar cane, and an excellent breed of camels too. To this day, some of the

world's most luscious melons come from nearby Kunduz. Most significantly, several natural trade routes intersect at Balkh. From there, caravans could follow the well-watered foot of the mountains westward towards Herat and Iran, or across the Oxus to Samarkand and China [Fig. 1]. The valley of the Balkab still gives passage to Bamiyan and thence to Kabul; of all the routes across the Hindu Kush, this is the most westerly and the easiest. But geography is at most opportunity, not destiny; and the greatness of Balkh owes even more to those

inventive Iranian peoples who promoted craftsmanship and trade, built cities and wrote poetry all across ancient Central Asia. On the down side, Balkh was usually rich rather than powerful, and became the envy and the prize of more warlike neighbors.

Always a place of importance, the province of Bactria and its capital city flash into view in the fragmentary annals of historians and travelers. Bactria first appears on the list of the conquests of Darius, who incorporated it into the Achaemenid empire. Tradition claims that Zoroaster taught here and died here, in the sixth century BCE, or even earlier; the Zoroastrian faith became the state religion of the Achaemenids, and later of the Sasanians. Alexander took Bactria in 329 BCE, married the princess Roxane, and made the region his base for further conquest and for the amalgamation of the Greek and Iranian civilizations. That vision, far in

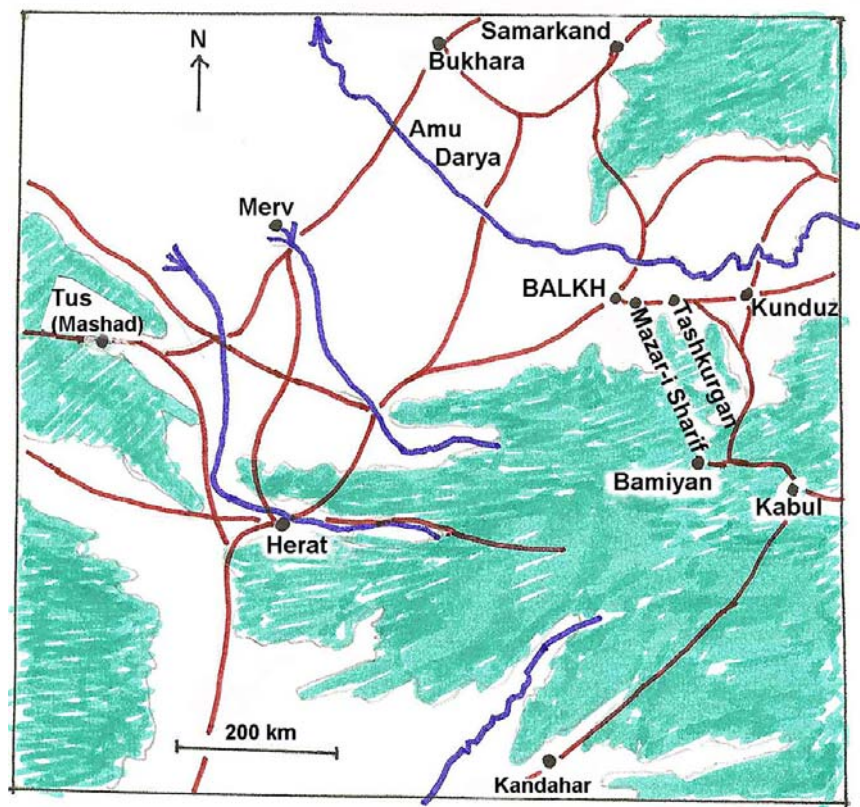


Fig. 1. Balkh and its neighbors. Copyright © 2007 Frank Harold.

---

advance of the times, survived for another three centuries in the small Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms that thrived and quarreled on both sides of the Hindu Kush. The ruins of one of their cities have been found at Ai Khanum, close by the River Oxus. They wrote no history but contributed greatly to the development of Gandharan architecture and sculpture, and they minted the most gorgeous silver coins of the ancient world.

Bactria reappears with its annexation by the Kushans (129 BCE), whose large and powerful empire stretched from Central Asia deep into India. This was a fortunate era, when the lands through which the caravan routes passed were divided among a few stable states which submerged their differences in the interests of trade; and Balkh flourished at the crossroads, as a depot and trans-shipment point for the world's luxuries. 'From the Roman Empire the caravans brought gold and silver vessels and wine; from Central Asia and China rubies, furs, aromatic gums, drugs, raw silk and embroidered silks; from India spices, cosmetics, ivory and precious gems of infinite variety' (Dupree 1967, 71). With the merchants came monks preaching the new religion of Buddhism, and Balkh became a center of worship and learning, famous for its temples and monasteries.

By the time the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang passed through Balkh on his way to the fountainhead of Buddhism in India (630 CE), the city had become part of the Sasanian empire. Sasanian viceroys ruled from Balkh, and a splendid fire-temple had been erected in the suburbs. The bazaars were still humming with trade, the countryside fertile, and a hundred Buddhist temples and monasteries testified to the continued vitality of Buddhism. Xuanzang was particularly impressed by the wealth of the chief monastery and its associated stupa. But he noted also that the



*Fig. 2. Balkh. The Timurid walls of the Bala Hissar. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.*

building had recently been looted, and that the monks had become lax in the performance of their duties; perhaps he sensed that the glory days of Buddhism were over. There was frequent strife with the Turkic nomads across the Oxus, and the first Arab incursions were just fifteen years ahead.

The times that followed were turbulent ones in Central Asia. Balkh changed hands repeatedly among Arab, Persian and Turkic rulers, and was sacked more than once, yet it continued to prosper. The Arab geographers Yaqubi and Moqaddasi (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries) depict Balkh as it was under Samanid rule, when Bukhara was the center of power. A large and bustling city of mud brick some three square miles in area, it held perhaps 200,000 persons. Mud-brick walls surrounded the city, pierced by seven gates. Buddhist and Zoroastrian temples had been destroyed; instead, a splendid Friday mosque occupied the center, and many more mosques were scattered among the dwellings. The city was home, not only to Persians and Turks but also to communities of Jews and Indian traders; a Nestorian metropolitan had his see in Balkh. It nourished poets and scholars, lawyers and even geographers and astronomers. But peace was a sometime thing; even when Balkh came under Seljuk rule for

over a century, the nomads were never far away.

Catastrophe struck in 1220, when Chingis Khan chose to make an example of Balkh, perhaps as punishment for an uprising. One hundred thousand Mongol horsemen embarked on an orgy of slaughter and destruction that left nothing standing; a few weeks later they returned to pick off the handful of wretched survivors. Balkh remained in ruins for a century and was so described by Marco Polo (1275) and by Ibn Batuta (1333); and yet revival must have been under way, for Timur (Tamerlane) chose Balkh to proclaim his accession to the throne (1359). Timur and his successors favored Balkh; they restored the walls [Fig. 2] and endowed the city with quite splendid buildings, some of which survive.

Balkh remained worth fighting over, by Uzbeks, Safavids, Mughals and eventually the rising power of Afghanistan under the Durrani Shahs. But the city slowly declined as its surroundings grew swampy and malarial, the irrigation canals fell into disrepair, and cholera struck again and again. Uzbeks of nomad origins became the dominant element. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the population was down to 500 households, and the administrative center of Afghan



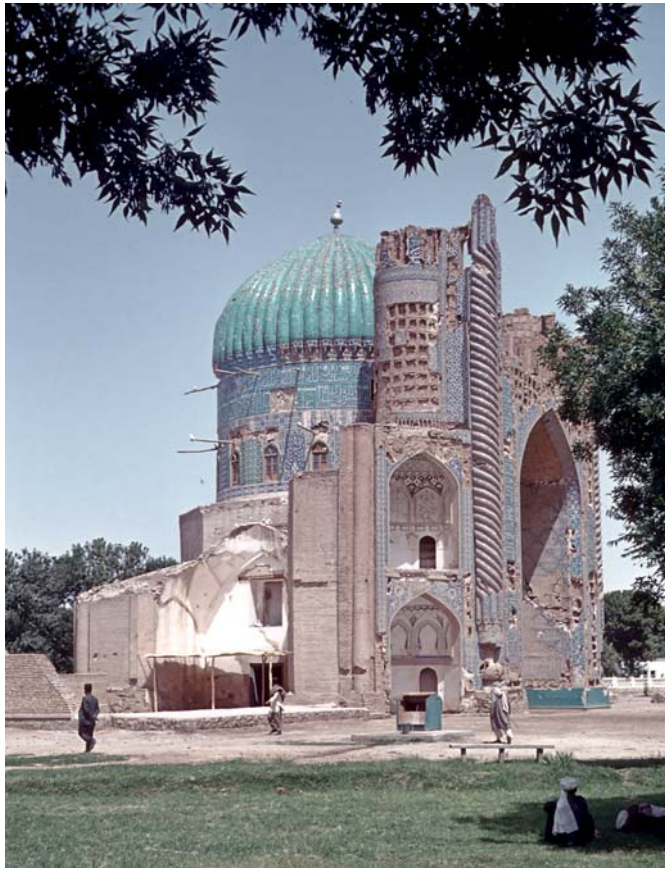


Fig. 3. Mausoleum of the theologian Abu Nasr Parsa (1462-1463 CE). Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

Turkestan had migrated (1866) to nearby Mazar-i Sharif. A new chapter had begun, the one in which we are still living.

Of all this eventful history, little enough remained on the ground at the time of our visit in 1970. One arrives in the center of an agricultural market town, neatly planted with trees and grass, that show off two Timurid edifices. One is the mausoleum of Khwaja Abu Nasr Parsa [Fig. 3], erected in 1462/63 in honor of a distinguished theologian; it is considered one of the finest examples of late Timurid architecture and often features on tourist posters. The shrine consists of a tall octagonal brick chamber surmounted by a fluted dome; entry is through a high portal flanked by a pair of corkscrew columns. The entire exterior is clad in brilliant blue tile mosaic, much of which has been slowly peeling off the walls. The interior

mounds probably mark the sites of that Buddhist temple and stupa, whose statuary Xuanzang described as being 'lustrous with precious gems.' A small brick mosque decorated with carved stucco survives from early Islamic times, but we failed to find it. What we had come to see was the walls



Fig. 4. Balkh. The Timurid walls of the Bala Hissar. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

is cool and austere, decorated with stucco honeycomb and painted floral designs. Across the park stands a tall gateway with some decorative tile work; this is all that remains of a madrassah built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Timurid style. As far as I can ascertain, both buildings still stand.

The earlier monuments take some searching. A couple of nondescript mounds probably mark the sites

[Fig. 4], battered and weather-beaten but still sixty feet high in places, that enclose the Bala Hissar, the High Fort. The ramparts were built in Timurid times (14/15<sup>th</sup> centuries) upon foundations that likely go back to the Kushans and possibly further. They enclose a roughly circular park stands a field half a mile across, that probably corresponds to the central city of medieval Balkh. Now there is only dry scrub and low mounds of debris; here and there potsherds and broken bricks call mutely for attention. There is nothing much to see; but I have never forgotten what it felt like, up there on those worn stumps of wall, gazing out over nothingness.

We stayed in Mazar-i Sharif ('Tomb of the Exalted'), which boasted a decent hotel and even occasional electricity. There is nothing ancient or traditional about Mazar, which only rose to prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We found it a bustling 'third-world-modern' town of straight wide streets, motor traffic, government offices and shops. Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Hazara and Pashtuns meet and chaffer in the seat of power, which is also a center for trade in Karakol lambskins and carpets. More recently, Mazar has all too often been in the news. It was largely spared Soviet shelling, but saw much fighting when the Taliban seized most of northern Afghanistan, and again when that





Fig. 5. Mazar-i Sharif. Shrine of Hazrat Ali. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

regime was toppled by the Northern Alliance with the help of American airpower. Miraculously, the great shrine of the Sharif Ali, which lent the city its name, has survived the turmoil and has recently been restored.

Hazrat (the noble) Ali is one of the central figures of Shia Islam, and almost as much revered as the Prophet Muhammad himself. Ali ibn Abi Talib was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and eventually became the fourth Caliph. But his reign was marred by discord; the Caliph was assassinated in 658 CE, and according to orthodox tradition was buried in Najaf, Iraq. Afghans believe otherwise: the body of the

slain Caliph, tied onto a camel's back, was carried out to Turkestan and buried in a secret location. Five hundred years later, thanks to dreams and visions, the grave came to light and a shrine was built over it. Chingis Khan leveled it, but Ali's sepulcher was rediscovered during the reign of Husain Baikara, the last Timurid Sultan of Herat, who erected a grand mausoleum on the site (1481 CE) [Figs. 5, 6, 7]. This is the building, many times restored and re-decorated, that one sees today. With its two domes, impressive courtyard and portals, excellent blue tile-work and a flock of white pigeons, the shrine of Hazrat Ali is one of the most spectacular buildings in

Afghanistan. Pilgrims flock to the tomb, which has a reputation for miraculous cures; and many thousands come here each spring to celebrate Nauruz, the Persian New Year.

Neither Balkh nor Mazar look anything like a caravan city of the middle ages, but nearby Tashkurgan does (or did in 1970) [Figs. 8, 9, 10, facing page]. The town officially goes by the name of Khulm. A ruined mud-brick castle looms over the town; it is only a couple of centuries old, but the weathered walls give it an



Fig. 5. Mazar-i Sharif. Shrine of Hazrat Ali, view in courtyard. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.



Fig. 5. Mazar-i Sharif. Shrine of Hazrat Ali. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

antique air. The covered bazaar was fascinating, a place of traditional crafts and small open-fronted shops and inviting chai-khanas (tea houses). You sat on a takht, a throne, by the side of the street, sipping your tea while puffing on a hookah, and watched the parade of Central Asia pass by. That was in a time of peace, which seemed like innocence. I wonder how Tashkurgan has fared.

### About the Authors

**Frank and Ruth Harold** are scientists by profession and travelers by avocation. Frank was born in Germany, grew up in the

Fig. 8. Tashkurgan. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

Middle East and studied at the City College, New York, and the University of California at Berkeley. Now retired from forty years of research and teaching, he is Professor Emeritus of biochemistry at Colorado State University and a member of the volunteer faculty at the University of Washington. Ruth is a microbiologist, now retired, and an aspiring painter. The Harold family lived in Iran in 1969/70, while Frank served as Fulbright lecturer at the University of Tehran. This experience kindled a passion for Asian travel which has since taken them to Afghanistan and back to Iran, into the Himalayas, up and down the Indian sub-continent



Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1905; reprint Lahore, 1977); and in

articles on Bactria and Balkh by Frantz Grenet in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 3 (London, 1988). A very readable account of the land, its past and its present, is in Nancy Hatch Dupree's *The Road to Balkh* (Kabul, 1967); unfortunately, this little gem is now a collector's item. The most celebrated traveler's tale is surely *The Road to Oxiana*, by Robert Byron (London, 1937; reprint Oxford, 1982). Discerning



Fig. 10. Chaikhane (tea house) in the bazaar, Tashkurgan. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.



Fig. 9. Street scene, Tashkurgan. Photograph copyright © 1970 Ruth Harold.

and along the Silk Road between China and Turkey. They make their home in Edmonds, Washington.

### Sources

The history of Balkh, and the reports of ancient travelers, are covered in some detail by Guy Le

readers will also enjoy *The Light Garden of the Angel King: Journeys in Afghanistan*, by Peter Levi (London, 1972). Afghanistan's recent travails have been extensively covered, for instance, in Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War* (Seattle, 2001).



---

# Further Evidence for the Interpretation of the 'Indian Scene' in the Pre-Islamic Paintings at Afrasiab (Samarkand)

Matteo Compareti

Venice

The Sogdian paintings at Afrasiab were discovered accidentally more than forty years ago during road construction near Samarkand. However, only in 1975 was the first book concerning them published (Al'baum 1975). Archaeological excavations continued at the Afrasiab site for some time, leading to the discovery of other fragments of schematic paintings between 1978 and 1985 (Akhunbabaev 1987). Since 1989 French archaeologists have been excavating at the ancient site in collaboration with Russian and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbek colleagues, but without a specific connection to the paintings themselves.

The room where the paintings were discovered came to be called the 'Hall of the Ambassadors,' since its western wall, facing the entrance, depicts several representatives of non-Sogdian lands bearing gifts. While from the start there has been general agreement on the identification of that imagery, the interpretation of what exactly the ritual is that the scene depicts and some of its details have been a matter of debate. This article is a contribution to that discussion.

## General Interpretation

At the end of the 1980s Chiara Silvi Antonini offered persuasive evidence to identify the scene of the western wall in the so-called 'Hall of the Ambassadors' as a representation of the Iranian New Year Festival (*Nawruz*) in conjunction with the coronation of the local king, Varkhuman (Silvi Antonini 1989). In this author's

opinion, Silvi Antonini's idea remains the key for a correct interpretation of the entire cycle of the paintings at Afrasiab. While a detailed study by Markus Mode a few years later disputed her interpretation (Mode 1993), the great specialist of Sogdian studies, the late Boris Marshak, not only accepted it but also added other important elements to the general interpretation of the whole cycle and, especially, of the southern wall paintings (Marshak 1994). Soviet scholars continued to study the Afrasiab paintings, although their interesting results did not become widely known because of their publication in Russian in rare journals or books (e.g., Maitdinova 1984; Akhunbabaev 1990; Motov 1999).

In recent years other authors such as Etsuko Kageyama, Frantz Grenet, Sergei Iatsenko, and Simone Cristoforetti together with the present writer reopened the problem of the interpretation of the Afrasiab paintings considering single scenes or details (Kageyama 2002; Grenet 2003; Yatsenko 2004; Grenet 2005; Grenet 2006; Compareti and Cristoforetti 2005). Finally, a conference was organized by the present writer in March 2005 in Venice in order to collect in one volume the most recent results of the investigations by those scholars who had already studied the paintings together with a new translation of the Sogdian inscriptions at Afrasiab by Vladimir Livshits (Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006).

The inscriptions are extremely important in order to attempt a chronology for the paintings.

Fragmentary inscriptions on the western wall mention the name of a sovereign, Varkhuman, who corresponds to the local king recognized as governor of Samarkand and Sogdiana by the Chinese Emperor Gaozong (649-683) in the period between 650-655 (Chavannes 1903, 135).<sup>1</sup> In 658 Gaozong even sent an envoy to the court of Varkhuman for an official investiture (Anazawa and Manome 1976, 21ff., cited by Kageyama 2002, 320). However, according to Islamic sources, when Sa'id ibn Othman conquered Samarkand in 676 he did not find any king there. So it is possible to suppose that Varkhuman was no longer regent of Samarkand at the time of the Arab conquest (Frye, 1954, 40; Smirnova 1970, 275; Fedorov 2006, 222-223). All of the evidence suggests that the Afrasiab paintings were executed around this period.

Other literary sources (Chinese, Persian and even Sogdian) could be useful for the comprehension and chronology of the mural paintings. They have already been extensively considered in a recent study by Frantz Grenet, who also demonstrated that the spatial organization of the Afrasiab paintings corresponds to an established scheme well known in Sasanian Persia (Grenet 2005, 124-130) and in India too where it possibly originated (de la Vaissière 2006, 148).<sup>2</sup> In particular, as already noted by Mode (Mode 1993), a passage of the *Tangshu* (History of the Tang Dynasty, composed between 1043 and 1060) referring to 7<sup>th</sup>-century central Sogdiana mentions a royal pavilion where representations of





Fig. 1. Western wall, Afrasiab (after F. Ory and Grenet reconstruction).

Persians and Byzantines appeared on the western wall, Chinese on the northern wall, and the Turks and Indians on the eastern one (Chavannes, 1903, 145).<sup>3</sup> As will be shown in the present paper as well, this is exactly the partition of the walls at Afrasiab, the only exception being the western one.

At present it is almost unanimously accepted that the scenes depicted in the 'Hall of the Ambassadors' are part of a unique cycle. The western wall most likely represents the initial stage of the Sogdian *Nawruz* celebrated in 7<sup>th</sup>-century Samarkand. According to the mobile Sogdian (and, more generally, Iranian) calendar, during the 7<sup>th</sup> century *Nawruz* fell in summer (Compareti and Cristoforetti 2005).<sup>4</sup> The fragmentary paintings enable us to recognize foreign delegates shown during the presentation of some gifts to an upper central figure that is irretrievably lost [Fig. 1]. The presentation of gifts (or, better, tributes) on the occasion of *Nawruz* is a very ancient Iranian custom, and, according to the interpretation by Roman Ghirshman and other scholars which was accepted by Silvi Antonini, it can be clearly observed among the very ancient reliefs of the Apadana at

Persepolis (Silvi Antonini 1989, 125-126).

It seems correct to consider the New Year Festival as a good occasion to celebrate the coronation of a king among ancient Iranians. The hypothesis is supported by some literary sources on ancient Persian habits, transmitted, however, only through Muslim authors (Ibid., 118-126). So, the lost figure in the upper part of the western wall was most likely that of a king, possibly Varkhuman himself. It is not excluded that he was probably represented together with his wife according to a scheme much appreciated on 6<sup>th</sup>-century funerary monuments belonging to powerful Sogdians settled in China and recently excavated in the area of Xi'an (China).<sup>5</sup> On those monuments the couple is represented under a canopy both in realistic and paradisiacal scenes (Marshak 2001), but it is not excluded that the two royal figures could have been positioned at a certain distance from each other. In this case, a possible alternative explanation is Mode's hypothesis that the two rows of tribute-bearers were proceeding towards two different sovereigns (Varkhuman and the Turkish Khaghan) (Mode 2006). Also of

interest is Sergei Iatsenko's very interesting observation about the necklace and the reconstructed torque in the hands of the envoy from Chaghanyan on the western wall. The envoy can be recognized in the lower left part of the scene since he is wearing a robe embellished with so-called *senmurv*-like creatures. Considering that all the other foreign envoys are bringing tributes to be presented to the figure that was depicted in the upper part of the scene, then most likely the torque was intended for a man and the necklace for a woman. On the western wall they can only be the Samarkand royal couple (Yatsenko 2004). In this way, as will be discussed more extensively below, the King and Queen of Samarkand could have counterbalanced the Chinese emperor and empress on the northern wall.

Boris Marshak has identified the scene on the southern wall as the final stage of the *Nawruz* festival, when the Sogdian sovereign celebrated a funerary ritual in honour of his ancestors in a temple which — according to the *Tangshu* — was built on the eastern fringes of the town (Marshak 1994, 11-15).<sup>6</sup> While the paintings are very fragmentary, the shape of an



Fig. 2. Southern wall, Afrasiab (after F. Ory and Grenet reconstruction).



Fig. 3. Northern wall, Afrasiab (after F. Ory and Grenet reconstruction).

enormous horse ridden by a person who was depicted larger than the other people around him can be discerned among the paintings of the southern wall [Fig. 2]. It is highly probable that this person was king Varkhuman moving in the direction of the temple of his ancestors. The representation of this building survived only partially in the left part of the scene depicted on the southern wall, almost on the corner with the eastern wall (the direction of the royal parade according to the Chinese sources). Two people wearing ritual Zoroastrian masks (*padam*) in the middle of the procession could be considered in charge of the sacrifice for the royal ancestors. In fact, they accompany a harnessed horse not mounted and four geese probably destined to be sacrificed in honour of Iranian gods (Grenet 2005, 125).

Chinese subjects appear on the northern wall exactly as reported in the *Tangshu* [Fig. 3]. It is an extremely complicated representation which is divided in two parts, both of them connected with astronomical-astrological matters. It is beyond the aim of the present article to discuss in detail all the elements which led to its general interpretation (Compareti and Cristoforetti 2005; Compareti 2006; Compareti forthcoming; Compareti and Cristoforetti forthcoming). Here it will be enough to say that the two parts of the scene constitute an exact parallel with the western and the southern walls. In fact, most likely, on the northern wall there is a representation of the Chinese New Year Festival. Some Chinese poems report the custom of very

ancient times when the emperor was expected to perform a ritual hunt in a special part of the imperial park and kill evil animals such as felines. After the hunt, members of the Chinese aristocracy went at a pond in the same park to listen to musicians and singers on boats shaped like birds' heads, while some people had to dive in the water in search of animals such as fishes, turtles and ducks. This is exactly what can be discerned in the hunting and aquatic scenes in the left part of the northern wall. Also the appearance of a dragon is recorded in Chinese poems in coincidence with a festivity possibly to be identified with the New Year Festival and, in fact, a composite winged monster can be discerned below the boat in the aquatic scene (Compareti forthcoming). A person leading two horses in the water is probably performing a Chinese ritual which has not yet been identified. As will be observed below, the presence of this last element is quite important for the comprehension of the whole cycle.

There is something more to be added as regards the aquatic scene. One lady on the boat is represented larger than the others, because she is possibly the Chinese empress. She is feeding the fishes just below the boat and, in fact, her left hand is opened as if to drop something into the water. Such an attitude calls to mind a typical Chinese festivity, the *Duanwu* Festival, still performed today around the summer solstice to remember a poet who committed suicide in ancient times, during the Warring States period (453-221 BCE). Every year

on that occasion people feed fishes in order to prevent aquatic animals from eating the

body of the poet and race in rivers and lakes on dragon-shaped boats searching, ideally, for his corpse. Other people dive in the water to look for his body which, needless to say, was never recovered. It is quite clear that the second part of the ancient Chinese New Year Festival, as reported in poems, and the *Duanwu* Festival very much resemble each other.

As is well-known, in Gregorian calendrical terms, the Chinese New Year Festival falls in January-February, while the *Duanwu* falls around mid-June. The latter date constitutes an exact parallel with the Sogdian *Nawruz* which, during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, was celebrated in summer. The artists in charge of the execution of the paintings at Afrasiab confused the two festivities because of their similarities. Possibly the artists even confused them deliberately in order to have a calendrical coincidence between a local Sogdian festivity and an important Chinese one (namely, the *Duanwujie*) which could balance the Chinese New Year celebration.

### The Eastern Wall

At this point we turn our attention to the eastern wall [Fig. 4, facing page]. Many scholars agree that this scene represents India mainly on the basis of the passage in the *Tangshu*, even though there is no Turk representative depicted here. Unfortunately, once more, the Chinese source is not specific about the subject of the scene, and the fragmentary state of the painting makes an identification extremely difficult.

The surviving fragments are concentrated just in the lower part

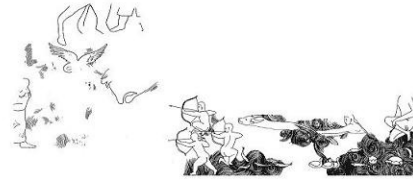
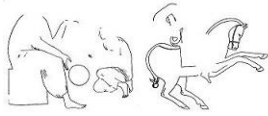


Fig. 4. Eastern wall, Afrasiab (after F. Ory and Grenet reconstruction).

of the wall. Starting from the left part, one can observe two sitting people facing each other in a typical attitude of teacher and student. Between them is a round object which was probably intended to be an armilla used for astronomical purposes. In a recent paper, Frantz Grenet argued convincingly that this image represents the transmission of astrology from the Greeks to the Indians according to an iconography rooted in Classical art (Grenet 2003). Next to them is a rider on a horse but so far there is no satisfactory explanation for its meaning. After the entrance, on the right portion of the wall, a second enigmatic scene can be discerned: a person wearing a long robe is carrying a child while two big birds spread their wings. The background is aquatic. Grenet proposed to identify this scene with a representation of Krishna and his foster-mother, Yashoda, just before the attack of the crane-demon Putana (Grenet 2005, 128). Above them, fragments of an image of a horse and the legs of a person could be intended as another episode of Krishna's youth, when he fought the horse-demon Keshin (Ibid.; Grenet 2006, 45) [Fig. 5]. On the right part of the painting, the background is still aquatic but infant-archers and a man grabbing the tail of a bull together with a



Fig. 5. Eastern wall, Afrasiab, detail (after Al'baum 1975, fig. 26, detail).

kneeling person appear among fishes, turtles, water-birds and flowers. Grenet identified the infant-archers as a multiple representation of Kama, the Indian god of love who was reproduced according to an iconography borrowed from Classical art. His presence could be justified because of the 'allusion to Krishna's romances with the cowgirls' (Ibid.). However, as Grenet himself noted, Markus Mode had already observed that those archers should be better identified with pygmies fighting cranes exactly as described (although differently represented) in Roman sources (Mode 1993, 98; Grenet 2006, 46-47). Mode's interpretation would fit better given the fact that a source in Classical art was proposed for the first scene on the left. Moreover, the demon-crane Putana is one, while in the painting there are parts of at least three birds. Unless there are new discoveries, the interpretation of this scene will remain open.

The long-haired man grabbing the tail of a buffalo in the water may recall an enigmatic scene engraved on a panel of a 6<sup>th</sup>-century funerary bed from China which possibly belonged to a Sogdian [Fig. 6].<sup>7</sup> It is possible to recognize an archer shooting a bird while sitting on an ox among waves, a scene which has not yet been identified. However, the Indian (or, better, Vishnuite) context of the panels of this funerary bed, recently pointed out by Penelope Riboud (Riboud 2004, 46, fig. 24), may mean that it provides a good comparison with the detail in the Afrasiab painting even if rendered differently. Other elements such as the pygmy

archers shooting cranes could be part of the same scheme but, unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the eastern wall does not allow one to discern more.

Among the different scenes on the eastern wall, the fragments of 'teacher and student' with armilla and the inferior parts of the horse close to the legs of a person are proportionately larger than the other figures in the same composition. Possibly, this fact is not to be neglected, especially in interpreting the scene identified by Grenet as Krishna fighting Keshin, since on the other walls larger characters have very important roles.

In his most recent paper devoted to the interpretation of the Indian scenes at Afrasiab, Grenet produced a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Gupta relief from Mandor representing Krishna fighting against Keshin (Grenet 2006, fig. 2), although two



Fig. 6. Panel of the Vahid Kooros Collection funerary bed (after Riboud 2004, fig. 25).

other specimens of Indian sculpture — one from a private collection and the other from Mathura — provide good parallels which support his arguments (Harle 1985, figs. 7-8). Lastly, a black wax inscribed seal (possibly Kushano-Sasanian) kept in the Ashmolean Museum deserves to be considered [Fig. 7, next page]. The figure, which appears together with a Bactrian inscription, could be interpreted as Heracles fighting the monstrous horse of Diomedes or Krishna fighting Keshin according to a





Fig. 7. Kushano-Sasanian inscribed black wax seal, Ashmolean Museum (after Harle, 1985, fig. 1).

common iconography which was possibly rooted in Classical art (Ibid.).<sup>8</sup> The interpretation is again complicated, typical for objects of Central Asian provenance in which Greek, Iranian and Indian elements co-exist, exactly as in the painting at Afrasiab under examination.

In any case, in our opinion, it is not so important to figure out the exact interpretation for the detail of the man with the horse. The very presence of this animal represents an interesting element. A reasonable hypothesis can be offered to explain its inclusion in the cycle of paintings at Afrasiab where, as already observed, a funerary sacrifice in the presence of royal characters is depicted on the southern wall as a continuation of the *Nawruz* on the western wall. On the northern wall the Chinese emperor and empress too are performing local rituals connected with calendrical matters which correspond quite precisely to the Sogdian events. In both the scenes of Sogdian and Chinese rituals the presence of the horse seems to be very important, although on the northern wall the explanation is not yet fully clear. Persian literary sources of the Islamic period explicitly indicate a connection between the horse and water (Cristoforetti 2006). Moreover, in the painting on the northern wall, two horses are swimming, since the connection with the aquatic element should have been extremely important for the Chinese too (Riboud 2003; Mao forthcoming). So, if the

hypothesis of the Indian character of the eastern wall is correct and if that fragmentary painting actually represents the lower parts of a man with a horse, then one should expect to find also there the depiction of an Indian festivity or celebration connected with royalty when a kind of horse sacrifice occurred. Such a ritual is reported in Indian literary sources explicitly and is described as the most important royal sacrifice that only important sovereigns could have afforded to celebrate since Vedic period: the *ashvamedha* (Dumont 1927).<sup>9</sup>

The aim of the horse sacrifice, or *ashvamedha*, in ancient India was the recognition of a king as an universal sovereign. It was also a magical ritual with very ancient solar reminiscences celebrated in order to ensure fecundity to the kingdom. In fact, the king was expected to accomplish it at the end of his reign, when it was almost time for the succession of the designated new king (Ibid., x). The preparation for the *ashvamedha* took normally one year but, sometimes, even two. The sacrificial animal — which was chosen because of his color, speed and other characteristics (Albright and Dumont 1934, 110-111) — had to be ritually immersed in a pond and later was set free together with one hundred castrated horses and obliged to move in a northeastern direction. The land crossed by the horse was considered to be under that king's dominion. Thus this was a warning to the neighboring kingdoms. Young nobles, and among them the designated successor, had to follow the horse in order to allow it to pass wherever it wanted and prevent it from coupling with any mare for one entire year. At the time of its return to the starting point, a three-day celebration took place during which encomiastic singing, music and offerings had to be performed at court. On the second day the sacrificial horse was attached to the royal war-chariot and led by the king himself

to a sacred pond. When he returned, the queen and concubines had to embellish the mane and the tail of the animal while praying. Then the horse was choked in the northern part of the area designated for the sacrifice, and the queen had to lie next to its corpse while the king and his companions performed an enigmas-competition. Only at this point, the dead horse, together with other sacrificial animals, could be quartered in the presence of priests, nobles and common people.

Ritual celebrations and other sacrifices in honor of Indian divinities such as Agni and Soma were performed as well. In particular, the ritual liquid Soma was solemnly offered on the third day of the *ashvamedha*, and, later, all the objects touched by it had to be thrown in the water (Dumont, 1927, 227). On the fourth day a purification bath occurred for all the participants in the *ashvamedha*, together with the sacrifice of twenty-one sterile cows. Although we do not know exactly the representation of that Indian ritual by the Sogdians (nor by the Indians themselves), at least this part of the *ashvamedha* celebration resembles very much the *Duanwujie*.

The *ashvamedha* took place around February-March (but also in spring or summer; see Ibid., 9-10) and had very clear calendrical connections: the wandering of the horse around and outside the kingdom had the symbolic value of the annual movement of the sun which conferred to the king the legitimacy to govern on the land during the period of the year. Furthermore, of considerable interest is the fact that, according to some Indian literary sources, among the characteristics of the designated sacrificial horse was a spot on its body or a tuft of hair on the forehead with a particular shape representing the Pleiades constellation. There is an exact parallel between such a characteristic of the horse of the

*ashvamedha* and a similar spot or tuft required for sacrificial horses in ancient Mesopotamia. Possibly this was due to the association of a certain period of the year, when the Pleiades were particularly visible in the sky, with phenomena such as inundations by large rivers. In this way, the Pleiades could have been seen as a link to the fertilization of the land (Albright and Dumont 1934, 124-127). So here is another link between horse and water in connection with calendrical matters. As is well-known, many elements coming from Mesopotamian culture were accepted in Central Asia such as, for example, the presence of the goddess called by Kushans and Sogdians Nana who, in the Iranian milieu, should be possibly identified with Anahita and, consequently, with Venus (Tanabe 1995; Grenet and Marshak 1998). Astral symbols seem to have played a very important role in ancient Sogdiana too, and for this reason the artists at Afrasiab were probably attracted by their presence also in other cultural spheres. Specimens of Sogdian art objects produced both in the motherland and in the colonies along the so-called 'Silk Road' present quite often images of a horse or a pegasus with a pole on its head embellished on its top with a half moon containing a star or a flower (Compareti 2003, 34). Since much of the horse represented on the eastern wall at Afrasiab disappeared, any attempt to find such astral symbols is completely useless. However, as now seems likely, the horse was associated with the aquatic element and had astral relationships almost in every ancient culture; for this reason it could have been chosen to be represented on the walls at Afrasiab.

Other details of the eastern wall could be considered to have a precise parallel with elements in the other three painted scenes at Afrasiab. Just as in the scenes

representing Sogdiana and China, where the sovereign was depicted together with his queen, for the celebration of the *ashvamedha* the presence of the royal couple was required. The character of the Indian sacrifice concerned the legitimacy of a king, and at Afrasiab the representation of such a concept can be observed on two opposite walls: the eastern (or Indian) one and the western (or Sogdian) one where the *Nawruz* is celebrated in conjunction with the coronation of Varkhuman. Finally, all the scenes on the four walls present clear connections with astrological-astronomical matters which could be considered reciprocally (although not exactly) balanced: when a king decided to perform the *ashvamedha*, this had to happen around February-March, a period of the year quite close to the celebration of the Chinese New Year Festival (January-February). The Sogdian artists and their patrons were certainly aware of the astronomical-astrological common notions of ancient 'Westerners' such as Indians, Greeks and Mesopotamians, but they had to find also common features with China that, in those days, still followed a different system and only later — most likely through the Sogdians — would have adopted 'western' features such as the division of the week into seven days, each one linked to a planetary deity (Chavannes and Pelliot 1913, 158-177). For this reason they cleverly opted for representations on the northern wall of the Chinese New Year Festival, which fell

approximately during the *ashvamedha*, and the *Duanwu*, which fell around the Sogdian *Nawruz*.

It is not possible to find an exact contemporary parallel for the painting of the eastern wall since, unfortunately, the few elements referring to the *ashvamedha* in Indian art are limited to the representation of the sacrificial horse itself — for example, in at least one sculpture and coins of the Gupta period (Huntington 1985, 187-188; Lindquist 2003). Nevertheless, hints of a horse sacrifice exist in Indian art, although they date to a period much later than the Afrasiab paintings. These are the relief carvings of the great platform of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Hazara Rama temple at Hampi (ancient Vijayanagara) (Dellapiccola and Verghese, 1998).<sup>10</sup> Almost forty years ago, the great indologist Hermann Goetz had already recognized among these reliefs some images of foreigners represented in processional rows together with animals such as elephants and horses (Goetz 1967, 195-196, fig. 11). In particular, one relief is extremely interesting because of the pose of one foreigner (possibly a Persian?) holding the bridle of a recalcitrant horse with one hand while the other seems to be beating the animal with a kind of dagger [Fig. 8]. Why would a person of possibly Iranian appearance have been represented in this way? Could his pose be considered the final part of a horse sacrifice? In the pre-Islamic Iranian sphere there was



Fig. 8. Relief carving, Hazara Rama temple, Hampi (after Goetz 1967, fig. 11).

an important funerary horse sacrifice, the *chakharom*, which is just alluded to, for example, on a Sogdian ossuary from Shahr-i Sabz (Uzbekistan) by the sole presence of a harnessed horse (Grenet 1993, 61, n. 44).<sup>11</sup> However, if the people in the relief at Hampi are Iranians then they should be considered in all probability Muslims and not Mazdeans. What is needed is an example from Indian art dated to a much earlier period.

As noted above, in Indian art there are very few specimens which can be identified as representations of the *ashvamedha*, and they are all date to the Gupta period. Nevertheless, an interesting horn cylinder seal from the Greco-Bactrian site of Takht-i Sangin [Fig. 9] which has

Fig. 9. Indian horn cylinder seal, Takht-i Sangin (after Rapin 1996, fig. 29b).



been recently attributed to India (Bernard, 1994, 112-113) presents a scene very similar to the relief of Hampi and, possibly, to the reconstruction of that detail of the Afrasiab painting reconsidered here. It is not easy to give an exact interpretation to the scene carved on the seal, which was termed by Claude Rapin 'an Indian myth' (Rapin 1996, 50, fig. 29b; Rapin 1995, 275-281); however, what is really important to consider here is the pose of the person standing in front of the horse, which at Afrasiab as well might have followed an established iconographic formula. It is not possible to be too specific about the pose of the man with the horse on the horn seal since the scene is depicted too sketchily and it could represent just a rider with his steed or even a procession. Processions of

people and animals can be observed already in very ancient Persian art (for example, at Persepolis<sup>12</sup>), and it is well known that the Achaemenids extended their control on some parts of northwestern India, where they influenced local cultures. However, the processions of Persepolis do not look exactly like the scene on the Indian horn seal, where the man seems to stand in front of the animal without walking and his right hand seems to grab the hilt of the sword while with the left, possibly, he holds the bridle.

Since the temple at Takht-i Sangin is much older than any other specimen of Indian art already considered in the present study, then it seems to be likely that a pure Indian iconography is involved at Afrasiab. In any case, independently from the origin of the iconography, it is clear that the Iranians were aware of it. In fact, it is possible to observe very similar scenes in a problematic 7<sup>th</sup>-century (?) textile fragment acquired on the antiquarian market embellished with nine horses on three parallel lines with people wearing caftans holding in one hand the bridles and with the other one a weapon or a stick. The position of those men indicates a clearly hostile attitude towards the horses; for this reason the scene of the textile could be intended as a representation of a sacrifice (Kitzinger 1946, fig. 46; Trilling 1982, pl. 17) [Fig. 10]. As the present writer has already noted,

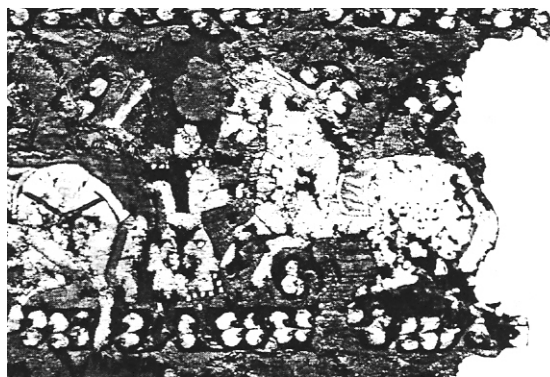


Fig. 10. 7<sup>th</sup> century fragmentary textile, Egypt? (after Trilling 1982, pl. 17).

notwithstanding the long period of time which separates the creation of the textile and the relief at Hampi, they resemble astonishingly each other (Comparsi 2005, 37-40). The same could be said for the earlier horn seal from Takht-i Sangin. That fragmentary Persian textile offers a good, if enigmatic, parallel to the specimens in Indian art. If ancient Iranians knew the Indian iconography for the horse sacrifice and had even adopted it, then it could be considered likely that it is exactly something similar that the Sogdians copied for the representation of India on the eastern wall at Afrasiab. The hypothesis is hardly demonstrable, but at least it can offer a possible alternative identification to the battle between Krishna and Keshin. In any case, the depiction of Indian subjects at Afrasiab according to that iconography could be simply explained because the context there was obviously Iranian.

#### An Indian King in the Paintings at Afrasiab?

We might, finally, propose a reconstruction for the upper part of the eastern wall which was completely lost: probably also in this scene there was a king together with his spouse; it is not unlikely that the royal couple had larger dimensions exactly as on the other walls. As in the case of Varkhuman and Gaozong on the other walls, could this Indian king be identified? It would seem that Harsha (606-647) is the most probable candidate, since he was a very powerful sovereign of northern India in that period. True, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, who visited India in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and was a respected guest at Harsha's court, recorded important Buddhist festivities celebrated in that kingdom but gave no hints about the *ashvamedha* (Beal



1884 [1983], 206-224). Xuanzang was a devoted follower of the Dharma, which could explain his scant interest in his memoir in religious customs extraneous to Buddhism. However, this explanation would not explain why Indian sources too, such as the Harshacharita, are silent about the *ashvamedha* during Harsha's reign, even though animal sacrifices should have existed in 7<sup>th</sup>-century India (Kane 1918, 236).

In the second part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Adityasena, one of the last representatives of the Gupta Dynasty (or Later Gupta) in Magadha performed the *ashvamedha* (Auboyer 1965, 387; Asher 1983), a fact that definitely created great sensation and whose echoes, possibly, reached other regions outside India. For this reason he could have been considered an appropriate candidate to appear together with Varkhuman and the Chinese Emperor Gaozong at Afrasiab.

This last hypothesis — although highly evocative — is hardly demonstrable. Despite the efforts of some students of Sogdian art to reconstruct the other fragmentary parts of the same painting with reference India, proof of the proposed identifications is still lacking (cf. Mode 2002).

## About the Author

**Matteo Compareti** graduated from The University of Venice 'Ca' Foscari' in oriental languages and literatures and in 2005 defended his PhD in Iranian studies at The University of Naples 'L'Orientale.' He is a specialist in art history of Sogdiana, especially pre-Islamic Samarkand, although his interests include also Sasanian Persia. At present his research focuses mainly on the iconography of Mazdean divinities.

## References

Akhunbabaev 1987

Khasan G. Akhunbabaev. "Domashnie khramy rannesrednevekovogo Samarkanda." In: *Gorodskaja kul'tura Baktrii-Tokharistana i Sogda*, Tashkent, 1987: 10-21.

Akhunbabaev 1990

Khasan G. Akhunbabaev. *Sotsial'no-planigraficheskaia struktura kvartala znati na Afrasiabe i problema izuchenii rannesrednevekovogo Samarkanda*. Samarkand, 1990.

Al'baum 1975

Lazar I. Al'baum. *Zhivopis' Afrasiaba*. Tashkent, 1975.

Albright and Dumont 1934

William F. Albright and Paul-Émile Dumont, "A Parallel between Indic and Babylonian Sacrificial Ritual." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 54/ 2 (1934): 107-128.

Anazawa and Manome 1976

W. Anazawa and J. Manome. "Korean Envoys Depicted in the Mural Painting from Ancient Samarkand." *Chosen Gakuho*, 80 (1976): 1-36 (in Japanese).

Asher 1983

Frederick M. Asher. "Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art." In: Bardwell Smith, ed. *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Delhi; Varanasi; Patna, 1983: 53-66.

Auboyer 1965 (1961)

Jeannine Auboyer. *L'India fino ai Gupta*. Milano, 1965 (original title: *La vie quotidienne dans l'Inde ancienne (environ IIe s. avant J.-C. -VIIe s.)*). Paris, 1961; in English as: *Daily Life in Ancient India, from Approximately 200 B.C. to 700 A.D.* New York, 1965).

Beal 1884 (1983)

Samuel Beal, tr. *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Chinese Accounts of India. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang AD 629*. London: Trubner, 1884 (Reprint New Delhi, 1983).

Belenitskii 1961

Aleksandr M. Belenitskii. "Raboty pendzhikentskogo otriada v 1961 g." *Arkheologicheskie raboty v Tadzhikistane*, IX (1961): 53-75.

Bernard 1994

Paul Bernard. "Le temple de Takhti Sangin en Bactriane: temple du feu ou pas?" *Studia Iranica*, 23 (1994): 81-121.

Chandra 1983

Lokesh Chandra, "Hellenistic Echoes in the Legend of Krishna." In: Joachim Deppert, ed. *India and the West. Proceedings of a Seminar Dedicated to the Memory of Hermann Goetz*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1983: 149-154.

Chavannes 1903

Edouard Chavannes. *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turks) Occidentaux*. Paris, 1903.

Chavannes and Pelliot 1913

Edouard Chavannes and Paul Pelliot. "Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine." *Journal Asiatique*, 11 sér., t. 1 (1913): 99-199; 261-394.

Compareti 2003

Matteo Compareti. "Note sull'iconografia del pegaso e del cavallo bardato nell'arte iranica." In: Matteo Compareti and G. Scarcia, eds. *Il falcone di Bistam. Intorno all'iranica Fenice/Samand: un progetto di sintesi per il volo del Pegaso iranico tra Ponto, Alessandretta e Insulindia*. Venezia, 2003: 27-37.

Compareti 2004

Matteo Compareti. "Remarks on the Sogdian Religious Iconography in 7th Century Samarkand." 2004: <http://www.eurasianhistory.com/data/articles/a02/422.html>.

Compareti 2005

Matteo Compareti. *I Popoli Iranici e la navigazione nell'Oceano Indiano*. Venezia, 2005.

Compareti 2006

Matteo Compareti, "A Reading of The Royal Hunt at Afrasyab Based on Chinese Sources." In:

- Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006, pp. 173-184.
- Compareti forthcoming
- Matteo Compareti. "On the Meaning of the Dragon in the Paintings at Afrasyab (Ancient Samarkand)." *Eurasian Studies*, 6 (2006): 64-76 (in press).
- Compareti and Cristoforetti 2005
- Matteo Compareti and Simone Cristoforetti. "Proposal for a New Interpretation of the Northern Wall of the 'Hall of the Ambassadors' at Afrasyab." In: *Central Asia from the Achaemenids to the Timurids: Archaeology, History, Ethnology, Culture. Materials of an International Scientific Conference Dedicated to the Centenary of Aleksandr Markovich Belenitsky*, ed. Valerii P. Nikonorov, St. Petersburg, 2005: 215-220.
- Compareti and Cristoforetti forthcoming
- Matteo Compareti and Simone Cristoforetti. "New Elements on the Chinese Scene in the 'Hall of the Ambassadors' at Afrasyab along with a Reconsideration of 'Zoroastrian' Calendar." *Studia Iranica*, forthcoming.
- Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006
- Matteo Compareti and Étienne de la Vaissière, eds. *Royal Nauruz in Samarkand. Proceedings of the Conference held in Venice on the Pre-Islamic Paintings at Afrasyab*. Rivista degli Studi Orientali, N.S., LXXVIII, Suppl. n. 1. Pisa; Roma: Accademia editoriale, 2006.
- Cristoforetti 2006
- Simone Cristoforetti, "Afrasyab toponimo e Afrasyab eponimo: considerazioni sulla riemergente plausibilità di una *lectio facillior*." In: Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006, pp. 163-171.
- Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998
- Anna L. Dallapiccola, Anila Verghese, *Sculpture at Vijayanagara: Iconography and Style*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1998.
- de la Vaissière 2006
- Étienne de la Vaissière. "Les Turcs, rois du monde à Samarcande." In: Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006: 147-162.
- Dumont 1927
- Paul-Émile Dumont, *L'Asvamedha. Description du sacrifice solennel du cheval dans le culte védique d'après les textes du Yajurveda blanc*. Paris: P. Geuthner, 1927.
- Fedorov 2006
- Michael Fedorov. "Returning to the Sogdian Incense-Burner of the Late VII-Early VIII c. AD: A Portrait of Ikhshid Varkhuman?" *Iranica Antiqua*, 41 (2006): 221-231.
- Fowden 2004
- Garth Fowden, "The Six Kings at Qusayr 'Amra." In: *La Persia e Bisanzio*. Roma, 2004: 275-290.
- Frye 1954
- Richard N. Frye, ed. and tr. *The History of Bukhara. Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshakhī*. Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1954.
- Goetz 1967
- Hermann Goetz. "Frühe Darstellungen von Moslems in der Hindu-Kunst." *Oriens*, 18-19 (1967): 193-199.
- Goossens 1993
- Roger Goossens. "Un texte grec relatif à l'*ashvamedha*." *Journal Asiatique*, t. 217 (1930): 280-285.
- Grenet 1993
- Frantz Grenet. "Trois nouveaux documents d'iconographie religieuse sogdienne." *Studia Iranica*, 22/1 (1993): 49-67.
- Grenet 2003
- Frantz Grenet. "L'Inde des astrologues sur une peinture sogdienne du VIIe siècle." In: Carlo Cereti, Mauro Maggi, and E. Provasi, eds. *Religious Themes and Texts in Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia. Studies in Honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Wiesbaden, 2003: 123-129.
- Grenet 2004
- Frantz Grenet. "Maracanda/Samarkand, une métropole pré-mongole. Sources écrites et archéologie." *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, 5-6 (2004): 1043-1067.
- Grenet 2005
- Frantz Grenet. "The Self-Image of the Sogdians." In: Étienne de la Vaissière and Éric Trombert, eds. *Les Sogdiens en Chine*. EFEO, Etudes thématiques 17. Paris (2005): 123-140.
- Grenet 2006
- Frantz Grenet. "What was the Afrasyab Painting About?" In: Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006, pp. 43-58.
- Grenet and Marshak 1998
- Frantz Grenet and Boris I. Marshak. "Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdiane." *Arts Asiatiques*, 53 (1998): 5-18.
- Harle 1985
- James C. Harle. "Herakles Subduing the Horse(s) of Diomedes and Krishna Slaying the Demon-Horse Keshin: a Common Iconographic Formula." In: Janine Schotsmans and Maurizio Taddei, eds. *South Asian Archaeology 1983: Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels*. Naples: Instituto universitario orientale, 1985: 641-652.
- Huntington 1985
- Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, with contributions by John C. Huntington. New York; Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985.
- Kageyama 2002
- Etsuko Kageyama. "A Chinese Way of Depicting Foreign Delegates Discerned in the Paintings of Afrasiab." In: *Iran, questions et connaissances*. Vol. 1: *La période*

- ancienne*, ed. Ph. Huyse. Paris, 2002: 313-327.
- Kane 1918  
P. V. Kane, ed. *The Harshacarita of Ba'abhatta (Text of Uchchhvasas I-VIII)*. Bombay, 1918.
- Kitzinger 1946  
Ernst Kitzinger. "The Horse and Lion Tapestry at Dumbarton Oaks: A Study in Coptic and Sassanian Textile Design." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 3 (1946): 1-72.
- Lindquist 2003  
S. E. Lindquist. "Enigmatic Numismatics. Kings, Horses, and the Ashvamedha Coin-Type." *South Asian Studies*, 19 (2003): 105-112.
- Maitdinova 1984  
Guzel M. Maitdinova. "K interpretatsii zhivopisi Afrasiaba VII v. n. e. (stseny v lodke)." *Izvestiia Otdeleniia obshchestvennykh nauk AN Tadzhikskoi SSR*, 2, Dushanbe, 1984: 20-27.
- Malville 2000  
John McKim Malville, "The Cosmic Geometries of Vijayanagara." In: John McKim Malville and Lalit M. Gujral, eds. *Ancient Cities, Sacred Skies: Cosmic Geometries and City Planning in Ancient India*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts; Aryan Books International, 2000: 100-118.
- Mao forthcoming  
Mao Min. "The Scene of the Bathing Horses at the «Hall of the Ambassadors» in Afrasiab (Samarkand): Its Iconography Influence from China and Its Cultural Link with the Nawruz Festival." Paper Presented to the Second Conference on Turfan Studies, Turfan, August 25<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> 2005, forthcoming.
- Marshak 1994  
Boris I. Marshak. "Le programme iconographique des peintures de la 'Salle des ambassadeurs' à Afrasiab (Samarkand)." *Arts Asiatiques*, 49 (1994): 5-20.
- Marshak 2001  
Boris I. Marshak. "La thématique sogdienne dans l'art de la Chine de la seconde moitié du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle." *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 2001, No. 1: 227-264.
- Marshak 2006  
Boris I. Marshak, "Remarks on the Murals of the Ambassadors Hall." In: Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006, pp. 75-85.
- Mode 1993  
Markus Mode. *Sogdien und die Herrscher der Welt. Türken, Sasaniden und Chinesen in Historienmalereien des 7. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. aus Alt-Samarqand*. Frankfurt/Main etc.: Peter Lang, 1993 (= Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXVIII, Kunstgeschichte. Bd. 162).
- Mode 2002  
Markus Mode. "Court Art of Sogdian Samarkand in the 7th century AD: Some remarks to an old problem." 2002: <http://www.orientarch.uni-halle.de/ca/afras/index.htm>, accessed January 15, 2007.
- Mode 2006  
Markus Mode. "Reading the Afrasiab Murals: Some Comments on Reconstructions and Details." In: Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006, pp. 113-128.
- Motov 1999  
Iurii A. Motov, "Izobrazhenie misterii prazdnika Mikhragan v nastennykh rospisiakh afrasiabskogo dvortsa." In: *Istoriia i arkheologiya Semirech'ia. Sbornik statei i publikatsii*. Almaty, 1999: 57-81.
- Rapin 1995  
Claude Rapin. "Hinduism in the Indo-Greek Area. Notes on Some Indian Finds from Bactria and Two Temples in Taxila." In: Antonio Invernizzi, ed. *In the Land of the Gryphons. Papers on Central Asian Archaeology in Antiquity*. Monografie di Mesopotamia, 5. Firenze: Le lettere, 1995: 275-291.
- Rapin 1996  
Claude Rapin. *Indian Art from Afghanistan. The Legend of Sakuntala and the Indian Treasure of Eucratides at Ai Khanum*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1996.
- Riboud 2003  
Penelope Riboud. "Le cheval sans cavalier dans l'art funéraire sogdien en Chine: à la recherche des sources d'un thème composite." *Arts Asiatiques*, 58 (2003): 148-161.
- Riboud 2004  
Penelope Riboud. "Description du monument", and "Quelques remarques sur l'iconographie religieuse du monument." In: Catherine Delacour and Penelope Riboud, eds. *Lit de pierre, sommeil barbare. Présentation, après restauration et remontage, d'une banquette funéraire ayant appartenu à un aristocrate d'Asie Centrale venu s'établir en Chine au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris, 2004: 15-31 and 43-47.
- Schiltz 1994  
Véronique Schiltz. *Gli Sciti. VIII secolo a.C.-I secolo d.C.*, Parigi, 1994.
- Silvi Antonini 1989  
Chiara Silvi Antonini. "The Paintings in the Palace of Afrasiab (Samarkand)." *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 43 (1989): 109-144.
- Sinor 1990  
Denis Sinor. "The Establishment and Dissolution of the Türk Empire." In: Denis Sinor, ed. *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 285-316.
- Stein 1983  
Burton Stein. "Mahanavami: Medieval and Modern Kingly Ritual in South India." In: Bardwell Smith, ed. *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Delhi; Varanasi; Patna, 1983: 67-92.
- Smirnova 1970  
Ol'ga I. Smirnova. *Ocherki iz istorii Sogda*. Moskva: "Nauka," 1970.



---

Tanabe 1995

Katsumi Tanabe. "Nana on Lion. East and West in Sogdian Art." *Orient*, 30-31 (1995): 309-334.

Trilling 1982

James Trilling. *The Roman Heritage. Textiles from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean 300 to 600 A.D.* Washington D.C., 1982.

Yatsenko 2004

Sergey A. Yatsenko. "The Costume of Foreign Embassies and Inhabitants of Samarkand on Wall Painting of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. in the 'Hall of Ambassadors' from Afrasiab as a Historical Source." *Transoxiana*, 8 (June 2004): [http://www.transoxiana.org/0108/yatsenko-afrasiab\\_costume.html](http://www.transoxiana.org/0108/yatsenko-afrasiab_costume.html).

## Notes

1. In 630, during the reign of Taizong (630-649), the Chinese defeated the Eastern Turk Empire in Mongolia and used Turkish contingents in order to subjugate the Western Turk Empire in the Tarim Basin and Transoxiana. This task was completed during the reign of Gaozong between 657-659 (Sinor 1990, p. 310). Turk guards can be observed everywhere in the paintings of the western wall at Afrasiab: they can be recognized by their hairstyle and other facial traits such as the absence of a beard. In fact, Chinese literary sources describe them as having long hair and plaits. They do not carry gifts in the paintings, and for this reason they have been considered to be guards in service in the territory of their former empire after the submission to the Tang.

2. A possible similar scheme is, *mutatis mutandis*, in the famous early 8<sup>th</sup> century Omayyad painting at Qusayr 'Amra (Jordan) (Fowden 2004).

3. The king of that Sogdian region (identified with Kushanya) went into that pavilion to pray; so it would not be incorrect to identify

the building as a temple too. This does not seem to have been the case in Afrasiab where the 'Hall of the Ambassadors' has been identified as the private space of a prominent person, possibly Varkhuman himself (Marshak 2006, p. 75).

4. Chinese sources also report the time of year when the Sogdian Nawruz was celebrated (Compareti and Cristoforetti forthcoming). Grenet noted that one of the Turk guards wrapped his robe around his hips, probably since the season was too warm (Grenet 2004, pl. B).

5. Recently Mikhail Fedorov suggested that Varkhuman is the person dressed like a warrior in the left corner of the southern wall, who is, however, depicted on the same scale as the other people around him (Fedorov 2006). For a different interpretation of that detail, see Compareti 2004.

6. It is not clear if this part of the celebration should follow or precede the *Nawruz* (Compareti and Cristoforetti forthcoming).

7. Unfortunately, the funerary monument was not excavated according to scientific criteria, and it is now part of a private collection (the Vahid Kooros Collection, Houston).

8. The same figure of Krishna presents some traits borrowed from Hellenistic culture (Chandra 1983).

9. Also classical authors were aware of the *ashvamedha*. In his book on Apollonius of Tyana, Philostratus (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) gives a description of an Indian horse sacrifice which could be only interpreted as the *ashvamedha* (*Vit. Apoll. Ty.*, 2, 19, 15, cited in Goossens 1930).

10. This is in all probability a representation of the Mahanavami, a nine-days festival which comprised also horse sacrifices exactly as in the *ashvamedha* to be held in March-April or September-October: (Stein 1983, 75-88). It is worth remembering

that the city of Hampi presents an urban plan which denotes a complex system of astral relationships (Malville 2000).

11. Other harnessed horses possibly ready for sacrifice can be observed in at least one painting at Panjikent and on a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Sogdian funerary bed from China (Belenitskii 1961, p. 72, fig. 15; Marshak 1994, pp. 11-15).

12. The motif was wide-spread among many ancient cultures connected with ancient Persia from very ancient times to the Islamization of Iran and Central Asia. Processions of this kind can be observed, in fact, at Pazyryk (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE; see Schiltz 1994, p. 284, fig. 215) but also in some unpublished fragmentary terracottas from 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Dvin (Armenia), directly observed by this writer in the State Museum of Armenian History.

# Mapping Early Buddhist Sites in Western Tibet: Recent Findings from Tsamda County, China

Karl E. Ryavec

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, WI, USA

In this article, I present recent field survey findings of early Buddhist sites in Ngari or western Tibet during August 2006. The sites are in the core region of the former Guge kingdom [Fig. 1], and date from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Second Diffusion of Buddhism period, known in Tibetan as the 'Chidar' (*phyi dar*). This survey of abandoned temples and cave murals at several locales

in Tsamda county of Ali prefecture in the Tibet Autonomous Region is designed to study the spatial patterns of newly discovered sites in relation to the better known sites of historical importance. In this way, it may be possible to deduce approximately how many sites probably lie in the canyons of Ngari awaiting detailed documentation. Historical Tibetan records do not contain maps, and

so it is often difficult to locate early temples listed. Also, many smaller shrines and cave murals are not recorded in the surviving historical records, and it is thus necessary to survey areas to document sites.

Interest in western Tibet has tended to focus on the region's historical importance in spearheading the Second Diffusion of Buddhism, and the

iconographic origins of Tibetan Buddhist art. Western scholarship largely started with the expeditions and findings of the noted Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci (1933). His interests were similar to those of Sir Aurel Stein who earlier explored ancient Buddhist sites along the Silk Road during the first decades of the twentieth century. In both cases, these early archaeological and art

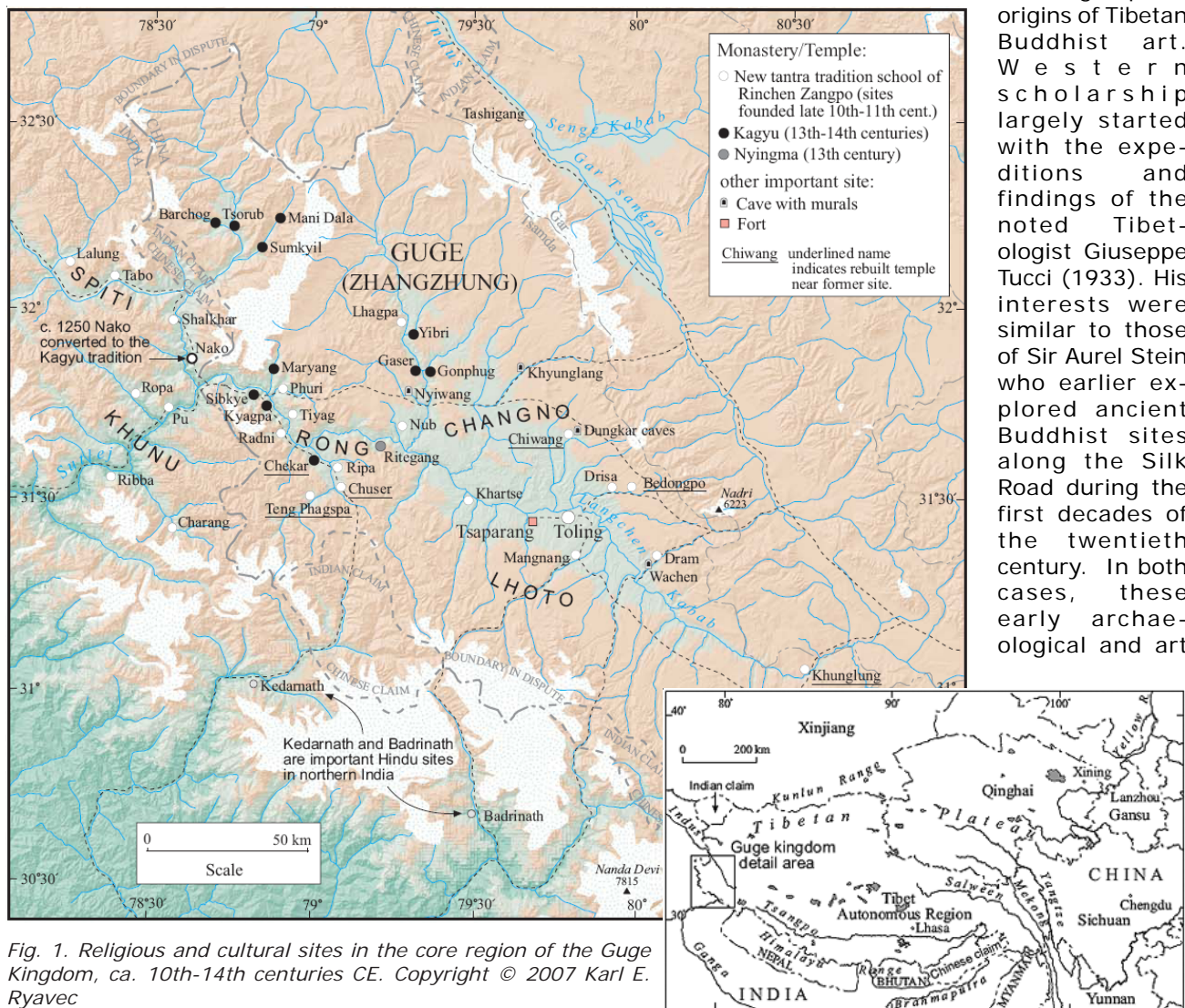


Fig. 1. Religious and cultural sites in the core region of the Guge Kingdom, ca. 10th-14th centuries CE. Copyright © 2007 Karl E. Ryavec



history surveys revealed a region desiccated by climate change over the past two millennia with numerous settlement areas abandoned due to dried-up irrigation sources. Recently, archaeological investigations of western Tibetan pre-Buddhist and Buddhist sites have commenced under collaborations between the American archeologist Mark Aldenderfer (2001, 2004), and the Chinese archaeologists Hou Wei and Li Yongxian (Hou and Li 2001) of Sichuan University. And I have studied the aerial extents of ancient abandoned farmland in several canyons of the former Guge kingdom based on 2-foot resolution satellite imagery, and made some preliminary findings on likely historical population levels (Ryavec 2005).

Tsamda county lies in the heart of the canyon country of southwestern Tibet carved by the Sutlej river of the Indus watershed, and bordered on the south by the Himalayan frontier with India. This region contains many ancient acropolis fort sites, some probably dating from the first millennium BCE Iron Age. Also, the terrain abounds in habitable caves. Traditionally, many people lived in caves especially during the cold winter months. Under the Tibetan empire ca. 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, western Tibet was annexed and referred to as Zhangzhung. The indigenous Bonpo religion remained strong while Buddhism seems not to have made any inroads, unlike in Central Tibet where it was fostered as a court religion of the emperors. Little is known of this past period, with studies by a small number of specialists referring to Zhangzhung in terms ranging from a coalition of territorially based lineages to group of kingdoms, and an empire (Bellezza 2003). However, most scholars agree that the Zhangzhung capital was located at Kyunglung on the eastern border of Tsamda county where the Sutlej river originates on the Tibetan

Plateau west of sacred Mount Kailash. After the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the new Guge kingdom that arose in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was sometimes still referred to as Zhangzhung.

It is not clear what sort of broader cultural influences may have interacted with the historical development of Zhangzhung during the pre-Buddhist period. The nearest major cultural hearth in this part of the world was the Harrapan, or Indus valley civilization that flourished c. 5000 – 2000 BCE, long before available archaeological evidence pertaining to Zhangzhung appeared. What impact the urban Harrapan culture may have had on historical developments in western Tibet is speculative at best, as outlined by Geoffrey Samuel (2000). Furthermore, George van Driem (1998) postulates that the northern Neolithic culture of Kashmir (2500 – 1700 BCE), much closer to western Tibet, represents a colonial exponent of the north China Majiayao Neolithic culture (ca. 3900 – 1800 BCE). Van Driem aptly points out that this provides

an explanation for the fact that Tibeto-Burmans inhabit both sides of the Himalayas, the greatest natural land barrier on earth. Certainly it is reasonable to assume these settlements in the upper Sutlej River valley had an agrarian base long before Buddhism arrived, but some time after the historical domestication of the important grain crop plants of wheat and barley in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago. According to J. P. Mallory and Victor Mair (2000), the weight of circumstantial evidence for the early settlement of eastern Central Asia during the Mesolithic period indicates western origins. In addition to the cultivation of cereals, archaeological evidence for the domestication of sheep also favors this western origin hypothesis. The extent to which western Tibet was geographically connected with these early diffusions and later trading networks requires further detailed interdisciplinary research.

Most of the Buddhist monasteries in western Tibet were built under patronage of the western



*Fig. 2. The acropolis fort complex above the present-day village and monastery of Mangnang. Note the numerous caves of the former residents. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.*





*Fig. 3. Mangnang village, and ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century temple complex. Himalaya frontier between Tibet and India in background. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.*

Tibetan Guge dynasty (ca. 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), which became instrumental in supporting a

Yet almost every canyon in the county has an ancient acropolis fort complex that saw the addition



*Fig. 4. Ca. 12<sup>th</sup> century ruined statue of a Buddhist deity, approximately 4 m tall, on the top of the Mangnang fort complex. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec*

resurgence of Buddhist art and literature. During this period many acropolis fort sites were re-developed to accommodate temples. In fact, the former Guge capital at the fortress of Tsaparang is the main destination of most tourists going to Tsamda county today, and is described in detail in guide books to western Tibet.



*Fig. 5. Ruined ca. 12<sup>th</sup> century fort/temple complex above the village of Bedongpo. Note small new Buddhist temple at foot of site. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec*

of Buddhist temples during the 'Chidar' period. Buddhist monks also painted cave murals as they did throughout the Silk Road region.

### New Sites

The acropolis fort complex [Fig. 2, facing page] above the village of Mangnang [Fig. 3] contains a ruined temple with an approximately 4 m 12<sup>th</sup>-century Buddhist statue still largely intact [Fig. 4]. Mangnang is well known as the site of an 11<sup>th</sup> century temple where the famed Bengali Buddhist master Atisha was invited to stay one year ca. 1043 before traveling to Central Tibet where he passed away. Available guidebooks to Ngari make no mention of this important surviving statue in the fort above the Mangnang village temple complex.

Bedongpo village lies in a small tributary of the Sutlej at approximately 4,200 m. Ruins of a fort/monastery complex tower above the village [Fig. 5]. Historical records show that the monastery of Bedongpo was a branch of the main monastery of Toling constructed in 996 CE during the beginning of the Buddhist period in western Tibet. Various other ruined temples are also found in the Bedongpo valley,





Fig. 6. Drisa fort complex with ca. 12th century chorten. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.

but only near the village was a small temple rebuilt after China's political and economic reforms in Tibet during the 1980s. About 2 km downstream from Bedongpo is a relatively unknown site called Drisa [Fig. 6]. Numerous chorten dating from circa the twelfth century lie on the valley floor below an extensive complex of caves and an acropolis fort. Traces of red pigment on the walls of at least one of the ruined fort buildings indicate possible temples. No traces of houses, however, are noticeable, indicating that the former farmers probably lived year-round in the caves. The entire valley here below Bedongpo village consists of large tracts of abandoned farmland, also indicated by a surviving chorten near the edge of an ancient field [Fig. 7].

The Khyunglang cave [Fig. 8] contains 3 walls with surviving

circa twelfth-century murals [Figs. 9, 10, facing page]. There are some other caves in the valley, but ladders are required to access



Fig. 7. Ca. 12<sup>th</sup> century chorten and abandoned farmland in the Bedongpo valley. Note the numerous caves of the former residents. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.

them. The Khyunglang cave lies about 5 km upstream from Shangtse fort, the reputed summer capital of the Guge kings.

### Conclusion

Tsamda county contains many surviving

early Tibetan Buddhist forms of art and architecture relatively unknown except to a handful of specialists. The area's importance as one of the core agrarian bases of the kingdoms of Guge and Purang starting in the tenth century led to royal patronage for substantial temple construction.

There are several problems, however, that make it difficult if not impossible for scholars and tourists to visit most of these sites. In recent years, tourists to Tsamda county have generally only been granted access to the main temples at Toling in the county seat, the nearby fort and temples at Tsaparang, and the Dungkar caves and fort easily accessed from the main road into the county. Chinese border security concerns place most of the other sites off limits, ostensibly due to sensitivity about the locations of military bases and patrols. China might do well to learn from its neighbor India, which now allows scholars to travel within 1 km of its claimed border



Fig. 8. Entrance to the Khyunglang cave. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.





Fig. 9. One of the three c. 12<sup>th</sup> century mandala murals in the Khyunglang cave. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.

with China. But China, unlike India, has to deal with its citizens attempting to flee the country. Thus the wider off-limit areas on the Chinese side reflect, in part, a method of preventing people from getting close enough to the border to walk into India. A second

concern relates to efforts by Chinese cultural offices preventing photography at the sites. This problem could be easily solved if those scholars who have already taken high-resolution photos (and official Chinese-sponsored surveys have already done this) made



Fig. 10. Detail of a Guge warrior in one of the three c. 12<sup>th</sup> century mandala murals in the Khyunglang cave. Photograph copyright © 2006 Karl E. Ryavec.

them freely available. This would then make it possible for more people to visit the sites without the need to take photographs of the murals, as complete images would already be available.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences and Prof. David Germano of the University of Virginia for facilitating my field research in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China under the general auspices of the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library project.

### About the Author

Dr. **Karl E. Ryavec** is an Assistant Professor in the Geography/Geology Department at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of Minnesota, 2002) was entitled "Land Use Change in Central Tibet, c. 1830-2000." Starting in 2004, Dr. Ryavec conducted field research in Tsamda county in China to understand better the growth and decline of the western Tibetan Guge kingdom. E-mail: <kryavec@uwsp.edu>.

### References

- Aldenderfer 2001
- Mark Aldenderfer. "Piyang: a Tibetan Buddhist Temple and Monastic Complex of the 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD in Far Western Tibet." *Archaeology, Ethnology, & Anthropology of Eurasia*, 2001, 4(8):138-146.
- Aldenderfer and Moyes 2004
- Mark Aldenderfer and Holley Moyes. "Excavations at Dindun, a pre-Buddhist village site in far western Tibet." In: Huo Wei and Li Yongxian, eds. *Essays of the International Conference on Tibetan Archaeology and Art*. Chengdu, China: Center for Tibetan Studies, Sichuan Union University, 2004: 47-69.



---

Bellezza 2003

John V. Bellezza. "Ancient Tibet: Bringing to Light the Forgotten. A comprehensive survey: of Pre-Buddhist sites in Upper Tibet (1992-2002)." *Athena Review*, 3/4 (2003), online at <<http://www.athena.pub.com/12tibet.htm>>.

Huo and Li 2001

Huo Wei and Li Yongxian. "Xizang Zhada Xian Piyang-Dongga Yi Zhi 1997 Nian Diaocha Yufa Jue" [Survey and Excavation of the Piyang-Dongga Site in Zanda County, Tibet in 1997]. *Acta Archaeologica Sinica*, 3 (2001): 397-426.

Mallory and Mair 2000

J. P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair. *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China*

*and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Ryavec 2005

Karl E. Ryavec. "Aerial Survey of Abandoned Agricultural Fields in the Ancient Tibetan Kingdom of Guge: Recent Findings from 2-foot Resolution Quick Bird Imagery of Bedongpo and Environs." *Aerial Archaeology Research Group Newsletter*, 30 (2005): 18-25.

Samuel 2000

Geoffrey Samuel. "The Indus Valley Civilization and Early Tibet." In: Samten G. Karmay and Yasuhiko Nagano, eds. *New Horizons in Bon Studies*. Bon Studies, 2. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2000: 651-670.

Tucci 1933

Giuseppe Tucci. *Secrets of Tibet: Being the Chronicle of the Tucci Scientific Expedition to Western Tibet*. Translated from the Italian edition by Mary A. Johnstone. London; Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1933.

Van Driem 1998

George Van Driem. "Neolithic Correlates of Ancient Tibeto-Burman Migrations." In: Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs, eds. *Archaeology and Language*. Vol. 2. London; New York: Routledge, 1998: 67-102.

---

## Han Lacquerware and the Wine Cups of Noin Ula

François Louis

*Bard Graduate Center, New York*

Lacquer work is today recognized as one of the centrally distinctive components of Han material culture (206 BCE–220 CE). What's more, the Former Han period (206 BCE–8 CE) has come to be celebrated as the apogee of Chinese lacquer art (see Wang 1982, 80–99; Prüch 1997; Fuzhou 1998; Barbieri-Low 2001; and Li 2004 for further reading on Han lacquer). These insights are relatively recent and entirely the result of archaeological discoveries. Precisely a century has passed since the first archaeological discovery and identification of a lacquer vessel from Han China. In the spring of 1907, while surveying the Han border fortifications north of Dunhuang — and just weeks before coming upon the sensational medieval library at the Mogao Caves — Aurel Stein dryly

recorded his historic find, a wooden ear cup with scroll ornament from the ruins of a Han command center (Stein 1921, Vol. 2, 645; Vol. 4, pl. LII). Since Stein's discovery, and especially over the past forty years, archaeologists have unearthed thousands of Han and even pre-Han lacquer artifacts, several hundred of which are fortunately still in fine condition.

We now know that the use of lacquer as a protective, water-proof coating made from the sap of the lacquer tree (*rhus verniciflua*) goes back to Neolithic times in China. But as an artistically emancipated craft, lacquering came into its own only in the late fifth century BCE in the state of Chu in southern China. From that time on it was the preferred means of decoration for

all types of wood-based artifacts, whether vessels, boxes, furniture, musical instruments, arms, chariots, or coffins. By the Qin (220–206 BCE) and early Han eras, lacquering had become so prominent a craft that certain vessels were even produced as 'pure' lacquer artifacts without a wood substrate, using instead lacquer-drenched ramie fabric to build a core.

As a commodity, lacquer work was in many respects akin to woven silk during the Han era. Both had relatively little intrinsic material value. Made from renewable resources, silk and lacquer products, unlike artifacts made of jade and gold, were valued primarily on the basis of their design and manufacture. This meant that they could be made to cater to a relatively broad spectrum of the population. Plain silk fabric and utensils simply varnished in raw brown lacquer were widely available and essential commodities. But patterned silks with complex weave structures and glossy, colored lacquers with artfully painted red and black decoration

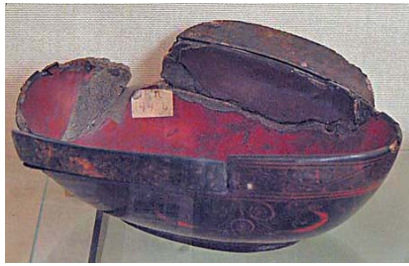


Fig. 1. Wine cup, dated 2 BCE, from Noin Ula tomb 6. Seen from the side. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (photograph © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh).

or even gold and silver inlays could be very expensive and functioned above all as means of social distinction. The quality of lacquer work found in archaeological contexts can thus explain much about the wealth and social position of its last owner; it can even illuminate his or her relationship to the Han imperial court.

While the discovery of Han lacquer ware in a military station from the ancient Han frontier may not be as spectacular as the finds from aristocratic tombs near big towns, it is by no means unusual or surprising. Lacquered artifacts were available everywhere in the Han Empire, even though the majority was made in the lacquering workshops of central and southern China where lacquer trees grew abundantly. Han lacquers have even been found in areas far beyond the ancient Han frontier, as far north as Lake Baikal and as far west as Begram in Afghanistan (for the Begram finds see Hackin 1954, 295-297, figs. 243-249; Mehendale 2005, 1.4.3).

The lacquer artifacts from such distant sites are still poorly understood, despite the fact that many of them were already found in the 1920s and 1930s. Although widely discussed early on, they have received little attention since the major discoveries in the People's Republic of China took center stage. Now, however, in light of recent insights on Han lacquer and in view of new



Fig. 2. Wine cup, dated 2 BCE, from Noin Ula tomb 6. Seen from the bottom without handles. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (photograph after Umehara 1960, pl. 59).

discoveries in Mongolia and Buryatia, it is worth taking a fresh look at some of the early finds.

Most recently, Han lacquer artifacts have been reported from a number of Xiongnu cemeteries. While some evidence was discovered in tombs in the Tamir River Valley in eastern Arkhangai, some 300 kilometers west of Ulaanbaatar (Waugh 2006), the majority of finds come from the mountains between Ulaanbaatar and Lake Baikal north of it (Miniaev 1998; Torbat et al. 2003). Of these recent finds a lacquered Han chariot is certainly the most extraordinary (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2006). The most significant early discoveries, however, remain the wine cups discovered in the mid-1920s in the Noin Ula

Mountains, about 100 kilometers north of Ulaanbaatar.

Four relatively well-preserved lacquer cups from Noin Ula have been adequately published [Figs. 1-5]; a few more have been reported though not illustrated in the main surveys. Unfortunately, no proper excavation report of the tombs was ever prepared, as its potential authors had fallen victim to Stalinist terror (Maenchen-Helfen 1965). And the Japanese



Fig. 3. Wine cup from Noin Ula tomb 23. Mid-first century CE. National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar (photograph courtesy of Thierry Ollivier).





Fig. 4. Wine cup from Noin Ula tomb 23. Mid-first century CE. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (photograph after Umehara 1960, pl. 63).

archaeologist Umehara Sueji (1893–1983), who was able to study the lacquers extensively soon after their discovery and planned on publishing a major analysis of the site, lost most of his research materials during the 1945 napalm bombing of Tokyo and had to reconstruct his book manuscript after the war. Finally, there has been some confusion due to the dividing of the Noin Ula finds between the State Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Museum of Mongolian History in Ulaanbaatar.

Umehara explains that the four Han lacquer cups come from three

different tombs, a fact that appears to have escaped several later authors (Umehara 1960, 28–32, pls. 59–62). The Russian expedition of 1924–25 led by Petr K. Kozlov, according to Umehara, found an inscribed and dated cup of 2 BCE in the large *kurgan* 6 [Figs. 1, 2] and two un-inscribed cups in *kurgan* 23, about 100 meters west of *kurgan* 6 (Figs. 3, 4). Sergei I. Rudenko later mentions in his inventories of the Kozlov expedition, published in 1962, that tomb 23 actually contained four lacquer cups, one of which [Fig. 3] had been returned to Mongolia (Rudenko

1969, 112). The fourth cup was not discovered by Kozlov, but by Mongolian scholars who investigated the tombs in summer 1927. This cup, found in four fragments, is also inscribed and dated to the year 2 BCE [Fig. 5], but was discovered in tomb 5, which lay in the vicinity of tomb 6. It has always been kept in Ulaanbaatar (Umehara 1944, 16; Umehara 1960, 29). The two cups now in Ulaanbaatar have recently been shown in two traveling exhibitions in Europe (Paris 2000, 147; Bonn 2005, 51), where they were both assigned to tomb 6, without any mention of Umehara's account of the 1927 investigations or the reports that the un-inscribed cup [Fig. 3] was found in the inner burial chamber of tomb 23, north of the coffin (cf. Trever 1932, 47, pl. 29, 1; Rudenko 1969, pl. 48). These discrepancies are likely the result of oversights by the catalogue authors. The catalogues, especially the one from Paris, do, however, have the virtue of providing outstanding color illustrations of Noin Ula lacquers.

The two cups from tombs 5 and 6 [figs. 1, 2 and 5] carry important inscriptions that identify them as official products manufactured in government workshops for the imperial court. Both share the same basic design of facing birds and spirals, yet they show very different styles: one bold the other tender and fragile. These stylistic differences have been recognized as typical for two distinct regional styles — those from Sichuan and Shaanxi, respectively. As Anthony Barbieri-Low has illuminated in his excellent recent dissertation, the cup from tomb 5 [Fig. 5] is a typical example of the thousands of mass-produced vessels from the two imperial luxury workshops in Shu and Guanghan; fifty lacquer vessels from these Sichuan workshops are still known today (Barbieri-Low 2001, 421–422). The cup is of beautiful quality, despite being mass-produced, and is explicitly designated in its inscription as 'fit for use by the emperor (*chengyu*).'



Fig. 5. Wine cup, dated 2 BCE, from Noin Ula tomb 5. National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar (photo courtesy of Thierry Ollivier).



---

In contrast, the cup painted with fine lines from *kurgan 6* [Figs. 1, 2] is unique in the archaeological record. It was produced in a palace workshop in the capital Chang'an in Shaanxi by the master artisan Wang Tanjing and design painter Hu. On the bottom, separate from the incised inscription made by the manufacturing office, the cup bears the two additional large characters 'Shanglin,' which refer to the imperial park in Chang'an. This reference led Barbieri-Low to speculate that the lacquer workshop might actually have been located in the imperial park. It is, however, much more likely that the inscription was simply part of the palace inventory system that designated the cup for use in the one of the imperial palaces in Shanglin Park.

There is indeed good reason to think that this cup was used in Shanglin Park in the year 1 BCE to host the chief Xiongnu leader, Shanyu Wuzhuliuruoti (r. 8 BCE–13 CE). According to Ban Gu (32–92 CE), this *shanyu* had requested an audience at the capital as early as the year 3 BCE. But the Han court extend the formal invitation only after months of deliberations centering on the vast expense and the bad luck occasioned by visits from the Xiongnu leaders. A subsequent illness of the *shanyu* further delayed the visit. When the *shanyu* finally arrived, he came in the company of five hundred men, more than in any delegation before, and all of them eager to experience the Han court's wealth and generosity. The emperor, who for astrological reasons had decided it best to 'reside in the Grapevine Palace (Putao Gong) in Shanglin Park and to treat his guest with additional honors,' invited the *shanyu* to stay at Shanglin Park as well — a privilege regular courtiers could only dream of. 'The *shanyu*, appreciative of this favor, was also regaled with 370 robes, thirty thousand bolts of various patterned silk fabrics, and thirty thousand pounds of raw

silk, in addition to the same gifts as had been given in the year 25 BCE [to his predecessor]' (*Hanshu* 94B.3817).

Ever since the Xiongnu and the Han court had reached a peace accord in 53 BCE, diplomatic exchange between the two had intensified. By the end of the first century BCE there was a well established system of tributary trade between the two rulers, according to which the emperor provided huge gifts to the *shanyu*, who in turn acted nominally submissive, promising to keep the peace and enable mutual trade. Before Wuzhuliuruoti's visit in the year 1 BCE, there were four instances of a Xiongnu *shanyu* attending an audience at the Han court, each more generously rewarded than the one before (Barfield 1989, 63–67). Back in his own country, as Thomas Barfield has pointed out, the *shanyu* was obliged to distribute among his nobility the wealth he had obtained through this tributary trade (Barfield 1981). Such gift distribution among the Xiongnu nobility offers one explanation as to why the two imperial lacquer cups were reportedly found in different tombs. It is of course also possible that the occupants of tombs 5 and 6 were both at the Chinese court in 1 BCE. Indeed it has often been suggested that *kurgan 6* is the tomb of Wuzhuliuruoti Shanyu himself (Paris 2000, 146).

The two cups made in the year 2 BCE, undoubtedly in anticipation of the expected Xiongnu visit, are the earliest lacquer cups from Noin Ula. The ear cups found in tomb 23 belong to an altogether different category. They are of noticeably lower quality than the vessels made in the government workshops, have no official inscriptions, differ in style, and may be as much as seven decades younger than the cups dated to 2 BCE (cf. a vessel from the tomb of Wang Xu [d. after 69 CE] in Pyongyang; Harada 1930, pl. 61). The symmetric and yet organic

cloud and scroll ornament with interspersed animals that was omnipresent during the Former Han period [Figs. 1, 2 and 4], faded away over the course of the first century CE. In the 40s, after two decades of civil war following the murder of Wang Meng (r. 9–23 CE), the aristocracy of the Later Han dynasty (25–220) abandoned the old luxuriant ornamental style in favor of a frugal one, and the imperial lacquer workshops henceforth produced only undecorated vessels, red on the inside, black on the outside, before finally shutting down for lack of funds early in the second century. With the trendsetting imperial elite forfeiting luxurious display, the Han lacquer industry becomes fiercely commercial, and the old ornamental style survives only in an increasingly simplified, downgraded form. The two cups from tomb 23 represent this commercial type of ware typical of lacquer production in the first century CE. Most likely these cups reached the Xiongnu not as official imperial gifts but through trade. We can view them as evidence for free forms of private trade between the Han and Xiongnu states, conducted both at Han frontier markets, by the countless members of the embassies that went to and fro, and by the military stationed along the borders. Yü Ying-shih has adeptly described this kind of frontier trade in his classic study (Yü 1967, 93–132).

Because lacquerwares were made in only some regions in China, they were among the frequently traded goods in the Han Empire. And because lacquers were unique Chinese products with excellent qualities, it seems reasonable to assume that they figured prominently in international trade — like bronze mirrors or silks (Maenchen-Helfen 1973 for an overview of bronze mirrors in Xiongnu contexts). Early Chinese sources are full of proud references to the infatuation of Han's neighbors with Chinese

goods, yet the sources virtually never mention lacquer specifically as an export good. Lacquer evidently did not fit the Han rhetoric of wealth in the same way gold, jade, and silk did. When the Han court provided wine cups to their tributary delegations, they handed them out as party favors after the main banquet rather than as serious gifts worth entering into the national records. Nevertheless, some recipients of such tokens of imperial grandeur — Chinese officials perhaps more so than others — treasured them, sometimes over generations, and rarely ever used them.

Not surprisingly, imitations of the imperial wares were also available on the market. Some, as Barbieri-Low has uncovered, were deceptively similar to authentic official wares, complete with fake official inscriptions (Barbieri-Low 2001). The majority, however, were of lesser quality and emphasized either the bold red line perceived as typical of the imperial Sichuan style or the fine red lines typical of the metropolitan style of the Former Han capital, Chang'an. The fragments of lacquer vessels recently discovered in Xiongnu tombs in the Tamir Valley represent such commercial categories from around the mid-first century CE (Waugh 2006). The bronze-mounted handle of an ear cup found in Feature 201 [Fig. 6], for instance, continues the characteristic design of diagonal



Fig. 7. Han lacquer bowl fragment, first century CE, found at Tamiryn Ulaan Khoshuu, Feature 97, Arkhangai aimag, in 2005 (photograph © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh).

lines seen on ear cup handles made for the court earlier on [cf. Fig. 5]. The bowl found in Feature 97 [Fig. 7], on the other hand, combines on its black exterior a striking pattern of sketchy red lines and dots — a faded continuation of the old imperial Sichuan-style — with a design of delicate scrolls painted in red, gray, and yellow. Such multi-colored painted ornament was typical for the commercial products of the early Eastern Han era (25-220 CE) and hinted at the earlier tradition of expensive gold and silver inlays. Like many Eastern Han artifacts for personal use, such as bronze mirrors, silks, or jewelry, this lacquer bowl was magically charged to enhance



Fig. 8. Inscription on Han lacquer bowl, first century CE, found at Tamiryn Ulaan Khoshuu, Feature 97, Arkhangai aimag, in 2005 (photograph © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh).

fertility through its auspicious inscription *yi zi sun*, 'may it bring you sons and grandsons' [Fig. 8].

The regularity with which remains of Han lacquers are found in Xiongnu tombs of the late first century BCE and the first century CE suggests that the Xiongnu elite recognized fine Han lacquers as prestigious and useful possessions, if not for their association with the Chinese court, then for their appeal as exotic commodities and their connection to the Xiongnu ruling family, whose policies resulted in the availability of Chinese artifacts. A more precise picture of Xiongnu perceptions and uses of fine Chinese commodities such as the perishable lacquers, however, awaits further research.

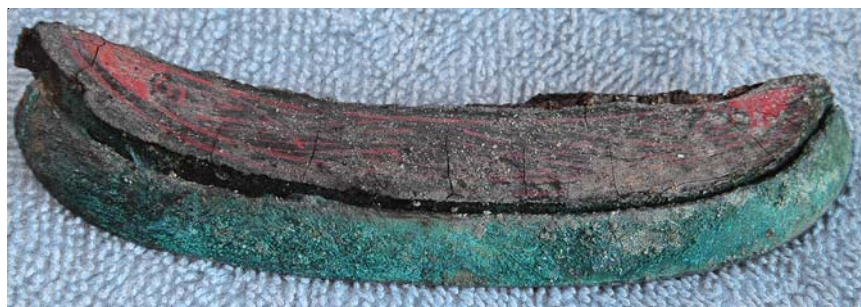


Fig. 6. Bronze-mounted handle of ear cup found at Tamiryn Ulaan Khoshuu, Arkhangai aimag, Feature 201, in 2005 (photograph © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh).



---

## About the Author

**François Louis** is an Associate Professor of Chinese Art and Design History at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture in New York. He has published widely on early and medieval Chinese metalwork and is currently working on a book on Khitan material culture.

## References

Barbieri-Low 2001

Anthony Barbieri-Low. "The Organization of Imperial Workshops during the Han Dynasty." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2001.

Barfield 1981

Thomas J. Barfield. "The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 41/1 (1981): 45–61.

Barfield 1989

Thomas J. Barfield. *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 B.C. to A.D. 1757*. Cambridge, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

Bonn 2005

Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, ed. *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben: Das Weltreich der Mongolen*. Munich: Hirmer, 2005.

Fuzhou 1998

Zhongguo qiqi quanji bianji weiyuan hui. *Zhongguo qiqi quanji: 3 Han*. Fuzhou: Fuzhou meishu chubanshe, 1998.

Hackin 1954

Joseph Hackin, J.-R. Hackin, Jean Carl, and P. Hamelin, eds. *Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Begram (ancienne Kâpici), 1939–1940. Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan*, t. 11. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1954.

*Hanshu*

Ban Gu. *Hanshu* [History of the Former Han Dynasty]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

Harada 1930

Harada Yoshito. *Lo-lang: A Report on the Excavation of Wang Hsü's Tomb*. Tokyo: Tôkô Shoin, 1930.

Li 2004

Li Zebin, ed. *Han Guangling guo qiqi* [Lacquer from the Han State of Guangling]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004.

Maenchen-Helfen 1965

Maenchen-Helfen, Otto J. "Review of Umehara, *Moko Noin Ura hakken no ibutsu*. (*Studies of Noin-Ula Finds in North Mongolia*) and Rudenko, *Kul'tura khunnov i Noinulinskie kurgany*." *Artibus Asiae*, 27/4 (1964 - 1965): 365–369

Maenchen-Helfen 1973

Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen. *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture*. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1973.

Mehendale 2005

Sanjyot Mehendale. *Begram Ivory and Bone Carvings*. <<http://ecai.org/begramweb>>. Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

Miniaev 1998

Sergei S. Miniaev. *Dyrestuiskii mogil'nik*. Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Siunnu, vyp. 3. St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1998.

Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2006

Sergei S. Miniaev and L. M. Sakharovskaia. "Khan'skaia kolesnitsa iz mogil'nika Tsaram." *Arkheologicheskie vesti*, 13 (2006).

Paris 2000

*L'Asie des steppes: d'Alexandre le Grand à Gengis Khan*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000.

Prüch 1997

Margarete Prüch. *Die Lacke der Westlichen Han-Zeit*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1997.

Rudenko 1969

Sergei I. Rudenko. *Die Kultur der Hsiung-nu und die Hügelgräber von Noin Ula*. Bonn: Habelt Verlag, 1969. [Translation of *Kul'tura khunnov i Noinulinskie kurgany*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1962.]

Stein 1921

Aurel Stein. *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*. 5 vols. Oxford 1921. Available online at: <<http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/VIII-5-B2-9/>>.

Torbat et al. 2003

T. S. Torbat, U. Erdenebat, and D. Seveendorzh. *Egiin golyn sav nutag dakh' arkheologiin dursgaluud: khurliin uees Mongolyn ue*. Ulaanbaatar, 2003.

Trever 1932

Camilla Trever. *Excavations in Northern Mongolia (1924–1925)*. Leningrad: J. Fedorov, 1932. Available on-line at: <<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/museums/shm/trever.pdf>>, with the photographs displayed separately at: <<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/museums/shm/shmnoinula.html>>.

Umehara 1944

Umehara Sueji. *Shina Kandai kinenmei shikki zuzetsu* [Catalogue of inscribed and dated lacquers from Han China]. Kyoto: Kuwana Bunseido, 1944.

Umehara 1960

Umehara Sueji. *Môko Noin Ura hakken no ibutsu* [Studies of Noin Ula Finds in North Mongolia]. Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1960.

Waugh 2006

Daniel C. Waugh. "The Challenges of Preserving Evidence of Chinese Lacquerware in Xongnu Graves." *The Silk Road*, 4/1 (2006): 32–36.

Wang 1982

Wang Zhongshu. *Han Civilization*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1982.

Yü 1967

Yü Ying-shih. *Trade and Expansion in Han China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.



---

# Trade and Commerce on the Silk Road after the End of Mongol Rule in China, Seen from Chinese Texts

**Ralph Kauz**

*Institute of Iranian Studies/Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna*

Traffic and exchange on the Silk Road are generally perceived to have taken place more before and during Mongol rule in Asia than in later periods. That is, in this view the 'Silk Road' is a historical phenomenon which came to a halt sometime during the late 'European' Middle Ages. Few would think about merchants and envoys crossing Asia well after the Mongols, before the Europeans 're-discovered' Central Asia. This paper will discuss the traffic along the route after the Mongols in order to demonstrate that the Silk Road did not break off completely in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but continued to function for a rather long time subsequently.

The historical documentation of trans-Asian contacts in Chinese texts started during the Han dynasty, when Emperor Han Wudi sent Zhang Qian, the first well-known traveller along the Silk Road, to the Yuezhi to propose a political and military coalition against the Xiongnu. Around the beginning of the Common Era, the Han conquered vast areas of the 'Western Regions' (*Xiyu*), and consequently the Han Empire stretched far into Central Asia. After the downfall of the Han, interactions between Western, Central and Eastern Asia persisted, though on a less institutionalized level. They rose again under the rule of the cosmopolitan Tang dynasty, when Sogdian and other merchants brought various exotics to China and exported Chinese silks and other products in exchange. For Peroz, son of the last Sasanian shah, China was the only haven

from the onslaught of the Arab Muslims. Already during the Tang, but much more during the following dynasties, direct overland contacts between Eastern and Western Asia declined to a certain degree; however, maritime trade increased enormously instead.

These circumstances changed under the Mongols, when travelers like John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, not to mention Marco Polo and others, brought reports and narratives of Central and Eastern Asia under Mongol rule back to Europe and implanted the idea of (relatively) free travel and trade into the heads of their countrymen. Nowadays images of journeys on the Silk Road are mostly connected with Marco Polo and the Mongol period. Few people would probably think of the aforementioned Han ventures, Sogdian traders, and even less of persons like the Chinese official Chen Cheng, the Timurid painter Ghiyas ad-Din and the Portuguese Jesuit Benedict Goës, who crossed Central Asia decades and even centuries after the fall of the Mongols.<sup>1</sup> What were the motives of these latter travelers and what was the historical and political background of their endeavors?

The famous Great Wall of China, in the shape we can appreciate today, was built during the Ming period (1368-1644), and in the popular view it is still a symbol of Chinese seclusion (cf., however, Di Cosmo 2006). In fact though, according to a major historical source of this dynasty, the 'Veritable Records' (*Ming shilu*) as well as other texts, numerous

embassies arrived in China from Central and Western Asia during this period. They number 89 embassies coming from the Central Asian center Samarkand alone — the first arrived on 27 October 1387 and the last on 3 May 1618.<sup>2</sup> If we take the average, about one embassy from Samarkand arrived in either of the two Chinese capitals under the Ming (Nanjing and later Beijing) every three years, though we must admit that this calculation is partly incorrect because many more embassies came at the beginning of the dynasty than at its end.

The embassies arriving from Samarkand during the Ming dynasty seemingly reveal the close continuous contacts with Central Asia. However, Samarkand still lies in Central and not in Western Asia. If we turn further west (or better southwest), we find that 21 embassies arrived from Herat (in 14 cases written Halie and in 7 Heilou) between the years 1409 and 1484. Herat was the second capital of the Timurids after Shahrokh ascended the throne in 1405 and from this base he re-conquered parts of his father's empire from various rivals. Herat was the contemporaneous capital of Khorasan — and Khorasan can absolutely be regarded as a province of Iran.<sup>3</sup> But Herat was not the furthest western city mentioned in the Ming records: three embassies came from Kerman, the important center of southeastern Iran, written in the 'Veritable Records' with different spellings (1415, 1424, 1425), and we also find five

---

embassies from Isfahan (1419-1483) and seven from Shiraz (1413-1484). The last three cities were (and are) definitely on what is considered Iranian soil and at least at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century they belonged to the Timurid Empire. Thus it seems that we may affirm commercial relations between Iran and China taking place well into the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Relations between China and Western Asia apparently went even beyond the region of Iran: we learn of 23 embassies arriving from Arabia (or Mecca), which the Chinese called Tianfang<sup>4</sup> (1433-1618), and of five coming from a country called Roumi (1423-1445) and finally eleven others from one pronounced similarly, namely Lumi (1524-1618). Roumi and Lumi should be both the transcription of 'Rum,' the popular term for Anatolia and *pars pro toto* for the Ottoman Empire.

According to Chinese texts, therefore, embassies from places as far as Samarkand, Arabia and the Ottoman Empire arrived in China during the whole Ming dynasty, though the numbers at the beginning of the dynasty surpass those in the second half by far. As a result continuous exchanges between Western and Eastern Asia seem to have taken place even centuries after the Mongols' conquests.

However, the real basis of the data gathered from the 'Veritable Records' can be doubted, and one may consider all or at least a number of these embassies to be 'fake embassies.' First, one may question whether embassies from Arabia and the Ottoman Empire still arrived in China in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and even early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, because Asia was separated by political and religious obstacles during that period. Another reason for these doubts is the existence of various Persian credential letters to the Chinese Emperor which were found as attachments to Persian-Chinese glossaries of

the period. These glossaries were compiled by the 'Muslim Office' (*Huihui guan*), a sub-office of the 'Office of the Four Barbarians' (*Siyi guan*) which was in charge of translations from various languages and thus essential for diplomatic and commercial exchange. Linguistic inconsistencies and errors allude to the probability that the texts were written by corrupt Chinese officials for 'fake embassies.'<sup>5</sup> These letters indicate that the embassies came from places much closer to China than they pretended in order to profit from the lucrative tribute system. Finally, the Chinese texts show that the Chinese officials themselves were often not sure of the veracity of many embassies. One early example recorded by the critics of the Supervising Secretary (*jishizhong*) Huang Ji on 26 December 1424 may be given here: 'Many of the envoys are trading barbarians who conduct their private businesses under a false pretext to bring tribute and under false authorization in order to attain an official position...' (*Ming shilu* 1966: *Renzong shilu*, j. 5, p. 160).

The reality of intense trans-Asian exchanges well after the fall of the Mongols in Iran and China may be doubted after these remarks. To illuminate this preliminary reasoning we will consider briefly the history of the region before we turn again to the embassies and put them in the framework of the broader political context of the period. Finally, we will address the question, 'Why did the Silk Road decline?'

When Zhu Yuanzhang defeated the Mongols and founded the Ming dynasty in 1368, he was forced to deal with areas across the borders of China, because the rest of the Mongol armies fled with the last Yuan emperor Toghan Temür into the steppes.<sup>6</sup> Serious Mongol pretenders survived until 1388, some of them recognized even by the Chinese as having legitimate claims. Thus Zhu Yuanzhang had to include the regions north of

China into his strategic schemes. Furthermore, many people of Central Asia (the so-called *semuren*) had settled in China during the Yuan dynasty, and some of them were obviously brought back to 'Samarkand' as it is written in Chinese texts, but this toponym probably includes other places of Central Asia as well.

Timur came to power at about the same time as the first Ming Emperor; he founded a Central Asian empire with its capital at Samarkand. Though of Turkic origin, Timur stood in the tradition of the Mongols and legitimized his rule by marrying a woman with Chingisid lineage. His pretensions clearly aimed far beyond the area in which he grew up, the core of the Ulus Chaghatay dominion. He conquered Iran, led his army into India and far into Asia Minor where he defeated the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid, but the east, China included, was to be spared until the end of his rule. Finally, Timur gathered his army to attack China, but he died in the early stages of this campaign at Utrar, on 18 February 1405.

Both rulers saw themselves as possible successors of the Mongols, and their respective aspirations reached beyond the area they actually ruled. Thus it is not surprising to find them spying out the other's ambitions. In fact we cannot prove this statement, yet the texts handed down may lead one to assume it. Timur sent several embassies to the Chinese emperor, bringing the greatly desired horses as tribute with them and Zhu Yuanzhang also sent embassies to the ruler of Central Asia and Iran. We may suppose that Timur presented himself as a tributary to the Chinese in order to gather necessary information on the strategic conditions in early Ming China. The first of these embassies arrived in late 1387 and was sent by the 'son-in-law'<sup>7</sup> Timur — thus state the Chinese texts. These Timurid embassies (some eleven can be counted) continued until

---

1396, and all of them brought with them relatively high numbers of horses which we will remember were the most sought after tribute item by the Chinese. Why they were brought to a temporary end is not quite clear. Fortunately, however, we can reconstruct the probable development of the relationship between the Timurids and the Ming of those years from a number of sources: first the aforementioned Chinese texts; second, Timurid historiographers who also disclose an amount of important information; and third even Europeans, namely the Castilian Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo and the Bavarian Johann Schiltberger, who both sojourned in Samarkand at the turn of the century. They did not leave much, but it is all the more valuable information because of this.

A letter, allegedly sent by Timur himself, seemed to have been crucial for the interruption of relations between both empires (Kauz 2005, 64-67). In this letter, which was received in late 1394 at the Chinese court, Timur unconditionally acknowledged the suzerainty of China in most obedient terms. As a result the Chinese government sent an embassy under the leadership of the official Fu An and others, among them the eunuch Liu Wei,<sup>8</sup> to Samarkand to thank Timur for his submission. Chinese and Timurid texts differ completely in telling the story. According to the first, Fu An refused to kowtow to Timur and was ordered to travel around the Timurid Empire to realize its size. Strangely enough, the Timurid Sharaf ad-din Yazdi gives a much more favorable impression of the reception: Fu An was allowed 'to kiss the carpet' — a high favor — and was graciously dismissed. Whatever happened, the embassy must have been a failure, because out of 1,500 accompanying soldiers only 17 returned in 1409.

Zhu Yuanzhang died in 1398, and his death was followed by years of struggle for the

succession. The victor of these struggles was Zhu Di, son of the first Ming emperor and governor of Beijing. His rule of 22 years (1402-1424) as the Yongle Emperor may be considered one of the most remarkable reigns of Chinese history. Zhu Di pursued an expansionist foreign policy. The movement of the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, close to the Mongols who were still a threatening enemy, can be seen as the symbol of this policy. The most important objectives of this policy were:

- Large-scale campaigns against the Mongols with participation of the emperor;
- Occupation of Vietnam;
- Maritime expeditions to the Western Indian Ocean under the leadership of admiral Zheng He;
- Active foreign policy towards Central Asia.

It is certainly the last objective which is of interest here, but the Central (and Western) Asia policy can only be seen in the context of the overall foreign policy. One example of this is the presence of Timurid envoys travelling overland and Hormuzian envoys travelling overseas to Beijing at the same time in early 1421! Zhu Di had woven a close net connecting the major parts of Asia with China at its center. This is certainly an extraordinary feature in the history of Chinese foreign relations.

Before we turn to the peak of these relations, their rather disastrous beginning must be revealed. Only a short time after his inauguration, Zhu Di sent an embassy 'to Samarkand, Herat and other places to present the emirs there with brocade' (*Ming shilu* 1966: *Taizong shilu*, j. 15, p. 270). Thus goes the official reason; the factual motive, however, was probably to inquire after the remainders of the former Chinese embassies and to resume tributary relations. According to the accounts of the Europeans already mentioned, Clavijo and

Schiltberger, this mission probably had a disastrous outcome. Clavijo tells us that the Chinese should be hanged (Clavijo 1928, 223-225), and we read nothing of the return of these envoys in Chinese texts. Timur wanted to deliver the tribute in person and he started to organize a campaign against China in late 1404. The motives behind his plans remain obscure; his self-exculpating words about leading his army against non-believers should be doubted. His main objective was more likely directed against the Moguls, who possessed the eastern part of the former Ulus Chaghatay; against China the campaign might have been a raid similar to the one he led against India some years before (Kauz 2005, 75-78). Luckily for the Chinese, the campaign came to no avail, because, as we have seen, Timur died in its early stages.

Timur's successors did not continue his aggressive politics, but pursued instead peaceful exchanges with China: Fu An and also Chen Dewen, another Chinese envoy, were allowed to return home with the rest of their respective entourages. The following years witnessed the most intensive exchange between the two empires. This exchange was documented in both Chinese and Timurid sources, which allow us to give a fairly exact picture of the interactions. It was the Chinese Emperor Zhu Di who was the driving force behind them; his probable aims were to propagate his rule and legitimize it by the numerous audiences given to foreign envoys. Possibly a military alliance against the continuing Mongol attacks was also part of his scheme. The Timurids on the other hand were primarily interested in the various Chinese exports such as silks and porcelain, though we know at least one occasion when Shahrokh, the Timurid ruler until 1447, wanted to impress Chinese envoys by ordering the extensive decoration of his capital Herat.



---

Some letters which were exchanged between the two rulers have survived in Chinese and Timurid sources and have become the object of various translations and research (e.g., Fletcher 1968; Kautz 2005, 93-129). They show that diplomatic misunderstandings were overcome by rather pragmatic responses: in particular the Chinese Emperor did not insist on his alleged superiority — which was of paramount significance for the Chinese political system — and acknowledged the Timurid ruler as (nearly) his equal. An almost modern system and network of diplomatic and political exchanges between Western, Central and Eastern Asia developed for the few decades of the Yongle reign. This regional network was certainly connected with the international network under Ming guidance.

However, further developments show that these interactions depended almost exclusively on the foreign policy of Emperor Zhu Di. After the death of this emperor on his return from a campaign against the Mongols in 1424, the Chinese embassies to the West met with increasing difficulties. It seems likely that they never reached their destinations in the West, although embassies from the West continued to arrive in rather large numbers. Thus, mutual contacts continued, albeit in a rather one-sided manner. One example may be given: the 'Veritable Records' tell of envoys arriving at the Chinese court from Qi'erman (Kerman), Roumi (Rum/Ottoman Empire) and Kuncheng (Kun-City = Qom?) on 14 September 1425. They brought horses and the ubiquitous 'local products' as tribute with them and received silks, brocades and cloth in return (*Ming shilu* 1966: *Xuanzong shilu*, j. 7, p. 184, j. 8, pp. 205, 216). Here we may challenge again the credibility of this embassy: it is possible that Kerman and Qom sent envoys to China because both cities were within the sphere of the Timurid

Empire, but envoys from the Ottoman Empire seem much less likely, since it was rather more orientated towards Europe in those years. However, it is not altogether impossible that Ottoman merchants/envoys travelled through the whole of Western Asia and joined their Timurid colleagues somewhere in Central Asia. We may recall that Schiltberger returned in these same years on a similar route back home to Bavaria.

Chinese texts record embassies from Western and Central Asia until the very end of the dynasty, whereas the number (and success) of Chinese embassies declined rapidly after the death of Zhu Di. We may thus turn to these efforts from the Chinese side before we consider again the West. During the Xuanzong era (1425-35), the foreign policy of Emperor Yongle was not yet completely abandoned: one last maritime expedition was sent to the Western Indian Ocean (1431-33), and three embassies were sent to Central Asia. However, the first succeeded, whereas the latter three in all probability did not. Their orders were all given in the second half of Xuanzong's rule, but they met with difficulties at the Chinese borders where Tatars and Tibetans maltreated the local population and no doubt also foreign missions, though it seems they might have been less severe on the Central Asians than on the Chinese (Kautz 2005, 162-172). It is not clear at exactly which part of the route the Chinese envoys decided to return, because all incidents are badly recorded. These records do not support a definite conclusion — they just allow a most probable assumption that the embassies did not cross the borders of China. The insecurity at the borders and the Chinese military incapability obviously hindered their passage beyond China.

However, the tribes in China's west were not the major menace for China; the attacks of the

Mongols had much greater impact. The Oirats or Western Mongols became the most important source of danger for the Ming in the 1440s, even managing to capture the Chinese emperor Zhu Qizhen in the battle of Tumu in 1449. Nevertheless, the Chinese government was still capable enough to react quickly and installed his half brother on the throne. After their captive lost his political importance, the Mongols released the former emperor, and the Ming faced the awkward situation of housing another possible emperor inside the walls of the capital. A number of military and civil officials finally overthrew the Jingtai Emperor in 1457 and installed the former emperor to take up his reign again under the title 'Heavenly Harmony' (Tianshun).

Zhu Qizhen had obviously learnt his lesson from captivity by the Mongols and considered preventive measures again, possibly even further assaults on the Mongols. Two further intended Ming embassies (1457 and 1463) to the Timurids must probably be regarded as parts of these political schemes, especially because both of them had to be conducted under military guidance. However, the course of these missions shows the almost complete structural military and administrative incompetence which made sending any more envoys to the West out of the question. It had proved to be difficult to obtain even the necessary horses for the undertaking. The envoys and their entourages struggled hard to reach Hami or, in the case of the second mission, did not even arrive at this oasis close to China. Maybe the latter did not even leave the capital (Kautz 2005, 211-219). Thus the last Chinese attempts to exchange embassies with the West came to an end.

This did not mean that the traffic collapsed completely. The Central Asian side had obviously far less difficulty sending envoys and merchants to China. One large

---

embassy which arrived in early 1453 deserves special mention because the Chinese texts relate that no fewer than 121 towns sent envoys — it seems that the whole Middle East and Central Asia sent their men to China. The reason could have been the inauguration of the aforementioned Jingtai Emperor. Their great number seems to nourish our suspicion that we are dealing with fake embassies just adopting names of foreign places. Fortunately, one imperial Chinese edict written in 1453 in Mongolian and Chinese has survived in Turkish archives. The recipient was a 'small vassal kingdom' named La'er, probably the transcription of Lar in southern Iran, a trading center of medium importance in the Western Indian Ocean region. This document proves that contacts between China and rather small principalities in the Middle East actually existed.

However, the Chinese administration gradually lost control of the various tribute embassies arriving in the capital. The number of envoys increased (sometimes dramatically), but the tribute they brought was lacking both in quality and quantity. Also embassies came more often than they were entitled to do and stayed much longer in China than before. Central Asians obviously lived more comfortably in China than they did back home; this assumption is also confirmed by numerous requests of 'people of Samarkand'<sup>9</sup> to settle down in China. But it must be acknowledged that far fewer embassies arrived in China from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the dynasty than in the preceding hundred years or so, the ratio being approximately 35 to 75. For the last period the annals of the Ming dynasty made the following comments: 'In the reign of Wan li (1573-1620) the intercourse with Samarkand was still animated, for those foreigners liked to carry on trade with the Chinese people. Besides this, it

was the custom that when they had entered China, the Chinese government took charge of their maintenance' (Bretschneider 1910, Vol. 2, 267).

Thus the history of the interchanges between Western, Central and Eastern Asia under the Ming dynasty can be roughly divided into two major periods: the time until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century and the period afterwards. In the time around 1500 the Middle East and Central Asia saw a number of major changes: the Shi'i Safavids came to power in Iran and partially blocked the traffic between the Sunni rulers in the East and in the West of their dominion. The Timurids perished, though they found a successor in Babur who conquered northern India in 1526, and were replaced by the Uzbeks, who, however, could not establish an empire as strong as Timur's. It can generally be said that the political and economic importance of Central Asia declined rapidly after 1500. The discovery of the maritime route to India and China by Vasco da Gama and the following European expansion towards the Indian Ocean did not have much influence over the Silk Road traffic.<sup>10</sup>

To conclude, the embassies from Timur to the new dynasty in China received a favorable response, mainly because they brought much desired horses with them. However, when China reciprocated and sent Chinese envoys to Samarkand, these were made much less welcome, probably because of the Chinese attitude to degrade Timur to a mere subordinate of the Ming Emperor. The relations between the Timurids and the Ming developed very well only after Timur's death, and the Ming initiatives proved paramount for the development of intercourse on the Silk Road. The Chinese side was rather more interested in the propaganda of its superiority, whereas the Timurid side favored commercial aspects. China

stopped sending embassies to the west after several failures disclosed its military and administrative incompetence. The Timurids and their successors continued to send embassies, though these were exclusively commercial in character. It is most probable that a number of these embassies did not come from Central Asia at all, but started somewhere near the borders of China and just disguised themselves as coming from places further away. However, it may be confirmed that the traffic towards China carried on almost until the very end of the Ming dynasty, although on a rather lower scale.

*[Portions of this article were presented in a lecture, co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and Columbia University, at the Asia Society in New York on November 11, 2005.]*

## About the Author

Doz. Dr. **Ralph Kauz** is a research scholar at the Institute of Iranian Studies/Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. His thesis for his *habilitation* on Ming-Timurid political and economic relations was published in 2005 (see citation below). Among his other recent publications are "Postal Stations in Ming China (1368-1644)," in: Angela Schottenhammer, ed., *Trade and Transfer Across the East Asian "Mediterranean"* (East Asian Maritime History 1) (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2005): 75-89, and "Bengali Textiles as Tribute Items to Ming China," in: Rosemary Crill, ed., *Textiles from India: The Global Trade* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2006): 39-55. He wrote in *The Silk Road*, 3/1 (2005) about his project to publish a translation of the "Khataynameh" (Book of China), written by `Ali Akbar Khata'i in 1516.

---

## References

Amiot 1789

Jean Joseph Marie Amiot. "Recueil de suppliques, lettres de créance." *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages & c. des Chinois*. 15 vols. Paris, 1776-1791. Vol. 14 (1789): 239-308.

Bretschneider 1910

Emil Bretschneider. *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources. Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*. 2 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910.

Clavijo 1928

Ruy González de Clavijo. *Clavijo: Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406*. Guy Le Strange, tr. and ed. London etc.: Harper & Brothers, 1928. Extended excerpts also available on-line at <<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/clavijo/cltxt1.html>>.

Di Cosmo 2006

Nicola Di Cosmo. "The Origins of the Great Wall." *The Silk Road*, 4/1 (2006): 14-19.

Fletcher 1968

Joseph F. Fletcher. "China and Central Asia." In: John King Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968: 206-24, 337-368

Kauz 2005

Ralph Kauz. *Politik und Handel zwischen Ming und Timuriden: China, Iran und Zentralasien im Spätmittelalter*. Iran – Turan 7. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2005.

*Ming shilu* 1966

*Ming shilu*, 133 vols. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966.

Rossabi 1963

Morris Rossabi. "A Translation of Ch'en Ch'eng's Hsi-Yü Fan-Kuo

Chih." *Ming Studies*, 17 (Fall 1963): 49-59.

Rossabi 1975

Morris Rossabi. *China and Inner Asia: From 1368 to the Present Day*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975.

Rossabi 1990

Morris Rossabi. "The 'decline' of the central Asian caravan trade." In: James D. Tracy, ed. *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 351-370.

Thackston 1989

Wheeler M. Thackston, tr. and ed. *A Century of Princes. Sources on Timurid History and Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989.

Watanabe 1975

Hiroshi Watanabe. "An Index of Embassies and Tribute Missions from Islamic Countries to Ming China (1368-1644) as recorded in the *Ming Shi-lu*, classified according to Geographic Area." *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko*, 33 (1975): 285-326

Yule and Cordier 1916

Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, tr. and ed. *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*. Vol. 4. London: Hakluyt Society, 1916.

## Notes

1. For an English translation of Chen Cheng's account, see Rossabi 1963; for Ghiyas-ad-din, see Thackston 1989, 279-297; for Goës, Yule and Cordier 1916, 198-254, and on-line at <<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/goes.html>>.

2. I used Watanabe 1975 to count the number of embassies from Central and Western Asia to China in the period mentioned. The numbers might not always be correct to the last digit, but differences are minor.

3. It is always difficult to apply toponyms to different historical periods. When I speak of Iran in this article, I mean the region whose borders roughly encompass the modern country.

4. According to the hitherto unpublished Chinese glossary 'Zengxu zazi' Tianfang is the country of the 'Kingdom of the Kaaba' (*mamlakat-e ka'beh*).

5. Some of these letters were already published in 1789; see Amiot 1789.

6. For an overview of Chinese relations with Inner Asia beginning under the Ming, see Rossabi 1975.

7. Chinese *fuma*, a translation of the Mongolian word *kürgän*, as Timur called himself. Son-in-law of Chingis Khan is meant, thus legitimating his rule.

8. Eunuchs played a crucial role in diplomatic and tribute relations during the entire Ming dynasty.

9. 'Samarkand' was here also used as a collective term for Central Asia as a whole.

10. On the decline of the overland trade, cf. Rossabi 1990.

---



---

# Hunting Hounds along the Silk Road – Which Way Did They Go?

Sir Terence Clark

London

In 2001 I journeyed for the first time along part of the Silk Road from Khiva to Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Bishkek, Lake Issyk-kul and Almaty to realise an ambition I had nurtured since studying Russian at Cambridge years before. The following year I journeyed along another part from Bishkek over the Tien Shan to Kashgar, then through the oasis towns on the southern side of the Taklimakan before crossing the desert to the northern oases and on to Dunhuang, finally leaving via Urumqi to Almaty. During these journeys I came across various hunting hounds peculiar to Central Asia but similar in many aspects to the Saluki, the hunting hound of the Middle East, where I had spent much of my professional career. I was curious to know whether there was indeed a relationship between them and, if so, whether these hounds owed their origins to Western or Central Asia.

Hunting hounds of the Saluki family [Fig. 1], characterised by



Fig. 1. Smooth-haired Iraqi Saluki. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

their long limbs, deep chest, tucked up waist, wedge-shaped head on a long neck, pendulous ears and whippy tail, have been known to exist in Western Asia since at least the fourth millennium BCE. Archaeological evidence from this period in the shape of seal impressions from Tepe Gawra in northern Iraq shows representations of such hounds in pursuit of cervidae (Clark 1995, 132). Similar hounds, though with distinctive pricked ears and a tail curled over the back and generally known as Tesem also occur in Ancient Egypt from ca. 3,750-3,400 BCE (Brewer 2001, 32). In the absence of evidence elsewhere to the contrary, it would seem likely that the Saluki type of hunting hound emerged first on the great plains of Mesopotamia, where they were used for hunting mainly by sight the whole range of the abundant game then to be found there, as well as predators such as fox, jackal and wolf. However it cannot be excluded that among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, who may have left few tangible clues, similar requirements for a hunting hound on the steppes and semi-deserts there may have shaped a similar kind of hound, possibly with a

denser coat to protect it from the colder climate [Fig. 2].

It has been shown recently that the dog was first domesticated from the wolf in Eastern Asia and spread outwards from there across the world probably about 15,000 years ago or possibly 40,000 years ago (Savolainen et al.). According to the Russian cynologist V. A. Gorodtsov hunting and other types of specialised dogs emerged in Central Asia in the Neolithic period (8-10,000 BCE) (Plakhov and Shelestova forthcoming). This accords with archaeological evidence in



Fig. 2. Central Asian Tazy in Kazakhstan. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

Western Asia and leaves a considerable period of millennia for distinctive breeds of hunting hounds to have developed before the advent of the Arabian Saluki to Central Asia, which Russian cynologists, such as L. P. Sabaneev, A. A. Sludskii and E. I. Shereshevskii, generally agree came in the wake of the Muslim conquests in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and was crossed with local breeds to produce the Central Asian Tazy (Ibid.). Sabaneev says that the admixture of blood from these local breeds brought about a change in the smooth-haired Saluki's appearance to a longer coat, fringes, pendulous ears and a generally coarser build. He does not specify what these local breeds were but only that they



Fig. 3. Petroglyph from Kazakhstan. Photograph copyright © 2006 Renato Sala of the International Scientific Projects of the Laboratory of Geo-archaeology, Almaty. Reproduced with permission.

were longhaired mountain dogs with pendulous ears (Sabaneev 1993, 13).

However this attribution of the origin of the Tazy to the eastward movement of Salukis with the conquering Arabs seems to overlook other evidence that suggests the presence of very similar smooth-haired hunting hounds in the region at much earlier dates, which might equally have contributed to the development of the Tazy. There are for example petroglyphs from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that show stylised dogs in hunting scenes, though in general they appear to have pricked ears and an upward curling tail more like the Tesem of Ancient Egypt [Fig. 3].

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Alexander the Great and his Seleucid successors had established an empire from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan and the Indus. It is known that the Greeks used Saluki-like hounds for hunting. Indeed there are grounds for believing that the very name Saluki comes from the Arabic word *Saluqi* for Seleucid (Smith 1980). The Greeks traded with western Central Asia and their influence can be seen in some of the

Scythians' splendid examples of the goldsmith's art, including the famous pectoral from the Tolstaia Mogila, showing smooth-haired hounds with either pricked or cropped ears in pursuit of hare (Przedziecki 2001, 67). The Seleucids' capital at Seleucia in contemporary Iraq was retained by their successors — the Parthians, though

the following Sasanians built a new town at Ctesiphon on the opposite side of the Tigris in 226 CE — and was the great hub controlling international trade from Rome to China that became known as the Silk Road (Valtz Fino 2005, 149). Much of this trade for some 500 years was in the hands of the Sogdians, based around Bukhara, Samarkand and the Ferghana valley, who were for long exposed to Hellenistic influence, not least since Alexander's wife Roxanne was a Sogdian (Sinor 1990, 175). So it is entirely possible that Saluki hounds were being conveyed eastwards along that route well before the Arab conquests. Indeed if we look further east in China in the Qin Period (221-207 BCE) we find funerary bricks from noble tombs with graphic examples of smooth-haired hunting hounds with cropped or pricked ears in hunting scenes (Przedziecki 2001, 98). Similar hounds appear on stamped bricks (Ibid.) and in stone reliefs (Schafer 1985, 77) later in the Han Period (206-220 CE).

Be that as it may, it is clear that by the 7<sup>th</sup> century hounds looking remarkably like contemporary Salukis were being represented in art across Central Asia and China. In a remarkable exhibition at the

British Library on the Silk Road in 2004 there were two 7<sup>th</sup> century Tang dynasty terra cotta figurines of such hounds in unmistakable poses: one sitting upright and the other crouching on the crupper of a horse behind its huntsman master [Fig. 4]. A magnificent mural in an imperial 7<sup>th</sup> century Tang tomb near Chang'an shows a falconer with a Sparrowhawk on his arm accompanied by a beautifully represented feathered Saluki (Whitfield 1999, 89). A 9<sup>th</sup>-century painted scroll in the British Museum of the Paradise of Bhasajyaguru from Dunhuang in the time of the Tang dynasty Iraq was retained shows a smooth-haired hound Saluki reaching for a piece of meat. Another Tang painting shows two Salukis in a butcher's



Fig. 4. Tang dynasty figurine. Photograph copyright © 2007 Victoria and Albert Museum. Reproduced with permission.

shop, while a Song dynasty colour and ink on silk painting from the 10<sup>th</sup> century shows three mounted hunters carrying unmistakable Salukis on their horses (Waters and Waters 1984, 92, 40). Much later a Jesuit painter resident in Beijing in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century painted several Salukis for a presentation album to the Qianlong Emperor, though it is suggested that foreign dignitaries may have given them as tribute



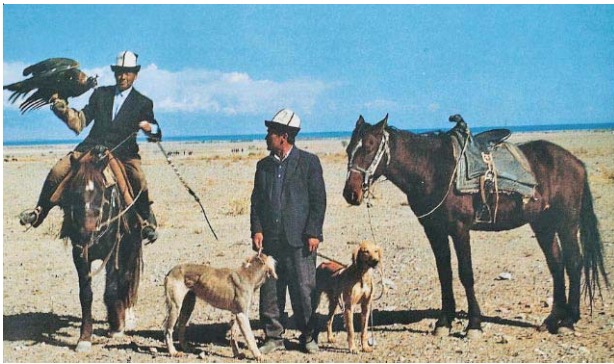


Fig. 5. Mounted Berkutchis and Tazys in Kyrgyzstan. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark, from original on display in Cholpon Ata Museum, Kyrgyzstan.

(Rawski and Rawson 2005, 188-191, 410-411).

Against this academic evidence I set off to explore for facts on the ground today. The start in the walled oasis town of Khiva in western Uzbekistan appeared auspicious as I spotted a *Berkut* or Golden Eagle sitting on a stand. The Berkut is traditionally used for hunting right across Central Asia and is often used in tandem with Tazys [Fig. 5]. My hopes were soon dashed however as it turned out to be a mere tourist attraction. We crossed the Oxus or Amu Darya as it is now called and drove parallel with it along the southern side of the Kyzyl Kum in ideal hunting country but without success, apart from some information about an oasis town far from our road that was described as the centre for hunting with Tazys. However I noticed on the map an area outside Bukhara that was designated as a gazelle nature reserve. I reasoned that if gazelle were indigenous there hunting hounds might also be found there. We stopped at the entrance to the reserve, and I went in with our guide to speak to the Director in charge. Bounding to meet us came the familiar form of what I supposed to be a smooth fawn Saluki. On closer inspection it proved to have turned back ears, which are more commonly associated with Greyhounds, though it definitely was not a

Greyhound; yet it was not a Saluki either. All their keeper could tell us was that this hound and all the others we saw there had come originally from Russia and that he used them for seeking out fallen gazelle in the reserve. During a visit to Russia in 2004 I saw many similar hounds, which were called *Hortaya* (*khortaiya*) [Fig. 6]. Some Russians believe that this breed may have descended from those smooth-haired hunting hounds shown in the early Scythian representations mentioned above.

After taking in the many delights of Bukhara, Shakhrisabz



Fig. 6. Russian Hortaya in Uzbekistan. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

and Samarkand, we drove on via Tashkent and Bishkek deep into Kyrgyzstan. Our destination was a yurt in the Tien Shan Mountains near the former Silk Road caravanserai at Tash Rabat. All along our route I had been told about the decline in hunting with

hounds, particularly since the departure of many of the ethnic Russian population, and I had given up all thought of seeing any more hunting hounds. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to be greeted on arrival in Tash Rabat by a hound with a dense black coat that the local Kyrgyz called a *Taigan* [Fig. 7]. This breed is particular to the high mountains where it has developed the ability to hunt all manner of animals in the rare atmosphere above 2,500 m even in the depths of winter. It appears to be related to the Saluki but with a broader head, a stockier build and a dense coat.

It proved to be the first of a number of such hounds that we were to see. We took a walk up into the mountains hoping to see into China and on the way came across a yurt that was protected by a red and white Taigan. A woman emerged from the yurt who turned out to be someone to whom we had given a lift earlier. She welcomed us into her yurt and showed us a tiny black Taigan puppy. Her husband appeared and said that he hunted marmot and mountain goat for the pot, and the hounds were very affective even when the temperature fell to -30 degrees C. As we explored further in the area we passed near another yurt from which a man hailed us, offering us hospitality. We declined but asked if there were any Taigans nearby. He indicated a valley



Fig. 7. Taigan at Tash Rabat. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.



where we would find some. We splashed through an icy mountain stream up the valley and around a bend came on another yurt and a mud-brick house under construction. As we approached three Taigans rushed out to greet us. They were very friendly and looked in good condition: one of



Fig. 8. Afghan Hound? Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

them was heavily pregnant and was due to give birth within a few days. All, we were told, were excellent hunters. A little further on I saw another Taigan on the other side of a stream by a small house. As soon as we stopped to get a better look, the door of the house flew open and some young lads rushed out, jumped onto horses and raced across the stream towards us, followed by a very lively Taigan puppy. It was only with difficulty that we managed to extricate ourselves from their pressing invitations to their house. We did relent further on where a woman appeared from a small house with a plate of different dairy products: *kaimak* (a sweet thick cream), curds and cheese with delicious fresh bread.

As we descended from the mountains the next day we passed many yurts and great herds of horses, sheep and cattle — and even a few yaks. We stopped at one where a woman was making little round cheeses (*qurut*) that she was setting out to dry and harden in the sun. She showed us

round her beautifully decorated yurt, from the roof of which hung a fur from a fox caught by her Taigan. Further on we came across a young lad walking by the roadside with a beautiful black and tan hound that had something of the old-fashioned Bell-Murray type of Afghan Hound about it [Fig. 8].

Nearby I spotted out of the corner of my eye a familiar shape gliding along the base of a farmhouse wall. We made a little detour and were warmly welcomed by the farmer's wife and her small bright-eyed daughter, who proudly showed us the black and white Taigan bitch, rather strangely called Tarzan, and her five tiny puppies. The bitch gave a warning growl when I stepped too near to take a picture of the puppies and the next thing I knew was that she had bitten me in the ankle, to the mortification of her owner! No serious harm was done and I was assured that the bitch had been vaccinated against rabies, but it was a warning not to mess with a Taigan with puppies.

It was clear from all these encounters that the Taigan, like the Saluki in the Middle East, is held in a position of high esteem both as a pot-filler and as a companion. However, as in other parts of the region, the pressures of modern life on the habitat of the hunting hound's prey is leading to a decline in the numbers of the Taigan and, according to local sources, the carelessness of some of the hunters has resulted in some crossing with other breeds. Nevertheless in my short exploration I had seen enough of the breed to form the impression that it is still hanging on successfully in this area of Kyrgyzstan.

By the time of my next trip along the Silk Road a year later I had established via the Internet contact with people in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan so that my search for Central Asian hunting hounds was less haphazard. This time my earlier impression of the situation of these hounds was reinforced both factually and visually. Our guide, Almaz Kurmankulov, was a founder of the Kyrgyz Taigan Society, which had recorded about 200 purebred Taigans and was encouraging breeders to preserve the breed as part of the nation's heritage. Starting in Bishkek he took us first to meet a well-known horse and Taigan breeder on his farm. Here we saw a number of his breeding stock, all of them black and white, with the distinctive ring at the end of the tail where the last two vertebrae are fused together. One bitch was surrounded by a litter of lively puppies, two of which were due to be presented later to King Juan Carlos of Spain. We had intended to see one of the kennels on Lake Issyk-kul, but all the hounds were away in the mountains where they spend the summer months with the flocks and herds. As we were to see later this is the bountiful time for Taigans when marmots are abundant, which they catch to feed their puppies. Instead we made a diversion high into the mountains to visit Zarnai Sagenbai, one of the few remaining *Berkutchis* in Kyrgyzstan. We found him and his wife at their yurt, outside of which sat a screaming Berkut. Zarnai put on a demonstration of his skill, flying the Berkut from his horse to a lure in the valley below [Fig. 9, next page]. He and his sons still flew their eagles to hunt mainly hare for food and fox for fur but also for wolf to protect their livestock. In the past they used to fly them in tandem with Tazys, as an old photograph in the Cholpan-Ata Museum illustrated [Fig. 5, facing page].

As on our last trip we made for Tash Rabat whence we planned to drive over the Torugart Pass into



Fig. 9. Kyrgyz Berkutchi. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of China. As we arrived at our yurts we were greeted with the news that there was a Kyrgyz community some 30 km away with Taigans that Almaz was keen to register. So he and I and a local Russian driver set off to find them. Before long we found ourselves at a military checkpoint before the border with China. The prospects of passing it did not look too good as neither of my companions had passports with them. However a friendly officer pointed to a white house a few hundred metres away where he said we would find many Taigans and allowed us to pass. Sure enough we found several mature hounds there, some with young puppies that kept popping out of deep holes in the ground where they lived, protected from the biting wind and predators. Almaz duly measured them and recorded their details. A young lad came up and asked if we would like to see some more. So under his guidance we set off in our ancient car across country where there was not so much as a dirt track. After some while we stopped at the top of a bluff from where we could see below a yurt belching smoke from its chimney: we had arrived. Scrambling down we were met by several Taigans of different ages and sizes and in no time Almaz was submerged in a heap of playful puppies, grown fat on regurgitated marmot meat from their parents. The lady of the

yurt dragged out from her underground den a very reluctant bitch to show us her recently born puppies. There could be no doubt that in these remote parts Taigans still formed an essential part of the Kyrgyz nomads' way of life.

Fascinating though the journey along the Silk Road through the Uighur Region proved to be, in terms of hunting hounds it was totally unrewarding. According to border officials and our guide, we were not allowed to depart from the main road to visit Kyrgyz villages in which I had expressed an interest; so I could not make enquiries there. Among the Uighur and Han Chinese I met only blank looks when I showed them photographs of the hounds. Yet a contemporary mural in the Khotan Museum illustrating medieval travellers on the Silk Road showed in the central foreground an unmistakable Tazy.

How different was the reception at our final destination in Kazakhstan! In Almaty Konstantin Plakhov, a biologist at the Institute of Zoology and a champion of Kazakhstan's native breeds, came to the hotel and took me to call on Askar Raibaev, President of the Dog Breeding Federation of Kazakhstan. As I entered his house I almost fell over Roshan, a beautiful Tazy that occupied much of the centre of the room with her eight puppies. Askar described the considerable efforts being made to preserve not only the Tazy but also the Tobet [Fig. 10], a huge shepherd guard dog, of which I was shortly to see some specimens at my next stop — the Sunkar Breeding Centre in a beautiful setting outside the town. The Centre contains a large

number of raptors of different kinds, some of which are there for breeding and some for rehabilitation, after being found injured, and release into the wild. Running loose were several mature Tazys and puppies, while in well-designed kennels some Tobets padded massively up and down. Both the Tazy and the Tobet have suffered from a decline in numbers and in quality, and the Centre is endeavouring to preserve the breeds and to encourage their wider distribution. It is hard to judge its success. Certainly I heard of some Kazakhs who maintained quite large kennels of Tazys for hunting on their farms and on the steppe, and I met some Tazy breeders in Almaty. However, the problem is also one of changing lifestyles: there is no longer the same need to hunt for food or for fur, and younger people are more interested in computer games than hunting in the often harsh conditions of the steppe.

Throughout my tours I was collecting here and there from the various hunting hounds both mtDNA and DNA samples to send to Dr Peter Savolainen in Sweden, who is undertaking research into the origins of dogs. The research,



Fig. 10. Kazakh Tobet. Photograph copyright © 2007 Terence Clark.

which has of course important implications for the history of mankind in this region, continues, and in due course it may lead to an answer to my initial question about the western or central Asian origins of these hunting hounds along the Silk Road.

---

## About the Author

The author studied Russian at Cambridge University while in the Royal Air Force but on joining the British Foreign Service was sent to study Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University and at the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in Lebanon. He spent much of his career in the Middle East, latterly as Ambassador to Iraq and to Oman. In retirement he retains close links with the Middle East through a number of academic bodies and has written extensively in books and journals on the history and politics of the region and on the Saluki and hunting. E-mail <Sirterenceclark@aol.com>.

## References

Brewer 2001

Douglas J. Brewer. "The Dogs of Ancient Egypt." In: Douglas J. Brewer, Terence Clark and A. A. Phillips. *Dogs in Antiquity. Anubis to Cerberus: The Origins of the Domestic Dog*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 2001.

Clark 1995

Terence Clark. "Saluqis in Iraq." Ch. 5 in: Gail Goodman, ed. *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East*

*/Al-Saluqi: kalb al-sayd al-sharqi*. Apache Junction, Az.: Midbar, Inc., 1995: 131-134.

Plakhov and Shelestova forthcoming

Konstantin N. Plakhov and A. S. Shelestova. *Borzye Tazy i okhota s nimi*. Almaty: forthcoming.

Przedziecki 2001

Xavier Przedziecki. *Our Levriers*. Nice: Les Amis de Xavier Przedziecki, 2001. (Tr. of *Le Destin des Levriers*. Paris, 1984.)

Rawski and Rawson 2005

Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson. *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.

Sabaneev 1993

Leonid P. Sabaneev. *Sobaki okhotnich'i: Borzye i gonchie*. Ed. E. A. Kalganov. Moscow: Terra, 1993 (first published in 1895-1898 in journal *Priroda i okhota*).

Savolainen et al. 2002

Peter Savolainen, Ya-Ping Zhang, Jing Luo, Joakim Lundeberg and Thomas Leitner. "Genetic Evidence for an East Asian Origin of Domestic Dogs." *Science*, 298, 22 November 2002: 1610-1613.

Schafer 1985

Edward H. Schafer. *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study*

*of T'ang Exotics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985 (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1963).

Sinor 1990

Denis Sinor, ed. *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.175.

Smith 1980

G. Rex Smith. "The Arabian Hound, the *Saluqi* — Further Consideration of the Word and Other Observations on the Breed." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London), 43/3 (1980): 459-465.

Valtz Fino 2005

Elisabetta Valtz Fino. "In the Wake of Alexander." Ch. VIII in: Milbry Polk and Angela M. H. Schuster, eds. *The Looting of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad: The Lost Legacy of Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Abrams, 2005.

Waters and Waters 1984

Hope Waters and David W. Waters. *The Saluki in History, Art and Sport*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wheat Ridge, Co.: Hoflin, 1984.

Whitfield 1999

Susan Whitfield. *Life along the Silk Road*. London: John Murray, 1999.

---

## A Thousand Years on the Silk Road: Epic Poetry and Music from the Kyrgyz Republic

**Rysbai Isakov**, *Epic Singer*

**Akylbek Kasabolotov**, *Musician*

**Dr. Helen Faller**, *Anthropologist*

In February-March 2006, with generous support from the Silkroad Foundation, anthropologist Helen Faller toured the United States with two young artists from Kyrgyzstan in a series of university residencies called the Kyrgyz Cultural Performances Project. The artists were Rysbai Isakov, a laureate epic singer, who

performed episodes from the Kyrgyz national epic *Manas*, the longest in the world at over half a million lines, and Akylbek Kasabolotov, a member of Kyrgyzstan's *Tengir Too Ensemble*, who shared his country's unique nomadic musical traditions. The three of them were in residence at eight universities

in six states and performed for over 3000 people. The purpose of the tour was to provide opportunities for Americans to learn about Central Asian performance culture from two talented cultural ambassadors and to provide the artists with experiences that would help them to develop their art in new ways. Video footage of the Kyrgyz Cultural Performances concert at the University of Texas at Austin is on view at [www.silkroadfoundation.org](http://www.silkroadfoundation.org) and [realaudio.cc.utexas.edu:8080/ramgen/cola/centers/creees/images/media/kyrgyz\\_022206E.rm](http://realaudio.cc.utexas.edu:8080/ramgen/cola/centers/creees/images/media/kyrgyz_022206E.rm). Information about the project can be found on



---

the Central Asian Cultural Exchange website — [www.cace.us](http://www.cace.us).

In addition to being a *manaschy* — reciter of the *Manas* epic — Rysbai is the Executive Director of the Manas Miras Foundation, the mission of which is to preserve the *Manas*. Rysbai explained to American audiences that he suffered from terrible migraine headaches as a child and that only after he received a vision and began to recite the *Manas* did they dissipate. In fact, if he doesn't recite regularly, he becomes ill. Akylbek is in his first year of graduate school at Bishkek's Conservatory, where he studies under composer and director of the Tengir Too Ensemble, Nurlanbek Nishanov. Unlike Rysbai, he considers himself an artist who needs to practice in order to perform. In addition to studying and playing professionally, Akylbek teaches music at the university level.

This interview, here somewhat shortened for publication, took place, mostly in Russian, over tea in Helen Faller's Philadelphia home in early mid-March 2006.

*Helen*: I wanted to start by asking how long you have each been pursuing your art, although (she nods to Rysbai) you don't consider it art, right? If you could talk a little about the place of the *Manas* in your life, in your childhood, for example, that would be interesting.

*Rysbai*: I had a grandmother who told me all those folk tales. Epics, legends, and all that. And of course she told me about the *Manas*. I don't know at what age, but in my childhood I was familiar with the *Manas* and when I already had learned how to read, my grandmother gave me a book. And she wanted me to read from it not as it is read silently, but as it is recited. And when I read it, she broke into tears.

*H*: How old were you at the time?

*R*: I was six, no, not six. Older. And that's how I grew up. I grew up in the spirit of the *Manas*. And I began to recite at the age of 12.

How I started to recite I've told you, right? Before [I began to recite] I was very ill. I was very, very ill. It's impossible to describe it in words — it wasn't a physical disease. And then I had a vision. After that I began to get better slowly. At the beginning I didn't even understand what it was, it was incomprehensible. But, afterwards, after I started to recite a little, I noticed that my head wasn't aching like it used to.

*H*: You were already older than 12 at that time?

*R*: That was when I was around 15 or 16. Only then did I start to notice, but up till then I didn't quite...Only at the age of 12 did I start to understand...not understand but rather to feel it...

*H*: Did people start inviting you to recite the *Manas* at that age?

*R*: No. I recited at school on special occasions. I was very shy about reciting the *Manas*. My upbringing made me shy. But, there were occasions.

*H*: They called upon you.

*R*: Yes, people who wanted to hear. And when they asked, I began...I closed my eyes and I don't know how I performed. The epic began...I probably started to recite the *Manas* properly from the age of 20. That's when I started truly to understand the *Manas*. Until then, I was somehow blind.

*H*: And how did that happen? I'm curious.

*R*: I became accustomed somehow and began no longer to suffer from shyness when I recited. Step by step...

*H*: But by the age of 20 you had already lived in Bishkek for four years after graduating from high school. Right?

*R*: I became a student at the university. In Bishkek I participated in competitions and festivals. We all competed among ourselves. From every department in the university.

*H*: That was 10 years ago. Didn't studying interfere?

*R*: No. ... I took ten years off from school and then went back afterwards.

*H*: When did you start working for the Manas Miras Foundation? At first you worked in television, right?

*R*: After I got my university degree, I worked in television programming. But before that we established a society among ourselves of creative young people. I worked there as the executive director. We developed oral folk projects in the form of contemporary performance. We submitted a proposal to the television company and started working there. We collaborated there with writers from the House of Poets. At that time I received an invitation from Baitkochernezov (Sponsor of the Manas Miras Foundation) which I accepted, and we started the Foundation.

*H (turning to Akylbek)*: I would like to learn more about how you came to work in music.

*Akylbek*: Well, my father's younger brother is a musician. He plays the *komuz* (Kyrgyz lute). Even now he works at the Karakul Music School. And he was the one who showed me the musical path in the road [of life]. He had me start as a student at the music school in 1996. And there I learned how to play the *balalaika*, the Russian 'lute.'

*H*: And for the *komuz* there are no written notes. Is that how they taught the instrument?

*A*: No.

*H*: They taught students to play by using musical notation.

*A (nods)*: And around then they opened a department of mountain region instruments. At the time, there was no such thing.

*H*: But I thought your father's brother was a *komuz* player?

*A*: Yes he is. But he was the only *komuz* player, and he took me under his wing. So that's how I ended up learning how to play the *balalaika*. But, I also have a grandmother who plays the

---

*komuz*. After I finished music school, I wanted to study at the Conservatory in the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek.

H: And that was five years ago?

A: Yes. In 1996 I entered the Karakul Music School and I graduated in 2000. And in the same year I immediately began at the Conservatory. At that time the Conservatory offered only traditional singing and the *komuz*. But in 2000 they opened a department of national music that included wind instruments and the *kylkiyak* (Kyrgyz cello).

H: It was Nurlanbek. [Nurlanbek Nishanov is a Kyrgyz composer and director of Tengir Too, who has worked with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for some five years. Akylbek is his protégé.]

A: Both Nurlanbek and Chytyrbaev opened the new department. So after entering the Conservatory, I gave it a lot of thought and decided that I wanted to play my own national instruments. And I immediately started playing wind instruments. I gave up the balalaika and began from nothing. Nurlanbek started me out from nothing. And when I graduated from the Conservatory, he immediately gave me work in Tengir Too.

H: But, before joining Tengir Too, you also played in a group, right?

A: Yes, yes. I played when I was in music school in an ensemble called Aidigil. I played a little *sybyzgy* (Kyrgyz flute), but only the *sybyzgy*. But, in Karakul there weren't really any musicians of professional stature. And then Nurlan *aga* [an honorific meaning older brother or uncle] invited me to work with Tengir Too. I worked with Tengir Too for two or three months, but then they closed due to lack of finances. And then in 2003 we started to work again.

H: That was because of the Aga Khan Foundation? You started getting money from them or...

A: Yes. And in addition to that we got support from the Kyrgyz State

Technical University. So we started to work there, and we're there now.

H: I have a question. You both had to move to Bishkek in order to seriously pursue your callings?

A: Yes.

R: I didn't know that I was going to become a *manaschy*. I just decided to go to university.

A: I wanted to continue studying music.

H: Hm. I ask because it's not an absolute contradiction but it seems somewhat strange that you as rural people who have very deep folk roots in your blood, in order to develop those roots to reach a higher level had to move to Bishkek, which is a much less Kyrgyz place. In the sense that Russians live there, Russian speakers. In Bishkek, things aren't really so much culturally Kyrgyz as they are post-Soviet, right?

A: If I had stayed in Karakul, I wouldn't have learned to play national wind instruments. There aren't any professionals like Nurlanbek there. And I want to say that Nurlanbek *aga* is the only Kyrgyz folk musician who works at a professional level. Now he has begun to revive all our musical traditions and has started to make instruments. And he composes works to be played on folk instruments. For that reason I had to leave home to study. Because there weren't any professionals, any teachers.

R: For me, as I said, the situation was different. I never dreamed of becoming a *manaschy*. I simply thought about getting into university. Just like everyone else. I got in and suddenly that was what happened. I've already said that I started truly to understand the *Manas* when I was studying in Bishkek.

H: It's interesting to me that in order to continue to do your work, you have to be in the city.

R: Well, we aren't always there. We very often leave the city for the villages to tour and perform.

H: I would like to know from you why you decided to participate in this project, to take part in a residence across what seems like almost all of America?

R: For me it was an honor. And not everyone is given such an opportunity, right? To travel to America.

H: Akylbek, why did you decide to participate in this project?

A: We have a saying in Kyrgyz that states, if they invite you, it is necessary to go. And the second reason is that I wanted to show my culture to Americans. It's as Rysbai *aga* said, for us it is an honor. Athletes and cultural activists have a special role. It is our obligation...

R: To bring to light the splendor of the people, the people's culture.

H: And what did you want to get out of this experience?

R: We wanted to perform as we should, so that our people wouldn't be ashamed of us after our performance. We hoped for that.

H: Akylbek, did you want something different or the same thing?

A: The same thing. For the public to understand and listen to us. We are very pleased. It has been good. Our dream has been realized.

H: How do you feel you're being received by American audiences. How do you feel when you perform?

A: I feel comfortable, somehow.

R: Yes, and it's not only our music that they understand. If a person has music in his or her soul, then it is possible to understand without language. But, the astonishing thing is that they understand the *Manas* as well. You saw that yourself in Texas. The audience told us what was happening in the epic. They asked the question about the woman speaking [the students heard Rysbai vocalizing Kanykei's distress and wanted to know more]. That shows that they understood the words. And one woman said that she began to cry

---

when I was reciting. Moments like that make it clear to us that American audiences comprehend us with their souls.

*H:* Did you have any other additional goals for your trip to America?

*R:* We didn't come here only to acquaint America with our culture. At the same time we wanted to learn, to see how Americans live with our own eyes. What life is really like for Americans. To hear about it is one thing, but to see it with your own eyes is another. We didn't even know that Americans would be so hospitable...but of course their traditions are completely different. And that was a surprise for us. I personally thought that Americans wouldn't invite us to their houses as guests.

*H:* And what else surprised you?

*R:* Wyoming was surprising. The heavenly nature in Wyoming, the beautiful mountains, and of course the antelope. How the sheep roam free.

*H (addressing Akylbek):* And did anything surprise you other than that?

*A:* Well, seeing the cities and the civilization itself, yes. And the cars, by comparison with ours... There are differences... The people here are good and very open.

*H:* You didn't expect that?

*A:* No. I didn't expect that. No matter where you go, people are ready to answer your questions. And the cities, the cities are very beautiful.

*H:* What haven't you liked in America? I have asked you several times. It probably seems like a strange question to you, since you haven't answered.

*R:* Aha, what haven't we liked? That of course is a matter for each person. That's personal... Well, I notice that very few people are a healthy weight.

*H:* Yes, Americans eat too much.

*R:* I think it's not just a matter of overeating. I eat a great deal too and I don't put on weight.

*H:* Yes, but you walk 11 km every day [to and from work in Bishkek].

*R:* There you go. If you're going to eat a lot, you need to be active. But, that's my personal opinion. There's a lot more, of course. If you compare Texas with Wyoming and New York, it's magnificent. We saw Texas first, and then Wyoming. In those places everything was clean. Like glass, right? But when we arrived in New York, it was unexpected. New York was dirty. It turns out that a big city means big trash. (Laughs)

*H:* Akylbek, you didn't answer the question about what you found surprising in America.

*A:* Well, what has been surprising is to see such big cities, how they're built, and also I'm surprised by how much work is involved...and how well the buildings are looked after. Inside everything is in order. So, all that human labor, that surprises me. How everything is kept up. And another thing — the relationship between man and nature is very close. In my opinion, that's very good.

*H:* What do you mean exactly?

*A:* Yesterday we learned [while guests at the house of some Philadelphia Kyrgyz] that sheep aren't slaughtered the same way we do it in Kyrgyzstan. Here they use a special razor. The attitude of people to nature here is respectful, not only towards animals but towards all nature. Also, it was good to meet local musicians, who played different kinds of music. I played with them. They taught me music and I taught them music. It was very interesting.

*R:* I would like to collaborate creatively with Americans again.

*H:* Although you haven't yet seen all of America, you've spent some time here and I wonder if your opinion of it has changed.

*R:* Yes. Yes, now we've seen it with our own eyes, right? Of course our knowledge isn't complete. Everywhere we go, we are treated as guests. We live in hotels. In short, everything is done for us —

every detail is looked after. With this experience we can't say that we really know America, but we do have some understanding of the place now. And our impressions are completely different from what we have been told about America.

*H:* Interesting.

*R:* In Kyrgyz we say: it's better to see something once than to hear about it a thousand times. I wanted to make one more point. Here it seems easier for people to realize their dreams. I would like to establish a creative connection, a scholarly and creative connection, with Americans with the goal of preserving the *Manas* epic. To create that connection and realize it... In the *Manas* there are sacred things — not for any particular nations or tribes. But things that should be sacred for all people. Like the Bible, like the Koran! Like Buddhism and Krishnaism and so on. The *Manas* is also a part of those worlds. One shouldn't divide them. And it's not right to love only one and deny the others, the way that religious fanatics do. For example, one fanatic loves only the Bible and denies all other religions. Another loves only Islam and denies another religion. If a person truly believes in the sacredness of his religion, then he ought to value other sacred things.

*H:* Certainly. Akylbek?

*A:* Well, for me this experience has given the inspiration when I go back to Kyrgyzstan to practice and play music even more. To make even more instruments. To learn how to play new instruments. And eventually to compose a piece of music. That's what I feel inspired to do.

*H:* And the piece of music will be for Kyrgyz folk instruments or for...

*A:* For folk instruments.

*H:* Good. Thank you for taking the time to do this interview. *As bolsyn.*

*R and A:* *As bolsyn.*

---