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## Traces of Buddhist Art in Sogdiana

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# Traces of Buddhist Art in Sogdiana

By

Matteo Compareti

Venice, Italy

It is commonly accepted—on both literary and archaeological bases—that Sogdiana was never part of the Kushan Empire (c. 50 BCE–233 CE). According to the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian (second century BCE), Sogdiana was occupied briefly by the Yuezhi confederation between 133 and 129 BCE, but then it was abandoned and became a buffer state between the Kushans and the nomads.<sup>1</sup> It was after the formation of the Kushan Empire that Buddhism began to be widely diffused beyond the Hindu Kush and the Pamir. There were two paths for the Buddhist missions in Asia: the first was from Southern India into Ceylon and Indochina, the second through northwest India, Bactria-Tokharistan, Sogdiana, Ferghana, the Tarim Basin, and onto China and beyond.<sup>2</sup> The latter path was certainly favored by the presence of a stable kingdom that controlled trade along the so-called “Silk Road,” and whose sovereigns supported non-Brahmanical religions.

The presence of Mazdean and Buddhist beliefs in Sogdiana is mentioned in the *Tangshu* (or “History of the Tang”),<sup>3</sup> and it is impossible to deny the importance of the

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<sup>1</sup> See: P. Cannata, *Sulle relazioni tra India e Asia Interna nelle testimonianze cinesi*, 2006, pp. 31–32; Yu Taishan, “A Study of the History of the Relationships between the Western and Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Western Regions,” 2006, pp. 3–16.

<sup>2</sup> See: E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adoption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 1959. The path of Buddhism through Central Asia to China was seriously criticized by the same E. Zürcher, one of the greatest scholars on Buddhism in China: E. Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region,” 1990. On the diffusion of Buddhism even before the Kushans, specifically in the period of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka: R. E. Emmerick, “Buddhism in Central Asia,” 1987, p. 400. See also: P. Daffinà, “Sulla più antica diffusione del Buddismo nella Serindia e nell’Iran Orientale,” 1975.

<sup>3</sup> See: E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kieu (Turks) Occidentaux*, 1903, p. 135.

Iranian element in the fortunes of Buddhism in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> However, the Chinese sources should be used with extreme care, because the Sogdians were very skilled in the transmission of false information.<sup>5</sup> However, it is impossible, with the present state of our knowledge, to ascribe the few traces of Buddhism in Sogdiana to the benevolent attitude of the Kushans towards this religion.<sup>6</sup>

The Buddhist literary works in Sogdian had been translated from Chinese since the sixth century.<sup>7</sup> The specific religious terminology originally taken from Sanskrit appears in Sogdian, filtered through Chinese.<sup>8</sup> The inscriptions found in Sogdiana proper that refer to Buddhism are very few, and they were found in Panjakand and among the Mount Mug documents.<sup>9</sup>

Numerous followers of the *Dharma* can be found among the Sogdians of the Central Asian colonies, in China<sup>10</sup> and probably in India as well.<sup>11</sup> In particular, we know China played a key role as the protector of Buddhist kingdoms in Central Asia in the Tang period (618–906) up until the battle of Talas (751) and the An Lushan–Rokhshan rebellion (755–756). In fact, the Tang armies constituted a convincing deterrent against the enemies of Buddhism exactly as the Kushans did in the first centuries CE.<sup>12</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> See: A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'Évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman," 1974; R. E. Emmerick, "Buddhism Among Iranian Peoples," 1983, pp. 959–962; R. E. Emmerick, "Buddhism in Central Asia," 1987; D. A. Scott, "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," 1990; R. E. Emmerick, "Buddhism among Iranian Peoples," i. "In pre-Islamic Times," 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Also in X. Tremblay, the information about Buddhism in sixth-seventh-century Sogdiana is false "mais convient aux marchands sogdiens de Chine": X. Tremblay, *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde*, 2001, p. 2, n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See: É. De La Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens*, 2002, p. 84. On Sogdian Buddhism see: M. N. Walter, *Sogdians and Buddhism*, 2006. The ideas expressed by M. Walter are arguable in some parts.

<sup>7</sup> See: D. N. MacKenzie, "Buddhist Terminology in Sogdian: a Glossary," 1971; N. Sims-Williams, "Indian Elements in Parthian and Sogdian," 1983; X. Tremblay, *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde*, 2001, pp. 69–71, 203–206; R. Kaschewsky, "Das Sogdische-Bindeglied zwischen christlicher und buddhistischer Terminologie," 2002.

<sup>8</sup> See: N. Sims-Williams, "Indian Elements in Parthian and Sogdian," 1983, p. 138; X. Tremblay, *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde*, 2001, pp. 69–71. In eighth-century Sogdian art there are several hints of Chinese Buddhism of the Tang period (M. M. Rhie, *Interrelationships between the Buddhist Art of China and the Art of India and Central Asia from 618–755 A.D.*, 1988, pp. 23–28; F. Grenet, "Vaiśravaṇa in Sogdiana. About the Origins of Bishamon-ten," 1995/96). Loanwords in Sogdian borrowed from Sanskrit exist and refer especially to trade, without particular link to Buddhism: N. Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Merchants in China and India," 1996b, pp. 49–50.

<sup>9</sup> See: T. K. Mkrtichev, "Buddizm v Sogde," 2002a, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> See: B. I. Marshak, "The Sogdians in Their Homeland," 2001, p. 232.

<sup>11</sup> The spread of Buddhism among the Sogdians with all the related problems is admirably summarized in: R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia. From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion*, 1998, p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that during the reign of Kanishka (c. 78–130), precisely in 90–91, the Kushans in open contrast with the Han Empire penetrated as far as the Tarim Basin, apparently for futile reasons: P. Cannata, *Sulle relazioni tra India e Asia Interna nelle testimonianze cinesi*, 2000, pp. 38, 41–42.

Tang China position can be attributed to the Brahmanical reaction in the Indian subcontinent against Buddhism and Jainism, a situation culminating in the almost complete disappearance of the religion of the Enlightened in India, with the exception of Bengala.<sup>13</sup> But this region was completely isolated and surrounded by unfriendly Brahmanical domains, so the Buddhist kingdoms of Central Asia turned to the Tang as the natural protectors of their religion since Buddhism had become the predominant belief in China during the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian (684–705). The regions of Central Asia under Tang rule (more or less nominally) were strongly influenced by the Chinese element in their artistic production: the clearest result of this situation was the sinicization of faces portrayed in art, especially in Buddhist countries.<sup>14</sup> In Sogdian art (in a non-Buddhist sphere) the sinicization of human faces was not common. On the contrary, this motif can be noted in the eighth-ninth century paintings of Ustrushana, a Sogdian-culture region of Transoxiana converted to Islam only quite late, developing around modern Khojand (Tajikistan), that is to say, closer to the Tang empire borders than to the Sogdian motherland.<sup>15</sup>

Although the evidence is scanty, the existence of Buddhism among the Sogdians during the third century is clear from the available data. These are the references to the Iranian missionaries and translators in the Chinese sources.<sup>16</sup> Among them and particularly important is, for instance, the mention of Kang Senghui, a monk active in the third century who was born into a Sogdian family that transferred from the region of Samarkand to India and then Tonkin.<sup>17</sup> In 247 he arrived in Nanjing and started his career

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<sup>13</sup> See: G. Verardi, "Images of Destruction. An Enquiry into the Hindu Icons in Their Relation to Buddhism," 2003.

<sup>14</sup> See: G. Verardi, "Diffusione e tramonto del Buddismo in Kirghisistan," 2002; G. Verardi and E. Paparatti, *Buddhist Caves of Jāghūrī and Qarabāgh-e Ghaznī, Afghanistan*, 2004, pp. 100–102.

<sup>15</sup> See: N. N. Negmatov, "O zhivopisi dvorca Afshinov Ustrushany (Predvaritel'noe soobshchenie)," 1973, figs. 4–8, 12–14.

<sup>16</sup> For a recent and much updated study on the spread of Buddhism among the Iranians see: D. A. Utz, "Aršak, Parthian Buddhists, and «Iranian» Buddhism," 1999.

<sup>17</sup> See: E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adoption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 1959, p. 23; R. Shih, *Biographies des moines éminents (Kao seng tchouan) de Houei-kiao. Première partie: biographies des premiers traducteurs*, 1968, pp. 20–31; É. De La Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens*, 2002, pp. 77–80. The name "Kang" is a clear reference to Samarkand. In fact, the Sogdians settled in China had adopted as a surname a character that referred to a specific part of Sogdiana, and they were generally called "The Nine Families Hu": K. Shiratori, "A Study on Su-T'ê or Sogdiana," 1928; X. Trembaly, *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde*, 2001, pp. 134–135, n. 228; É. De La Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens*, 2002, p. 125; É. De La Vaissière and É. Trombert, "Des Chinois et des Hu. Migration et intégration des Iraniens orientaux en milieu chinois Durant le haut Moyen Âge," 2004. On

as a translator. Kang Senghui was certainly Buddhist (and so, probably, was his family), but these references concern Sogdian immigrants. In the present study only Sogdiana itself is considered, although some conclusions will be proposed regarding the situation of Buddhism in Bukhara, Samarkand, and Panjakand in the period preceding the coming of Islam.

## The sources

Islamic sources do not give detailed information on Buddhism in Sogdiana. Tabari (tenth century) tells of the presence of a "temple of divinities" and of a "fire temple" in a village a few kilometres east of Bukhara.<sup>18</sup> According to the famous scholar W. Barthold, the first mosque in Bukhara would have been built by Qutayba ibn Muslim in 712/713 in place of a Buddhist temple;<sup>19</sup> then, in the same city, there was, twice a year, a market called Makh where Buddhist images were still sold at the time of Narshakhi, that is to say, the tenth century.<sup>20</sup> However, in the version of the "History of Bukhara" by Narshakhi translated by Frye there are no explicit hints as to the kinds of temples and idols that were present.<sup>21</sup> Barthold maintained that the temples and idols in Bukhara were Buddhist. He was convinced of this because of the terminology used by Muslim authors (his main source), who notably used terms employed by the Buddhists.<sup>22</sup> According to

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the term "*hu*" see now: D. Boucher, "On Hu and Fan Again: the Transmission of «Barbarian» Manuscripts to China," 2000. It is worth noting also that the Sogdians settled in China have started to use the Chinese names at least by the eighth century, as testified by the term '*n*' ("An," that is to say, "Bukhara") in a Sogdian Buddhist sutra copied in Luoyang in 728: N. Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Merchants in China and India," 1996b, p. 58. Another translator of Sogdian origin, specifically from Samarkand, Kang Mengxiang, was active at the end of the second century at Luoyang: E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adoption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 1959, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Tabari, II. 1230. See: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, 1954, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> In the Russian version of his 1898 authoritative work, W. Barthold would have recorded other information on the construction of a mosque in Samarkand in the place of the "temple of idols" (not explicitly called Buddhist). His source was another Muslim author, al-Idrisi, active after the time of Narshakhi. However, this passage does not appear in the 1977 English translation of Barthold: P. Bernard and F. Grenet and M. Isamiddinov, "Fouilles de la mission franco-soviétique à l'ancienne Samarkand (Afrasiab): première campagne, 1989," 1990, 370, n. 32.

<sup>20</sup> See: W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 1977, pp. 107–108.

<sup>21</sup> See: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, 1954, pp. 20, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Barthold, quoting Tabari, writes of a temple of idols in a village not far from Bukhara built next to the temple of the fire worshippers. In this way he made a clear distinction between the Mazdeans (the fire worshippers) and the idolaters. The latter, however, are not explicitly called Buddhist: W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 1977, p. 98. About the Hegira year 91 Tabari writes:

the *pahlavi* tradition, the term "*but*" normally means Buddha, even if ambiguous cases are attested.<sup>23</sup>

In the version of the *History of Bukhara* edited by C. Schefer, in the chapter dedicated to the construction of the mosque by Qutayba, it is written:

Qutayba ibn Muslim founded a great mosque in the city of Bukhara in the year 94. That place had been a temple of idols [literally: *botkhane* "house of the idols"].<sup>24</sup>

The Arab word *budd* or *but* (in Persian *bot*) is linked to three specific meanings in "The Encyclopaedia of Islam" by B. Carra de Vaux: a) temple or pagoda; b) Buddha; c) idol. It is not explicitly mentioned as a Buddhist or Brahmanical idol and neither is the temple, although many Muslim authors associate the term only with Buddhism.<sup>25</sup> Although A. Bausani insisted on the ambiguity of the definition of non-Islamic priests and holy places in Persian literature, G. Scarcia supports the former view.<sup>26</sup>

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"[...] they went in the direction of Bukhara where there was a village with a house of fire and a house of divinities with peacocks, [so] they called it house of the peacocks [...]" (Tabari, II, 1230). N. Lapierre writes about the construction of the mosque described by Narshakhi in place of a Buddhist temple, quoting a passage of Frye translation where, on the contrary, there are no hints of Buddhist buildings (N. Lapierre, *Le Bouddhisme en Sogdiane d'après les données de l'archéologie (IV-IX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 1998, p. 18). Frye reported in just one note a hypothesis by B. Spuler (*Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1952: 139) – never confirmed – according to which the Muslims in Bukhara would have confronted the Buddhists and not the fire worshippers as reported by Narshakhi: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, 1954, p. 48, n. 182.

<sup>23</sup> See: H. W. Bailey, "The word «*But*» in Iranian," 1930–32. In the *Shahrestaniha i Eranshahr* (a *pahlavi* text dated to the eighth-ninth centuries) there is a clear hint about the juxtaposition between the "temples of the baghas" (gods) and the "temples of the daivas" (demons): J. Markwart, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānšahr (Pahlavi Text, Version and Commentary)*, 1931, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> See: C. Schefer, *Description topographique et historique de Boukhara par Mohammed Nerchakhy suivie de textes relatifs à la Transoxiane. Texte persan*, 1892, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> See: B. Carra de Vaux, "Budd," 1960; D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les bouddhistes dans la tradition musulmane," 1969; W. L. Jr. Hanaway, "Bot," 1990. As observed by D. Gimaret, it is probable that the Arabs during the invasion of Sind found more Buddhist than Hindu monuments: D. Gimaret, "Bouddha et les bouddhistes dans la tradition musulmane," 1969, p. 275. In fact, Brahmins were always hostile to monuments and also to scriptures. For the problem of the Buddhists of Sind from an archaeological point of view: A. H. Dani, "Buddhists in Sind as Given in the Chachnamah," 1978; E. J. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "Pre-Muslim Antiquities of Sind," 1979; W. Ball, "The Buddhists of Sind," 1989. In the Chachname (the history of the Chacha dynasty, c. 644–712, in Persian) a temple (probably a Buddhist one) is recorded in Alor (modern Rohri) called "Naubahar": A. H. Dani, "Buddhists in Sind as Given in the Chachnamah," 1978, pp. 27–30. On the relations of the Chachas with Buddhism and enigmatic idols: H. M. Elliot, "Chach-Nama," 1955, pp. 44, 50–51, 54–55.

<sup>26</sup> See: A. Bausani, "La letteratura neopersiana," 1968, pp. 152–153; G. Scarcia, "I Mongoli e l'Iran: la situazione religiosa," 1981, p. 170; G. Scarcia, *Storia di Josaphat senza Barlaam*, 1998, p. 30.

In the chapter of the "History of Bukhara" in which is mentioned the Makh market (*bazar*), Narshakhi states that, according to some elderly natives, the local people were *bot-parast* (idolaters), but he gives no specification of the kind of idols worshipped.<sup>27</sup> Then, after reporting the origin of the name of the Makh *bazar*, Narshakhi says that in it had been built a *atesh-khane*, literally a "house of fire," i.e., a fire temple. According to Narshakhi:

...then this place [the Makh *bazar*] became a fire temple. During the market, when the people assembled, they went into the fire temple to worship fire. That fire temple was still there in the time of Islam. When the Muslims prevailed, they built that mosque [the Makh one] and even now it is a famous mosque of Bukhara.<sup>28</sup>

The text is quite enigmatic. Probably, in the very beginning the place was not a market of idols associated with fire worship, and so the Buddhist hypothesis suggested by Barthold would seem correct. However, the text says that the market was still active even after the foundation of the fire temple (most likely, until the coming of Islam), and people continued to buy and sell "idols." Narshakhi does not specify which kind of idols.<sup>29</sup> If the idols were Buddhist, why the people of Bukhara should have produced and bought them in order to go into a Mazdean temple to worship fire is not clear. As is now quite well known, the Sogdians followed a local form of Mazdeism different from the one professed by Persians,<sup>30</sup> who, in theory, worshipped only Ahura Mazda. So, it could even be argued that the people of Bukhara adopted the Persian Mazdeism because of their proximity to

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<sup>27</sup> See: C. Schefer, *Description topographique et historique de Boukhara par Mohammed Nerchakhy suivie de textes relatifs à la Transoxiane. Texte persan*, 1892, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> See: C. Schefer, *Description topographique et historique de Boukhara par Mohammed Nerchakhy suivie de textes relatifs à la Transoxiane. Texte persan*, 1892, p. 19. See also: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, 1954, p. 21; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'Évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman," 1974, pp. 32–33. I am grateful to Simone Cristoforetti for the translation of the Persian texts.

<sup>29</sup> These idols could have been very similar to the terracotta statuettes so widespread in Central Asia. As it will be observed below, such statuettes found in great numbers also in the region once corresponding to Sogdiana are probably Buddhist only in a few cases.

<sup>30</sup> See: B. I. Marshak, "Sogdiana. Part One. Sughd and Adjacent Regions," 1996, p. 253; B. I. Marshak, "The Sogdians in Their Homeland," 2001, pp. 232–233.



the Sasanian Empire just before the arrival of the Arabs, and for this reason they were considered pagans by the "genuine" Mazdeans (the Persians) and by the Muslims.

As already observed, in the *Tangshu* there is a passage on Sogdiana about the coexistence between Buddhism and the local form of Mazdeism. Even if the reference to Buddhism seems to be incorrect, there is other information on the religion of the barbarians (*hu*) in a passage of the *Jiu Tangshu* and in the same *Tangshu* on the Persians:

*Jiu Tangshu*: It is their [the Persians'] habit to worship spirits: of the sky, of the earth, of the sun, of the moon, of the water, of the fire. Several Hu [barbarians in general, but specifically for this epoch, the Sogdians] of the Western Regions who worship fire, or *xian*, have all taken this religion going to Persia....

*Tangshu*: They [the Persians] make sacrifices to the sky, to the earth, to the sun, to the moon, to the water, to the fire.... Several Hu of the Western Regions received the rules to make sacrifices to *xian* from Persia.<sup>31</sup>

The authors of the Tang dynastic histories knew about the religious affinities of Persians and Sogdians (or Iranians in general). In a much-discussed Christian Chinese source attributed to the Tang period (probably seventh-century), called the "Oration of the Venerable of the universe on alms—third part," there are two passages extremely important for the idols among the Iranian people:

... both in Fulin [the Byzantine Empire] and in Persia some died because of evil laws: who professed frankly [his creed] was persecuted to death. But now the whole of Fulin worship the Venerable of the universe [the god of the Christians]; in Persia, there is still a small number of people who, drawn away by evil spirits, worship clay figures; but the rest worship Jesus the Messiah ...

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<sup>31</sup> See: P. Daffinà, "La Persia sasanide secondo le fonti cinesi," 1983, pp. 162–163; M. Nicolini-Zani, *Sulla Via del Dio Unico. Discorso del Venerabile dell'universo sull'elemosina Parte terza*, 2003, pp. 37–38, n. 88.

and then:

... Among the ones who wander [from the right Path], fear the men  
who worship the sun, the moon and the stars, or the men who worship fire;  
fear also the ones who worship evil spirits, as *yaksha* and *rakshasa* ....<sup>32</sup>

Once more, a source of Chinese historiography is quite well informed about the Persian Mazdeans (who actually had had religious monuments since the beginning of the Sasanian dynasty),<sup>33</sup> although with a large exaggeration regarding Christianity among the Persians.<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting, as some recent researches show, that Christianity had particularly spread among the late Sasanians (from the reign of Khusrow II, 591–628, to Hormazd V, 631–632),<sup>35</sup> so that the date of the "Oration of the Venerable of the universe on alms—third part" proposed by M. Nicolini-Zani around 641 is further supported.<sup>36</sup> Then, there is the accusation of idolatry by the Christians against the Mazdeans in Persia (but probably also against the Mazdeans in China like the Sogdians) and even against the Buddhists. These accusations considered together with the passages of the *Jiu Tangshu* and of the *Tangshu* suggest that we should deal with caution with sources on the Iranian peoples of Central Asia.

In Islamic sources there is another interesting passage about the accusation of idolatry against Afshin Haydar in 841. Afshin Haydar was a king of Ustrushuna and a favorite of the caliph, but he was eventually executed because some idols and a book associated with "the cult of the Magi" were found during a search of his room at Samarra. According to Tabari:

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<sup>32</sup> See: M. Nicolini-Zani, *Sulla Via del Dio Unico. Discorso del Venerabile dell'universo sull'elemosina Parte terza*, 2003, pp. 35–38.

<sup>33</sup> At Firuzabad and at Naksh-e Rjab there are scenes showing the investiture of the first Sasanian emperor, Ardashir I (224–241) by Ahura Mazda, and again, at Naksh-e Rjab, there is the investiture of Shapur I (241–272) by the same god: L. Vanden Berghe, "Les scènes d'investiture sur les reliefs rupestres de l'Irān ancien: évolution et signification," 1988, fig. 5–6, 8.

<sup>34</sup> See: M. Nicolini-Zani, *Sulla Via del Dio Unico. Discorso del Venerabile dell'universo sull'elemosina Parte terza*, 2003, p. 36, n. 85.

<sup>35</sup> See: C. Mango, "Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse sassanide. II. Héraclius, Šahrvaraz et la Vraie Croix," 1985, pp. 109–118; G. Scarcia, "Cosroe secondo, San Sergio e il Sade," 2000; M. Compareti, "The Last Sasanians in China," 2003, pp. 207–208.

<sup>36</sup> See: M. Nicolini-Zani, *Sulla Via del Dio Unico. Discorso del Venerabile dell'universo sull'elemosina Parte terza*, 2003, p. 10.

... among his things there was a wooden anthropomorphous statue  
embellished with jewels and pearls and golden ear-rings ...

and then:

... they found among his books a volume of the Magi and many things  
which proved his guilt and [they found] books of their religion used to  
pray to their god....<sup>37</sup>

In this case as well there are no references to the nature of the idol. However, if it had jewels and earrings, it could hardly have been an image of Buddha unless it was a statue coming from Tibet or Khotan, where Tantrism existed. Maybe it was a Bodhisattva, but it is not possible to exclude the theory that this statue was a representation of a local divinity of Ustrushuna "di carattere fondamentale iranico."<sup>38</sup> According to E. Esin it could also have been a Manichaean idol because of the presence of illustrated religious texts, while É. De La Vaissière and P. Riboud are inclined towards a Mazdean hypothesis.<sup>39</sup>

A notion expressed for the first time by Tomaschek about the etymology of the name of Bukhara is that it comes from the Sanskrit word *vihara* meaning "Buddhist monastery." According to Tomaschek, the word *vihara* passed into Iranian languages as *bahar* and into the Altaic ones as *bukhar* in the "Hephthalite period."<sup>40</sup> His hypothesis was accepted by Barthold and, more cautiously, by Melikian-Chirvani.<sup>41</sup> Barthold insisted on the Buddhist connotation of the supposed Bukharan monastery even if the sources of Tomaschek are unknown, especially regarding the role of the middlemen of the

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<sup>37</sup> Tabari, III, 1318. For a summary on this events see also: E. Esin, "The Turk al-ʿAḡam of Sāmarrā and the Paintings Attributable to Them in the Ġawsaq al- Hāqānī," 1973/74, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> See: Lo Muzio, "Ustruṣāna," p. 918.

<sup>39</sup> See: E. Esin, "The Turk al-ʿAḡam of Sāmarrā and the Paintings Attributable to them in the Ġawsaq al- Hāqānī," 1973/74, p. 51; É. De La Vaissière, P. Riboud, "Les livres des sogdiens (avec une note additionnelle par Frantz Grenet)," 2003.

<sup>40</sup> See: W. Tomaschek, *Centralasiatische Studien. I. Sogdiana*, 1877, pp. 103–104.

<sup>41</sup> See: W. Barthold and R. N. Frye, "Bukārā," 1960; W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 1977, p. 102; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'Évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman," 1974, pp. 3, 11–22, 46–51; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Buddhism among Iranian Peoples. ii. In Islamic Times," 1990. Also R. Gauthiot share the same opinion but he seems to ignore the hypothesis by Tomaschek: R. Gauthiot, "Termes techniques bouddhiques et manichéens," 1911, pp. 52–59.

Hephthalites. In addition, Frye reported the opinions of several Muslim authors on the origins of the name Bukhara but without explicit reference to Buddhism. This noted Iranist suggests that there was a link with a religion connected with Mazdean priests (the Magi). Frye quotes Juvaini (13<sup>th</sup> century) who says that, with the term *bukhar*, the Sogdians pointed at the "place of knowledge," probably a temple where there was a cult connected with the Magi. Frye is less inclined to believe in *vihara* as the etymological source for Bukhara; in fact, he has proposed that the origin of the name Bukhara (in the Sogdian \**buḫārak*, ancient Turkish *buqaraq*, Arabian *fākhera*) is literally "lucky place."<sup>42</sup> About 70 years after the first hypothesis of this etymology for Bukhara by Tomaschek, Marquart, quoting al-Khuvarizmi, posed the possibility that the idols of the temple mentioned above were Hindu divinities.<sup>43</sup>

The etymological problem linked to *vihara* calls to mind the Buddhist temple of Balkh (the capital of Bactria–Tokharistan, where archaeological investigation has revealed many traces of Buddhism), called Naubahar and recorded in Islamic and Chinese sources.<sup>44</sup> Muslim historians did not always agree on the nature of this temple; in fact, for Yaqut and ibn-Khallikan (13<sup>th</sup> century) it would have been a Zoroastrian sanctuary while for Mas'udi (10<sup>th</sup> century) it would have been the temple of a lunar deity. The comments by Barthold were, of course, in favor of a Buddhist identification, and he was skeptical of a Zoroastrian connection. In fact, for him, the two 13<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim authors would have been affected by the less ancient tradition according to which the

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<sup>42</sup> See: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, 1954, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> See: J. Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang. Untersuchungen zur Mythischen und Geschichtlichen Landeskunde von Ostiran*, 1938, p. 163, n. 2.

<sup>44</sup> See: W. Barthold, D. Sourdel, "al-Barāmika," 1960; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'Évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman," 1974, pp. 11–34, 46–51; R. W. Bulliet, "Naw Bahār and the Survival of Iranian Buddhism," 1976; W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 1977, p. 77; Sh. S. Kamaliddinov, *Istoricheskaja geografija Juzhnogo Sogda i Toharistana po arabojazychnym istochnikam IX-nachala XIII vv.*, 1996, pp. 303–308. Regarding the archaeological investigation in the historical region of Tokharistan, there are Buddhist remains at Qal'a-i Kafirnigan, Ajina Tepe, Kafir Qal'a (Tajikistan), Dalverzin (Uzbekistan) and Dilberjin (Afghanistan): B. A. Litvinskij and T. I. Zeimal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepe, Tajikistan. History and Art of Buddhism in Central Asia*, 2004, pp. 143–174, 180–184. In several cases Buddhism is attested until the seventh-eighth centuries. However, in Tokharistan non-Buddhist findings dated to the seventh-eighth centuries as well were discovered at Qal'a-i Kafirnigan, Kafir Qal'a, Balalik Tepe and Kujovkurgan: L. I. Al'baum, *Balalyk-Tepe. K istorii material'noj kul'tury i iskusstva Toharistana*, 1960; C. Silvi Antonini, "Le pitture murali di Balalyk Tepe," 1972; T. D. Annaev, "Raskopki rannesrednevekovoj usad'by Kujovkurgan v severnom Toharistane," 1984; B. A. Litvinskij and V. S. Solov'ev, "L'art du Toxaristan à l'époque du Haut Moyen Âge (monuments non bouddhiques)," 1985.

family of the priests of the temple (the Barmakids) were descended from Sasanian ministers and, implicitly, should have supported Mazdeism.<sup>45</sup> However, according to M. Carter, the *lokapala* Vaishravana who was the guardian of the temple at Balkh as reported by Xuanzang could have been modeled on the image of a pre-Buddhist divinity.<sup>46</sup> So, the information attributed to Yaqut and ibn-Khallikan could be considered correct. Recently it has been proposed that the history of the temple of Balkh was more complicated than previously thought. In the beginning, it would have been consecrated to a lunar divinity but later converted into a Buddhist temple, in the Kushan period between the first century BCE and the first century CE. With the coming of the Sasanians it would then have been transformed into a Mazdean temple in the fourth-fifth centuries and finally in the sixth-seventh centuries it was reconverted into a Buddhist temple because of the Turk conquest of Tokharistan.<sup>47</sup> A Bactrian document studied by Sims-Williams clearly testifies to the use of a specific terminology for the temples of Bactria-Tokharistan: *βavaṛo* (*vihara*) was employed only for Buddhist holy places while *βαγολαγγο* was a generic sanctuary.<sup>48</sup> Islamic sources do not show the same precision.

In Samarkand and in Bukhara there were portals along the walls of the two cities called Naubahar.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately the sources are not explicit on this point, but usually the portals were called after their direction so, probably, the temples or the monasteries would have been outside the cities. Scholars have usually accepted the term Naubahar as

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<sup>45</sup> See: W. Barthold, "Der iranische Buddhismus und sein Verhältnis zum Islam," 1933; W. Barthold and D. Sourdel, "al-Barāmika," 1960.

<sup>46</sup> See: M. Carter, "Aspects of Imagery of Verethragna: the Kushan Empire and Buddhist Central Asia," 1995, p. 128; F. Grenet, "Vaiśravana in Sogdiana. About the Origins of Bishamon-ten," 1995/96, p. 281. Khotanese upper classes, in fact, considered themselves to be descendants of Vaishravana: H. W. Bailey, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, 1982, p. 6. Faxian, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Khotan two centuries before Xuanzang, had already described a Buddhist sanctuary in Khotan called "New Royal Temple": S. Beal, *Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun Buddhist Pilgrims from China to India (400 A.D. and 518 A.D.)*, 1869 (reprint 1996): pp. 11–12. The name "New Royal Monastery" used by J. Legge some years after does not represent the real translation of the text by Faxian: Legge, *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fā-Hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399–414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline*, 1896 (reprint 1993), p. 19. The fact that the temple was called "new" suggests a possible more ancient tradition probably originating in Khotan and later borrowed by the other Buddhist kingdoms as Bactria-Tokharistan, even if it should be considered that Buddhism was accepted in the latter region before reaching Khotan.

<sup>47</sup> See: Sh. S. Kamaliddinov, *Istoricheskaja geografija Juzhnogo Sogda i Toharistana po arabojazychnym istochnikam IX-nachala XIII vv.*, 1996, p. 304.

<sup>48</sup> See: N. Sims-Williams, "Nouveaux documents sur l'histoire et la langue de la Bactriane," 1996a, p. 648.

<sup>49</sup> See: W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion*, 1977, pp. 86, 102.

meaning Buddhist monastery, although R. Bulliet is not certain.<sup>50</sup> So nothing allows us to assume automatically that only Buddhists were idolaters; in fact, archaeological research has shown unquestionably that the Sogdians had a great pantheon of gods even if Buddhism does not appear as their main religion. It is worth noting that the entry in "The Encyclopaedia of Islam" studied by Bulliet was written by Barthold (and by D. Sourdel), a scholar too inclined towards Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

According to Xuanzang, in the seventh century Buddhism suffered persecutions in Samarkand.<sup>52</sup> In Bukhara the fire-worshippers had a similar attitude toward other religions just before the coming of the Arabs, but it is not stated in any sources whether Buddhism suffered more than other creeds.<sup>53</sup> Narshakhi is the only source on this matter, but he never wrote expressly about persecutions against the Buddhists. However, as A. S. Melikian-Chirvani observed, the foundation of a fire temple in place of a "house of idols" (*botkhane*) in the area of the Makh market suggests the prominence of Mazdeans and probably an unfriendly attitude toward other religions, among them Buddhism.<sup>54</sup>

## The archaeological investigation

### a) Architecture

As observed above, when the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang arrived in Sogdiana (c. 630), he saw persecutions of Buddhist believers by the local population of Samarkand.<sup>55</sup> About one century later, the Korean pilgrim Hye-ch'ŏ (in Chinese, Huichao) recorded in his memorial that in Samarkand there was just one monastery with only one monk.<sup>56</sup> The information gathered from the reports of the two pilgrims strongly supports the

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<sup>50</sup> See: R. W. Bulliet, "Naw Bahār and the Survival of Iranian Buddhism," 1976, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> See: W. Barthold and D. Sourdel, "al-Barāmika," 1960.

<sup>52</sup> See: S. Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, 1911, pp. 45–46.

<sup>53</sup> It is not possible to say whether Buddhism was persecuted in Sogdiana before the seventh century. During the submission to the Western Turks (mid-sixth to mid-seventh century), there is no reference to Buddhism in Sogdiana, but it is attested among the Sogdians in the Empire of the Eastern Turks: H.-J. Klimkeit, "Buddhism in Turkish Central Asia," 1990. If Maniakh (the name of the leader of the Turco-Sogdian mission in 567–568 to Constantinople) was a Buddhist name (as argued in: S. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey*, 1985, p. 185), then it could be considered that Buddhists did not suffer particularly in Sogdiana under Western Turkish rule.

<sup>54</sup> See: A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'Évocation littéraire du bouddhisme dans l'Iran musulman," 1974, p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> See: S. Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, 1911, pp. 45–46.

<sup>56</sup> See: W. Fuchs, 1939, "Huei-Chao's Pilgerreise durch Nordwest-Indien und Zentral-Asien um 726," p. 452.

hypothesis that Buddhist buildings did not survive in Sogdiana, possibly because they were systematically destroyed. The archaeological investigation of the region could support such a view as well, but it is not possible to be more specific without concrete results. It cannot be excluded that in the future some new archaeological discovery could change the state of the field, which is now still lacking needed information.

During the 1930s the remains of a temple embellished with possible Buddhist elements were found not far from Samarkand, in the Sanzar Valley. Unfortunately, the complex had been successively demolished and only scarce information was recorded.<sup>57</sup> A famous sixth-century painting from Temple II at Panjakand is considered to be an indication that the Sogdians knew about Buddhist architecture (fig. 1). It is the so-called "funerary painting" of a figure lying inside a building similar to a *stupa*, flanked by two pilasters on top of which are the wheel or "*cakradhvaja*" (fig. 2).<sup>58</sup> The scene has a religious meaning, but the building is most likely a pavillion very similar to the mausoleum of Isma'il Samani (893–907) in Bukhara, a funerary monument considered with unanimous consent to be a work deeply rooted in the traditions of Sogdian art.<sup>59</sup> At Panjakand the painting, commonly identified as "funerary mourning for the corpse of Syavush," was recently reinterpreted as representing mourning of the body of a Mesopotamian deity, connected to the seasonal cycle.<sup>60</sup>

## b) Painting

Only one painted representation of Buddha has been recovered, in a house with a granary dated between the end of seventh and the beginning of eighth century at

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<sup>57</sup> The information on this finding can be found in: L. I. Al'baum, "Buddiskij hram v doline Sanzara," *Doklady Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoj CCP*, 8, 1955 (*non vidi*); Stavisky, "The Fate of Buddhism in Middle Asia, in the Light of Archaeological Data," 1993/94, pp. 118–119. Among the few findings that were recovered at the temple of Sanzar there is the sculpture of a lion, but it cannot be considered definitive evidence of the Buddhist nature of the site: T. K. Mkrtychev, *Buddijskoe iskusstvo Srednej Azii I-X vv*, 2002b, pp. 159–160, fig. 1.1; T. K. Mkrtychev, "Buddizm v Sogde," 2002a, pp. 57–58.

<sup>58</sup> See: K. Jettmar, "Zur «Beweinungsszene» aus Pendžikent. I. Die Verbrennung der Leiche Buddhas als Kompositions-vorbild?" 1961, pp. 265–266; M. Mode, "Sixth Century Sogdian Art and Some Buddhist Prototypes," 1994; L. I. Rempel, "La maquette architecturale dans le culte et la construction de l'Asie centrale préislamique," 1987, p. 82, figs. 2–3.

<sup>59</sup> See: G. Stock, "Das Samanidenmausoleum in Bukhara II," 1990, pp. 238–240.

<sup>60</sup> See: F. Grenet and B. I. Marshak, "Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdisane," 1998. The identification was accepted and recently summarized in: C. Silvi Antonini, *Da Alessandro Magno all'Islam. La pittura dell'Asia Centrale*, 2003, pp. 130–133.

Panjakand.<sup>61</sup> According to the archaeologists who discovered the mural painting, neither the client nor the artist was Buddhist (fig. 3). In fact, the position of the hands is reproduced according to an unknown *mudra*, in which the left hand is in *abhayamudra* (but with the thumb in an unnatural position), and the right hand probably in *namaskaramudra*. The latter is one of the most enigmatic *mudra* for the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas occurring in the art of Gandhara.<sup>62</sup> On the left side of Buddha, a male figure smaller in size and dressed in Indian garments stands with a flower in his hand. This painting is not a canonical icon; on the contrary it seems to be the work of an artist with a limited knowledge of Buddhist art. In addition, the image is represented as a marginal one, and it appears isolated above a door (fig. 4). However, the greater size of the Buddha is a clear signal that the artist wanted to stress his divine essence.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the flying figure of a dragon on the right side of the Buddha could be considered to be the distinctive sign of divine essence that was very widespread in Sogdian painting. According to some scholars, this could be considered a representation of the Buddha Bhaishajyaguru "the healer Buddha," an icon very widely diffused in Central Asia, in the Himalayas, in Mongolia, and in Southeast Asia.<sup>64</sup> Such an identification fits well with the house of a rich merchant who wanted every kind of apotropaic image around him.

One of the painted panels in Panjakand normally filled with scenes from the "Panchatantra" or from the fables by Aesop shows a bald man who is probably going to be slapped on his head by a second figure (fig. 5). According to B. Marshak, the person who is going to be hit could be a Buddhist monk.<sup>65</sup> As Marshak writes, in Central Asia there are several stories about bald-headed people, and a famous Buddhist legend tells

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<sup>61</sup> See: B. I. Marshak and V. I. Raspopova, "Wall Paintings from a House with a Granary. Panjikent, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of the Eight Century A.D.," 1990, pp. 151–153.

<sup>62</sup> See: M. Taddei, "Gandhāra, Arte del," 1994, p. 717.

<sup>63</sup> The representation of divinities as bigger in size than common people is a solution common to Indian and Iranian art. In Sasanian art the emperor could be represented as of the same dimension as the god and, in one case, at Taq-e Bostan, even larger: Khusrow II is taller than Ahura Mazda and Anahita because he is standing on a pedestal: R. Ghirshman, *Art persane. Parthes et Sassanides*, 1962, fig. 235; G. Scarcia, "La Persia dagli Achemenidi ai Sasanidi 550 a.C.-650 d.C.," 2004, p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> See: Catalogue Paris, *Sérinde terre de Bouddha. Dix siècles d'art sur la route de la soie*, 1995, p. 258, cat. 199; N. Lapierre, *Le Bouddhisme en Sogdiane d'après les données de l'archéologie (IV-IX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 1998, p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> See: B. I. Maršak, "La Sogdiana nel VII-VIII secolo d.C. (Cat. nn. 196–211)," 1987, cat. 201; B. I. Marshak, *Legends, Tales, and Fables in the Art of Sogdiana*, 2002, pp. 140–141. The same technique used by the Sogdian artists to represent narrative episodes (mostly taken from Indian and Classical literary



about Susima, Ashoka's elder brother, who lost the throne because he slapped the bald minister of his father, Bindusara, on the head. It was thanks to this fact that Ashoka ascended the throne in place of his ill-mannered brother. The legend is reported also in its Khotanese version.<sup>66</sup>

Another very interesting painting was recovered at Qal'a-i Shadman, a seventh-eighth-century Bactrian site that displays very strong Sogdian elements or, probably, even was executed by Sogdian artists. The main fragment shows a person dressed in typical Central Asian garments sitting cross-legged on pillows embellished with the pearl roundel motif (fig. 6). Litvinskij and Solov'ev (the archaeologists who discovered it) identified this person as a Bodhisattva.<sup>67</sup> Not only does the identification seem incorrect, but there are not enough elements even to allow the scene to be interpreted as of a religious character. The object on the left knee could be a sheath, so that the "Bodhisattva" could equally well be a representative of the Sogdian upper class or a rich merchant.

Finally, the mourning scene on the southern wall of the Temple II at Panjakand (fig. 1) led some to see a parallel with the Parinirvana scenes in Buddhist art.<sup>68</sup> In the same building there is another scene in which some crowned riders (the so-called "kings") present characteristics common to the usual representation of the quarrel for the holy relics of the Buddha: the gesture of their hands called *tarjanimudra* or "threatening *mudra*" (fig. 7).<sup>69</sup> This is another piece of evidence that the Sogdian artists knew about everything coming from India, which they filtered and adapted locally according to the Mazdean form.

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works) was very well known in the art of Gandhara as well: A. Filigenzi, "L'arte narrativa del Gandhara," 2002.

<sup>66</sup> See: M. Maggi, *Pelliot Chinois 2928: a Khotanese Love Story*, 1997, pp. 75–79.

<sup>67</sup> See: B. A. Litvinskij and V. S. Solov'ev, "Raskopki na Kalaishodmon v 1979 g.," 1986, pp. 232–233.

<sup>68</sup> See: M. Taddei, *India*, 1976, p. 173.

<sup>69</sup> A. Naymark suggested to me the association of these paintings with Buddhist art, even if the idea had already been expressed in: M. Taddei, *India*, 1976, p. 173. I am grateful to Naymark, who supplied me with a copy of his unpublished Ph.D. thesis: A. Naymark, "Sogdiana Its Christians and Byzantium: a Study of Artistic and Cultural Connections in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," Ph.D. thesis, Departments of Art History and Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2001; see especially p. 320. I am grateful also to Ester Bianchi for the Sanskrit terminology of this specific *mudra*. A very similar *mudra* can be observed in a much later Sogdian metalwork with the representation of a siege of a city (probably Jerico) represented as a large palace. According to recent studies also this metalwork is evidence of the knowledge that the Sogdian artists possessed of Buddhist art: B. Marshak and F. Grenet, "L'arte sogdiana (IV-IX secolo)," p. 162.

### c) Sculpture

The enigmatic *mudra* of the painted Buddha observed above (fig. 3) appears in a terracotta mold recovered in Panjakand (fig. 8). The position of the hand could be considered another example of *namaskaramudra*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to propose a chronology for the relic: the mold was found inside Temple II, but its association with the religious building is not clear. Several images of local divinities were found in Temple II, both painted and carved. In some cases their iconography was clearly borrowed from Hindu art and one statue in particular is extremely interesting: the Umamaheshvara couple sitting on the *vahana* of Shiva, the bull Nandi.<sup>70</sup> According to the archaeologists who found the mold, this object is not the product of a Buddhist artist or, at least, its author was not familiar with Buddhist images.<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that, according to one theory, G. Verardi proposed an original Buddhist use for the temples of Panjakand.<sup>72</sup> Even if the results of the excavations at the site of Panjakand revealed a cult different from Buddhism,<sup>73</sup> this terracotta mold recalls some of the stimulating ideas expressed by Verardi on the presence in Sogdiana of decorative elements borrowed from Indian art. A second terracotta fragment from Panjakand was identified as a representation of Vajrapani (fig. 9), but its state of preservation is very bad.<sup>74</sup>

A Buddhist terracotta icon was found in Samarkand (fig. 10). It represents an unidentifiable figure, but it is probably a Ttara. In this case also, the chronology is problematic, and the archaeologists who found it proposed a period between the seventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>75</sup> Other terracotta fragments with Buddhist subjects come from Saryk Tepe (Southern Sogdiana, not far from Kish). Among the most interesting specimens there are a Buddha head image (fig. 11) and a standing Buddha (fig. 12). The

<sup>70</sup> See: V. Škoda, "Ein Śiva-Heiligtum in Pendžikent," 1992; C. Lo Muzio, "The Umāmaheśvara in Central Asian Art," 2003.

<sup>71</sup> See: B. I. Marshak and V. I. Raspopova, "Buddha icon from Panjikent," 1997/98.

<sup>72</sup> See: G. Verardi, "Osservazioni sulle sculture in argilla e su alcuni ambienti dei complessi templari I e II di Pendžikent," 1982, pp. 283–293; F. Grenet, *Compte rendu* 163: Verardi G. "Osservazioni sulle sculture in argilla e su alcuni ambienti dei complessi templari I e II di Pendžikent," 1983; G. Verardi, "Pendžikent: on a note in *Abstracta Iranica*," 1986.

<sup>73</sup> See: V. Škoda, "Le culte du feu dans les sanctuaires de Pendžikent," 1987; V. Škoda, "The Sogdian Temple: Structure and Rituals," 1996.

<sup>74</sup> T. K. Mkrtychev, *Buddijskoe iskusstvo Srednej Azii I-X vv.*, 2002b, p. 94, fig. 2.

<sup>75</sup> See: K. Abdullaev, "Une image bouddhique découverte à Samarkand," 2000.

most probable chronology for the piece is sixth-seventh century and fifth-sixth century respectively.<sup>76</sup> One more terracotta figurine from Southern Sogdiana was found at Kul Tepe (fig. 13). Most likely it is a Bodhisattva sitting in *dhyanamudra*.<sup>77</sup> It is worth remembering that Southern Sogdiana is still poorly investigated by archaeology, and Buddhist findings could be considered quite usual here, taking into consideration the proximity to the Bactrian border.<sup>78</sup> Several terracotta statuettes found in Afrasyab in the beginning of the last century attracted the attention of students of Buddhist art, and V. Viatkin identified some of them as being of Buddha or Bodhisattvas (fig. 14). Unfortunately, in this case there are no incontestable elements to allow a definitive Buddhist identification for these objects, and an exhaustive study of the numerous Sogdian terracotta statuettes does not yet exist.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, a bronze statuette from Samarkand should be mentioned. It is most likely a representation of Avalokiteshvara (fig. 15), but it is not a local product: everything points to a Chinese importation probably of the period of the Northern Wei (386–535), a chronology based in fact on stylistic details.<sup>80</sup> Chinese Buddhist art of this period shows, together with a clear Indian matrix, remarkable Central Asian elements, which were adapted to the local taste.<sup>81</sup> The Sogdians and the Iranian Central Asians in general active

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<sup>76</sup> See: S. B. Lunina and Z. I. Usmanova, "Terrakotovaja plitka s izobrazheniem Buddy iz Saryktepa," 1990; T. K. Mkrtichev, *Buddijskoe iskusstvo Srednej Azii I-X vv.*, 2002b: 194–196.

<sup>77</sup> T. K. Mkrtichev, *Buddijskoe iskusstvo Srednej Azii I-X vv.*, 2002b, p. 196, fig. 2.

<sup>78</sup> See: T. K. Mkrtichev, "Buddizm v Sogde," 2002a, p. 60. This could be considered true also for Western Sogdiana, that is to say, the region around Bukhara: some seventh-eighth-century terracotta statuettes displayed at the Museum of Paykand are described as Buddhist, but no investigations were carried out on them.

<sup>79</sup> See: V. L. Viatkin, *Afrasiab-Gorodishche bylogo Samarkanda. Arheologicheskij ocherk*, 1927, p. 26; V. A. Meshkeris, *Sogdijskaja terrakota*, 1989. Terracotta finds coming from clandestine excavations or from the black market are said to be numerous in the area around Samarkand, and in some cases they also present possible Buddhist elements. A terracotta plate embellished with a central head of a Buddha is said to have been presented to E. Rtveladze for study, but the piece (together with many others) was not published: personal communication of Olga Tsepova (St. Petersburg). For some other terracotta figures described as Buddhist, see: V. A. Meshkeris, *Sogdijskaja terrakota*, 1989, pp. 180–183; T. K. Mkrtichev, "Buddizm v Sogde," 2002a, pp. 59–60; T. K. Mkrtichev, *Buddijskoe iskusstvo Srednej Azii I-X vv.*, 2002b, pp. 194–196.

<sup>80</sup> See: Yu. V. Karev, "Statuetka bodhisattvy Avalokiteshvary iz Samarkanda," 1998.

<sup>81</sup> See: W. Willets, *Origini dell'arte cinese*, 1965, pp. 184–196; E. R. Knauer, "The Fifth Century A.D. Buddhist Cave Temples at Yün-Kang, North China," 1983, pp. 35–46; A. L. Juliano, "Buddhist Art in Northwest China," 2001, pp. 133–138; Ji Chongjian, "The Origins and Development of Chinese Buddhist Sculpture," 1999–2000; A. F. Howard, "Liang Patronage of Buddhist Art in the Gansu Corridor during the Fourth Century and the Transformation of a Central Asian Style," 2000; J. C. Y. Watt, "Art and History in China from the Third to the Eighth Century," 2004, pp. 32–37; A. F. Howard, "Buddhist Art in China," 2004, pp. 90–98.

in China had a very important role in the process of transferring artistic typologies originally extraneous to Chinese and "barbarian" dynasties (such as the Wei)<sup>82</sup> until the Sui (581–618). Such receptivity towards Central Asia had been active in China since the second-third centuries, even for works of Taoist art (especially sculptures), such as the Xiwangmu image created around the second century CE or the Kongwang Shan rock reliefs in Jiangsu.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

The few findings and the enigmatic written sources do not favor a strong Buddhist presence in Sogdiana. In addition, it is not clear whether the scarce traces of a Buddhist presence between Bukhara and Panjakand point toward a predominance of Mahayana or Hinayana. According to some scholars, the Buddhist borrowings in Sogdian art came from Gandhara or from Bactria-Tokharistan.<sup>84</sup> These hypotheses can be confirmed only with further research.

At the present moment, the general impression is that there were a small group of Buddhists in Sogdiana. Could they be considered extremely rich or powerful, as in China and—exactly as under the Tang—persecuted in certain periods? The (small?) community practically disappeared between the seventh and eighth centuries, but it is not clear

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<sup>82</sup> A foreign religion open to the whole of mankind such as Buddhism could help to legitimate a foreign dynasty better in China than could Taoism or Confucianism: W. Willetts, *Origini dell'arte cinese*, 1965, p. 178. This idea is also more convincing if one considers that Empress Wu Zetian was even able to found her own dynasty (the Zhou, 690–705) within the Tang period. Such an act would have been impossible according to a Taoist or a Confucian point of view: A. Forte, "Cenni storici e relazioni estere, religioni straniere, scienze," 2005, pp. 25, 30–31. A very similar situation was probably confronted in India by the Kushans who supported the Central Asian trade and, consequently, also Buddhism. On the contrary, the Wei had an agricultural economy exactly like all the native Chinese dynasties. Under the Wei, Buddhism flourished under the sinicization of the culture of this barbaric dynasty and the persecution of 446–452. The Wei tombs recovered around Datong (Shanxi) revealed the sinicization also of their customs concerning funerary rites, even if Iranian luxury goods were recovered as well: A. Dien, "A New Look at the Xianbei and Their Impact on Chinese Culture," 1991; Yang Hong, "An Archaeological View of Tuoba Xianbei Art in the Pingcheng Period and Earlier," 2002.

<sup>83</sup> See: Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries A.D.)," 1986, pp. 292–303; Wu Hung, "Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West," 1987, pp. 32–33. The Buddhist elements in this relief from Eastern China can be observed both for divine figures and humans such as adorants, disciples, etc., who are represented dressed in Central Asian garments: Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries A.D.)," 1986, pp. 292–303; Zheng Yan, "Barbarian Images in Han Period Art," 1998, p. 54.

<sup>84</sup> See: M. Taddei, *India*, 1976, p. 173; F. Grenet, "The Second of Three Encounters between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism: Plastic Influences in Bactria and Sogdiana (2<sup>nd</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)," 1994, p. 52, n. 29.

whether the cause of this situation was persecution. If it were persecution, it is likely that the scarcity of traces of Buddhist art in this part of Central Asia are due to a systematic destruction of the monuments by the local Mazdeans: in fact the materials employed for their construction most likely were the same as that of the houses and temples in the rest of Sogdiana, such as unbaked bricks and other highly perishable materials. It is also highly probable that this "persecution" happened in a way similar to such occurrences in China during the ninth century.

The Chinese point of view could once more be important in understanding the situation. It is now clear that the period between the fifth and sixth centuries in China was very important, not only for the formation of the local Buddhist iconography but also for the particular form of Mazdean (in Chinese, *xian*)<sup>85</sup> art of the Sogdian immigrants. As has recently been observed, the funerary monuments of these Sogdians were full of elements borrowed from Chinese art of the Han period and also divinities represented according to Hindu iconography. "Indian iconography" can be observed also for the Hindu gods, which were already accepted inside the Buddhist system and represented in cave VIII at Yungang dated to the late fifth century.<sup>86</sup> It seems likely that the Iranian Buddhists borrowed the iconography for representations of the Hindu deities inside their own system, not directly from India but from Central Asia, possibly from Sogdiana. What we still do not know is whether the iconography of the Indian gods arrived in Sogdiana for the representation of local deities following Buddhism or directly through Hinduism.<sup>87</sup> The conclusions proposed by Marta Carter in one of her last, interesting studies point in part to what one could consider a sort of battle between Iranian Mazdeans and Iranian Buddhists on neutral Chinese soil. Maybe this battle had already been won in Sogdiana by the Mazdeans, who could not openly persecute the Buddhists or destroy their monuments in China as they had probably done in their motherland. It is not certain whether the Mazdeans ever tried to convert Chinese dynasties to their creed as the

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<sup>85</sup> É. de la Vaissière and P. Riboud, "Les livres des sogdiens," 2003, p. 130. For a general presentation of the problem of Sogdian religion according to Chinese sources, see: P. Riboud, "Réflexions sur les pratiques religieuses désignées sous le nom de *xian*," 2005.

<sup>86</sup> See: M. L. Carter, "Notes on Two Chinese Stone Funerary Beds Bases with Zoroastrian Symbolism," 2002, pp. 274–275.

<sup>87</sup> The latter hypothesis seems more convincing. This problem was the main part of the PhD dissertation of the present author, which is not yet published. For a very interesting point of view explained especially on

Buddhists did more successfully, even if traces of Mazdean art can be found at the court of the "barbarian" Wei.<sup>88</sup>

A last possible reference to the Sogdian adversity towards Buddhism can be found in an inscription among the Afrasyab paintings. One can see written in it (and it is still legible) that the ambassadors from Chaganyan knew the habits, the script system, and the gods of Samarkand—so they would have not offended the Sogdians.<sup>89</sup> Probably the Chaganyans (who came from a Buddhist region) knew the attitude of the Sogdians towards Buddhism, and with this statement they officially refused to act as a sort of missionary in a foreign land where their religion was not well appreciated.<sup>90</sup>

It is worth noting once more that these are only hypotheses without any claim to being definitive. However, from the points observed in this discussion it is quite clear that Buddhism was not so strong in Sogdiana at the dawn of the Islamic conquest as many scholars in the past have considered. Actually, in complete contrast with B. Spuler's opinion,<sup>91</sup> the real antagonist of Islam in Sogdiana was probably the local form of Mazdeism, whose divinities were represented often in paintings and in the still enigmatic terracotta statuettes, the main sources of information on the Sogdian religious creed.

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archaeological bases see: F. Grenet, "The Second of Three Encounters between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism: Plastic Influences in Bactria and Sogdiana (2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)," 1994.

<sup>88</sup> See: M. Carter, "Notes on Two Chinese Stone Funerary Beds Bases with Zoroastrian Symbolism," 2002, pp. 274–276. On some studies on the (supposed) adoption of Mazdean elements in sixth-century Chinese art: Shi, "Study on a Stone Carving from the Tomb of a Sogdian Aristocrat of the Northern Qi," 2000, figs. 10–13; Shi, "Senmurv and Farn Spiritual Light. An Explanation of the Images on the Stone Coffin of Yuan Mi of the Northern Wei," 2004, pp. 150–158.

<sup>89</sup> V. Livšic, "The Sogdian Wall Inscriptions on the Site of Afrasiab," 2006, p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> T. K. Mkrtichev, "Buddhism v Sogde," 2002a, p. 60. Very recently Frantz Grenet proposed seeing in this inscription at Afrasyab a reference to the participation of the Chaganyans in local sacrifices: F. Grenet, "The Self-Image of the Sogdians," 2005.

<sup>91</sup> See: R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshaki*, p. 48.

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## Figures

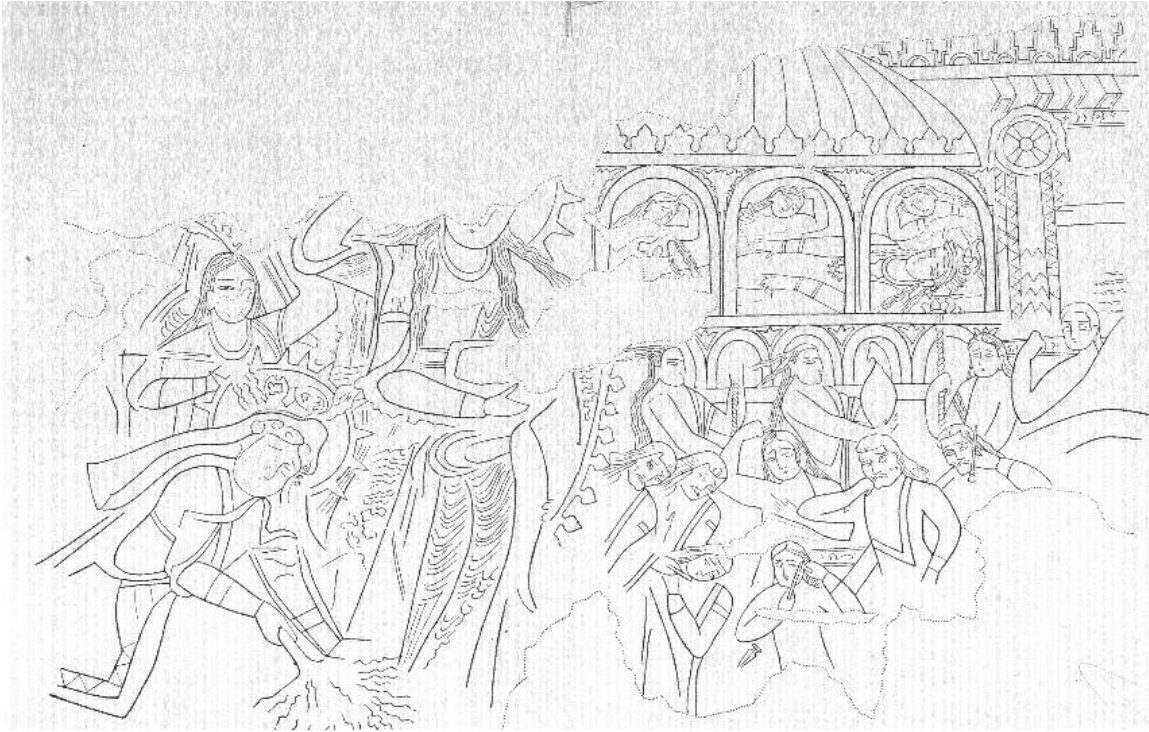


Fig. 1. After: A. M. Belenickij, *Monumental'noe iskusstvo Pendzhikenta*, Moskva, 1973, p. 12.

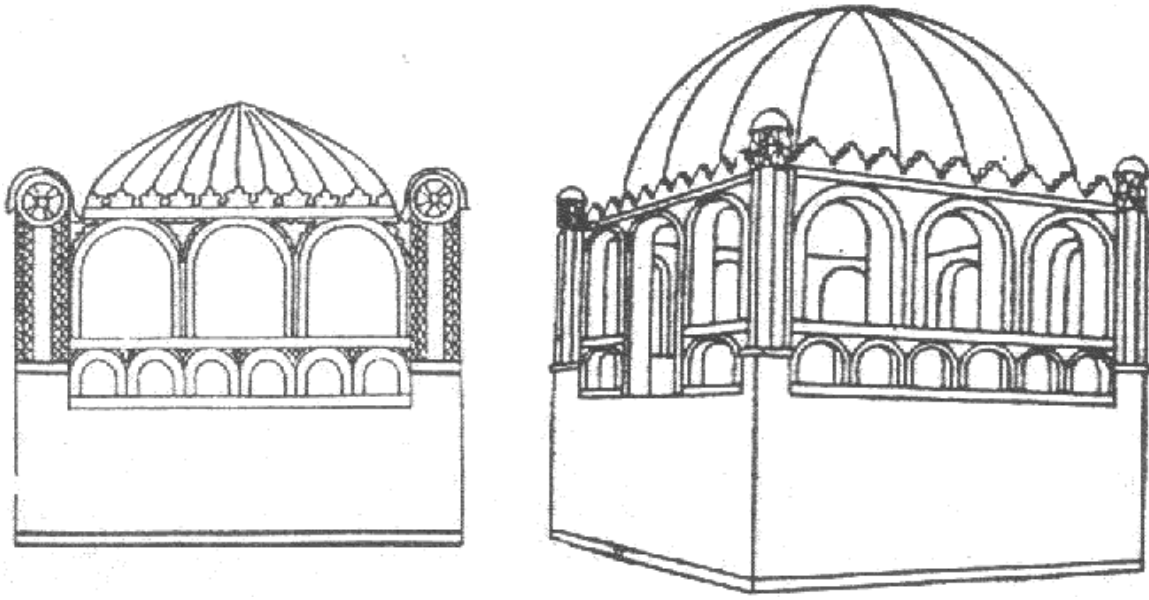


Fig. 2. After: Stock, 1990, fig. 5.



Fig. 3. After: Marshak, Raspopova, 1990, fig. 24.

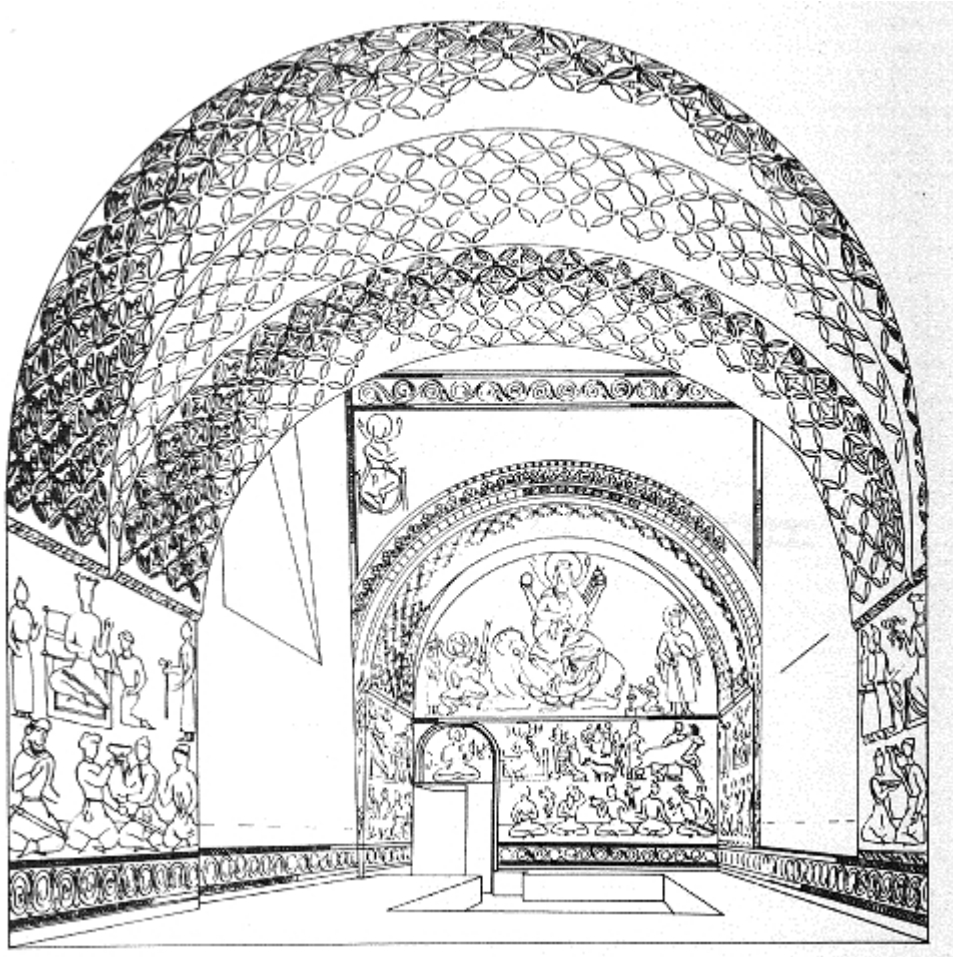


Fig. 4. After: Marshak, Raspopova, 1990, fig. 19.

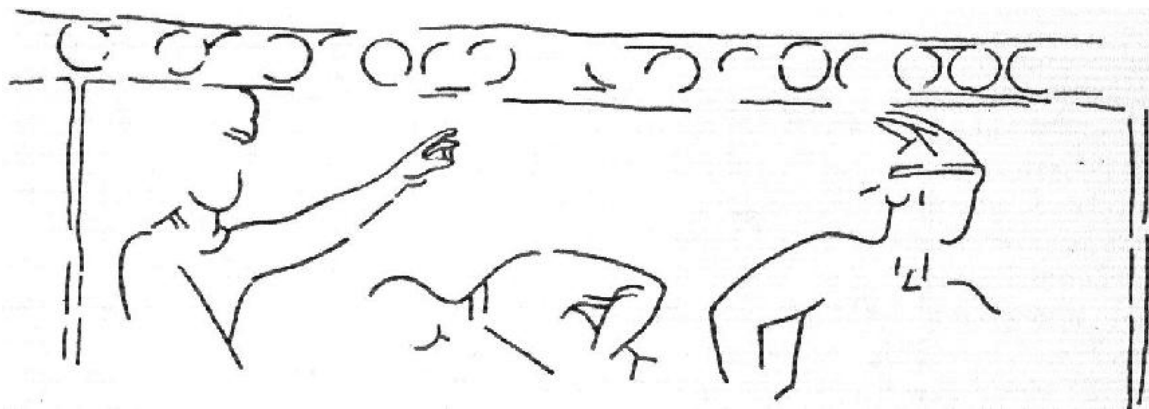


Fig. 5. After: Marshak, 2002, fig. 91.

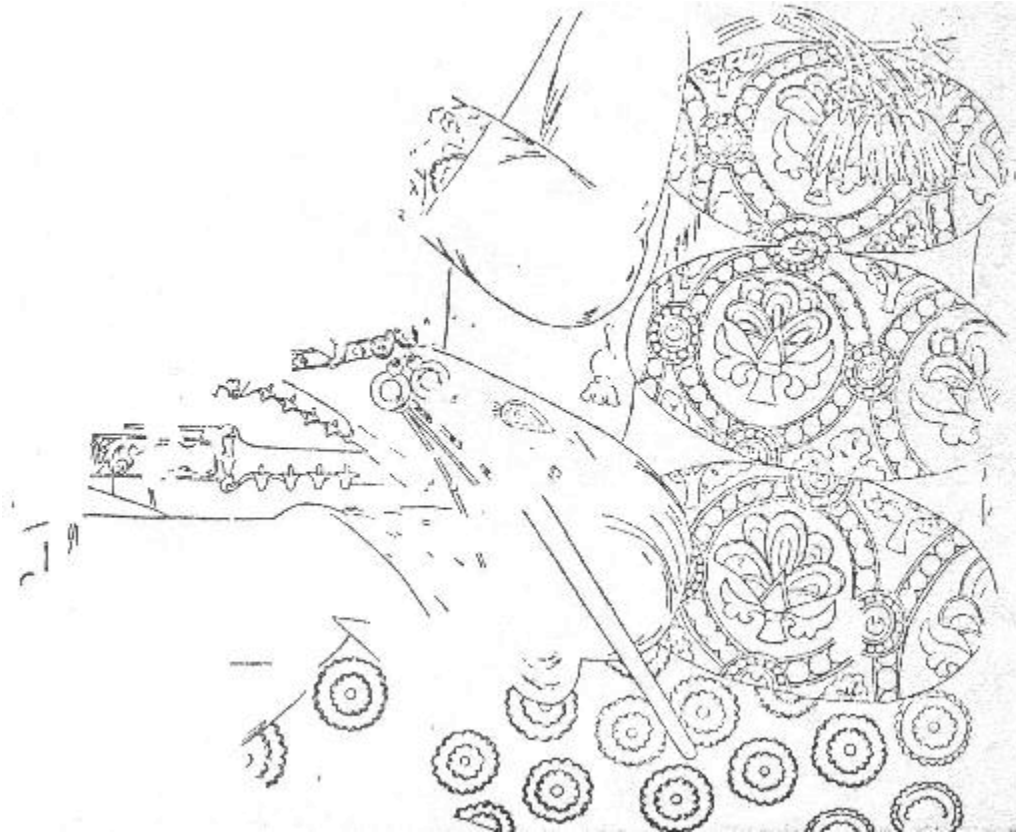


Fig. 6. After: Litvinskij, Solov'ev, 1986, fig. 4.



Fig. 7. After: Belenitskij, 1973, 11.



Fig. 8. After: Marshak, Raspopova, 1997/98.

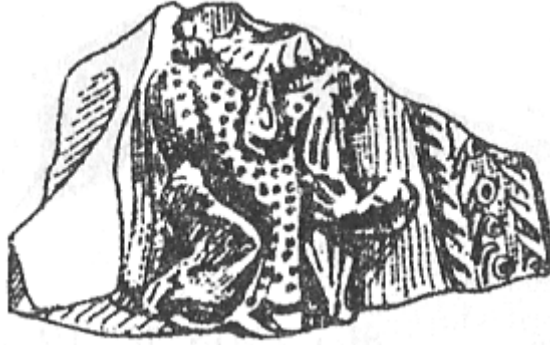


Fig. 9. After: Mkrtychev, 2002.b, p. 194, fig. 2.



Fig. 10. After: Abdullaev, 2000.





Fig. 11. After: Lunina, Usmanova, 1990.



Fig. 12. After: Mkrtychev, 2002.b, p. 196, fig. 1.



Fig. 13. After: Mkrtichev, 2002.b, p. 196, fig. 2.



Fig. 14. After: Vjatkin, 1927, fig. 21.

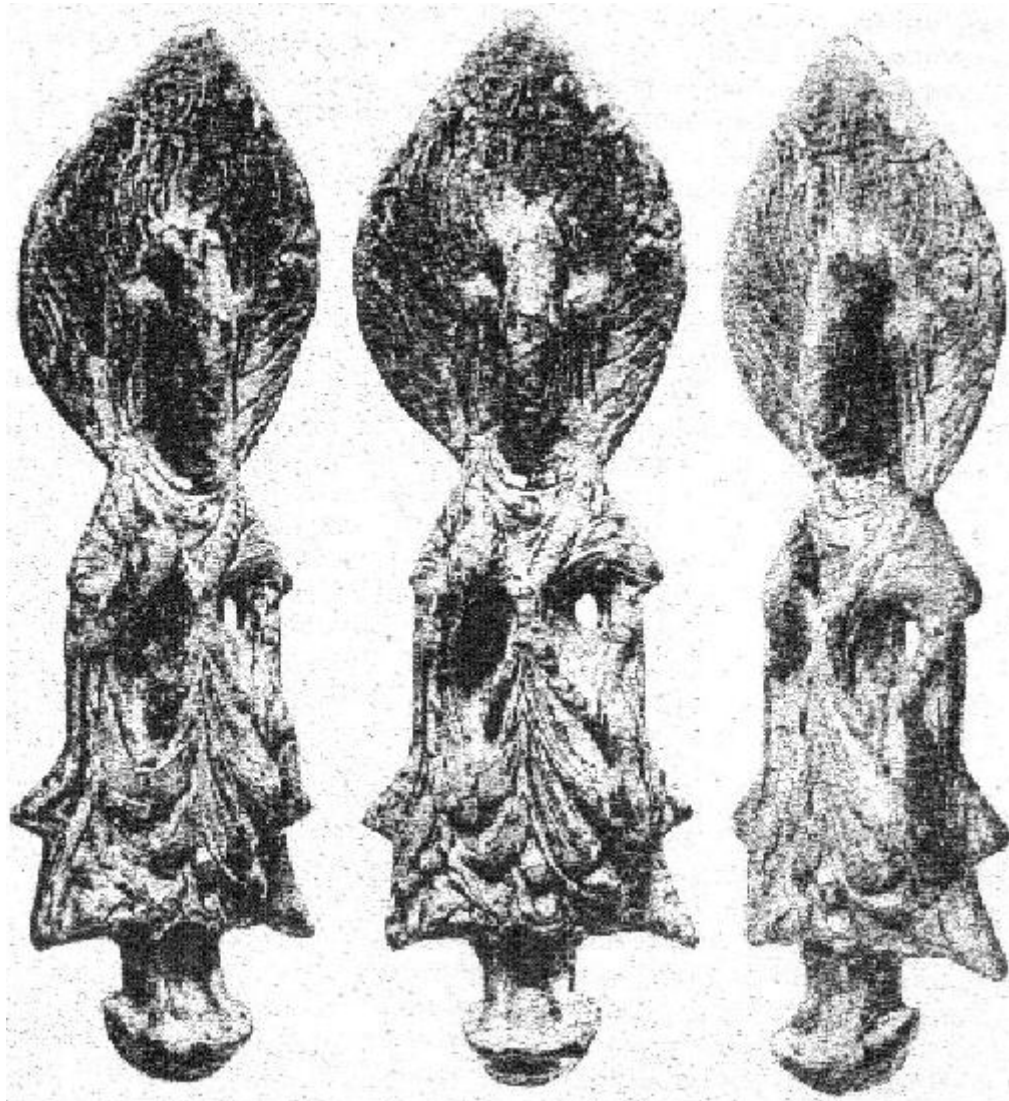


Fig. 15. After: Karev, 1998.

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