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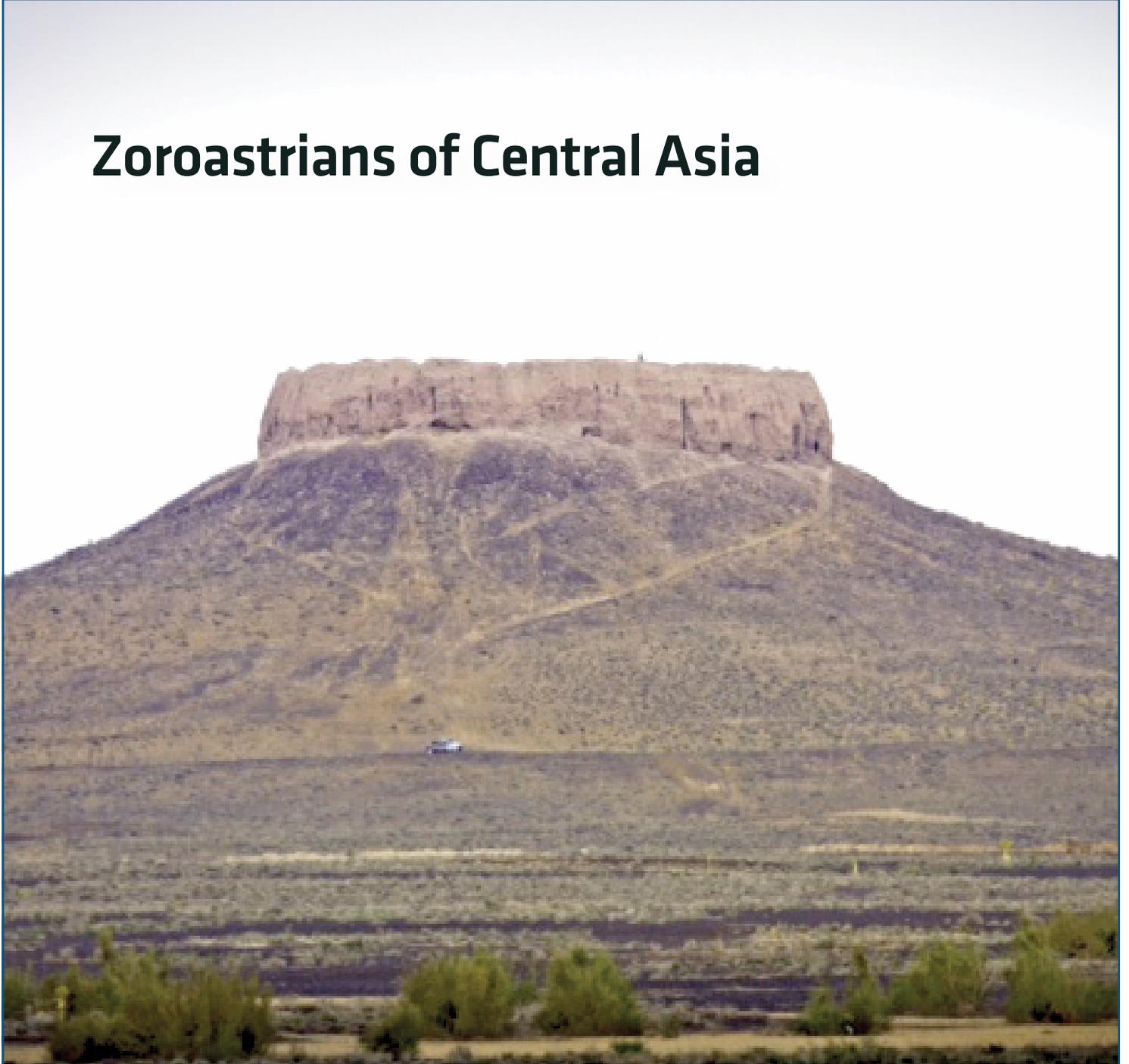
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Zoroastrians of Central Asia



PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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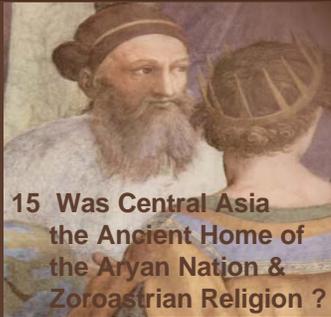
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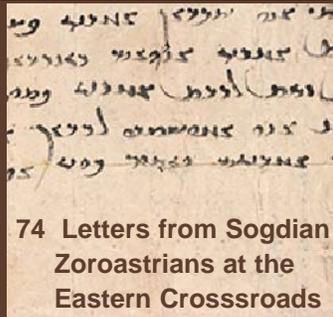
FEZANA JOURNAL

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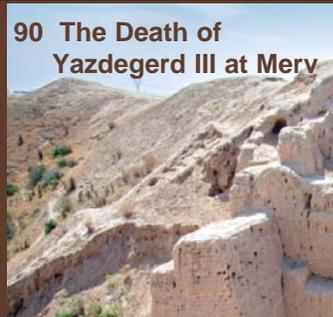
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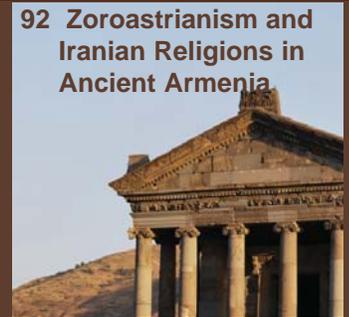
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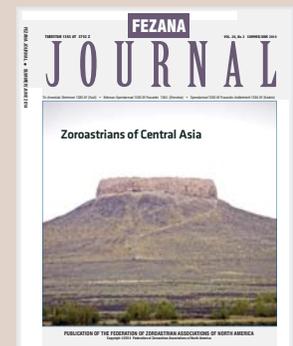
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Shilpiq Dakhma, Photo Jenny Rose see page 61 for description

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FALL 2014

Gahambars: A tradition to perpetuate
Guest Editors Ervad Soli Dastur
and Kayo Mehta

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At the Crossroad – Adapt, Adopt or Abandon



This is the third colour edition of the FEZANA Journal, each being of archival value for coffee table display. *The 25th anniversary issue (2012)*, *I am Cyrus issue (2013)* and *the Zoroastrians of Central Asia (2014)*

The focus of this issue is to recreate the history of the **Zoroastrians of Central Asia**, an overlooked group of people, a group we had not heard of five to seven years ago. For most of us the history of Zoroastrianism is only or mainly associated with Iran. In lacing their story together, it was a very interesting discovery to realize how religious seeds are sown, how they are nurtured, how philosophies, customs and thoughts of neighbouring religions influence each other and get syncretized and how they die. Eduljee sets the stage for the cover story by describing the lands of Airyana Vaejah. We then read in the articles of Judith Lerner, Matteo Comparetti and Wu Xin, wherein they describe the iconography that crept in the Zoroastrian religion as influenced by the Hindu, Buddhist and Chinese philosophies, all at the crossroad of the Silk Route. Jenny Rose tells us of the “Bone Boxes”, the ossuaries to collect the bones of the dead, the plight of a Sogdian immigrant wife, not unlike the stories we read of in 2014; and Jenny Rose also relates the death of the last Sassanian King Yazdegard III. Kersi Shroff infuses the reader with the thrills of discovering and uncovering cultural treasures buried thousands of years ago. Homi Gandhi, Fariborz Rahnmoon and Viraf Soroushian

speak of the yearnings, aspiration and indifference of some present day Central Asians to their cultural roots. It was a fascinating exercise to learn of the evolution of the religious concepts, from expression of religious thought in concrete imagery to abstract concepts of the Gathas. Are there any lessons for us to learn ?

This special issue of the Journal is a collaborative effort of many people, starting with Dr Jenny Rose, whose help was invaluable at every step, from conception of the cover story, to suggestions of authors, she was generous with her time and knowledge ; Doug Lange our language editor, needs to be thanked for his professional assistance in polishing the language and the images, Aban Rustomji for her skills in locating references, to Shahrokh Khanizadeh for creating the artistic layout and to Feroza Fitch for the design of the pleasing cover, and to our anonymous donor, who believed in us to sponsor this issue. I thank them all.

Coming to the Zoroastrians of North America, FEZANA had its elections and all candidates were elected unopposed. Congratulations to all very qualified professionals worthy of leading the organization. We welcome Nilufer Shroff as our Treasurer and Saghar Javanshir Behroozi as the Secretary of FEZANA, Homi Gandhi continues as Vice-president and we wish our Katayun Kapadia, much more success in her second term as president. However what was missing was an healthy competition, we need people to step forward to accept leadership positions and chairmanship of committees to serve the community,

We need to thank Shiraz Italia, our outgoing assistant secretary who carried a heavy administrative burden in the absence of a secretary and Ratan Mistry, the out-going treasurer of FEZANA , who served the community very efficiently for four years, we could rely on him to produce the most detailed and accurate reports for any funding activity. Thank you Ratan, we will miss your professionalism and your personable approach to all funding problems. The Journal and the editorial team will miss your able guidance.

And you dear loyal readers, have a wonderful summer.

Dolly Dastoor

A Message from FEZANA President

FEZANA 2012-2014 A RETROSPECTIVE AND WAY FORWARD

Dear Presidents and Representatives of Member Associations, Corresponding Members, Committee Chairs and fellow Zarathushtis

It has been a challenging and thought-provoking journey these past two years since you elected me as President of FEZANA and I would like to reflect on some of the opportunities and creative ideas that were presented to us and the affirmative solutions and initiatives that we continue to support.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, Inc. (FEZANA) was registered in the State of Illinois on June 2, 1987 as a non-profit, religious and charitable organization. FEZANA comprises 26 Zarathushti member associations and 14 small groups located in U.S.A. and Canada.



1. The present FEZANA Executive comprised of Katayun Kapadia, President; Homi Gandhi, Vice-President; Ratan Mistry, Treasurer; Nahid Dashtaki, Secretary (2012-13), and Shiraz Italia, Assistant Secretary.
2. I welcome *Nilufer K. Shroff* as FEZANA Treasurer and *Saghar Javanshir-Behroozi* as FEZANA Secretary for 2014-16.
3. I thank the outgoing FEZANA Treasurer, *Ratan Mistry* for his proactive, prompt and efficient handling of our requests for information and reimbursements and Assistant Secretary, *Shiraz Italia* for her services to the FEZANA organization.
4. The six FEZANA Past Presidents have continued to play an active role either as Committee Chairs or lead and participate in FEZANA's key projects and activities: Rohinton Rivetna – Infrastructure Development in N.A. & Interfaith; Dolly Dastoor – Journal editor-in-chief, Academic Scholarships & Strategic Planning; Framroze Patel – Financial Statements & Filing of Tax Returns; Firdosh Mehta – Research & Preservation; Rustom Kevala – Funds & Finance; and Bomi Patel External- Affairs & North American Zoroastrian Congress (NAZC). I thank them for their advice and guidance given to me personally and to the FEZANA Executive and look forward to their continued involvement and participation in FEZANA activities in the years ahead.
5. FEZANA functions through its several standing and ad-hoc committees that work on various worthy causes and projects to provide service to the Zarathushtis of North America and world-wide. Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs bring expertise to their committees from all walks of life. I thank all of them for their active participation and efforts in working harmoniously with the FEZANA Executive, member associations and small groups to achieve the mission and goals of the FEZANA organization.
6. Zenobia Damania continues to serve as FEZANA Administrator and ably manages the activities of the FEZANA Office including the publishing of the monthly FEZANA Bulletin.

FUNDS & FINANCE

Ratan Mistry, Treasurer, has done an outstanding job in managing very ably the funds and finance of the Federation and the details can be reviewed in the Treasurer's Report*. The Market Value of Investments at December 31, 2013 was \$1,121,000 as compared to \$1,096,000 as of December 31, 2012. The Market value of investments as of April 30, 2014 was \$1,137,000. The investments continue to be maintained in accounts with TD Ameritrade (LPL Financial till February 2014) and are managed by Adil Masani. I thank Ratan Mistry; the Funds & Finance Committee – Rustom Kevala, Jerry Kheradi, Zubin Bagwadia; Adil Masani and Framroze Patel for their management of FEZANA's Treasury. These past two years have also seen an increase in the number of funds and scholarships and I thank the donors for their generosity towards FEZANA's mission and the causes they support.

ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

THE FEZANA STANDING & AD-HOC Committees have continued to perform their activities and accomplished a lot in the past year*. Here are some highlights:

Second Ten Year Strategic Plan (2011-2021):

The plan consists of 5 major goals with a given set of action items under each goal to be implemented in the next decade by identified stakeholders.

GOALS:

1. *Increase awareness of FEZANA domestically*
2. *Foster HAMAZORI (harmony) by building strong relationships between various Zarathushti entities/groups*
3. *Advance religious education, cultural awareness, and interfaith dialogue*
4. *Ensure economic stability through fund raising and prudent investments*
5. *Showcase FEZANA successes around the world*

The Stakeholders are: Member Associations, Corresponding Members, Standing & Ad-Hoc Committees and the Zarathushti community.

In the past year, the FEZANA Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG) - Mahrukh Motafram-Chair, Jimmy Antia, Keshvar Buhariwala, Roshan Sethna, and Homi Gandhi, VP FEZANA have been having extensive discussions with Committee Chairs to follow-up on the action items, short term and long term goals as identified in the Plan. The results were shared in the two sessions scheduled at this AGM.

The purpose of this entire plan is to encourage team work, to have committees interact with one another and work together along with the Executive to reach the goals. The success of this plan depends upon each Committee Chair being accountable for their respective goals and responsible for communicating them effectively to the FEZANA Executive and to the rest of the FEZANA community. The plan needs to be flexible enough to accommodate changes over the ten years. It is imperative that all of us actively work together with the complimentary organizations like NAMC, WZCC, and others as a team and find resources within the community to bring this plan to fruition.

I am very pleased to see the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the various FEZANA Committees that are the key outputs from the intensive joint efforts of the Committee Chairs and this SPWG. The ToRs will define the Committee's mission, roles, and operational responsibilities to be used as road maps to plan and conduct their activities to achieve short and long term goals as identified in this Plan.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH AMERICA:

The Infrastructure Development in NA Committee has developed a list of needs that is fair and equitable, and captures the dreams and vision of all sectors of the NA community. These paramount overarching

goals are four fold:

- *Establishing our identity as North American Zarathushtis*
- *Perpetuating our community in North America*
- *Gaining visibility in North America as Zarathushtis*
- *Branding of Zarathushtis in North America as an industrious, trustworthy, prosperous and a compassionate community much like the stature achieved in the mother countries of Iran and India*

As these infrastructure needs are developed, we need to have one eye focusing on serving the above goals and the other, on ways and means to perpetuate the developed infrastructure assets. It is one thing to develop these assets and quite another to perpetuate them. Every infrastructure asset conceived will be subject to that scrutiny to ensure its perpetuation both in terms of human and material recourses needed for its perpetuation. Assets developed shall be income generating and/or self -sustaining.

At the AGM in Dallas on May 4, 2013, after discussions among member associations on Infrastructure Development in North America, Homi Gandhi, VP FEZANA conducted an informal survey on the prioritization and next steps for Infrastructure Needs. It was decided to concentrate on 2 projects (Atash Kadeh & FEZANA Center) while FIRES works on its enhancement. We have sent out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to the Member Associations for the setting up of Atash Kadehs and the establishment of a FEZANA Center and are awaiting proposals.

PROCLAMATION OF FARMAN-e-KOROUGH-e-BOZORG (Cylinder of Cyrus) Tour of USA: One of the most iconic objects in human history -- the Cyrus Cylinder, which is on permanent exhibit in the British Museum -- toured the United States in 2013. It was the first time the Cylinder, a replica of which is enshrined at the United Nations as the first charter of human rights, was on display in the U.S. We, at FEZANA, were very excited about the tour, which we saw not only as a cultural milestone but also as an opportunity to celebrate our ancient and remarkable Zarathushti heritage. We were very pleased to see and read about our fellow Zarathushtis across North America visiting the five museums: Washington, D.C., New York, Houston, San Francisco and Los Angeles that hosted the Cylinder and its accompanying cast of significant objects of Persian antiquity; participating in discussions and other events linked to the tour; bringing it to the attention of local news media; e-mailing friends about it; blogging about it; informing and enlightening our fellow North Americans about a history that lies at the roots of human civilization but is not well-known here, and linking its relevance to current world events. Thank you ZAMWI, ZAGNY, ZAH, ZANC, ZACalifornia and CZC for your promotion and active participation in this epic event. I thank Homi Gandhi, VP FEZANA and his team for coordinating on the Cylinder Tour with the *Iran Heritage Foundation (IHF)* and various other associations and individuals across North America in promoting this Tour.

I thank Dr. Dolly Dastoor, Behram Pastakia and their team for the special edition of the FEZANA Journal Summer 2013 to commemorate Cyrus Cylinder exhibit. This issue has become a prized possession to own and display in Zarathushti homes worldwide. It was also distributed to all delegates at the 10th. World Zoroastrian Congress in Mumbai, in December 2013.

ZOROASTRIAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY – Stanford is one of the most prestigious universities in North America and for the last nine years along with Stanford, we have had a community effort led by Farrokh Billimoria of Redwood City, California to help create and sustain a program on Zoroastrian Studies at the University. This Program has been extended for 3 more years 2013-2015. It's success is due to the interest of the community and the very generous monetary contributions and commitments made by FEZANA, various individuals and associations in North America as well as from all over the world. I thank Dr Lovji Cama, Chair, Education, Conference and Scholarship Committee for coordinating this for FEZANA. I thank each and every individual donor, FEZANA and the individual North American Associations who have made the Zoroastrian Studies Program possible over the last nine years. Your commitment and vision is to be commended.

RETURN TO ROOTS is a youth-initiated program designed to strengthen community identity amongst Zoroastrian youth the world over. The idea of a Zoroastrian Return to Roots Program was born out of the increasing disconnect between the Zoroastrians in the diaspora with their ancestral communities in Iran and India. It is a unique means of fostering community links. It aims to **return, reconnect, and revive** the religion and community identity by taking small groups of youth on trips to explore their religious, social and cultural heritage.

The inaugural **PARZOR – Zoroastrian Return to Roots (RTR)** youth-led program initiative was launched successfully in 2013. 16 Fellows from a range of professional and educational backgrounds arrived in India from Canada, UK, USA and Pakistan to participate in the tour held from 23rd December 2013 to 6th January 2014. There were four participants of Iranian Zoroastrian heritage and for some of the participants this was their first visit to India. I thank FEZANA, ZAGNY, ZSO and other individual donors from North America for contributing towards this Program. We are pleased that three fellows together with Arzan Wadia participated in the AGM in Seattle, May 17 -18 2014 and did a presentation on their current trip and talked to us about their vision and mission for their next trip.

FEZANA ON WORLD STAGE: In my role as President of FEZANA, I had the pleasure and privilege of participating and representing FEZANA in several sessions at the 10th World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC) in Mumbai, December 27-30, 2013. It gave me a great opportunity to network and to discuss topics of common interests, concerns, opportunities and challenges for the Zarathushtis worldwide with Zarathushti leaders from other organizations like BPP, ZTFE, and representatives from Iran, Middle East, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia. It was good to see several zarathushtis from North America as speakers and participants at this WZC. Three of the FEZANA Past Presidents, a few Committee Chairs and others participated with me in the Global Working Group Meeting in Mumbai on January 4, 2014.

WAY FORWARD

Each day brings new opportunities, so let us look for creative ideas and affirmative solutions and continue to support initiatives as we move to 2014-2015:

Second Ten Year Strategic Plan – Looking ahead, the Executive with the help of the Strategic Plan Working Group, Committee Chairs, member associations and small groups will continue to actively work together with the complimentary organizations like NAMC, WZCC, ZWIN, RTR and others to find solutions and resources within the community to bring this plan to fruition.

Infrastructure Development in North America – We continue to identify and prioritize the Infra Structure needs of North America and work together to make it a reality.

Welfare & Critical Assistance – Continue to support the welfare & critical needs of the North American and global Zarathushti Community in conjunction with WZO-Trust, thanks to continued and consistent efforts of Dinshaw Tamboly.

Youth Involvement & Development – Work together with youth committees and organizations like ZYNA, ZYWIB, Zoroastrian Sports Committee, Return to Roots (RTR), Zoroastrians Stepping Forward, NextGenNow to foster community involvement and work together on youth participation in interfaith, UN-NGO and other related North American and global activities.

Religious Education Class Curriculum – Contribute & support this initiative led jointly by Lovji Cama and Daraius Bharucha to develop, update, revise and appropriately format the religious class curriculum for various age groups to be shared & used across NA and world-wide.

Scholarships – Thank our donors and encourage them and other prospective donors to continue to contribute to FEZANA and help us to award academic, religious education, sports, and performing & creative arts scholarships.

NAMC, WZCC, ZWIN and Return to Roots – Develop a spirit of teamwork and partner with these complimentary organizations and programs to provide value added services resulting in the achievement of community service objectives.

Corresponding Members – Reach out and involve these small communities in FEZANA activities.

Congresses & Sports Events – Member Associations together with FEZANA need to develop a strategy to subsidize the participation of youth in North American & World Congresses and Sports Events. Motivate and

A Message from FEZANA President

support small member associations and corresponding members to host the FEZANA Annual General Meetings which would enable them to meet the FEZANA family and get them involved in FEZANA activities and projects which would help them to achieving their community goals too.

Communication Strategy - To build, enhance and promote a unified NA Zarathushti Community requires a direct, clear, systematic, well-planned and organized communication strategy. Let us continue to work together and share our achievements, upcoming events, community service projects, welfare & critical assistance appeals and other information using the FEZANA Journal (quarterly), FEZANA Bulletin (monthly), the fezanayahoogroups emails and the updated FEZANA website.

FEZANA was founded with the purpose of providing the North American Zarathushti community a united platform to plan and control its future. FEZANA's mission is to preserve our religion on the North American continent by providing a cohesive force. Our core values are being recognized and enhanced through a strong emphasis on education, economic stability, and volunteerism. As we nurture a love for humanity and promote our Zarathushti way of life, we are increasing awareness of our religion and culture domestically and globally. This is the vision we are promoting, to instill pride in our future generations.

Thanks to your generosity, we are able to do all this. The work of awarding the scholarships, making sure that your donations are used wisely to help those in real need, planning and coordinating religious education, workshops, sports, seminars, publications is done by committees made up of numerous volunteers who freely give their time, and often their money. To continue this work and prepare for our future, we need to continually raise funds. Please support FEZANA's goals and activities with your generous donations.

I request that all of us continue to follow the **5-STAR Guiding Principles for FEZANA: Teamwork, Respect Diversity, Innovation, Empowerment & an Optimistic 'Can Do Attitude'**. Let us continue to work individually and collectively for a unified, healthier Zarathushti community in North America. The FEZANA Executive looks forward to continue working with all of you in harmony and with an optimistic *can-do* attitude to support FEZANA's goals and activities in 2014-15

May Ahura Mazda shower his choicest blessings on the Zarathushti community in North America and worldwide.

Katayun Kapadia
President

****To view all reports presented at the AGM visit www.fezana.org***

FEZANA EXECUTIVE 2014- 2016



From left Treasurer Nilufer Shroff; Vice-President Homi Gandhi, President Katayun Kapadia; Secretary Sagar Behroozi

FEZANA EXECUTIVE 2012- 2014



From Left Treasurer Ratan Mistry, Asst Secretary Shiraz Italia, President Katayun Kapadia; Vice-President Homi Gandhi

Hanja Mana (Part II)

Pathaamchaa vícharanaao yazamaide, Pathaamchaa hanjamanaao yazamaidé.

We revere the forking of the roads, And we revere the coming together of the roads.

[Yasna Ha 42.1 - From the Haptanghaaiti]



We learned of the wisdom of the ancient Indo-Iranian tradition of reverence for “**hanjamanaao**”, the divergence and the confluence of rivers and roads, at the 10th World Zoroastrian Congress in Mumbai (1,2,3,4). The point made by Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary is that **Hanja Mana** has to do not only with rivers and roads but with human interactions in building relationships (5).

“Our community members and leaders need to attach similar piety and reverence, to the elected management committee bodies of their anjumans, and *vice versa*” (italics added) (1).

An important take away: not only should elected leaders be respected, but they in turn should listen carefully to what is being expressed by those at the grassroots. We learnt this lesson from the story of the Great King Jamshed, whom we remember every year at the spring equinox and the loss of his *Khavarneh* (Glory), when he succumbed to arrogance.

Participation in a respectful dialogue makes for positive outcomes. A thought expressed at an appropriate time and in proper manner can be adopted by another, who brings his/her own unique skills in executing the concept to the advantage of the entire group. A healthy and vibrant governance structure thus created, assures success. Shared below are a few examples, to illustrate

how the powerful concept of **Hanja Mana** (*i.e.* listening to divergent views with respect) can, with patience, lead to consensus building among likeminded people, creating gifts which keep on giving.

CREATING AWARENESS

A few years ago, a cyber-dialogue was started from California by Mehrborzin Soroushian under the title “CreatingAwareness”. Carefully monitored for content, a vibrant educative exchange, (*an electronic Hanja Mana in cyberspace!*), grew to over 5000 subscribers worldwide rapidly. Faced with an earthquake in South-East Asia, an introspective e-mail on our possible collective response to such a humanitarian calamity from Dina McIntyre, became a clarion call to action. A warm-clothes collection drive by Zarathushtis from North America drew support from faith traditions other than our own. Consignments of donated woolies were air-lifted to Pakistan, distributed by Toxy Cowasjee and her team to survivors freezing at the foothills of the Himalayas. Listening to one another we came together to work together for a common cause moving us to tap into our better selves.

ZOROASTRIANS STEPPING FORWARD

Other examples abound: The *Zoroastrians Stepping Forward* initiative, arising from the 5th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Vancouver, Canada ended with shoes from Virginia, USA taken to a remote village in Africa (Children of Mtaya) from a collection drive launched by the annual 911 Unity Walk. (photo page 9)

Editorial



Children of Mtaya, a remote village in eastern Zambia, Africa - Beneficiaries of the Shoe Collection Drive initiative of Zarathushti Stepping Forward and implemented by the 911 Unity Walk on Embassy Row in Washington D.C.

Photo credit: Carolyn Kulisheck



COMING TOGETHER ROUND TABLE

An ongoing Zarathushti Cyber-dialogue at Zoroastrians.net, is a legacy of a successful *Hanja Mana* - the Coming Together Roundtable held at the Athornan Institute at the Dadar Parsi Colony, Mumbai. A suggestion made during a tea-break by Behram Nagarwala from Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, executed brilliantly by Yazdi Tantra from Mumbai, now provides a service for FEZANA Association members and small groups, *gratis*, to post upcoming events on an electronic calendar with RSS feeds.

Editorial



RETURN TO ROOTS

A graduate student in Princeton University, Dinsha Mistree noticed the transformation in his friend who travelled to Israel, to connect with his roots and traditions. Modelled on this idea, we have successfully completed the First Zarathushti *Return to Roots* program. We hope the legacy perpetuates itself ⁽⁶⁾.

This issue of the Journal showcases a *Return to Roots* of a different kind. We go back to our ancient past and delve into long lost archeological treasures. Travel is education. Let us enjoy what our scholars have taken the trouble to unearth from our Zarathushti heritage in Central Asia.

Our North American Zarathushti team of intrepid explorers plans to return to their roots on the Ancient Silk Road in 2014. We look forward to hearing about their voyage of discovery and share with us stories of *Hanja Mana*: not only of rivers and roads of Ancient Iran, but of how they envision the evolution of our Zarathushti diaspora on this continent.

May we keep learning from each other and improve ourselves incrementally as we travel together on this short sojourn of life.

Behram Pastakia

Chair of the Publications Committee of FEZANA

Notes:

1. Mehraban Firouzgary: *How Useful are WZC's ?* Parsiana, World Zoroastrian Congress Special Issue: December 2013, page 13.
2. The "H" and the "S" sounds often get transposed linguistically as one travels east from Ancient Iran to the valley of the Indus and beyond. *Ahura* is transposed to *Asura*. *Hapta Hindu* becomes *Sapta Sindhu*.
3. The town of *Sanjan*, is by some accounts, a derivative of the word *Hanjan*, a village where three different classes (not castes) of Zoroastrians priests lived in harmony. हंजामननगर [Sir J.J. Modi: The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. XXI, 1904 page 14].
4. *Sangam* (the sacred confluence of rivers on the vast Gangetic plains of Eastern India revered by the Hindus) is very close phonetically to *Hangam*. We can even construe that the word *Anjuman* derives from the scriptural reference to *HanjaMana*.
5. "If allowed to convey my own, acquired, knowledge of the Subject matter – the Gathic words *Hem... Jamaete* meaning Assembly / participants as in *Yasna 44 (15)* has developed derivations like *Hanjam = to meet together /meeting point, further into Hanjam Mana = Meeting point of minds / intellects (Mana)*. With such thoughts in mind I am led to believe that the **Patamchaa Hanjamanao**, may not indicate, simply, the coming together of the Roads as earthen roads but a junction or meeting place for Intellects who have travelled / crossed different roads / directions to meet for discussions / consultations. Other derivations are: *Jamyath* as in the *Niyayesh "Atha Jamyath Yatha Aafrinamie"* (May it turn out as the Participants (here) wish), the Farsi word *Jameeat = population & etc..* Derivations of *Hanjamana* are used in several *Yashts*, e.g. 10(7), 10(65), 13(16), 13(85), 23(3), 25(61), *Yasna 62(5)*, *Vand.22(13)* & etc. always preceded by a variation of the word *Viakhana* meaning Leader /Supervisor." – Notes from Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary, Tehran, Iran.
6. Sasan Jahanian and Diana Vania: *Zoroastrian Return to Roots, Perpetuating the Zarathushti Faith for Future Generations* – [Fezana Journal, Vol. 27, No 4, pages 34-37, Winter/December 2013].

FEZANA AGM 2014 Tops Expectations

Washington State is one of the fastest growing Zoroastrian communities in North America. The families are young and the number of children is increasing significantly every year. A group of enthusiastic volunteers from the Zoroastrian Society of Washington State (ZSWS) decided to learn more about FEZANA and highlight their young community. They embarked on a journey in 2013, making a bid to host the AGM in Seattle a year later. They weren't aware of the tasks ahead but were confident that dreaming big would leave a mark on their community and the visiting delegates.

Over the next 12 months, the group of volunteers under the leadership of Fred Bhesania put their heart and soul into coordinating the weekend. According to Fred, *"We need to prepare ourselves as a community to take on bigger challenges as we grow. Hosting the FEZANA AGM in Seattle empowers us to build camaraderie, learn how to work efficiently together and most importantly prove to ourselves that WE CAN DO IT!"*. The committee consisted of representatives from both the Parsi and Irani cultural groups coming together and working hand in hand. Over a 100 community members pitched in to raise over \$3400 at the



The FEZANA AGM Organizing Committee celebrating at Saturday Gala Banquet. Committee members (from left to Right): Maruk Ghadiali, Anahita Afkham; Afshin Sepehri, Anhaita Jamula, Arnaz Bharucha, Fred Bhesania, Anaheita Kapadia, Cyrus Khubcher, Atriya Salamati, Rushna Bhesania, Mahrukh Motafram, Delnaz Pithawalla, Firozi Daruwala.

"Bite-of-FEZANA" fundraiser in February.

The community opened their homes to the delegates with Feroze and Mahrukh Motafram hosting a scrumptious dinner on Thursday night. On Friday morning there were tours arranged to visit Boeing manufacturing plant tour and museum and Microsoft Corporation, a rare opportunity to the prominent technology companies in Seattle. The AGM events officially started on May 16th (Friday) and ran through

Sunday afternoon at the Sheraton Hotel, Bellevue. Days were filled with detailed presentations and healthy debates among the 50 visiting delegates and their families. The delegates were entertained on Friday and Saturday evenings with food and festivities from the local community.

Friday night marked the first night of celebrations, with Parsi food prepared by the talented Seattle Zoroastrian chefs. There was an assortment of dishes ranging from masala daars to patra-in-machi (*fish wrapped in authentic banana leaves*) and lagan-nu-custard. The spread of food brought smiles to everyone's faces, and the event allowed for a casual gathering of individuals to get to meet one another and learn more about what FEZANA has to offer.

Saturday night marked the Gala Banquet celebration at the Mercer Island Banquet Hall, offering breath taking views of beautiful Seattle. Over 250 people attended the gala function. The show started at 7pm with performances from the children of Seattle. Over 2 dozen kids (ranging from 2-12 years) prayed together and then explained the different parts of the Farohar, along with the significance of each part. This was followed with a talented set of adults performing to "*Chaiya-Hamae-Zarathushti*" proceeded by "*Khan Ashem Vohu*". Two key elements that stood out were the camaraderie between the 30 members from the Parsi and Irani community, along with hours of practice that they had put in to make the performance stand out. A feast of Persian food followed the entertainment along with dancing into the late hours of the night.

The FEZANA AGM in Seattle offered a winning combination to the community, as well as the delegates. It created an opportunity for the community to work together towards a common goal, building friendships and overcome challenges. In addition, it offered the delegates an opportunity to see a relatively hidden community and, share their experiences to help shape the future of this blooming community in the North West.

For those interested in seeing pictures and videos of the events at the AGM, please search for "FEZANA 2014" on <http://www.youtube.com>.



50 Visiting Delegates at the FEZANA AGM 2014 event in Seattle, WA.



The talented children's performance on Saturday night.



Afshin Sepehri (right) and his talented singers performing to "*Khan Ashem Vohu*"

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

GENESIS OF THIS ISSUE

In April 2013, Dr Jenny Rose, Adjunct Professor of Religion at Claremont Graduate University led an educational tour of the Ancient Silk Route across Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. We had always heard of those regions as the probable location of the early Zarathushti religion and so I eager to join the tour with two other Zarathushti friends from Houston, Aban Rustomji and Yasmin Pavri.

Later in the same year, our colleague, Kersi Shroff, went on an excavation tour to Tajikistan with Dr Pavel Lurje, a Russian archeologist based at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, as the tour leader. Kersi has written a travelogue in two parts in our sister publication *Hamazor* of his visit to the ancient Sogdian and Bactrian sites of Panjakent, (also spelt Panjikent, Penjikent, Pendjikent) Historic, Sarazm and Takhti Sangin (Oxus Temple).

While viewing the ancient ruins, the frescoes and the artifacts in the Museums on both tours, it became apparent to my Zarathushti colleagues and I, that the Zoroastrian religion - both in its praxis and its interpretation as depicted in that region - was very different from the religion we knew of as being practiced in the Iranian plateau, the “mother country” of the religion and in the India of our childhood. It seemed that the structure and the substance of the religion evolved in the regions of Central Asia in ways that differed from the

coherent theology that developed under the Sasanians in Iran.

Representation of deities in Greek form appeared in the frescoes of Panjikant and in the ruins of the Oxus Temple, at Toprak Kala in Khorasmia (West Uzbekistan) there were three storied palaces and temples with formal chambers ornamented with frescoes depicting fifty male and female figures vigorously dancing, reflecting the influence of India. And yet they were representing the spirit of a specific day of the month according to the Zoroastrian system. Concepts which we thought were allegorical were expressed in clay and stone. There were ossuaries on which were depicted the “chinvat bridge” which the soul crossed to enter the other world. There were murals which depicted the soul being judged on the fourth day after death.

HOW CAN THIS BE ?

Upon probing we learnt that the lands of Sogdiana, Chorasmia, Bactria and Margiana are all mentioned in the Vendidad (or Videvdat 1)



From left Aban Rustomji, Dolly Dastoor, Yasmin Pavri in front of the Eternal Flame monument with an Avesta carved in stone in background in Urgench, Uzbekistan. Photo Jenny Rose



Kersi Shroff on left with Shodman Sanginov, the Tajik tour organizer with Dr Pavel Lurje.

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connected with the “Airyana Vaejah” - the Aryan expanse fashioned for Iranians by Ahura Mazda. It was here that Zarathushtra is supposed to have started his ministry in the court of Vishtaspa. Sogdiana and Chorsmia were satrapies of the Achaemeinids, and after the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks this region became part of the Greco-Bactrian satrapy. The Sasanians adopted the Zoroastrian religion as the state religion, they placed it under the control of a priesthood that proceeded to codify and systematize the texts of the faith, generating a formalism and orthodoxy- that may not have sat well in the northeastern regions of Iran that are now part of Central Asia.

With the beginning of trade and commerce, this region became the crossroads of cultures and philosophical traditions from India and China. Religions borrowed freely from each other in an ecumenical spirit, and diverse religious systems and cults seemed to have coexisted there without the conflicts that appears to have existed under various kings in Sasanian Iran. The Central Asians continued their own practice of Zoroastrianism even after the coming of Islam, and the exit of many Iranian Zarthushtis to India

I was eager to explore the theme of “**Zoroastrians of Central Asia**” with a focus on these eastern Iranian inhabited lands, as the area in which the religion emerged and grew, although in slightly differing ways, to the development under the successive regimes in Iran “proper”. For most Zarthushtis Iran was where the religion took root and is still practiced, and our history is intimately connected to that country. However the regions to the northeast of Iran, where the religion started and was practiced in different form are never or rarely mentioned.

I was interested in knowing what were the influences that made the religion evolve differently and why it seems to have died out so completely in those regions. This I thought this would help the present Zoroastrian community to understand better the forces which guide the evolution of the religious praxis such as we see unfolding in the Zoroastrian diaspora.

Dolly Dastoor

ZOROASTRIANS OF CENTRAL ASIA

This special summer edition of *FEZANA Journal* ranges across a wide geographical expanse, referred to in modern times as “Central Asia,” which stretches east from the Caspian Sea to northwestern China, and north from Afghanistan to the borders of Russia. The religion attributed to Zarathustra is thought to have begun somewhere in this region, most probably within the boundaries of the modern republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Much of this area was under the control of the Ancient Persians until the arrival of the Greeks: it continued to be inhabited by those who spoke Eastern Iranian languages, some of which survive into our own time (for instance, Yaghnobi and Pashto). The articles in this edition trace the archeological and literary evidence for local expressions and survivals of the religion

through most of the above geographical area from early times to the modern period. They cover aspects of the history of Zoroastrianism that have, until recently, not formed part of the general discourse concerning the religion. It is encouraging, therefore, that contributions have been written by scholars specializing in several different fields, including philology (Nicholas Sims-Williams), art history (Matteo Compareti and Judith Lerner), archaeology (Wu Xin) and the history of religion (Jenny Rose), as well as knowledgeable Zarthushtis and friends of Zarathushtis, Ed Edulji, Kaveh Farrokh, Homi Gandhi, Fariborz Rahnmoon, Kersi Shroff and Viraf Soroushian.

Jenny Rose

Jenny Rose in a market in Bukhara, Uzbekistan



Zoroastrians of Central Asia

Was Central Asia the Ancient Home of the Aryan Nation & Zoroastrian Religion

K. E. Eduljee

1. Home of Zarathushtra & the Aryan Nation

Where was the ancient home of the Aryan Nation? Where was Zarathushtra's family home? Where did Zarathushtra's creed first take root? The *Avesta* and Middle Persian texts give us some tantalizing clues to possible answers.

A. Zarathushtra's Home – Airyana Vaeja

The Middle Persian *Greater Bundahishn*ⁱ states that Zarathushtra's father, Pourushasp's, house stood on the banks of the Daraja River in Airan Vejⁱⁱ and Zarathushtra was born there. The Middle Persian writings of Zadsparam state that Zarathushtra received Divine revelations by the Rivers Daitya and Daraja in Airan Vej, known in the more ancient *Avesta* as Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan homeland.

Airyana Vaeja is the first of sixteen nations listed in the *Vendidad*.ⁱⁱⁱ In the *Bundahishn*,^{iv} these nations are called the nations or districts of Airan-shahr otherwise known as Iran-shahr or Eran-shahr. The *Bundahishn* provides us with a medieval Persian interpretation of the more ancient Avestan place names.

ANCIENT AIRAN-SHAHR - VENDIDAD NATIONS



Zoroastrians of Central Asia

B. Strabo & Eratosthenes' Ariana

Basing his account on the information provided by Eratosthenes (276 to 196 BCE), librarian of the Great Library in Alexandria, Egypt, classical Greek author Strabo who lived from around 63 BCE to 24 CE, describes a nation-of-nations he calls Ariana. The constituent nations of Eratosthenes and Strabo's Ariana correspond fairly well with the nations listed in the *Bundahishn's* version of the Vendidad nations – Airan Shahr.

C. Central Asia, Airyana Vaeja & the Vendidad Nations

While the location of ancient Airyana Vaeja is not made clear to us, we are able to identify most of the other fifteen Vendidad nations. The corresponding English names (based on the Greco-Latin versions of the classical writers) for Sughdha, Mouru and Bakhdhi – the second, third and fourth Vendidad nations – are Sogdiana, Margiana and Bactriana respectively. Today, these nations are part of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan – all part of Central Asia.

Importantly, there are no nations listed in the *Vendidad* that we can directly identify with modern Kerman, Yazd or Pars (Persia) located in the central-south and south-west of today's Iran. Even the *Bundahishn* – written when Persia had become the centre of Zoroastrianism – does not attempt to identify any of the Vendidad nations with Persia. As such, it does appear that the Avestan canon was closed before Kerman, Yazd and Pars had become part of Iran-shahr. Ancient Iran-shahr had a more eastern bias to it than the modern nation of Iran – a bias towards Central Asia.

If we are to assume that the Vendidad nations are listed in the order that they became part of Iran-shahr – or Greater Aryana as we prefer to call it – then Sughdha (Sogdiana) may have bordered Airyana Vaeja. Or, at the least, Sughdha, Mouru and Bakhdhi (that is Sogdiana, Margiana and Bactriana respectively) would have been located in proximity to Airyana Vaeja as indicated in the *Avesta's* Meher Yasht,^v where we are informed that the rivers of the Arya's abode (Airyo-Shayanem) cascaded towards Mouru, Haroyum (Haroyu/Herat/Aria), Gava-Sughdha and Khvairizem (Khvarizem/Khorezm/Chorasmia).

D. Location of Airyana Vaeja & the Vendidad Nations

Zarathushtra's patron king, King Vishtasp, is commonly identified as the king of Balkh (Bakhdhi/Bactria) as in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* – Balkh being a one-time seat of the Kayanian dynasty. The Warners' translation of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* has in the section on Gushtasp (Vishtasp) & Zardhusht (Zarathushtra), "When the envoys from Arjasp, King of Turan and Chin arrived at Balkh they went toward the court afoot and, drawing nearer to Gushtasp, bowed down before him on the threshold."

Western accounts also link Zarathushtra with Bactria. According to Hermippus, a third century BCE philosopher, Zoroaster was a Bactrian.

Further, first century BCE Roman historian Trogus Pompeius in his *Historiae Philippicae* (as quoted by Justinus), notes, "Zoroaster, 'king' of the Bactrians, is said to have been the first to have invented the Magian arts and to have investigated, with great attention, the origin of the world and the motions of the stars." References such as those above form the preponderance of references regarding the locale of Zarathushtra's ministry. The earlier the source text of the reference, the more eastern is the bias with relation to modern Iran.

The association of Zarathushtra with Bactria and not Airyana Vaeja in classical Western accounts is understandable. At the time the extant accounts were written some two thousand five hundred to two thousand years ago, memory of ancient Airyana Vaeja may have been relegated to the Avesta and Zand. Instead, before the rise of Parthia, Bactria was the predominant eastern Aryana nation. Strabo quotes Apollodorus^{vi} as saying that "*Bactriana is the ornament of all Ariana. They extended their empire even as far as the Seres^{vii} and Phryni (eastern lands that may have included the Tarim Basin bordering ancient China).*" As such, it is possible that at one point in history, the empire of Bactria may have subsumed Airyana Vaeja.

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Figure 1 Detail of the painting *School of Athens* by Raphael 1509 CE. An artist's entirely fanciful impression of (the Bactrian) Zoroaster & Ptolemy in conversation. Ptolemy (c. 90-168 CE) holds an earth sphere, backs the viewer and faces Zoroaster who holds a celestial sphere. (There are no surviving images of Zarathushtra and he lived long before Ptolemy's time.)



Figure 2 Ferangees, a Badakhshan-Pamiri woman from Tajikistan. Image:Pamirs.org.

This author's research over the past thirty five years has led him to propose greater Badakhshan (including the Pamiro-Alaya/Hissar Mountains of Tajikistan) as a strong candidate for the location of Airyana Vaeja. Greater Badakhshan includes parts of north-eastern Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Very approximately, Sughdha (Sugd/Sogdiana) would have been to greater Badakhshan's north, Mouru (Marv/Margiana) to its west and Bakhdhi (Balkh/Bactriana) to its west-south-west.

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2. Role of Trade in the Growth of Iran-shahr

It is this writer's contention that the Aryans were traders par excellence and that the Aryans owned the trade roads commonly known as the Silk Roads (they would have had to, since the Silk Roads passed through the sixteen Vendidad nations).^{viii} It is hardly a coincidence that the sixteen nations as well as the subsequent nations that later formed the core of the Persian Empire were established along the Silk Roads. The hubs and junctions along the trade roads became the metropolises and capital cities of the Aryan nations, the Airyanam dakhyunam of the Avesta.

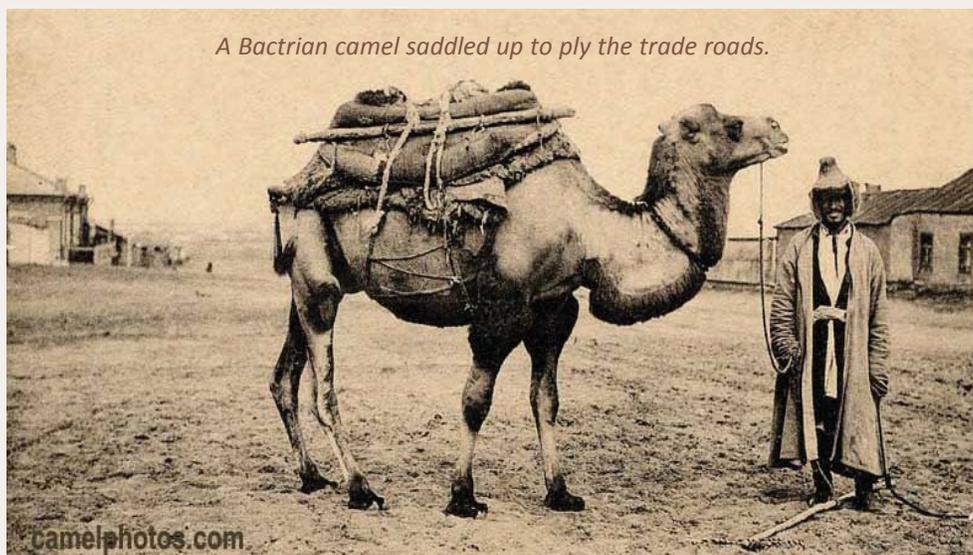
Particularly noteworthy is the role of the Sogdians as traders. Sughdha/Sugd/ Sogdiana as we had noted earlier, is the second Vendidad nation right after Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan homeland.

The trade plied by the Sogdians was aided by the hardy Bactrian camel (Bakhdhi/Balkh/ Bactriana was the fourth Vendidad nation).

The Sogdian bazaars of Samarkand and Bokhara became legendary as did the Bactrian capital of Balkh.



Tang dynasty era (618–907 CE) sancai glazed ceramic 'Persian' merchant (likely a Sogdian) on a Bactrian camel. Presently at the Palace Museum in China. Image: Wikipedia



camelphotos.com

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

3. Central Asia, Archaeology & Zoroastrianism

Following the visit of French scholar Anquetil du Perron to Surat from 1759 to 1761, Western interest in Zoroastrianism and its origins was focused towards the western realms of Greater Aryana – until, that is, the explorations of Central Asia in the early 1900s by a geologist from New York, Raphael Pumpelly. Pumpelly believed, *“the fundamentals of civilization – organized village life, agriculture, the domestication of animals, weaving”* (as well as mining and metal work) *“originated in the oases of Central Asia long before the time of Babylon.”* Today, Raphael Pumpelly’s extraordinary work in Central Asia is all but forgotten. Instead, it is ex-Soviet archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi’s^{ix} excavations and reports linking Turkmenistan to early Zoroastrianism that have gained notoriety for all the wrong reasons.

Sarianidi announced that he had found traces of hallucinogenic substances in an excavation site called Gonur in Turkmenistan. He associated what he had found with haoma and thereby a Zoroastrian cult (sic) ritual.^x However, the contents of the vessel in which Sarianidi claimed he had found the narcotic materials were subsequently examined by Professor C. C. Bakels of the Faculty of Archaeology at University of Leiden. Bakels concluded that *“the material we examined contained broomcorn millet. This cereal is known from the Merv oasis, at least from the Bronze Age onwards (Nesbitt 1997).”* The imagined hedonistic ‘temple’ in which Sarianidi found his ‘narcotic haoma’ was likely a bakery. Wild speculation such as Sarianidi’s can have an incredibly negative impact on the historical record and how the general public perceive Zoroastrians and Zoroastrianism. Once wrong information is accepted as fact, it is particularly difficult to remove.

Haoma prepared during the Zoroastrian Yasna ceremony is an extract of ephedra and pomegranate twigs known for its health giving properties. It is in no way hallucinogenic.^{xi} Unfortunately, archaeologists like Sarianidi and a cadre of like-minded ‘scholars’ have now become the arbiters of what defines Zoroastrianism. If Zoroastrians allow these unfounded assertions to stand, Zoroastrians will have abdicated their responsibility to define their own precious heritage based on tradition. And that will be a shame.

4. The Shifting Centre of Zoroastrianism

A few thousand years ago, the ‘centre of gravity’, so to speak, of Zoroastrianism moved from the eastern Aryan realms under Kayanian rule to the western realms under the Medes and Persians. The Avestan canon was closed at the end of Kayanian rule, and we read of a ‘war of religion’. Then after an interregnum that Professor Mary Boyce calls the *“unrecorded centuries”*, Zoroastrian history picks up in Media and Persia. According to the *Denkard* and the *Arda Viraf Nameh* ^{xii}, King Darius *“ordered the preservation of two written copies of the whole Avesta and its commentary (Zand)”* and, *“...the entire Avesta (scrip-*



Artist's reconstruction of the Gonur north complex. Artist unknown. Gonur is located in the Murgab River delta once part of Mouru/Margiana/Merv and now part of Turkmenistan. Ruins of over 150 ancient settlements dating back to the early Bronze Age (2500-1700 BCE) have been found in the Murgab delta region.

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tures) and Zand (commentaries) to be written on hides with gold ink – and which were deposited in the archives at Stakhar Papakan (the royal library at Istakhr, near Persepolis and Shiraz in Pars province).”

We can assume that some measure of conformity in practice was imposed by the head priests during the Achaemenid era (c. 700-330 BCE). All that would have changed drastically after Alexander’s overthrow of the Achaemenids in 330 BCE followed by the burning of the libraries as well as the killing of Zoroastrian priests. Around this time Buddhism began to take hold in Central Asia and we can further assume that all manner of syncretic beliefs may have prevailed in Central Asia from time-to-time – even after the Parthians (c. 250 BCE– c. 224 CE) and Sasanians (c. 224 - c. 649 CE) reasserted Zoroastrianism across Iran-shahr. The advent of Islam would have dealt the final blow, gradually making the practice of previous religions – Zoroastrianism, Buddhism or any other – barely noticeable.

In 636 CE, the Arabs engaged and defeated the Sasanian Persian army in the battle of Qadisiyyah (now in South-Central Iraq). In the face of the advancing Arab armies that sought their heads, Persian-Zoroastrian royalty fled eastward. The last Sasanian King Yezdegird III fled to Merv (ancient Mouru/Margiana, now in Turkmenistan, Central Asia) where he was betrayed and murdered in 651 or 652 CE.

From the Chinese *Old Book of the Tang* we learn that around 661 CE, Yezdegird III’s son Piruz^{xiii} (known as Pinyin in Chinese) appealed to the Chinese court for help in resisting the Arabs. The Chinese established garrisons (apparently financed by Piruz) in what is today Tajikistan, eastern Afghanistan and parts of Uzbekistan. These eastern Aryan lands became part of China for a while and the alliance contained the Arab advance in Central Asia temporarily. The last we hear of Sasanian-Zoroastrian resistance is that in 728 CE, Khosro, a descendant of Yezdegird III fought alongside the Sogdians and Turks against the Islamic forces besieging Bokhara (today in Uzbekistan).

5. Practice of Zoroastrianism After the Arab Invasion

The rise of sects or denominations is a natural process for most religions save those that are heavily controlled by a central authority. One can imagine that in the ancient past, when communication was primarily through word of mouth and distances traversed at great risk, contact between different Zoroastrian groups would have been minimal and local groups could well have developed customs and practices that might have been barely recognizable to their coreligionists in another region. Zoroastrian sects continued to develop during the Sasanian era. Some of these sects spread into Central Asia and beyond.

In his epistles, Manuschihr, a ninth century CE head priest of Zoroastrians in Iran, guardedly admonishes his brother Zadsparam, who had lived and ministered among the Tughazghuz/Tagharghar, a Turkic people of Central Asia and Mongolia. The beliefs and practices of some Tughazghuz ‘Zoroastrians’ may have been different from the beliefs and practices of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman. Twelfth century CE Arabic writer, Edrisi informs us that “there is a race of fire-worshippers (sic) amongst the Turks of Tagharghar” while other writers make mention of Manicheans and Mazdakites. Perhaps there were even Zurvanites amongst these groups. Given that north-eastern Central Asia and its frontiers are still relatively unexplored from a Zoroastrian perspective, perhaps future archaeologists may unearth artifacts left by the different Zoroastrian sects of Central Asia and Mongolia. We can imagine that any such discovery may cause considerable confusion and we can only hope that the conclusions of the archaeologists will not be accompanied by a speculative frenzy.

6. Fate of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia

Did Zoroastrianism completely die out in Central Asia after the Islamic armies prevailed over the Zoroastrians and their Chinese allies?

Fariborz Rahnmoon, who visited Tajikistan in 2006^{xiv}, informs this writer that he had met several Tajiks who

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professed to be Zoroastrians. Even the President of the Tajikistan has reportedly professed his beliefs in the teachings of Zarathushtra while Tajikistan was still part of the Soviet Union. Rahnmoon feels that Zoroastrianism never completely died out in Tajikistan or for that matter in Central Asia, and that it has survived as an unorganized faith.

From this and other reports we learn that against all odds, the enduring Zoroastrianism flame continues to burn in its ancient home, Central Asia.

NOTES

ⁱ The *Greater Bundahishn* at 11.A.29 states, "*Daraja Rud pa Airan Vej, kesh man-i Porushasp-i pedar-i Zaratusht pad bar bud*", which this author translates as, '(The) Daraja River is in Airan Vej, and there the house of Pourushasp, Zarathushtra's father, was/stood upon its banks.' At 17.16 we have, "*Daraja Rud baran rad; chish man-i pedar-i Zaratusht pa bar; Zaratusht ano zada*", which this author translates as, '(The) Daraja River of the (high) banked (rivers) is the chief, for, the residence of Zarathushtra's father was on its bank; Zarathushtra was born there.' Similarly the *Lesser Bundahishn* at 20.32 & 25.15 resp. (tr. E. W. West) as well as the *Selections of Zadsparam* at 22.12 (tr. E. W. West). The *Bundahishns'* statements appear to be based on passages in the *Avesta's* book of *Vendidad* at 19.4, 11.

ⁱⁱ 'Airan Vej' is transliterated by some authors as 'Eran Vez'. Our transliteration is based on that by B. T. Anklesaria.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Vendidad* chapter 1.

^{iv} *Greater Bundahishn* chapter 30.

^v Meher Yasht 10.13.

^{vi} Apollodorus of Artemita was a Greek writer who lived between 180 and 120 BCE.

^{vii} The Seres are reputed to be the inhabitants of Serica, perhaps meaning 'land of silk'.

^{viii} See Aryan Trade at <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/aryans/trade.htm>.

^{ix} Also see Gonur, Turkmenistan, Very Poor Archaeological Practices at <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/merv/gonur3.htm#practices>.

^x Also see Speculation About the Use of Haoma at <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/merv/gonur2.htm#haomause> and an article by Viktor Sarianidi titled *Margiana and Soma-Haoma* in *E. Journal of Vedic Studies* Vol. 9, issue 1c (May 5, 2003).

^{xi} Also see <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/haoma/index.htm>

^{xii} 3rd or 4th century CE?

^{xiii} Also spelt Pirooz/Peroz/Firooz.

^{xiv} Also see *Report on Tajikistan 2006* at <http://www.ancientiran.com>.



Eduljee is a past director of the Zoroastrian Society of BC and a founding trustee of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr trust for BC. His efforts in maintaining the Zoroastrian Heritage site are directed towards providing objective information on the Zarathushti religion and its heritage, promoting the good name of the community, and honouring the memory of Zarathushtis who through the ages have performed great sacrifice in order to faithfully preserve Zarathushti heritage and its core values.

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

Evidence from Archeology & Art

Wu Xin

SACRED TOPOGRAPHY

Central Asia is the geographic locus of the Zoroastrian religion. The valley of the Amu Darya (Greek: Oxus) river, the Pamir, and Hindu Kush, which approximates the land area of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, southern Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, northern Pakistan, and a sliver of eastern Iran formed the core of the ***Avestan world***. A recent study of the geography of the “Younger Avesta” by Frantz Grenet (2005) further argues that the sixteen countries created by Ahura Mazdā and celebrated in the *Yašts* were all outside Iran and in Central Asia, with southern Afghanistan at the center (Figure 1).

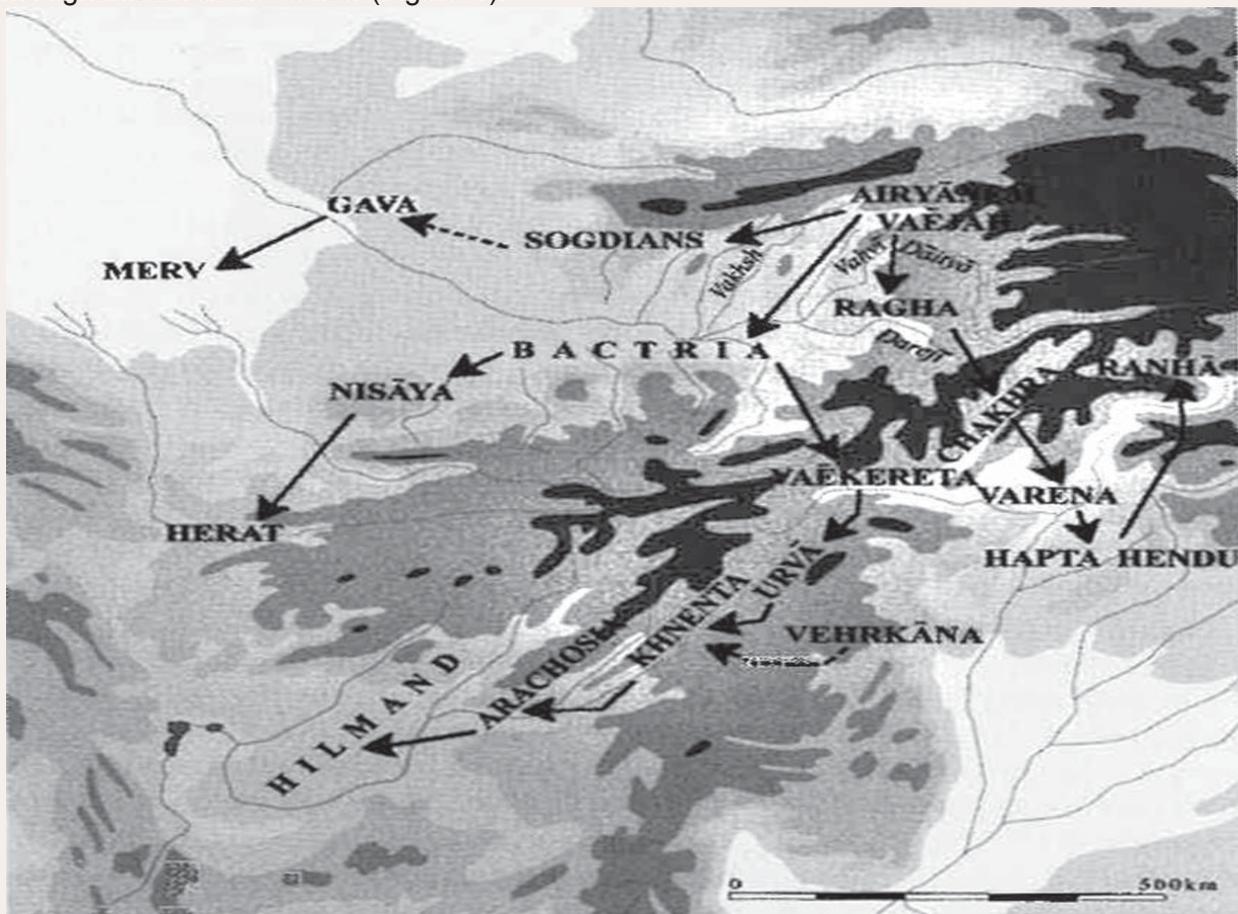


Figure 1. Map according to Frantz Grenet showing the old Zoroastrian homeland. Grenet 2005: 44, Fig. 5.

Central Asia's importance is reflected in Avestan sacred topography. *Lake Hāmūn*, in the present provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, near the border of Iran and Afghanistan and fed by the Helmand River that flows from the Hindu Kush Mountain, and nearby rocks with reddish cracks, associated with the sacred Avestan Lake Kayānsīh and Mount Ušidarēna from which the Future Savior Saošyant was expected to rise at Renovation. The site has been identified as Kūh-i Khwāja, where an important Zoroastrian sanctuary was located, presumably from the Parthian to the Sasanian periods. According to commentarial tradition, two of the three oldest and most sacred fires of ancient Iran—Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, Ādur Farnbāg, and Ādur Gušnasp—created by Ahura Mazdā “for the protection of the world,” had strong links with Central Asia, though their locations have not been identified with certainty. Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, the oldest of the three, was established in Parthia (in today's

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southern Turkmenistan and northeastern Iran). According to legend, Ādur Farnbāg, though associated to Pārs, was brought there from Chorasmia (Boyce 2011). Most scholars agree that Zoroaster might have come from either Chorasmia or Sogdia (in today's Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) or from somewhere between northeast of Sistān and Kazakhstan's Inner Asian steppes (Malandra 2009).

Compared with Iran, Central Asia has been severely underrepresented in Zoroastrian scholarship, primarily owing to the dearth of textual sources from the region. Nevertheless, thanks to archeological work at sites in the region, especially in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and recently Afghanistan, our knowledge of Zoroastrianism and its practices in Central Asia is now significantly improved. Further, a class of burials and mortuary devices belonging to Central Asian expatriates discovered by archeologists in northwest and northern China over the past ten years sheds new light on the history of Zoroastrianism in the east.

EDIFICES AND ALTARS RECORD EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Although many scholars think the kings of the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550-330 BCE) were followers of Zoroastrianism, it is unclear when the Zoroastrian religion began. According to Mary Boyce (1975) Zoroastrian fire temples and image shrines started during the late Achaemenid period.

SANCTUARIES AND OTHER SACRED STRUCTURES

In Central Asia, many Bronze Age structures of cultic significance have been discovered that date to the Third and early Second millennium BCE. At sites such as *Jakuntan* in Southern Uzbekistan, *Gonur depe*, *Togolok-1*, and *Togolok-21* (in ancient Margiana) in southern Turkmenistan, archeologists discovered evidence of fire-worship and ritual use of hallucinogens. Some structures are extremely monumental, especially those found in Turkmenistan, and have been referred by the excavators as "pre-" or "proto-Zoroastrian temples" (cf. Shenkar 2007:171). But none of these places have been unanimously accepted among scholars as connected with the Zoroastrian religion, as the Vedas make no mention of temples or temple structure and that fire worship and rituals involving the *haoma* drink were part of the common Indo-Iranian heritage and not of being particular to Zoroastrianism (Bryant 2003: 170, cf. Dandamaev 1989: 170).

Scholars generally accept that prior to using temples, Zoroastrians usually performed rituals on open-air platforms, which are usually located on high places (Boyce 1975: 459; Shenkar 2007, 2011. Ghanimati 2000). Such platforms, made of mud-bricks, have recently been discovered by an Uzbek-French team at Koktepe near Samarkand and at Sangirtepe near Shahr-i Sabz in Uzbekistan. Connected with the foundations are a series of



Figure 2. Ritual pits connected to foundation of sacred platform at Koktepe (Period III) in Uzbekistan, ca. sixth century or early Achaemenid period. Photo Claude Rapiin.

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ritual pits (Figure 2).

The recent Uzbek-German mission at *Kindyk-tepe*, in the *Bandikhan* region of the *Surkhandarya* valley, yielded a religious structure, so far the earliest and best candidate for a Zoroastrian fire temple in Central Asia (Boroffka 2009:141, fig.11).

ALTARS

The recent excavation of the *Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* (DAFA) at Chashma Shafā, 20 kilometers south of Balkh, in northern Afghanistan, yielded a limestone altar, which is one of the earliest fire altars found in Central Asia (Figure 3). The altar was probably associated with a fire temple. It is 2.1m tall and has an inverted pyramidal, stepped top. On its rectangular surface (2.65x1.6m) a circular hole might have held the fire. The altar may be associated with a structure standing high on top a fort (called *Kafir*



Figure 3. Fire altar from Cheshme Shafā, northern Afghanistan, ca. fourth century BCE. View from three sides, with human scale. Photo DAFA.

Kala) that occupies a rocky spur and could have been seen from afar.

HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The Achaemenid Empire was conquered by the Macedonian King, Alexander, around 330 BCE. Between 329-327 BCE Alexander invaded Central Asia and incorporated the region into his empire. After his death in 323 BCE, Central Asia became part of the Seleucid kingdom. But soon afterward, the Greek governors of Bactria declared independence and expanded their territory to the mid-Amu Darya region. Although Greco-Bactrian kings worshipped Greek gods, as shown by the images of Greek deities on their coins; many of the local population may have followed Zoroaster's teachings (Holt 2005: 24). The *Temple of Oxus at Takht-i Sangin* in northern Bactria is one of the greatest fire temples discovered in Central Asia and the entire Iranian world. The site, at the confluence of the *Vakhsh and Panj* rivers in southern Tajikistan, was excavated in the 1970s and 80s by Soviet archeologists. The temple was constructed on a massive *temenos* protected by towers. Layers of ash found in the two altar rooms indicate that the structure was used for activities and rituals related to fire; therefore, the rooms have been associated with the Zoroastrian religion. Additional altars in Greek style, which

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were found associated with animal bones, indicate that other non-Zoroastrian people perhaps also used the temple.

PARTHIAN PERIOD: FIRE TEMPLES EXCAVATED

Contemporaneous with the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in Parthia, the Arsacids established their dynasty (238 BCE-224CE) after overthrowing the Seleucids. The Parthian empire soon stretched from India to Mesopotamia. The Parthian kings followed Zoroaster. Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, the oldest and most venerated fire, favored by the Arsacids during their ascendancy, was established somewhere in their home province (the fire's location has not been found with certainty). Parthian period texts provide the oldest description of tending sacred fires.

Inscriptions on ostracons from the old Parthian capital at Old Nisa, nearby Turkmenistan's capital Ashkhabad, provide evidence for temples in Parthia. Inscriptions referring to the "*Ayazan of the place of Nanai*" a Mesopotamian goddess absorbed into the Anāhitā cult, and "*Ayazan of Frahat*," suggest that image shrines (for example, for Nanai), and temples for the soul of dead rulers existed in Parthia (Boyce 2001). Recent excavation by a Turkemen-Polish team at the site of *Mele Hairam* in southwestern Turkmenistan yielded remains of a fire temple established during the late Parthian period and used until the Sasanian period.

The fire temple at *Kūh-i Khwāja* ("*Hill of the Master*") in *Seisten*, near the Iran-Afghanistan border, is another temple established perhaps during the Parthian period. The site, because of its unique geographic location near *lake Hāmūn* (and the mythical *lake Kayānsīh* and *Mt. Ušidar_na*) and thus its connection with the *Future Savior*, is considered one of the most sacred Avestan sites. It has been assumed that the Zoroastrians had used the place to pray long before any temple was established in Seistan (Boyce 1975: 461). Archaeological work at the site has yielded remnants of a citadel, fortification walls, towers, a substantial lower city, and a religious precinct that contains a large fire temple. The temple stands on a platform. It was ascended, through a pair of monumental staircases, from a large rectangular courtyard at the south, which may have served as a school for Zoroastrian priests (Ghanimati 2000: 144). The main sanctuary of temple is a square chamber with four columns supporting a dome and surrounded by ambulatory corridors. Recent carbon-14 dating indicates that the temple was constructed during the late Parthian period and was expanded and renovated during the early and late Sassanid period, respectively (Ghanimati 2000: 145-146).

KUSHAN AND KUSHANO-SASANIAN PERIODS

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

In second century BCE, the Kushans, presumably descendants of a nomadic people that migrated from northwestern China, established their sovereignty in Bactria and soon expanded their territory to include much of Central Asia and north India. During the early Kushan period, Zoroastrianism continued to flourish even in Greek dominated Bactria. The great temple complex at *Surkh Kotal*, on a hilltop in eastern Bactria, which was excavated by the *Delegation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* from 1951-1963 may have included a fire temple dedicated to the rulers of the Kushan dynasty. The complex contained a single *cella*, a four-columned hall with an ambulatory on three sides. The *cella* contains a stone altar/raised platform decorated by two great birds on its sides, flanked by a pillar at each corner. On its upper surface, there was a shallow cavity with traces of burning and much wood ash indicating that it was used for fire.

The Kushans practiced other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The territory controlled by the Kushan kings became more Indianized toward the late period. The Kushan kings' patronage of Buddhism made the religion more common in Central Asia. The religious syncretism of the Kushans can be best illustrated by coins issued by early Kushan kings, on which at least fifteen (out of 26) were Zoroastrian deities, most portrayed as Greek gods and, in rare cases, as Indian gods (for instance, *Wahman* and *Vayu*), these deities are all labeled with Bactrian names derived from the Avesta. For example, on a gold coin of the Kushan king *Huvishka*

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(ca.153-191 CE), the image is of *Zeus-Bēlos*, but the legend identifies him as Ahura Mazda (shortened as ŌROM) (Grenet 2012: 34, Fig. 7).

In the fourth century CE, the Kushan Empire was followed by the so-called *Kushano-Sasanian* or *Indo-Sasanids* kingdom, whose kings were probably members of a junior line of the Eastern Kushans. They continued to rule Gandhara and the Indus valley. The northern part of the former Kushan territories, including Bactria, came under the direct rule of the Sasanian prince-governors. Coins bearing Greco-Bactrian legends show the kings bearing the title of “*Mazda-worshipping king*” suggesting that some Kushano-Sasanian kings continued to follow the teaching of Zoroaster. Meanwhile, a class of Kushano-Sasanian coins was issued with the images of the Indian god Shiva and his vehicle, Nandi, on the reverse and depictions of kings in Kushan military dress attending and sacrificing at a fire altar on the obverse—demonstrating the continuation of religious syncretism in the region.

It is noteworthy that in Sasanian Iran since Ardashīr I's (r. 224-241) “iconoclastic reform” anthropomorphic images of Zoroastrian deities were restricted and appeared rarely in official art in the Sasanian core regions. But in Central Asia, cult images continued to appear on official media. For example, on a group of the Kushano-Sasanian coins, the images on the reverse usually show the king standing either before a seated deity or with a deity flanking a fire altar.

DECLINE OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN BACTRIA AND HINDU KUSH

During the mid-fifth to sixth centuries, the *Hephthalites* (also called Huna or White Huns), a nomadic Hunnish people, established their control over Bactria and the lands to the south of Hindu Kush and northwestern India. Their empire stretched from Kashmir to Margiana (in southern Turkmenistan) and extended from Sogdia to China. In mid sixth century the newly arrived Turks from the northern steppes defeated the Hephthalites. Kings of local ruling dynasties, such as that of the *Bamiyan Kingdom*, held sway over the Hindu Kush Mountains. Under their patronage, Buddhism permeated from central Afghanistan farther to the north. Contemporaneously, Zoroastrianism witnessed its decline in its home countries around the Hindu Kush.

DEVELOPMENT OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN SOGDIA

Contrasted with its decline in Bactria and Hindu Kush, Zoroastrianism gained more popularity in Sogdia, located to the north of Bactria. Between the fifth and eighth centuries a cluster of principalities emerged and prospered in this region as it became the commercial power along the Silk Road. The Sogdians practiced a variant of Zoroastrianism. Excavations at Sogdian sites, such as Afrasyab in Uzbekistan and especially Panjikent in northwestern Tajikistan, yielded temples and sumptuous houses of wealthy merchants, richly decorated with elaborate wall paintings, wooden sculptures and ornamental carvings, many of which contain Zoroastrian-themed imagery. In fact, the Sogdian artists created the richest set of religious images ever produced in a Zoroastrian context (Genet 2006: 89). In contrast with Bactria, where images of deities are often represented in a Greek fashion, the divine images produced in Sogdia do not betray strong Greek influences. Rather, they seem to follow closely the Indian models and show a strong tendency of assimilating Iranian gods with their Hindu counterparts.

ZOROASTRIANISM IN CHINA : SOGDIAN MIGRATION

During their heyday, many Sogdians moved to China and lived in trading colonies or urban centers along the Silk Road. Sogdian immigrants brought Zoroastrianism to China. Principal cities, such as Chang'an (today's Xi'an), the Tang Empire's capital, and Luo Yang had Zoroastrian temples: at least five in Chang'an and four in Luo Yang, usually in or around markets. Excavations in northwestern and northern China during the past few decades have uncovered tombs of Sogdian expatriates and their descendants. Funerary furniture and stone epitaphs from tombs often carry biographies and information about their burial customs and religious practices. Most significant of these Sogdian artifacts is a class of stone funerary furniture that dates from the fifth to eighth centuries. These funerary couches or sarcophagi, excavated during the past decade, have elaborately carved

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screens showing activities such as hunting and feasting; some show activities characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion and its funerary rituals. For example, images showing fire altars attended by a pair of half-man, half bird chimeras wearing Zoroastrian priestly attire (*padam* and belt) standing next to and sacrificing to a fire altar, the visit of the dog to the corpses, or the soul of the dead crossing of the **Chinvat Bridge** (for more detail on the subject see Judith Lerner's article, Page 64).

ZOROASTRIAN FUNERARY PRACTICES

Excavated material from China indicates however, that despite the appearance of the Zoroastrian iconographies on funerary monuments, the funerary practice of the Sogdians and other Central Asian descendants seem to differ significantly from those of their homeland. In southern Central Asia—from the end of the Bronze Age until the Kushan period—burials were rarely found by archeologists. This is consistent with Zoroastrian practices. According to the Zoroastrian purity laws, inhumation is strictly prohibited. In Central Asia, the funeral practice was to expose the dead to vultures or dogs where the earth, water, fire, or wind (but not stone) would not be polluted by corpses. After the flesh of the corpses was removed, the disarticulated bones were collected and stored in special ceramic ossuaries. Many of these ossuaries are decorated with stamped images of Zoroastrian iconographies, such as temple, fire altar, deities, priests, funerary, and other scenes. An ossuary from Shahr-i Sabz, for example, shows the scene of the soul's judgment at the Chinvat Bridge and its admission into Paradise. (for image see page 63) Places for exposing the dead are called "*dakhma*." Two types of *dakhma* were used by Zoroastrian communities in Iran and other places: the first is a round, man-made stone or mud-brick tower-like structure with a platform on the top for exposing the corpses, with a central well that reaches to the ground, used to contain bleached bones; the second is a natural mountain ridge or rocky spur encircled by mud brick walls. In Central Asia, each has been archeologically identified. The *dakhma* discovered in **Durmen-tepe** near Samarkand is a variant of the first type. The most famous *dakhma* is at **Chil'pyk** in Chorasmia in northern Uzbekistan, used perhaps during the fourth to eighth centuries. This



Figure 5. General view of the Dakhma at Chil'pyk, Chorasmia, Northwest Uzbekistan, ca. fourth to eighth centuries, with the remaining wall of the fire chamber (*sāgri*) to the right of dakhma on the slope. Photograph by author.

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Figure 6. The Dakhma at Chil'pyk showing mud brick walls, ca. fourth to eighth centuries, with human scale. Photograph by author.



Figure 7. Stairway of the Dakhma at Chil'pyk, view towards the west, with the remaining wall of the fire chamber (sāgri) near the entrance and Amu Darya at the distance. Photograph by author.

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spectacular site is a natural rocky mount near the Amu Darya River, along which the corpses can be easily transported from far away. Rising high above the surrounding plain the site can be seen from a long distance. The *dakhma* contains a monumental staircase, high mud-brick walls and compartments for depositing corpses (*pāvis*). Associated with it was also a fire chamber (*sāgris*).

AN-SHI REBELLION AND DISSOLUTION OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN CENTRAL ASIA: SOGDIAN ASSIMILATION INTO CHINESE CULTURE

During the mid-eighth century, Zoroastrianism lost ground in Central Asia after the Arab conquest. In China, a political disturbance initiated by a Sogdian descendant, *An Lushan*, and his associate *Shi Siming* (called the An–Shi Rebellion), resulted in the suppression of Central Asians living in China. To avoid persecution, the Sogdians became more Sinicized; their gradual assimilation into Chinese culture also ended Zoroastrianism in China. Nevertheless, administrative texts documenting distribution of provisions to the Zoroastrian community for religious activities and drawings of Zoroastrian deities on paper from the “*manuscripts cave*” at Dunhuang



Figure 8. Drawing of the Zoroastrian deities on paper, from “Manuscripts cave” at Dunhuang, western China. The image represents the two Dēns (Avestan *daēnā*), with the good Dēn who personifies the Zoroastrian religion on the left, and her counterpart the bad Dēn on the right. Grenet and Zhang 1996: Figure 1.

in northwestern China (Figure 8). show that in areas between China and Central Asia, Sogdian temple still existed and Zoroastrian celebrations were continued to be practiced during the ninth to tenth centuries CE.

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Dunhuang was thus perhaps one of the “last refuges” of the religion (Grenet and Zhang 1996).

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Wu Xin trained in Chinese Archaeology in the Department of Archaeology at Peiking University in Beijing, and received her B.A. in 1994, her MA in Central Asian Buddhist and Manichaean Art. and her Ph.D in 2005 from University of Pennsylvania in Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology. Her dissertation, “*Central Asia in the Context of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (6th to 4th Centuries BCE)*,” explores the political and cultural interactions between the Persia, Central Asia, and the Eurasian steppe. Her research and fieldwork has taken her to China, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Israel. Since 2010 she has been the Director of the excavations at Kyzyltepa, Uzbekistan.



Wu Xin has taught both undergraduate and graduate courses on ancient civilizations of the Old World, Art and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Bronze Age Art of the Mediterranean World, Empires and History, and Afghanistan and the Silk Road. In summer 2013 she was a visiting professor at Beijing University and Beijing Normal University.

In 2006-2007 Wu was Curatorial Assistant at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, continuing as an Andrew Mellon Fellow and from 2008–2010 was a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at NYU, continuing as a Research Associate in 2010–2011, in 2010 was a Noble Group Fellow, and in 2012-2013 was at the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (Jerusalem) and worked on a book “*Persia and the East*”. Since 2013, she has been teaching at Penn as a lecturer in Central Asian Art and Archaeology. Currently, she is a Distinguished Research Fellow with the Beijing Normal University’s Institute of History.

Wu Xin has presented papers and lectures on her research on Achaemenid history, Archaeology of the Iron Age in Central Asia, and cultural interactions between China and the West. Among her publications “*O Young Man ... Make Known of What Kind You Are: Warfare, History, and Elite Ideology of the Achaemenid Persian Empire*,” (*Iranica Antiqua* 2014: 209-299), the most recent one, represents her multiple years of effort in bringing Central Asia into scholarly attention for historical research.

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Chips From A Wine Cellar: PARTHIAN ZOROASTRIANS AT NISA



Figure 1. Overlook of the Parthian city of Nisa

JENNY ROSE

*'We have accepted this Holy Religion from Ohrmazd,
and we will not give it up.'*
Ayadgar-i Zareran

According to several ancient sources, sometime in the 3rd century BCE a nomadic Iranian-speaking tribe known as the **Parni** settled in the Greek-controlled satrapy of Parthia to the east of the Caspian sea. The **Arsacid**, or **Arsacid Parthian**, dynasty that they founded was named after an eponymous leader, '**Arshak**.' The name Arshak may be related to the Ancient Persian name Artaxsaça (Greek: Artaxerxes) meaning 'ruling through Arta/Asha.' An inscription from the early Parthian capital of Nisa in Turkmenistan, mentions the name '**Ar[tax] shahrakan**' which suggests an identification with previous ideology. This idea is supported by iconography on the earliest coins of Arshak 1 (c. 238–211 BCE), where a seated archer on the reverse recalls the standing or bent-kneed royal archer of Ancient Persian coinage.

Parthian kings **from Mithradates I** (c. 171–138 BCE) up to **Ardavan II** (r. 10–38 CE) referred to themselves as **philhellene** - a 'lover of things Greek' - on their coins. Although this epithet may have served as a political device, Parthian familiarity with Greek language and literature is evidenced by reports that

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king **Orodes II** (r. 57–38 BCE), and the vassal king **Artavasdes of Armenia** (r. 53–34 BCE), organized banquets and drinking parties for each other, at which Greek compositions were produced.¹

ZOROASTRIANS NEGLECTED BUT NOT ABANDONED

Such examples of the adoption of Greek culture, along with a lack of internal evidence from both Seleucid and Parthian Iran, led to the view that the Zoroastrian religion was largely abandoned during this period. This negative perspective was promoted in Middle Persian texts, particularly **Denkard**, which describes the restoration of the *weh den* ('good religion') under the Sasanians after a long period of neglect following the Greek conquest. During the later Sasanian period there appears to have been a concerted effort to minimize Parthian achievements. This approach is reflected in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*: although he traces the '**Ashkani**' lineage either to one of the mythical Kayanian kings of eastern Iran, or to the legendary archer **Arash**, he dismisses the dynasty in a few lines, declaring that they ruled only for a brief period and were of negligible influence.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that numerous stories incorporated into Ferdowsi's final collection appear to have been preserved within the eastern Iranian region that was once the Parthian stronghold. Many of the Pahlavan (Iranian 'heroes') of the *Shahnameh* are presented in the manner of Parthian warriors, particularly Rustam and Giv. The former is sometimes equated with the actual Parthian military leader **Suren**, who led the Iranians to victory against the **Roman Emperor, Crassus, at Carrhae** in 53 BCE. The quote at the beginning of this article comes from a Middle Persian narrative of the first battle for the religion, the **Ayadgar-i Zareran** ('Memorial of Zarer'), thought to have been based on an original Parthian epic poem, since many of its reported speeches contain Parthian words and phrases.

ILLUMINATING A DARK AGE

Data from the past few decades has contradicted the categorization of the long period of Parthian rule (c. 247

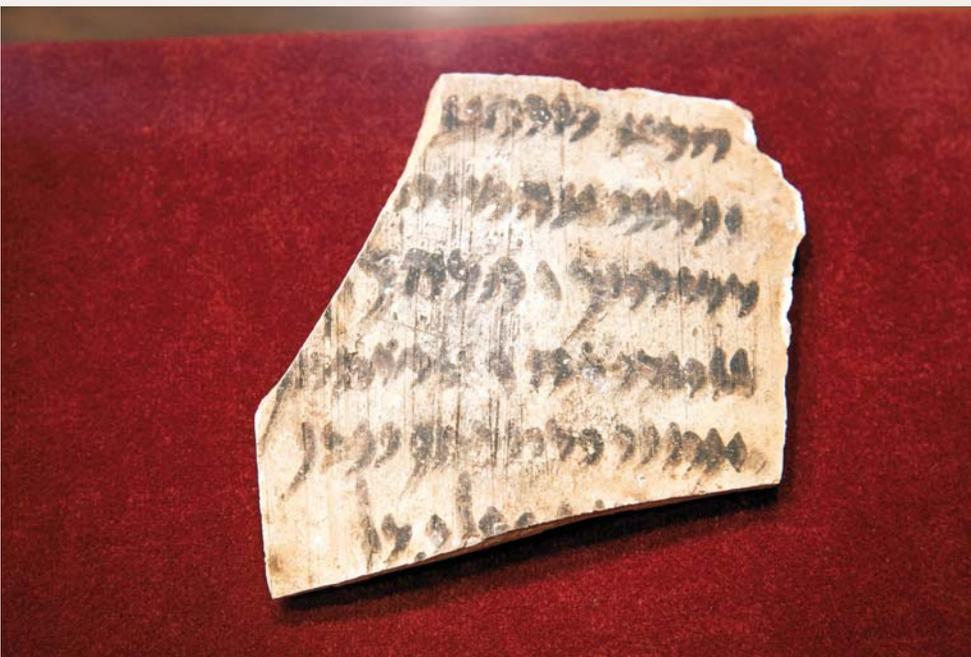


Figure 2. Parthian Ostraca (potshards) from Nisa

BCE – 224 CE) as a 'dark age' in the history of the religion. Excavations in eastern Iran - at **Mele Hairam** in modern Turkmenistan, and at **Kuh-e Khwajeh in Sistan** - have unearthed fire temples that were established during the Parthian period. The practice of enclosing fire might have been established initially in this region. Both temples had a central rectangular hall, leading to a small square room with four columns with a still smaller room behind, which is thought to have been the sanctuary where the fire was kept, concealed from general view until taken into the columned room for ceremonies. Parthian ostraca (potshards) from Nisa, located to the west of **Ashqabat** in Turkmenistan, mention the term **ayazan** -

'place of worship' - which relates to the Old Persian **ayadana**, meaning 'sanctuary.' The Nisa ostraca also

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include the oldest title for a priest responsible for tending the fire: **aturshpat** or 'fire master.'

Evidence for the early centrality of fire for the Parthians is recorded by **Isidore of Carax**, a Greco-Parthian who lived in the Mesene (southern Iraq) at the beginning of the Common Era. Isidore's *Parthian Stations* describes the significant sites along the trading routes between the River Euphrates and Arachosia (ID), including an 'eternal fire' burning at 'Asaak in Astavene' in the northern part of Parthia above Nisa, where Arsakes (Arshak) had been crowned.

ANCIENT TALLIES RECORD ZOROASTRIAN-LIKE NAMES

Although there is no hard evidence that the site at Old Nisa was either a Parthian royal or religious center, it is commonly thought to have been part of the Parthian capital of the region, known as **Mithradatkirt**. In a wine cellar on the site, over 2,500 potshards were found, on which Parthian inscriptions detail transactions relating to consignments of wine, grain and other goods as well as land tenure, including the names and titles of the various parties and regnal dates. These clay receipts witness the Zoroastrian background of the local population of the area between around 100 BCE and 10 CE: the majority of personal names are Zoroastrian in character, for instance, those reconstructed as **Ohrmazdik, Artavahishtak, Spandarmatak, Tiridat, Mihrbozan, Mihrfarn, Saroshdatak and Denmazdak**. Calendar references on the ostraca are to Avestan months - **Spenta Armaiti, Asha Vahishta, Haurvatat and Ameretat** - and day names, such as the day of **Mihr (Mithra)**, following the traditional religious almanac, rather than the Seleucid calendar.

One of the titles given on the Nisa receipts is **magush** -'priest,' similar to the Old Persian word - indicating that Parthians used western Zoroastrian terminology for their religious officials. The title **bagnpat** is also found, referring to a 'temple priest' (literally 'master of the gods'), possibly indicating that there was an image shrine at Nisa. It has been suggested that contact with the Greeks had stimulated the development of Zoroastrian image cults in the Seleucid and early Parthian periods, and some scholars identify such a shrine in the Round Hall at Old Nisa. Others classify this structure, which is two floors high, and contained statues on the upper level, as part of a royal cult. There is nothing to connect this center directly to the necropolis of the Parthian kings, which Isidore of Carax located at Nisa: although the site has been excavated extensively by Russian archeologists and then by an Italian-Turkmeni team, no royal tombs have yet been found.

This article is partly taken from the chapter on the Parthian period in my book, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (I.B. Tauris, 2011).

¹ See Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, 33

Jenny Rose has a doctorate in Iranian Studies from Columbia University. Her doctoral dissertation was published as *Image Zoroastrianism: The Persian Mage Through European Eyes* (Eisenbrauns 2000), and two recently published books are: *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (I.B. Tauris, 2011) and *Zoroastrianism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2011). She also contributed several articles to the catalogue for the recent exhibition on the religion at SOAS in London, *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*.

Jenny teaches a course in Zoroastrian Studies at Claremont Graduate University, California. She is also a study leader on archaeological and cultural tours to Iran, Central Asia, and Western China.

This year, Jenny is the recipient of a Frances E. Malamy Research Fellowship, based at the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum, which will allow her to spend a few months focusing on her current field of interest - the Parsi-Yankee connection in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

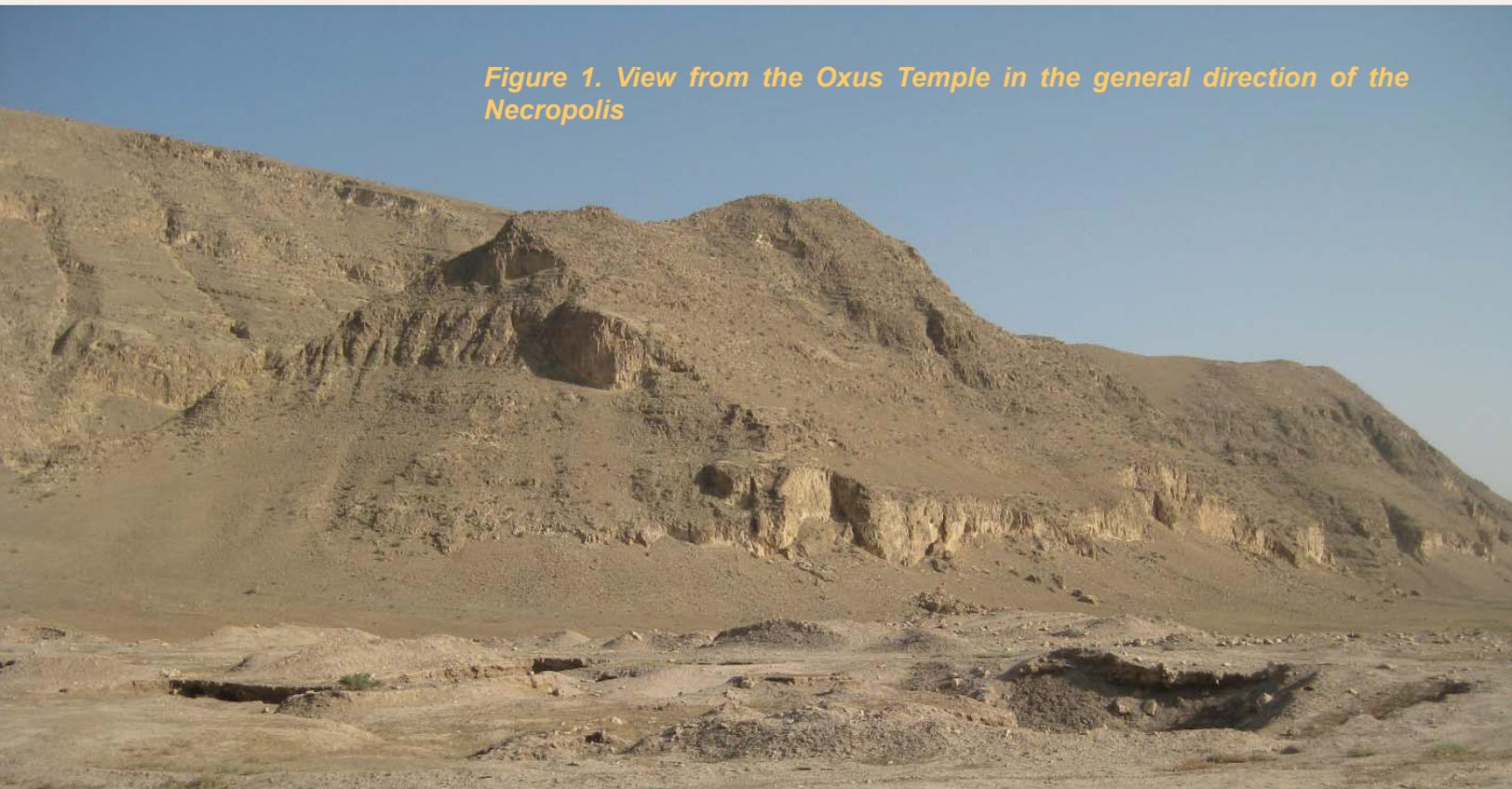
‘ZOROASTRIAN TRACES’ⁱ IN TWO ANCIENT SITES IN BACTRIA AND SOGDIANA TAKHTI SANGIN AND SARAZM

KERSI SHROFF

In 629 CE a Buddhist monk undertook a momentous 17-month long overland journey from China to India and back in search of places sanctified by the Buddha. In an account of his travels, the monk, Hsuan-tsang, reported that when he reached the valley of the river Yaxartes (Syr Darya) and crossed into Sogdiana and Bactria, he found a heavenly region where pomegranate, almond, peach and plum trees grew in abundance and the inhabitants were draped in rich silks and woolen cloths. The cities also had splendid palaces adorned with statues and monuments. Hsuan-tsang was astonished to see that while the Buddhist religion was common, *“there were groups who still observed the ancient fire-worship of Bactria.”*ⁱⁱ The account in Chinese of Hsuan-tsang’s travels was first translated into French in 1857 and continues to serve as a primary source of the knowledge of life in medieval Central Asia. By the 2nd century BCE religious life in Bactria and Sogdiana was characterized by a number of beliefs, but among the Iranian populations Zoroastrianism was the main faith. Zarathushtra’s teachings had prevailed in the region before Alexander’s conquests. This is not to say that pre-Zoroastrian ideas did not survive as the latter iconoclastic reforms in Zoroastrian orthodoxy did not become firmly established in the territories adjoining eastern Iran.ⁱⁱⁱ

After Alexander’s conquests many Greek settlers in the region formed other religious communities. Coinage from the period attests to the worship of Greek divinities and Greek religious architecture and art influenced

Figure 1. View from the Oxus Temple in the general direction of the Necropolis



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temple buildings and the incorporation of Greek iconography for Iranian deities. The Greeks began to identify Zeus with Ahura Mazda, Heracles with Verethragna and Apollo with Mithra.^{iv} In turn, Greek forms of worship influenced Iranian practices in the eastern territories.

This article traces the presence of Zoroastrians and their culture in two sites in ancient Bactria and Sogdiana. **The first, Takhti Sangin in Southern Tajikistan**, close to its border with Afghanistan, is a vivid example of Greco-Iranian syncretism. Second, a brief account is given of Sarazm in Sogdiana a recently re-discovered proto-urban settlement, located 15 km from another ancient town, Panjakent, located in Western Tajikistan.

TAKHTI SANGIN: THE LOCUS OF GREEK, EASTERN ZOROASTRIAN, AND KUSHAN SYNCRETISM



Figure 2 Entrance to the Oxus Temple and channel for river water

Takhti Sangin (meaning stone throne) is located on the banks of the Amu Darya at the confluence of the Vakash and Panj rivers. It covers an area of 2 kilometers x 250-300 meters, encompassing 75 hectares. Located within it is the Temple of the Oxus, a fire temple, built in the 3rd century B.C. It is predominantly Iranian-influenced, but with numerous Greek designed features. The plan of the temple and the altars resemble the Iranian style of architecture, while the columns are Hellenistic similar to those found in a temple further south in Bactria (in Afghanistan) at Ai Khanoum. This interaction between the

two cultures is thus recognized to have led to a hybrid but uneven admixture that is termed “**Graeco-Bactrian.**”

The location of the site on a caravan route, its strong defensive walls and the scattering of ancient columns were of great interest to historians and archeologists. Excavations conducted between 1976-1991 by a South-Tajik archeological expedition, headed by Russian archeologists *Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan*,^v revealed an “*extraordinarily well-preserved Zoroastrian temple.*”^{vi}

Special side rooms were built for the eternal flame with fire altars very similar to those found in the basement of the Panjakent Temples in Sogdiana (discussed later). The Oxus Temple can also be compared with temples in Susa, Persepolis, and other places, which suggests a single tradition for the development of temple architecture in the Iranian world.^{vii}

The Temple measures a symmetrical 51 x 51 meters, with a courtyard, the main entrance to it being an

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eight-columned *ayvan* or portico. Two altar rooms are identified by Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan as *atashgahs*, consisting of a central altar and smaller altars located in the four corners that contained charcoal and ashes. The corridors to the *atashgahs* were used for depositing sacred ashes in pits dug into their floors. The location of the Temple near “the river Oxus symbolically represents the birth of its waters and was personified in the form of the water god “Oxus” (a Greek transliteration of the Iranian Vaxs).”^{viii} The Temple is oriented in the Eastern direction in keeping with traditional standards.



Figure 3. Remains of Oxus Temple

A Greek inscription incised on a stone fire altar with a bronze statuette of the Greek figure of Marsyas, the god of rivers, playing a double flute again symbolizes symbiosis between the Greek and Iranian features of the Temple. The inscription reads “Atrosokes dedicated his vow to the Oxus.”^{ix}

Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan refer to the donor of the offering as “[T]he local priest of the fire ... whose name stems from ancient Iranian, signifying ‘blazing (or sacred) fire’ or ‘useful to the god of fire.’” In their view, the synthesis embodied in the statuette is not just a “superficial confusion or amalgam of forms, but a deep process that led to the interpenetration of the world concepts of Bactrians and Hellenes.”^x

Professor Richard N. Frye, however, distinguishes between eastern and Sasanian Zoroastrian strains: “Apparently the temple served both Greeks and local Zoroastrians, who, in their rites and practices, are to be distinguished from the later Zoroastrians of western Iran, who canonized their scriptures and established an orthodoxy under the Sasanians (ca. CE. 225-650). In the east, ancient beliefs and practices prevailed.”^{xi}

Offerings made by devotees, consisting of coins and other objects, were found in an underground depositary. There was a limited number of gold jewelry and thread, and items of silver, but an extensive collection of ivory, bone, horn, alabaster, fired and unfired clay, stone and glass was found. Some of these were weapons, such as arrowheads, spears, swords, daggers and bronze helmets. Common household items of scissors and knives were also found. The total findings numbered over 5,000, among which were 1,000 works of art.^{xii} The Temple’s yield of only a limited number of gold and silver objects suggests that its priests fearing an invasion must have buried a large quantity of them in the banks of the Vaksh river between Takhti Sangin and Takhti Kobad. The discovery of the “Oxus Treasure” in the 19th century consisting of many gold and silver items may then have resulted from the river eroding its banks.^{xiii} Priests are depicted in a number of gold plaques in the Oxus Treasure carrying bundles of *barsom* twigs, dressed in trousers, tunics, a *bashlyq*, and *akinakes* (daggers) on their right sides. It is conjectured that during the temple’s existence, the priests may have enjoyed significant economic, political and military authority.

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In 1993, there was another discovery of objects similar to the Oxus Treasure along the course of the Panjshir River, northeast of Kabul. If the newly discovered objects now housed in the Miho Museum in Japan are not fakes, “they may well form part of the original hoard”^{xiv} held in the British Museum.

The Zoroastrian connection to Takhti Sangin is further made by the site being the land of the *Saka Haumavarga* (which could mean ‘Haoma-using Sakas’) people who in Achaemenid sources are known as the descendants of Scythian invaders who became the ruling class of Eastern Iran, especially in the Northeast. They acknowledged the King of Kings in Persepolis and a delegation of Scythian subjects of the Achaemenid kings are depicted in the Apadana of the Palace. The Achaemenid army consisted of contingents of Bactrians and Sakas, headed by Vishtaspa, the son of Darius. He was said to be the Satrap of Bactria at the time, and the grandson of another Vishtaspa who is mentioned in the Behistun inscriptions in Iran as holding a position in the northeast of Iran. Vishtaspa was also the name of the first patron of Zarathushtra. Moreover, the grandson of Darius and the son of Darius’ successor Xerxes were also of the same name. This shows a clear connection between this Avestan name and Bactria and “it may have been a satrapal name or title, which linked the official to Zarathushtra’s faith.”^{xv}

A concluding note on the Oxus Temple is best left to “[t]he indefatigable archeologist *Boris Anatolovich Litvinskii* and his collaborator, the late *Igor Rubenovich Pichikyan*”^{xvi}:

The fact that the Graeco-Bactrian temple of Oxus continued to function during the Kushan period,^{xvii} and that the religious tradition was carefully preserved, attests not only the religious tolerance of the Kushans, but also a prevailing symbiosis of Greek, eastern Zoroastrian, and Kushan beliefs. It emerges that the achievements of Bactrian civilization were made possible not by its isolation, but rather by the existence of its broad and varied contacts. Thus arose a potent creative synthesis, which stimulated the development of an opulent culture.^{xviii}

PANJAKENT: THE POMPEII OF TAJIKISTAN

The previously mentioned Temple in ancient Panjakent, sometimes referred to as the Pompeii of Tajikistan, further enhances the Zoroastrian connection to the region. Panjakent, located in Sogdiana, lay at the center of power from the 5th to 8th centuries CE. It had a religious section of the town where two similarly constructed temples have been excavated each of which had two courtyards, the one on the east leading to the street and the western one led to a platform on which the temple was built. In Temple I a special “house of fire” for the eternal flame was built in the second half of the 5th century. It occupied the southern side of the platform. In the 2nd stage of reconstruction in the 6th century “*Temple I became similar to the fire temples of modern Indian Zoroastrian (Parsees)*” and “*the ceremonies conducted there could be similar to those of the Zoroastrian Dari Meher temple.*”^{xix}

Wall paintings in Panjakent also often show fire burning in front of deities.^{xx}

Shkoda thus concludes that the rituals in the Panjakent Temple I were “*undoubtedly Zoroastrian in origin*” and combined “*fire-worship and the veneration of divine images*” suggesting that “*Sogdian religion had much in common with the orthodox Sassanian Zoroastrianism.*”^{xxi}

SARAZM: THE ANCIENT HUB OF TRANSOXIANAN COMMERCE

Sarazm, situated west of Panjakent, reveals the remains of over 5500 years of settlements bearing testimony to trade and cultural interchange over long distances between pastoral nomads of the mountains of Central Asia and the agrarian people of Transoxiana. It is stated to have connections with the steppes of Central Asia, Mesopotamia and the Indus worlds. The town played a regional role over a long period in the mining of metals and, in the development of handicrafts for the production of tools, ceramics, and jewelry. A most remarkable discovery is the “*The Princess of Sarazm*” dating to the period between 3500-3200 BCE, whose remains show her burial in clothes richly embroidered with turquoise, lapis

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Figure 4. A surviving section of a Panjakent temple

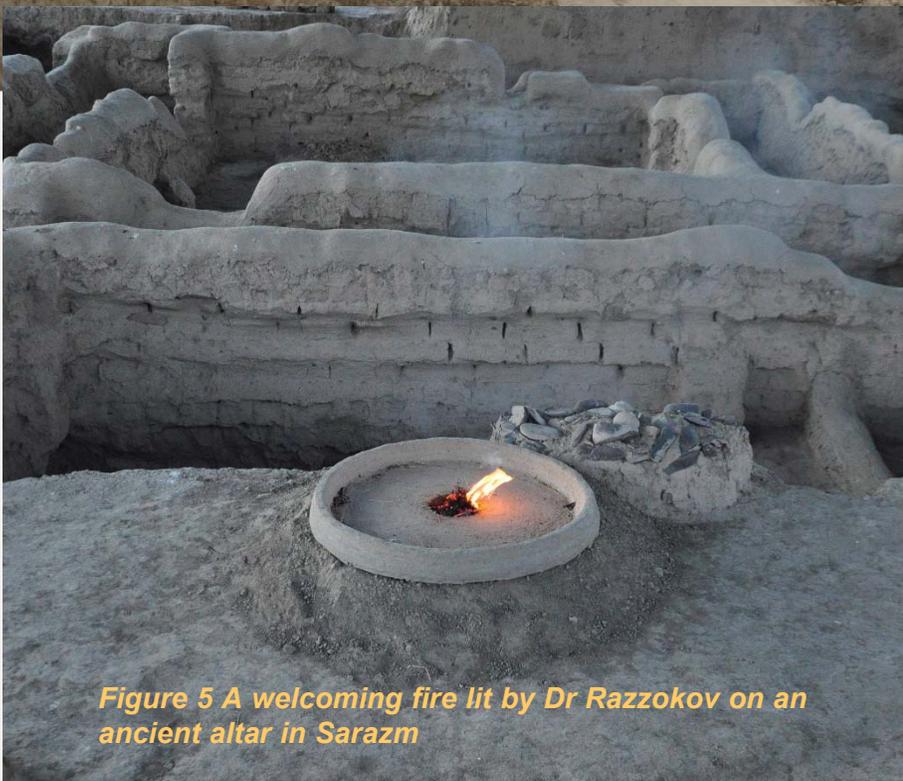
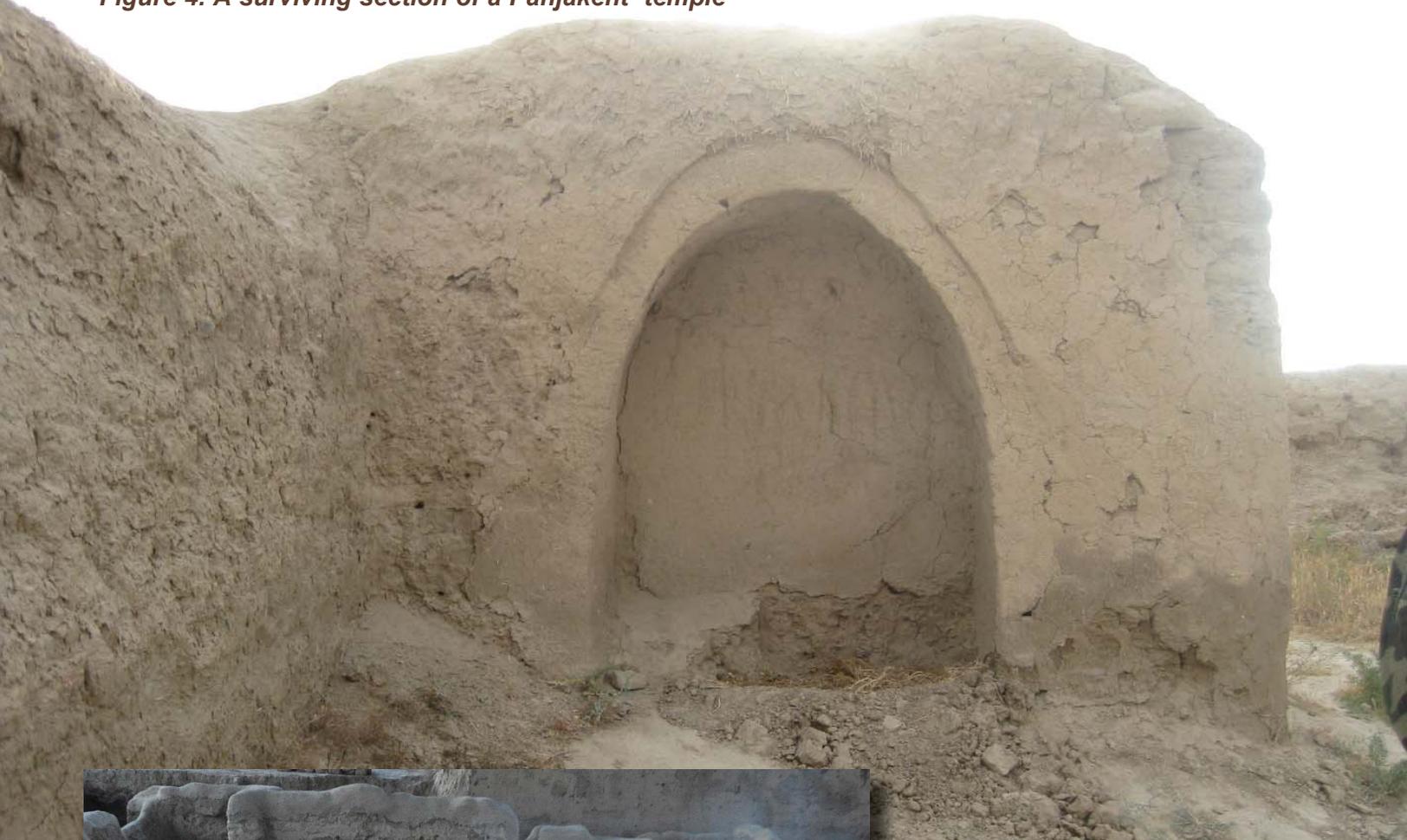


Figure 5 A welcoming fire lit by Dr Razzokov on an ancient altar in Sarazm

lazuli and a headdress decorated with silver beads, and her plaited hair entwined with 49 golden beads. Sarazm was accidentally discovered in 1976 by a villager who came upon a bronze axe and excavations have been carried out since 1979 at thirteen different places on 2.5 hectares, out of a total archeological urban area of 47 hectares. The excavated parts are later partially back-filled in order to preserve them from destruction, but due to visible natural deterioration of the standing structures, five excavation zones have been covered with metal shelters.

Among the structures revealed are warehouses, domestic buildings,

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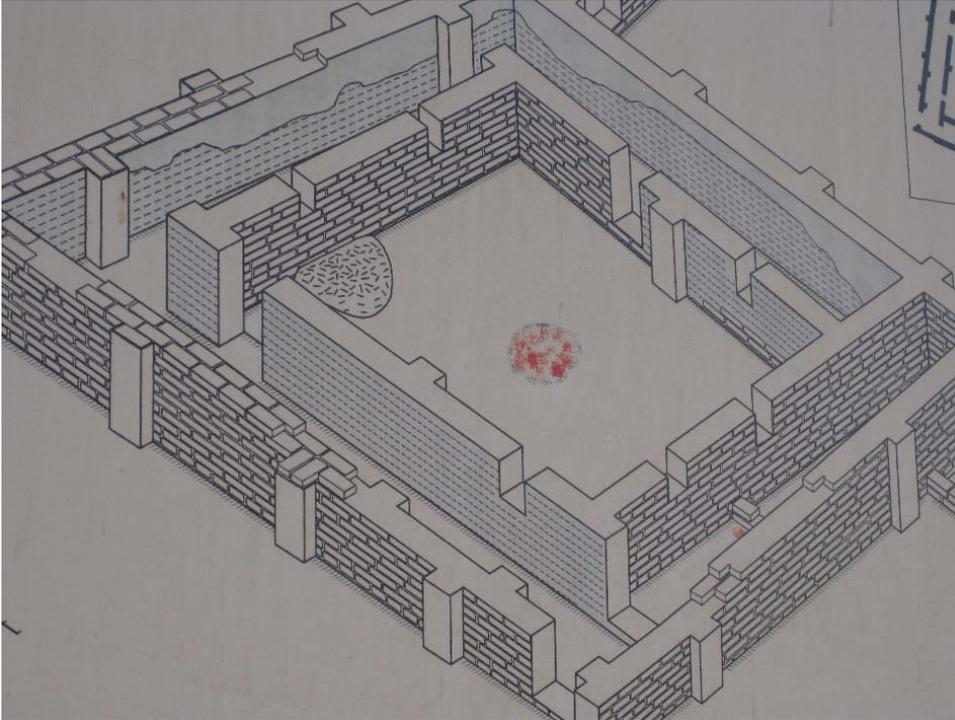


Figure 6. Drawing depicting a sanctuary with a fire altar in Sarazm

and separately built sanctuaries with interior and exterior altars for burnt offerings and wall paintings depicting scenes of worship. In the center of the hearths deep niches were found for the lighting of the holy fire.^{xxii} The walls of the ceremonial buildings were buttressed internally and externally and generally plastered and decorated with red or polychrome paintings. During one stage of excavations, a religious building was uncovered consisting of four rooms, two of which had rectangular altars; in the fifth stage remains were found of a circular construction of two rings of bricks and round corridors, considered to be devoted to the Sun.

In a later stage, a complex of temples was revealed, but with-

out any traces of occupation, thus suggesting that the structures with hearth-altars were used for purposes of rituals. While seeking the inclusion of Sarazm on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Tajikistan submitted:

Fire worships could be regarded not specifically to Zoroastrian religion but rather to an early protohistoric, if one may say a “pre-Mazdeism substratum” on which Mazdeism in part was founded. However while reading the most ancient parts of the Avestic literature and poetic corpus, one can recognize that Sogdiana is mentioned and it reminds easily the natural setting and remains of Sarazm.

Further tracing Sarazm to Zoroastrianism, Tajikistan advocated:

[S]ubsequent cultural and historic tradition of the Bronze and Iron Ages until the Penjikent Sogdian age (during which the Mazdeism and Zoroastrism emerged and evolved from the Indo-Iranian) could be recognized; ... various ethnographic traditions, especially dealing with Pamir, upper Zerafshan valley, Wakhan, Shughnan, Roshan and other regions mention specific rituals of customs related to fire and fire places within the dwellings.^{xxiii}

In 2010, UNESCO finally placed Sarazm on the World Heritage List on account of its outstanding universal value, integrity and authenticity.

On July 12, 2013, Dr. Abdurauf Razzokov, (photopage 39, Fig 8) the Tajik archeologist/curator of Sarazm, welcomed visitors from the United States, including the writer, by lighting a ceremonial fire on one of the ancient altars (see figure 5). Dr. Razzokov, was born in Vorhu (or Vorhukash), a village in the Zerafshan valley, which he proudly noted is mentioned in the Avesta. He has presented the findings on Sarazm in Iran and, speaking in fluent French, he invited Zoroastrians worldwide to visit Sarazm as a site of their heritage and to support the work being done there.

A copy of Dr. Valentin Shkoda's seminal work in Russian on 'The Temples of Pendjikent' (see end

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note vii) was presented by Pasha to the writer with the request to have it translated into English. It has a short summary in English, but is deserving of a comprehensive translation so as to increase the awareness of Panjakent and its role in 5th-8th century Zoroastrian culture in Central Asia. Any organization or individual interested in helping to finance the translation may write to: kersi.shroff@gmail.com

Photos of Oxus Temple Ruins and Fire Altar in Sarazm by Dr Dolores Moody



Figure 7. Entrance in Khojand Museum to 'Hall of Arian Civilization'. Written in Cyrillic: "Goftare nik, Pendare nik, Kerdare nik", (good thoughts, good words good deeds)

ⁱ The phrase is from D.A. Scott, Zoroastrian Traces along the Upper Amu Darya (Oxus), *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2, pp. 217-228 (1984).

ⁱⁱ Gustav Glasser, *Painting in ancient Pjandzikent*, 8 *East and West*, No. 2, pp. 199-215 (1957).

ⁱⁱⁱ *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. II, pg. 313 (UNESCO, 1992).

^{iv} *Ibid.* pg. 314.

^v B.A. Litvinskiy and I.R. Pichikiyan, *The Temple of the Oxus*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2, pp. 133-167 (1981).

^{vi} Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans* pg. 109 (2002).

^{vii} Valentin Shkoda, *The Temples of Pendjikent* 153 (2009).

^{viii} Jeffrey D. Lerner, *Book Review of Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan, Hellenistic Temple of the Oxus (in Russian)*, 106 *Journal of Archeology*, pg. 486 (Jul. 2002).

^{ix} Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan, *supra* note v, pg. 153.

^x *Ibid.*

^{xi} Richard N. Frye, *Book Review of Khram Oksa, The Hellenistic Temple of the Oxus in Bactria, South Tajikistan (in Russian)*, 105 *American Journal of Archeology*, pg. 742 (Oct. 2001).

^{xii} *National Museum of Antiquities of Tajikistan, The Album*, pg. 93 (2005).

^{xiii} Jeffrey D. Lerner, *supra* note viii, pg. 487.

^{xiv} Willem Vogelsang, *supra* note vi, pg. 109

^{xv} *Ibid.* pg. 105.

^{xvi} Richard N. Frye, *supra* note xi.

^{xvii} The Kushans formed a powerful new dynasty in Bactria in the 1st century A.D., and eventually also dominated northern India. Their renowned King Kanishka who reigned in the 2d century is considered to have helped the spread of Buddhism from India to Bactria and deep into Central Asia.

^{xviii} Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan, *supra* note v, pg. 163.

^{xix} Valentine Shkoda, *supra* note vii, pg. 153.

^{xx} Guitty Azerpay, *Sogdian Painting* (1981). See Figure 48, a sketch of a Panjakent Temple painting of sacrifice at a fire altar and a banquet.

^{xxi} Valentine Shkoda, *supra* note vii, pg. 154.

^{xxii} *The Album*, *supra* note xi, pg. 67.

^{xxiii} *Tajikistan, Nomination to the World Heritage List of Sarazm*, pg. 12, along with related documents, available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1141/documents/> (last visited, April 7, 2014).

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Figure 8. The President of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomali Rahmon (center) visiting Sarazm. On his right is Dr. Abdurauf Razzokov, Archeologist/Curator of Sarazm.

In 2005, when declaring 2006 as the “Year of Aryan Culture,” President Rahmon said: *“Our ancestral culture with a valuable and world-wide slogan Good thoughts, good words and good deeds expresses best and vividly the dream of humanity in a philosophical way and this invaluable thought serves not only for development of thoughts and deeds of a single nation but for the entire humanity.”*



Kersi Shroff, a lawyer from Virginia, visited Tajikistan in July 2013 and volunteered with a team of Russian and Tajik archeologists, headed by Dr. Pavel Lurje, “Pasha,” at two ancient sites in Hisorak and Panjakent. Other places visited included Takhti Sangin, Sarazm, Dushanbe, Khojand and the Zerafshan valley. Pasha, who is from the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Haftkul Travel Company have announced two separate tours of Tajikistan in August and September, 2014. For further information, go to: <http://www.haftkul.tj>

On photo left Kersi on donkey returning from the day’s digs in ancient Hisorak in the Zeravshan Valley. During the ride, the owner of the donkey (on a cellphone!) and his colleagues expressed their curiosity in Tajik (similar to Dari) and some English. When mention was made of Zoroastrians, one of them exclaimed: “Ah, Guftare nek; Pindare nek, Kirdare nek

For an article in two parts on the writer’s journey to Tajikistan, see “Finding ‘Sraosha, Tying Kusti’ in Sogdiana,” HAMA ZOR, 2014, Issues 1 and 2, the publication of the World Zoroastrian Organization

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON ZOROASTRIANISM IN SOGDIANA AND BACTRIA¹

NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS

Our picture of Zoroastrianism in ancient and mediaeval times is strongly biased towards the west of Iran, where the Zoroastrian religion was well-established already in Achaemenid times. We know this from the cuneiform inscriptions of Darius the Great and his successors, who call upon Ahura Mazda, and later on also Mithra and Anahita, for help and protection. For the Sasanian period, too, and the early centuries of Islam, we have abundant evidence for the practice of Zoroastrianism in Western Iran. Even the Avesta has come down to us in a South-western Iranian recension, as it was collected and written down in Sasanian times.

THE LANDS CREATED BY AHURA MAZDA

Avestan is not a South-western Iranian language and the cradle of the Zoroastrian religion must be looked for much further to the east, in regions such as Choresmia, Sogdiana, Bactria, Sistan, or the lands beyond. Traditionally, these lands to the east and north-east of Iran were regarded as the heartland of Zoroastrianism. The first chapter of the Vendidad lists the lands created by Ahura Mazda, beginning with Airyana Vaejah, the

mythical homeland of the Iranians, as the first and best, but continuing with Sogdian, Margiana and Bactria as the second, third and fourth. According to a legend preserved in the Pahlavi text known as the *Shahristānīhā* ī

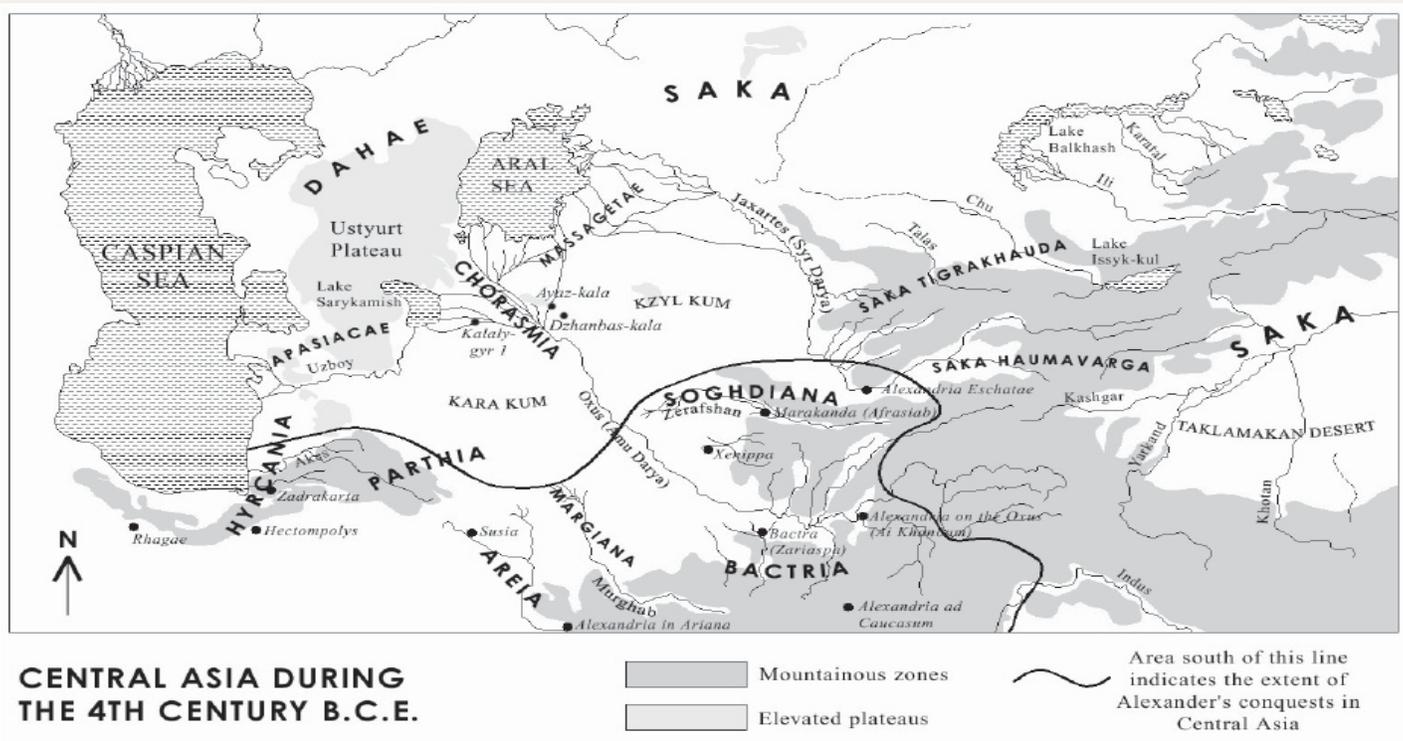


Figure 1 - Map showing Sogdiana, Bactria and adjacent areas. From https://www.academia.edu/1475330/The_Ancient_Oasis_Landscape_of_Choresmia_The_role_of_the_kala_in_Central_Asia_settlement_patterns

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Ērān “The cities of Iran,” the Avesta itself was preserved in the citadel of Samarkand, the capital of Sogdiana.

A hundred years ago, not much was known of the ancient religion of the Eastern Iranian lands. At that time the Avesta and the Pahlavi books, despite the obscurities of their language, were almost the only authentic sources of knowledge concerning ancient and mediaeval Zoroastrianism. A little information could be gleaned from the Old Persian inscriptions, the Sasanian rock reliefs, or the Kushan coins, with their partially deciphered legends in Greek script. External sources, such as the Greek and Latin texts, or the works of Muslim authors, were often biased or contradictory and had to be regarded with skepticism. During the present century, materials relevant to the study of early Zoroastrianism have increased greatly. In particular, a wealth of new material has been discovered in Eastern Iran and Central Asia. Excavations at Sogdian towns such as Samarkand and Penjikent have revealed frescoes depicting gods and scenes of worship. New studies in numismatics and iconography, together with the gradual decipherment of the Bactrian language, have led to a better understanding of the pantheon of the Kushan coinage. Manuscripts from Turfan, Dunhuang and elsewhere have revealed the existence of previously unknown Eastern Iranian languages such as Sogdian and Khotanese, as well as Middle Persian and Parthian texts written in a clear phonetic writing system. Although much of the literature written in these languages is Buddhist, Manichaean or Christian rather than Zoroastrian in inspiration, their religious terminology, calendars and personal names preserve many traces of older religious views. Moreover, the languages themselves fill the huge gap between the Avestan of the 1st millennium BCE and the Eastern Iranian languages of the present day, helping us towards a better understanding of the language of the Avesta itself.

ANCIENT KHOTAN TEXTS PROVIDE LINGUISTIC KEY TO AVESTAN AND PAHLAVI TEXTS

One of the first to realize the potential of these new linguistic materials for Zoroastrian studies was the late Sir Harold Bailey, who began to devote his energies to Khotanese in the 1930s. Bailey felt that Avestan and Pahlavi studies had got stuck in a rut as a result of the linguistic obscurities of the Avestan and Pahlavi texts. As he later explained, his motive in turning to Khotanese was a desire “to draw out ‘Middle Iranian’ from those unexplored MSS with a view to advancing Zoroastrian studies.”²

An excellent example of the kind of material Bailey hoped to find in the Eastern Iranian texts was his discovery that the Khotanese words *śśandaā-* “earth” and *ysamaśśandaa-* “world” derive from an unattested Old Iranian expression **zam-* **śśwantā-* “the beneficent earth” partially corresponding to Avestan Spenta Armaiti, the name of a divine being who is especially associated with the earth in the Avesta and the Pahlavi books. The exact equivalent of Avestan Spenta Armaiti is also attested in Khotanese in the form *śśandrāmatā-*, which is used in a Buddhist text to translate the name of the Indian Śrī, the goddess of abundance.³ Such correspondences raise the question whether the Khotanese terms result from Zoroastrian influence, as is most natural to suppose, or whether, as Bailey believed, they go back to an ancient, pre-Zoroastrian stratum of Iranian belief.

A new source of information on Zoroastrianism in the Eastern Iranian area is provided by a large number of 4th to 8th century Bactrian documents from Afghanistan which came to light during the years from 1990 onwards.⁴ From the places referred to in the texts, they seem likely to come from the region of Rui and Samangan in the Northern Hindukush. In addition to dating by years (in an era which probably began in 223 CE, many of the Bactrian documents indicate the month and sometimes even the day on which they were written.⁵ The day-names all belong to the well-known Zoroastrian calendar and bear dedications to the usual divine beings: Ahura Mazda, the Creator, Wahman, Mithra, Justice (Ashtad), the Religion, the Waters, and so

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on. The phonological and morphological peculiarities of these names show that they, like those used in other variants of the Zoroastrian calendar, were borrowed (rather than inherited) from an Old Iranian language, most likely Avestan.

Except for a couple of texts containing Buddhist invocations, none of the Bactrian documents is primarily religious in content. But although there is nothing which could be described as a Zoroastrian text, the secular documents contain many scattered indications of the Zoroastrian traditions of the region. I have already mentioned the Zoroastrian calendar terms. Another example is the use of the word *lakhmig*, the Bactrian equivalent of Avestan *daxma*, to refer to a place for the disposal of the dead (though the context does not make it clear whether the *lakhmig* was a place for exposing the corpse, in traditional Zoroastrian fashion, or for burial). Another Bactrian word with Zoroastrian overtones is *kēd*, which in Pahlavi means “astrologer” or “magician;” in Bactrian, however, it is used of the priest or devotee of a god who is referred to as “Kamird, the king of the gods”. The literal meaning of Kamird is “head” or “chief” (cf. Avestan *kamərədā-*); it may well be the god’s title rather than his name, and one can only speculate as to his identity.

Sometimes a Bactrian word may even help to establish the meaning of a cognate form in Avestan or Pahlavi. In Yasht 19, the Avestan hymn devoted to the Khwarnah or “glory,” it is venerated in two forms, the *kauuaēm x^Varənō* and the *ax^Varətəm x^Varənō*. The *kauuaēm x^Varənō*, the “glory of the kavi-dynasty” is associated both with the divine beings and with the mythical heroes and kings of Iran. The *ax^Varətəm x^Varənō* is referred to in the central part of the hymn, which is devoted to the mostly unsuccessful attempts of various gods and heroes to obtain it. The expression *ax^Varətəm x^Varənō* is translated into Pahlavi as *agrif xwarrah*, literally “the untaken Khwarnah.” The translator clearly understood Avestan *ax^Varəta-* as the negative past participle of a verb *x^Var* meaning approximately “to take.” Since the verb *x^Var*, which usually means “to eat or drink,” does not occur anywhere else in the Avesta in this sense, the question is whether the translator was right. Was his interpretation based on an authentic tradition, or did he merely guess the meaning of *ax^Varəta-* from the context?

This is where the new Bactrian documents can help us. In Bactrian the verb *xwar-* is frequently combined with the verb *lēr-* “to have” in an expression which may be understood as “to have and to hold,” the object of the two verbs being a possession such as an estate or a slave. Since this sense is not attested either in Avestan or in Pahlavi, and since the authors of the Pahlavi version of the Avesta are unlikely to have been familiar with Bactrian, the Bactrian usage provides independent evidence for the correctness of his translation of *ax^Varətəm x^Varənō* as *agrif xwarrah* “the untaken Khwarnah” — or perhaps rather “the unpossessed Khwarnah.”

THEOPHORIC ASSOCIATIONS PROVIDE EVIDENCE FOR ZOROASTRIANISM

The main body of evidence for Zoroastrianism in the Bactrian documents consists of personal names, many of which refer to Ahura Mazda, Spenta Mainyu and other gods, such as Mir, the sun, and Mah, the moon, Dyen (the Religion), Srosh, Wesh or Wyesh (Avestan Vayu, the spirit of the atmosphere), Tir, Adur (Fire), and so on. But beside these we find names referring to local divinities such as Wakhsh (the River Oxus) or non-Zoroastrian divinities such as the Mesopotamian goddess Nana or Nanai. Sogdian personal names, of which we now know a large number thanks to the discovery of more than 600 graffiti scratched on boulders along the

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course of the River Indus in northern Pakistan, provide a similar picture of mixture between Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian elements.⁶ Indeed, one of the most notable features of the traditional East Iranian religion revealed by the discoveries of the twentieth century is the extent to which it differs from that of the Avestan and Pahlavi books. Divinities and other beings known from the Avesta appear in unexpected functions or with changes of name: thus the name of Ahura Mazda appears in Khotanese *urmaysde* as the ordinary word for the “sun,” although the Avestan Ahura Mazda is by no means a sun-god. Other Eastern Iranian languages, such as Sogdian and Bactrian, call the sun by the name of the god Mithra. Both usages survive in modern languages of Eastern Iran: in Sanglechi the word for “sun” is *ormōzd* but in Yidgha it is *mīra*. The Avestan hero Yima, the Persian Jamshid, the king who presided over the golden age of the world, makes a surprising appearance in the Bactrian pantheon as a god, whose name Yamsh probably means “Yam the king.”⁷ On a rare coin of Huvishka he is portrayed as a warrior, with weapons and armour; a bird on his wrist may represent the Khwarnah, the royal glory, which took the form of a falcon and abandoned Yima when he fell from grace.⁸ The fact that the Bactrian Yamsh is portrayed on the reverse of the coin in itself indicates his divine status, which is confirmed by personal names such as Yamsh-bandag “servant of Yamsh” and Yamsh-lad “given by Yamsh” in the Bactrian documents.

By now you may be wondering whether a religion which has incorporated so many disparate elements can be regarded as a variety of Zoroastrianism at all. It is no part of my job to defend the orthodoxy of the ancient Bactrians or Sogdians; but I would like to conclude by drawing your attention to a couple of pieces of evidence

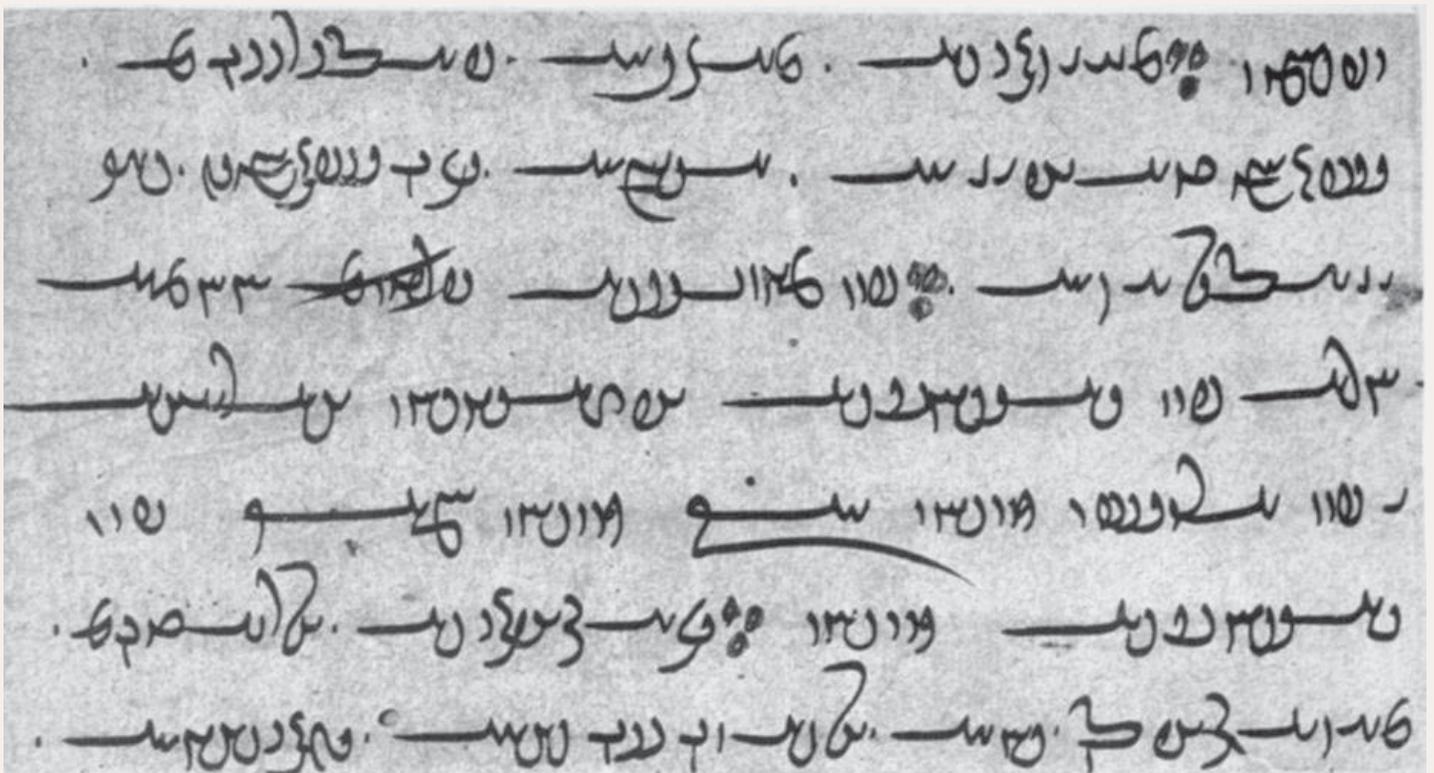


Figure 2. - A page from a manuscript of Yasna 28 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, J2)
“At that time, when the king of the gods, the famous(?), excellent supreme god was in the fragrant paradise in good thought, the perfect, righteous Zoroaster came thither (and) paid homage, from the left knee to the right, from the right knee to the left, and addressed him thus: O god, beneficent law-maker, justly-deciding judge...”

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which tend rather to indicate the antiquity and authenticity of the Zoroastrian stratum in the popular religion of Eastern Iran. In particular, I would like to demonstrate that the Sogdians must have been familiar with parts of the Avesta at least as far back as Achaemenid times. The crucial piece of evidence is a short fragment of a Sogdian manuscript containing one of the very few Sogdian texts which is wholly Zoroastrian in content. The main part of the text, from the third line onwards, describes a meeting between Zoroaster and the “supreme god” (who is not named):⁹

Though this passage resembles an Avestan text in many details of style and wording it is written in the normal Sogdian of about the eighth or ninth century. It is preceded by two lines which at first sight make no sense at all, but which Ilya Gershevitch brilliantly recognized as a slightly corrupt version of the Avestan *ašəm vohū* prayer (Yasna 27.14 etc.). The manuscript reads as follows:

[. . .]mwxšt myšt'y wšt'y wšt'y
'štwxm'y twrt'y 'xwšt'yrtm

If we lay this out in three lines (ignoring the faulty word-division), restore the missing letters at the beginning of the first word, and insert a couple of letters apparently omitted accidentally, we obtain a text which can be directly compared with that of the Avestan prayer:

[' r t] m { w x } w x š t m y š t ' y
ašəm vohū vahištəm asī

w š t ' y w š t ' ' y ' š t w x m '
uštā asī uštā ahmāi

y t w r t ' y ' x w š t ' y r t m
hyat ašāi vahištāi ašəm

The first thing to be said about this text is that it is probably at least 300 years older than any surviving Avestan manuscript¹⁰. But the really significant point is that the text is neither a Sogdian translation of the Avestan text, nor a transcription of the Avestan text as it was codified in Sasanian times and as we know it today. In place of Avestan *aša-* “truth,” for instance, it clearly attests a more ancient form (**arta-* or **ṛta-*) close to the Vedic *ṛtā-*. So one must suppose that the Zoroastrians in Sogdiana preserved this prayer from Achaemenian times (or even earlier) in an Old Iranian form and according to a tradition independent of the Sasanian redaction of the Avesta.

ONOMASTICS ENABLE SCHOLARS TO UNDERSTAND ANCIENT PROPER NAMES AND ORIGINS

Finally, I would like to refer to another of the divine beings alluded to in the Sogdian onomastic tradition. The divine name in question is Avyāman or Avyāmanyu, an otherwise unknown divinity attested in the Upper Indus inscriptions by names such as Avyāman-vandak “slave of Avyāman” and Avyāmanyuwakk. The longer form Avyāmanyu clearly indicates that the name is a compound of Old Iranian *manyu-* “spirit.” Although in principle the term “spirit” or “spiritual” (Avestan *mainiiauu-*, Pahlavi *mēnōg*) can be applied to many of the divine beings, it is *a priori* probable that the name Avyāman should refer to Spenta Mainyu, the only member

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of the Zoroastrian pantheon whose name actually contains the word *manyu-*. In Avestan this divinity is usually called *spəntō mainiiuš* “the holy spirit,” but he is also referred to in the Gathas by the equivalent superlative and comparative forms as *spəništō* “the holiest” or *spaniiā* “the holier (of the two spirits),” the latter usage surviving in his Middle Persian name Spenāg Mēnōg. Yet another alternative is the use of the adjective *vaŋhuš* “good” or its superlative *vahištō* “best” in place of *spəntō*. The whole range of forms attested may be tabulated as follows:

<i>spəntō</i> “holy”		<i>vaŋhuš</i> “good”	
<i>spaniiā</i> “holier”	+ <i>mainiiuš</i> “spirit”	+ <i>mainiiuš</i> “spirit”
<i>spəništō</i> “holiest”		<i>vahištō</i> “best”	

To fill the obvious gap in this table one may reconstruct the term **vahiiā mainiiuš* “the better spirit (of the two),” whose absence from the extant Avesta may be nothing more than an accident of survival. Sogdian Avyāman represents this form perfectly—provided that one does not think of it as an inherited Sogdian cognate of the reconstructed Avestan expression, but as an ancient loanword which, like the Zoroastrian calendar terms, has undergone normal phonetic changes in Sogdian after being borrowed from Avestan.¹¹

The Sogdian term for “devil,” Shimnu, which corresponds to the Christian Satan, the Buddhist Mara, the Zoroastrian or Manichaean Ahriman, and which survives as a loanword in Old Turkish and Mongolian, may provide a close parallel to the case of Avyāman. According to Junker, Shimnu is identical with Avestan *aŋrō mainiiuš*, Pahlavi Ahriman,¹² and this view has been accepted by many scholars; but no-one has succeeded in finding another example in Sogdian or any other Iranian language for the assumed development of Old Iranian **hr* to *š*. In this respect a more satisfactory suggestion is that of F. C. Andreas,¹³ who proposed that Shimnu represents an Avestan **ašā mainiiuš* “the worse spirit”, the comparative equivalent of the attested *akō mainiiuš* “the bad spirit” and the exact negative counterpart of **vahiiā mainiiuš*. As in the case of Avyāman, the Sogdian form would be an ancient loanword from a form unattested in the Avesta.

Since neither **vahiiā mainiiuš* nor **ašā mainiiuš* is actually found in the Avesta, these etymologies imply that at an early stage in the history of the Zoroastrian church in Sogdiana, its adherents had access to the text of the scriptures in a form more complete than that which survived in Sasanian Iran. Together with other evidence, such as the Sogdian version of the *ašəm vohū* prayer, or the Sogdian ossuaries decorated with pictures of the Amesha Spentas,¹⁴ they counter the impression that the Zoroastrian elements in the Sogdian religion may be late or superficial additions: on the contrary, they suggest that the faith of the Avesta must be an ancient and fundamental component of this religion, though overlaid and obscured by accretions from the popular beliefs of Sogdiana and the surrounding regions.

- ¹ This paper is a shortened version of an article published in D. Christian & C. Benjamin (eds.), *Realms of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern* (Silk Road Studies 4), Turnhout, Brepols, 2000, 1-12.
- ² H. W. Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies being Khotanese Texts*, Volume VII, Cambridge 1985, p. vii.
- ³ See H. W. Bailey, *BSOS* 7/2, 1934, p. 294; 8/1, 1935, pp. 136, 142; “Saka śśandrāmātā,” in G. Wiessner (ed.), *Festschrift für Wilhelm Eilers*, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 136-43.
- ⁴ See N. Sims-Williams, *Bactrian documents from Northern Afghanistan*, 3 vols., London 2000-2012.
- ⁵ See N. Sims-Williams and F. de Blois, “The Bactrian calendar,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 10 (Studies in honor of Vladimir A. Livshits), 1996 [1998], pp. 149-65.

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⁶ See N. Sims-Williams, "The Iranian inscriptions of Shatial," *Indologica Taurinensia* 23-24, 1997-8 [2000] (Professor Gregory M. Bongard-Levin Felicitation Volume), pp. 523-41.

⁷ N. Sims-Williams, *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 5, 1997-8 [1999], pp. 196-7.

⁸ F. Grenet, "Notes sur le panthéon iranien des Kouchans," *Studia Iranica* 13/2, 1984, pp. 253-8.

⁹ N. Sims-Williams, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18/1-2, 1976 [1977], pp. 46-7.

¹⁰ The oldest surviving manuscript of any Avestan text is K7, a Vispered dating from 1288 A.D.

¹¹ For details cf. N. Sims-Williams, *Sogdian and other Iranian inscriptions of the Upper Indus II*, London 1992, p. 40.

¹² H. Junker, "Türkisch Šimnu 'Ahriman,'" *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 5, 1925, pp. 49-55.

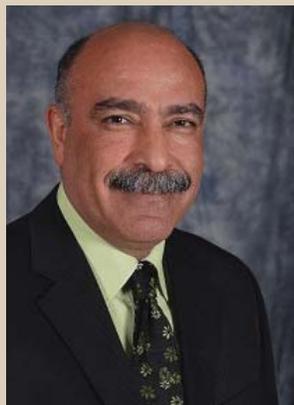
¹³ Reported by E. Waldschmidt and W. Lentz, *Manichäische Dogmatik aus chinesischen und iranischen Texten* (SPAW 1933, Nr. 13), p. 515.

¹⁴ F. Grenet, "L'art zoroastrien en Sogdiane: études d'iconographie funéraire," *Mesopotamia* 21, 1986, pp. 97-131.



Nicholas Sims-Williams is currently Research Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has published widely on the Old and Middle Iranian languages, in particular on Sogdian and Bactrian, the medieval languages of Samarkand and northern Afghanistan.

In the News



FROM EDITOR TO EDITOR

Sharokh Khanizadeh retired as Editor-in-Chief from the Canadian Journal of Plant Science and accepted the position of editor with Board of Scientific Reports, Nature, within Plant Biology starting Feb 2014.

Shahrokh volunteers his time to do the graphic and layout for the FEZANA journal and the ZAQ website. <http://khanizadeh.info>

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UNDERSTANDING CENTRAL ASIAN ZOROASTRIANISM THROUGH SOGDIAN ART FORMS

MATTEO COMPARETI (ISAW-NYU)

FOLLOWING THE THREADS OF EARLY ZOROASTRIANISM ALONG THE SILK ROAD

From ancient times through the advent of Islam, Zoroastrianism was practiced from central Anatolia and the Caucasus region to China and India. Zoroastrianism was and continues to be considered by Muslims a “Religion of the Book,” as are Judaism and Christianity. Although Zoroastrians in Persia and west Central Asia suffered persecution during the Islamic period, after the Sasanian Dynasty’s (224 - 651 C.E.) fall, the Zoroastrian religion was not extirpated. Zoroastrianism in Christian hegemonies became extinguished as Zoroastrians converted to Christianity, as in the Caucasus region.

Scholarly interest in Zoroastrian texts began during the late 18th century and increased with the growing European presence in India. Zoroastrian studies based on ancient texts and supplemented with archeological research have increased our knowledge in this field. Field work started by the Soviet government in Central Uzbekistan and Western Tajikistan made valuable contributions to our knowledge of historical Sogdiana.

The Sogdians were of Iranian stock and began their migration to other areas in Central Asia and China during the third and fourth centuries C.E. - probably as traders following the “Silk Road.” Written Sogdian sources are scant, leaving scholars to depend on information contained in Chinese chronicles, not always easy to understand. Sogdians living in Sogdiana were Zoroastrian and had an agriculturally-based economy. Sogdian expatriates were predominately Buddhists and involved in the Eurasian caravan trade. Sogdians maintained close ties with Persia from very ancient times. Since the Achaemenid conquest of Central Asia between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the Sogdians adopted and used the Old Aramaic alphabet (used in Persian diplomacy and trade before Alexander the Great’s invasion). During the seventh century C.E., close contacts with the Chinese resulted in the Sogdian’s adoption of writing in columns.

CENTRAL ASIAN POMPEII

The most important sites attributed to the Sogdians are: Varakhsha (close to Bukhara) and pre-Mongol Samarkand (or Afrasyab) in Uzbekistan, and Penjikent in Tajikistan. The latter has been called the “Pompeii of Central Asia” because of the many painted murals found in multistoried houses and two temples. Starting the sixth century C.E., the Sogdians adopted the Indian iconography of Hindu divinities for theirs. Only one Sogdian language inscription is known: it identifies the god Weshparkar in an early eighth century C.E. painting from Penjikent (Figure 1.) Weshparkar was the local name of the Zoroastrian wind-god Vayu. The image is interesting in that Weshparkar is depicted according to Shiva’s iconography with three heads, four arms, and a trident. At least two fragmentary texts, written in the Sogdian language, contain a list of several local divinities with their Indian counterparts and attributes. As the identification of Hindu divinities is not difficult for art historians, it is possible to deduce other Zoroastrian local gods in Sogdian paintings. All such identifications are hypothetical and are based on Sogdian documents found in China and in a Buddhist milieu. Moreover, not all linguists agree on the association of Sogdian and Indian gods.

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Figure 1. – Image depicting Veshparkar (standing, right) and Apam Napat (seated, left), located in Sector XXII, Room 1. (Photograph the author.)

Another basis for identifying Central Asian Zoroastrian divinities is from inscribed Kushan coins (Kushans were a dynasty, with nomadic origins, that conquered a large area in Central Asia and India from the first through third centuries C.E.). The introduction of Indian religious iconography into Central Asia is probably attributable to the Kushans. Several Zoroastrian divinities are on Kushan coins; other coins have Indian, Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and even Mesopotamian images.

In some Chinese sources, the name of the religion professed by the Sogdians is *Xian*. The Chinese character used in these texts contains the word for “fire” which gives further evidence for its association with

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Zoroastrianism—and the central role played by fire. However, the representation of many divinities and the relative importance of other gods (that did not find fortune in Sasanian art, such as Zurvan) would suggest that the Sogdians professed a local form of Zoroastrianism.

PENJIKENT ART PROVIDES RARE GLIMPSES OF SOGDIAN DIVINITIES

Several Sogdian divinities have been identified in the Penjikent paintings from written sources. Others have been distinguished from their attributes or animal hypostases. For example, the identification of the wind-god Weshparkar, as the Sogdian equivalent of Shiva, is based on an inscription on his leg found in a Penjikent wall painting. In other representations, not necessarily painted, he is accompanied by a bull—also associated with Shiva. However, sixth century paintings from Penjikent link him with the wild boar. In the painting mentioned above, Weshparkar stands, facing a seated male divinity encircled by flames and water, where swimming fishes are shown. This mixture of igneous and aquatic elements suggests an identification with Apam Napat, the aquatic Zoroastrian divinity considered the guardian of *Xwarrah*, a term that could be translated as “Glory/Fortune” or “Charisma.”

The sun-god Mithra can be recognized in some eighth century paintings and wooden friezes at Penjikent from the motif showing the sun chariot being pulled by horses. Sometimes the image of Mithra is a frontal representation of a god sitting centrally, with the horses shown in profile. This iconography could have been borrowed from India although it is Greco-Roman in origin. Sometimes, the chariot is not present but the god is shown seated on a throne shaped like back-to-back horses.

Ahura Mazda (Sogdian: *Adbagh*) was portrayed according to Indra’s iconography. Despite his predominately Iranian traits, he also has characteristics borrowed from many cultures, including the Indian and Byzantine. In a fifth century painting from temple II at Penjikent, Adbagh is shown with Vahram (Sogdian: *Washagh*; Avestan: *Verethragna* - the god of war and victory) whose attribute is a human head. Vahram holds it like a terrible trophy; exactly how the Mars was illustrated in



Figure 2. - Mythological painting of an encounter of the goddess Nana, riding a lion, and the Sun God in a chariot, 750-850 CE, Kalai Kachkacha I (Tajikistan), Palace, Room 4. (Photograph the author)

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Islamic books. In fact, there is a close parallel between Mars and Vahram: in each case the reference to a war divinity is clear.

Other Sogdian divinities are less identifiable in figurative arts. Yima, the god of underworld, is probably represented, like Vaishravana in Buddhist art, clad in armor. In Sogdian paintings, he is sometimes shown as standing on a demon, exactly as Saint Michael or the Virgin Mary in Christian art. Also, Zurvan, the Iranian god of time, is difficult to identify. In some Sogdian texts, he is described according to the Indian iconography of Brahma (that is, with a long beard).

MESOPOTAMIAN INFLUENCE ON SOGDIAN ART

Nana, who originated in Mesopotamia, is probably the most pervasive goddess in the Sogdian pantheon. Despite her four arms she was identified with the lion. (Figure 2.)

Other ancient divinities have been associated with the Semitic Ishtar, the Persian Anahita (for example, Ishtar was the goddess of planet Venus, still called *Nahid* in Persian). Furthermore, the Sogdians may have identified Nana with a local fertility goddess. The fact that Anahita's name appears only in Central Asia after the third century C.E. Persian invasion is noteworthy.

The importance of Mesopotamian influence in Iranian lands (in Persia and Central Asia) during Late Antiquity is apparent in another painting from Penjikent, which has been considered for a long time the depiction of mourning over Syavush's body; whereas, recent interpretations of this painting have convinced scholars that it depicts Tammuz' funeral.

Another instance where a local goddess was merged with Nana is her association with a male four-armed god usually clad in armor. His emblems are an arrow and a bird that he holds in his hands. The arrow is a common attribute of Tishtrya, the Iranian rain god associated with the planet Mercury (*Tyr*). Furthermore, he holds one bird exactly like the Indian god of war Kartikkeya also clad in armor. This Indian divinity, which resembles the armored god Tishtrya is hard to identify (as was the case of Yima, mentioned above). Whoever that god was, his integration with Nana created a powerful icon venerated in Central Asia. This image is present in the Sogdian paintings and on terracotta ossuaries.

Until a few years ago, ossuaries were not a well-known aspect of Sogdian art. To date, the few Sogdian ossuaries embellished with religious scenes have been fragmented. New excavations at a site close to Sharsisabz (ancient Kish, southern Uzbekistan) have recovered several interesting ossuaries inscribed with scenes of the underworld that seem to reflect Sogdian beliefs. Some ossuaries show the soul being judged in the underworld - Rashnu judges the karma of the dead, possibly with two other divine judges: Mithra and Shrosha. This is a hypothesis based on Zoroastrian textual evidence, because it is impossible to say whether the divinities are men or women. The scenes on these ossuaries were created from molded clay. It is possible that the molds were reused to create similar decorations for members of the same group. (for image of Sharsisabz ossuary see page 63)

Hypothetical identifications of other Zoroastrian divinities have been proposed for Sogdian paintings from Penjikent and the much earlier Kushan coins. For example, Druvaspa has been identified because she is carrying a small horse under her arm. Scholars are divided about the identification of the god of Glory/Fortune *Xwarrah* (Sogdian: *Farn*) whose attribute was probably the ram. The Fravashis were shown as young women warriors holding banners. (Figure 3.)

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*Figure 3. – Penjikent, temple II wall of the outer court (late 7th-early 8th century) 0979 excavations
(Photograph the author)*

HOLY BOOKS, HALOS AND THE SIMURGH

Even though no manuscripts or fragments of the Avesta have been found during excavations in ancient Sogdian sites, one unique painting from Penjikent is interesting because it has been claimed to be the representation of a holy book that believers transported in parades. In the painting, a bust rises from this colossal book showing that, probably, the Sogdians did have holy books (such as the Avesta) and devoted particular celebrations to them.

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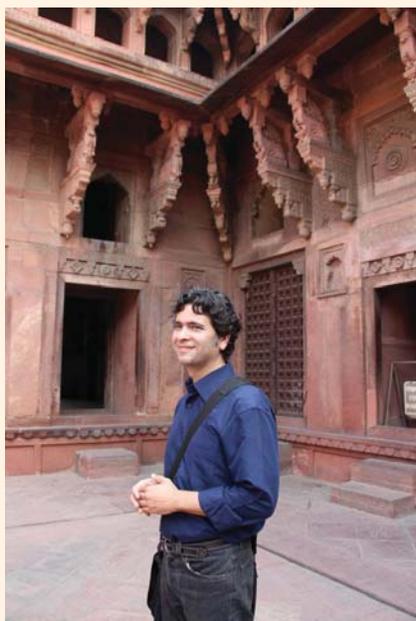
Divinities in Sogdian arts are usually portrayed larger than human beings. Some have halos behind their heads and flames on their shoulders that signify their Glory/Fortune. These characteristics are not the sole prerogative of divinities because kings and, interestingly, demons may be depicted with them.

Although not strictly a divinity, the Simurgh (Middle Persian *Senmurv*) was a fanciful bird found in Iranian mythology that could be summonsed by epic heroes when necessity. During the first part of the 20th century, some scholars proposed to identify the Simurgh as a winged dog-headed chimera that occasionally appears in late Sasanian art. Recent research suggests that this monster represents the Sasanian Glory/Fortune (*Xwarrah*); while the Simurgh could have been a bird exactly as illustrated in Islamic books. The *Shahname* says that the feathers of the Simurgh contain *Xwarrah*; which has caused confusion. In a few early 14th century book illustrations from Fars (the cradle of Persian civilization), the Simurgh was represented as a colossal bird with two ears or feathers on her head, like an owl. This bird appears behind a knight in a painted program from Penjikent that has long been identified as Rustam fighting the demons. According to this identification, the Simurgh is the bird behind the hero while the chimera in front of Rustam should be considered symbolic of his Glory/Fortune.

Sogdian paintings are an important source of information to correctly identify many aspects of pre-Islamic, Iranian tradition that would have been otherwise irretrievably lost. Fortunately, archeological excavations of Sogdian sites in the ex-Soviet republics never experienced any serious interruptions. The situation in Iran is much more complicated. For this reason, most of our knowledge of pre-Islamic Persia and the glorious time of the Sasanians relies on discoveries made outside Iran proper.

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Matteo Compareti graduated at the University of Venice "Ca' Foscari" and defended his Ph.D at Naples University "L'Orientale". The Silk Road was the main subject of his dissertations. Later, his interest focused mainly on Sogdian paintings and Sasanian art especially the representation of Zoroastrian deities. He is at present a visiting research scholar at the ISAW-NYU and this is his first official academic position.

He published several studies on pre-Islamic Persia and Central Asia both in Italian and English (occasionally in French). His most recent publications include: -**The Painted Vase of Merv in the Context of Central Asian Pre-Islamic Funerary Tradition**, *The Silk Road*, 9, 2011: 26-41. -**Classical Elements in Sogdian Art: Aesop's Fables Represented in the Mural Paintings at Penjikent**, *Iranica Antiqua*, XLVII, 2012: 303-316
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IRANIAN THEMES IN THE AFRASYAB HALL OF THE AMBASSADORS PAINTINGS

Matteo Compareti,
ISAW-NYU

The *Afrasyab* wall paintings refer to seventh century C.E. Sogdian murals discovered in 1965 in a richly decorated building in the residential area of ancient Samarkand. Until the Islamization of Central Asia that started in the eighth century C.E., Samarkand was one of the principal cities of Sogdiana, which historically was an Iranian land in central Uzbekistan and western Tajikistan. Afrasyab is a relatively new name. Geographically, it corresponds to the site of the ancient city of Samarkand before its destruction by the Mongols during the beginning of the 13th century. During the Timurid Period (14th century), the city was rebuilt close to the ancient site near the famous Registan Square and its famous monuments, which shaped our perception of Samarkand as an exotic land.

Despite the well understood and longstanding importance of the Afrasyab site, Soviet authorities built a street right through the middle of the archaeological site during the mid-1960s. The Hall of the Ambassadors was accidentally discovered during construction.

During the past twenty years, interest in the Afrasyab paintings has increased because of the rituals identified in the paintings. Not all scholars agree on these interpretations; clearly the paintings form an uninterrupted series, as opposed to a sequence of isolated scenes. Several areas in the paintings are irretrievably lost, making it impossible to reconstruct the lacunae.

HALL OF THE AMBASSADORS

THE WESTERN WALL

The primary paintings are on the walls of Room 1, Sector 23 (the Hall of the Ambassadors). The Hall's name comes from observations made during its discovery that several representatives from foreign lands were depicted with gifts in their hands, possibly to be offered to the local king. Local artists who created the paintings probably had access to Chinese paintings. For example, the way the Korean envoys are depicted is consistent with the typical formulae of Tang funerary paintings. It is not known whether any Koreans visited Samarkand during that period.

Chinese chronicles are the primary sources for the identification and chronology of the site, although some fragmentary Sogdian inscriptions have been discovered on several figures depicted on the western wall. Chinese written sources referring to the seventh century (especially the *Tangshu*, or *Chronicle of the Tang Dynasty*) record that one Sogdian king, from a city called *Kushanya*, prayed to his ancestors every morning in a room whose walls were dedicated to foreign kingdoms in contact with Sogdiana: the western wall was dedicated to Persia and Byzantium; the northern wall to China; and the eastern wall to India and the Turks. Implicitly, the southern wall was reserved to Sogdiana. Every wall had a king. This is roughly the plan presented at Afrasyab. A departure to the plan is found on the western wall, probably dedicated to the local king, at the same time as the southern wall. A long inscription, written in Sogdian on the western wall, mentions a local king named *Varkhuman* who was invested by the Tang Emperor Gaozong (649-683) between 650-655 and 658.

The Sogdian worldview placed their homeland at its center. The *Tangshu* mentions that the paintings were

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

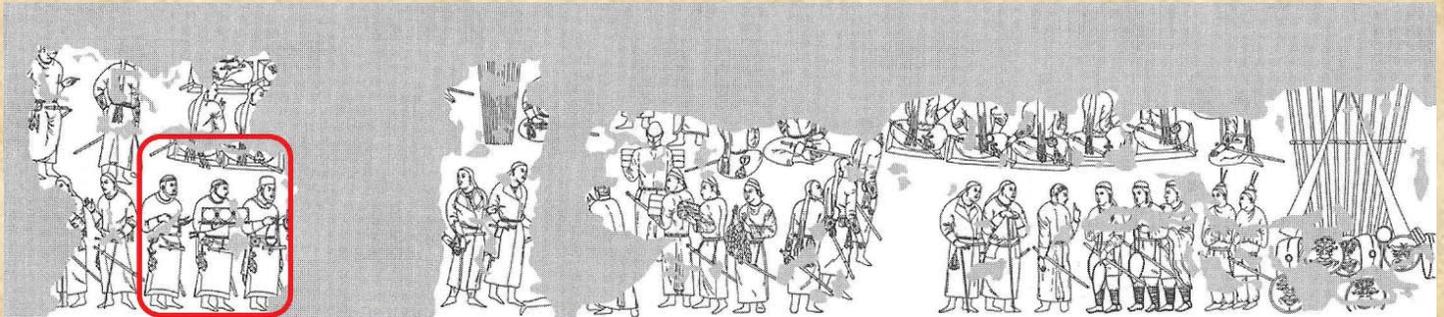


Figure 1. Reproduction of the extant parts of the Western Wall of the "Hall of the Ambassadors" Afrasyab (Sketch by F. Ory)

in the city of *Kushanya*. However, as Sogdian cities shared language and culture, descriptions of *Kushanya* could be applied to Samarkand as well. Some paintings found at the ancient Penjikent site (today in western Tajikistan, 60 kilometres from Samarkand) present a similar scheme despite their fragmentary state of preservation. The archaeological site corresponding to ancient *Kushanya* has not yet been identified but it was in central Sogdiana-between Bukhara and Samarkand.



Figure 1A Detail of the lower part of the Western Wall of the "Hall of the Ambassadors", Afrasyab, Envoys from Eastern Iranian lands. Photo Jenny Rose

The entrance to the Hall of the Ambassadors is on the eastern wall, so whoever entered the hall faced the western wall-the wall dedicated to Samarkand and its sovereign. Several scholars have argued that, based on Chinese texts, the foreigners represented are presenting gifts to *Varkhuman* and his queen during the local New Year (*Nowruz*) and the king's coronation. The foreigners are possibly ambassadors who travelled to Samarkand to honour the king, his family, and ancestors and participate in the rituals. Some figures are Turkish warriors, with typically long braids, shown escorting the delegations toward the upper part where, probably, the king was sitting on a throne. The Sogdian inscriptions confirm the presence of foreign delegations.

One of the Turkish guards shown on the western wall at Afrasyab wears his robe wrapped around his hips (the celebration probably occurred during the summer). The ancient Iranian solar calendar (also used during ancient times in Central Asia and the Caucasus) did not have an intercalary month. Over the centuries, this resulted in celebrations falling in different seasons. This problem was resolved during the Islamic Period by adjusting the calendar so that *Nowruz* always occurs in spring. Therefore, the hypothesis of a painted representation of the *Nowruz* celebrations on the western wall is very possible because, when *Varkhuman* was king (about the mid-seventh century), the Iranian New Year fell in summer.

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Recent analyses have enabled the recognition of musicians among the Turks, and a dog. All these elements have been repeated in Persian and Central Asian book illustrations from the Islamic period that depict important occasions, including banquet scenes. The festive character of the scene can be considered correct. However, some scholars have argued that the upper portion of the western wall, now lost, could have been dedicated to a local deity or to the king in front of a divinity. This would be consistent with some paintings at Penjikent. This is not implausible as the space could have accommodated a large scene. Anyway, the principal figures on every wall are always larger than their attendants (as on the remaining portion of Varkhuman's image on the southern wall and the Chinese imperial couple on the northern).

Sogdian sixth century funerary monuments have been found in Xi'an (China) and some scenes on the funerary panels probably are *Nowruz* rituals after a motif similar to the Afrasyab paintings. As previously noted, some book illustrations from the Islamic period contain similar details. The Afrasyab paintings could be considered an ideal link between the sixth century funerary monuments found in China and 13th through 14th century Islamic miniatures, where people are shown presenting gifts, musicians playing their instruments, and the ubiquitous dog.

Drawing a parallel with the Persian reliefs of the Apadana in Persepolis (6th-5th century?) is difficult despite the similarity of their depictions of foreign envoys accompanied by local nobles, probably presenting gifts. The correspondence is not exact and some scholars have recently argued that there is no *Nowruz* celebration depicted in the Persepolis reliefs. For this reason, it is better to rely on artefacts conceived and executed in Central Asia.

THE SOUTHERN WALL

The southern wall continues the rituals started on the western wall. In fact, a parade of various people walking or riding horses and camels are going toward a structure where the king probably kept the ossuaries containing the bones of his ancestors, another well-known Iranian custom. Chinese sources have documented the existence of golden urns that contained the remains of the earlier Sogdian kings. Iranians continue to commemorate the souls of their dead around the beginning of the year.

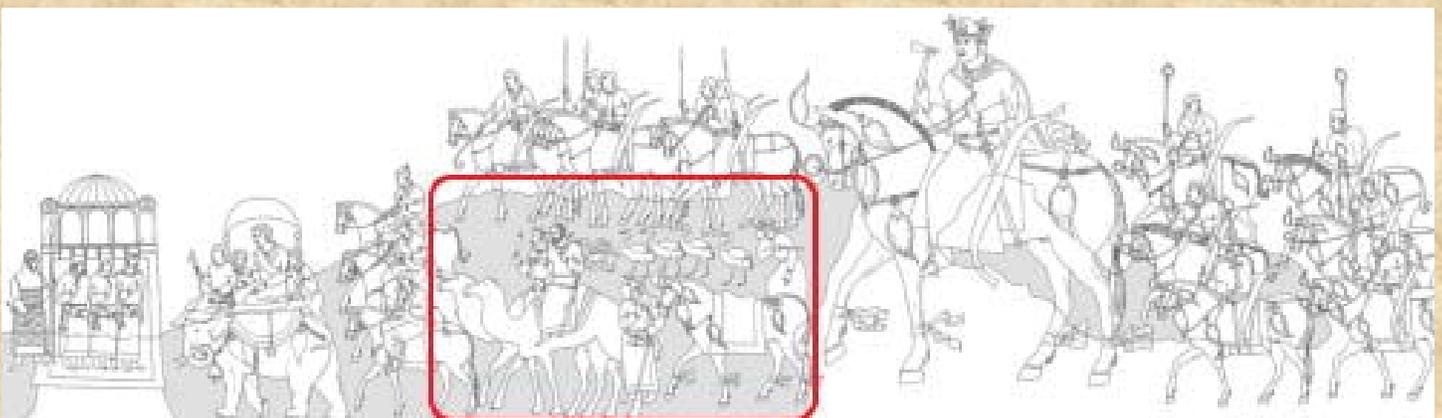


Figure 2 Reconstruction of the Southern Wall of "Hall of Ambassadors", Afrasyab. (Sketch by F. Ory)

Fragments from that scene have been conserved to the point where the king and queen are depicted as colossal figures in comparison to the attendants around them. Some attendants shown wearing a *padan* (a mask that covers a Zoroastrian priest's mouth while he tends the fire), still used by Zoroastrian priests. People wearing *padams* accompany a saddled horse and four big white birds, probably sacrificial animals. Some scholars identify the horse as the prevalent animal sacrificed to Mithra with birds being commonly sacrificed to

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Figure 2. A Central part of the Southern wall of the “Hall of Ambassadors”, Afrasyab. The sacrificial parade.
Photo Jenny Rose

Zurvan. Although the former was well-known in pre-Islamic Persia, the latter was probably worshiped among only non-orthodox Zoroastrians. According to Sogdian texts, Zurvan (the god of infinite time) was one of the principal gods of the local pantheon.

THE NORTHERN WALL

The northern wall was dedicated to China and portrays people wearing garments of the Tang Dynasty. The Iranian textile decoration, known as “pearl roundels,” is common on the western wall but is absent here. Keep in mind that during the seventh century Central Asia recognized Chinese supremacy (probably nominally) and paid tribute to the Tang emperor.



Figure 3 Reproduction of the extant part of the Northern Wall of the “Hall of the Ambassadors”, Afrasyab. (Sketch F. Ory)

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Figure 3A. Details of the left part of the Northern Wall of the “Hall of the Ambassadors”, Afrasyab. The Chinese Empress and her retinue. Photo Jenny Rose

The mural on the northern wall is divided into two scenes: an aquatic scene is to the left and a hunt scene is on the right side. The two colossal central figures that dominate each scene have been identified as: the empress on a dragon-shaped boat and the emperor riding a horse. Again, the information provided in the Chinese text is correct.

Also on the northern wall there could be a celebration of the Chinese New Year. According to some poems, the Chinese emperor hunted in a part of the imperial park represented in that scene on New Year day. After the hunt, he was expected to present the game to his ancestors. However, according to the lunar-solar Chinese calendar, the New Year always begins during winter. Probably, Sogdian artists wanted a precise correspondence between the time when *Nowruz* was celebrated in Samarkand (summer) and the Chinese New Year in China. It was impossible, then, to combine the two festivities calendrically as, in the seventh century, the Iranian *Nowruz* and the Chinese New Year occurred during the summer and winter, respectively. Sogdian artists knew the problem and corrected it with an innovative solution.

The Chinese *Duanwu* (Dragon Boat) Festival includes dragon-shaped boats and is still celebrated in China. The festival involves feeding fish from the boats, which the empress is doing with her open right hand, as shown on the northern wall at Afrasyab. A dragon is also portrayed under the boat with the fish. This is possibly an artistic attempt to combine elements of the *Duanwu* festival with the New Year when a dragon is believed to appear and bring good fortune. This technique enabled the Sogdians to harmonize summer Chinese festivals with Samarkand’s *Nowruz* celebrations. The artists probably combined different funerary festivals.

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The only detail on the northern wall that has not been plausibly explained is the man in the water who appears to push two horses toward a dragon and the empress' boat. This possibly represents a parallel to the horse that will be sacrificed to Mithra painted on the southern wall.

THE EASTERN WALL

Chinese sources mention that the eastern wall was dedicated to the Indians and Turks. This painting is the most fragmented at Afrasyab and is impossible to reconstruct in its entirety. Albeit, some intact areas show Indians with garb and hair styles reflecting a brahmanical touch.(no image reproduced in this article).

Some figures seem to have been represented larger than others, this can be observed at the left corner and upper portion. The left fragment shows two astrologers with a circular object between them-probably an armillary sphere. This subject was possibly inspired by Greco-Roman models. If confirmed, this would be an extremely interesting detail as it could further support the reading of Afrasyab murals as having astronomical / astrological significance. If correct, only professional artists, well-versed in the observation of the heavens, could have made these works.

The upper part of the mural is badly damaged; however, some colossal people and the legs of an animal can be recognized at the very top. Scholars have proposed that the animal could be the she-wolf associated with the legend of Turk origins or, perhaps, a horse. The latter may be more plausible, as it is consistent with the horse images found on the southern wall (the horse for sacrifice to Mithra) and the northern wall (the two horses in the water). Horse sacrifices had an important, central role in Indian culture and were celebrated during spring or summer by the king. Their funerary nature is similar to the scenes in the Hall of the Ambassadors. The Turks also sacrificed a horse (by immolation) during a summer festival.

CONCLUSION

Much of the lacunae of the Afrasyab paintings can be remediated, hypothetically, by “borrowing” detail and style from the other, more complete wall paintings at the site. These paintings are unique; there is nothing like them in the Sogdian milieu, including that from the excavations at Varakhsha (near Bukhara) and, mostly, Penjikent. Generally, paintings from these sites have religious themes; while the murals of Afrasyab were created for the king of Samarkand. The size of the building where the Hall of the Ambassadors has been found indicates that it was a royal palace; most likely, this was the palace of King Varkhuman or a powerful member of the local upper class.

The artists who designed and created the paintings in the Hall of the Ambassadors knew the culture of the neighbouring countries and had an excellent understanding of astronomy/astrology. This aspect of ancient Iranian culture has been known from Zoroastrian texts, but its traces in visual arts are very few in Persia and Central Asia.

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Bio of Matteo Comparetti see page 54

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THE ZOROASTRIAN BONE BOXES OF CHORASMIA AND SOGDIANA

JENNY ROSE



Figure 1. *Shilpiq Kala* (clay fortress, earliest example of an *dakhma* in Karakalpakstan (west of Uzbekistan) in use till 7th or 8th Century CE.

In the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, to the west of Uzbekistan, a hilltop fortress towers over the Amu Darya (Oxus) River valley. It was built in the early Common Era with compacted clay carried up from the nearby river to form a huge wall around a bare mountaintop. This wall surrounded what may be the earliest example of an identifiable *dakhma*. The hill is known as ***Shilpiq Kala*** (***‘clay fortress’***), and local legend tells that Zarathushtra began the composition of the Avesta nearby.

Excavation has shown that the *Shilpiq dakhma* was used until the 7th or 8th century CE, being repaired several times before it was finally abandoned around the 10th century. It is thought that perhaps the site was the *dakhma* for the rulers of Chorasmia (an ancient name for the region), although it is over forty miles from the royal residence at ***Toprak Kala***.

A possible hill of exposure much nearer to Toprak Kala, also in Karakalpakstan, is at a site called ***Mizdahkhan***. This mound, now surrounded by a Muslim burial ground, faces an ancient fortress named ***Gyaur Kala***. ‘Gyaur’ comes from a term used by Muslims to refer to Zoroastrians. The foundations of Gyaur Kala date to around 4th century BCE and were restored between the 2nd – 4th centuries CE.

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Figure 2 Toprqq Kala, the royal residence, Karakalpakstan

OSSUARY MOTIFS PROVIDE RARE GLIMPSES INTO 7th CENTURY CENTRAL ASIA ZOROASTRIAN CEREMONIES

The identification of *Shilpiq and Mizdahkhan* as dakhmas has been supported by the fact that **ossuaries - 'bone containers'** - were found at both places, although only a few were discovered at the former site. Mizdahkhan seems to have been used by the Zoroastrian inhabitants of Gyaur Kala for their funerary rituals. The use of ceramic ossuaries to hold the bones of the dead after they had been bleached and dried in the sun begins around the 2nd- 3rd century CE in Chorasmia, and about the 5th century in

Figure 3. Ossuary found at Mizdahkhan , used by the Zoroastrian inhabitants of Gyaur kala, Photograph courtesy the author



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Figure 4 Ossuaries placed in family vaults in Sogdian City of Panjikant

.Sogdiana. Ossuaries have also been found in Merv, but none from the Bactria-Tokharistan region, nor areas near the Kopet-Dagh mountain range, the Caspian Sea or Ferghana, all nearby places inhabited by Zoroastrians.¹

Although a Middle Persian term *astodan* ('bone holder') does exist, there is no clear evidence for the use of similar ossuaries in Iran proper.

The ossuaries were placed in family tombs outside the walled city, such as the vaulted burial chambers discovered at the Sogdian city of Panjikant in Tajikistan, or, less commonly, in graves. One of the last Sogdian kings, *Devastich*, was executed by the Arab governor on the site of a Zoroastrian 'bone depository' (Arabic, *naus*) in early 723 CE. The family tombs were known as *frawartik* in Chorsmian and *frawart-kate* in Sogdian, meaning 'house of the *frawashis*.'²

In the Avesta, the *frawashis* appear collectively as pre-existent souls, who continue after death to bring good to the world of the living.³

One house-shaped ossuary from ancient Samarkand depicts a possible representation of a *frawashi* as a winged female, although she seems to be wearing a mouth cover, like that usually worn by priests.

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*Figure 5 Ceramic ossuary from Mulla-Kurgan, Uzbekistan, ca. seventh century. Image on the ossuary shows two Zoroastrian priests with mouth cover (padan) attending a fire altar probably an afrinagan ceremony for chaharom. Female figures on the pyramidal cover may represent the female yazatas Haurvatat and Ameretat
Photo Dolly Dastoor*

Many of the motifs on both Chorasmian and Sogdian ossuaries are familiar from Zoroastrian text or praxis, relating the religion as practiced in Central Asia to that in Iran. Some ossuaries, however, incorporate iconography that is unfamiliar, although probably based on Avestan concepts. One stamped clay Sogdian ossuary from **Mulla Kurgan** near Samarkand dating to the 7th century CE, depicts the recognizable motif of a fire-holder flanked by priests. The seated priest and standing attendant each wear a *kusti* and mouth cover (*padan*), so as not to pollute the fire. The seated officiating priest (*Zot*) is holding *barsom* bundles in what seems to be a funerary ritual, probably the **afrinagan** ceremony performed on the fourth morning after death, known as the **chaharom**. The standing priest is the assistant (*rspi*), who holds either tongs or bellows to keep the fire going. The colonnaded building with the pitched roof behind the priests may be a fire temple, and the upper scene of two women with plants standing under a crescent and a circle could represent the female **yazatas** Haurvatat and Ameretat – symbolic of the qualities of ‘wholeness’ and ‘undyingness’ that Zoroastrians aspire to.

Several fragments of ossuaries stamped with the same imagery were discovered in 2012 at a site called **Yumal-akatepe**, near Shakhri Sabz, the ancient Sogdian city of Kesh, about 50 miles south of Samarkand. The ossuaries date to the 6th or 7th century CE. When the fragments were reassembled, the scene depicted was revealed to be that of the judgment of the soul at death. The central section shows the weighing of the soul (in the form of a naked body) by **Rashnu**, one of the *yazatas* said to meet the soul at the place of reckoning: while below, a priest with a mouth covering conducts the **chaharom** ritual. On the left it is perhaps **Vohu Manah**, who waits in the ‘house of song’ - symbolized by musicians - to welcome the soul.

Besides the ossuaries, vessels with food, golden coins, and decorated silverware have also been found in Sogdian tombs. Echoes of these family burial vaults are found in the vaulted brick tombs of **Khiva**, dating from the medieval period onwards. Today, local Muslims do not inter the body in the earth, but rest it on top of the ground, or on the brick base of a tomb, so that it is possible to stack the tombs one on top of the other.

DAKHMA MAY HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED IN CHORASMIA AND SOGDIANA AFTER THE ARAB INVASION

Until recently, it was thought that, because ossuary-making abruptly stopped in Chorasmia and Sogdiana just after the Arab invasion in the 8th century CE, the practice of exposure had ended as well. In a New Persian *rivayat*, however, there is a reference to a letter written in the early 9th century by **Adurfarrobbay Farrokhzadan** to the Zoroastrians of Samarkand, in response to their request as to how to dispose of bodies

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Figure 6 Yumalaktepe Ossuary, near Shakhri Sabz, 6th or 7th century CE, depicted the judgment of the soul at death. It depicts the soul of the deceased (figure on one side of the balance) and the admission of it to paradise (scene on the left). In the middle down below is a priest wearing padam conducting chaharom. Photograph courtesy the author

while they constructed a new dakhma to replace the old, damaged one.¹ Adurfarroby's answer was that until the new dakhma was complete, they should put the body on a small pile of stone slabs arranged on the surface of one side of the old dakhma, and then transfer the body to the new dakhma when it was finished.

This article is partly taken from a chapter on "The Zoroastrians of Central Asia" in my book Zoroastrianism: An Introduction (I.B. Tauris, 2011).

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- 2 Frantz Grenet, "Zoroastrian Funerary Practices in Sogdiana and Chorasmia and among expatriate Sogdian communities in China," in *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination* ed. Sarah Stewart (I.B. Tauris, 2013): 18-27; 20
- 3 See, for example, Yt. 13. 67-71.
- 4 B.N, Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others* (KRCOI, 1999): 104-5.

Bio of Jenny Rose see page 33

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ZOROASTRIAN FUNERARY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AS SHOWN ON THE TOMB FURNITURE OF SOGDIA NS AND OTHER CENTRAL ASIANS IN CHINA

JUDITH A. LERNER*

The identification and discovery in north and northwest China of tombs of Sogdians and other Central Asians have provided us with information, heretofore unknown, about these foreigners and their descendants who lived among the Chinese in the 6th and 7th centuries CE. In particular, their funerary furniture—stone beds and sarcophagi—are carved with scenes that offer us glimpses into their lives. We learn about their appearance and dress, their mercantile and diplomatic pursuits, their pastimes, such as hunts and banquets, and—most pertinent for this article—their religious beliefs. Although these tomb owners were buried in Chinese-style tombs on a Chinese-style stone bed or within a Chinese-style stone sarcophagus, each tomb owner's choice of decoration for his bed or sarcophagus reveals his affiliation with at least some aspect of Central Asian culture and the religion prevalent there—Zoroastrianism or, more broadly, Mazdaism.

It is an irony of archaeological and art historical scholarship that the carved decoration on these beds and sarcophagi illustrate specific Zoroastrian funerary rites for which we have no visual documentation in Sogdiana itself, in other parts of Central Asia, or even in Iran. These funerary rituals, known only from the Zoroastrian texts and the actual funerary practices of Zoroastrians, along with beliefs associated with the soul of the deceased entering Paradise, are the subjects of this article.

THE USE OF BEDS AND SARCOPHAGI BY CENTRAL ASIANS

As is known by readers of *Fezana Journal*, a characteristic of Zoroastrian funerary practice is exposure of the corpse to animal scavengers; the bones are then gathered and placed in ossuaries, stone or ceramic containers that are often decorated with Zoroastrian deities or some aspect of Zoroastrian ceremony. This practice, however, was not universal; in both Sogdiana and Iran we have evidence of other means of treating the corpse. One such means is found in China during the period under discussion, when Sogdian and other Central Asian elites chose to be buried in the Chinese fashion, in a deep underground domed tomb, accessed by a long and sloping shaft or corridor, its walls embellished with paintings, and its inclusion of grave goods, such as personal belongings and funerary models (*mingqi*), in addition to the stone funerary bed or sarcophagus to support or contain the deceased's remains.

That foreigners living in China also used such stone funerary furniture has been known only since the 1950s, when an American art historian, *Giustina Scaglia*, recognized that three carved stone panels and two gateposts displayed shared among three different museums, depict Central Asians and thus were made for a member of that community living in China (Scaglia 1959). To date, we have evidence of nine examples of funerary beds and sarcophagi attributed either to these foreigners or to Chinese elites, some of whom, as known from

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Chinese texts, followed at least some Zoroastrian beliefs: six stone beds and three stone sarcophagi. Some come from excavated contexts, which in most cases have yielded the epitaph stone giving the name and biography of the deceased; others, unfortunately, were acquired on the art market, thereby depriving us of important information about the tomb owner, other than what can be inferred from their carved decoration. Many more tombs of these Central Asians await discovery, especially in the imperial capital of Xi'an, where two stone beds and one sarcophagus mentioned here, and where it seems many of these Central Asian elites, regardless of where they actually lived in China, chose to be buried.

ZOROASTRIAN FUNERARY PRACTICE AND BELIEF

As prescribed by the *Vendidad*, the Zoroastrian funeral ritual consists of continuous prayers and ceremonies over the course of three full days and nights (divided into five “watches” or *gahs*) performed in the house of

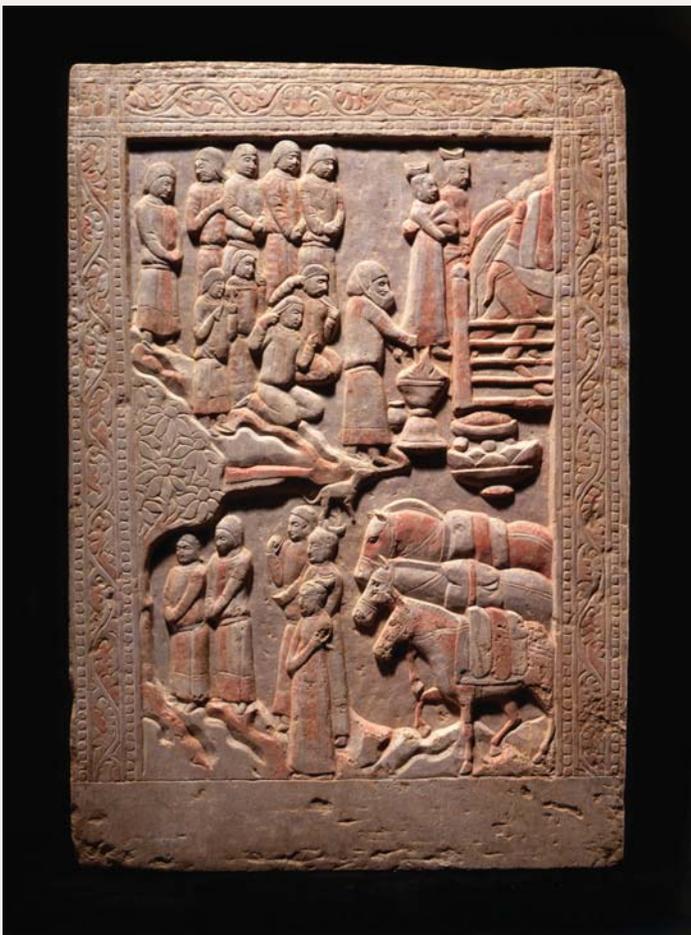


Figure 1. The central panel of the Miho bed, depicting the *sagdīd* ceremony. Miho Museum, Shigaraku, Japan. Photo: courtesy of J.J. Lally; Maggie Nimkin, photographer.

of the deceased. On the fourth day the corpse is taken to the *dakhma*—the so-called “tower of silence” that keeps the corpse from contact with the earth (and thereby from defiling the earth)—to allow its exposure to carrion-eaters (Russell 1989, p. 561). On this fourth day (*chahārōm*) the soul is believed to make its way across the *Chinvat Bridge* into paradise, but only after its life on earth has been judged worthy of this passage (Modi 1922/1979, pp. 58-68).

The Sagdīd Ceremony

Central to the funerary rite, the *sagdīd* (“the viewing by the dog”) is done three times in the course of a funeral. The first *sagdīd* is performed immediately after the death, when a dog is made to look at the deceased. The dog, regarded by Zoroastrians as beneficent and righteous, is made to look at the deceased, since its gaze is believed to drive away the evil and polluting spirit of dead matter (*nasu*) which tries to attack the dead body; it is also believed to discern better than a human that a person is dead. The second *sagdīd* occurs sometime in the course of the three-day watch over the corpse, prior to its urbeing washed and transported to the *dakhma*. The third *sagdīd* occurs after the funeral procession has reached the *dakhma*: the dog gives a final glance at the corpse just before it is left.

The *sagdīd* is clearly shown on the central panel of the funerary bed in the **Miho Museum**, which dates to the Northern Qi period (550-577 CE): in a rocky landscape, a long-robed Zoroastrian priest, the lower part of

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Figure 2. Line drawing of a panel from a sarcophagus found at Yidu, Shandong (dated by its now-lost epitaph to 573 CE) showing a sarcophagus being transported and the third *sagdīd*.

his face covered by the *padām* stands before a fire altar (Figure 1.) Behind him stand a group of men, the first four (two kneeling and one standing) hold knives to their heads. On the other side of the fire are two dishes filled with foodstuffs as well as incense, while between the priest and the brazier is a round-bellied vase. These accouterments represent the edibles and other offerings of the *āftrīnagān* ceremony which the priest is performing. Beyond these objects, and in the upper right, are two women, one of whom holds a folded cloth, and the hindquarters of three camels behind a portion of a railing. The lower half of the panel contains a group of men and women in reverent poses standing before a tree with three saddled horses behind them.

The men who stab at their heads or cut their hair are mourners, and although this manner of grieving is proscribed in the Zoroastrian texts (Grenet 1984, pp. 40-41), it does appear in painted scenes of grieving at Sogdian Panjikent and in one of the Kizil caves in Chinese Turkestan (Lerner 1995, p. 184). That this mourning scene is the *sagdīd* is shown by the figure of a dog, standing in the exact center of the panel. The first *sagdīd* of viewing the body has been performed, and now, with fire lit, the dog has been brought again to gaze on the corpse. Whether this is the second or third *sagdīd* is difficult to say. The women in the upper right, as will be discussed, may refer to a ritual that occurs before

removal of the corpse and the third *sagdīd*. But the rocky landscape and the railing and camels may instead, as will also be discussed, indicate the events of the fourth day or *chahārōm*.

We are more certain that the third and last *sagdīd* is represented on one of nine engraved stone slabs that formed a house-shaped sarcophagus found at Yidu, Shandong, and is dated to the Northern Qi (Lerner 2013). The slab shows a team of four horses transporting a house-shaped sarcophagus of the same style as the sarcophagi that housed the remains of other Central Asians buried in excavated tombs of the Northern Zhou (557-581) and Sui (581-618) periods (Figure 2). This surely represents the tomb owner's sarcophagus being brought to his tomb. The presence of the small dog—similar in breed to that on the Miho panel—running alongside refers to the final viewing of the corpse when the procession has reached the tomb.

And so, in these two Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments, the Miho bed and the Yidu sarcophagus, we have illustrated the Zoroastrian *sagdīd* ceremony, a funerary ritual as yet not found in the art of Zoroastrians in their homeland.

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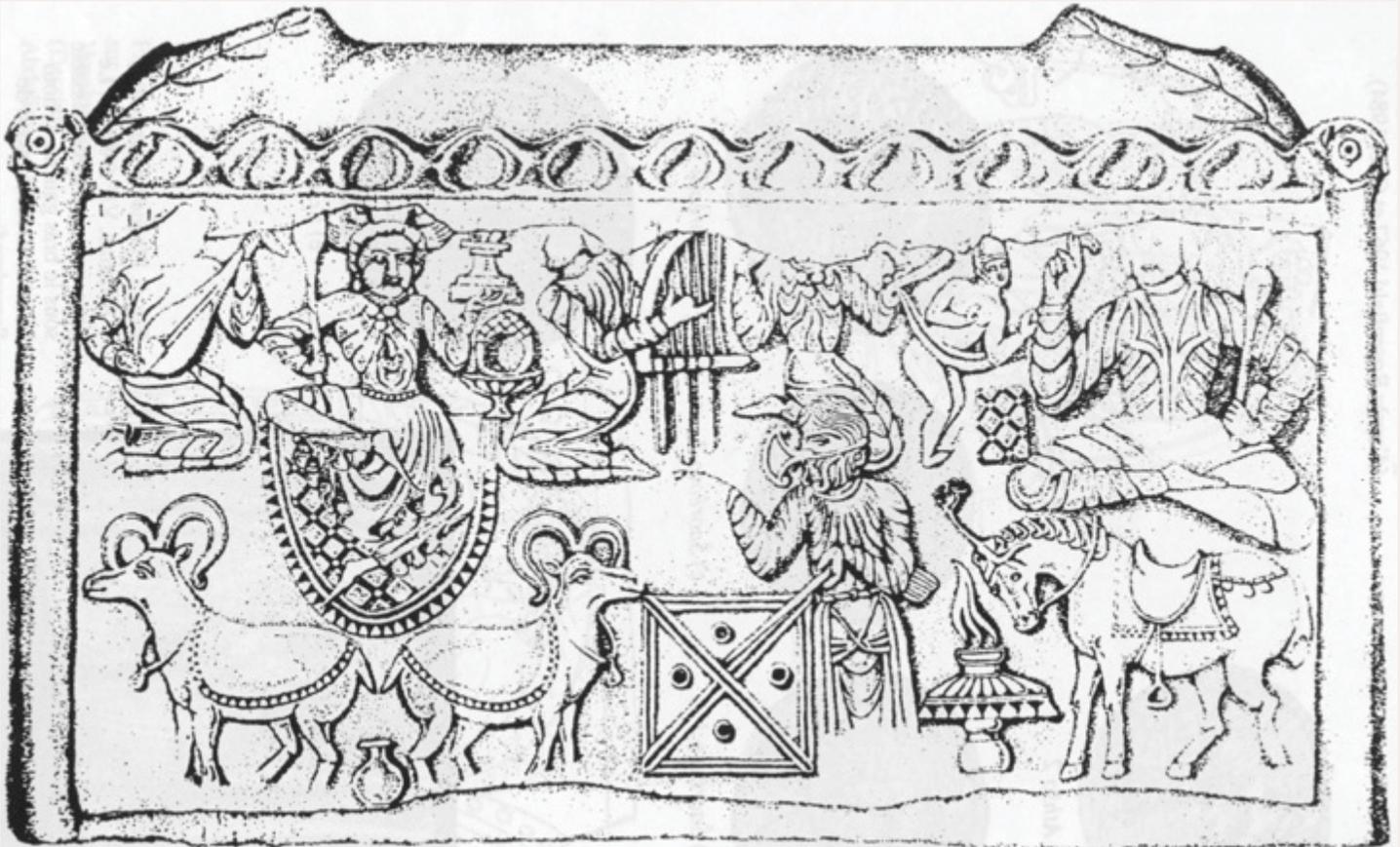


Figure 3. Line drawing of the front of a ceramic ossuary found at Sivaz, Uzbekistan. In the upper register the soul may be wrapped (or unwrapped?) in a cloth held by two deities, identified by Grenet (1993) as the *dēn*, the beautiful maiden who assists the soul in its entrance to Paradise, and *Wahman*, the embodiment of Good Thought. Other images are those of a priest before an offering table, a riderless horse, and two seated deities, the one on the left on a ram-supported throne, flanked by heavenly musicians.

THE SEDRA

As previously noted, the Zoroastrian funeral ceremony lasts for four days, each day with its set of rituals, with the first three concerned with watching over the corpse. At the end of the last watch of the third day, the priest blesses a length of cloth that will serve as a “spirit garment” for the soul in the afterlife. This is the *sedra*, symbolic of the sacred shirt that every adult Zoroastrian wears (Boyce 1977, pp. 154-155) and is surely the cloth held by one of the women in the *Miho sagdīd* panel (Fig. 1; Grenet 2009). This seems to be, so far, the only depiction known of the *sedra* in the funeral rite, although a decorated 7th-century ossuary from Sivaz (southern Sogdiana) may include among its divine and liturgical images, the soul in Paradise, naked but for the *sedra* (Figure 3.).

The Chinvat Bridge

At dawn of the fourth day the soul of the deceased crosses the “Bridge of Judgment” (*chinvat pul*) – but only if the deceased’s good thoughts, words and deeds in life are deemed sufficient. Among the rites that are performed to facilitate this difficult passage is the weighing of the soul’s earthly good and evil deeds, the image of which decorates an ossuary from Sogdian Afrasiab (Fig. 4). But for illustrations of the *entire* passage over the Chinvat Bridge, as described in the Zoroastrian texts, we again turn to the Sino-Sogdian monuments, in this case the sarcophagus of the *sabao* Shi Jun (Sogdian name, *Wirkak*) who was buried with his wife in Xi’an

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in 580 (Figure 5.) On the eastern wall of his sarcophagus we can see the Chinvat Bridge arching over a churning sea from which demonic heads emerge. In the lower right, two Zoroastrian priests stand at the entrance of the Bridge, each holding long *barsom* bundles in performance of the *chahārōm* service; shown above them (but probably intended to be standing to the side) are the two dogs that guard the Bridge. These and other details of the soul's journey after death are paralleled in the Zoroastrian texts (see Grenet 2007, pp. 492–93). Moving across the Bridge is a caravan with camels and other beneficent animal species deemed appropriate for paradise. This entourage is led by Shi Jun and his wife, whose earthly deeds have been judged sufficient for the bridge to widen to allow their passage and ascend to Paradise (had they been found wanting, the bridge would have narrowed like a razor blade, and their souls would have fallen into the waters of Hell).

Based on this clear depiction of the soul's passage across



Figure 4. Fragment of a ceramic ossuary from Afrasiab (Old Samarkand). The railing of the Chinvat Bridge and the swirling waters appear below Rashn who weighs the good and the evil deeds of the soul with his spiritual balance; nearby is Sarosh.

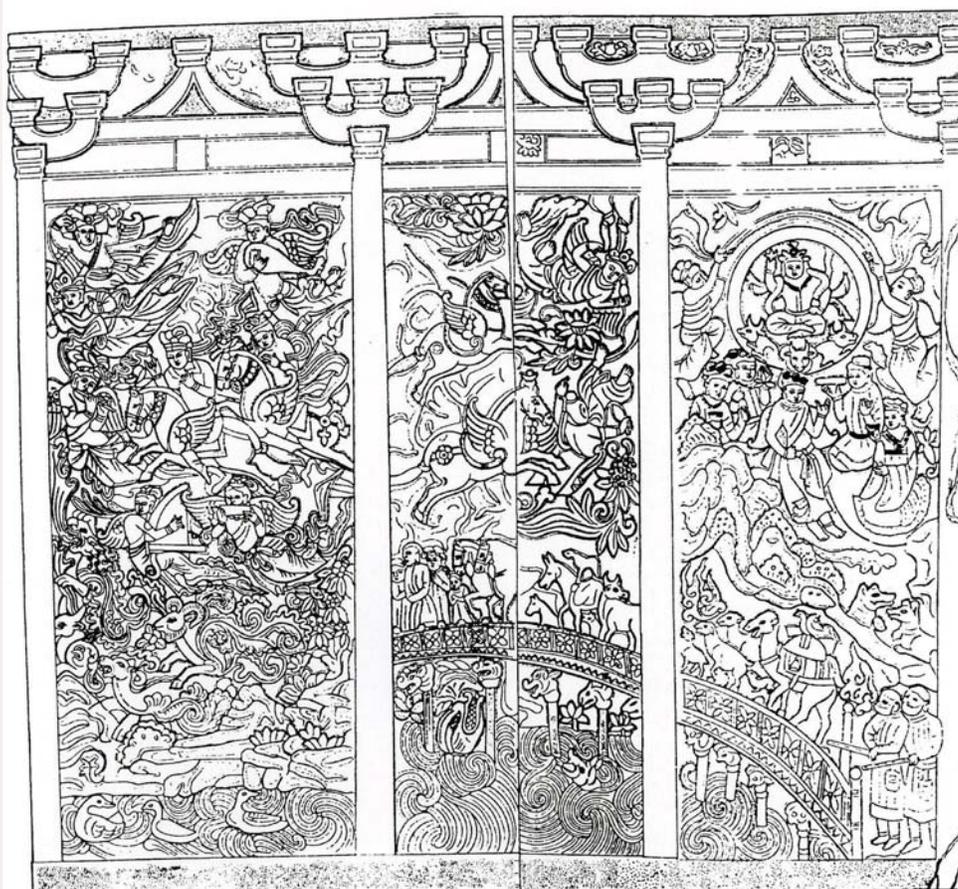


Figure 5. Drawing of the panels on the eastern wall of Shi Jun's sarcophagus, excavated in Xi'an, Shaanxi. The lower central and right panels show the Chinvat Bridge across which Shi Jun, his wife and their caravan pass. Above is the stage in their heavenly ascent, before the Sogdian god Vayu-Weshparkar and the welcoming figure of the *dēn*, pictured here with wings, who has helped them to cross over to Paradise. After Kaogu 7 (2004): 44, figure 6.

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the Chinvat Bridge, Yang Junkai interprets the upper right portion of the Miho panel with its camels placed behind a railing and the women with the *sedra* as another depiction of the Bridge (Grenet, Riboud and Yang 2004, p. 279). Militating against this identification is the single priest and lone dog; however, this small element at the edge of the panel may refer to the crossing of the Bridge as the next sequence of the funeral ceremony, after the second *sagdīd* or perhaps the third and after the blessing of the *sedra*. Indeed, it may suggest that the Miho panel actually represents the third *sagdīd* since its setting is a rocky landscape, which could fit with the location of a *dakhma*. Or the Miho panel preserves elements of the Zoroastrian funerary rite as the tomb owner wished it to be presented for eternity.

CONCLUSION: ZOROASTRIAN IMAGERY AND SINO-SOGDIAN ART

The Miho bed, and Shi Jun's and the Yidu sarcophagi illustrate specific Zoroastrian funerary beliefs and practices associated with death that are not found in the art of Sogdiana; they are also unique among the other examples we have of funerary furniture from other foreigners' tombs in China. We must note, however, that the beds and sarcophagi of these foreigners — as well as the three examples discussed here — are replete with other Zoroastrian subject matter: beribboned birds and hybrid creatures, such as the Senmurv, who are believed to protect humans from evil and malice; "priest-birds," half-man and half-bird, who wear the *padām* and hold the *barsom*, and are affiliates of Sraosh, the god of obedience and cultic activity, who is associated with the soul's passage into Paradise; and depiction of Paradise, replete with dancers and musicians (Lerner 1995; Grenet 2007). Most of these images have counterparts in Sogdiana itself, in contrast to the scenes discussed here of actual Zoroastrian funerary practices — rituals that we can observe only on these Sino-Sogdian beds and sarcophagi.

This article is a condensed version of the author's earlier article, "Zoroastrian Funerary Belief and Practices Known from the Sino-Sogdian Tombs in China," The Silk Road 9 (2011): 18-25, which can be accessed at <http://www.silk-road.com/newsletter/vol9/>.

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Zoroastrians of Central Asia

LETTERS FROM SOGDIAN ZOROASTRIANS AT THE EASTERN CROSSROADS

JENNY ROSE

SOGDIAN, THE SILK ROAD LINGUA FRANCA



Most merchants did not travel the entirety of the so-called Silk Road between the Mediterranean and China, but traded goods through middlemen based in towns or oases along the way. The Sogdians, however, developed a network of agents who lived in sizeable communities along the 1500 miles between their homeland and northern China. In what are now Xinjiang and Gansu provinces in northwestern China, the Sogdians settled around Turfan and Hami in the north, Khotan in the south, and Dunhuang in the east, where the routes converge (area in the red ellipse in the map above). Sogdians involved in the network of trade and commerce included merchants, artisans, hotel owners and food sellers. Sogdian became a common language of these trade routes. The Khotanese even used the term 'Sogdian' (Khot. *suli*), as a generic reference to *all* merchants, regardless of their origins. Central Asians were distinguished in Tang dynasty tomb figures (Chin. *mingqi*) by their beards, big noses, their outfit of tunic and trousers, and their pointed caps.

In the last century or so, a range of material discoveries has emerged from Dunhuang at the eastern end of the Tarim basin, providing information about Sogdian Zoroastrian traders, much of which is only just being evaluated. In 1907, an unopened postbag was found in the ruins of a watchtower not far from Dunhuang. The bag held several letters in Old Sogdian Aramaic script, the oldest surviving texts written in Sogdian, dating to

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the early 4th century CE. Sogdian is an eastern Middle Iranian language: its Aramaic script, like Middle Persian, was adapted from the Achaemenid chancellery script. These 'Ancient Letters' were written on rag paper, with the name and location of the recipient on the outside. They provide a glimpse into the lives of Sogdian merchants and their communities, which were by that early period already well established in the region.

MISSIVES FROM MERCHANT'S WIFE HINT AT GROWING ZOROASTRIAN PRESENCE IN 4th CENTURY DUNHUANG

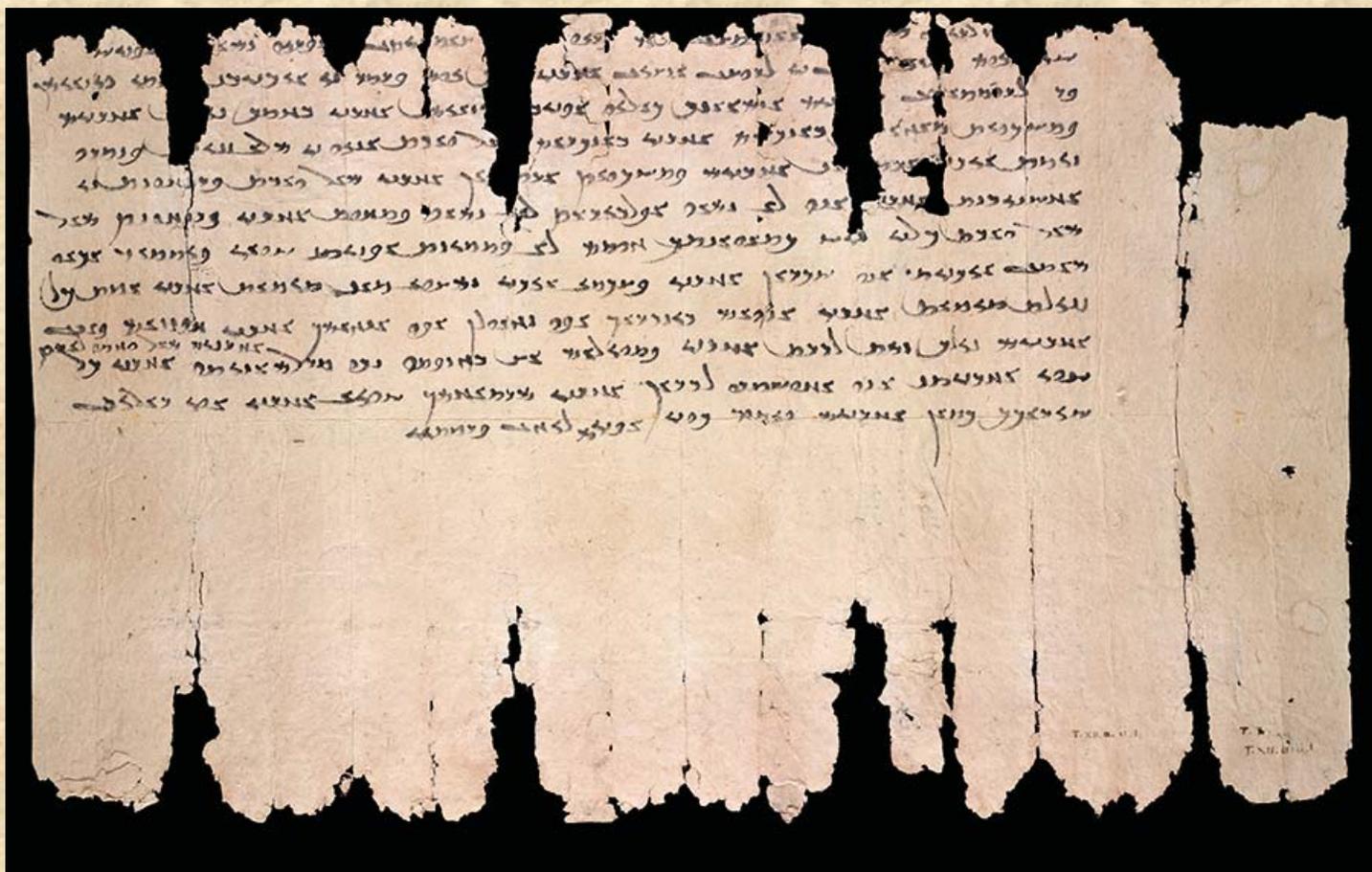


Figure 1 Letter from a Sogdian wife Miwnay stranded in Dunhuang, to her mother Chatis, in Samarkand complaining of her poor condition. Early 4th century CE, Special permission of British Library Board Or.8212/92.1

Two of these Sogdian letters are from a merchant's wife named Miwnay. One is addressed to her husband Nanaidhat, who had apparently got into debt and moved to another town, leaving Miwnay alone to look after their daughter. To make ends meet, Miwnay had become a servant in a local Chinese household. The other letter is to Miwnay's mother Chatis back home in Samarkand. In the letter to her mother, Miwnay grumbles: "I live wretchedly, without clothing, without money," and complains that, although she has petitioned various relatives, including Artivan and Farnkhund, to give her a loan so that she may return home, or go and look for her husband, no help has been forthcoming. She has had to rely on charity from the temple priest, who had offered to give her a camel and a man to accompany her should she decide to leave. The reference to a 'temple priest' (*bagnpat*) indicates that at this early stage - 4th century CE - the Sogdian Zoroastrian community of Dunhuang was sufficiently large to have a place of worship and a serving priest. In some of the other letters, Sogdian forms of Zoroastrian names also appear, including 'Ahuramazdak' and 'Narisaf' (Av. Nairyosangha). Chinese sources from the 8th century mention a Zoroastrian temple (*xian*) on the eastern edge of Dunhuang, which had a courtyard, and a main hall with a religious painting, and twenty niches.

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10th century Chinese documents indicate that this temple - and its adherents - still flourished. This is our latest evidence for the continuity of Sogdian Zoroastrian practice in the region.

Confirmation of this long-lasting presence of Zoroastrians in Dunhuang is found in a small fragment of a Sogdian manuscript, which was discovered amongst 40,000 other texts in the 'library cave' at Dunhuang. The main section of the manuscript is written in regular Sogdian of around the 9th century CE, but its style and wording resembles an Avestan text. It describes "the perfect, righteous Zarathushtra" meeting an unnamed "excellent supreme god" (*Adbag*: that is, Ahura Mazda) who dwelt in "the fragrant paradise in good thought." Zarathushtra addresses this supreme being as "beneficent law-maker, [and] justly-deciding judge."

The first two lines of the manuscript were initially impossible to decipher, until they were recognized by the Iranist *Ilya Gershevitch* as a Sogdian version of the *Ashem Vohu*. The text is not in standard Avestan as codified in the Sasanian period, nor a Sogdian translation, but includes some characteristic Sogdian elements that preserve archaic Old Iranian forms. This information points to a continual oral transmission of the prayer by Sogdians from at least Ancient Persian times down to the 9th century CE, independent of – and apparently more ancient than - the Sasanian recension of the Avesta. The Sogdian manuscript from Dunhuang predates surviving Avestan manuscripts from Iran and India by over 300 years. (see photo left)

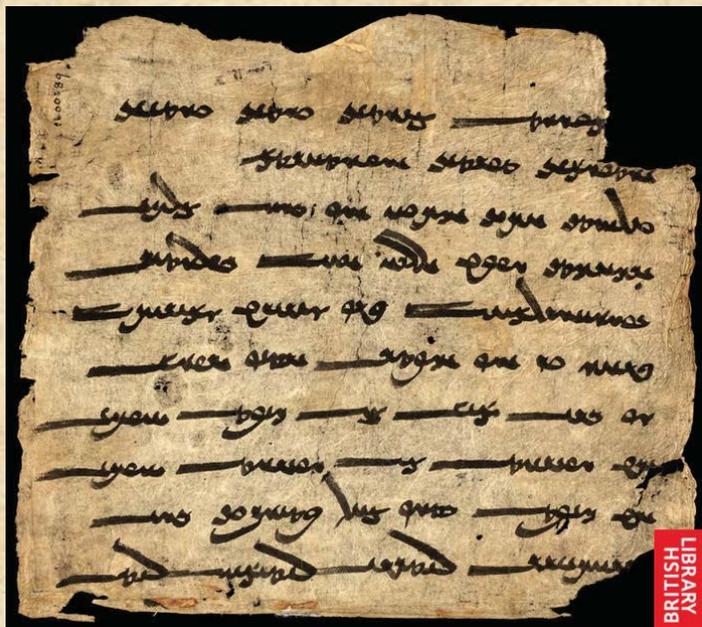


Figure 2 The manuscript of the Sogdian version of the "Ashem Vohu", the most ancient of Zoroastrian prayers. was found in the 'library cave' in Dunhuang, China. Special permission of British Library Board Or.8212/84

ROSTAM STORY LINKS PANJIKANT AND DUNHUANG

Another Sogdian fragment from Dunhuang is equally fascinating. In the same distinctive handwriting as the *Ashem Vohu* text, it is probably by the same scribe. It contains a story about Rostam that is not included in the *Shahnameh*, which suggests that it may come from an east Iranian cycle unfamiliar to Ferdowsi. When we place this Rostam story alongside the frescoes of Rostam's heroic deeds from Panjikant, we may assume that the Sogdians in their homeland shared an enjoyment of such popular narrative material with their relatives who lived far to the east.¹

The existence of a fire temple and an oral transmission of sacred text at Dunhuang, as well as this ancient Iranian epic story, testify to the endurance of the faith outside the Iranian plateau and to the continued importance of the earliest prayers, practices, and ethos of the religion.

¹ See Annette Juliano and Judith Lerner, eds., *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China* (Asia Society, 2001); 222.

² See Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, trans. James Ward (Brill, 2005); 128. See also Frantz Grenet & Zhang Guangda, "The Last Refuge of the Sogdian Religion: Dunhuang in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 10 (1996): 175-186.

³ Nicholas Sims-Williams, "Some Reflections on Zoroastrianism in Sogdiana and Bactria," in *Realms of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern*, eds. D. Christian and C. Benjamin (Brepols, 2000): 1-12; 5.

⁴ See Boris Marshak, in *Monks and Merchants*, 232.

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Figure 3 Rustom from Panjikant on Raksh, mural in Rudaki Museum, in modern Panjikant, Tajikistan,

Bio of Jenny Rose see page 33

Sogdian Ancient Letter from Miwnay to Chatis (Sogdian Ancient Letter 1, Or.8212/92.1): <http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news42/images/010.jpg>

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html>

By special permission from the British Library

Zoroastrian prayer, the Ashem Vohu

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Sogdian Ancient Letter from Miwnay to Chatis (Sogdian Ancient Letter 1, Or.8212/92.1): <http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news42/images/010.jpg>

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KAZAKHSTAN INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES ZOROASTRIAN PARTICIPATION

HOMI D GANDHI

Figure 1 Homi Gandhi with Kazakhstan Ambassador to the United States, Erlan Idrissov to discuss pluralism. Photo author

It all began for me in March 2006 when Kazakhstan Ambassador Erlan Idrissov (currently Kazakhstan Foreign Minister) photo above, invited me to participate in a group discussion on the current status of Interfaith Pluralism in the USA. Many religions' leaders were invited to exchange views on how the interfaith pluralism came into being so successfully in the US. Ambassador Idrissov initiated this gathering to bring together these leaders to build the bridge between cultures and religions, as Kazakhstan was moving into a secular state.

Ambassador Idrissov took me aside into the reception area outside his office, where some of the heritage of Kazakhstan was displayed. They were the gold replicas of bulls, horses, and other items from the excavations of the Assyrian empire. Some of

these images corresponded with many items of the Achaemenian and pre-Achaemenian items excavated in Central Asia. Ambassador mentioned that there must be some close relationship of Zoroastrians with the Assyrians to show these similarities.

The history of Central Asia is defined by the area's climate and geography. The aridness of the region made agriculture difficult, and its distance from the sea cut it off from much trade. Thus, few major cities developed in the region; instead, the area was for millennia dominated by the nomadic horse peoples of the steppe. Relations between the steppe nomads and the settled people in and around Central Asia were long marked by conflict. The nomadic lifestyle was well suited to warfare, and the steppe horse riders became some of the most

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militarily potent peoples in the world, limited only by their lack of internal unity. Any internal unity that was achieved was most probably due to the influence of the Silk Road, which traveled along Central Asia.

During pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, Central Asia was a predominantly Iranian region that included the sedentary Eastern Iranian speaking Bacterians, Sogdians and Chorasmians, and the semi-nomadic Scythians and Alans. The ancient sedentary population played an important role in the history of Central Asia. After expansion by Turkic peoples, Central Asia also became the homeland for many Turkic peoples, including the Kazaks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Uydhurs.

Kazakhstan is at the crossroads of Europe and Asia; historically, the territory of Kazakhstan has been, for centuries, the meeting place of different religions and civilizations. Vedic Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were major faith in Central Asia prior to the arrival of Islam. Its influence is still felt today in such celebrations as Nowruz, held in all five of the “core” Central Asian states.

The discussions at Kazak embassy in 2006 were a backdrop to the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan A. Nazarbayev to convene in Kazakhstan’s capital, Astana, the second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions (CLWTR). The first CLWTR was held in Astana in September 2003 and enjoyed support of representatives of practically all world and traditional religions. So this has become Kazakhstan’s tangible contribution to interfaith and intercultural understanding, harmony and cooperation as a mechanism to maintain regional and global stability.

Ambassador Idrissov invited all faith leaders to participate in the 2nd CLWTR in Astana in September 2006. However, I was unable to participate due to prior commitments. Dr. Homi Dhalla from India represented Zoroastrians at that Congress.

Kazakhstan population is made up of representatives of more than 130 ethnic groups and 46 religious denominations. Kazakhstan believes that the concepts of interfaith and interethnic accord and dialogue cannot be considered in isolation. Without harmony in interethnic relations one cannot expect serious dividends from the policy of enhancement of

interfaith dialogue.

It is for this reason that preservation of interfaith and interethnic accord and tolerance is one of the priorities of government’s policy. Since gaining its independence, Kazakhstan has been carrying out a balanced state policy in the area of interfaith relations. Kazakhstan is a secular state where religion is separated from the state. Yet the country has created conditions for spiritual revival and has guaranteed constitutional freedoms of worship and religion.

Since that first meeting in 2006 in Washington DC, Kazakhstan Embassy and Kazakhstan UN Mission have invited Zoroastrians to many interfaith, cultural, and other events in Washington DC and New York. In 2013, Homi Dhalla from India and I were invited to participate in the International Research and Practice Conference in Astana on September 25, 2013 commemorating the 10th anniversary of the CLWTR. Many papers were presented at that meeting to move to the next step.

We were entertained with traditional Kazakh dances and music at a reception banquet in the evening for the participants. Before the conference began, I had the honor to present a replica of Cyrus Cylinder on behalf of FEZANA to the people of Kazakhstan, which was received by Mr. Kayrat Mami, Chairman of the Senate, Republic of Kazakhstan.

Work is under way to institutionalize the CLWTR. The objective is for the Congress to function as permanent international organization, which implements decisions taken by influential spiritual leaders. The city of Astana has launched a major construction project, a Palace of Peace and Accord. That structure will house the headquarters of the CLWTR, an institute of Civilizations and a large theological library for global religious studies.

Homi D Gandhi is Vice President of FEZANA, Co-Chair of the UN -NGO committee and Co-Chair of Interfaith Activities Committee. He is also FEZANA NGO’s Main Representative at the UN

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BALKH THE HOLY LAND

FARIBORZ RAHNAMEON

Given the knowledge that result in goodness
Gained through the mind
Truly gives righteousness

Vishtasp desired for his people and
Decreed that truly Wisdom shall rule and
That those words should be carried out by all grades
Gatha HA 28.7 (FR)

Zarathustra left his home town in search of a people who would understand him. His quest took him to the court of King Vistasp. In the Gathas we read that Vistasp accepts Zarathustra's teachings and decrees that "Wisdom" shall rule in his Kingdomⁱ and everyone was to follow this mantra without exception.

Vishtaspe was the king of Ancient Balkh which consisted of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Khorasan (northern Iran) and northern Afghanistan. In the Avesta we see that Zarathustra was engaged in his research near Lake Hamoun on the border of modern day Iran and Afghanistan. There he designated 63 degrees longitude as the natural Meridian, Nim Rooz (Mid-Day)ⁱⁱ. According to Mehr Yasht; when the sun (Mithra) is in the mid day position at this location the rays of the sun (the arms of Mithra) are spread all over the hemisphere,ⁱⁱⁱ from Japan and Australia to Europe and the western most regions of Africa. Unlike the prime meridian at Greenwich which has no scientific significance. Nim Rooz is based on science.

The Continuing Struggle to Retain a Proud Legacy

As the Arabs who invaded Iran came to these countries with less force and strength, the people of Tajikistan were spared and were able to preserve their Aryan heritage. After the initial Arab occupation the Samaanians who were of Sassanian lineage, ruled Balkh for about two centuries (819-1005 CE). They restored their ancient culture and language, and called their language "Tajik". Today Tajik is spoken from Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan to Nim Rooz in Afghanistan. It is a purer form of Persian and follows the Avesta grammar.

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Tajikistan has been continuously celebrating its ancient heritage. During the early days of independence, groups of Tajiks visited Iran and India in search of fellow Zarathusties hoping that they would help them reestablish their ancient faith. During the 70 years of Soviet rule, practice of religion was forbidden, they needed books and guidance. Sadly, the Tajiks were not treated well in either country; they returned home heart broken and empty handed.

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The Tajikistan civil war ended in 1997, during which time the Islamists had tried to take over the newly independent country. President Emomali Rahmon, who was elected as head of government in 1992, has diligently tried to revive their ancient culture. President Rahmon writes in his biography:

“Not infrequently in those hard times I recited in my mind Zarathustra’s call for ‘goodness in thoughts, word and deed’. During the authoritarian regime when it became common practice that all the work in the collective farm were ordered by the commanding voice of the chairman, the wisdom of Zarathustra’s precept quite often saved me from acting in a manner which otherwise I would have afterwards deeply regretted. At other moments when I was about to loose my temper and let some rude word escape my lips, the precepts of Zarathustra would always help me regain my composure.”

He further writes “My thought go back to Zarathustra who created the immortal Avesta, the **first prophet of the Tajiks** whose trace on earth has not been erased by the dust of millennia and the ashes of the countless wars.”

Poignant *Zarathusti* Events Largely Unnoticed by the International Community



Fig 1 Zarathushtra enacted in Kulob Stadium - Celebration of Revival of Aryan Civilization at the 2700 years old city of Kulob, Tajikistan

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Tajikistan initiated the registration of Now Rooz with UNESCO. They celebrated 2003 as the year of “Zarathushti Civilization” and 2006 as the year of “Revival of Aryan Civilization”. Unfortunately only a hand full of Zarathushties, including myself, visited Tajikistan for these ceremonies.

The celebration in 2006 lasted 4 days, from the 7th to the 10th of September. The highlight of the celebrations was the International Symposium, which was dedicated to the year of the Aryan Civilization. Forty five speakers from all over the world presented their papers on Aryan Civilization, which were subsequently published. The Independence Day concert, which was a continuous performance of dance, music and songs, started with a song that said, “**We are the heirs of Avesta, we are the fire of Zarathushtra**”. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=widpn9lsp6A>



Figure 2. Sudreh Pushi (Novjote) of father and daughter in Tashkent. Priests from India Ervad Faramroze Mirza and Ervad Khushrow Madon. Photograph the author

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The other event was the celebration of the 2700 year history of the ancient Aryan city of Kulob, the highlight of which was a musical play in which Zarathushtra appeared in the sport stadium with hundreds of young girls and boys singing and dancing around him carrying Avesta written on cowhide.

On the walls of Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, were murals of Zarathushtra, the Fravahar and the Avesta on cowhide, along with the images of other proud sons and daughters of the ancient Aryan civilization from - Shah Jamshid, Kurosh and Daryush, upto the present day.

Wherever people learned that we were Zarathushties, the common question asked was, how can they return to their ancient faith. In this short trip, with no preplanning, a total of 45 Sedreh Poushi (Novjote) were performed in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by two Mobeds from Bombay under the auspices of the Zoroastrian



Figure 3. Kakh e Arbab (Palace of Arbab) in Khujand, Tajikistan. This is a portrait of the Arbab –and his Sedreh.. The theatre in this palace was used by the president for his first inauguration. The Arbab was a landlord who was made the head of the community cotton farm and factory during communist era.

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College of Sanjan. When I asked the lady professor of history, who had her Novjote performed, the reason for her decision. She said:

“My grandfather had a small metal box which was very dear to him and nobody was allowed to touch it, he had some papers in it which he read privately, after he died my father opened the box and found Avesta prayers in it. We realized that my grandfather was a Zarathusti and had kept it private due to unfavorable circumstances. Since then I have always been a Zarathushti at heart and now seeing the opportunity I decided to make it official”.

Later, in a village high in the mountains, the village chief lifted his shirt and showed his Sedreh and Kushti when he was told that his visitors were Zarathusties. In another moving incident, a professor of English, who had his Novjote performed years ago when visiting India, seeing the presence of the two mobeds in his hometown Khujand, decided to have the ceremony performed for his entire family, including his grand children.



Figure 4. Hushang Cultural Centre, near Khujand, Good thoughts, good words, good deeds written in Tajik and Avesta script. Photograph the author

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In the ancient city of Istaravshan near Khujand Dr.Abtin Sasanfar a philanthropist from Paris has built a cultural centre, Near the entrance to the city of Istaravshan there was a small hill which had some very ancient ruins on it. To keep these ruins safe the authorities had built a modern gateway as an entrance to the ruins. The mayor of the city requested that a huge Afrigan be donated to the city so he could place it in the center of the gateway and keep it lighted every night with gas fire.

In the city center, a local architect by the name of Huseynzode Abdumanon had built a cultural centre near the city of Istaravshan near Khujand, on his own land, and named it **“Hushang Cultural Centre”**. The Centre’s design was based on Takht e Jamshid. At the top front of the building in Tajik and Avesta script it said, **‘Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds’**. At the top of the doorway was a verse from the Shahnameh in Persian and in cuneiform script.

A Sectarian and Religious Tug-of-War

We were invited to two marriage ceremonies during our stay, one in Dushanbe and one in Kulob. In neither of the ceremonies was any priest or Mullah present, based on their ex-Soviet custom only the official from the office of the registry of marriages was there to register the marriage. Taking advantage of the lack of religious customs the government of Iran had sponsored the marriage of 250 young couples in one day during the festivities, and performed it in accordance to Islamic customs. We were told that every year Iran sponsored such marriages by luring them with valuable gifts.

As part of the ongoing efforts by outsiders to weaken Tajik heritage and culture, the Saudi government had promised that any Tajik woman who would wear the burkha would be paid hundred dollars per month. This was a very tempting offer considering that the average wage in Tajikistan was twenty dollar. The President in his speech in Kulob reminded the Tajik women that their dress was their national heritage and they should preserve it at all cost.

In the year 2010 a proclamation was made that any mosque that was built without proper building permission had to be either converted into a library or a gym or raised to the ground. In the city of Dushanbe alone 200 mosques were reported shut down.^{iv}

Tajikistan is land locked with 93 percent of the country being mountainous. Their economy is weak and money can do wonders. Agha Khan has wisely injected millions of dollars in the Tajikistan economy by building schools, universities and hospitals, making inroads into the mind and heart of the youth.

This ancient land, that over 3752 years ago adopted Zarathushtra as its own son and opened their heart and mind to his teachings is in the process of being lost. History is being repeated.

Opportunities Abound in Tajikistan for Investors and Individuals

Zarathushti organizations, rather than encouraging its members to trade in countries that prohibit public discussion of Zarathushti religion, where the use of the word ‘Persian Gulf’ is a crime, should instead promote and encourage every Zarathushti businessperson to strongly consider investing in this holy land where Zarathushtra once walked. There are limitless opportunities and skilled labor is cheap. Let’s not forget that Zarathushtism is not about amassing wealth; it is about achieving Khordad (Perfection) in what you do best and becoming Amordad (being remembered for the good deeds).^v

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The Zarathushti youth, particularly those in Iran, who are denied opportunities in their country,^{vi} should explore the possibility of setting up small-scale industries and business in Tajikistan.

It is only through education that these great people can realize their dream. To begin with: Every Zarathushti professor should volunteer their time to teach in one of the universities in Tajikistan and in the process help to explore the possibility of further cooperation.

Scholarship funds should be set up to help Tajik students get higher education, if possible, in India.

Concise information on the Gathas should be written in Cyrillic script and distributed to those who seek information and guidance.

Volunteer Mobeds should routinely travel to Tajikistan and perform Novjotes.

Help and guidance should be given to set up Anjumans.

Pilgrimage tours must be organized to this holy land where Zarathushtra once lived and composed his Gathas.

The World Congress/Youth Congress should be held in Tajikistan, where Believers can experience the land where Zarathushtra introduced his Gathas.

*Let us be Faredoon, imprison Lahaak,^{vii} re-educate ourselves, stop
whining, and be brave.
May Wisdom Prevail*

i Establishment of Mazdianism

ii http://ahura.homestead.com/Revive_the_Nou_Rouz_Table.pdf

iii Mehr Yasht Kardeh 103-104

iv <http://wwrn.org/articles/30042/?&place=russia-cis§ion=judaism>

v http://ahura.homestead.com/Revive_the_Nou_Rouz_Table.pdf

vi <http://wwrn.org/articles/36525/>

vii http://ahura.homestead.com/files/wzc2013/GATHAS_THE_BEACON_IN_THE_21st_CENTURY.pdf



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Fariborz is the president of the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia (ZSBC), the Chair Person of Arbab Rostam Guiv Trust – Vancouver, and Director of WZCC and Chapter Chair of WZCC BC.

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IS THERE A ZOROASTRIAN REVIVAL IN PRESENT DAY TAJIKISTAN?

VIRAF SOROUSHIAN

In September 2010, I embarked on a journey to Tajikistan where I would stay for ten months. I had managed to convince the US government to award me a Fulbright Scholarship to research issues concerning food security and agricultural development in the only Persian-speaking former Soviet Republic.¹ Whatever the reason was, I was excited to experience a world so drastically different from the one in which I grew up. During the months leading up to my trip, the conversations I had with members of the Zoroastrian community were often the same. Most were perplexed with why any sane individual would choose to travel to that region. Then they would recall having heard that the country was home to a sizeable and growing Zoroastrian population. The number of people who mentioned this, was enough to give it the appearance of truth. But it proved to be nothing more than a rumor; one stemming from the brief existence of a small, but highly active and visible group of converts. I confirmed this when I was in the country and met with two Tajik Zoroastrians who informed me that the population was less than 20. Even so, the rumor has endured, and I often find myself informing people that there is in fact no Zoroastrian revival in Tajikistan.

So what is the country's relationship with Zoroastrianism? The answer is cast in the religious *identity crisis* that the country is enduring. The 20th century is where this crisis first emerged. For centuries, Tajiks have been predominantly Muslim; official statistics capture the present population of Tajikistan at 90% Muslim² (though I would put the numbers even higher).² But as a member of the Soviet Union, the ruling communists attempted to expunge religion from society. They were successful to a certain degree; most of the population fell out of touch with religious practice, but they never lost their Islamic identity. After declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country fell into a bloody Civil War with the remnants of the country's communist party fighting against—and eventually prevailing over—the Islamist and democratic reformists. The war put Tajikistan's ruling government at odds with the country's Islamic elements. Animosity toward the religion grew stronger with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in neighboring Afghanistan, which they feared was creeping across their border. Viewing Islam as a major threat to its existence, the government actively sought to minimize its handprint. Some of its actions were strikingly similar to pre-Revolutionary Iran.

This is where Zoroastrianism fits in. The government of Tajikistan, in an attempt to downplay its Islamic ties, harkened back to its Zoroastrian roots.³ Tajikistan was the main sponsor of UNESCO recognizing the year 2003 as the 3000th anniversary of Zoroastrian religion and culture. It planned extravagant events to commemorate the occasion. In a chapter of a book authored by the country's president, he speaks of being deeply influenced by the Gathas in his formative years and makes an impassioned case for Prophet Zarathustra's birthplace being along the Tajikistan/Afghanistan border.ⁱⁱ One of the country's patriotic anthems has a reference to the nation's Zoroastrian roots.

The general population reveres its pre-Islamic past as well. After all, their Persian identity distinguishes them from the rest of Central Asia. They are quick to mention the shared cultural heritage (*ham-farhang*) between

1 Since religions was not the subject of my research, this article is a series of observations I had while living in the country. I offer them to you as my musings.

2 The breakdown is 85% Sunni and 5% Esmaili (a progressive sect of Shi'ism). Esmailis are seen as heretic by the religious establishment in Iran, which subscribes to Twelver Shiism.

3 The government also employed harsher tactics to fight back Islamism. Men with beards longer than a fingernail were arrested with their freedom contingent on shaving. Mosques were routinely shut down for not having properly completed the opaque registration process. There are still military operations in Islamist centers of the country.

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Figure 1 Rudaki Statue in Rudaki park Photo the author

Tajiks and Iranians. Their language, Tajik, is a dialect of Farsi infused with Russian words and written using Cyrillic characters.⁴ They celebrate Nouruz, revere Ferdowsi and Rumi, and adore Googoosh. But Zoroastrianism has a very small place in this shared Persian identity. Whereas most Muslim Iranians know the basic tenants of Zoroastrianism and can identify its symbols, Tajiks can do neither. At most, they recognize that at some point their ancestry probably subscribed to the faith.

Even with all the government attempts, the population continued moving closer to Islam as if it were responding to a primal yearning for a religious identity. The Arab Gulf States - led by Saudi Arabia - have been successfully encouraging Sunni Islam as the faith of choice by pouring in money for development assistance as well as for constructing new mosques.

Tajiks practiced their own unique version of Islam.⁵ This makes sense when considering there was little religious freedom for the 69 years under Soviet rule. The Civil War wiped out the remaining elements of the Islamic leadership. As such, most Tajiks do not have a deep understanding of their religion. They can recite a few simple prayers from the Quran, but cannot read Arabic. Adding to the complication, it is difficult to find versions translated in Russian or Tajik.⁶ Some basic rules of religion have been relaxed while others are enforced. I drank vodka with spiritual leaders, but never saw pork being served. Like many other sects of Islam, the rights of women suffer. As an example, it is common for a man to take a second wife even though it is illegal under the national law.

Over time, it became evident that



Figure 2 Green Bazaar main market place in Dushanbe. Photo author

How do we reconcile the differences in experiences

between my account and those of other Zoroastrians who ventured to Tajikistan and may have met Tajiks eager to return to Zoroastrianism First, I would point to the purpose of our visits. Most Zoroastrians who I know that traveled to Tajikistan did so with the intention of uncovering the nation's Zoroastrian roots. These individuals were likely limiting their interactions to those that looked more favorably on Zoroastrianism or who were spiritually curious.

On the other hand, religion was not the purpose of my trip, so I did not emphasize it. In fact, I decided not to openly identify as a Zoroastrian. This was largely because of the location of my research sight. The Rasht Valley was home to the Islamist opposition movement during the Civil War and remains one of the most religiously conservative parts of the country. If it came up, I would discuss it. Otherwise, I was fine with most

4 The rest of Central Asian languages are Turkic-based.

5 This does not apply to Ismaili population which possesses a tightly knit global network that establishes a cohesive religious identity.

6 This was the case during my time in the country. It may have changed since 2011.

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people assuming whatever they wanted.⁷ What I found was Tajiks throughout the country emphasized their identity as “musalman” (muslim). Participating in a haj was highly venerated. Most formal events (not sponsored by the government) featured a recitation from the Quran. All these signs point to a reverence for Islam in the “Tajik Street”.

Or perhaps they emphasized their Islamic roots because they thought I was Muslim. I observed that many Tajiks tended to be ingratiating. It was largely a matter of their hospitable nature, but there were definitely people who did it to get on the good side of a foreigner who could be their ticket to a better life experience. I mainly observed this in terms of my dual cultural identity. When people thought I was American, they would pronounce their affection for my homeland and insist I help them travel there. But when they believed I was Iranian, they would laud Iran’s defiance of the west and praise Ahmadinejad (former President of Iran) for standing up for all Muslims worldwide. It is possible that if I played up my Zoroastrian roots, I would probably get a lot more interest in the religion.

Beyond their religious identity crisis, Tajiks possess a fascinating and charming culture. Its cuisine, traditional dress, textiles, and sporting events are distinctly Central Asian. Yet, Tajiks stand out for synthesizing elements of neighboring regions: Persia, Russia, and South Asia. The main attraction is the people, who are friendly, curious, and helpful. They are genuine in their hospitality, even when they do not have much.

With such wonderful people, it pains me to see their nation languishing. It is at the mercy of geopolitical forces and an authoritarian leader with few concerns beyond maintaining an iron grip on the nation and filling his family’s coffers. Tajikistan is propped up by remittances from Tajiks working abroad (mainly Russia) and foreign assistance. Both can easily be cut off. It is a situation not too different from other developing countries. Even with such difficult circumstances, Tajiks take pride in who they are and where they came from.



Figure 3 Viraf Soroushian with his host family in Dushanbe. Photo author



Viraf Soroushian spent ten months in 2010-2011 on a Fulbright Scholarship in Tajikistan studying rural development and food security. He received his BA from UC San Diego and MA from Johns Hopkins University. Viraf presently lives and works in Washington DC.

⁷ In fact, even expatriates made their own assumptions. In one instance, I had a foreign diplomat invite me to speak to a group of Tajik students about being Muslim in America. When I informed him that I wasn’t Muslim, he insisted saying, “You are close enough.”

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The Death Of Yazdegerd III at Merv

JENNY ROSE

The area around Merv in modern southeastern Turkmenistan is part of a large oasis fed by the River Murghab. The region has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. The city of Old Merv forms a huge archaeological site in the oasis, parts of which date back to the 6th century BCE, when the Ancient Persians built a citadel from which to rule the country known as 'Margush' in the Bisutun inscription.

The Achaemenid city was extended by the Seleucids in the late 3rd century, when it was known as *Antioch Margiana*. It was then occupied by the Parthians, who increased the thickness of the surrounding walls, and who brought the Roman soldiers captured in the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE to the city, apparently to help out with the grape harvest! Under the Parthians, the oasis city of Merv became one of the main centers for Silk Road commerce and crafts.

Persian-language accounts of important figures at the court of the Sasanian king *Khosrow I* (r. 531-579 CE) note that several came from Merv; these include *Bozorgmehr*, the legendary vizier, and the physician *Borzuya* (*Burzoe*).

Under Sasanian rule, many people of different religions lived within the fortified walls of the growing city. Evidence has been discovered of a late 4th century CE Buddhist monastery and stupa, a large Christian presence, and "Zoroastrian excarnated human remains which had been carefully re-interred within the fortification system."¹

By the time of *Yazdegerd III* (r. 632- 651), the oasis was at the center of a highly developed irrigation agriculture that enabled the cultivation of summer and winter crops. It was to this outpost of the empire, with its fortress city that,

¹ See St. John Simpson, "Suburb or slum? Excavations at Merv (Turkmenistan)" in *Current research in Sasanian Archaeology, Art and History*, ed. D. Kennet and P. Luft. Iran Heritage Foundation, 2008: 65-78; p. 66.



Figure 1. Old City of Merv, parts date to 6th century BCE



Figure 2. Reinforced city walls at Merv



Figure 3. Statue of Buddha found at Merv

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according to *Ferdowsi*, the young king – having been pursued across the breadth of his empire by the Arab Muslim invaders - made a last, valiant stand against the enemy.

THE DEATH OF YAZDEGERD III AT MERV

The story of the death of Yazdegerd III is one of the most poignant and sorrowful moments in Ferdowsi's epic narrative poem, the *Shahnameh*. This 'Book of Kings' sets out to recount the rulers of Iran from its mythical beginnings: the demise of its last king brings the chronicle to a close.

Yazdegerd, betrayed by Mahuy, the Sasanian governor of Merv, and far apart from his loyal troops, took refuge in a mill by the river, where he sat on the bare ground, wondering what his next move should be. Suddenly, the door of the mill opened, and the miller came in with a bundle of dried grass on his back. He let out a cry of astonishment when he saw a warrior like a tall cypress tree sitting despondently on the dirt floor, wearing a royal diadem on his head, and clothes of shimmering Chinese brocade. The miller exclaimed: *"Oh sire, whose face shines like the sun, what are you doing here in my mill? Who are you, and why are you sitting here in the dust and straw?"*

The king replied that he was one of the Persians who had fled from the army of Turan. Perturbed, the miller offered his visitor some barley bread and herbs that grew alongside the stream. Now the king had not had any food for three days, and was very hungry, but before he would eat, he asked the miller to find a sacred barsom, so that he could pray before his meal. The miller set off to find a barsom, but when the village headman heard his tale, and realized the identity of this mighty warrior in the mill, he sent the miller straight to Mahuy. Mahuy said to the miller, *"Go straight back to the mill, and cut off the man's head. If you do not, I will cut off your head, and kill all of your family."* All the noblemen surrounding Mahuy gasped with horror and anger at his treachery, warning him that the impact of this evil deed would have terrible repercussions, but Mahuy would not listen. So the miller, filled with shame and fear, made his way back to the mill. There, he gave Yazdegerd the barsom, and while the king was eating his bread, the miller plunged a dagger into his ribs. The king collapsed onto the floor, and his crown fell off his head into the dust.

Mahuy's followers took the king's crown, his royal cloak and other clothing, his boots, and jewels back to their leader, cursing Mahuy all the way. Mahuy ordered the king's body to be thrown into the millpond, where it was spotted by a Christian monk, who recognized the king and raised the alarm in the monastery. Four monks took off their religious robes and dove into the water to drag the young king's corpse to dry land. They tended his body with care, washing his wound and applying unguents. When they had dressed the dead monarch in clothes of yellow brocade, they placed him in a tomb that reached up to the sky.

For the most recent English translation of Ferdowsi's account, see Dick Davis, The Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings (Penguin, 2006), from which the narrative above was adapted.

Bio Jenny Rose see page 33

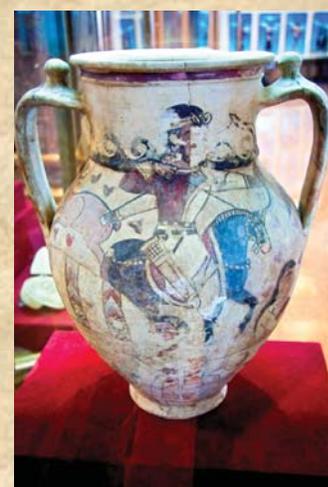
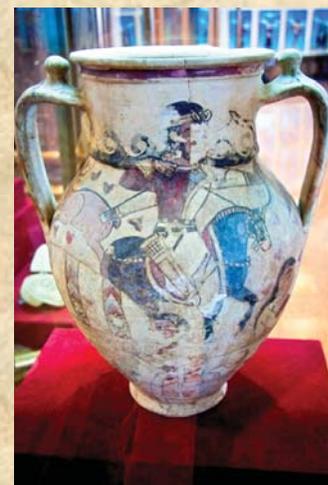
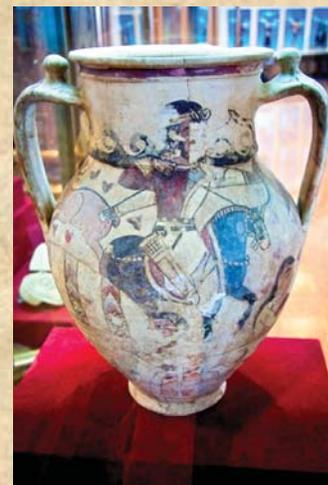


Figure 4. Painted vase at Buddhist monastery in Merv showing a Sasanian style hunting scene.

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Zoroastrianism & Iranian Religions in Ancient Armenia

Kaveh Farrokh

Armenia and Iran share a close if not common spiritual heritage, especially with respect to theology and Zoroastrianism. Armenian Zoroastrians are believed to have been strict dualists, as seen for example with references to *Haraman* (Zoroastrian's evil *Angra Mainyu*), *Deevs* (demons) and *Pariks* (evil female demons).

Map of Persian Armenia of the Sasanian Empire in the 4th to 6th century CE (Source: Public Domain)



While the topic of Zoroastrian links with Armenia has been exhaustively researched and documented by world-class academics (notably Russell, 1987), this paper will endeavor to first provide a sketch of Armenian-Iranian historical links followed by an overview of links with respect to the cults of Mithra and Anahita, Zoroastrianism as well as Zurvansim.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL LINKS

Iranian-Armenian cultural and historical links have existed for thousands of years (Garsoïan, 1997). Armenian dynasties of the Orontids, Artaxiads and Arsacids were all of Iranian origins (Russell, 2011) with much of the Armenian lexicon being composed of Middle Iranian (Pahlavi) vocabulary. Achaemenid documents in particular suggest very close Armenian-Iranian ties. Darius the Great's (522-486 BCE) inscription at Susa describes the Armenians as "*this Persian folk*" (Kent, 1953, p. 136). Herodotus however describes the *Armenioi* as being of Phrygian origin (7.73) and as the 13th satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire (3.93). Armenians are visually depicted at the Apadana at Persepolis (Ghirshman, 1964, p. 271, fig. 216) with Xenophon highlighting the importance of the Armenian "*Palace of the Satrap*" (Anabasis, 4.4.2). Armenian general Dardarshish's support proved decisive in assisting Darius I's securing of the Achaemenid throne (Huart, 2013, p.52). The

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Armenians' favoured status in the Achaemenid Empire is further highlighted by Xenophon's reference to the West Armenian satrap, Tiribazus, being "...a friend of the king ... the only man permitted to help the King mount his horse..." (Anabasis, IV, 4). Armenian warriors remained loyal to Achaemenid dynasty's last days where they supported Darius III against Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 3.8.5).

KNIGHTLY LINK



Figure 1. Sassanian metalwork at right depicting Khosrow I Anoushiravan and four Sassanian knights (possibly the Sassanian empire's primary generals). Note the stance of one of the knights from the plate highlighted for reference (Kavehfarrokh.com). Note the figure highlighted on the Surp Neshan Basilica – the parallels of this form (despite the wear of weather over the centuries) with its Sassanian counterparts are virtually exact.

Lang has noted "There is good reason to assert that the Armenians, equally with the Parsees, rank as the true spiritual heirs of Parthian and Sassanian civilization ..." (Lang, 1983, p.524). One example of such cultural links is seen in the domain of the Partho-Sassanian knightly tradition. Metallic artworks and rock-reliefs depict Sassanian Shahanshah (King of Kings) and the *Arteshtaran* (warriors) of the elite *Savaran* knights hunting their prey on horseback. The royal hunt and ensuing symbolic banquets with silver cups are fundamental expressions of the epic *Farr* or *Xwarrah* (divine glory), symbolized in Sassanian metal works with representations of regal splendor such as the halo, floating ribbons and other symbol (Farrokh, 2014, in Press). A near-exact parallel is found in the Armenian *Phawstos Buzand* (*Buzandaran Patmuthiwnkh*) in reference Sassanian king Shapur II (r. 309-379 CE) and Armenian war-leader and hero Mushel Mamikonean and his white war-steed. Shapur is described as possessing a silver cup depicting Mushel and his white steed, honoring the Armenian during festivities by declaring "Let the rider of the white steed drink" (Phawstos Buzand, V.ii).

ARMAZD/AHURA-MAZDA LINK

Artaxerxes II (405-04 to 359-58 BCE) is known for his invocation of the "trinity" of *Ahura-Mazda*, *Mithra* and *Anahita* (Russell, 1987, p. 262) instead of invoking just the supreme *Ahura-Mazda* by name alone, as did

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Darius I (r. 522- 486 BCE) in the Behistun inscription (Boyce, 2001, p.56). All three entities (Ahura-Mazda, Mithra, Anahita) had strong parallels in Armenia since at least Achaemenid times. The god *Armazd* whose links with *Ahura-Mazda* have often been hypothesized, was especially revered in Armenia. Armenian royalty of the Artaxiad dynasty (189 BCE-12 CE) paid homage to *Armazd* at the royal shrine of Bagawan. Artaxias I (190/189– 160/159 BCE) is recorded as having had appointed a certain “...*Mazan high priest of the god Armazd at Ani...*” (*Moses Khorenatsi*, II.53). The Temple of Ani dated to approximately 1st century CE to mid-4th century CE, was also the primary shrine of the earlier Achaemenid-era Orontid dynasty (549 - 331 BCE). *Armazd* was known as the supreme lord ruling all other lords and provinces of Armenia (Russell, 1987, p.160).

MITHRA LINK



Figure 2. The Temple of Garni in Armenia. An example of Classical Armenian architecture bearing a Hellenic inspiration, this Temple was first ordered to be built in dedication to Mithras by Tiridates I in approximately 66 CE. The god Mithras in time became merged with the Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun) of the Roman Empire (Source: Public Domain).

Mithra is a warrior god of war, fate and victory who fights all evil, the lord of light who fights evil, vice, lies, impurity and darkness (Taraporewala, 1980, p.151; Nigosian, 1993, p.18) and the guardian of contracts (Hinnells, 1988, p.76). These characteristics had strong parallels in Armenian Mithraism, especially with respect to the god's role as the guardian of the covenant (Russell, 1987, p.266). The legacy of Mithra made deep inroads into Armenia a topic that deserves a textbook of discussion, however, a number of important examples serve to illustrate its importance. Known as *Meherr* in Armenia (*Mehr* in Persian), the legacy of this God in Armenia is attested to by Greek sources, such as the Armenian general *Mithraustes* who fought for Darius III at the battle of Gaugamela. *Mithraustes* is believed to be derived from Old Iranian *Mithra-Vahista* (lit. Mithra who is the Best). Strabo (11.14.9) described the Armenians for their talent in raising excellent horses to then send them to Iran for the Mithras celebration - *Mehregan*.

The term *Mithra* continuously appears among Armenian nobility, such as *Mithra-Barzanes*, one of Tigran II's generals. The seventh month of the ancient Armenian calendar was known as *Mehekan*, a name directly derived from *Mithra-Kana* (modern Persian: *Mehregan*). The eighth day of the ancient Armenian calendar was named *Mihr* (*Mehr*). Excavations at the ancient site of Artašat yielded clay plaques with representation of a mythical rider appearing to be “*Mithra the hunter*” (Garsoïan, 1997, p. 15, figs. 3-4). The temple of Garni stands today as perhaps the most enduring legacy of Mithraism in Armenia (Nozari, 2008, p.65).

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ANAHITA LINK



Figure 3, Bronze head and left hand of the statue of Anahit (Anahita) dated to 200-100 BCE. This important find was discovered in the 19th century near the ancient Armenian site of Satala, in modern eastern Turkey. The artifacts are now housed in the British Museum (Source: Public Domain).

Armenia was also host to the cult of goddess *Anahita*, described by Yasht (V) as a picturesque, magnificent, tall and powerful woman (Farrokh, 2013, pp.48-49), mistress of all waters, source of the cosmic ocean (Sarkhosh-Curtis, 1993, p.12), the source of fertility for humans, animals and plants (Yasht, V, 2, 34, 120, 130), and the purifier of the seed of humanity (Hinnels, 1988, p.28). *Anahita* is also the female warrior counterpart of Mithra (Yamauchi, 1990, pp.498-521) who combats evil (Nigosian, 1993, p.18). The Anahita cult spread deeply into Armenia (where she was known as *Anahit*) and Asia Minor, especially during and after the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BCE) (Hanaway, 1982, p. 290-291). Known Armenian *Anahit* temples were located in Artashat (Artaxata), Yashtishat (Ashtishat) (Hoschander, 1921, p. 44) and Erez (Erznka, Hachdeanq, Acilisene) and Armavir although other temples may have existed (Russell, 1987, p. 249). Roman troops are believed to have carried off the great golden statue of *Anahit* in Erez during Marc Antony's invasion of Armenia in 36 BCE (Boyce, 2001, p. 85). An Armenian bronze head of *Anahita* or *Anahit* has survived and is housed presently at the British Museum.

A major spread of the Zoroastrianism, cult of Anahita and Mithraism occurred in the first century CE during the reign of the Parthian descended Tirdat (Tiridates) I (r. 63) (Hacikyan, Basmajian, Franchuk, & Ouzounian, 1999, p.70). Tirdat I's famous journey to Rome for his coronation by Nero at Rome

Figure 4, Statue of Armenian king Tiridates I (r. 63 CE) in Versailles, France Versailles (Courtesy: People of Ar). Of Parthian descent, Tiridates I is known for having widely spread the cult of Anahita, Mithra and Zoroastrianism in Armenia.



Zoroastrians of Central Asia

is notable for: (1) being accompanied by Zoroastrian priests (2) insisting on traveling entire way by land for fear of polluting sea by accident (3) when in Rome, adored the emperor: "...as I do Mithra" and (4) initiating Nero into a number of Zoroastrian rituals (Dio Cassius, 63. 5. 2; Pliny, *N.H.* 30.6.16-17). There is archaeological evidence of Zoroastrian-type temples in what was Greater Armenia, which would have encompassed parts of modern east Turkey.

ZURVAN LINK

Mention must also be made of Zurvanism, an ancient Iranian cult that (like Mithraism) predates Zoroastrianism. In Zurvanism, an entity known as *Zurvan*, who is master of time, is father to both the benevolent *Ahura-Mazda* and malevolent *Angra-Mainyu* (Hinnells, -, p.-). *Zurvan* was known in Armenia. Movses Khorenats'i (*Moses Khorenatsi*) notes that the Biblical *Shem* is in fact *Zruan* (I.6). There is also an Armenian legend of an old man named *Zamank* or *Zuk* (Russell, 1987, p.163). However information on *Zurvan's* legacy in Armenia remains scant.

ARCHITECTURAL LINK



Figure 5. Pictures of a Medieval Armenian Church at Goshavank sent to Kavehfarrokh.com by Professor George Nercessian. This was built on the remains of cyclopean walls, where a Zoroastrian fire temple (Armenian *Atrushan* = Iranian *Atar-Roshan*) originally stood. There are many similar sites in Armenia where Churches were built on top of Zoroastrian fire temples (Pictures courtesy of Professor George Nercessian; Kavehfarrokh.com).

Despite the consolidation of Christianity in Armenia, cultural ties with ancient Iran have endured. Zoroastrian temples of the domed square system resting on four pillars for example may have influence the development of the later Armenian Church with its domed and centrally planned system.(photo above) The famous Armenian Church of Echmiadzzin has in fact a basement area featuring a Zoroastrian style fire temple, a clear indication that the Church was built over a pre-existing Mithraeum or Zoroastrian structure. The Medieval Armenian Church at Goshavank was built on the remains of cyclopean walls, where a Zoroastrian fire temple (Armenian *Atrushan* = Iranian *Atar-Roshan*) originally stood. In addition to ancient Iran's resonance in Armenian Christianity, a small group of Zoroastrian and ancient Iranic type cults have survived in Armenia

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

to this day. These are the “Arewardik” (Children of the Sun) who were never converted to Christianity by St. Gregory (Russell, 2011).

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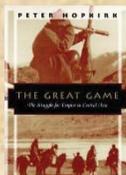
Kaveh Farrokh teaches history at University of British Columbia (UBC) Continuing Studies. He has received numerous citations (including from Wall Street Journal) and awards including Best History Book Award (2008). He has been interviewed by numerous media outlets including the BBC, the History Channel, Armenian national media, the Voice of America Network and the Leonard Lopate Show in New York City. His most recent book “Iran at War: 1500-1988” was published in May 2011.

Zoroastrians of Central Asia

Treasures of the Silk Road

Suggested Reading List

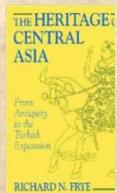
There is a wealth of writing on Central Asia and the Silk Road. This compiled list focuses on the best introductory books for the general interest reader or traveler.



The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia

Peter Hopkirk, Kodansha America, 1990.

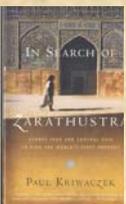
Probably the most popular book on Central Asia, this is the ultimate Great Game book; a detailed account of a century of intrigue and adventure between Great Britain and Russia. Based on meticulous scholarship and on-the-spot research, this gripping narrative recounts the history at the core of today's geopolitics.



The Heritage of Central Asia: From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion

Richard Nelson Frye, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001.

Richard Frye surveys the true history of this much-contested crossroad, touching on the supreme importance of water and oases, analyzing the influence of Zoroastrianism and Islam, and describing in detail a harshly beautiful landscape's various peoples, places, and cultures.



In Search of Zarathustra: Across Iran and Central Asia to Find the World's First Prophet.

Paul Kriwaczek, Vintage Books, 2002.

A fascinating journey through time and across Europe and Central Asia in search of the prophet Zarathustra, this enthralling travel book is also a revelation of the importance of the prophet, and a brilliantly conceived and lucid explication of the belief systems that helped shape the European Enlightenment, the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, and the beginning of the Christian era.



Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane

S. Frederick Starr, Princeton University, 2013.

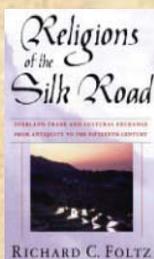
S. Frederick Starr tells the fascinating but largely unknown story of Central Asia's medieval enlightenment through the lives and accomplishments of its greatest minds who built a bridge to the modern world. Long assumed to be Arabs, they were, in fact, from Central Asia drawn from the Persianate and Turkic peoples of a region that today extends from Kazakhstan southward through Afghanistan and from the easternmost province of Iran.



Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China

Annette L. Juliano, Judith A. Lerner, Boris L. Marshak.

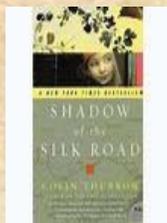
Published in conjunction with the October 2001 exhibition at the Asia Society Museum in New York, this volume illuminates a pivotal epoch in Chinese history, when Buddhism took root in China and trade in exotic goods flourished along the Silk Road. It features 120-plus rare works of art in gold, silver, glass, and clay including a rare depiction of the Zoroastrian funerary rite, the sagdid.



Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century. Richard Foltz, St. Martins Press, 1999.

This book tells the story of how cultural traditions, especially in the form of religious ideas, accompanied merchants and their goods along the overland Asian trade routes in pre-modern times. More than just a conduit along which these religions hitched rides East, the Silk Road was a formative and transformative rite of passage, and no religion emerged unchanged at the end of the journey.

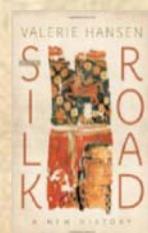
Zoroastrians of Central Asia



Shadow of the Silk Road

Colin Thubron, HarperCollins, 2008.

Making his way by local bus, truck, car, donkey cart, and camel, Colin Thubron covered some seven thousand miles in eight months - out of the heart of China into the mountains of Central Asia, across northern Afghanistan and the plains of Iran into Kurdish Turkey - and explored an ancient world in modern ferment.



The Silk Road: A New History

Valerie Hansen, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Hansen describes the remarkable archeological finds that revolutionize our understanding of these trade routes. She explores seven oases along the road, from Xi'an to Samarkand, where merchants, envoys, pilgrims, and travelers mixed in cosmopolitan communities, tolerant of religions from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism. China's main partners were the peoples of modern-day Iran, whose tombs in China reveal much about their Zoroastrian beliefs.



When Zarathustra Spoke: The Reformation of Neolithic Culture and Religion

By Mary Settegast, Mazda Publishers, Inc. 2005

Mary Settegast uses contemporary archeological techniques to uncover "... a transformative cultural impulse sweeping across Iran, Iraq ... in the last half of the seventh millennium BC." She provides a comprehensive comparison of the archeology of the period with texts from the Zoroastrian "tradition." Well-illustrated and rich with an exhaustive bibliography, When Zarathustra Spoke is a thought-provoking read for those interested in the Neolithic Revolution and how it may relate to the rise of Zoroastrianism.



Zoroastrianism: An Introduction (Introductions to Religion)

Jenny Rose, I. B. Tauris, 2010.

"Jenny Rose's lively and engaging account comprises a very readable, well informed survey of Zoroastrianism and its history. ...I particularly welcomed her valuable discussion of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia. All in all, the book is a fine example of considered synthesis and compression. This is a book one wants to read from beginning to end without putting it down. It will find a warm welcome from students of the subject and their teachers." -- Almut Hintze, Zartoshty Reader in Zoroastrianism, SOAS, University of London

Additional suggestion

"The Silk Road," History Channel, Time: 3:00. Good period costumes, graphics, and local videography with a focus on the silk trade. <http://www.history.com/shows/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us/videos/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us-the-silk-road>

"Zoroastrian monuments in Qoralqalpogiston. Ancient Khorezm Sights (Uzbekistan, Central Asia)." YouTube. Time: 8:28. In the west part of Uzbekistan is an ancient land called Khorezm there many monuments of Zoroastrianism have been preserved to our days. They are ruins of ancient fortresses and walls of the Zoroastrians built of pakhsa (clay). Also has footage of ancient dakhma and fire temple. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MxLpfDj2Ns>

"The Silk Road," 12 episode joint production of NHK (Japan) and China Central Television. First episode is on Chanag-An (Xian). It provides a good overview of the Silk Road, historic sites, people, etc. First episode: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-AqeE2p_ww

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We Zoroastrians in the
Western Diaspora
Have taken for granted
That Zoroastrianism
Is a God Given Right
Regarding the religion
Of Asho Zarathushtra

Once upon a time
In cities of Central Asia
Afghanistan, Khyrgystan, Tajikistan
Just to name a few
Out of blue
When conquering hordes
Occupied the land
Forcing to convert
To a different religion
With threats of death
Hanging over their heads
Some relented
Others resisted for they knew
Faith will see them through

Long ago in these very places
Of Central Asia
Fire temples & Sacred Fires
Were alive with crackling sparks
Leaping up to the highest skies
With sadness in my heart
I hate to say
They are few & far between
'Cause the Wrecking Ball
Of hatred Racism & Bigotry
Did Zoroastrianism in

They still can't practice
Their faith openly
In fear living constantly
They have the will power
Alas! Their hands are tied
"Cause they rather not
Practice Zoroastrianism openly
But rather hide
'Cause they do not
Want Zoroastrianism
To die!

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Dr. Dhun Noria: A Royal Inspiration

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw



From left son Zubin, Dr Dhun Noria, The Duchess of York, Lady Sarah Ferguson, daughter Sabrena and husband Farrokh

On May 10, 2014, in Toronto, Dr. Dhun Noria, an eminent surgical and oncological pathologist, was the recipient of the **Lifetime Achievement Award** of the Scarborough Hospital Foundation for her “impressive, professional accomplishments and commitment to her community”.

FEZANA Journal had an opportunity to talk to her about her life, achievements and future vision of breast health. She fondly recalled her childhood growing up in India. “My early childhood as Dhun Pestonji was in a little town called Raichur in Karnataka. My parents, Pesi and Dina, had seven kids and living in a joint family my fondest memories are of the fun and the games we played in our compound, where we could play cricket with 22 kids and an umpire. My father was an extremely successful businessman with a

heart of gold. He was constantly helping the students finish education, building schools and orphanages and donating them to the local convent. We realized the impact when he passed away and people came to tell us, “Now, who will support us. Mr. Pestonji was always there for us when we were in need.” At Sunday school, we had to volunteer in orphanages, women’s shelters and service clubs. My mother, Dina constantly told us that with the privileges we enjoyed we had an obligation to serve others less fortunate in the community.”

Dhun was marked for success even as a teenager. India’s first Prime Minister, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, presented her with the ‘All India Best Cadet Award’ in the National Cadet Corps in New Delhi. The Zarathushti community is very proud of her achievements, and

Personal Profiles

she is proud of being part of the community and of her identity as a Zarathushti. She says, *"I must tell you that I say my prayers only once a day. More important is the way I lead my life on a daily basis, through good thoughts, good words and good deeds. This is the constant theme whether I am alone or in public. I am a very positive person, whose glass is always half-full [as opposed to half-empty]. I like to look for the best in people and give my very best to every task, project, mission that I take on."*

Dhun graduated with an M.B.B.S. degree from Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. After immigrating to Canada, she continued her training at the University of Toronto, and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in anatomic pathology. She then went on to become a surgical pathologist and began her illustrious career at Toronto General Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital. She qualifies, *"Fortunately, I have never experienced any discrimination in my work or social environment. In fact, my medical education from Osmania University in Hyderabad provided for a very solid background. Right from day one, I was confident enough to present cases at medical rounds, and discuss patient care issues. There are over 40,000 physicians of Indian origin in the US, and most are doing very well."*

She is presently the Chief of Laboratory Medicine and Medical Director of Laboratories at the Scarborough Hospital, one of the largest community hospitals in Canada. Her list of notable achievements includes providing leadership during the restructuring of 44 hospitals in Metro Toronto. She also took the initiative of consolidating the microbiology labs of five hospital sites under one roof thereby achieving economies of scale and improvement in quality. In addition to her medical duties, Dr. Noria currently serves as a trustee of the University Health Network (comprising Toronto General Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto Western Hospital and Toronto Rehabilitation Institute). She also serves on the Toronto Police Services Board, an appointment by former Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Lieutenant Governor of Ontario David Onley. Not one to rest on her laurels, she says of the future, *"My focus is to push the envelope of quality of care, equity of care, timely care closer to a patient's home. I would also like to see patients as partners in*

their health care, rather than just being told that this is the right care."

One of her continued commitments is towards breast health research. The Scarborough World Gala at which Dhun was given her award helped raise \$2 million for the hospital's Cancer Care program. *"I am a two time breast cancer survivor. My initial journey with Breast Cancer was in 1994, it then recurred in 2003. So I've had a number of surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy. All through this I have been blessed to have the best quality care, compassionate docs, nurses and most importantly a very positive outlook and a caring supporting husband, Farrokh and my kids, Sabrena and Zubin. Even when my body was scarred, skin ash grey and I had a bald "Telly Savalas" head, they loved, cared and nurtured me to life. I am eternally grateful to them."* She is quick to point out that there is more to be done, adding, *"Approximately 1 in 8 women will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. Men also get cancer of the breast to a lesser degree. Both men and women should be doing self breast examination and go to their family doctor if they notice any lump, cyst, nipple discharge or other changes. We need the funds for research and innovations, early diagnosis and treatment. Each organisation has a specific mission and role in health care with the ultimate goal of providing the best possible care in a timely fashion."*

In spite of her busy work schedule, Dhun understands the need to have a balanced lifestyle spending time with her family and friends. *"We like fine dining, theatres, and big game fishing as well as travelling. My day is very full with work and play."*

The Duchess of York, Lady Sarah Ferguson, who was the keynote speaker at the award Gala, addressed Dhun in her opening remarks, saying, *"I came today with a great big heart for you, if I may say, Dr. Dhun Noria, and all that you have achieved."* She went on to say that Dhun was an inspiration to her. FEZANA takes this opportunity to add that Dhun Noria is also an inspiration to Zarathushtis worldwide. **

Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane

By Starr, S. Frederick

Reviewed by Richard Foltz Ph.D, Professor and Director,
Centre for Iranian Studies, Concordia University, Canada

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. ISBN-13:
978-0691157733. 696 pp. \$44.13.

Available at FIRES www.fires-fezana.org

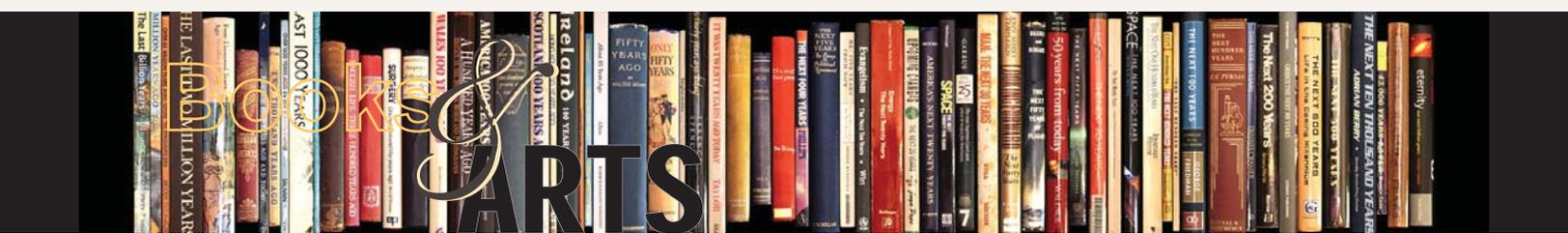
This book does a marvelous job of highlighting the contributions of medieval intellectuals from Central Asia to the history of world civilizations. The author, who is Founding Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies program at Johns Hopkins University, is extraordinarily knowledgeable and widely read on his chosen topic, one which has not previously received such an extensive scholarly treatment. His writing style, moreover, is highly accessible; although it is a scholarly book, the general reader should have no problem in following the narrative or contextualizing the vast parade of historical figures discussed.



Starr's major aim in writing this book is to highlight the *"intellectual effervescence"* which took place in the eastern Islamic world between the founding of the Abbasid Caliphate in 750 CE up to 1150 CE, when he considers a *"cultural and religious crisis"* to have thrown *"the entire enterprise of rational enquiry, logic and Muslim humanism into question"* – largely due, he believes, to the intellectual attacks of Muhammad Ghazali (p. 5). His geographical focus is on the region encompassed by the modern states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, in addition to Iranian Khorasan and Chinese Xinjiang.

Starr illustrates his "Central Asian Enlightenment" with figures in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, optics, medicine, geology, geography, history, anthropology, philosophy, literature and the arts. He chooses not to treat areas such as music or popular culture. Instead he has chosen to focus on urban culture, to the exclusion of the nomadic peoples who played such an important role in Central Asian history. Nor does Starr have much to say about the experiences of women, citing lack of available sources.

In fact, despite these self-imposed limitations, Starr does treat a much broader span in time and space, necessarily so, since the phenomena he discusses neither arose from nor disappeared into a vacuum. His first three chapters give attention to Central Asia in the pre-Islamic period, and the last four continue the narrative beyond the twelfth century into the Ghaznavid, Seljuk, Mongol, and Timurid periods. Thus, in effect the book covers the thousand-year period between about 500 and 1500 CE.



Though Zoroastrianism was not a major force during the “Enlightenment” period posited by Starr, he does give some passing attention to the religion as part of the Central Asian cultural context. Zoroastrianism’s influence on other religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam is noted while qualifying that *“its adherents in Central Asia were never so exclusively committed to it that they did not simultaneously take up other religions that came to their notice”* (p. 72). He also gives brief mentions to surviving Zoroastrian communities under the Arabs (pp. 103-4), the Abbasids (pp. 135-6), and the Seljuks (pp. 412-13).

The occasional small factual errors to be found in this book should be forgiven due to its large scope, and do not detract significantly from its overall value. The only major objection that might be raised is the author’s choice to emphasize Central Asia as a distinct cultural region, which appears to be overstated since it was really just eastern Iran and an integral part of the broader Iranian world. The author does attempt to justify his limited focus by arguing that Central Asia is somehow unique, but the supposedly distinctive features he mentions – such as linguistic dialects (this diversity exists everywhere; a more operative point is that the languages of intellectual production were Arabic and Persian) – are fairly minor and do not, in this writer’s view, adequately support his position.

As early as the tenth century, Sogdian elites were championing Persian, not Sogdian, as against Arabic, and the Turkic peoples who played such an important role in the history of the region could only enter the elite classes by becoming Persianized (just as in other parts of Iran further west) – this remained the case up to the early twentieth century. In short, “Central Asia” is a European construction, not a native one. Starr’s decision to artificially separate Central Asia from the rest of the Iranian world would thus seem to owe more to contemporary geopolitics than it does to historical reality. It is nevertheless a very informative and readable book.

WHO COULD THIS LADY BE



At the Susan B. Anthony House, Rochester, New York, (between Rochester and Seneca Falls) which is converted in a museum, the third floor gallery is filled with photos. In one photo there is a lady dressed in a sari, worn the Parsi way with a net sudra showing over the sari as was the fashion in the 1930s.

Susan B Anthony played a pivotal role in the women’s suffrage movement and was a social reformer in the 1930s. Who could this lady be to be photographed with the suffrages? Would any residents of New York State close to Seneca Falls or Rochester be able to throw some light on this figure in the photo? Contact editor@fezana.org

The Reshaping of Iran from Zoroastrian to Muslim: A History of Cultural Transformation

By Writer, Rashna,
Reviewed by K. E. Eduljee, Vancouver, Canada.

Published The Edwin Mellen Press, UK, USA, Canada
January 2013

Pages 532 Price £109.95 /\$169.95
ISBN-13:978-0-7734-4492-8

Available at FIRES www.fires-fezana.org

Dr. Rashna Writer dedicates her book, *The Reshaping of Iran from Zoroastrian to Muslim: A History of Cultural Transformation*, to the late Mr. Mehraban Faranghi who Writer acknowledges in the book's Preface as the funder of her research in Iranian history. "This led to his financing a five-year Research Fellowship at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University." Writer now holds a Ph.D. from London University.

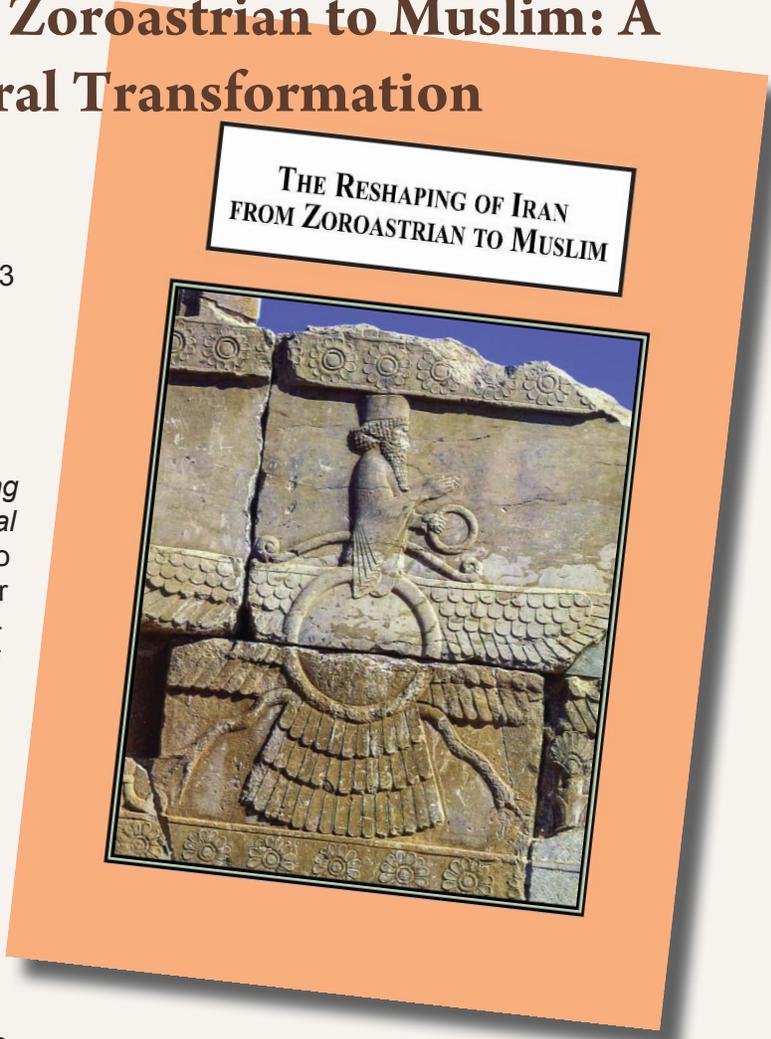
The Reshaping of Iran from Zoroastrian to Muslim covers the history of Iran's transformation from a predominantly Zoroastrian society to one that is now predominantly Muslim. It starts with the final years of Iran under Zoroastrian-Sasanian rule and goes on to cover the Arab-Islamic conquest and subsequent rule of Iran. The book ends with an overview of the living conditions of Zoroastrians and treatment in the current Islamic Republic of Iran while examining how the state of relations between the Zoroastrian and Muslim communities in Iran has changed over the centuries.

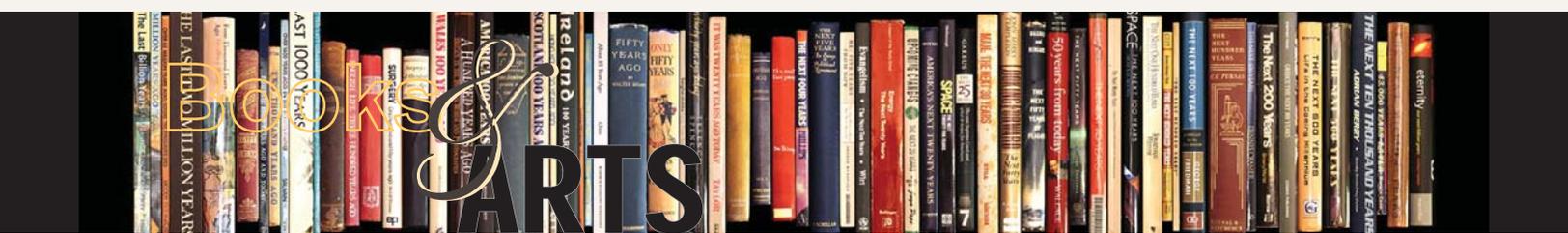
The penultimate paragraph of the book starts with the following words:

"Iran's draconian attitudes towards its Zoroastrian minority were institutionalised by the Safavid shahs, carried forward by the hapless Qajar dynasty, and bolstered by Shi'a law and customs, which remain entrenched in the Islamic Republic's constitution and legal system. ...not much has changed for the original inhabitants of Iran: they remain on the margins of a society in a fundamentalist Islamic state that has historically dismissed them as 'fire-worshipping' pagans."

Earlier in the closing section, Writer has stated with some finality that *"Iran is and will remain a Shi'a Islamic state. Any return to a Zoroastrian Iran is now fantasy."*

The Appendix of the book contains a 1996 letter written by Azarmidokht Bilivani regarding the abduction (kidnapping) in Yazd of her fifteen year old daughter, Shirin Demehni. Shirin was forcibly converted to Islam and 'married' to a Muslim. This reviewer notes that this barbarous practice sanctioned by the state is the continuation of a long-standing practice of abducting minor Zoroastrian girls to be 'married' to a Muslim. In any civilized





country, this would constitute abduction and rape.

Rashna Writer starts her chronicle of events that culminated in the sad state of affairs we have just described, with a catalogue of conditions and events that prevailed in the closing years of Zoroastrian-Sasanian rule of Iran.

According to Writer, one of the principal reasons for the “chaos that enveloped the House of Sasan in its final decades” is the thesis proposed by Parvaneh Pourshariati in the latter’s *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire* regarding “*the centrality of the Parthian dynasts*”. The thesis states that despite the overthrow of the Parthian dynasty by the Sasanians in 224 CE, what followed was a confederate arrangement between the Sasanians and Parthian dynastic families. Writer then gives us several examples of the ensuing dysfunction (our term) when the arrangements between the two houses “*broke down irrevocably*”.

One such example is that of the disagreement between Sasanian King Hormozd IV (579-90 CE) “who fell foul of his immensely influential general Bahram Chubin of the great Parthian Mehran dynasty. The general’s rebellion led to the king’s death, and Khosrow II succeeded his father to the throne.” The Parthian Chubin was only displaced by Khosrow “*with help from the Byzantine emperor Maurice . . .*” “*The far-reaching consequences of Bahram Chubin’s rebellion*” was that it “*Nullified the contract of the Sasanian-Parthian confederacy.*” “*Iran was thus engulfed by a veritable mutiny well before the Arab armies turned their attention to the plateau.*” Thus, the ever present tussle between the Sasanian and Parthian dynastic families had led to the ‘mighty Sasanian edifice’ become vulnerable to an advancing Arab army. In-between the Chubin narrative, Writer also informs us that Khosrow appointed “*12,000 priests to pray at fire-temples throughout the realm.*” It is these nuggets of information that delight us throughout our reading of Writer’s book. Citing Pourshariati, Writer informs us that after the Arab defeat of the Persian armies, the last Sasanian king, Yazdgerd III, fled eastward with a Parthian dynast Farukhzad in charge of his safety. When the pair arrived in Khorasan, the dysfunction between the scions of the two royal houses eventually led to quarrels, a mutiny by Farukhzad and Yazdgerd’s possible murder by Mahuy, the marzban (regional military commander) of Merv (now in Turkmenistan).

We were also interested in Writer’s references to the *mawalis*. When this reviewer was growing up, he frequently heard the term ‘*mawali*’ used as a label for an uncouth ruffian. It was only years later while researching Zoroastrian history that he learned that *mawalis* were the non-Arab enablers or allies of the Arabs. To a Zoroastrian, a *mawali* is a treacherous turncoat who facilitated Arab domination of Iran. Many a Zoroastrian died at the hands of *mawalis* – Iranian and Turkic Muslims. Writer introduces us to the *mawali* in describing their role in the Arab conquest of Khorasan, and then later in her account of the Khorasani *mawali* Abu Muslim who caused the Arab caliphs considerable grief. It is at this point that we are introduced to the developing divisions within Islam – those between the Shi’a and Sunni.

Further along in the book, Writer examines how on the one hand the Iranian desire to maintain a cultural identity separate from that of the Sunni Arabs played in role in the 1501 Safavid dynasty’s decree that Twelver Shiism become the state religion of Iran, and how on the other hand, Shi’a Islam helped to define modern Iran’s unique national and cultural identity.

At the risk of sounding trite, we note the old adage that “those who ignore the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its mistakes.” This reviewer therefore asks if Zoroastrians have learnt anything from the lessons of this tragic phase of their history – one that Dr. Rashna Writer chronicles so thoroughly. Only the future will tell.

K. E. Eduljee is an independent researcher of the Zoroastrian Religion in West Vancouver, BC Canada he maintains the website www.zoroastrianheritage.com and <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.com/>



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COL. KURUSH FIROZE BHARUCHA-REID (fondly called KB), spent his early childhood in Mumbai where he attended 1st standard at Scholar School. His Navjote ceremony was conducted in 1964. In 1973, KB graduated from Cranbrook Schools (Michigan) and enlisted in the US Army's elite Special Forces.

He was commissioned in 1983 as second Lieutenant, Military Intelligence; and in 1984 went to the Republic of Korea as Chief of the Combined Liaison Team, US Army Intelligence and Security Command. In 1987 he served as Special Assistant for Military Affairs for a national-level intelligence agency and later, was Commander, Defense Human Intelligence Service, Bosnia and Director of Current Operations. In 2002, he commanded a HUMINT detachment, deploying to Afghanistan providing support to US Special operations Command and in 2004 deployed again as Commander of a Defense HUMINT Base, supporting Afghanistan's first democratic elections.

In 2005 KB was deployed as Senior HUMINT Advisor, Iraq, returning to the US, serving as Chief of the Military Group and Senior Department of Defense Instructor, Interagency strategic intelligence training institution. In May 2009 he assumed command of the Army Field Support Center.

In 2011, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Contingency base, Kabul, renamed Camp K.B. Reid in honor of his memory, and the newly established DIA training facility in Norfolk, VA. dedicated as the Reid Center. Both now closed. Selected Army Soldiers and civilians are now awarded the Colonel Kurush Bharucha-Reid Award for Excellence- HUMINT.

In recognition of his services he was awarded and decorated with: The Defense Superior Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal with one Oak leaf Cluster, Defense Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal with one Leaf Cluster, Army Achievement Medal, and the Ranger, Special Forces Pathfinder, a member of military group Send Me.

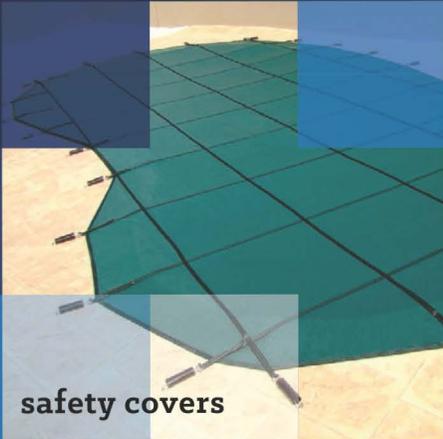
On May 25, 2010, KB died of Cancer and was laid to rest with full military Honors Funeral at Arlington National Cemetery. Brig (Rtd) Ervad Behram Panthaki led the funeral procession with the Army Chaplain and recited selected passages from the Gathas. For the first time in Military history a Farohar symbol graces the gravestone at Arlington National Cemetery.

KB's accomplishments add to those of his grandparents (Col. Phiroze B. Bharucha, FRCS, OBE, DSO, VHS, and Medical Director, Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital and Pilloo Phiroze (Karaka) Bharucha, who pioneered the first free blood bank in Lahore, India), his great great-grandfathers Dosabhai Framjee Karaka editor Jame Jamshed, and Sorabjee Shapoorjee Bengalee, C.I.E champion of rights of widows to remarry.

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