

CHAPTER SIX
STRUCTURES

This chapter, placed in the center of the work but anticipating data to be presented in the following chapters, has an important goal: as I have pointed out, in order for a purely external study of Sogdian great commerce to be fully and legitimately historical, it should be supported as much as possible by an analysis of the social and economic structures which formed the heart of this commercial expansion. I have therefore assembled information scattered throughout the Sogdian and external sources which makes it possible to sketch the internal structure of Sogdian trade, including social structures in Sogdiana and the expatriate communities, as well as within the merchant society itself (for example, the social contrast between great and small merchants, and the question of family organization within the commercial enterprises). I will discuss economic structures, in terms of the balance of exchanges, money, commercial law and the interface between small- and large-scale trade, and also geographic structures, in connection with transport and the considerable distances with which the Sogdians were confronted.

1. *Social Structures*

Among the societies of the Middle East in the early Middle Ages, Sogdian society is one of the best known. Important archaeological excavations have made it possible to excavate castles and rural villages as well as whole quarters of cities, so that the state of research in Sogdiana differs clearly from that prevailing in Iran, for example, where there has been very little excavation of the towns, particularly for the Sassanid period. To these archaeological data we can add written sources, fragmentary to be sure, but of very diverse origins, including Chinese, pre-Islamic Sogdian, and Muslim Arabic sources written after the conquest. The synthesis of this information can supply us with a sort of ideal type, showing how Sogdian society functioned at its height just before the Arab conquest.

The Importance of the Merchant Class

The first task is to characterize a merchant class in Sogdiana and the expatriate Sogdian communities. For this purpose, the testimonies in external sources are as clear as they are concordant.

The oldest are the Chinese texts. The pilgrim Xuanzang, who travelled through the Sogdian colonies north of the Tianshan in 630, writes:

Both parents and child plan how to get wealth, and the more they get the more they esteem each other [. . .] The strong bodied cultivate the land, the rest [half] engage in money-getting [business].

And later, with regard to Samarkand:

The precious merchandise of many foreign countries is stored up here.¹

In essentials the Tang annals repeat the testimony of Xuanzang, but when speaking of the towns to the north of the Tianshan, they specify that those towns are populated by *hu* merchants, and on the subject of Sogdians in general they indicate:

They excel at commerce and love profit; as soon as a man reaches the age of twenty, he leaves for the neighboring kingdoms; to every place that one can earn, they have gone.²

These testimonies are corroborated by other external observations of the Sogdians. Thus, the Armenian geographer Ananias of Širak writes in his *Geography*:³

The Sogdians are wealthy and industrious merchants who live between the lands of Turkestan and Ariana.⁴

The parallel with contemporary Chinese sources is striking. A century and a half later, the caliph al-Mahdī (775–785) had the following discussion in his palace at Baghdad with the poet Bashshar, from Tukharistan:⁵

¹ Trans. Beal, pp. 27 and 32, *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, p. 8, col. 8 and p. 9, cols. 9 and 10.

² Chavannes, 1903, pp. 120–1 and 134–5. *Xin Tang shu*, chap. 221, pp. 6233 and 6244.

³ Ananias of Širak, *Geography*, trans. Hewsens, 1992, pp. 32–5. This is a rewriting of the *Geography* of Ptolemy, from the 7th century.

⁴ Ananias of Širak, *Geography*, p. 74A.

⁵ Born around 714 at Bašra, he was in fact the grandson of a captive from Tukharistan.

Al-Mahdī asked me:
 From what people did you originate?
 I answered:
 Horsemen mostly, hard to their enemies, the people of Tukharistan.
 He said:
 The Sogdians are said to be braver.
 I answered:
 No, the Sogdians are merchants.
 Al-Mahdī did not contradict me.⁶

The perfect parallelism of these three independent sources in itself constitutes a historical fact, namely the existence of a class of great merchants sufficiently important and structured to make a significant impression on distant observers. At the time of the Arab conquest, the conquerors treated the merchants with particular favor: in 722, the Muslim armies captured the Sogdian rebels at Khujand; the nobles and the merchants were separated into two distinct groups, and only those in the first were put to death.⁷ The existence of a powerful merchant class in Sogdiana is therefore indisputable.

The convergence of these independent testimonies is one of the major justifications for this study of large-scale Sogdian commerce. Just as *Ancient Letter II* proves the existence of a network and makes the historical analysis of it possible, this echo among sources from different ends of Asia demonstrates the existence of a social class of merchants, which justifies a sociological analysis.

However, while the foreigners—including an inhabitant of neighboring Tukharistan—noted that the merchants had a great role in Sogdian society, what of the Sogdians themselves? The principal collection of Sogdian documents available to us from 8th century Sogdiana—the documents from Mount Mugh—were found in 1933 in Tadjikistan. This collection is made up of the archives of one of the great Sogdian nobles who resisted the Arabs, Dēwāštīč, the lord of Panjikent and self-proclaimed king of Sogdiana. It is made up primarily of letters dealing with the struggle against the Arabs and the administration of his agricultural domains, but also contains a few contracts (for marriage, the purchase of a burial plot, et cetera). In this corpus the term “merchant” (*γw'kr—xwākar*) appears only one time, in connection with the Sogdians besieged in the city of Khujand

⁶ Al-Isfahanī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, III, p. 132, cited by Spuler, 1952, p. 400.

⁷ Ṭabarī, II, 1444–1445, Eng. trans. vol. XXIV, pp. 175–6.

(at the border between Sogdian Ustrushana and Ferghana):⁸ document A 9 is a report addressed to Dēwāštīč which describes the political situation to the east and the surrender of the city. The text specifies:

This is the news: Khujand is at an end, and the whole people has gone out on trust of the amir, and whatever (there were) of noblemen, of merchants, and of workmen, 14 000 (altogether), they have evacuated.⁹

This text shows that the existence of a structured social class of merchants is not the simple effect of an external perspective.¹⁰

The Social Status of the Merchants

Iconography constitutes another source of information. Specifically, it allows us to outline the self-image that Sogdian society sought to present. Numerous mural paintings, rich in information, have been uncovered, notably at Panjikent. But these paintings bring to the fore a wide gap between Sogdian social reality as described in external accounts and the image of itself which the society wished to display. In fact, it is an aristocratic and not a merchant culture that clearly prevails in the iconography: scenes of legendary combats, armored heroes on horseback, persons carrying long swords even during banquets. Together with religious iconography and political iconography—including a representation of the capture of Samarkand by the Arabs at the citadel of Panjikent, and the theme of the kings of the world—noble iconography reigned supreme, integrating a refined culture with its depictions of Indian tales, the epic of Rostam, and more. We thus find nothing which relates to commerce, if not in the details: in one of the paintings at Panjikent (sector XVI, room 10), the customary sword of noble banquet-goers is replaced by a black purse attached at the waist.¹¹ The archaeologists point out the exceptional richness of the dress of the attendees [see plate V, ill. 1, and the plan in plate VI], and interpret this as a banquet of merchants.

⁸ Livšic, 1962, pp. 94, 95, 100. Livšic has incorrectly interpreted this text as referring to the city of Kucha.

⁹ Trans. Frantz Grenet and Étienne de la Vaissière, 2002, p. 172.

¹⁰ Belenitski and Marshak, 1971, p. 18.

¹¹ Belenitski and Marshak, 1971, p. 18. Grenet, “The self-image of the Sogdians,” in 2005.

Religious motifs also furnish information. One of the deities most often represented in Sogdiana, in paintings as well as on coins, is the “god with the camel,” seated on a throne with camel foreparts.¹² The consensus is that this was a god of wealth for the caravaners.¹³

One text gives an interesting piece of information, even if it is late:

In Bukhara there was a clan which was called the Kashkathān. They were an honored group possessing power and dignity, and they enjoyed great respect among the people of Bukhara. They were not (originally) dihqāns, but of foreign origin. They were, however, a good family, traders, and rich.¹⁴

The information is from the 10th century, but concerns the beginning of the 8th century. It seems to rather precisely define the social status of the merchants, who occupied a high place in society, and yet were not assimilated with the nobles.

At times the distinction between merchant and aristocratic families seems very slight. At Panjikent—by force of circumstances, the only city where such a study has been made—the aristocracy built houses which from the beginning integrated independent shops into their exterior walls, which were rented to artisans or to shopkeepers.¹⁵ The Sogdian aristocracy was not a purely landowning aristocracy, living by means of income from the land alone. It participated brilliantly in urban life, where riches and exchanges were concentrated, and from which the countryside seems to have been cut off.¹⁶ But the sole residence which may be identified as the house of a merchant at Panjikent, the one containing the painting of the merchant banquet, presents the same characteristics as the aristocratic houses: one

¹² Smirnova, 1987. Note, however, that the Bactrian camel was a dynastic emblem at Bukhara as well, and that it was commonly a symbol of military and virile strength in Central Asia. Thus the Qarakhanids in the 11th century were divided into two clans, the “lions” and the “(male) camels.” Starting in the 8th century, a sovereign of Ustrushana bore the name of “black (male) camel” (Qarabughra).

¹³ His name, on the other hand, is a matter of debate: Frantz Grenet sees him as Farn, the god of fortune (Grenet, 1995–6, p. 279), while Boris Maršak and Valentina Raspopova identify him with Wašaghū, god of victory but also of travellers (Maršak and Raspopova, 1990, pp. 141–2).

¹⁴ Narshakhī, trans. Frye, p. 30.

¹⁵ Raspopova, 1993, p. 26. Her typology is based on the distribution in statistical series of the city’s dwellings by location and the magnificence of their ceremonial halls.

¹⁶ On the economy of the plains and the mountains, see mainly Jakubov, 1988 and 1979. On urban population see Belenickij, Maršak and Raspopova, 1979.

of the bazaars of the city was built against it, and this was included in the plan of the villa from the beginning [see plate VI, ill. 1].¹⁷ Note, however, that Panjikent, located deep in the Zarafshan valley, was not the most mercantile city of the country, and that these social data thus originate from a region less concerned than others with great commerce.

At Semireč'e as well as near the Lobnor, we know that aristocrats were the founders of the Sogdian colonies. These colonies were not exclusively or even primarily commercial, and were initially established for the purpose of agricultural colonization. In the specifically mercantile sphere, we have no facts available that would enable us to determine whether the Sogdian aristocracy participated in the commercial development of the country. The agricultural wealth brought to the cities by aristocrats certainly created an important market for the merchants' luxury goods,¹⁸ but one could imagine that land revenues also served to finance their long-distance commercial enterprises. It is also unknown whether the nobles themselves embarked upon large-scale trade. The only texts which supply a partial answer are ambiguous: in Ancient Letter II, mention is made of "a hundred freemen from Samarkand" (100 "ztpyδrk sm'rkndc), at lines 19–20. The term here translated as "freeman" etymologically signifies "noble son." It seems probable, but not certain, that it had already lost its original meaning. The same text is addressed to "the noble lord Varzakk son of Nanai-thvār [of the family] Kānakk." But Kānakk seems to be attested as a title¹⁹ as often as a proper name.²⁰ In this case, it is hard to tell whether the name functions as a title or as a clan name. Given the documents that are currently available, we know neither the exact role that the Sogdian aristocracy could have played in the merchant emigration, nor the exact status of the merchants in the social hierarchy of Sogdiana.

¹⁷ Raspopova, 1971, p. 72.

¹⁸ See Raspopova, 1980, pp. 53–4, 107, 130–1 for the role of this noble market in stimulating the local craft industry.

¹⁹ See Yoshida, 1991, p. 242. Recto: "To my lord Kānak Tarqan eskātač." Verso: "To my lord eskātač Kānak Tarqan." The title seems to be "Kānak Tarqan" and the personal name "eskātač," for if this were not so, it would be difficult to understand the inversion between the two phrases.

Range of Activity and Social Hierarchy among the Merchants

The majority of Sogdian merchants were probably small merchants, completing a circuit between three or four towns over some hundreds of kilometers. In 648, Mi Xunzhi 米巡翬, of Beshbalik, requested a trading permit: 31 years old, he wished to go to the market at Turfan with two slaves (a boy of 15 years and a girl of 12), an 8-year-old Türk camel and 15 sheep.²¹ In 732–3, the Sogdian Shi Randian 石染典, a resident of Turfan, asked the Chinese administration for a passport in order to be able to travel from town to town: he travelled between Turfan, Hami and Dunhuang.²² Already at the time of the *Ancient Letters* certain merchants specialized in travelling the Gansu-Loulan route.

But others planned journeys of much greater distance. Without mentioning the case of Maniakh, who mounted an expedition from the Altai to Byzantium, and to whom I will return at greater length below,²³ it is enough to recall the case of Nanai-vandak, who wrote to Samarkand from Guzang/Wuwei, and to compare it with the lawsuit of the Cao family against the Chinese merchant Li of Chang'an: the range of activity in this instance was from Almalig, in the Ili valley north of the Tianshan, to Chang'an, which is not exactly local! Moreover, the transaction concerned 275 rolls of silk, or about the equivalent of 15 kg of pure silver, a significant sum.²⁴ The documents from Turfan occasionally show the involvement in transactions of Sogdians who had come directly from Sogdiana:

The fourth year *Xianheng*, the twelfth month, the twelfth day, in the prefecture of Xi 西 the commander Du 杜 of the government of Qianting 前庭府, [...] has bought, in paying 14 rolls of finished silk to Kang Wupoyan 康烏破延 *xing sheng hu* 興生胡 of the country of Kang 康, a good yellow camel 10 years of age . . .²⁵

Certain merchants, moreover, signed Chinese documents in Sogdian.²⁶ Lastly, the Arabic texts which mention Sogdian merchants show them

²⁰ Sims-Williams, 1992b, p. 53, and Grenet, 2000.

²¹ Jiang Boqin, 1994, p. 187.

²² Ikeda, 1981, p. 78.

²³ See chapter VIII, pp. 227 ff.

²⁴ See below, p. 271, for the calculation of the price of a roll of silk in silver.

²⁵ Yamamoto and Ikeda, 1987, text 29, p. 13.

²⁶ See Grenet, 1957, pp. 357–60, and Yamamoto and Ikeda, 1987, no. 33, p. 207, and pl. 27.

returning from expeditions in China,²⁷ by which at a minimum one must understand Turfan—which the Sogdians called the “City of the Chinese” (*Čīnānčkath*)—if not inner China.

The whole problem lies in the interaction of the different social strata which can be discerned in Sogdian commerce of the 7th and 8th centuries. While it is more than probable that great merchants organized and controlled Sogdian commercial companies after the period of the *Ancient Letters*, on the other hand we lack data that would allow us to evaluate their precise role in connection with the tradesmen seen in business documents.²⁸ One text alone makes it possible to demonstrate the existence in Sogdiana of very great merchants, very remote from the small Sogdian merchants depicted in the majority of these documents. At the time of the conquest of Paykent by the Arab armies in 706 (88 AH), a captive proposed to ransom himself for 5,000 pieces of raw Chinese silk.²⁹ This prisoner had organized the resistance of the merchant city, and had made contact with the Türks in order that they might come to his aid. He was certainly one of the principal merchants of this mercantile republic, specializing in trade with China.

This text aside, the greatest Sogdian merchants, so clearly designated as such in the external sources, remain unknown to us. We observe itinerant tradesmen whose range of activity was very wide, sometimes handling important sums, but mostly we see small merchants shuttling between the cities. An important part of the social hierarchy of the Sogdian merchants escapes us, without a doubt.³⁰

Such companies very probably had a familial basis. We have several pieces of evidence concerning the role of the family group in the conduct of Sogdian commerce. Besides the family connections attested in the *Ancient Letters*, the inscriptions of the Upper Indus allude to Sogdians travelling in family groups: five persons distributed over three generations, then a father and his son, two brothers, and

²⁷ For example Narshakhī, trans. Frye, pp. 44–5, or Ṭabarī, II, 1444–1445, Eng. trans. vol. XXIV, pp. 175–6.

²⁸ Contrary to the claim of Maljavkin, 1988. For the Muslim world, however, see Udovitch, 1970, and Goitein, 1967, pp. 149–167.

²⁹ See Ṭabarī, II, 1188–1189, Eng. trans. vol. XXIII, pp. 136–7.

³⁰ It has been suggested that *γlk* (with a feminine *γlh*), attested in the inscriptions of the Upper Indus, be seen as a word signifying “Great Merchant” (Sims-Williams, 1992b, p. 52), but the parallels mentioned lead rather to the notion of “master of the house,” “free man,” like *zthyδrk*.

lastly a father and his two sons.³¹ The son of Maniakh, the creator of western Sogdian commerce, succeeded his father. Much later, one of the last texts to mention a Sogdian merchant shows a small Sogdo-Uighur family network in action.³²

Our inquiry into the social structures of Sogdian commerce thus comes to a relatively sudden end, due to the lack of a document which would help us to understand the structure of the possible Sogdian commercial companies of the Golden Age, in particular the relations between great and small merchants, as well as those between the various expatriate communities.

2. *Legal and Political Structures*

The Sogdian Oligarchy

In Asia, the Sogdian political structure was rather exceptional. In many respects it calls to mind the Italian mercantile republics of the late Middle Ages. Sogdiana was not unified, and several Sogdian city-states shared the Zarafshan and adjacent valleys. Samarkand was certainly the principal political power: it occasionally managed to secure control of certain small cities,³³ and its king claimed the title of “King of Sogdiana, Sovereign of Samarkand” (*šγwδy’nk MLK’ sm’rknδc MR’Y*). Each city had its particular aristocracy, and the castles of the nobles made the Sogdian countryside bristle with many fortified towns around which the population was organized. The nobles drew vast revenues from the land and possessed properties in both town and country.

Within each state, the king enjoyed only the status of “first among equals.” The dynastic principle was not at all dominant in Sogdiana, at least at the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th, the time for which data is available: among the three known sovereigns at Panjikent there was no father-son succession, and at Samarkand we note two father-son successions, one deposition by

³¹ Fussman, 1997, p. 76, n. 16.

³² See chapter X, p. 325.

³³ Such as Maymurch and Kabudhan in 731: see Chavannes, 1903, *Notes additionnelles*, p. 53. We also have in the Persian *Qandiyya* the last memory of a tribute paid by the Bukharans to Samarkand: see the translation of Vjatkin, 1906, p. 247.

the people and two elections.³⁴ There is at least one example of a Sogdian king intervening directly in the commercial sphere: between 650 and 655 the king of He proposed to the Chinese to supply grain to the Chinese armies that had been sent to the west.³⁵

The urban community, *n'β—nāf*, had rights of its own in Sogdiana. This is specified in the legal texts. It was in the name of the community that the town could rent out certain properties, such as the bridge at Panjikent, the toll of which was entrusted to two persons, on condition that they pay 150 silver drachms in advance for the annual receipts.

From the Panjikent tax office and from the community, to Tarkhān and Vaghifarn. When you come across this notice, you should pay (lit. “give”) 150 drachmas, counting beforehand, each year, on the [takings of] the Chak bridge. Keep this notice as a proof. Year 14 of Dēwāshthīch the khūv of Panch, in the Khuryaznīch month. Sealed with the clay seal.³⁶

From a legal point of view, the city appears as a moral personality acting with full right, without reference to the king. In the contracts which the king concluded, he appears as a simple individual, subject to the same rules as other persons.³⁷ It even seems that in certain regions, it was in the name of the community that coins were minted.³⁸

No text makes it possible for us to make a direct connection between the presence of a strong merchant class and the Sogdian political structure. While it cannot be proven, the hypothesis of this connection is nonetheless very tempting. Indeed, the summit of Sogdian society was occupied by an oligarchy whose exact social nature we must struggle to discern. One can suppose that it was formed by the union of the families of noble *dihqāns*, with their possessions in the countryside, and the merchant families. At Bukhara,

³⁴ Maršak, 1990, p. 287.

³⁵ Chavannes, 1903, p. 145. *Xin Tang shu*, chap. 221, p. 6247.

³⁶ Document from Mount Mugh A 13, trans. Livšic, 1962, p. 69 and Henning, 1965, p. 249. See now Grenet and de la Vaissière, 2002, p. 187, n. 33. This text was translated again by Frantz Grenet and myself during a seminar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Yutaka Yoshida has kindly discussed it with us at length.

³⁷ See the texts from Mount Mugh, for example Livšic, 1962, pp. 53 ff.

³⁸ My sincere thanks to Yutaka Yoshida for having shared with me his readings of coins from Čāč: some of the coins published in Rtveldze, 1997–8 (p. 327) were unquestionably struck in the name of the *nāf*.

in any case, when the Arabs had seized the city, the merchant family of Kashkathān was at the head of the resistance to Islamization.³⁹ Likewise, at Paykent, the “city of merchants” par excellence in the Arabic sources, no sovereign is ever named and the merchants seem to have acted collectively. The community (*nāf*) of Turfan is cited together with the Chinese king of Gaochang/Turfan.

Sogdian Law

All in all we possess four Sogdian contracts. They give an idea of the legal aspects of Sogdian society. The first three texts were discovered in the archives of the king of Panjikent at Mount Mugh—a marriage contract, dating from 25 March 710, a contract for the purchase of a burial plot (very end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th century), and the location of a mill (in the neighborhood of 710);⁴⁰ the fourth, a contract for the purchase of a slave from Turfan, dates from 639.⁴¹ The text of this contract reads as follows:

[l. 1] As to the year, it was the year 16 of divine and great Ilteberking [by the name] of Yanchyu, [the ruler] of Gaochang, in the fifth [l. 2] month [of the] Chinese [calendar], [while] it is called the Khshumsafich month in Sogdian, in the year of the pig, on the twenty-seventh [day]. [l. 3] Thus, before the people in the bazaar of Gaochang, a monk [by the name of] Yansyan, [l. 4] the son of Uta, who is from the family of Chan, bought a female slave by the name of Upach, who is from the family of Chuyakk and was born in Turkestan, from Wakhshuvirt, son of Tudhakk originating from Samarqand, [l. 6] for [the price of] 120 drachms [coins which are] very pure [and were] minted in [Sassanian] Persia.

Monk Yansyan is to buy [l. 7] the female slave Upach thus as an unredeemable [slave who is] without debt and without possessions (?), [and who is] an unpersecutable and [l. 8] unapproachable permanent possession [of] his sons, grandsons, family, and descendants [as well]. Accordingly, [l. 9] the monk Yansyan himself and his sons, grandsons,

³⁹ Narshakhī, trans. Frye, p. 30.

⁴⁰ They have been edited and translated into Russian with a commentary by V.A. Livšic: Livšic, 1962, pp. 17–45, 45–53 and 53–63. For the funerary plot see the improved translation of Gershevitch, 1975.

⁴¹ Yoshida and Moriyasu, 1988. English translation by Yoshida in Hansen, 2003, modified on one point: “itinerant and resident”, now translated by Yoshida as “is persuasive (?) and effective and authorized” because of the Bactrian parallel quoted above in chap. 5, p. 132 n. 59.

family, and [l. 10] descendants may at will hit her, abuse her, bind her, sell her off, pledge her, [l. 11] give and offer her as a gift, and do whatsoever they may wish to [do to her]. [They are entitled to treat her] just as a female slave [l. 12] inherited from their father or grandfather, or a female slave [who was] born in their house, born on their side (?), or born at home, [l. 13] or as permanent property purchased with money.

[Accordingly,] as regards this female slave [named] [l. 14] Upach, Wakhushvirt no longer has any concern with her, renounces all the old [claims to her], [l. 15] and has no power to coerce her. This female-slave contract takes effect for all the people, itinerant or resident, [l. 16] both for a king and a minister. Whoever may bring and hold this female-slave contract, [l. 17] may receive and take this female slave [named] Upach, and may hold her as his female slave on this [l. 18] condition, [i.e.] such condition as is written in this female-slave contract.

[These people] were present there [as witnesses]: [l. 19] Tishrat, the son of Chuzakk originating from Maymurgh, Namdhar, the son of Khwatawch, [l. 20] originating from Samarqand, Pesak, the son of Karzh originating from Nuchkanth, Nizat, the son of Nanaikuch, [l. 21] originating from Kushaniya.

This female-slave contract was written by Ukhwan, the son of Pator [l. 22] by the authority of Pator, the chief scribe, by the order of Wakhushvirt, and with [l. 23] the consent of Upach.

[l. 24] Signature (?) of Pator, the chief scribe of Gaochang.

Verso

F[emale-slave] contract for monk Yansyan.

The characteristic features of this text place it midway between the Iranian tradition—going back to Babylonian law, inherited by the Achaemenid chancellery—and Chinese law. The general organization of the contract and the stereotyped formulae belong to the former heritage.⁴² But the text also incorporates some provisions which are specifically Chinese, in particular the mention of the consent of Upach. The sale of slaves was in fact very closely monitored in China, and had to occur in a quite precise and regulated framework, which here modified the form of the Sogdian contract so that it could actually be valid both for the Sogdian community as well as for the king of Turfan. The contract for the lease of the bridge

⁴² For comparison with the form of Sassanid contracts, see Choksy, 1988, and for a translation of Bactrian contracts, Sims-Williams, 2000.

at Panjikent shows that relatively complex legal and commercial formulae were in contemporary use in Sogdiana.

Lastly, the contrast within the populace between “itinerants” and “residents” is met again in the marriage contract from Mount Mugh.⁴³ Sogdian law thus might have recorded an indication of Sogdian mobility.

On the other hand, we do not possess the texts of any Sogdian laws. We know of their existence from a reference in an inscription on the great painting of Samarkand, but nothing of them has reached us.⁴⁴ Further to the south, Syriac texts have preserved scraps of the commercial regulations of the Sassanid Empire, and testify to a developed organization of commerce. A detailed jurisprudence made allowances for the risks of long-distance trade (shipwreck, fire, confiscations or plundering) in the rules of compensation in case of bankruptcy, organized the collective ownership of merchandise and the distribution of the shares in case of a separation of the partners, and fixed the rates of interest for merchants providing themselves with credit and counting on the profits from sales for their reimbursement.⁴⁵ We can only suppose the existence of such rules among the Sogdians, but the proofs are lacking.

3. *The Economics of Sogdian Commerce*

Money

While the monetary series from the Greek period were maintained up to the 5th century,⁴⁶ the coins struck thereafter in Sogdiana were of an entirely different type. In the oasis of Bukhara, the series called “Bukhar Khuda” began its long career based on a Sassanid prototype, the coins of Vahrām V (420–438) struck at the mint of Merv,

⁴³ Livšic, 1962, pp. 23 and 25–6: document Nov. 4, verso, lines 9–10. See above, pp. 131–132, for the discussion of these terms.

⁴⁴ Al’baum, 1975, p. 52, fig. 15 and pp. 54–6. See Maršak, 1994, *contra* Mode, 1993.

⁴⁵ See Peegulevskaya (Pigulevskaja), 1956, who uses the jurisprudence compiled by Ishoboht in the 8th century, in particular book V, largely devoted to commerce.

⁴⁶ Such as the archer type, for example, which I have already mentioned in chapter II, p. 55, and which survived until the end of the 5th century. See Zeimal’, 1994, p. 249.

which were used until the 13th century. It is a trickier matter to fix the exact date at which their issue began: two times can be considered, the end of the 5th century⁴⁷ or the 6th century.⁴⁸ The coinage of Samarkand also underwent an Iranian influence, due to the prevalence of coins paid by Pērōz after his defeat by the Hephtalites as well as imitations of drachms, and was further influenced in the 7th century by the Bukhar Khuda coins⁴⁹ as well as those of Chinese type with a central hole.

The penetration of Sassanid models is not explained solely by the abundance of coins associated with the tribute sent by the Sassanid state after the defeat of Pērōz. The creation of the Bukhar Khuda series and its diffusion in areas beyond the reach of possible Sassanid incursions attests to the existence of a deeper influence, of an economic rather than a military nature. The period of the invasions temporarily put an end to the features of the local coinage, which were six centuries old, in favor of an alignment with the neighboring Iranian and Chinese monetary systems. In the 7th century, several cities struck imitations of Chinese coins, just as several struck Bukhar Khuda. The princes did not have a monopoly over their issue: coins in the name of the goddess Nana were minted at Panjikent, which suggests that they were issued by the great temple of the city.⁵⁰ I have already mentioned the issue of coins in the name of the *nāf*.

But one of the characteristics of the local coinage persisted, because the coins rapidly lost a good part of their value,⁵¹ and their circulation was forced, being established and valid within the states that issued them. They bear overstrikes attesting to their validity, not to their quality.⁵² One text shows quite clearly that the Sogdians, great

⁴⁷ Loginov and Nikitin, 1985.

⁴⁸ Zeimal', 1994, p. 246.

⁴⁹ Zeimal', 1994, p. 249.

⁵⁰ I owe this suggestion to Frantz Grenet.

⁵¹ As early as the 7th century the Bukhar Khuda had lost from 20 to 30% of their silver, and the content declined further afterward. The last series of the archer type of Samarkand contained between 0.2 and 0.3 grams of silver in the 5th century. On the circulation of money in Sogdiana see Belenickij, Maršak and Raspopova, 1980.

⁵² It is possible that their name also reflects the same idea: in the documents from Mount Mugh we find the term "drachms [of the type of] religion," *δρμυη δυν'κκνι* (Livšic, 1962, document Nov. 3, recto l. 20, p. 21; Nov. 4, recto l. 20, p. 22; V 8, l. 12, p. 47, read by Livšic as *δρμυη δυν'ρκ'η*—the correction has been made by I. Yakubovich, who is preparing a new edition of these texts). This term probably designates the group of coins of Sassanid type struck in the 7th century,

traders, had perfect awareness of the necessity, for their purposes, of having a currency without worth, for fear of seeing it leave the country in the merchants' bags:

The coins should be (such) that no one would take them from us nor out of the city, so we can carry on trading among ourselves with (this) money.⁵³

The Sogdian coins were simple tokens of account issued by city-states with feeble political power and were intended solely for economic exchange in Sogdiana, in contrast to the Sassanid coins, which were instruments of dynastic prestige whose value remained more or less accurate over the long term. Minted in small quantity, the Sogdian coins played only a very minor role in great commerce, and are unknown in China.

When the Sogdians used a currency in their large-scale commercial activities of the 6th and 7th centuries, it was the Sassanid drachm. The example of the principal Sassanid hoard found in China is revealing: the hoard of Ulugh Art includes 947 Sassanid and Arab-Sassanid coins, of which 567 are coins of Khusrō II (591–628) and 281 are Arab-Sassanid coins of the Khusrō II type. It also contains 13 gold bars. It was hidden hastily in a cleft of rock at the exact opening of the pass joining Ferghana and the Tarim basin by way of the high valley of the Alai, and thus shows what a merchant or refugee reaching China from Central Asia in the 7th century could carry with him.

When a Sogdian sold a slave at Turfan in 639, he asked to be paid in “drachms [coins which are] very pure [and were] minted in [Sassanid] Persia.” They were present in the mouths of the deceased, following a practice which recalls the obols offered to Charon.⁵⁴

Sassanid silver coins, although found in limited number in China, unquestionably were circulated over a vast area as a result of Sogdian commercial activities. This is attested in the written sources. For want of Persian or Bactrian merchants, who are never or very rarely mentioned in the texts, it was the Sogdians who transported these coins on the land route.

long after the fall of the empire, the members of which contain a quite variable amount of silver, but all of which bear on the reverse the symbol of the Zoroastrian religion, the fire altar.

⁵³ Narshakhī, trans. Frye, p. 36.

⁵⁴ See Thierry, 1993, pp. 100–2.

The Sassanid drachms were not circulated solely because of their weight in silver: they were occasionally able to serve as monetary instruments in China.⁵⁵ These coins were legal tender in the Gansu corridor (Hexi) at the end of the 6th century, the only region of China, together with Canton and Tonkin, in which this was the case.⁵⁶ Under the Tang they also posed difficult problems for the authorities charged with control of the markets in the capital, where they circulated.⁵⁷ A fragment of the Tang fiscal statutes provides an interesting detail: the westerners who settled in the empire had to pay their first taxes in silver coins, changing to payment in kind only after two years had passed.⁵⁸

On the whole, Sogdian great commerce did extremely well without any coinage of its own. A large-scale barter economy operated from one end of Asia to the other, composed of a few deluxe products in universal demand—precious metals, silk, spices, perfumes. Yet it must be noted that what appears to be barter from a western perspective is actually a monetary exchange from the perspective of the Chinese: Sogdian products were paid for in rolls of silk in China, where silk was in fact a money.

Sogdian Products

The main text enabling us to know precisely what products were traded by the Sogdians on a daily basis along the Chinese route is certainly the *Register of the Customs* of Turfan, mentioned in the previous chapter. A fragmentary text, it gives us details of commercial operations over a few months.

The goods exchanged fit perfectly into the general framework of Sogdian commerce: gold, silver, brass, ammonia, saffron (or turmeric), silk thread, medicinal plants, “stone honey,” perfumes. Only silk came from the East; the other commodities were typically occidental

⁵⁵ See the objections of Zeimal, 1991/2, p. 171. Thierry, 1993, p. 134, concedes the existence of a circulation of silver coins in Hexi due to the presence of strong *hu* communities.

⁵⁶ This is also a very good example of the difficulties to be met in systematically passing from archaeological finds to history, for none of the monetary finds from 6th century Hexi contain Persian coins. See Thierry, 1993, pp. 98–9 and 133, and the *Sui shu*, chap. 24, p. 691.

⁵⁷ See Twitchett, 1967, p. 213.

⁵⁸ Twitchett, 1963, p. 142 (*Tax statutes*, Art. 6, from 624 and 719).

to the Chinese. All of these products were rare and precious, even brass, produced in Persia.⁵⁹ The Sogdians had an important silver mine in Čāč.⁶⁰ Saffron could have come from neighboring Tukharistan, which produced it in abundance.⁶¹

To this list must be added musk, which the Sogdians traded from the time of the *Ancient Letters*, and which is mentioned again as the commodity carried by a Sogdian merchant in China in a text by Abū Zayd written at the beginning of the 10th century.

We must also include slaves. The only Sogdian sales contract from Turfan is concerned with the sale of a young girl from Turkestan. Sogdian slaves are mentioned on several occasions in the documents from Turfan. Above all, in the Chinese capitals the Sogdians specialized in the importation of young female servers, musicians, singers and dancers who pleased the fashionable quarters of Chang'an.

To the west, a Byzantine text notes that the silk trade occupied the primary position among the enterprises conducted by Sogdian merchants. Archaeological excavations also indicate the role played in Sogdian commerce by the export of Sogdian and Sassanid silver tableware. On the edge of the forests of the Upper Volga, these objects were exchanged for Baltic amber, furs and slaves.⁶² Such dishes are also found in China.

What emerges from these lists is that Sogdian commerce was not specialized—rather, the Sogdians traded everything that could have value in Inner Asia. It is a fact that at certain times these very diverse products were principally exchanged for silk.

The Status of Silk in Sogdian Trade

The distinctive role of silk in Sogdian commerce is connected to its function as money in China. In fact, monetary circulation in China acted according to a very different model from that which prevailed in the West. Together with a metallic currency without intrinsic value

⁵⁹ For each of these products, see Laufer, 1919, and Schafer, 1963.

⁶⁰ Burjakov, 1974, pp. 102–7, points out that production at the mine in Čāč began well before the Muslim period and grew strongly in the 7th century.

⁶¹ Ibn Ḥawqal, trans. Kramers and Wiet, p. 459: “Saffron in abundance is found from Washjird and Shuman as far as Quwadhiyan, and is exported to a great number of regions and countries.”

⁶² See below, chap. VIII, pp. 249–253.

and of a chronically insufficient quantity to satisfy the needs of economic life, the roll of silk and the bushel of grain served as monetary instruments in their own right.⁶³

There were two causes for the flow of silk to the West. The first is attributable to Chinese diplomacy against the nomads: I have already alluded in the first chapter to the driving role that this played in the birth of long-distance commerce in Central Asia during the 2nd century BCE. The second cause was no more commercial than the first. After the Han period, the 7th century and the first half of the 8th century were the second great period for the movement of silk by land to the West: at that time the Tang dedicated a considerable part of its budget to financing the expansion of the empire westward. Around 750, silk and hemp fabrics represented 55% of the receipts of the state, while grain accounted for 35% and coins 9%. In the first half of the 8th century, 20% of the receipts in fabric were dedicated by the state to control of the western regions, which amounted to more than 5 million pieces of cloth every year.⁶⁴

These were the circumstances in which considerable quantities of silk arrived in the Tarim basin, in the form of salaries and expenditures for the soldiers and Chinese administrative personnel stationed in all the towns from Dunhuang to Suyab. The example of a high Chinese military functionary at Dunhuang (in manuscript Pelliot 3348 V 2 B) shows that for the first 6 months of the year 745, the army owed him 120 piculs of grain, or more than 8 metric tons, a sum which was converted to coins and then paid in silk. If it had been paid in coins, 160 kg of bronze would have been sent by the army to Dunhuang, and that only for the pay of a single functionary . . .⁶⁵ This phenomenon had two consequences for the Sogdian merchants. One was positive: the transportation costs of the silk were cut in half, as the Sogdians were responsible only for the second half of the journey, from the Tarim basin to Sogdiana and beyond, while the first half was financed by the Chinese state. The other consequence was more negative: from the time that the administration took charge of the transport of silk from the capitals to the Tarim basin, the milieu of the Sogdian caravaneers in the towns of Gansu,

⁶³ Thierry, 1993, pp. 132–4.

⁶⁴ Trombert, 2000b, pp. 108–9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

one of their oldest areas of settlement, must have known some hard times, since one of the most important commodities had escaped from their hands. Is it a matter of chance that the Sogdian families which integrated themselves into the Chinese administration came from *sartapao* circles in Gansu that had changed their activities?

It is therefore necessary to differentiate the periods of Sogdian commercial history according to the presence or lack of abundant and inexpensive silk in Eastern Turkestan. It was the stability of the Han Empire over centuries that made it possible for western merchants to come and settle in Chinese territory and to establish their networks there. From the 3rd to the 5th century silk still circulated—this is shown by the document from Niya, cited in chapter II, concerning the silk merchants from China during the second half of the 3rd century, but this commerce was conducted under much more difficult conditions that increased its cost, and it is indeed of a shortage that the text speaks.⁶⁶ After the period of disorder in the 4th century, the Sogdians succeeded in reconstructing their networks in a satisfactory manner, for according to the text of Cosmas Indicopleustes, considerable quantities of silk circulated by the land route at the beginning of the 6th century. The success was in this case purely commercial, as the Chinese state was absent from Central Asia. The birth of the Türk Empire brought silk of diplomatic origin to the market in force, sent by the states of North China to the new nomadic power beginning in the 550s. The conquest of the Tarim basin by the Tang from 640 onward at last opened the way to silk of administrative origin. Then the Sogdians sold all of the exotic and expensive products mentioned above to the Chinese armies in exchange for the silk paid them as salaries until the 760s, at which time Chinese control over the area totally collapsed. The Chinese state needed the Sogdians in order to maintain its hold over its Central Asian territories, and the benefits they received during this period were certainly very considerable: it can be shown that the price of silk precisely doubled between Dunhuang and Samarkand at the beginning of the 8th century.⁶⁷ This was a matter neither of

⁶⁶ “At present there are no merchants from China, so that the debt of silk is not to be investigated now [. . .] When the merchants arrive from China, the debt of silk is to be investigated.” Trans. Burrow, 1940, p. 9, document 35.

⁶⁷ See the demonstration of this in chapter X, p. 271.

commerce between merchants, nor of commerce between states, but of the balance between the needs of the Chinese state and those of the Sogdian merchants.

The only silk available afterward was either produced locally or, up to the year 840, sent by the Tang to the Uighurs in Mongolia. Meanwhile, an economic phenomenon of major importance had taken place: between the time of Cosmas Indicopleustes and the 9th century, the maritime route supplanted the land route both in terms of the volume and of the value of trade. Perhaps the Sogdians owed the preservation of their position in the great commerce of China to the continuous shipment by the Chinese administration, from 550 to 760, of extensive quantities of silk of non-commercial origin to the west. But after the revolt of the Turco-Sogdian general An Lushan, who put North China to fire and the sword beginning in 755, Persian commerce prevailed.

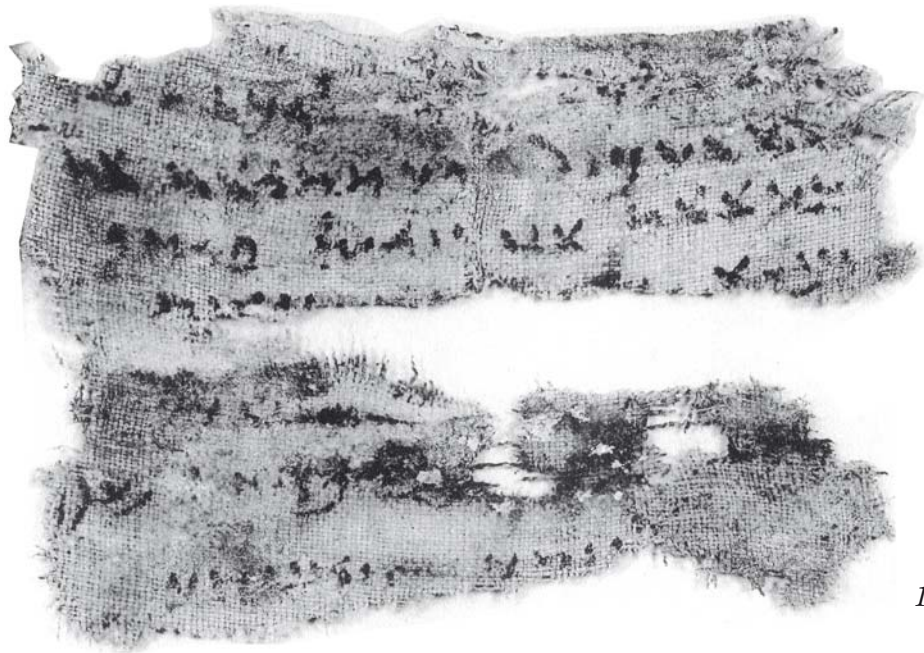
4. *The Sogdians and their Rivals*

My study is devoted exclusively to the Sogdian merchants. Other merchants are however mentioned in the texts I have cited, and it may be wondered how these different communities coexisted and competed with each other. Certain peoples were able to rival the Sogdians over the entire extent of their commercial lines, while others engaged in a more local competition, or one limited to certain well-defined products.

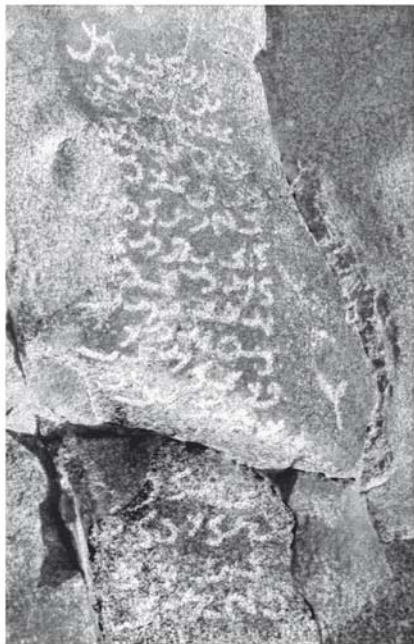
The Societies of the Tarim Basin

Among competitors of the more local variety were first of all the merchants of Khotan. They are indeed a good example of those peoples who enjoyed both a commercial niche—precious stones, in their case—and a geographical niche: jade came from their territory, and their city was the largest on the route between Badakhshan, whence came garnet and lapis lazuli, and the Chinese possessions. Together with the Sogdians, the Khotanese were thus the great merchants dealing in precious stones in the Tang Empire.⁶⁸ They were

⁶⁸ Schafer, 1963, p. 224 ff. The Sogdians exported carnelian and rock crystal (quartz), among others.



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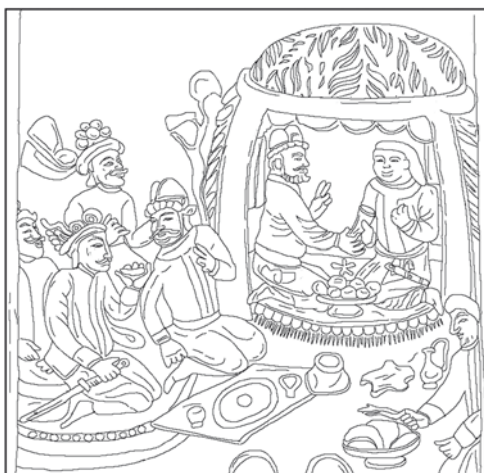


3

Plate I. Documents pertaining to Sogdian commerce. Ill. 1: The linen envelope of *Ancient Letter II* (courtesy of the British Library Board). Ill. 2: A Sogdian inscription of the Upper Indus (from Jettmar, 1989). Ill. 3: Sogdian *ostrakon* from the Strait of Kerch (© V. Livshic).



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Plate II. Merchants and ambassadors of the steppe. Sogdians in Chinese funerary reliefs. Ill. 1: Caravan on the Miho relief (© Miho Museum). Ill. 2: Ambassador An Jia (© CNRS, Fr. Ory).



Plate III. Life in the communities in China.
Ill. 1: A banquet (© Miho Museum).



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Plate IV. Chinese statuettes representing Sogdians. Ill. 1: Caravaneer (© Musée Cernuschi).
Ill. 2: Merchant on foot (© Musée Guimet). Ill. 3: Groom (© Musée Cernuschi).



Plate V. Iconography of the merchants. Ill. 1: Merchants at a banquet in Panjikent (© Hermitage Museum).

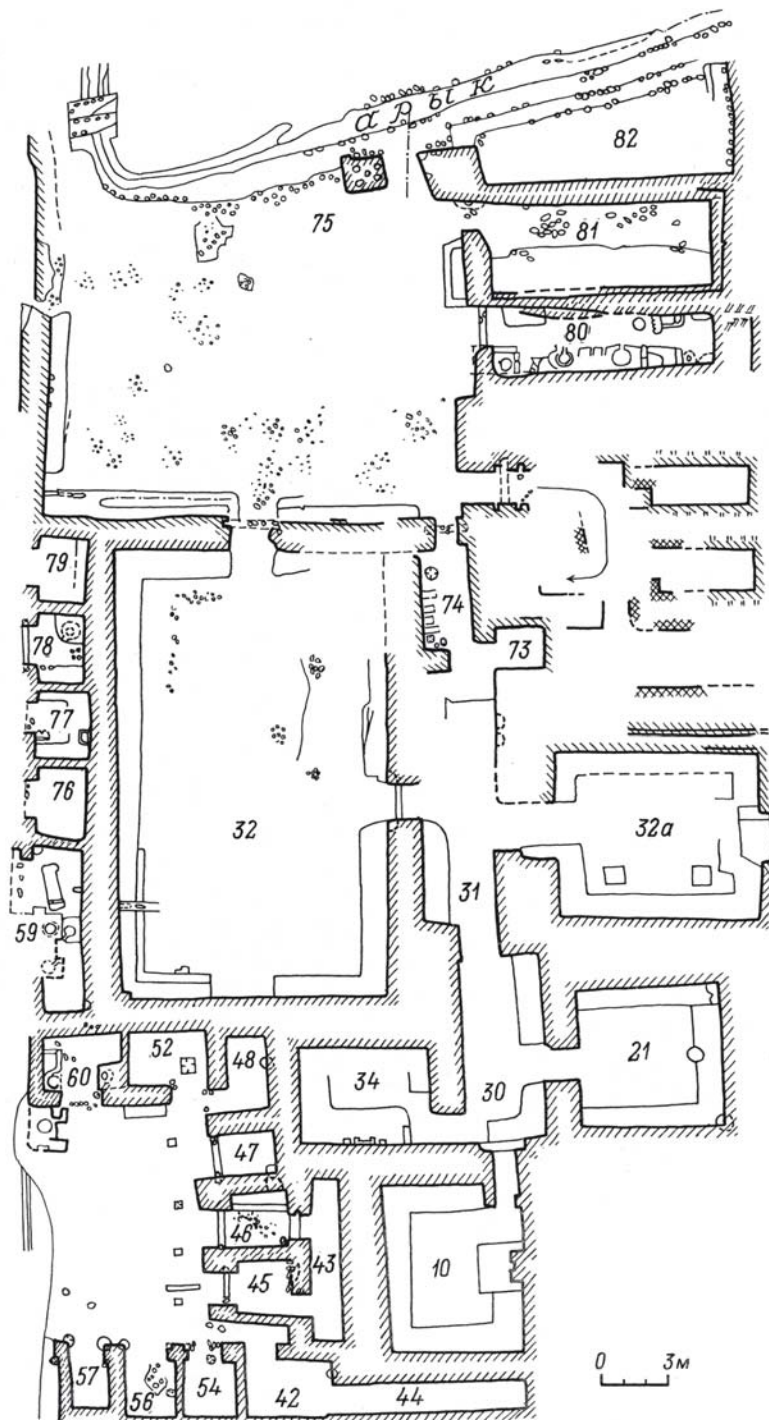


Plate VI. Panjikent. Ill. 1: A bazaar integrated into the plan of a property (from Raspopova, 1990).

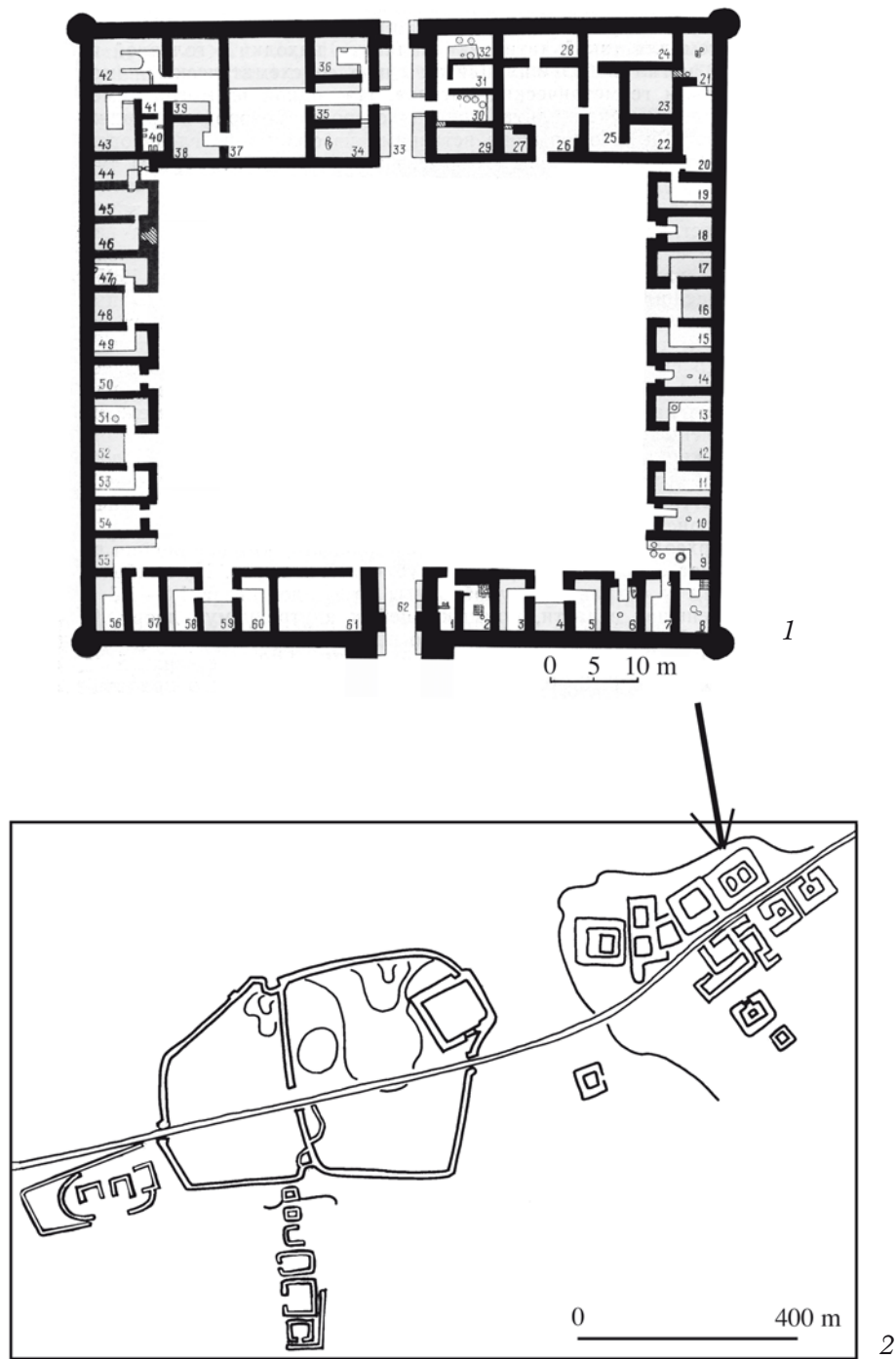


Plate VII. Paykent. Ill. 1: A Muslim fort (*ribāt*) (from *Gorodišće Paykent*, 1988). Ill. 2: Plan of the city and its *ribāt* (© CNRS, Fr. Ory, from Seménov, 2002).



Plate VIII. Silver objects made or sold by the Sogdians. Ill. 1: The head of Senmurv, found on the Ob (from Marshak and Kramarovskij, 1996). Ill. 2: Sogdian pitcher with its Khorezmian inscription (from Smirnov, 1909). Ill. 3: Sassanid dish with its weight inccribed in Sogdian (from Smirnov, 1909).

also probably the predominant merchants in Tibet;⁶⁹ furthermore, the principal market of Khotan was that of furs.⁷⁰ The long-standing presence, since at least the 4th century,⁷¹ of Sogdian merchants in the city thus in no way prevented the development of a significant Khotanese commerce, even though it did not have the range of that conducted by the Sogdians. No document describes the relations between the two merchant groups,⁷² but we may suppose that the Khotanese could surely have possessed the political means to chase the Sogdians from their city, which had long been independent, had there been conflict between them. We may therefore imagine that their relationship was one of cooperation. A man named Mi Liang 米亮, perhaps a Sogdian, sold jade from Khotan to Chang'an during the second half of the 8th century.⁷³

Sogdian dominance is more apparent on the northern route. We have few documents which indicate the presence of other merchants: at the Customs of Turfan at the beginning of the 7th century, two transactions involving a Kuchean are mentioned against 29 involving Sogdians. The Kuchean economic texts are primarily of an agro-pastoral nature.⁷⁴ Some commercial contracts in Saka have also been recovered at Maralbaši, to the east of Kashgar.⁷⁵

But the most striking absence remains that of Chinese merchants. They appear only very rarely in the sources. It is true that the lawsuit already mentioned opposed a family of Sogdians and a Chinese merchant, but this document is the exception. In China, very little is known about the exact role of merchants during the first period of the Tang dynasty, up to the year 755. When the government tried to stimulate economic life and commerce in the Chinese territory furthest to the northeast, it called upon western merchants

⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Khotan was not the "City of Tibet" (*madīna al-Tubbat*) of the Arab geographers, contrary to what is often read. Thus, for example, in Idrīsī (trans. de la Vaissière, 2000, 3rd climate, section 9); Rubinacci, 1974, has shown that it was Kashgar that was so named.

⁷⁰ Bailey, 1982, p. 38. See also the *Hudūd al-Ālam*, trans. Minorsky, p. 92, for a list of the furs exported from Tibet.

⁷¹ See the document from Endere Kh. 661, cited above (p. 64), which is difficult to date.

⁷² The documents cited in Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, 1992, seem to belong to the world of the village and countryside.

⁷³ Xiong, 2000, p. 182.

⁷⁴ See Pinault, 1998.

⁷⁵ Henning, 1936, p. 11.

(*shang hu*). It is only with the second period of the dynasty that the texts present Chinese merchants,⁷⁶ when the role of the foreign merchants—who were cut off from their bases and too closely linked to the rebellion of An Lushan—had diminished. Mi Liang sold jade at Chang’an under the direction of a great Chinese merchant.

Western Neighbors

Of the ancient Bactrian masters there remained only rather weak heirs at the time of the Sogdian zenith. The merchants of Tukharistan are occasionally mentioned in the Chinese texts, and the very fact that they are treated distinctly allows us to point out their feeble representation. At Chang’an, the production (and importation?) of fine-quality glass seems to have been their specialty.⁷⁷ Very few Bactrian texts have been found in the Tarim basin. On the other hand, a few Bactrians are mentioned in the Chinese documents. While we know more than 850 Sogdian names at Turfan, there are 2 Tuhuoluo 吐火羅 in all (and 26 if we include the Luo, of which only around ten were actually Tokharians). This is a very small number, especially compared to the number of Sogdians.

Some of these references are nevertheless not without interest for our subject: among the ten or so Luo, at least four appear in a clearly commercial context. One document is particularly worthy of mention: in a travel permit issued by the Chinese administration, a *gosuo* 過所, dating from 685, Tokharians are seen to have travelled with Sogdian merchants. One of the Tokharians, named Moseduo 磨色多, 35 years of age, was en route with one male and two female slaves, two camels and five mules. The other Tokharian Fuyan 拂延 *p^hut jian* (“favor of Buddha”?) was 30 years of age, with two slaves and 3 mules. They were part of a group led by the Sogdian Kang Weiyiluoshi 康尾義羅施, which also included two other Sogdians. None of them spoke Chinese, and they had to await the services of an interpreter, Nanipan 那你潘 (or Ninapan) in order to obtain the right to go beyond Turfan. They were guaranteed by five citizens from cities of the region—Turfan, Beshbalik, Hami, Qomul and Qarashahr—who very probably were locally settled caravaneers, four

⁷⁶ Twitchett, 1968.

⁷⁷ Enoki, 1969, p. 1, citing the *Bei shi*, chap. 97, p. 2275.

of whom bore Sogdian names. They had come from the West and sought to go eastward to the capital, Chang'an.⁷⁸ The other commercial document mentioning a Tokharian, Luo Yena 也那 is a contract for the sale of a horse from 733, drawn up for a Sogdian at Turfan. The Tokharian, who was called a “prosperous *hu*” 興胡—a merchant—was one of the witnesses of the sale, together with other Sogdians.⁷⁹ Lastly, a travel permit from the same year lists one Luo Fujie 伏解, a laborer employed by a Sogdian and registered with him on the permit.⁸⁰ Continuously associated with Sogdians, these Bactrian merchants hardly seem to have been autonomous.

At Gilgit, much closer to Bactriana, only twelve Bactrian inscriptions are known. In the 6th and 7th centuries, the coins of northeastern Tukharistan, under Türk domination, bore Sogdian countermarks,⁸¹ which seems to imply Sogdian economic control of the region.

Later I shall analyze Khorezmian long-distance commerce, which certainly existed in the western steppe but was little developed in the East.⁸² Khorezmian commercial activities were included within the Sogdian commercial lines in the 8th century: in the middle of the 8th century, the silver coins of Khorezm began to carry a Sogdian legend, while those made of bronze continued to have one that was purely local. No political reason justifies this novelty: the only explanation lies in the inclusion of Khorezm in the Sogdian economic sphere, and particularly in its commercial area; this fact would account for the contrast between silver coins, intended for great commerce, and bronze coins.

The Great Rivals: The Persians

Two peoples were able to try to compete with the Sogdians throughout their domain: the Persians and the Jews of the Diaspora.

The diplomatic aspects of the connections between the Sogdian merchants and the Sassanid state will be analyzed at greater length further on.⁸³ It is certain that from the 5th century the Persians had

⁷⁸ 64 TAM 29: 107, vol. VII, p. 88 ff. See V. Hansen, “The Impact of the Silk Road Trade on a Local Community: The Turfan Oasis, 500–800,” forthcoming.

⁷⁹ 73 TAM 509: 8/10, vol. IX, pp. 48–9.

⁸⁰ 73 TAM 509: 8/21a, vol. IX, p. 68.

⁸¹ Rtveladze, 1987, p. 127.

⁸² See below, chapter VIII, pp. 255–258.

⁸³ See below, chapter VIII, pp. 227–232.

organized a maritime commercial network which reached its apogee in the trade with China during the 9th century. A large amount of archaeological information and a few texts show the importance and strength of their commercial activities. Concurrently with the Sogdian commercial expansion, a Persian commercial expansion took place, and throughout the history of Sogdian trade the Persian network acted as its counterpart.⁸⁴ In terms of commercial geopolitics, the formation to the southwest of Sogdiana of a merchant class supported by one of the leading states of the time could not remain without major consequences, particularly for the land routes that constituted the Sogdian domain.

In the Sogdian inscriptions of the Upper Indus, we find some names of Sassanid merchants, as well as that of a more distant Syrian merchant,⁸⁵ which at least proves the existence of a cooperation that we may imagine to have been reciprocal, to a certain extent. The passage from Cosmas cited in chapter III, while showing the partial separation of the two networks' areas of influence in Asia during the first half of the 6th century, also implies points of contact, since Chinese silk was able to pass from Sogdiana to the Persian Empire.⁸⁶ Geographically, Merv and Bukhara were the two hubs necessary for these contacts. Items have been found at Merv which attest to the importance of connections with Sogdiana. In fact, several Sogdian *ostraka* have been found at the Sassanid site of the city (Erk Kala). In an area developed in the course of the 5th and 6th centuries, the rubbish heaps of a huge house contained writing exercises in Sogdian, Bactrian and Middle Persian.⁸⁷ With good reason, the archaeologists think that a school of languages existed there, which is evidence for the Central Asian connections of Merv. The discovery of a mold for the fabrication of crosses is a sign of the role that Merv played as a stage in the spread of Nestorianism in Central Asia.⁸⁸

In addition to this archaeological evidence, we also have texts which show Merv to have been the great Sassanid stronghold in the direction of Central Asia. We have already seen that, from a mon-

⁸⁴ Kervran, 1994, Piacentini, 1992, as well as Hall, 1992, and Pigulevskaja, 1951.

⁸⁵ Sims-Williams, 1997, pp. 65 and 71.

⁸⁶ See Frye, 1993.

⁸⁷ See Herrmann and Kurbansakhatov, 1994, p. 69, and 1995, p. 37. See also Frejman, 1939.

⁸⁸ Herrmann and Kurbansakhatov, 1994, p. 68.

etary perspective, it was from Merv that Sassanid models reached Sogdiana and became established there.

There is every reason to believe that an important interface between Persian and Sogdian merchants existed at Merv. This is in fact affirmed in certain texts, which ought therefore to take precedence over the indirect evidence mentioned above. These texts are, however, all from the 10th century at the earliest, even though at times they give accounts of events at the end of the 7th century. They too will be used in detail later in this study.⁸⁹ Let us here simply note the most significant of them: at the beginning of the 10th century, the historian Ṭabarī details the circumstances of one of the expeditions led from Merv against Bukhara in 699, and indicates that at that time the Sogdians were the principal moneylenders in the marketplace of Merv, although we cannot determine how far back in time this situation extended.⁹⁰ The texts of the Muslim period also provide evidence for a Persian commercial presence in Sogdiana.⁹¹

To my knowledge, the Chinese texts do not mention any Persian merchants who had arrived in China by the land route. On the other hand, an Arabic text speaks of a merchant from eastern Iran who had made the journey to China in the second half of the 8th century.⁹² It is therefore probable that Persians joined the Sogdian caravans to China. Furthermore, a text from the middle of the 8th century mentions a merchant from the empire of the Arabs at Turfan.⁹³ A significant Persian and Arab presence is well known in South China, particularly from the 8th century. Yet the Persian political refugees who fled to the Chinese court after the fall of the Sassanid Empire were very probably more numerous than the Persian merchants who had come by the land route.

The relationship between Persians and Sogdians thus appears to have been based upon a relative separation of their respective areas of influence, in which contacts were made in a specific zone. In 568, when the Sogdians attempted to break the equilibrium in their favor by establishing themselves in the Persian commercial area—as I will

⁸⁹ See chapter VIII, pp. 273–276.

⁹⁰ Ṭabarī, II, 1022, Eng. trans. vol. XXII, pp. 165–166.

⁹¹ In 701, some Arabs and Persians passing a party of Türks between Kesh and the Amu Darya were assumed to be merchants (see Ṭabarī, II, 1078, Eng. trans. vol. XXIII, p. 27).

⁹² Sadighi, 1938, p. 118.

⁹³ My thanks to Éric Trombert for having brought this to my attention.

show in chapter VIII—the Sassanid government firmly turned them away and reestablished the *statu quo ante*, which remained in effect until the first half of the 8th century, when the Persian network and the heart of the Sogdian network were incorporated into the same political space, the Muslim Caliphate.

Sogdians and Rādhānites

The Rādhānite Jewish merchants are assuredly the most famous great merchants to be found in the historiography of the Near Eastern early Middle Ages. Only one text is known,⁹⁴ a passage from the *Kūtāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik* by the postmaster Ibn Khurdādhbih (middle of the 9th century), which describes the extraordinary maritime and terrestrial itineraries of these Jewish merchants, ranging from Spain to China. One of the land routes passed through the Maghreb, Egypt, Baghdad, Fars, India and China. The second is of more direct interest:

Sometimes also, they take the route beyond Rome and, crossing the land of the Slavs, travel to Khamlydj, the capital of the Khazars. They embark upon the sea of Djordjān [the Caspian], then arrive at Balkh, they go from there to Transoxiana, and continue on the road to Urt (Yurt) of the Toghozghor [the Uighurs], and from there to China.⁹⁵

Very few documents are available to confirm this text. In China, only two isolated fragments testify to a Jewish presence: a Hebrew manuscript from Dunhuang (9th century)⁹⁶ and a Judeo-Persian fragment mixed with Sogdian from Dandān-Uiliq (8th century)⁹⁷ are the oldest pieces of evidence known. The first was used as an amulet, and the second dates from the second half of the 8th century and was found near Khotan. It is a letter about the trade of livestock and perhaps also of clothing and slaves. A certain number of words seem to be Sogdian (the words signifying “slave” and “harp”). These are the only documents for the early Middle Ages. No Sogdian document attests to a Jewish presence in Transoxiana before the Arab invasion, but one text, the Persian *Qandiyya*, reports that Jews who

⁹⁴ A second text by Ibn al-Faḡīh only repeats in an incomplete manner the information provided by Ibn Khurdādhbih.

⁹⁵ Trans. de Goege, p. 116, Arabic text p. 153.

⁹⁶ See Wu Chi-yu, 1996. Reproduction in *Sérinde*, 1995, p. 78.

⁹⁷ Utas, 1968.

had come from China played an important role in pre-Islamic Samarkand. Unfortunately the information is not dated.⁹⁸ In Persia, a Jewish cemetery existed at Merv at least since the 6th century,⁹⁹ and several cities of Khurasan possessed strong Jewish communities (e.g., Nishapur and Maymana, near Balkh).¹⁰⁰ In the direction of India, the Jewish presence is attested by a few graffiti in the passes of the Indus¹⁰¹ and especially by a passage from Bīrūnī.¹⁰² Lastly, the cities of the Khazar Empire, which from the end of the 8th century dominated all the steppe north of the Caucasus and the Crimea, harbored strong Jewish communities.¹⁰³

It is probably not impossible for these different communities from the south to have been organized into east-west networks. The text of Ibn Khurdādhbih, in spite of the great mistrust it has inspired, probably describes a historical reality that existed in the middle of the 9th century.¹⁰⁴ The general historical interpretation that could be given it has been shown: this Rādhānite network could have taken its name from a region in the immediate neighborhood of Ctesiphon, the Sassanid capital.¹⁰⁵ From this one can deduce that the network was a Jewish duplication of Persian commercial operations, and that *rādhāniyya* could simply be an archaic name for the network of the Diaspora of Iraq. Within this framework, if it can be considered in tandem with the better-known Sassanid networks, there is no reason to doubt the reality of this Jewish network.¹⁰⁶ We do not know

⁹⁸ See the translation of Vjatkin, 1906, pp. 247–9: there is no edition of this highly composite text, only a Russian translation.

⁹⁹ See Klevan, 1979, and Rtveladze, 1997. The Jewish community of Merv probably existed from the Parthian period.

¹⁰⁰ Rtveladze, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Jettmar, 1987a. Written in square Hebrew characters of eastern type, these inscriptions find a close paleographical parallel in a Bukharan codex of 847. They are situated in the same region as the Sogdian inscriptions already alluded to. One Sogdian inscription is found in the same location (Campsite).

¹⁰² *Indica*, trans. Sachau, p. 206: the inhabitants of Kashmir allowed only Jewish merchants into their territory, for fear of invaders. On the grounds of this passage and the inscriptions referred to above, K. Jettmar has hypothesized that Sogdian merchants were replaced by Jewish merchants in the 8th century, which is possible but cannot be proven with so few elements. Note that the Sogdian inscriptions probably do not go beyond the 5th century: the question of the 6th–8th centuries thus remains unresolved.

¹⁰³ See Golb and Pritsak, 1982, p. 35, for the evidence of an important presence at T'mutorokan, Phanagoria, Kerč and to the north of the Caucasus.

¹⁰⁴ Cahen, 1972.

¹⁰⁵ Gil, 1974, p. 320.

¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of the 7th century, Theophylactes Simocatta wrote of a

what the relations between Sogdian and Rādhānite merchants might have been. The fame of the Rādhānite network is entirely due to the text of Ibn Khurdādhbih—whose duties as postmaster of a government centered on Iraq made him particularly suitable to speak of these merchants—but it should be clear that, even though we have no equivalent text concerning them in the Arabic and Persian sources, the Sogdians were masters of the terrain over a large part of the Rādhānite network. Until the beginning of the 9th century, great commerce by land was Sogdian. On the other hand, it is possible that in certain areas it was replaced by a Jewish network—whose importance in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean during the 10th and 11th centuries is known thanks to the documents of the *Geniza* of Cairo¹⁰⁷—which could have benefitted in earlier centuries from the religious neutrality of these merchants and the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism.

All things considered, Eurasia during the early Middle Ages appears as a remarkably integrated space of commercial networks united by relations of dependence, collaborations, interfaces and interlockings which enabled them to cover the entire continent. In Asia the Sogdian, Persian, and surely the Syrian and Indian networks are particularly conspicuous, but these groups of great merchants also relied, regionally and locally, on smaller-scale merchant groups. These merchants must have maintained points of contact between the great networks, as Merv, the markets of Chang'an, the Crimea, the Upper Volga and northern Mongolia did for the Sogdian merchants.

5. *Mastering the Distance*

A Caravan Commerce

The Sogdians were carriers as much as they were merchants. The role of the *sabao* in their communities, the very fact that the Chinese chose this word to name the community officials who were promoted to mandarin rank, the text of the *Ancient Letters* as well as the Chinese

significant Jewish commerce supported by the Sassanid state which operated towards the Red Sea (V 7.6, trans. Whitby).

¹⁰⁷ See the works of Goitein: Goitein, 1967 (in which, moreover, a Jew from Samarkand is mentioned, p. 400, n. 2) and 1973.

documents from Turfan—all show the importance of the Sogdians in the transport of merchandise. In China, it seems that they played a quite important role as auxiliaries of the army in its expansion to the northwest as well as the northeast.¹⁰⁸ We know little about the concrete realities of Sogdian transport.

The classic image of trade in Central Asia is that of a caravan commerce, organized around great caravans of camels. The reality which the documentation allows us to outline is far more complex.

In this sphere there exists a marked contrast between the business documents and the other texts. The business documents report small caravans, at the most composed of some forty people, and often considerably fewer, as well as donkeys, mules or horses. The more literary texts, whether Chinese or Arabic, for their part evoke great caravans of camels with several hundred caravaners. The travel-permits of Kucheans provide a good example of everyday traffic north of Kucha in the middle of the 7th century: a group of wooden tablets was recovered by Pelliot at the foot of an old guard tower, located at the opening of a gorge six kilometers to the northwest of Kucha on the mountain route to Aqsu.¹⁰⁹ This tower was part of a group of guard towers constructed at regular intervals in order to monitor the caravan traffic. The caravans travelled from one post to another, provided with travel permits which precisely described their composition (name of the leader of the caravan, number of individuals and beasts of burden, date, the post from which they had departed and the post to which they were heading). The travel permits studied are from the years 641–644. Some examples: one caravan was composed of 20 men, 3 donkeys and a horse; another included 6 men, 10 women and 4 donkeys; a third had 32 men and 4 horses. These Kucheans data, bearing upon a small local trade, are amply confirmed by the rare Sogdian data available. Thus in 732–3, the caravan of Shi Randian 石染典 was made up of four Sogdians, including a laborer, two slaves and Randian himself, and ten mules; he added a horse in 733.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See notably Arakawa, 1992, on the role played by Chinese and Sogdian merchants in the transport to Central Asia of merchandise destined for the armies. For the northeast, see above, p. 143.

¹⁰⁹ Pinault, 1987, pp. 67–8.

¹¹⁰ Ikeda, 1981, p. 78.

In the *Ancient Letters*, however, a possibly extensive group of travellers is mentioned (*Ancient Letter V*, lines 13–4: “Many Sogdians were ready to leave, (but) they could not leave . . .”) and the caravans from Dunhuang to Loulan mentioned in *Ancient Letters I* and *III* seem to have been sufficiently large to assure the protection of a woman travelling on her own.¹¹¹ At the same period of time, a document from Khotan describes a caravan of 319 beasts of burden transporting 4,326 rolls of silk.¹¹² Later, texts of every origin mention caravans of several hundred merchants. Without again going over the Tibetan Buddhist text already cited, whose 500 Sogdian merchants belong to the style of the *exemplum* rather than to objective reality, we can consider the caravan of 240 *hu* merchants and 600 camels and mules captured by the Chinese in the region of Qinghai,¹¹³ or the reference by the Arab traveller Ibn Faḍlān to an enormous caravan which took him from Khorezm to the Upper Volga in 921.¹¹⁴ The historian Ṭabarī speaks of Sogdian merchants returning as a group from China in 722,¹¹⁵ and Narshakhī does the same in his *History of Bukhara*.¹¹⁶

There is nothing strange about the existence of two principal modes of travel. The very etymology of the word “caravan,” like the first references to the institution in India, refers to the idea of a military convoy, to travelling as a group for reasons of security. It may be supposed that in safe regions the Sogdian merchants moved in small groups or individually, but that they regrouped in order to cross areas that were difficult, either due to the nature of the terrain (the desert between Dunhuang and the southern route, or the Qaidam) or to political conditions (Sogdiana when the Arab armies were present, the territory of the Ghuzz).

The same pragmatism explains the references in the sources to every kind of pack animal. The camel was employed: to the Sogdian woman from Dunhuang who wrote *Ancient Letters I* and *III*, a priest promised to supply one camel in order for her to be able to join the caravan and make the journey to Loulan.¹¹⁷ Furthermore,

¹¹¹ Reichelt, 1931, pp. 8–9 and 22–5.

¹¹² Lubo-Lesničenko, 1994, p. 237.

¹¹³ Schafer, 1950, pp. 180–1.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Faḍlān, trans. Charles-Dominique, p. 38.

¹¹⁵ Ṭabarī, II, 1444–1445, Eng. trans. vol. XXIV, p. 176.

¹¹⁶ Trans. Frye, pp. 44–5.

¹¹⁷ Trans. Reichelt, pp. 8–9, line 11.

several Chinese texts insist upon the superiority of the camel in this desert region:

Northwest of Chü-mo [Qjemo] there are several hundred li of shifting sands. On summer days there are hot winds which are a calamity to travellers. When such a wind is about to arrive, only the old camels have advance knowledge of it, and they immediately snarl, and standing together, they bury their mouths in the sand. The men always take this as a forewarning, and they too immediately wrap their noses and mouths in blankets. The wind is swift, and passes by in a moment, but if they did not protect themselves, they would be in danger of death.¹¹⁸

Tang iconography abundantly represents westerners arriving in the Chinese cities on the backs of camels. While some of these terracotta statuettes do not represent merchants, but musicians and particularly grooms bringing camels or horses to China [see plate IV, ill. 3], it nonetheless remains true that a large number of them clearly represent Sogdian merchants, dressed in characteristic costume [see plate IV, ill. 2], seated on the backs of camels with full packs [see plate IV, ill. 1].¹¹⁹ Northern Sogdiana raised camels, and the Chinese captured large numbers of them in the course of their raid on Čăč in 751;¹²⁰ moreover, half-wild Bactrian camels are still common in the Uzbek steppes. The Türk general Toñuquq prided himself on camels brought back from a raid on Sogdiana.¹²¹ A Sogdian sold a ten-year-old yellow camel to a Chinese at Turfan in 673.¹²²

But in no case was the camel the sole means of transportation: the caravans in the documents from Kucha as well as the texts from Turfan referred to above indicate the presence of horses, donkeys and mules. In certain areas, such as the passes of the Upper Indus, transport on camel-back was impossible—only yaks were able to travel there. At any rate, no large caravan could have found sufficient pasturage in those desolate areas. Sometimes goods even had to be transported on the backs of people, as on the “suspended paths”

¹¹⁸ *Bei shi* 97, p. 3209, cited by Schafer, 1950, p. 181.

¹¹⁹ The highly fanciful identifications in Mahler, 1959, should not be relied upon.

¹²⁰ Schafer, 1963, p. 71.

¹²¹ Inscription of Bañ-Tsokto, line 48. Trans. Giraud, 1960, p. 64: “Yellow gold, white silver, virgins and women, humped camels and pieces of silk were brought in abundance.”

¹²² Yamamoto and Ikeda, 1987, text 29, p. 13.

made of planks suspended from posts on the sides of cliffs, which made such an impression on the Chinese pilgrims travelling to India.¹²³

Sogdian Ethics and the Spirit of Caravanserais

Masters of great caravan commerce over several centuries, the Sogdians had to solve one of the major problems facing this kind of commerce, that of daily halts in the city or between cities. We know the solution that the Muslim world worked out over time: networks of caravanserais lined the main commercial highways of Iran, Turkey and the Arab world. The origin of the Islamic caravanserai is one of the most debated problems of eastern historical architecture, and it is unresolved to this day. While numerous hypotheses have been formulated,¹²⁴ the almost complete absence of data concerning the material organization of terrestrial commerce in the Sassanid Empire makes the reconstruction of this origin difficult.¹²⁵ In the context of a study of Sogdian commerce, it is natural to pose the question of a possible Sogdian origin or influence.

None of the caravanserais or buildings known in Sogdiana that were constructed on the same plan can be attributed with certainty to the pre-Islamic period. Thus, assuming their function as caravanserais to be proven, the *ribāt* constructed at the gates of the merchant city of Paykent date only to the end of the 8th century, and were built on virgin soil¹²⁶ [see plate VII, ill. 1 and 2]. Excavations in the Kyzylkum desert, at a stopping-place for caravans between Samarkand and the delta of the Syr Darya, show the development of a simple encampment into a permanent facility at the turn of the 8th-9th centuries.¹²⁷ At Kanka on the other hand, to the south of Čāč, the excavators have apparently located, beneath a Qarakhanid caravanserai, the remains of a building on the same plan from the Sogdian period, and they hypothesize that this was also a cara-

¹²³ Jettmar, 1987b.

¹²⁴ Kervran, 1999.

¹²⁵ Currently the Sassanid maritime warehouses are better known: see Kervran, 1994, for analyses of several of these sites.

¹²⁶ Here I should like to thank Djamal Mirzaaxmedov, who was kind enough to allow me take part in his excavations of the *ribāt* of Paykent, as well as Gregori Semënov for our long conversations about Sogdian commerce at the same site. For the *ribāt* of Paykent, see *Gorodišče Paykent*, p. 113 ff.

¹²⁷ Manylov, 1996, pp. 122–3.

vanserai.¹²⁸ But the excavation is not sufficiently advanced for this information to be considered reliable. At the current time, archaeology has not provided us with knowledge of any pre-Islamic caravanserai in Sogdiana.¹²⁹ From a linguistic point of view, it should be noted that in Sogdian, the word meaning “inn,” “hotel”—the only word comparable to the notion of caravanserai—was borrowed from Chinese (*tym* < Chinese *dian* 店).¹³⁰ The institution was therefore not local, and nothing allows us to establish a connection between the Chinese inns and caravanserais. When the Sogdian translator of the *Vessantara Jātaka* attempted to convey the Indian idea of hospices for travellers founded by royal charity at the gates of cities, he was obliged to coin a half-Sogdian, half-Indian word, *pwny'nkt'k* (“houses of merit”), as the necessary term was not available to him.¹³¹

There are thus no Sogdian caravanserais. Paradoxically, it seems that the Muslim institution of the caravanserai may have been of East Iranian—and more specifically of Sogdian—origin. Ibn Ḥawqal devotes a long passage to the manner in which travellers were accommodated in the region:

In every part of Transoxiana there is no person having an estate or farm at his disposal who does not apply himself night and day to put this custom into practice. It is really an object of competition among them, which leads to the disappearance of fortunes and the ruin of properties, while ordinarily the people try to accumulate more than the others, show off their properties and go to a lot of trouble to add to their possessions. I myself have noticed in Sughd the remains of an abode, where the entrance had been closed by beams,¹³² and it seemed evident to me that this door had not been closed for a hundred years and even more and that no passer-by had been prevented from staying there: occasionally the accommodation was occupied unexpectedly and without anything having been prepared, by one hundred, two hundred people, or even more, with beasts and servants; they found

¹²⁸ Personal communication from the excavator, M. G. Bogomolov. See Burjakov, 1989, pp. 27–31.

¹²⁹ The building of Aktepe Čilanzar, interpreted as a temple by the excavators, nevertheless has features typical of a caravanserai. But the dating of this site is not precise enough—7th or 8th century—to be certain that it is pre-Islamic. See Filanovič, 1989, p. 47.

¹³⁰ Moreover, it passed from Sogdian into Persian with the meaning of “caravanserai” (Henning, 1939).

¹³¹ Trans. Benveniste, 1946, line 43, p. 4.

¹³² Note here a misinterpretation by the translator: the door was blocked (in an open position) by posts, see BGA (*Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*) II, p. 466.

forage for their animals, food for themselves and bedding in sufficient quantity to enable them to avoid using their own blankets [. . .] Let us add that the greater part of the wealthy in the lands of Islam only make expenditures for their personal amusements [. . .] On the contrary, one notes that the inhabitants of Transoxiana devote their fortunes to the construction of hospices (*ribāṭāt*), to the repair of roads, to the establishment of waqfs [religious endowments] for the pursuit of the holy war, or to works of charity, to the construction of stone bridges. Rare indeed are the frivolous people who refrain from such activities. There is no gathering place, no frequented waterpoint, no inhabited village which might not be endowed with hospices with more than enough room for the influx of travellers who stay there.¹³³

It is a description of the very concept of caravanserai which is given here, a concept which took root in an ethic specific to Transoxiana, and therefore probably in pre-Islamic Sogdian culture. For all that, Ibn Ḥawqal does not specify the architectural form of these *ribāṭāt*, and the conclusion drawn from archaeological data remains entirely valid. The Muslim caravanserai probably emerged in the 9th or 10th century from the adaptation of this pre-Islamic ethic to a new architectural form, that of the square Muslim fort (*ribāṭ*), which the Muslim governments scattered along the frontiers to face the infidels in the course of the 9th century.

For the situation before that period, the idea advanced by the Soviet researchers, that the oversized courtyards of the Sogdian castles could have served as accomodation along the routes, seems to me to be very sound. The case has been studied particularly at Zaamin, where two great routes of Sogdian commerce diverged, one leading to Čāč, the other to Ferghana: a great enclosure measuring 100 meters per side, whose ceramics date from the 7th century, corresponds well to the text of Ibn Ḥawqal.¹³⁴ In its presentation of the manorial way of life, his text entirely confirms this idea, in my opinion. The ostentatious generosity of these charitable works and accomodations seems to be the counterpart in the commercial sphere of the aristocratic way of life which completely dominated Sogdiana. At Panjikent notice has been made of the attention that the Sogdian nobles gave to greeting and reception in the superbly decorated halls

¹³³ Ibn Ḥawqal, trans. Kramers and Wiet, II, pp. 448–9, Arabic text BGA, II, pp. 466–7.

¹³⁴ *Dreenij Zaamin*, ill. 2, pp. 96–7 and pp. 22–5. At Čāč, some castles seem to have large enclosures (Filanovič, 1989, p. 40, and Filanovič, 1991, fig. 2, 3, 4).

planned for this sole purpose, which formed a significant part of the area of noble houses.¹³⁵ The underlying ethic is the same: a noble has a duty to appear and accomodate guests at his home. Economic necessity and the aristocratic way of life thus went hand in hand and converged in the utilization of the courts of the castles, which were very numerous in Sogdiana, by the merchants and their caravans.

The connection between manor and caravanserai is not certainly architectural, as has been occasionally supposed.¹³⁶ It is functional: the one succeeded the other for the purpose of housing travellers. On their own lands the Sogdians did not have need of caravanserais, for a sufficiently strong social obligation enabled the integration of commerce into the aristocratic culture.

In less populated areas, on the other hand, the caravans used tents. One text which treats of the Türk postal system between Semireč'e and northern Mongolia, an itinerary of long standing which was frequently travelled by merchants as often as officials of the various successive Türk empires, explicitly mentions tents in the steppe that were established in order to lodge couriers and travellers.¹³⁷ No provision was made for a permanent building. Likewise, the embassy in which Ibn Faḍlān participated in 921 crossed the Ust-Yurt plateau to reach the country of the Bulgars of the Upper Volga, just as many Sogdian and Khorezmian merchants had done in the preceding centuries, but the route was provided with a succession of caravanserais only in the 14th century [see map 8].¹³⁸

More generally, it seems from a technical point of view that the Sogdians did not develop their roads to a great degree for the purposes of commerce. One example is particularly striking. To the north of Samarkand, between Ustrushana and Čāč, the "Steppe of Hunger" formed a considerable obstacle on account of its aridity. It compelled travellers to follow the piedmont north of the Turkestan range as far as Zaamin, and thereafter to reach either Ferghana or the Syr Darya as rapidly as possible, then the piedmont west of the Tianshan to finally get to Čāč. A more direct route was conceivable, in a straight line from Samarkand to Tashkent: beginning in

¹³⁵ Raspopova, 1990.

¹³⁶ Hillenbrand, 1994, p. 341.

¹³⁷ See the narrative of Tamīn b. Baḥr, ambassador to the Uighurs in 821, trans. Minorsky, 1948.

¹³⁸ Manylov, 1982.

the 9th century it was provided with a line of cisterns which made possible a gain of two days' travel.¹³⁹ But this occurred during the Islamic period, and archaeology shows that the soils were virgin beneath these improvements.¹⁴⁰ The Sogdians had therefore not carried out necessary improvements over an extremely busy section of their network. A second example supports the first: between Merv and Bukhara, over the route by which all traffic with Iran necessarily flowed, and which was one of the major highways of the Muslim world under the Abbasids, the numerous improvements date in general from the 9th century at the earliest. Only a few wells—vital because no alternative route was possible—existed before that time.¹⁴¹

This analysis of a few of the internal characteristics of Sogdian commerce that can be drawn from our sources brings up the question of the possibly antiquated nature of that commerce from the 8th century on. The lack of organization of the area according to commercial imperatives is particularly striking in that regard. We should also note the simplicity of the forms of commercial organization attested in Sogdiana—based on the family—in contrast with the complexity seen further south in Sassanid law. The comparison is distorted by the absence of sources: the contract for the lease of the bridge at the very least shows the existence of sophisticated juridical forms in Sogdiana. The Sogdians were moreover able to work out a solution to the problem of caravan commerce on their territory. Even so, it may be supposed that the effect of the windfall represented by the massive transfers of Chinese silk to the west from 550 to 750 could have brought about a golden age for Sogdian commerce on a basis that was more political than strictly commercial.

¹³⁹ *Drevnij Zamin*, ill. 1, pp. 96–7.

¹⁴⁰ Personal communication from the excavator, M. Gricina. See Burjakov, 1990, p. 91, and Masson, 1935.

¹⁴¹ Masson, 1966. This remarkable archaeological study of a commercial route, stage by stage, needs to be revised, for the dates have been assigned on the basis of surface materials. The study shows that the route was not entirely stable over the course of time: crossing the desert, its course was at the mercy of (for example) the drying up of a well.