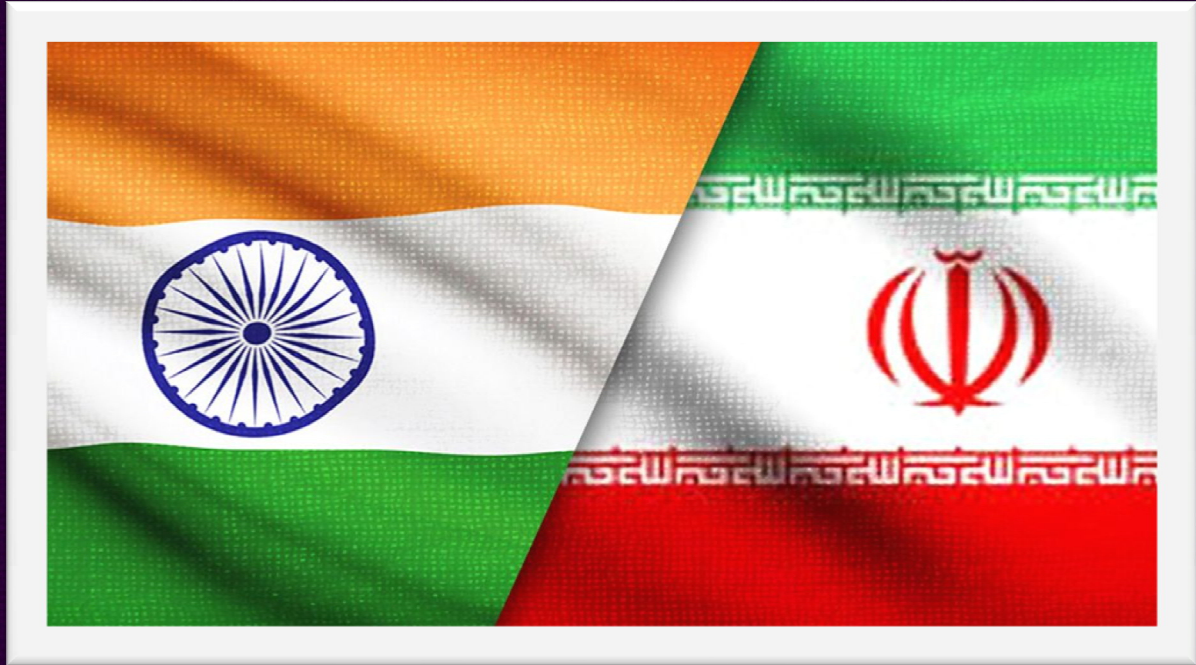


# INDIA (BHARAT) - IRAN (PERSIA)

## AND ARYANS

### PART - 5



#### Dr. Gaurav A. Vyas

This book contains the rich History of India (Bharat) and Iran (Persia) Empire. There was a time when India and Iran was one land.

This book is written by collecting information from various sources available on the internet.

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## 49. Indo - Scythians :

### Indo-Scythian Kingdom :



**Territories (green) and expansion (yellow) of the Indo-Scythian Kingdom at its greatest extent**

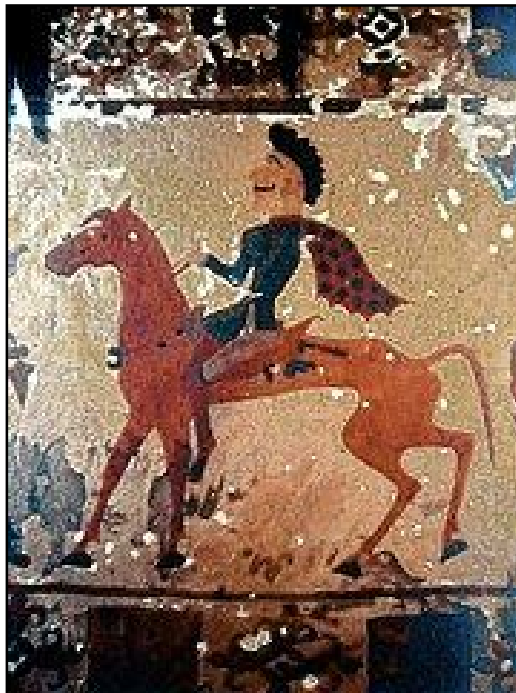
Indo-Scythians were a group of nomadic Iranian peoples of Saka and Scythian origin who migrated southward into western and northern South Asia (Sogdiana, Bactria, Arachosia, Gandhar, Sindh, Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra) from the middle of the 2nd century BC to the 4th century AD.

The first Saka king in South Asia was Maues/Moga (1st century BC) who established Saka power in Gandhar, and Indus Valley. The Indo-Scythians extended their supremacy over north-western India, conquering the Indo-Greeks and other local kingdoms. The Indo-Scythians were apparently subjugated by the Kushan Empire, by either Kujul Kadphises or Kanishk. Yet the Saka continued to govern as satrapies, forming the Northern Satraps and Western Satraps.

The power of the Saka rulers started to decline in the 2nd century CE after the Indo-Scythians were defeated by the Shatvahan emperor Gautamiputra Satakarni. Indo-Scythian rule in the northwestern Indian subcontinent ceased when the last Western Satrap Rudrasimha III was defeated by the Gupta emperor Chandragupt II in 395 CE.

The invasion of northern regions of the Indian subcontinent by Scythian tribes from Central Asia, often referred to as the Indo-Scythian invasion, played a significant part in the history of the Indian subcontinent as well as nearby countries. In fact, the Indo-Scythian war is just one chapter in the events triggered by the nomadic flight of Central Asians from conflict with tribes such as the Xiongnu in the 2nd century AD, which had lasting effects on Bactria, Kabul, and the Indian subcontinent as well as far-off Rome in the west, and more nearby to the west in Parthia.

Ancient Roman historians including Arrian and Claudius Ptolemy have mentioned that the ancient Sakas ('Sakai') were nomadic people. However, Italo Ronca, in his detailed study of Ptolemy's chapter vi, states: "The land of the Sakai belongs to nomads, they have no towns but dwell in forests and caves" as spurious.



**A Scythian horseman from the general area of the Ili River, Pazyryk, c 300 BC**



**The treasure of the royal burial Tillya Tepe is attributed to 1st century BC Sakas in Bactria**



**Bearded man with cap, probably Scythian, Bamiyan, 3rd–4th centuries**

The ancestors of the Indo-Scythians are thought to be Sakas (Scythian) tribes.

"One group of Indo-European speakers that makes an early appearance on the Xinjiang stage is the Saka (Ch. Sai). Saka is more a generic term than a name for a specific state or ethnic group; Saka tribes were part of a cultural continuum of early nomads across Siberia and the Central Eurasian steppe lands from Xinjiang to the Black Sea. Like the Scythians whom Herodotus describes in book four of his History (*Saka* is an Iranian word equivalent to the Greek *Scythes*, and many scholars refer to them together as Saka-Scythian), Sakas were



Iranian-speaking horse nomads who deployed chariots in battle, sacrificed horses, and buried their dead in barrows or mound tombs called *kurgans*."

According to their own origin myths, they claimed descent from Kushtan Maurya, the exiled son of the Indian Emperor Ashokvardhan Maurya who established the Kingdom of Khotan at Tarim Basin.

#### Yuezhi expansion :

In the 2nd century BC, a fresh nomadic movement started among the Central Asian tribes, producing lasting effects on the history of Rome in Europe, Parthia in Western Asia, and Bactria, Kabul, and India in the east in Southern Asia. Recorded in the annals of the Han dynasty and other Chinese records, this great tribal movement began after the Yuezhi tribe was defeated by the Xiongnu, fleeing westwards after their defeat and creating a domino effect as they displaced other central Asian tribes in their path.



#### **Detail of one of the Orlat plaques seemingly representing Scythian soldiers**

According to these ancient sources *Modu Shanyu* of the Xiongnu tribe of Mongolia attacked the Yuezhi (possibly related to the Tocharians who lived in eastern Tarim Basin area) and evicted them from their homeland between the Qilian Shan and Dunhuang around 175 BC. Leaving behind a remnant of their number, most of the population moved westwards into the Ili River area. There, they displaced the Sakas, who migrated south into Ferghana and Sogdiana. According to the Chinese historical chronicles (who call the Sakas, "Sai" 塞): "[The Yuezhi] attacked the king of the Sai who moved a considerable distance to the south and the Yuezhi then occupied his lands.

Sometime after 155 BC, the Yuezhi were again defeated by an alliance of the Wusun and the Xiongnu, and were forced to move south, again displacing the Scythians, who migrated south towards Bactria and present Afghanistan, and south-west closer towards Parthia.

The Sakas seem to have entered the territory of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom around 145 BC, where they burnt to the ground the Greek city of Alexandria on the Oxus. The Yuezhi remained in Sogdiana on the northern bank of the Oxus, but they became suzerains of the Sakas in Bactrian territory, as described by the Chinese ambassador Zhang Qian who visited the region around 126 BC.

In Parthia, between 138–124 BC, a tribe known to ancient Greek scholars as the Sacaraucae (probably from the Old Persian *Sakaravaka* "nomadic Saka") and an allied, possibly non-Saka/Scythian people, the Massagetae came into conflict with the Parthian Empire. The Sacaraucae-Massagetae alliance won several battles and killed, in succession, the Parthian kings Phraates II and Artabanus I.

The Parthian king Mithridates II finally retook control of parts of Central Asia, first by defeating the Yuezhi in Sogdiana in 115 BC, and then defeating the Scythians in Parthia and Seistan around 100 BC.

After their defeat, the Yuezhi tribes migrated relatively far to the east into Bactria, which they were to control for several centuries, and from which they later conquered northern India to found the Kushan Empire.

Settlement in Sakastan :



Map of Sakastan around 100 BC

The Sakas settled in Drangiana, an area of Southern Afghanistan, western Pakistan and south Iran, which was then called after them as Sakastan or Sistan. From there, they progressively expanded into present day Iran as well as northern India, where they established various kingdoms, and where they are known as "Saka".

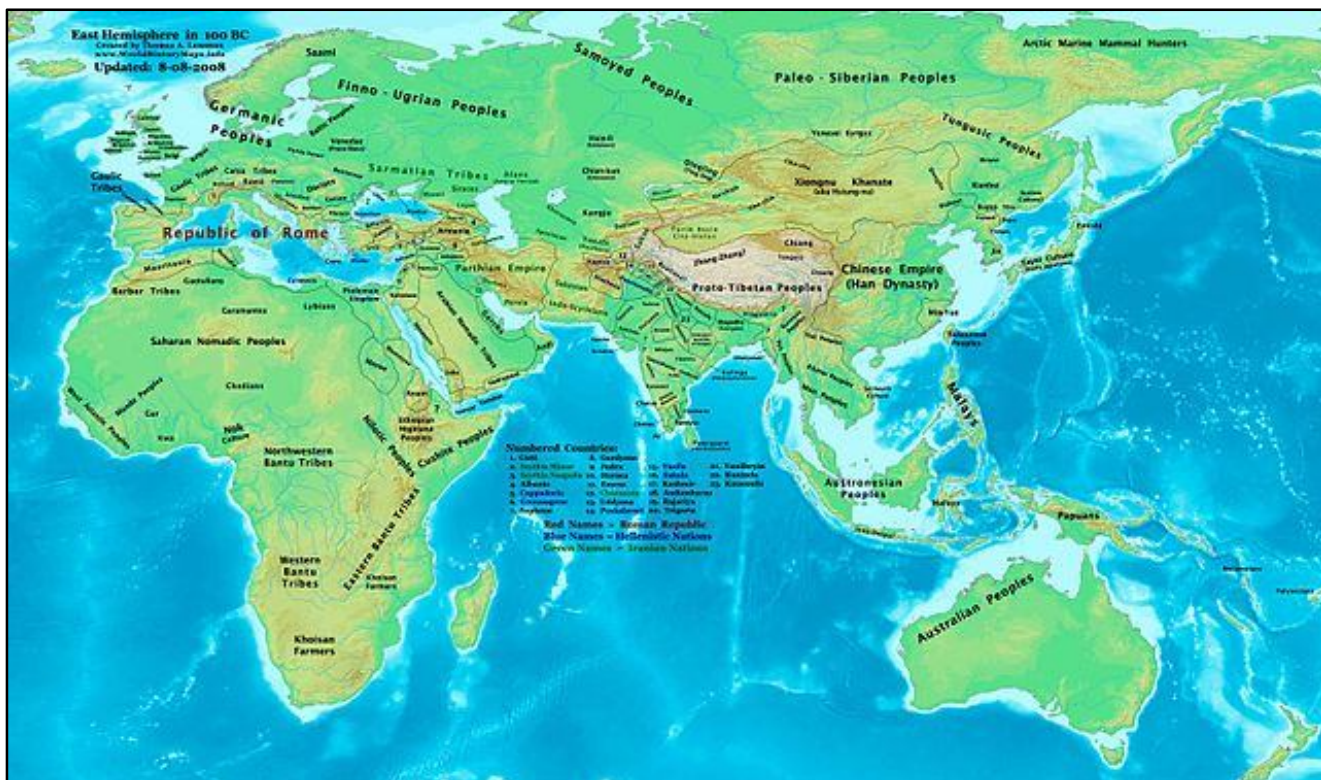
The Arsacid emperor Mithridates II (c. 123–88/87 BCE) claimed many successes in battle and added many provinces to the Parthian Empire. Apparently the Scythian hordes that came from Bactria were conquered by him.

Following military pressure from the Yuezhi (precursors of the Kushana), a section of the Indo-Scythians moved from Bactria to Lake Helmond (or Hāmūn), and settled in or around Drangiana (Sigal), a region which later came to be called "Sakistana of the Skythian Sakai [*sic*]", towards the end of 1st century BC. The region is still known as Seistan. The presence of the Sakas in Sakastan in the 1st century BC is mentioned by Isidore of Charax in his "Parthian stations". He explained that they were bordered at that time by Greek cities to the east (Alexandria of the Caucasus and Alexandria of the Arachosians), and the Parthian-controlled territory of Arachosia to the south:

"Beyond is Sacastana of the Scythian Sacae, which is also Paracetacena, 63 schoeni. There are the city of Barda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Sigal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sacae; and nearby is the city of Alexandria (Alexandria Arachosia), and six villages." Parthian stations, 18.

Indo-Scythian kingdoms :

Abiria to Surastrene :



Asia in 100 BC, showing the Sakas and their neighbors



**Scythian devotee, Butkara Stupa**

The first Indo-Scythian kingdom was located in northwest India in the areas from Abiria (eastern Sindh and Gujarat) to Surastrene (Saurashtra), from around 110 to 80 BC. They moved progressively further north into Indo-Greek territory until the conquests of Maues, c. 80 BC.

The 1st century AD Periplus of the Erythraean Sea describes the Scythian territories there :

"Beyond this region (Gedrosia), the continent making a wide curve from the east across the depths of the bays, there follows the coast district of Scythia, which lies above toward the north; the whole marshy; from which flows down the river Sinthus, the greatest of all the rivers that flow into the Erythraean Sea, bringing down an enormous volume of water. This river has seven mouths, very shallow and marshy, so that they are not navigable, except the one in the middle; at which by the shore, is the market-town, Barbaricum. Before it there lies a small island, and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Minnagara; it is subject to Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out"

The Indo-Scythians ultimately established a kingdom in the northwest, based near Taxila, with two great Satraps, one in Mathura in the east, and one in Surastrene (Gujarat) in the southwest.

In the southeast, the Indo-Scythians invaded the area of Ujjain, but were subsequently repelled in 57 BC by the Malwa king Vikramaditya. To commemorate the event Vikramaditya established the Vikrama era, a specific Indian calendar starting in 57 BC. More than a century

later, in AD 78, the Sakas would again invade Ujjain and establish the Saka era, marking the beginning of the long-lived Saka Western Satraps kingdom.

Gandhar and Punjab :



**A coin of the Indo-Scythian king Azes**

The presence of the Scythians in north-western India during the 1st century BCE was contemporary with that of the Indo-Greek Kingdoms there, and it seems they initially recognized the power of the local Greek rulers.

Maues first conquered Gandhar and Taxila around 80 BCE, but his kingdom disintegrated after his death. In the east, the Indian king Vikrama retook Ujjain from the Indo-Scythians, celebrating his victory by the creation of the Vikrama era (starting 58 BCE). Indo-Greek kings again ruled after Maues, and prospered, as indicated by the profusion of coins from Kings Apollodotus II and Hippostratos. Not until Azes I, in 55 BC, did the Indo-Scythians take final control of northwestern India, with his victory over Hippostratos.

Sculpture :



**A toilet tray of the type found in the Early Saka layer at Sirkap**

Several stone sculptures have been found in the Early Saka layer (Layer No4, corresponding to the period of Azes I, in which numerous coins of the latter were found) in the ruins of Sirkap, during the excavations organized by John Marshall.



A bronze coin of the Indo-Scythian King Azes. Obverse: BASILEWS BASILEWN MEGALOU AZOU, Humped Brahman bull (zebu) walking right, Whitehead symbol 15 (Z in square) above; Reverse: Kharosthi "jha" to right / Kharosthi legend, Lion or leopard standing right, Whitehead symbol 26 above; Reference: Whitehead 259; BMC p. 86, 141.



The Bimaran casket, representing the Buddha surrounded by Brahma (left) and Śakra (right) was found inside a stup with coins of Azes inside. British Museum.

Several of them are toilet trays (also called Stone palettes) roughly imitative of earlier, and finer, Hellenistic ones found in the earlier layers. Marshall comments that "we have a praiseworthy effort to copy a Hellenistic original but obviously without the appreciation of form and skill which were necessary for the task". From the same layer, several statuettes in the round are also known, in very rigid and frontal style.

#### Bimaran casket :

Azes is connected to the Bimaran casket, one of the earliest representations of the Buddha. The casket was used for the dedication of a stup in Bamiran, near Jalalabad in Afghanistan, and placed inside the stup with several coins of Azes. This event may have happened during the reign of Azes (60–20 BCE), or slightly later. The Indo-Scythians are otherwise connected with Buddhism (see Mathura lion capital), and it is indeed possible they would have commended the work.



Mathura area ("Northern Satraps") :



Coin of **Rajuvul** (c. 10 CE), AE, Mathura Obv: Bust of King Rajuvul, with Greek legend. Rev: Pallas standing right (crude). Kharoshthi legend.



The Mathura lion capital is an important Indo-Scythian monument dedicated to the Buddhist religion (British Museum).

In northern India, the Indo-Scythians conquered the area of Mathura over Indian kings around 60 BCE. Some of their satraps were Hagamasha and Hagana, who were in turn followed by the Saca Great Satrap Rajuvul.

The Mathura lion capital, an Indo-Scythian sandstone capital in crude style, from Mathura in northern India, and dated to the 1st century CE, describes in kharoshthi the gift of a stup with a relic of the Buddha, by Queen Nadasi Kasa, the wife of the Indo-Scythian ruler of Mathura, Rajuvul. The capital also mentions the genealogy of several Indo-Scythian satraps of Mathura.

Rajuvul apparently eliminated the last of the Indo-Greek kings Strato II around 10 CE, and took his capital city, Sagala.

The coinage of the period, such as that of Rajuvul, tends to become very crude and barbarized in style. It is also very much debased, the silver content becoming lower and lower, in exchange for a higher proportion of bronze, an alloying technique (billon) suggesting less than wealthy finances.

The Mathura lion capital inscriptions attest that Mathura fell under the control of the Sakas. The inscriptions contain references to Kharahostes and Queen Ayasia, the "chief queen of the Indo-Scythian ruler of Mathura, satrap Rajuvul." Kharahostes was the son of *Arta* as is attested by his own coins. Arta is stated to be brother of King Moga or Maues.

The Indo-Scythian satraps of Mathura are sometimes called the "Northern Satraps", in opposition to the "Western Satraps" ruling in Gujarat and Malwa. After Rajuvul, several successors are known to have ruled as vassals to the Kushans, such as the "Great Satrap" Kharapallana and the "Satrap" Vanaspara, who are known from an inscription discovered in Sarnath, and dated to the 3rd year of Kanishka (c. AD 130), in which they were paying allegiance to the Kushans.

#### Pataliputra :



**Silver coin of Vijayamitra in the name of Azes. Buddhist triratna symbol in the left field on the reverse**



### **Profile of the Indo-Scythian King Azes on one of his coins**

The text of the Yuga Puran describes an invasion of Pataliputra by the Scythians sometime during the 1st century BC, after seven great kings had ruled in succession in Saketa following the retreat of the Yavans. The Yuga Puran explains that the king of the Sakas killed one fourth of the population, before he was himself slain by the Kaling king Shat and a group of Sabals (Sabars or Bhills).

#### Kushan and Indo-Parthian conquests :

After the death of Azes, the rule of the Indo-Scythians in northwestern India was shattered with the rise of the Indo-Parthian ruler Gondophares in the last years of the 1st century BC. For the following decades, a number of minor Scythian leaders maintained themselves in local strongholds on the fringes of the loosely assembled Indo-Parthian empire, some of them paying formal allegiance to Gondophares I and his successors.

During the latter part of the 1st century AD, the Indo-Parthian overlordship was gradually replaced with that of the Kushans, one of the five tribes of the Yuezhi who had lived in Bactria for more than a century, and were now expanding into India to create a Kushan Empire. The Kushans ultimately regained northwestern India from around AD 75, and the area of Mathura from around AD 100, where they were to prosper for several centuries.

Western Kshatrapas legacy :



**Coin of the Western Kshatrapa ruler Rudrasimha I (c. AD 175 to 197), a descendant of the Indo-Scythians**

Indo-Scythians continued to hold the area of Seistan until the reign of Bahram II (AD 276–293), and held several areas of India well into the 1st millennium: Kathiawar and Gujarat were under their rule until the 5th century under the designation of Western Kshatrapas, until they were eventually conquered by the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II (also called Vikramaditya).

Indo-Scythian coinage :



**Silver tetradrachm of the Indo-Scythian king Maues (85–60 BC)**

Indo-Scythian coinage is generally of a high artistic quality, although it clearly deteriorates towards the disintegration of Indo-Scythian rule around AD 20 (coins of Rajuvul). A fairly high-quality but rather stereotypical coinage would continue in the Western Satraps until the 4th century.

Indo-Scythian coinage is generally quite realistic, artistically somewhere between Indo-Greek and Kushan coinage. It is often suggested Indo-Scythian coinage benefited from the help of Greek celators (Boppearachchi).

Indo-Scythian coins essentially continue the Indo-Greek tradition, by using the Greek language on the obverse and the Kharoshthi language on the reverse. The portrait of the king is never shown however, and is replaced by depictions of the king on horse (and sometimes on camel), or sometimes sitting cross-legged on a cushion. The reverse of their coins typically show Greek divinities.

Buddhist symbolism is present throughout Indo-Scythian coinage. In particular, they adopted the Indo-Greek practice since Menander I of showing divinities forming the vitarka mudra with their right hand (as for the mudra-forming Zeus on the coins of Maues or Azes II), or the presence of the Buddhist lion on the coins of the same two kings, or the triratana symbol on the coins of Zeionises.

Depiction of Indo-Scythians :



**Azilises on horse, wearing a tunic**

Besides coinage, few works of art are known to indisputably represent Indo-Scythians. Indo-Scythian rulers are usually depicted on horseback in armour, but the coins of Azilises show the king in a simple, undecorated, tunic.

Several Gandhara sculptures also show foreigners in soft tunics, sometimes wearing the typical Scythian cap. They stand in contrast to representations of Kushan men, who seem to wear thick, rigid, tunics, and who are generally represented in a much more simplistic manner.

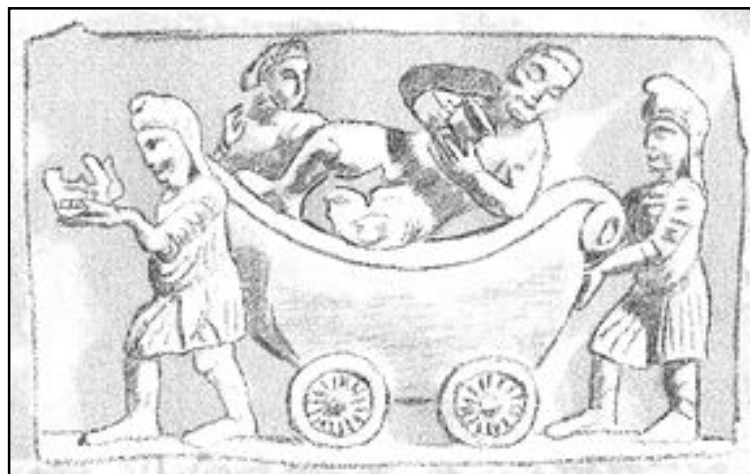
Buner reliefs :

Indo-Scythian soldiers in military attire are sometimes represented in Buddhist friezes in the art of Gandhar (particularly in Buner reliefs). They are depicted in ample tunics with trousers, and have heavy straight swords as weapons. They wear pointed hoods (the Scythian cap or bashlyk), which distinguishes them from the Indo-Parthians who only wore a simple fillet over their bushy hair, and which is also systematically worn by Indo-Scythian rulers on their coins. With the right hand, some of them are forming the Karan mudra against evil spirits. In Gandhar, such friezes were used as decorations on the pedestals of Buddhist stupas. They are contemporary with other friezes representing people in purely Greek attire, hinting at an intermixing of Indo-Scythians (holding military power) and Indo-Greeks (confined, under Indo-Scythian rule, to civilian life).

Another relief is known where the same type of soldiers are playing musical instruments and dancing, activities which are widely represented elsewhere in Gandhar art: Indo-Scythians are typically shown as reveling devotees.



**One of the Buner reliefs showing Scythian soldiers dancing. Cleveland Museum of Art**



**Indo-Scythians pushing along the Greek god Dionysos with Ariadne.**

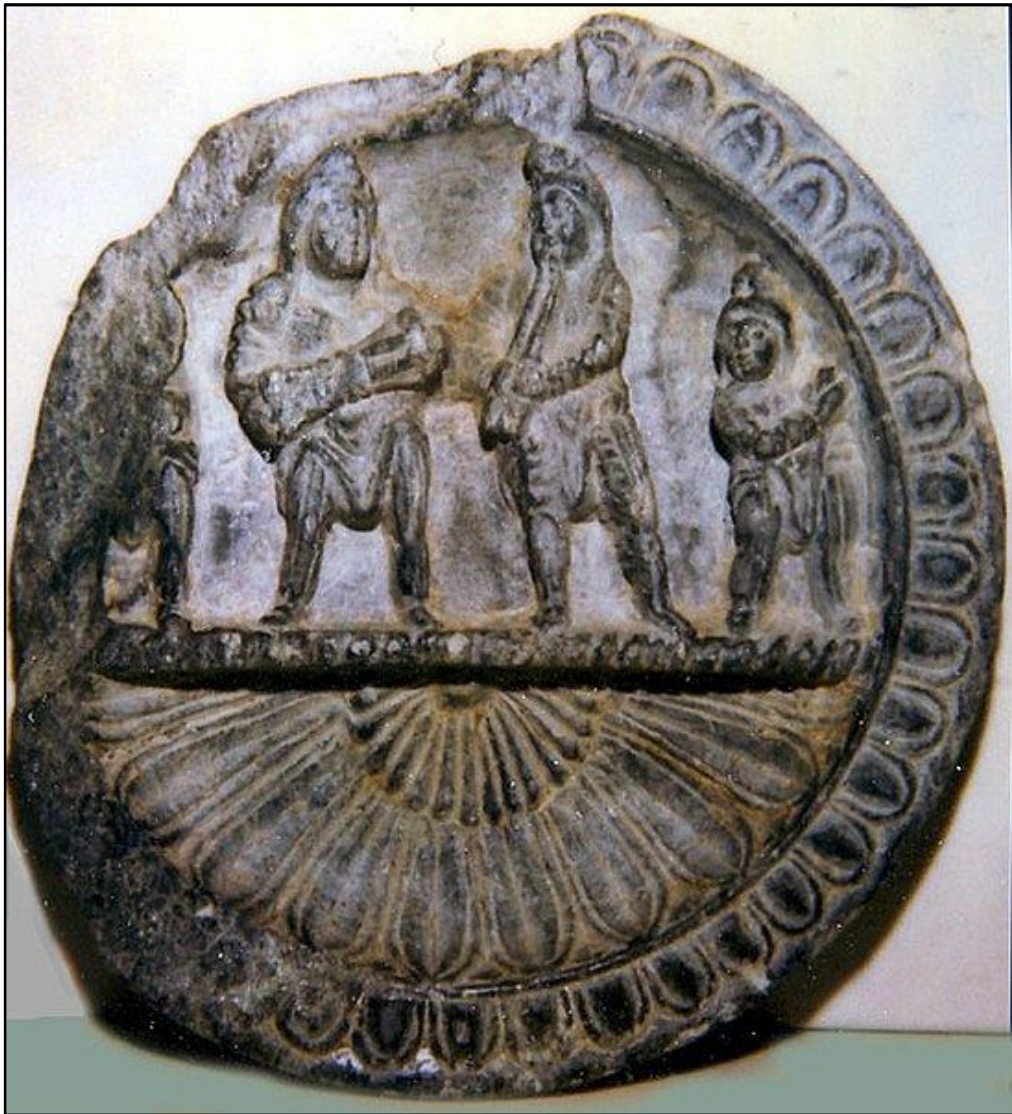


Hunting scene



Hunting scene

## Stone palettes :



**Gandhar stone palette with Scythians playing music**

Numerous stone palettes found in Gandhar are considered good representatives of Indo-Scythian art. These palettes combine Greek and Iranian influences, and are often realized in a simple, archaic style. Stone palettes have only been found in archaeological layers corresponding to Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian rule, and are essentially unknown in the preceding Mauryan layers or the succeeding Kushan layers.

Very often these palettes represent people in Greek dress in mythological scenes, a few in Parthian dress (head-bands over bushy hair, crossed-over jacket on a bare chest, jewelry, belt, baggy trousers), and even fewer in Indo-Scythian dress (Phrygian hat, tunic and comparatively straight trousers). A palette found in Sirkap and now in the New Delhi Museum shows a winged Indo-Scythian horseman riding winged deer, and being attacked by a lion.

## The Indo-Scythians and Buddhism :

The Indo-Scythians seem to have been followers of Buddhism, and many of their practices apparently continued those of the Indo-Greeks.



Royal dedications :

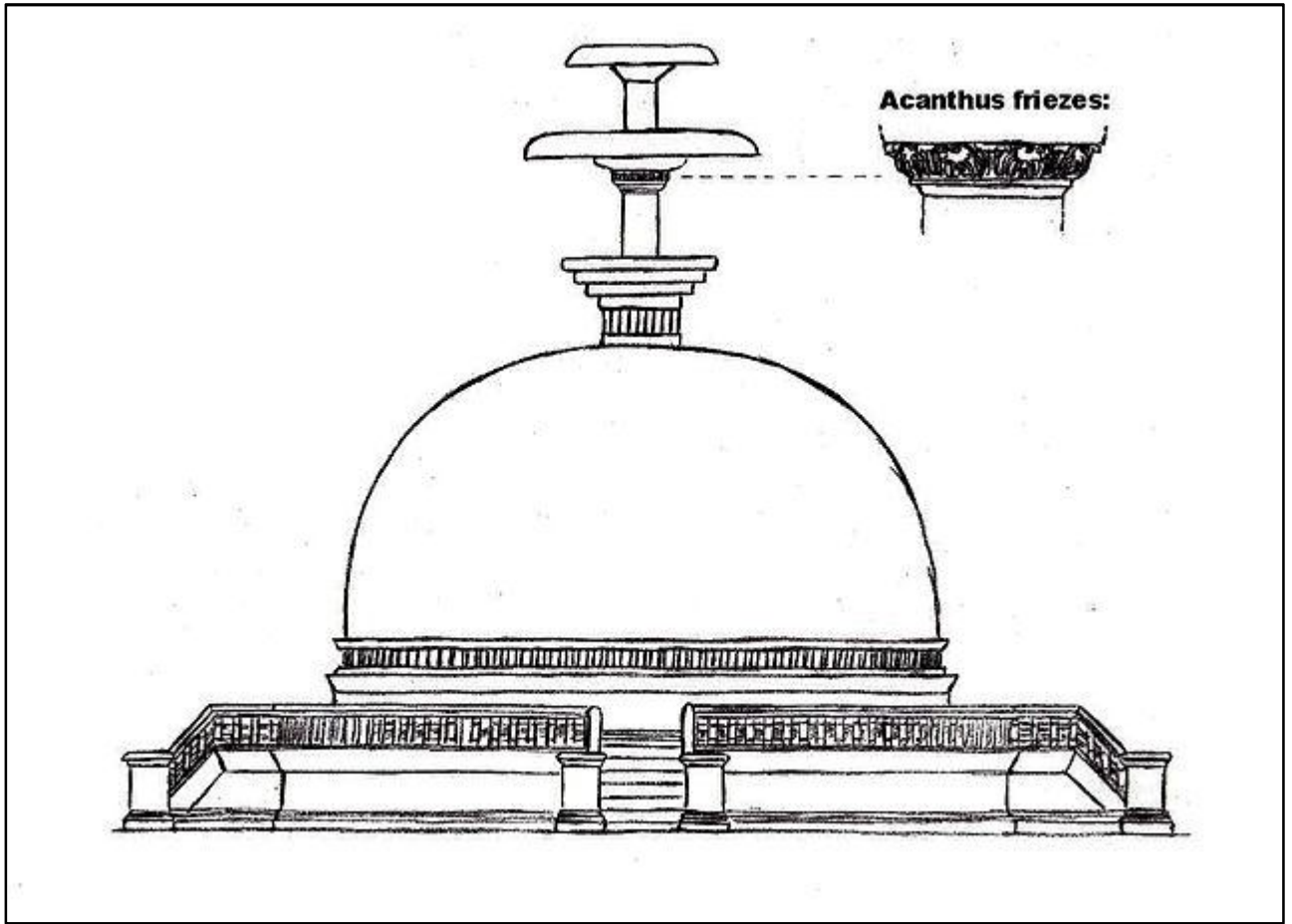


**The Bajaur casket was dedicated by Indravarman, Metropolitan Museum of Art**

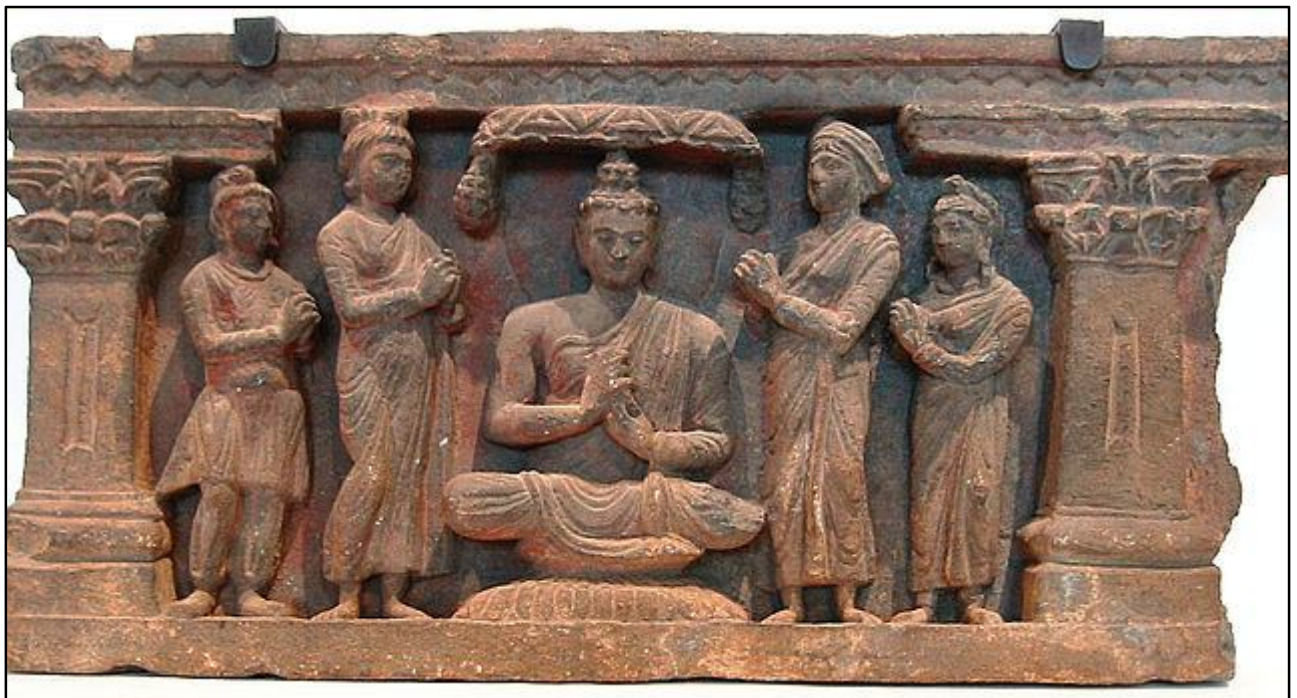
Several Indo-Scythian kings after Azes are known for making Buddhist dedications in their name, on plaques or reliquaries:

- Patika Kusulak (25 BCE – 10 CE) related his donation of a relic of the Buddha Shakyamuni to a Buddhist monastery, in the Taxila copper plate.
- Kharahostes (10 BCE – 10 CE) is mentioned on the Buddhist Mathura lion capital and on a reliquary. His coins were also found in the Bimaran casket, a beautiful Buddhist gold reliquary with an early image of the Buddha, now in the British Museum. Some of his coins bear the Buddhist triratna symbol.
- Vijayamitra (ruled 12 BCE - 15 CE) personally dedicated in his name a Buddhist reliquary. Some of his coins bear the Buddhist triratna symbol.
- Indravarman, while still a Prince, personally dedicated in 5-6 CE a Buddhist reliquary, the Bajaur casket, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Zeionises and Aspavarma also used the Buddhist triratna symbol on their coins.
- Rajuvul erected the Mathura lion capital, which incorporates Buddhist symbols and relates the donations by his wife of relics to a stupa.

Butkar Stup :



Buddhist stupas during the late Indo-Greek/Indo-Scythian period were highly decorated structures with columns, flights of stairs, and decorative Acanthus leaf friezes. Butkar stup, Swat, 1st century BC.



Possible Scythian devotee couple (extreme left and right, often described as "Scytho-Parthian"), around the Buddh, Brahma and Indra.

Excavations at the Butkar Stup in Swat by an Italian archaeological team have yielded various Buddhist sculptures thought to belong to the Indo-Scythian period. In particular, an Indo-Corinthian capital representing a Buddhist devotee within foliage has been found which had a reliquary and coins of Azes buried at its base, securely dating the sculpture to around 20 BC. A contemporary pilaster with the image of a Buddhist devotee in Greek dress has also been found at the same spot, again suggesting a mingling of the two populations. Various reliefs at the same location show Indo-Scythians with their characteristic tunics and pointed hoods within a Buddhist context, and side-by-side with reliefs of standing Buddhas.

#### Gandharn sculptures :

Other reliefs have been found, which show Indo-Scythian men with their characteristic pointed cap pushing a cart on which is reclining the Greek god Dionysos with his consort Ariadne.

#### Mathura lion capital :

The Mathura lion capital, which associates many of the Indo-Scythian rulers from Maues to **Rajuvul**, mentions a dedication of a relic of the Buddha in a stup. It also bears centrally the Buddhist symbol of the triratana, and is also filled with mentions of the bhagavat Buddha Sakyamuni, and characteristically Buddhist phrases such as:

*"sarvabudhana puya dhamasa puya saghasa puya"*

"Revere all the Buddhas, revere the dharma, revere the sangha"

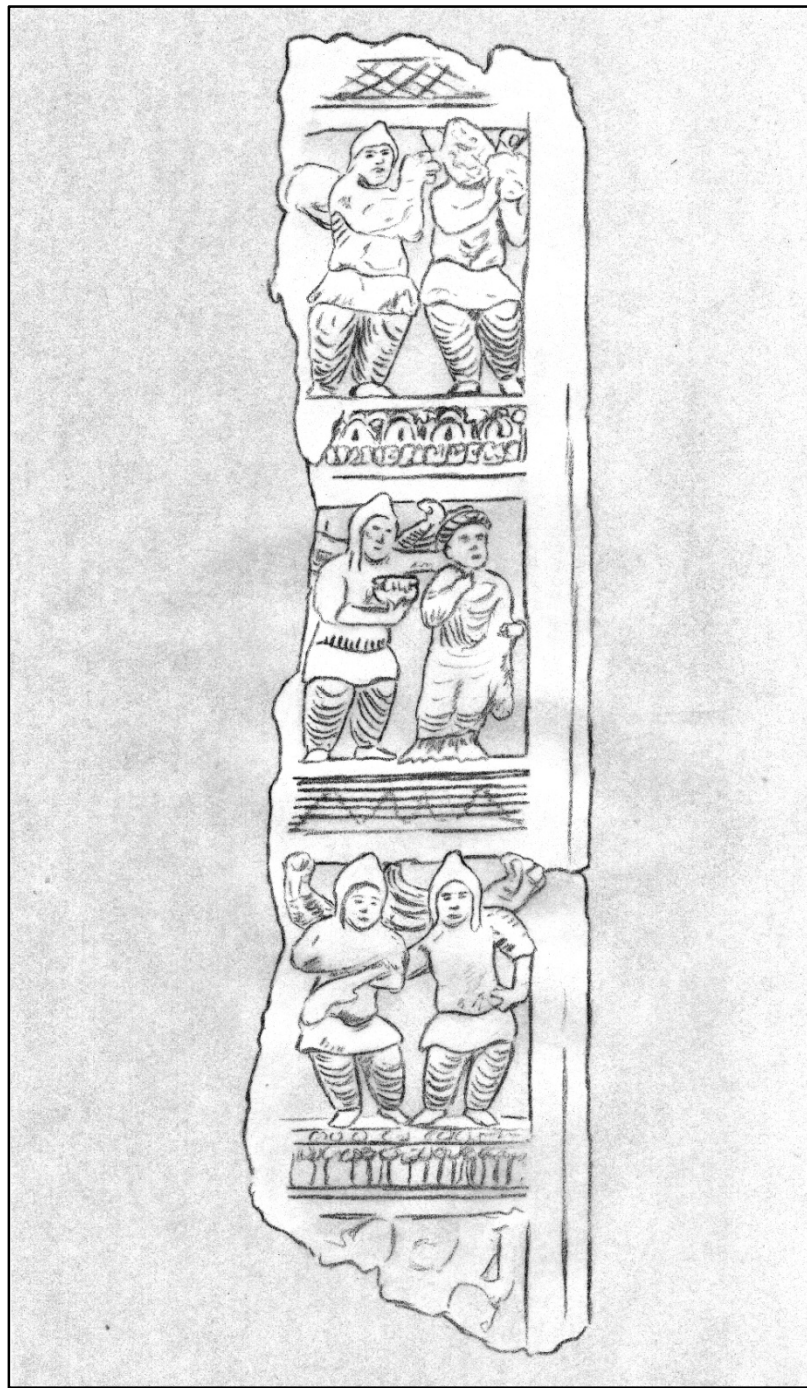
(Mathura lion capital, inscription O1/O2)



**Indo-Corinthian capital from Butkara Stup, dated to 20 BC, during the reign of Azes II. Turin City Museum of Ancient Art**



Dancing Indo-Scythians (top) and hunting scene (bottom). Buddhist relief from Swat, Gandhar

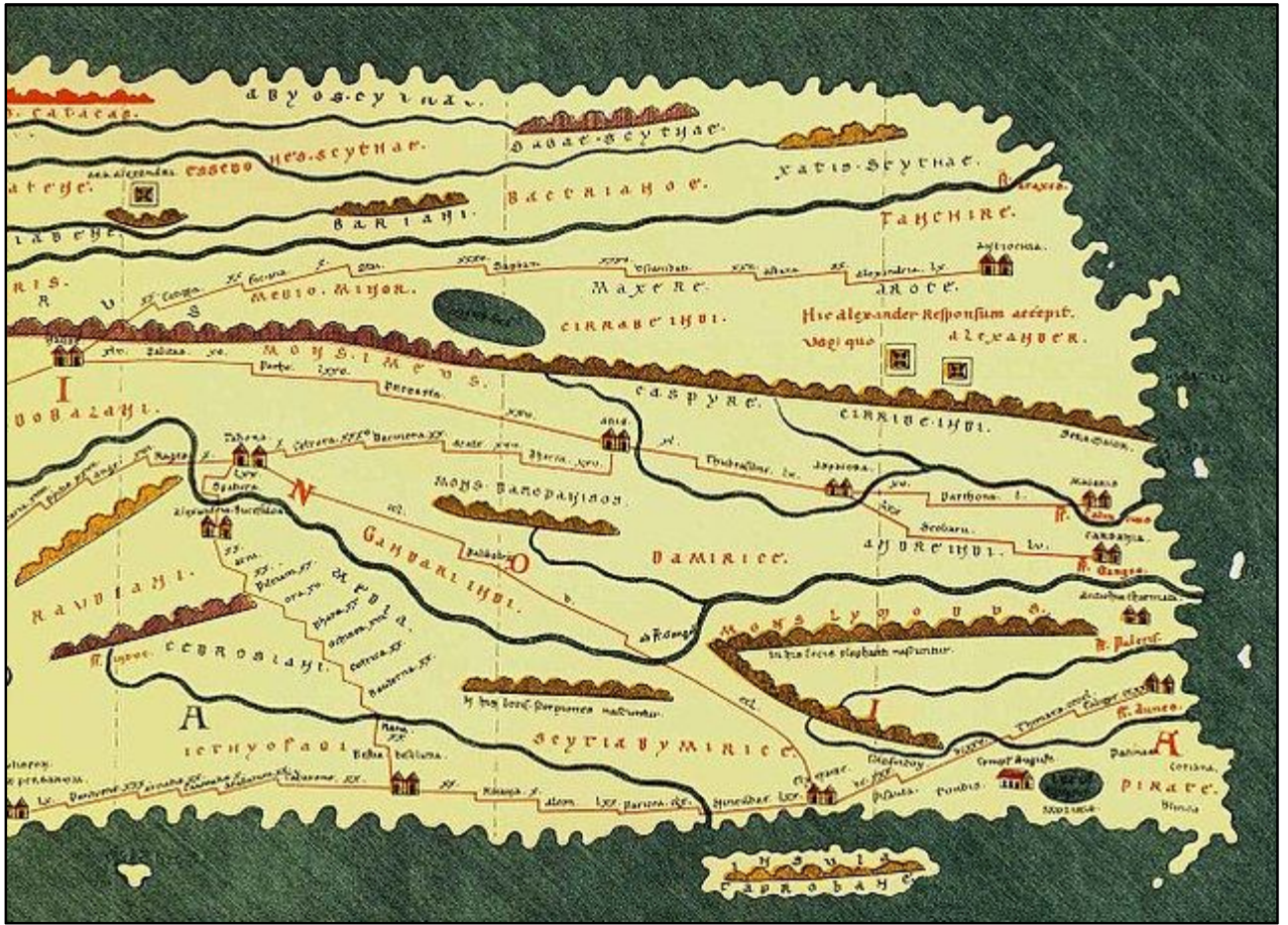


**Butkara doorjamb, with Indo-Scythians dancing and reveling. On the back side is a relief of a standing Buddha**



Statue with inscription mentioning "year 318", probably 143 CE. The two devotees on the right side of the pedestal are in Indo-Scythian suit (loose trousers, tunic, and hood).

## Indo-Scythians in Western sources :



"Scythia" appears around the mouth of the river Indus in the Roman period Tabula Peutingeriana.

The country of Scythia in the area of Pakistan, and especially around the mouth of the Indus with its capital at Minnagar (modern day Karachi) is mentioned extensively in Western maps and travel descriptions of the period. The Ptolemy world map, as well as the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mention prominently, the country of Scythia on the Indus Valley, as well as Roman Tabula Peutingeriana. The Periplus states that Minnagara was the capital of Scythia, and that Parthian Princes from within it were fighting for its control during the 1st century AD. It also distinguishes Scythia with Ariaca further east (centred in Gujarat and Malwa), over which ruled the Western Satrap king Nahapana.

## Indo-Scythians in Indian literature :

The Indo-Scythians were named "Shaka" in India, an extension on the name Saka used by the Persians to designate Scythians. From the time of the Mahabharat wars (3100 BC roughly, prior to Kalyug start Shakas receive numerous mentions in texts like the Purans, the Manusmriti, the Ramayan, the Mahabharat, the Mahabhasiya of Patanjali, the Brhat Samhita of Vrahmihir, the Kavyamimamsa, the Brihat-Katha-Manjari, the Katha-Saritsagar and several other old texts. They are described as part of an amalgam of other war-like tribes from the northwest.



**Coin of Azes, with king seated, holding a drawn sword and a whip**

A section of the Central Asian Scythians (under Sai-Wang) is said to have taken southerly direction and after passing through the Pamirs it entered the Chipin or Kipin after crossing the Hasuna-tu (*Hanging Pass*) located above the valley of Kand in Swat country. Chipin has been identified by Pelliot, Bagchi, Raychaudhury and some others with Kashmir while other scholars identify it with Kapish (Kafirstan). The Sai-Wang had established his kingdom in Kipin. S. Konow interprets the Sai-Wang as Śaka Murunda of Indian literature, Murunda being equal to Wang i.e. king, master or lord, but Bagchi who takes the word Wang in the sense of the king of the Scythians but he distinguishes the Sai Sakas from the Murund Sakas. There are reasons to believe that Sai Scythians were Kamboj Scythians and therefore *Sai-Wang* belonged to the *Scythianised Kambojs* (i.e. Param-Kambojs) of the Transoxiana region and came back to settle among his own stock after being evicted from his ancestral land located in *Scythia* or *Shakdvip*. King Moga or Maues could have belonged to this group of Scythians who had migrated from the *Sai* country (*Central Asia*) to Chipin.





**Coin of Maues depicting Balarama, 1st century BC. British Museum**

The mixed Scythian hordes that migrated to Drangiana and surrounding regions later spread further into north and south-west India via the lower Indus valley. Their migration spread into Sovira, Gujarat, Rajasthan and northern India, including kingdoms in the Indian mainland.

There are important references to the warring *Malech* hordes of the Sakas, Yavans, Kambojs and Pahlavs in the *Bal Kand* of the Valmiki Ramayan. H. C. Raychadhury glimpses in these verses the struggles between the Hindus and the invading hordes of Malech barbarians from the northwest. The time frame for these struggles is the 2nd century BC onwards. Raychadhury fixes the date of the present version of the Valmiki Ramayan around or after the 2nd century AD.

Mahabharat too furnishes a veiled hint about the invasion of the mixed hordes from the northwest. Vanparv by Mahabharat contains verses in the form of prophecy deploring that "the Malech (barbaric) kings of the Shaks, Yavans, Kambojs, Bahliks, etc. shall rule the earth un-righteously in Kalyug".

According to H. C. Ray Chaudhury, this is too clear a statement to be ignored or explained away.

Evidence about joint invasions :



**"Scythian" soldier, Nagarjunakonda**

The Scythian groups that invaded India and set up various kingdoms included, besides the Sakas, other allied tribes, such as the Medii, Xanthii, and Massagetae. These peoples were all absorbed into the community of Kshatriyas of mainstream Indian society.

The Shakas were formerly a people of the *trans-Hemodos* region—the *Shakadvipa* of the Puranas or the Scythia of the classical writings. *Isidor of Charax* (beginning of 1st century AD) attests them in Sakastana (modern Seistan). The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (c. AD 70–80) also attests a Scythian district in lower Indus with Minnagra as its capital. Ptolemy (c. AD 140) also attests to an Indo-Scythia in south-western India which comprised the Patalene and Surastrene (Saurashtra) territories.

The 2nd century BC Scythian invasion of India, was in all probability carried out jointly by the Sakas, Pahlavs, Kambojs, Parads, Rishiks and other allied tribes from the northwest.

### Main Indo-Scythian rulers :

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Eastern Pakistan :

- Maues, c. 85–60 BC
- Vonones, c. 75–65 BC
- Spalahores, c. 75–65 BC, satrap and brother of King Vonones, and probably the later King Spalirises.
- Spalirises, c. 60–57 BC, king and brother of King Vonones.
- Spalagadames c. 50 BC, satrap, and son of Spalahores.
- Azilises, before 60 BC
- Azes I, c. 60–20 BC
- Zeionises, c. 10 BC – AD 10
- Kharahostes, c. 10 BC – AD 10
- Hajatria

### Kshaharats (Punjab, Pakistan and beyond) :

- Liaka Kusuluk, satrap of Chuksa
- Kusulak Patika, satrap of Chuksa and son of Liaka Kusulaka
- Bhumak
- Nahapana (founder of the Western Satraps)

### Aprācas (Bajaur, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan) :

- Vijayamitra (12 BC - AD 15), wife Rukhan
- Indrvasu (c. AD 20), wife Vasumitra
- Vispavarman, wife Śísirena
- Indravarman, wife Uttara
- Aspa (AD 15–45) or Aspavarma (AD 15 - 45)
- Sasan

Pāratas (Balochistan, Pakistan) :

- Yolamir, son of Bagarev (c. 125–150)
- Bagamir, son of Yolamir (c. 150)
- Arjun, a second son of Yolamir (c. 150–160)
- Hvaramir, a third son of Yolamir (c. 160–175)
- Mirahvar, son of Hvaramir (c. 175–185)
- Miratakhma, another son of Hvaramir (c. 185–200)
- Kozan, son of Bagavharn (and perhaps grandson of Bagamir?) (c. 200–220)
- Bhimarjun, son of Yolatakhm (and perhaps grandson of Arjun?) (c. 220–235)
- Koziya, son of Kozan (c. 235–265)
- Datarvharn, son of Datayol I (possible grandson of Bhimarjun) (c. 265–280)
- Datayol II, son of Datarvharn (c. 280–300)

"Northern Satraps" (Mathura area) :


- Hagamash (satrap, 1st century BC)
- Hagan (satrap, 1st century BC)
- Rajuvul, c. AD 10 (Great Satrap)
- Sodasa, son of Rajuvul
- "Great Satrap" Kharapallan (c. AD 130)
- "Satrap" Vanspar (c. AD 130)

Minor local rulers :

- Bhadayas
- Mamvadi
- Arsakes

## Western Satraps :

- Nahapana (119–124)
- Chastan (c. 120), son of Ghsamotik 
- Jayadaman, son of Chastan
- Rudradaman I (c. 130–150), son of Jayadaman 
- Damajadasri I (170–175)
- Jivadaman (175 died 199)
- Rudrasimha I (175–188 died 197)
- Isvaradatt (188–191)
- Rudrasimha I (restored) (191–197)
- Jivadaman (restored) (197–199)
- Rudrasen I (200–222) 
- Samghadaman (222–223)
- Damsen (223–232)
- Damajadasri II (232–239) with
- Viradaman (234–238)
- Yasodaman I (239)
- Vijaysen (239–250)
- Damajadasri III (251–255)
- Rudrasen II (255–277)
- Visvasimha (277–282)
- Bhratadarman (282–295)  with
- Visvasen (293–304)

- Rudrasimha II, son of Lord (Svami) Jivadaman (304–348) with
- Yasodaman II (317–332)
- Rudradaman II (332–348)
- Rudrasen III (348–380)
- Simhasen (380– ?)
- Rudrasen IV (382–388)
- Rudrasimha III (388–395) 



**Drachm of Parataraj Bhimarjun**

**Obv: Robed bust of Bhimarjun left, wearing tiar-shaped diadem.**

**Rev: Swastik with legend surrounding.**

**1.70g. Senior (Indo-Scythian) 286.1 (Bhimajhun)**

Source :

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Scythians>

## 50. Saka :



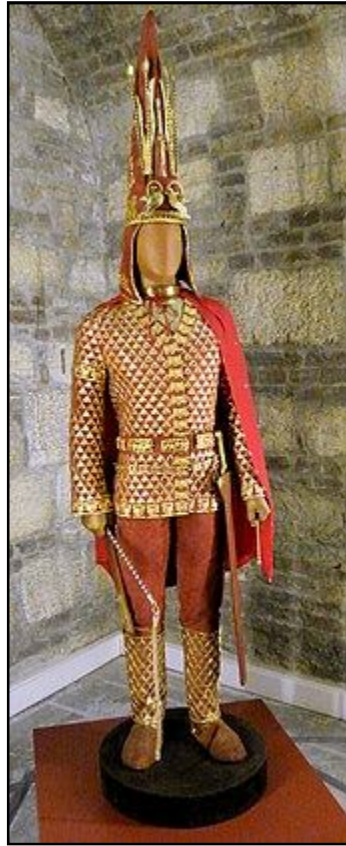
### Scythia and Parthia in about 170 BC (before the Yuezhi invaded Bactria)

Saka, Śaka, Shaka or Sacā (Persian: old *Sakā*, mod. ساکا; Sanskrit: शक, Śaka; Ancient Greek: Σάκαι, Sákai; Latin: Sacae; Chinese: 塞, old \*Sək, mod. Sāi) were a group of nomadic Iranian peoples who historically inhabited the northern and eastern Eurasian Steppe and the Tarim Basin.

Though closely related, the Sakas are to be distinguished from the Scythians of the Pontic Steppe and the Massagetae of the Aral Sea region, although they form part of the wider Scythian cultures. Like the Scythians, the Sakas were derived from the earlier Andronovo and Karasuk cultures. Their language formed part of the Scythian languages. Prominent archaeological remains of the Sakas include the Pazyryk burials, the Issyk kurgan, artifacts of the Ordos culture and possibly Tillya Tepe.

In the 2nd century BC, many Sakas were driven by the Yuezhi from the steppe into Sogdia and Bactria and then to the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, where they were known as the Indo-Scythians. Other Sakas invaded the Parthian Empire, eventually settling in Sistan, while others may have migrated to the Dian Kingdom in Yunnan, China. In the Tarim Basin and Taklamakan Desert region of Northwest China, they settled in Khotan, Yarkand, Kashgar and other places, which were at various times vassals to greater powers, such as Han China and Tang China.

Usage of name :



A cataphract-style parade armour of a Saka royal, also known as "The Golden Warrior", from the Issyk kurgan, a historical burial site near ex-capital city of Almaty, Kazakhstan. Circa 400-200 BC.

Modern debate about the identity of the "Saka" is partly from ambiguous usage of the word by ancient, non-Saka authorities. According to Herodotus, the Persians gave the name "Saka" to all "Scythians". However, Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, AD 23–79) claims that the Persians gave the name Sakai only to the Scythian tribes "nearest to them". The Scythians to the far north of Assyria were also called the Saka suni (Saka or Scythian sons) by the Persians. The Neo-Assyrian Empire of the time of Esarhaddon record campaigning against a people they called in the Akkadian the Ashkuza or Ishhuza.

Another people, the Gimirrai, who were known to the ancient Greeks as the Cimmerians, were closely associated with the Sakas. In Biblical Hebrew, the Ashkuz (*Ashkenaz*) are considered to be a direct offshoot from the Gimirri (Gomer).

The Saka were regarded by the Babylonians as synonymous with the Gimirrai; both names are used on the trilingual Behistun Inscription, carved in 515 BC on the order of Darius the Great. (These people were reported to be mainly interested in settling in the kingdom of Urartu, later part of Armenia, and Shacusen in Uti Province derives its name from them.) The Behistun Inscription initially only gave one entry for Saka, they were however further differentiated later into three groups:



The *Sakā tigraxaudā* – "Saka with pointy hats/caps", the *Sakā haumavargā* – interpreted as "haoma-drinking saka" but there are other suggestions, the *Sakā paradraya* – "Saka beyond the sea", a name added after Darius' campaign into Western Scythia north of the Danube.

An additional term is found in two inscriptions elsewhere :

The *Sakā para Sugdam* – "Saka beyond Sugda (Sogdia)", a term was used by Darius for the people who formed the limits of his empire at the opposite end to Kush (the Ethiopians), therefore should be located at the eastern edge of his empire.

The *Sakā paradraya* refers to the western Scythians (European Scythians) or Sarmatians. Both the *Sakā tigraxaudā* and *Sakā haumavargā* are thought to be located in Central Asia east of the Caspian Sea.

*Sakā haumavargā* is considered to be the same as Amyrgians, the Saka tribe in closest proximity to Bactria and Sogdia. It has been suggested that the *Sakā haumavargā* may be the *Sakā para Sugdam*, therefore *Sakā haumavargā* is argued by some to be located further east than the *Sakā tigraxaudā*, perhaps at the Pamir Mountains or Xinjiang, although Syr Darya is considered to be their more likely location given that the name says "beyond Sogdia" rather than Bactria.

In the modern era, the archaeologist Hugo Winckler (1863–1913) was the first to associate the Sakas with the Scythians. John Manuel Cook, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, states: "The Persians gave the single name *Sakā* both to the nomads whom they encountered between the Hungry Steppe (Mirzacho'l) and the Caspian, and equally to those north of the Danube and Black Sea against whom Darius later campaigned; and the Greeks and Assyrians called all those who were known to them by the name *Skuthai* (Iškuzai). *Sakā* and *Skuthai* evidently constituted a generic name for the nomads on the northern frontiers." Persian sources often treat them as a single tribe called the Saka (*Sakai* or *Sakas*), but Greek and Latin texts suggest that the Scythians were composed of many sub-groups.

Modern scholars usually use the term Saka to refer to Iranian peoples who inhabited the northern and eastern Eurasian Steppe and the Tarim Basin.

## History :

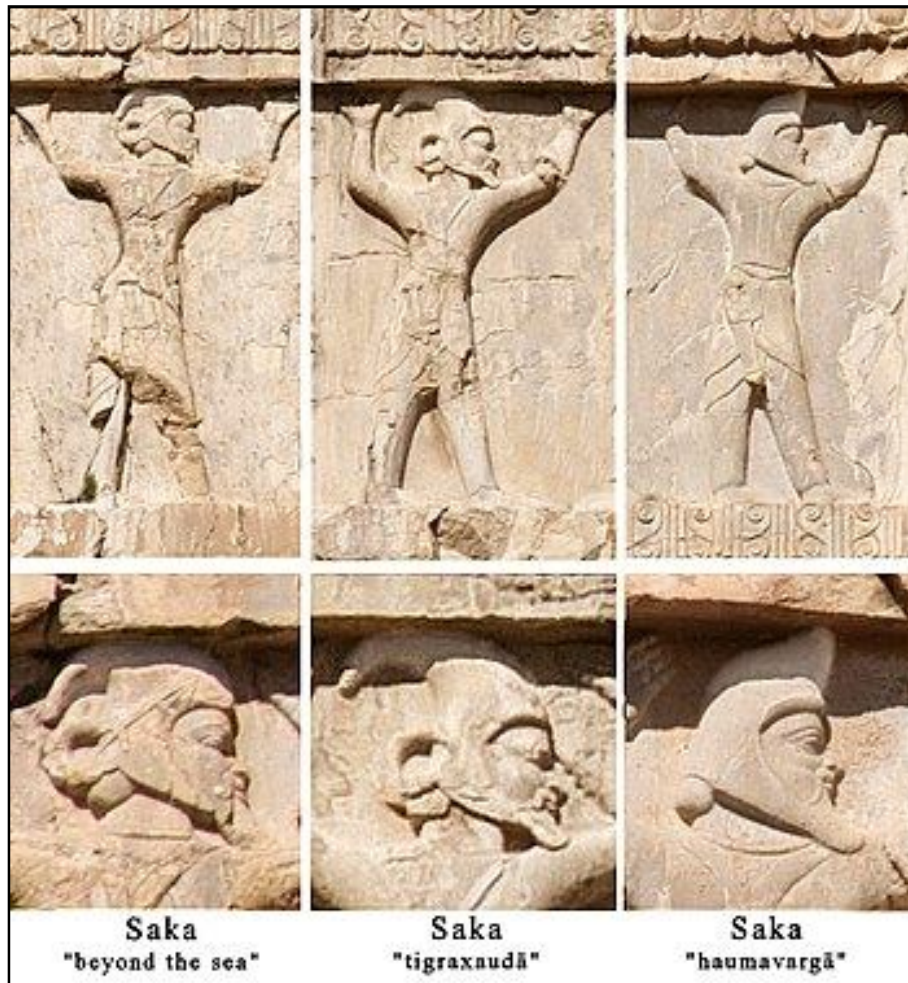


## **Artifacts found the tombs 2 and 4 of Tillya Tepe and reconstitution of their use on the man and woman found in these tombs**

## Origins :

The Sakas a group of Iranian peoples who spoke a language belonging to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages. René Grousset wrote that they formed a particular branch of the "Scytho-Sarmatian family" originating from nomadic Iranian peoples of the northwestern steppe in Eurasia. Like the Scythians of the Pontic Steppe, with whom they were related, the Saka were racially Europoid and traced their origin to the Andronovo culture and the Karasuk culture. The Pazyryk burials of the Pazyryk culture in the Ukok Plateau in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC are thought to be of Saka chieftains. These burials show striking similarities with the earlier Tarim mummies at Gumugou. The Issyk kurgan of south-eastern Kazakhstan, and the Ordos culture of the Ordos Plateau as also been connected with the Saka. It has been suggested that the ruling elite of the Xiongnu was of Saka origin. Some scholars contend that in the 8th century BC, a Saka raid on Altai may be 'connected' with a raid on Zhou China.

Early history :



For the Achaemenids, there were three types of Sakas: the *Sakā tayai paradraya* ("beyond the sea", presumably between the Greeks and the Thracians on the Western side of the Black Sea), the *Sakā tigraxaudā* ("with pointed caps"), the *Sakā haumavargā* ("Hauma drinkers", furthest East). Soldiers of the Achaemenid army, Xerxes I tomb detail, circa 480 BCE.

The Saka are attested in historical and archaeological records dating to around the 8th century BC. In the Achaemenid-era Old Persian inscriptions found at Persepolis, dated to the reign of Darius I (r. 522-486 BC), the Saka are said to have lived just beyond the borders of Sogdia. Likewise an inscription dated to the reign of Xerxes I (r. 486-465 BC) has them coupled with the Dahae people of Central Asia.

Two Saka tribes named in the Behistun Inscription, *Sakā tigraxaudā* ("Saka with pointy hats/caps") and the *Sakā haumavargā* ("haoma-drinking saka"), may be located to the east of the Caspian Sea. Some argued that the *Sakā haumavargā* may be the *Sakā para Sugdam*, therefore *Sakā haumavargā* would be located further east than the *Sakā tigraxaudā*. Some argued for the Pamirs or Xinjiang as their location, although Jaxartes is considered to be their more likely location given that the name says "beyond Sogdiana" rather than Bactria.

The contemporary Greek historian Herodotus noted that the Achaemenid Empire called all of the "Scythians" as "Saka".

Greek historians wrote of the wars between the Saka and the Medes, as well as their wars against Cyrus the Great of the Persian Achaemenid Empire where Saka women were said to fight alongside their men. According to Herodotus, Cyrus the Great confronted the Massagetae, a people related to the Saka, while campaigning to the east of the Caspian Sea and was killed in the battle in 530 BC. Darius I also waged wars against the eastern Sakas, who fought him with three armies led by three kings according to Polyaeus. In 520–519 BC, Darius I defeated the *Sakā tigraxaudā* tribe and captured their king Skunkha (depicted as wearing a pointed hat in Behistun). The territories of Saka were absorbed into the Achaemenid Empire as part of Chorasmia that included much of the Amu Darya (Oxus) and the Syr Darya (Jaxartes), and the Saka then supplied the Achaemenid army with large number of mounted bowmen. They were also mentioned as among those who resisted Alexander the Great's incursions into Central Asia.

The Saka were known as the Sak or Sai (Chinese: 塞) in ancient Chinese records. These records indicate that they originally inhabited the Ili and Chu River valleys of modern Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In the *Book of Han*, the area was called the "land of the Sak", i.e. the Saka. The exact date of the Sakas' arrival in the valleys of the Ili and Chu in Central Asia is unclear, perhaps it was just before the reign of Darius I. Around 30 Saka tombs in the form of kurgans (burial mounds) have also been found in the Tian Shan area dated to between 550–250 BC. Indications of Saka presence have also been found in the Tarim Basin region, possibly as early as the 7th century BC. At least by the late 2nd century BC, the Sakas had founded states in the Tarim Basin.

## Migrations :



**Captured Saka king Skunkha, from Mount Behistun, Iran, Achaemenid stone relief from the reign of Darius I (r. 522-486 BCE)**

The Saka were pushed out of the Illi and Chu River valleys by the Yuezhi. An account of the movement of these people is given in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. The Yuezhi, who originally lived between Tängri Tagh (Tian Shan) and Dunhuang of Gansu, China, were assaulted and forced to flee from the Hexi Corridor of Gansu by the forces of the Xiongnu ruler Modu Chanyu, who conquered the area in 177-176 BCE. In turn the Yuezhi were responsible for attacking and pushing the Sai (i.e. Saka) west into Sogdiana, where, between 140 and 130 BCE, the latter crossed the Syr Darya into Bactria. The Saka also moved southwards toward the Pamirs and northern India, where they settled in Kashmir, and eastward, to settle in some of the oasis-states of Tarim Basin sites, like Yanqi (焉耆, Karasahr) and Qiuci (龜茲, Kucha). The Yuezhi, themselves under attacks from another nomadic tribe, the Wusun, in 133-132 BCE, moved, again, from the Illi and Chu valleys, and occupied the country of Daxia, (大夏, "Bactria").



**The Sakas as subjects of the Achaemenid Empire on the statue of Darius I, circa 500 BCE**

The ancient Greco-Roman geographer Strabo noted that the four tribes that took down the Bactrians in the Greek and Roman account – the *Asioi*, *Pasiani*, *Tokharoi* and *Sakaraulai* – came from land north of the Syr Darya where the Ili and Chu valleys are located. Identification of these four tribes varies, but *Sakaraulai* may indicate an ancient Saka tribe, the *Tokharoi* is possibly the *Yuezhi*, and while the *Asioi* had been proposed to be groups such as the *Wusun* or *Alans*.

René Grousset wrote of the migration of the Saka: "the Saka, under pressure from the *Yueh-chih* [*Yuezhi*], overran Sogdiana and then Bactria, there taking the place of the Greeks." Then, "Thrust back in the south by the *Yueh-chih*," the Saka occupied "the Saka country, *Sakastana*, whence the modern Persian *Seistan*." Some of the Saka fleeing the *Yuezhi* attacked the Parthian Empire, where they defeated and killed the kings *Phraates II* and *Artabanus*. These Sakas were eventually settled by *Mithridates II* in what become known as *Sakastan*. According to Harold Walter Bailey, the territory of *Drangiana* (now in Afghanistan and Pakistan) became known as "Land of the Sakas", and was called *Sakastāna* in the Persian language of contemporary Iran, in Armenian as *Sakastan*, with similar equivalents in Pahlavi, Greek, Sogdian, Syriac, Arabic, and the Middle Persian tongue used in Turfan, Xinjiang,

China. This is attested in a contemporary Kharosthi inscription found on the Mathura lion capital belonging to the Saka kingdom of the Indo-Scythians (200 BC - 400 AD) in North India, roughly the same time the Chinese record that the Saka had invaded and settled the country of Jibin 罽賓 (i.e. Kashmir, of modern-day India and Pakistan).

Iaroslav Lebedynsky and Victor H. Mair speculate that some Sakas may also have migrated to the area of Yunnan in southern China following their expulsion by the Yuezhi. Excavations of the prehistoric art of the Dian Kingdom of Yunnan have revealed hunting scenes of Caucasoid horsemen in Central Asian clothing. The scenes depicted on these drums sometimes represent these horsemen practicing hunting. Animal scenes of felines attacking oxen are also at times reminiscent of Scythian art both in theme and in composition.

Migrations of the 2nd and 1st century BC have left traces in Sogdia and Bactria, but they cannot firmly be attributed to the Saka, similarly with the sites of Sirkap and Taxila in ancient India. The rich graves at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan are seen as part of a population affected by the Saka.

The Shakya clan of India, to which Gautama Buddha, called Śākyamuni "Sage of the Shakyas", belonged, were also likely Sakas as Michael Witzel and Christopher I. Beckwith. have demonstrated.

#### Indo-Scythians :

The region in modern Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Saka moved to become known as "land of the Saka" or Sakastan. This is attested in a contemporary Kharosthi inscription found on the Mathura lion capital belonging to the Saka kingdom of the Indo-Scythians (200 BC – 400 AD) in northern India, roughly the same time the Chinese record that the Saka had invaded and settled the country of Jibin 罽賓 (i.e. Kashmir, of modern-day India and Pakistan). In the Persian language of contemporary Iran the territory of Drangiana was called *Sakastāna*, in Armenian as Sakastan, with similar equivalents in Pahlavi, Greek, Sogdian, Syriac, Arabic, and the Middle Persian tongue used in Turfan, Xinjiang, China. The Sakas also captured Gandhar and Taxila, and migrated to North India. The most famous Indo-Scythian king was Maues.

An Indo-Scythians kingdom was established in Mathura (200 BC - 400 AD). Weer Rajendra Rishi, an Indian linguist, identified linguistic affinities between Indian and Central Asian languages, which further lends credence to the possibility of historical Sakan influence in North India. According to historian Michael Mitchiner, the Abhira tribe were a Saka people cited in the Gunda inscription of the Western Satrap Rudrasimha I dated to 181 CE.

## Kingdoms in the Tarim Basin :

### Kingdom of Khotan :



**Coin of Gurgamoya, king of Khotan. Khotan, first century.**

**Obv: Kharosthi legend, "Of the great king of kings, king of Khotan, Gurgamoya.**

**Rev: Chinese legend: "Twenty-four grain copper coin". British Museum.**

The Kingdom of Khotan was a Saka city state in on the southern edge of the Tarim Basin. As a consequence of the Han–Xiongnu War spanning from 133 BCE to 89 CE, the Tarim Basin (now Xinjiang, Northwest China), including Khotan and Kashgar, fell under Han Chinese influence, beginning with the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141-87 BC).

Archaeological evidence and documents from Khotan and other sites in the Tarim Basin provided information on the language spoken by the Saka. The official language of Khotan was initially Gandhari Prakrit written in Kharosthi, and coins from Khotan dated to the 1st century bear dual inscriptions in Chinese and Gandhari Prakrit, indicating links of Khotan to both India and China. Surviving documents however suggest that an Iranian language was used by the people of the kingdom for a long time Third-century AD documents in Prakrit from nearby Shanshan record the title for the king of Khotan as *hinajha* (i.e. "generalissimo"), a distinctively Iranian-based word equivalent to the Sanskrit title *senapati*, yet nearly identical to the Khotanese Saka *hīnāyasa* attested in later Khotanese documents. This, along with the fact that the king's recorded regnal periods were given as the Khotanese *kṣuṇa*, "implies an established connection between the Iranian inhabitants and the royal power," according to the Professor of Iranian Studies Ronald E. Emmerick. He contended that Khotanese-Saka-language royal rescripts of Khotan dated to the 10th century "makes it likely that the ruler of Khotan was a speaker of Iranian." Furthermore, he argued that the early form of the name of Khotan, *hvatana*, is connected semantically with the name Saka.

The region once again came under Chinese suzerainty with the campaigns of conquest by Emperor Taizong of Tang (r. 626-649). From the late eighth to ninth centuries, the region changed hands between the rival Tang and Tibetan Empires. However, by the early 11th century the region fell to the Muslim Turkic peoples of the Kara-Khanid Khanate, which led to both the Turkification of the region as well as its conversion from Buddhism to Islam.





A document from Khotan written in Khotanese Saka, part of the Eastern Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages, listing the animals of the Chinese zodiac in the cycle of predictions for people born in that year; ink on paper, early 9th century.

Later Khotanese-Saka-language documents, ranging from medical texts to Buddhist literature, have been found in Khotan and Tumshuq (northeast of Kashgar). Similar documents in the Khotanese-Saka language dating mostly to the 10th century have been found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.

Although the ancient Chinese had called Khotan Yutian (于阗), another more native Iranian name occasionally used was Jusadanna (瞿薩旦那), derived from Indo-Iranian Gostan and Gostana, the names of the town and region around it, respectively.

#### Shule Kingdom :

Much like the neighboring people of the Kingdom of Khotan, people of Kashgar, the capital of Shule, spoke Saka, one of the Eastern Iranian languages. According to the *Book of Han*, the Saka split and formed several states in the region. These Saka states may include two states to the northwest of Kashgar, and Tumshuq to its northeast, and Tushkurgan south in the Pamirs. Kashgar also conquered other states such as Yarkand and Kucha during the Han dynasty, but in its later history, Kashgar was controlled by various empires, including Tang China, before it became part of the Turkic Kara-Khanid Khanate in the 10th century. In the 11th century, according to Mahmud al-Kashgari, some non-Turkic languages like the Kanchaki and Sogdian were still used in some areas in the vicinity of Kashgar, and

Kanchaki is thought to belong to the Saka language group. It is believed that the Tarim Basin was linguistically Turkified before the 11th century ended.

### Historiography :

Persians referred to all northern nomads as Sakas. Herodotus (IV.64) describes them as Scythians, although they figure under a different name:

The Sacae, or Scyths, were clad in trousers, and had on their heads tall stiff caps rising to a point. They bore the bow of their country and the dagger; besides which they carried the battle-axe, or *sagaris*. They were in truth Amyrgian (Western) Scythians, but the Persians called them Sacae, since that is the name which they gave to all Scythians.

### Strabo :

In the 1st century BC, the Greek-Roman geographer Strabo gave an extensive description of the peoples of the eastern steppe, whom he located in Central Asia beyond Bactria and Sogdiana.

Strabo went on to list the names of the various tribes he believed to be "Scythian", and in so doing almost certainly conflated them with unrelated tribes of eastern Central Asia. These tribes included the Saka.

Now the greater part of the Scythians, beginning at the Caspian Sea, are called Däae, but those who are situated more to the east than these are named Massagetae and Sacae, whereas all the rest are given the general name of Scythians, though each people is given a separate name of its own. They are all for the most part nomads. But the best known of the nomads are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks, I mean the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari, and Sacarauli, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Iaxartes River that adjoins that of the Sacae and the Sogdiani and was occupied by the Sacae. And as for the Däae, some of them are called Aparni, some Xanthii, and some Pissuri. Now of these the Aparni are situated closest to Hyrcania and the part of the sea that borders on it, but the remainder extend even as far as the country that stretches parallel to Aria.

Between them and Hyrcania and Parthia and extending as far as the Arians is a great waterless desert, which they traversed by long marches and then overran Hyrcania, Nesaea, and the plains of the Parthians. And these people agreed to pay tribute, and the tribute was to allow the invaders at certain appointed times to overrun the country and carry off booty. But when the invaders overran their country more than the agreement allowed, war ensued, and in turn their quarrels were composed and new wars were begun. Such is the life of the other nomads also, who are always attacking their neighbors and then in turn settling their differences. (Strabo, Geography, 11.8.1; transl. 1903 by H. C. Hamilton & W. Falconer.)

Indian sources :



**Silver coin of the Indo-Scythian King Azes II (ruled c. 35–12 BC). Note the royal tamga on the coin**

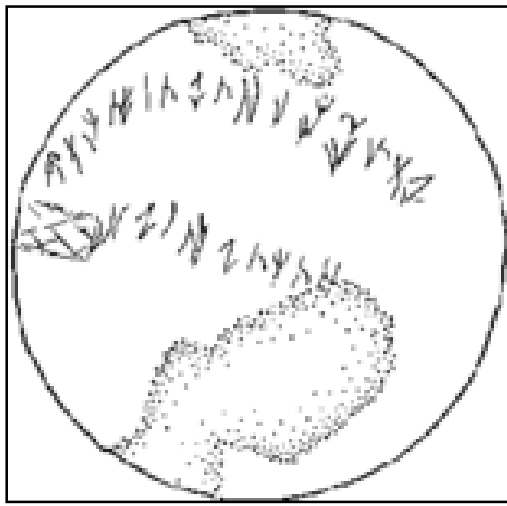
Sakas receive numerous mentions in Indian texts, including the Puranas, the Manusmriti, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Mahabhashya of Patanjali.

Language :

Issyk inscription :



**Issyk dish with inscription**



**Drawing of the Issyk inscription**

Modern scholarly consensus is that the Eastern Iranian language ancestral to the Pamir languages in North India and the medieval Saka language of Xinjiang, was one of the Scythian languages. Evidence of the Middle Iranian "Scytho-Khotanese" language survives in Northwest China, where Khotanese-Saka-language documents, ranging from medical texts to Buddhist literature, have been found primarily in Khotan and Tumshuq (northeast of Kashgar). They largely predate the arrival of Islam to the region under the Turkic Kara-Khanids. Similar documents in the Khotanese-Saka language were found in Dunhuang and date mostly from the 10th century.

Attestations of the Saka language show that it was an Eastern Iranian language. The linguistic heartland of Saka was the Kingdom of Khotan, which had two varieties, corresponding to the major settlements at Khotan (now Hotan) and Tumshuq (now Tumxuk). Both the Tumshuqese and Khotanese varieties of Saka contain many borrowings from the Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrit, but also share features with modern Wakhi and Pashto.

The Issyk inscription, a short fragment on a silver cup found in the Issyk kurgan (modern Kazakhstan) is believed to be an early example of Saka, constituting one of very few autochthonous epigraphic traces of that language. The inscription is in a variant of Kharosthi. Harmatta identifies the dialect as Khotanese Saka, tentatively translating its as: "The vessel should hold wine of grapes, added cooked food, so much, to the mortal, then added cooked fresh butter on".

A growing body of both linguistic and physical anthropological evidence suggest the Wakhi are descendants of Saka. According to the Indo-Europeanist Martin Kümmel, Wakhi may be classified as a Western Saka dialect, the other attested Saka dialects such as Khotanese and Tumshuqese being Eastern Saka dialects. The Saka heartland was gradually conquered during the Turkic expansion, beginning in the 6th century, and the area was gradually Turkified linguistically under the Uyghurs.

Some remnants of the eastern groups have survived as modern Pashto and Pamiri languages in Central Asia.

## Genetics :

The earliest studies could only analyze segments of mtDNA, thus providing only broad correlations of affinity to modern West Eurasian or East Eurasian populations. For example, in a 2002 study the mitochondrial DNA of Saka period male and female skeletal remains from a double inhumation kurgan at the Beral site in Kazakhstan was analysed. The two individuals were found to be not closely related. The HV1 mitochondrial sequence of the male was similar to the Anderson sequence which is most frequent in European populations. The HV1 sequence of the female suggested a greater likelihood of Asian origins.

More recent studies have been able to type for specific mtDNA lineages. For example, a 2004 study examined the HV1 sequence obtained from a male "Scytho-Siberian" at the Kizil site in the Altai Republic. It belonged to the N1a maternal lineage, a geographically West Eurasian lineage. Another study by the same team, again of mtDNA from two Scytho-Siberian skeletons found in the Altai Republic, showed that they had been typical males "of mixed Euro-Mongoloid origin". One of the individuals was found to carry the F2a maternal lineage, and the other the D lineage, both of which are characteristic of East Eurasian populations.

These early studies have been elaborated by an increasing number of studies by Russian scholars. Conclusions are (i) an early, Bronze Age mixing of both west and east Eurasian lineages, with western lineages being found far to the east, but not vice versa; (ii) an apparent reversal by Iron Age times, with an increasing presence of East Eurasian lineages in the western steppe; (iii) the possible role of migrations from the south, the Balkano-Danubian and Iranian regions, toward the steppe.

Ancient Y-DNA data was finally provided by Keyser et al in 2009. They studied the haplotypes and haplogroups of 26 ancient human specimens from the Krasnoyarsk area in Siberia dated from between the middle of the 2nd millennium BC and the 4th century AD (Scythian and Sarmatian timeframe). Nearly all subjects belonged to haplogroup R-M17. The authors suggest that their data shows that between the Bronze and the Iron Ages the constellation of populations known variously as Scythians, Andronovians, etc. were blue- (or green-) eyed, fair-skinned and light-haired people who might have played a role in the early development of the Tarim Basin civilisation. Moreover, this study found that they were genetically more closely related to modern populations in eastern Europe than those of central and southern Asia. The ubiquity and dominance of the R1a Y-DNA lineage contrasted markedly with the diversity seen in the mtDNA profiles.

## Physical appearance :

Early physical analyses have unanimously concluded that the Saka, even those far to the east (e.g. the Pazyryk region), possessed predominantly "Euroid" features, although mixed "Euro-mongoloid" phenotypes also occur, depending on site and period.

The 2nd century BC Han Chinese envoy Zhang Qian described the Sai (Saka) as having yellow (probably meaning hazel or green), and blue eyes. In *Natural History*, the 1st century AD Roman author Pliny the Elder characterises the Seres, sometimes identified as Sala or Tocharians, as red-haired and blue-eyed.

## Archaeology :



### **A Pazyryk horseman in a felt painting from a burial around 300 BC. The Pazyryks appear to be closely related to the Scythians**

The spectacular grave-goods from Arzhan, and others in Tuva, have been dated from about 900 BC onward, and are associated with the Saka. Burials at Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains have included some spectacularly preserved Sakas of the "Pazyryk culture" – including the Ice Maiden of the 5th century BC.

### Pazyryk culture :

Saka burials documented by modern archaeologists include the kurgans at Pazyryk in the Ulagan (Red) district of the Altai Republic, south of Novosibirsk in the Altai Mountains of southern Siberia (near Mongolia). Archaeologists have extrapolated the Pazyryk culture from these finds: five large burial mounds and several smaller ones between 1925 and 1949, one opened in 1947 by Russian archaeologist Sergei Rudenko. The burial mounds concealed chambers of larch-logs covered over with large cairns of boulders and stones.

The Pazyryk culture flourished between the 7th and 3rd century BC in the area associated with the *Sacae*.

Ordinary Pazyryk graves contain only common utensils, but in one, among other treasures, archaeologists found the famous Pazyryk Carpet, the oldest surviving wool-pile oriental rug. Another striking find, a 3-metre-high four-wheel funerary chariot, survived well-preserved from the 5th to 4th century BC.

Tillia Tepe treasure :



**"Kings with dragons", Tillia Tepe**

A site found in 1968 in Tillia Tepe (literally "the golden hill") in northern Afghanistan (former Bactria) near Shebergan consisted of the graves of five women and one man with extremely rich jewelry, dated to around the 1st century BC, and probably related to that of Saka tribes normally living slightly to the north. Altogether the graves yielded several thousands of pieces of fine jewelry, usually made from combinations of gold, turquoise and lapis-lazuli.

A high degree of cultural syncretism pervades the findings, however. Hellenistic cultural and artistic influences appear in many of the forms and human depictions (from amorini to rings with the depiction of Athena and her name inscribed in Greek), attributable to the existence of the Seleucid empire and Greco-Bactrian kingdom in the same area until around 140 BC, and the continued existence of the Indo-Greek kingdom in the northwestern Indian sub-continent until the beginning of our era. This testifies to the richness of cultural influences in the area of Bactria at that time.

Culture :

Art :



**Royal crown, Tilia Tepe**

The art of the Saka was of a similar style as other Iranian peoples of the steppes, which is referred to collectively as Scythian art. In 2001, the discovery of an undisturbed royal Scythian burial-barrow illustrated Scythian animal-style gold that lacks the direct influence of Greek styles. Forty-four pounds of gold weighed down the royal couple in this burial, discovered near Kyzyl, capital of the Siberian republic of Tuva.

Ancient influences from Central Asia became identifiable in China following contacts of metropolitan China with nomadic western and northwestern border territories from the 8th century BC. The Chinese adopted the Scythian-style animal art of the steppes (descriptions of animals locked in combat), particularly the rectangular belt-plaques made of gold or bronze, and created their own versions in jade and steatite.

Following their expulsion by the Yuezhi, some Saka may also have migrated to the area of Yunnan in southern China. Saka warriors could also have served as mercenaries for the various kingdoms of ancient China. Excavations of the prehistoric art of the Dian civilisation of Yunnan have revealed hunting scenes of Caucasoid horsemen in Central Asian clothing.

Saka influences have been identified as far as Korea and Japan. Various Korean artifacts, such as the royal crowns of the kingdom of Silla, are said to be of "Scythian" design. Similar crowns, brought through contacts with the continent, can also be found in Kofun era Japan.



## Society :

Fraternal polyandry was a common custom among Saka. Brothers had one wife in common and the children were considered as belonging to the oldest brother.

## Clothing :

Similar to other eastern Iranian peoples represented on the reliefs of the Apadāna at Persepolis, Sakas are depicted as wearing long trousers, which cover the uppers of their boots. Over their shoulders they trail a type of long mantle, with one diagonal edge in back. One particular tribe of Sakas (the Saka tigraxaudā) wore pointed caps. Herodotus in his description of the Persian army mentions the Sakas as wearing trousers and tall pointed caps.

Herodotus says Sakas had "high caps tapering to a point and stiffly upright." Asian Saka headgear is clearly visible on the Persepolis Apadana staircase bas-relief – high pointed hat with flaps over ears and the nape of the neck. From China to the Danube delta, men seemed to have worn a variety of soft headgear – either conical like the one described by Herodotus, or rounder, more like a Phrygian cap.

Saka women dressed in much the same fashion as men. A Pazyryk burial, discovered in the 1990s, contained the skeletons of a man and a woman, each with weapons, arrowheads, and an axe. Herodotus mentioned that Sakas had "high caps and ... wore trousers." Clothing was sewn from plain-weave wool, hemp cloth, silk fabrics, felt, leather and hides.

Pazyryk findings give the most number of almost fully preserved garments and clothing worn by the Scythian/Saka peoples. Ancient Persian bas-reliefs, inscriptions from Apadana and Behistun and archaeological findings give visual representations of these garments.

Based on the Pazyryk findings (can be seen also in the south Siberian, Uralic and Kazakhstan rock drawings) some caps were topped with zoomorphic wooden sculptures firmly attached to a cap and forming an integral part of the headgear, similar to the surviving nomad helmets from northern China. Men and warrior women wore tunics, often embroidered, adorned with felt applique work, or metal (golden) plaques.

Persepolis Apadana again serves a good starting point to observe tunics of the Sakas. They appear to be a sewn, long sleeve garment that extended to the knees and belted with a belt while owner's weapons were fastened to the belt (sword or dagger, gorytos, battle-axe, whetstone etc.). Based on numerous archeological findings, men and warrior women wore long sleeve tunics that were always belted, often with richly ornamented belts. The Kazakhstan Saka (e.g. Issyk Golden Man/Maiden) wore shorter tunics and more close fitting tunics than the Pontic steppe Scythians. Some Pazyryk culture Saka wore short belted tunic with a lapel on a right side, upright collar, 'puffed' sleeves narrowing at a wrist and bound in narrow cuffs of a color different from the rest of the tunic.

Men and women wore coats, e.g. Pazyryk Saka had many varieties, from fur to felt. They could have worn a riding coat that later was known as a Median robe or Kantus. Long sleeved, and

open, it seems that on the Persepolis Apadana Skudrian delegation is perhaps shown wearing such coat. The Pazyryk felt tapestry shows a rider wearing a billowing cloak.

Source :

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saka>

## **51. Saka, Origins, Scythia, Dahi, Parthava (Parthia), Seistan and Rustam :**

### **PART - 1**

Introduction to the Saka :

The Saka included groups who were part of the Zoroastrian and Aryan families of nations. They included the Chorasmii from Khairizem / Khvarizem / Khwarezm (Gk. Chorasmia), the Parthava (Parthians), the Dahi (Dahae) and the Sistani.

The largest number of ancient Zoroastrian related ruins and artefacts, including a dakhma, a Zoroastrian burial tower known as a 'Tower of Silence', have been uncovered in Chorasmia / Khwarezm. The Dahi were one of the first five nations or people amongst whom Zarathushtra preached his message. The Parthav (Parthians) liberated Iran-Shahr from Macedonian rule and reconstructed the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta that had been destroyed by Alexander. Sistan's heroes, Sam, Zal and Rustam, were the pahlavans, the strongmen and protectors of the imperial Iranian throne. Their stories occupy the largest sections in Ferdowsi's epic poem, the Shahnameh.

For the main part, the traditional land of the Saka forms part of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan today.



Map of Saka lands

Herodotus (485 BCE - c. 420 BCE) and Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - 24 CE) described the Saka (Sacaе) in general as nomads who engaged in perpetual warfare plundering their neighbours and far off lands. However, Strabo and Herodotus mention exceptions to this generalization. Their comments together with supporting evidence indicate there were both settled and nomadic Saka. Strabo sums up the reputation of the Saka as follows: "They are self-assertive, uncouth, wild, and warlike, but, in their business dealings, straightforward and not given to deceit."

## Saka and Scythians :



**Map of Eurasian steppes or grasslands**

**Scythia occupied the grasslands of Ukraine. The grasslands of Asia are to the north of Saka lands, which were around & to the south of the Aral Sea**

The Central Asian Saka (Sacaee) and the European Scythians are very often referred to as the same people in books on the subject. Unfortunately many authors of European origin display a strong Euro-centric bias in their writing. These authors find support for their bias in the work of classical Greek writers who loosely called all the peoples who lived on an immense swath of land - land that became in modern times the Russian Empire - as Scythian. That was because these people lived - in the estimation of the ancient Hellenic writers - a similar Scythian-like lifestyle. That life-style was a broad approximation of what they called the nomadic lifestyle of the people living in the Eurasian grasslands - the steppes.

The people caught in this broad approximation were and are ethnically very different: from light haired Europeans - to Mongolian-like peoples - to the Iranian-Aryans. Nor were all these people nomadic. The differences between the dwellers of the Ukrainian steppes, those who dwell in arid lands of Turkmenistan, and those who reside in the expanses of Mongolia are evident today even to the casual observer.

The confusion between the Saka and Scythians in classical literature is understandable since many classical writers had to rely on third-hand information on which to base their accounts, and because some of the groups were only loosely organized as coherent communities - at least in the estimation of outsiders. Greeks and other Europeans rarely travelled through the Eurasian grasslands or east beyond Persia (Western Iran). The Hellenic authors wrote from their frame of reference. They were familiar with the characteristics of the Scythians. Unfortunately many modern writers are doing the same. Today, however, we have the benefit

of a more comprehensive approach and a wide data base. Pliny sums up the difficulty faced by classical author in his *Natural History*, Book 6, Chapter 19, by saying, "Indeed, upon no subject that I know of are there greater discrepancies among writers, from the circumstance, I suppose, of these nations (Saka) being so extremely numerous, and of such migratory habits."



Scythia itself was a fairly small nation. The father of modern history, Herodotus, states the extent of Scythia in his *Histories* 4.21: Travelling west to east, "Across the Tanais (commonly today's Don River in the Ukraine) it is no longer Scythia; the first of the districts belongs to the Sauromatae, whose country begins at the inner end of the Maeitian lake (commonly taken to mean the Sea of Azov at the north of the Black Sea) and stretches fifteen days' journey north, and is quite bare of both wild and cultivated trees. Above these in the second district, the Budini inhabit a country thickly overgrown with trees of all kinds."

From about 800 to 300 BCE, the Scythia of Greek texts (also see Herodotus 4.21 above) extended east from the Carpathian Mountains in Central Europe - that is east of Rumania, Eastern Ukraine and Poland of today - east from the Carpathians to the Don River. To the south of Scythia was the Sea of Azov (the Maeitian Lake) and to the north, the start of the forests.

In other words the land of Scythia was a relatively small country that consisted of the grasslands of today's Moldova, Ukraine and Crimea. It was far removed from the eastern Saka lands and people. Certainly, as with any group in history, there would have been contact through conquest, plundering raids and even trade resulting in an osmosis of language elements and a borrowing of words. Nevertheless, in our investigation on the Saka, we have found no ethnic link between the Scythians and the Saka. Nor have we found an instance of the two forming a single community. Indeed, if we read the classical Greek accounts careful, we find it stated that the origins of the Saka are to be found in the east as part of the Central

Asian Aryan family and not the west. As we shall see below, the Saka's links as well as their making or breaking of community are found with the Aryan and Zoroastrian family of nations.

The Saka were not Scythians - nor any variation thereof.

[Reader's need to make allowance that many ancient and modern writers were and are not scientific or circumspect in their writing. Many filled the gaps in their information with their imagination or skewed information to support a political or racial motive. For instance, Greek writers added to their substantive and convoluted mythology that the nations of Persia (and Media) were formed by Greek gods. Expropriators of The Irano-N. Indian Aryan heritage (including symbols) claim eastward migrations of their 'race'. Other machinations had the Caucasus Mountains as a birthplace of the white Caucasian 'race'. At one time, the Soviet Russians actively promoted the concept of eastward 'Scythian' migrations perhaps to bolster their imperial acquisition of the once Saka lands in Central Asia. Also see our page: Western Views on the Aryans. We are, however, pleased to see some modern writers beginning to voice a contrary opinion to the old Eurocentric bias. Wikipedia's page of Scythian Languages starts with the statement, "The Scythian languages are a group of Eastern Iranian languages of the classical and late antiquity (Middle Iranian) period...." While we feel it is untenable to link language associations categorically to genetics (or race) as so many linguists and philologists attempt to do, or to equate the spread of languages solely to migrations of 'races' (race-based constructs provide racists with academic support and thereby legitimacy for their bogus postulations), and while the Wikipedia page persists in using the term 'Scythian' in contexts where 'Saka' is the correct and authentic term, the page nevertheless provides some refreshing insights.

Some authors such as Oswald Szemerényi imply that the Sogdians were Scythians i.e. Saka. The Sogdians and various Saka are listed as separate groups in Achaemenid inscriptions. The Sogdians and Saka though separate did live in close proximity and there are indications that some Saka did inhabit parts of Sogdian lands at different points in history. When times of mutual accommodation gave way to competition, there were likely repeated inroads of one group into the lands of the other.]

#### Herodotus & Pliny on the Saka :

At 7.64 of his Histories, Herodotus makes a revealing statement, "Σάκαι δὲ οἱ Σκύθαι...", i.e., "Sákai dé oi Skýthai", which translates as, "The Sakai (Sakas) who are Skythai (Scyths)...." A sentence later, "τούτους δὲ ἕοντας Σκύθας Ἀμυργίου Σάκας ἐκάλεον: οἱ γὰρ Πέρσαι πάντας τοὺς Σκύθας καλέουσι Σάκας" i.e., "τούτους δὲ ἕοντας Skýthas Amyrgíous Sákas ekáleon: oí gár Pérsai pántas toús Skýthas kaléousi Sákas.", which translates as, "But these (people) are in reality called Amyrgyan\* Sakas. For the Persians call all those Scythians, Sakas." Most translators do not translate *τούτους/τούς* (epic form of *ὁ*, 'the following' and here 'those', a demonstrative pronoun), leaving the phrase to incorrectly read "...the Persians call all Scythians, Sakas." The exclusion of *τούτους/τούς* changes the meaning of the phrase substantially. [\*5th cent. BCE Greek historian Ctesias in his *Persica* at § 3 has Amorges as king of the Sacae in the time of Cyrus. Polyaeus (2nd. cent. CE) in his *Stratagems* at vii. 12 has Amorges as king at the time of Darius. 'Amorg' is likely derived from the Old Iranin/Avestan 'amer' meaning 'immortal'.]

Compare our translation to the statement by Roman natural historian Pliny (23-79 CE) in his *Natural Geography* at 6.19: "*Ultra sunt Scytharum populi. Persae illos Sacas universos appellavere a proxima gente, antiqui Aramios, Scythae ipsi Persas Chorsaros et Caucasum montem Croucasim, hoc est nive candidum*". For the primary translation of this passage, we get, "Beyond\* (the Jaxartes River/Syr Darya mentioned previously in 6.18) are the Scythian people. The Persians call all as Saka after the nearest people, the ancient Arami, Scythians themselves Persians Chorsares (Chorasmian?\*) and/also the Caucasian Mountain Croucasis, that is snow white/whitened (cf. Safeed Kuh/Paropamisus)." We get a secondary translation by inserting 'call': "Beyond (the Jaxartes River/Syr Darya) are the Scythian people. The Persians call all as Saka after the nearest people, the ancient Arami, Scythians themselves (call) Persians Chorsares (Chorasmian?\*\*) and/also (call) the Caucasian Mountain Croucasis, that is snow white." [\*"Beyond" the Jaxartes means east of the Jaxartes. \*\*Khor in Old Iranian = Sun; as in Khorasan and Khorasmia/Chorasmia.]

Significantly, Pliny places his description of the 'Scythians' after his chapter on the Caspian Sea and before his chapter on the Seres (eastern most lands). His passage states (as does Herodotus) that the Persians call all those 'Scythians' descended from the Arami as Saka. 'Aram' is an Irano-N. Indian word. It could also be a corruption of Herodotus' 'Amyrgi'. Pliny lived during the Parthian reign of Aryana and we also know of Parthava as Khorasan. This might explain Pliny's statement regarding the "Persians Chorsares". Paradoxically, even though the West called the Parthians under the general appellation of 'Persians', the Parthians were originally a Saka group.

A note by Maj. Gen. Sir A. Cunningham in his article (at p. 223) published in the Royal Numismatic Society's *Numismatic Chronicle (Great Britain, 1888)* states, "In the Babylonian version of the inscriptions of Darius (likely at Behistun), Namiri (N'amiri?) is substituted for Saka. Perhaps Aramii should be Amarii." King Darius' inscription at Behistun that chronicles a secession by the Saka Tigra-Khauda is on column five. Gen. Cunningham's note indicates a possible relationship between 'Arami', 'Amyrgi' via 'Amiri' and the Saka Tigra-Khauda.

Darius in responding to the secession of the Saka Tigra-Khauda, states in his inscription that when he marched with his army to the Saka lands, he crossed a 'draya', a river, likely today's Syr Darya before encountering the Saka. Modern translators inevitably translate 'draya' as 'sea' and therefore translate 'para draya' incorrectly as 'across the sea'.

#### Location & Composition of the Saka :

The region described below consists of today's Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and parts of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

{ In the passages below we have replaced the word Scythian with [Sacae]. }

Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - 24 CE), in his *Geography* 11.8.1, writes: "As one proceeds from the Hyrcanian Sea towards the east, one sees ... the tribe of the Parthians (Parthav) and that of the Margianians (Mouru) and the Arians; and then comes the desert which is separated from Hyrcania (Verkani/Gorgani) by the Sarnius River as one goes eastwards and towards the Ochus (Murghab) River...Then comes Bactriana, and Sogdiana, and finally the [Sacae] nomads."

In the account above, travelling west to east, Strabo's sources encounter the Saka beyond, i.e. east, of the Sogdians. Since the Syr Darya (River Jaxartes) formed the eastern Sogdian border, that would place those Saka to the east of the river. However, Strabo adds below, that the Saka are also to be found on the left (north) of the traveller starting with the Dahi who lived to the north of Varkana and Parthava (Hyrcania and Parthia) immediately after the Caspian, followed by the great Karakum (Garagum) desert, and then the Massagetae.

Strabo 11.8.2: "On the left and opposite these peoples are situated the [Sacaе] or nomadic tribes, which cover the whole of the northern side. Now the greater part of the [Sacaе], beginning at the Caspian Sea, are called Däae (Dahi), but those who are situated more to the east than these are named Massagetae and Saca, whereas all the rest are given the general name of [Sacaе], though each people is given a separate name of its own. They are all for the most part nomads. But the best known of the nomads are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks, I mean the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari, and Sacarauli, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Jaxartes (Jaxartes or Syr Darya or Sihun) River that adjoins that of the Sacaе and the Sogdiani and was occupied by the Sacaе. And as for the Däae, some of them are called Aparni, some Xanthii, and some Pissuri. Now of these the Aparni are situated closest to Hyrcania (Verkani/Gorgani) and the part of the sea that borders on it, but the remainder extend even as far as the country that stretches parallel to Aria."

Strabo 11.8.3: "Between them (Sacaе) and Hyrcania and Parthia and extending as far as the Arians is a great waterless desert, which they (the Sacaе) traversed by long marches and then overran Hyrcania (Verkani/Gorgani), Nesaea (Nisa), and the plains of the Parthians Parthians (Parthav).

To paraphrase the above: various Saka groups, Saka being a general term, inhabit the northern plains that stretch from the Dahae lands that lie to the east of the Caspian Sea all the way to Aria (today's Herat Afghanistan), and that between these Saka and the southern kingdoms of Hyrcania (Varkana/Gorgan), Nesaea (Nisa), the plains of the Parthians (plains just north of the Kopet Dag, Bactria (Northern Afghanistan) and Aria lies a great desert that some of the northern predatory Saka tribes crossed by long marches to raid the kingdom along the south of the desert and particularly Varkana, Nisa, and the Parthian plains. The Saka who lived beyond the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) coincides with Saka Para-Darya, the 'Saka across the river'. The name Aparni is found in the Middle Persian Zoroastrian text, the *Bundahishn* as Aparnak, one of the six male children of the legendary Saka king, paladin and champion of Iran-shahr, Sam, Rustam's grandfather. Aparnak was given over-lordship of the land of Aparshahr derived from Aparnak-shahr. The Aparni were apparently a royal house of the Dahi.

According to Strabo, the Saka consisted of :

- An eponymous group called the Saka as well as
- Dahi (largest) consisting of the clans such as the Aparni, Xanthii, and Pissuri and who were situated closest to the Caspian Sea
- Massagetae (who were situated east across the desert - today's Karakum/Garagum), and Asii, Pasiani, Tochari, and Sacarauli who original came from east of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya)



and located presumably between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya). The name Sacarauli appears to be Saka-rauli.

Unlike Strabo, Pliny in his *Natural History* at 6.19 (see above), does not mention any Saka (Sacae) nation west of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya). Those Saka that others understand as living west of the Jaxartes, Pliny names and the places in the east, but admits, as we have quoted above, "Indeed, upon no subject that I know of are there greater discrepancies among writers..." His account states that the Sacae (Saka) occupied lands east of the Jaxartes. His enumerates the Saka groups as follows:

The Saka groups are the, "Sacae (here spelt differently than his previous spelling of Sakas), the Massagetae, the Dahae, the Essedones (Issedones situated in today's Kyrgyzstan?), the Ariacae (They dwelt, according to Ptolemy, along the southern banks of the Jaxartes), the Rhymmici, the Paesici, the Amardi (Mardi, near Caspian), the Histi, the Edones, the Camae, the Camacae, the Euchatae (today's Bukhara?), the Cotieri, the Anthusiani, the Psacae, the Arimaspi, the Antacati, the Chroasai, and the Cetei; among them the Napaei are said to have been destroyed by the Palaei.

"The rivers in their country that are the best known, are the Mandragæus and the Carpasus. ...He (M. Varro) adds also, that under the direction of Pompey, it was ascertained that it is seven days' journey from India to the river Icarus, in the country of the Bactri, which discharges itself into the Oxus, and that the merchandize of India being conveyed from it through the Caspian Sea into the Cyrus, may be brought by land to Phasis in Pontus, in five days at most. There are numerous islands throughout the whole of the Caspian sea: the only one that is well known is that of Tazata."

#### Parthian Saka as a Part of the Aryan Nations & Zoroastrian Family :

Parthia (Parthav) as an Iranian kingdom was in existence around 1000 BCE. It was a successor nation to Nisaya, the fifth nation mentioned in the Zoroastrian scriptures', the Avesta's, book of Vendidad. As a result, it is sometimes known was Parthaunisa. The Parthians liberated Iran-Shahr for Macedonian-Greek rule left behind by Alexander. They reassembled the Iranian federation of kingdoms, Iran-Shahr and they also reassembled fragments of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta destroyed by Alexander.

The Parthians are thought to be a part of Dahi-Saka, (Dahae in western literature) a part of the greater Iranian-Aryan family that had its origins in an area around the upper reaches of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) river. The Dahi migrated 1,500 km westward towards land around the southeast Caspian coast and the Kopet Dag mountains. The Dahi are mentioned in one of the oldest chapters of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta, as one of the five original people to accept Zarathushtra's message, i.e. become Zoroastrian.

The Parthava may have in this manner shared origins with the ancestors of legendary Rustam of Sistan. The strongmen of both groups are called pahlavans, a word related to Pahlavi, a later form of Parthava. The Parthava in turn have Saka roots. The Saka pahlavans were protectors of Iran-Shahr and the Iranian throne, a role they would fulfil very well when they liberated Iran-Shahr from Macedonian rule. The word Sagzi is used in as a title for Rustam with the implication that the word is derived from Sakzig, a derivative of Saka. [We find Sakzig

reminiscent of Tagzig (commonly thought to be Tajik), the nation where the Tibetan Bon claim spiritual roots.]

### Dahi & Zoroastrianism :

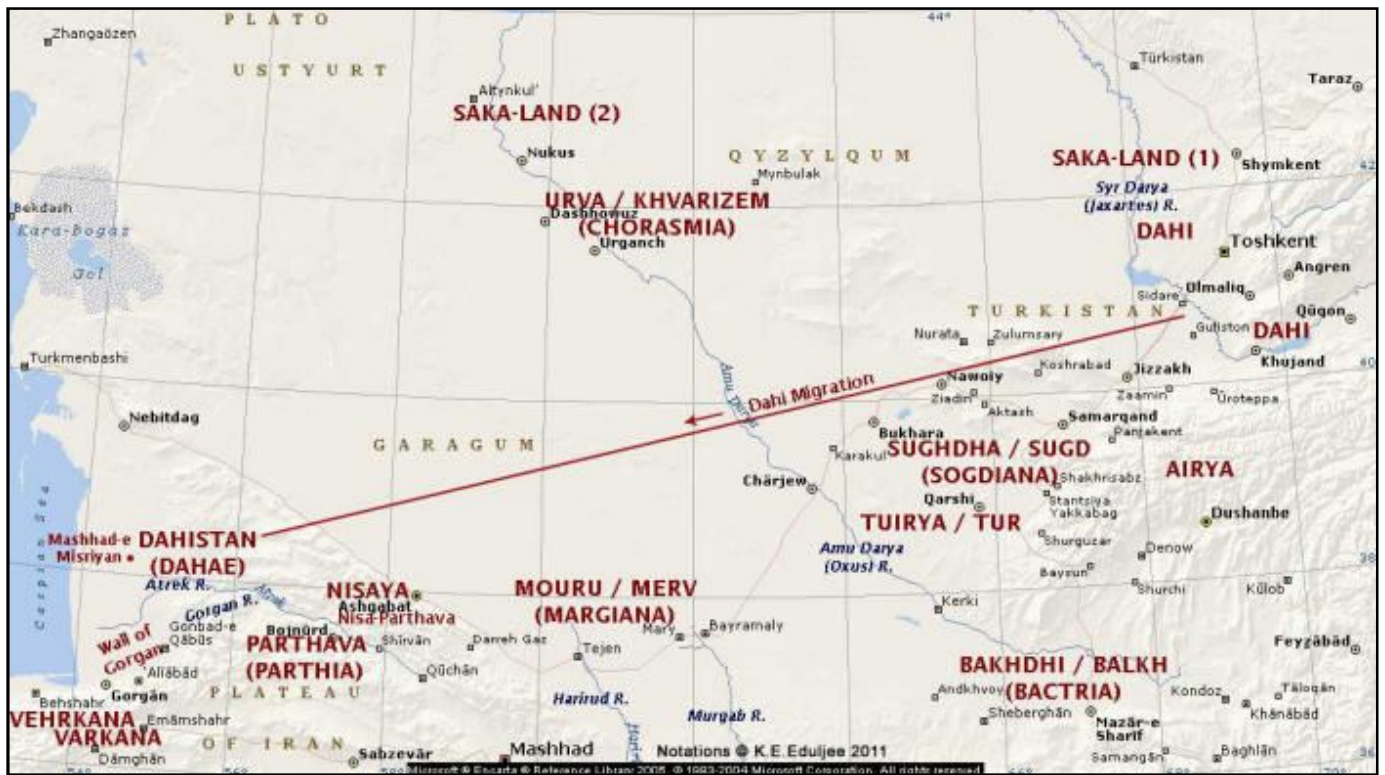
The country of Dahi or Dahinam (-nam is a usual ending for many Avestan nouns) finds mention in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta's Farvardin Yasht 13.144 where the fravashis (spiritual souls) of the Dahi's men and women are revered. The implication is that the Dahi, or some Dahi, were Zoroastrians - Zoroastrians worthy of perpetual veneration in each recitation of the scriptures. Contemporaneous with the life of Zarathushtra, Dahi, together with Airya (-nam), Tuirya (-nam), Sairima (-nam) and Saini (-nam), are the oldest in the Zoroastrian family of nations - nations that participated in the start of the Zoroastrian era.

### Original Homeland of the Saka :

A strong candidate for the original homeland of the Saka is the land north of Airyana Vaeja, ancient Airya, around the upper to mid Syr Darya or Jaxartes river. Today, that region extends from the Fergana Valley in Tajikistan to Tashkent in Uzbekistan.

According to Justinus, internal discord between the Saka forced the Parthians to leave their original homeland and migrate to new lands. The Dahi (Gk. Dahae) did the same and both migrated nearly 1500 km westwards towards the Caspian Sea. The entire area in-between the upper Syr Darya and the southern Caspian were settled by different Saka groups. Some Saka would have migrated eastward into present-day Kyrgyzstan as well.

The Saka connection with Eastern Iran's Sistan region appears to have taken place via two routes. The first and the more ancient was via the connection with ancient Parthava (Parthians), the Pahlavans or Paladins of Iran-shahr. The second took place during the liberation of Iran-shahr from Macedonian-Greek rule about 2,100 years ago resulting in the formation of Sagastan (Sakastan).



**Map of Iranian-Aryan Nations of Central Asian, Dahi lands & migrations.**  
 Click to see a larger map. Base Image Credit: Microsoft Encarta. Notations © K. E. Eduljee

Sagastan - Sakastan. Sistan :

Sagastan or Sistan is the ancestral kingdom of the legendary heroes of Iran, the protectors of the Iranian throne, the family of Sam, Zal and Rostam. The exploits of these heroes and their often stormy relationship with the Iranian-Aryan overlords, the king-of-kings occupy the bulk of the poet Ferdowsi's epic, the *Shahnameh*, the *Book of Kings*.

The name Sagastan (Sakastan, meaning the land of the Saka), and Sistan are relatively modern names. We do not find these names in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta or the Achaemenian inscriptions listing the nations of the Persian Empire (700-330 BCE) where we find the name Zraka or Zaranka (Gk. Drangiana) instead. The name Sagastan emerges in history during the Persian Sassanian empire (c. 200-650 CE) where we find the satrapy or kingdom of Sagastan located in the area of today's Sistan / Seistan province in eastern Iran. George Curzon in *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol 1 (1892), writes, "The derivation of the name Seistan or Sejestan from Sagastan, the country of the Sagan, or Sacae, has, says Sir H. Rawlinson, never been doubted by any writer of credit, either Arab or Persian." Not every writer shares Curzon's certitude.

In their flight from the invading Arabs c 650 CE, the Persians and their allies mounted significant resistance at Zarang in Sagistan (another name variation).

As we have stated above, the Saka connection with Eastern Iran appears to have taken place via two routes. The first and the more ancient was via the connection with ancient Parthav (Parthians), the Pahlavans or Paladins of Iran-shahr. The second took place during the

liberation of Iran-shahr from Macedonian-Greek rule about 2,100 years ago resulting in the formation of Sagastan (Sakastan).

Kingdom of Rustam - Greater Sakastan. Connections with India :



**Lion Capital from Mathura, India reportedly containing the word Sakastanasa.  
Photo credit: Wikipedia**

According to Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Rustam's grandfather Sam received from his overlord, King of Iran-Shahr, Manuchehr, a throne of turquoise, a crown of gold, a ruby signet-ring and a golden girdle. Manuchehr further gave Sam with a charter investing him his lands under his domain. These included:

- The whole of Kabul (Gandhar),
- Dunbur (derived from Sanskrit Udyanpur to Adynpur to Dunpur - a major city of Lamghanat, on the right bank of the River Kabul),
- May-e Hind (from Vay-hind, capital of Gandhar and the region between the Kabul and Indus rivers above their confluence),
- Land from the Darya-e Chin (Chen-ab River, an Indus tributary which irrigates Multan) to Darya-e Hind (Indus River),

Land from Zabulistan to the other side of Bust/Bost (Lashkar-gah, Southern Afghanistan).

Similarly, Rustam's overlord Kayanian King Kay Qubad granted him a fiefdom from Zabulistan to the Darya-e Sind, with the throne and crown of Nimruz; and Kabul to be given to Mihrab. Maintaining the tradition, Kayanian King Kay Khusrow bestowed on Framarz, Rustam's son, the kingdom of all Hind from Qinnauj (derived from Sanskrit Kanyakubja to Kanauj, a region of the Ganges) to Seistan, Hind (Sind), Dunbur, May, Bust, Zabol/Zabol, Kabul.

These immense lands cover what is today Seistan and Baluchistan in Iran, Afghanistan northern Pakistan, Kashmir and a large part of northern India.

If this is indeed history in some form, then the greater quasi-empire of Sakastan, a sub-empire if you will of the greater Iranian-Aryan (later Persian) empire, included what the Persians refer to as Hind i.e. India, and there was ample opportunity for Saka influence in India. There is some suggestion - a very tenuous one - that we have evidence of the Sakas in India. In Mathura, North-Central India (north of Agra and on the banks of the River Yamuna, a tributary of the Ganges, is a first century BCE inscription on the Mathura lion capital "honouring all Sakastanasa" cf. Sakastan, meaning land of the Saka. That reading of the words is debated and in any event, the sub-empire of Rostam would have long predated the 1st century BCE.

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/saka/index.htm>

## Part - 2

Love-Hate Relationship Between the Autonomous Saka and Iran-Shahr's Overlords.



**Northern Khorasani nomads. Image Credit: Khoosheh-Chin**

While some Saka became part of the Iranian-Aryan mainstream and a part of the Iranian-Aryan federation of nations, others choose to stay as autonomous as possible. Those Saka who became part of the Iranian mainstream, themselves had problems with the Saka who chose to stay autonomous. Regardless of their autonomy, when Ira-Shahr was threatened by external forces, it was often the Saka who came to the rescue. The relationship between the

autonomous Saka and with those Saka who chose to remain in the Iranian federation as well as with the overlords of the Iranian federation, the king-of-kings or emperor, as well as the relationship between the settled Aryan peoples and the predatory or nomadic groups, can best be described as a love-hate relationship.

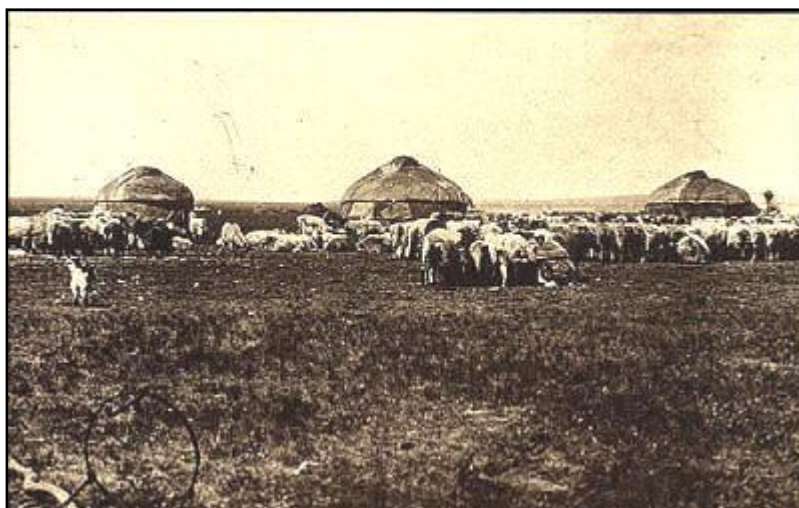
On the one hand, the Saka gave sanctuary and protection to Persians fleeing Alexander's army, and helped free Sughdha and Bakhdhi from the regime left behind by Alexander.

On the other hand, Achaemenian Persian Emperor Cyrus the Great and two Saka Parthav (Parthian) kings of Iran-Shahr, Frahat (Phraates) II, (c.138-127 BCE) and Ardaban (Artabanus) I (c.127-124 BCE) lost their lives in quick succession battling the Saka. Amongst the Parthian kings, the former perished at the hands of Saka in his army who revolted demanding more pay, while the latter died attacking the Tochari Saka who inhabited some areas north of the Kopet Dag mountains - mountains that today form the border between Iran and Turkmenistan. To add confusion to the story.

If we had a third hand, we would say that on yet another hand, the former Parthian Ardaban's successor, Ardaban (Artabanus) II was supported by a strong army of Dahae Saka in putting down a revolt.

The reader will appreciate why we describe the relationship as that of family members who alternate between loving and hating one another. When hate took over, they were not beyond killing one-another. This relationship is typified in legend between the kings of the Iranian-Aryan land of Sistan, Sam and Rustam, and the king-of-kings, the emperors of the Iranian-Aryan lands, to Sistan's north - Balkh (Bakhdhi). Sam and Rustam were pahlavans, champions of Iran, a name shared by the Parthians.

#### Herds-People / Nomadic Aryans :



**Central Asian nomadic encampment with yurts and sheep.  
Note the sparse grass.**

That groups employed in nomadic herding were also part of the Aryan family is indicated by Herodotus in 1.125. Here, he divides the Persian tribes that supported Cyrus into the settled and nomadic tribes: "The Persian nation contains a number of tribes, and the ones which Cyrus

assembled and persuaded to revolt were the Pasargadae, Maraphii, and Maspii, upon which all the other tribes are dependent. Of these, the Pasargadae are the most distinguished; they contain the clan of the Achaemenids from which spring the Perseid kings. Other tribes are the Panthialaei, Derusiaei, Jermanii, all of which are attached to the soil, the remainder - the Dai, Mardi, Dropici, Sagarti, being nomadic." (Translation by Aubrey de Selincourt)

It stands to reason, that people living in arid lands or mountain valleys not suitable for agriculture, would breed herds of cattle, sheep and horses instead. These people would have to move constantly in order find fresh pastures for their herds. However, their kinfolk who lived beside rivers in lands suitable for agriculture, would need to stay in one place and build settlements.

In 11.13.6, Strabo states, "Nearchus says that there were four predatory tribes and that of these the Mardi were situated next to the Persians... ." Here Strabo equates the nomadic Mardi mentioned by Herodotus as a predatory tribe as well. Nevertheless, we should equate nomadic with been predatory. Nomads were not necessarily predatory.

When Herodotus describes the five tribes (Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, and the Magi) of the Medes in 1.101, we find that the Medes and by extension the Aryans, consisted of the Magi, civil, nomadic and predatory groups. Presumably, the settled and nomadic Iranian-Aryans were not just neighbours - they were in all likelihood intermingled communities living side-by-side. That phenomenon can be observed in Iran and central Asia even today. An example are the cave-dwelling residents of Maymand, Kerman in Central Iran, they would have moved with their herds during the summer but returned to permanent homes during the winter - living therefore a fusion of nomadic and settled lives.

Inevitably, the two groups, the nomadic and the settled, would have developed different values, and their societies can therefore expected to have come into conflict from time to time.

#### Predatory Aryans Living Amongst Civil Aryans :

##### Parataceni / Paretaceni / Paraetaceni :

The classical writers write about predatory tribes living amongst the Median & Persian peoples, By extension, these tribes are part of the Iranian-Aryan family. one such tribe that they speak of in some detail is the Paraetaceni.

Strabo calls the Paraetaceni, a predatory tribe. In 11.13.6 he states: Greater Media is bounded on the east by Parthia and the mountains of the Cossaei (Kassite, today's Bakhtiari region), another predatory people, who once supplied the Elymaei (Elamites), with whom they were allies in the war against the Susians and Babylonians, with thirteen thousand bowmen. Nearchus says that there were four predatory tribes and that of these the Mardi were situated next to the Persians; the Uxii and Elymaei next to the Mardi and the Susians; and the Cossaei next to the Medians; and that whereas all four exacted tribute from the kings (ransom in reverse\*), the Cossaei also received gifts at the times when the king, after spending the summer in Ecbatana, went down into Babylonia; but that Alexander put an end to their great audacity when he attacked them in the winter time. So then, Greater Media is bounded on the

east by these (predatory) tribes, and also by the Paraetaceni, who border on the Persians and are themselves likewise mountaineers and predatory.

\*That these predatory tribes were able to exact tribute from the imperial government that surrounded them is a reversal in roles, since vassal states normally paid tribute to the dominant kingdom of the empire. Strabo in 11.13.6, and Diodorus Siculus (1st cent. BCE) in 19.19.2-3, add that the Cossaea/Kassites collected tolls for road passage on the route between Ecbatana and Mesopotamia and the mountain shortcut from Susiana to Ecbatana!

Herodotus states that the Paraetaceni were a Median clan. In 1.101, he states that the Medes consisted of "the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Aryzanti, the Budii, and the Magi." Further, in 7.62, Herodotus states, "These Medes were called anciently by all people Aryans." The name Ary-zanti may also indicate Aryan descent. If the Paretaceni are a tribe of the Medes and if the Medes were Aryans, then it follows that the Paretaceni were also Aryans. Paraetaceni may be broken down to Parae-tak-(eni) giving us Paraetak as the Iranian name.

According to Arrian in *Anabasis* 3.19.2, Diodorus Siculus at 19.34.7, the land of the Parataceni (Paraetacae), that is, Paraetacena (cf. Ptolemy, 6.4.3), occupied the mountains of western and northern Persia. The Parataceni held the shorter but more mountainous road from Persia into Media. Compared to the Cossaea and the other Saka or Saka-like tribes, the Parataceni were more settled and practiced farming.

Strabo in 15.2.14 states that Carmania (Kerman) has a desert which extends to Parthia and to Paraetacena.

Pliny in 6.29.113 sees Persian Paraetacena as extending eastward between Parthia (Khorasan) and Carmania (Kerman), an area either bordering on or including Sistan. Isidorus in 18 introduces us to the land of the Saka which had moved to Sistan (Sakastan) by his time. That land included the Paraetacena: "Beyond is Sacastana of the Scythian Sacae (Saka), which is also Paraetacena, 63 schoeni (378-508 km) [a comparatively large district]. There are the city of Barda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Sigal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sacae." We are not sure if we can read into this account by Isidorus, that the Paraetacena were simply living amongst the Saka or were a Saka people.

The geographical location for the Paraetacena given by Strabo, Arrian and Diodorus, is east of Media and Persia, i.e., the mountainous areas of Isfahan, Yazd and Kerman. However, the accounts of Pliny and Isidorus place the Paraetacena further east and cross the great deserts of the Iranian plateau arriving at the mountains of Sistan, Khorasan and Afghanistan (which would imply that Media and Persia stretched all the way east to these mountains). Arrian in *Anabasis* in 4.22.1 moves the Paraetacena even further east - as far east as the mountainous area in eastern Sogdiana and appears to use the name for all predatory Saka who lived in the mountains of the Iranian plateau.

While we have included a discussion on the Paraetacena in this page on the Saka, and while some may believe the Paraetacena model stereotype Saka behaviour, at this point we do not find a strong connection between the Paraetacena and the Saka.



Predatory Saka :

Strabo in 11.8.3 relates his views on the predatory practices of (some) Saka: "Between them (Sacae) and Hyrcania and Parthia and extending as far as the Arians is a great waterless desert, which they (the Sacae) traversed by long marches and then overran Hyrcania, Nesaea, and the plains of the Parthians. And these people agreed to pay tribute, and the tribute was to allow the invaders at certain appointed times to overrun the country and carry off booty. But when the invaders overran their country more than the agreement allowed, war ensued, and in turn their quarrels were composed and new wars were begun. Such is the life of the other nomads also, who are always attacking their neighbours and then in turn settling their differences."

Strabo 11.8.4: "The Sacae, however, made raids like those of Cimmerians and Treres, some into regions close to their own country, others into regions farther away. For instance, they occupied Bactriana, and acquired possession of the best land in Armenia, which they left named after themselves, Sacasene (cf. Sacasan / Sakastan); and they advanced as far as the country of the Cappadocians, particularly those situated close to the Euxine, who are now called the Pontici. But when they were holding a general festival and enjoying their booty, they were attacked by night by the Persian generals who were then in that region and utterly wiped out."

[The Saka (and the other Aryans as well) travelled far from the original eastern lands, naming some of the lands they settled after them. In talking about Sacasene, Strabo could well be taking about Sakastan (derived from Sakasan cf. Khorasan, and described on this page) that later became Sistan, the home of Rostam, pahlavan and protector of the Iranian throne - allied but autonomous, and fiercely independent when so inclined.]

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/saka/saka2.htm>

**Part - 3 :**

Frontier Saka :

Saka of the Achaemenian Inscriptions :



**Darius' listing of Persian Empire nations  
Cuneiform Inscription on rock at Behistun, Iran  
Column 1 lines 9-17**

In the Achaemenian cuneiform inscriptions of Darius I the Great (522-486 BCE), the list of nations that comprised the Persian Empire included three nations using Saka as a prefix to their names: Saka Haumavarga, Saka Tigrakhauda and Saka Paradraya.

In the English/European language translation of these inscription, the original word Saka has been universally substituted with the word Scythian. This substitution - together with other Greek-English substitutions for authentic local names - has unfortunately become automatic today. As we have stated above, these substitutions leave us with a distorted and incorrect picture of both the Scythians and the Saka, their place in history, and their location in geography.

For instance, Darius' (522-486 BCE) column 1 inscription at Behistun (in north-western Iran) lists the nations that were part of his Persian Empire. If they are transcribed without substituting the Persian names with Greek-English names, they read as: "Parsa, Uvja, Babirush, Athura, Arabaya, Mudraya, tyaiy drayahya, Sparda, Yauna, Mada, Armina, Katpatuka, Parthava, Zraka, Haraiva, Uvarazmīy, Bakhtrish, Suguda, Gadara, Saka, Thatagush, Harauvatish, Maka, fraharavam, dahyava XXIII thatiy."

The list is universally translated into English as "Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, (those) who are beside the sea, Sardis, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandhar, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, Maka; in all, 23 lands."

Darius provides us with more information about the Saka in column 5 of Behistun's inscriptions which transcribes as: "Darayavaush khshayathiya pasava, hada kara adam ashiyavam abiy Sakam, pasa Saka tyaiy khaudam tigram baratiy, imaiy Saka hacama aisha, yadiy abiy draya, avarasam parashim avada hada kara visa viyatarayam pasava, adam Saka vasiy ajanam, aniyam agarbayam hauv basta anayata abiy mam utashim, avajanam mathishtasham Skukha nama avam agarbaya uta anaya abiy, mam avada aniyam mathishtam akunavam yatha mam kama aha, pasava dahyaush mana abava, thatiy Darayavaush khshayathiya avaiy, Saka arika aha uta naiy Auramazdasham ayadiya, Auramazdam ayadaiy vashna, Auramazdaha yatha mam kama avathadish akunavam, thatiy Darayavaush khshayathiya hya, Auramazdam yadataiy avahya, yanam ahatiy uta jīvahya utamartahya."

This translates roughly as "Darius the King says: Afterwards with an army I journeyed to Sakam, beyond the Saka Tigrakhauda (commonly translated as 'pointed caps'). These Saka went from me. When I arrived at the draya (cf. darya, river or sea), I crossed and went beyond it with all my army. Afterwards, I smote the Saka exceedingly; another (leader) I took captive; this one was led bound to me and I slew him. The chief of them by name Skunkha - they seized and led him to me. Then I made another their chief as was my desire. After that, the land became mine. Darius the King says: Those Saka were faithless and by them Ahura-Mazda was not worshipped. I worshipped Ahura-Mazda; by the favour of Ahura-Mazda, as was my desire, thus I did to them. Darius the King says: Darius the King says: Who so shall worship Ahura-Mazda, divine blessing will be upon him, both (while) living and (when) dead."

If the translation is correct, we are provided with information that can add to our understanding of the Saka. First, there were more than one group of the Saka - more than one Saka nation. The first Saka Darius encountered were the Saka "who wear pointed caps",

the Saka Tigrakhauda (see below) - a Saka nation that did not resist his advance. Next, in order to reach a second Saka nation, Darius and his army crossed a draya, translated as river or sea (if this was a sea, he would have needed a flotilla of ships, the construction of which would have been noteworthy). Draya's modern version is likely darya. Today, two rivers in Central Asia use the name: the Amu Darya (Greek Oxus) and Syr Darya (Greek Jaxartes). Since our information tells us that the land of Sugada (Sugd) lay between the Amu and Syr Daryas, the Amu and Syr Rivers with the Syr being eastern-most, and given the additional information contained in another inscription cited below, Darius is likely talking about crossing Sugada and then the Syr Darya (Jaxartes).

We also understand from the inscription's translation that the two Saka nations he mentions were neighbours separated by a darya, river. If the two Saka were neighbours and if the common identification of the Saka Tigrakhauda with the Massagetae who lived around today's Aral Sea in central Asia is correct, then the 'draya' mentioned here cannot be the Black Sea in Europe some 1,500 km to the west of the Saka Tigrakhauda and in the opposite direction from Persia.

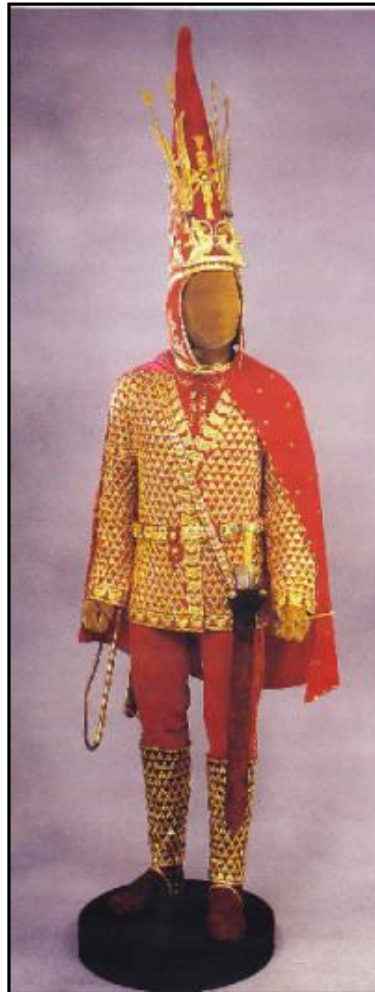
We have additional information that can assist us in indentifying the Saka Para-Darya, the Saka across the draya. An inscription left by Darius at Persepolis transcribes as: "Thatiy Darayavaush khshyyathiya ima khshacham tya adam daray amiy haca, Sakaibish tyaiy para Sugdam, amata yata Kusha, haca Hidauv amata yata a Sparda, tyamaiy Auramazda frabara hya mathishta baganam mam, Auramazda patuv utamaiy vitham."

Roughly translated, this reads, "Darius the King says: This is the empire which I hold: from the Sakaibish (Sakas) who are beyond Sugdam (Sogdiana), thence to Kusha (Ethiopia), from Hidauv (Hind / Indus?) thence to Sparda (Sardis) - which Ahuramazda the greatest of the deities bestowed upon me. May Ahuramazda protect me and my royal house."

What we are further informed here is that he states the extent of Darius' empire - from the farthest reaches east to west - extended at one end from the Sakas para-Sugdam, i.e. beyond Sugd to Kusha (Ethiopia) at the other end. Sugd is fairly well identified and continues to exist today as a province divided between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Ancient Sugd was bordered on the east by the Syr Darya (draya or river. Also see Saka para-draya below. Sugd provides us with a credible anchor around which to place the various pieces of the puzzle. The far-eastern land of Darius' empire was the land of the Saka para-Sugd, beyond Sugd to its east.



**Saka Tigrakhauda - Stone reliefs at Persepolis**



**Saka Prince - Issyk  
Wearing golden armour  
Kazakhstan**

## Location :

The Haumavarga's northern and north-western neighbours, the Saka Tigrakhauda, inhabited the grasslands around the Aral sea (south-western Kazakhstan today). The stone reliefs at Persepolis show the Saka Tigrakhauda with pointed caps. The height of the cap would have been an indication of status - the tallest caps being reserved for the senior most ruler or king.

The Saka Tigrakhauda appear to be the Massagetæ mentioned by Strabo, Herodotus and others. As we have stated in our introduction above, Strabo in 11.8.8 identified the Massagetæ as Saka. He further identified the Chorasmii, residents of Khairizem / Khvarizem / Khwarezm (Gk. Chorasmia) as Massagetæ. The Chorasmii were therefore a sub-group of the Massagetæ who were a sub-group of the Massagetæ, known to the Achemenians as Saka Tigrakhauda.

Chorasmia, later known as Khwarezm, occupied both banks of the lower Amu Darya (Oxus River). The largest number of Zoroastrian related ruins and artefacts, including a dakhma, a Zoroastrian burial tower known as a 'Tower of Silence', have been uncovered in Khwarezm. Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - 24 CE) further describes the location of the Massagetæ in his *Geography* 11.8.8:

Unknown translator 1924 : "Belonging to the tribe of the Massagetæ and the Sacæ (Saka) are also the Attasii and the Chorasmii, to whom Spitamenes fled from the country of the Bactriani (of Bactria: Bakhdi, Balkh including Western Tajikistan) and the Sogdian (Sughd, Sugd). Spitamenes was one of the Persians who escaped from Alexander, as did also Bessus; and later (Parthian king) Arsaces, when he fled from Seleucus Callinicus, withdrew into the country of the Apasiacæ. Eratosthenes says that the Arachoti and Massagetæ are situated alongside the Bactriani towards the west along the Oxus River (Amu Darya), and that the Sacæ and the Sogdiani, with the whole of their lands, are situated opposite India (Indus), but the Bactriani only for a slight distance; for, he says, they are situated for the most part alongside the Paropamisus (mountain range in Northern Afghanistan), and the Sacæ and the Sogdiani are separated from one another by the Iaxartes River (Jaxartes, Syr Darya, and the Sogdiani and the Bactriani by the Oxus River (Amu Darya)."

11.8.8 (translation: H.C. Hamilton, Esq., W. Falconer, M.A., 1903): The Attasii (Augasii?) and the Chorasmii belong to the Massagetæ and Sacæ, to whom Spitamenes directed his flight from Bactria and Sogdiana. He was one of the Persians who, like Bessus, made his escape from Alexander by flight, as Arsaces afterwards fled from Seleucus Callinicus, and retreated among the Apasiacæ. Eratosthenes says, that the Bactriani lie along the Arachoti and Massagetæ on the west near the Oxus, and that Sacæ and Sogdiani, through the whole extent of their territory, are opposite to India, but the Bactrii in part only, for the greater part of their country lies parallel to the Paropomisus; that the Sacæ and Sogdiani are separated by the Iaxartes, and the Sogdiani and Bactriani by the Oxus.

What we understand from the above is that the Massagetæ at the time of Strabo (around 0 BCE), occupied land to the west of the Amu Darya (Oxus) and immediately to the north-west of Bakhdi (Bactria i.e. including today's Balkh, Wakhan / Panj valley, and Western Tajikistan) and north of the Paropamisus mountains (in Northern Afghanistan today). Further, the Sogdians and the (main/parent/eponymous) Saka lived north of the Bactriani and therefore

immediately east of the Massagetae - on the east bank of the Amu Darya (Oxus). This location for the Massagetae and the Saka Tigrakhauda describes today's Eastern Turkmenistan & North-western Uzbekistan. It coincides well with Chorasmia as well with the only difference being that Chorasmia occupied the narrow stretch of fertile bank on the east bank of the lower Amu Darya including the river's delta at the Aral Sea.

Strabo 11.8.6: "Statements to the following effect are made concerning the Massagetae: that some of them inhabit mountains, some plains, others marshes which are formed by the rivers, and others the islands in the marshes. But the country is inundated most of all, they say, by the Araxes River (Strabo perhaps quoting Herodotus and others who mistakenly call the Oxus, the Araxes), which splits into numerous branches and empties by its other mouths into the other sea on the north, though by one single mouth it reaches the Hyrcanian Gulf (Caspian Sea) (The Oxus, a large river in ancient times, frequently changed course. One arm is known to have emptied north into the Caspian Sea with other arms ending in the desert creating marshes. It has since changed course and empties into the Aral Sea where its delta creates marshes)."

#### Saka Tigrakhauda-Massagetae Sub Groups :

From the accounts above, the sub groups of the Saka Tigrakhauda-Massagetae Sub Groups are:

- Chorasmii (Khorasami)
- Attasii/Augasii
- Apasiacae

#### Lifestyle of the Massagetae :

Strabo 11.8.6: "Statements to the following effect are made concerning the Massagetae: that some of them inhabit mountains (probably referring to the Haumavarga / Amyrgian Sacae), some plains, others marshes which are formed by the rivers, and others the islands in the marshes. But the country is inundated most of all, they say, by the Araxes River (Strabo is quoting others such as Herodotus, who mistakenly called the Oxus, the Araxes), which splits into numerous branches and empties by its other mouths into the other sea on the north, though by one single mouth it reaches the Hyrcanian Gulf (Caspian Sea. The Oxus was a large river in ancient times that frequently changed course. One arm is known to have emptied north in to the Caspian Sea with other arms creating a marsh like area with islands near today's Aral Sea)."

[Strabo may have been citing Herodotus who only had a vague idea about the northern rivers, combining rivers that flowed into the west and east of the Caspian. Strabo correctly names the Oxus further below in 11.8.8. Knowing that by Araxes, Strabo means the Oxus, this passage fairly clearly describes the Massagetae (Saka Tigrakhauda) as living around the northern stretches of the Oxus that at one time ran into the Caspian as well as the Aral Sea. As well, the river's various branches formed deltas or ended in desert marshes. Since the Massagetae lived north of the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts, the implication here is that it is the Massagetae

who were the Saka raiders of Varkana, Nisa and Parthia. It is also the Massagetae (Saka Tigrakhauda) that King Cyrus (the Great) sought to tame, and it is also they who killed Cyrus in battle.]

Strabo 11.8.7: "Now those who live in the islands, since they have no grain to sow, use roots and wild fruits as food, and they clothe themselves with the bark of trees (for they have no cattle either), and they drink the juice squeezed out of the fruit of the trees (probably referring to the Haumavarga / Amyrgian Sacae)."

Strabo 11.8.7 (contd.): "Those who live in the marshes eat fish, and clothe themselves in the skins of the seals that run up thither from the sea. The inhabitants of the plains, although they possess land, do not till it, but in the nomadic or Scythian fashion live on sheep and fish." (we have excluded references to 'mountaineer' Saka here and included them in the section on Haumavarga / Amyrgian Sacae.)

#### Battle Skills. Metal & Gold Use by the Massagetae :

Herodotus wrote (1.215) "In their dress and mode of living, the Massagetae resemble the Scythians. They fight both on horseback and on foot, neither method is strange to them: they use bows and lances, but their favourite weapon is the battle-axe. Their arms are all either of gold or brass. For their spear-points, and arrow-heads, and for their battle-axes, they make use of brass; for head-gear, belts, and girdles, of gold. So too with the caparison of their horses, they give them breastplates of brass, but employ gold about the reins, the bit, and the cheek-plates. They use neither iron nor silver, having none in their country; but they have brass and gold in abundance."

Artefacts uncovered at the royal tomb of the Saka Golden Warrior Prince at ancient town of Issyk (close to Almaty and the Kyrgyz border in southern Kazakhstan) have permitted a reconstruction of the clothing and armour worn by the prince. These items show an extensive use of gold and bronze - and a very tall pointed cap.

Strabo 11.8.6: "They are good horsemen and foot-soldiers; they use bows, short swords, breastplates, and sagares made of brass; and in their battles they wear headbands and belts made of gold. And their horses have bits and girths made of gold. Silver is not found in their country, and only a little iron, but brass (copper) and gold in abundance."

#### Herodotus' Account of the Death of Cyrus Fighting the Massagetae :

Selections from Book 1. 201-216:

When Cyrus had achieved the conquest of the Babylonians, he conceived the desire of bringing the Massagetae under his dominion. Now the Massagetae are said to be a great and warlike nation, dwelling eastward, toward the rising of the sun, beyond the river Araxes, and opposite the Issedonians.

The river Araxes, like the Gyndes, which Cyrus dispersed into three hundred and sixty channels... has forty mouths, whereof all, except one, end in bogs and swamps. These bogs and swamps are said to be inhabited by a race of men who feed on raw fish, and clothe

themselves with the skins of seals. The other mouth of the river flows with a clear course into the Caspian Sea. [Note: the old course of the Amu Darya, the River Oxus which Herodotus confuses with the Araxes, ran into the Caspian rather than the Aral Sea as it does today.]

The Caspian is a sea by itself. On the east it is followed by a vast plain, stretching out interminably before the eye, the greater portion of which is possessed by those Massagetae against whom Cyrus was now so anxious to make an expedition. Many strong motives weighed with him and urged him on - his birth especially, which seemed something more than human, and his good fortune in all his former wars, wherein he had always found that against what country soever he turned his arms, it was impossible for that people to escape.

At this time the Massagetae were ruled by a queen, named Tomyris, who at the death of her husband, the late king, had mounted the throne. To her Cyrus sent ambassadors, with instructions to court her on his part, pretending that he wished to take her to wife. Tomyris, however, aware that it was her kingdom, and not herself, that he courted, forbade the men to approach. Cyrus, therefore, finding that he did not advance his designs by this deceit, marched towards the Araxes, and openly displaying his hostile intentions; set to work to construct a bridge on which his army might cross the river, and began building towers upon the boats which were to be used in the passage. [Note: by this we understand that the Massagetae Saka lived on the east of the Amu Darya/Oxus. Strabo informs us that the Dahi Saka occupied the stretch of land between the Caspian and the Oxus.]

While the Persian leader was occupied in these labours, Tomyris sent a herald to him, who said, "King of the Medes, cease to press this enterprise, for you cannot know if what you are doing will be of real advantage to you. Be content to rule in peace your own kingdom, and bear to see us reign over the countries that are ours to govern. As, however, I know you will not choose to hear to this counsel, since there is nothing you desire less than peace and quietness, come now, if you are so mightily desirous of meeting the Massagetae in arms, leave your useless toil of bridge-making; let us retire equal distance three days' march from the river bank. Then come across with your soldiers, or, if you prefer we will give you battle on your side the stream." Cyrus, on this offer, called together the chiefs of the Persians, and laid the matter before them, requesting them to advise him what he should do. All the votes were in favour of his letting Tomyris cross the stream, and giving battle on Persian ground. [Note: there is a suggestion here that the river Amu Darya (Oxus) was the border of the Persian Empire to this point. The river has even in legend been the border between Iran-shahr and Turan.]

But Croesus the Lydian [note: Lydia was located in south-western Asia Minor, a part of Asiatic Greece], who was present at the meeting of the chiefs, disapproved of this advice; he therefore rose, and thus delivered his sentiments in opposition to it: "Oh! my king! I promised you long since, that, as God had given me into your hands, I would, to the best of my power, avert impending danger from your house. Alas! my own sufferings, by their very bitterness, have taught me to be keen-sighted of dangers. If you deem yourself an immortal, and your army an army of immortals, my counsel will doubtless be thrown away upon you. But if you feel yourself to be a man and a ruler of men, lay this first to heart, that there is a wheel on which the affairs of men revolve, and that its movement forbids the same man to be always



fortunate. Now concerning the matter in hand, my judgment runs counter to the judgment of your other counsellors.

For if you agree to give the enemy entrance into your country, consider what risk is run! Lose the battle, and therewith you whole kingdom is lost [note: we have confirmation here that the river Amu Darya was the border between the two]. For assuredly, the Massagetæ, if they win the fight, will not return to their homes, but will push forward against the states of your empire. Or if you win the battle, why, then you win far less than if you crossed the river where you might follow up your victory.

For against your loss, if they defeat you on your own ground, must be set theirs in like case. Rout their army on the other side of the river, and you may push at once into the heart of their country. Moreover, were it not disgrace intolerable for Cyrus the son of Cambyses to retire before and yield ground to a woman? My counsel, therefore, is that we cross the stream, and pushing forward as far as they shall fall back, then seek to get the better of them by stratagem. I am told they are unacquainted with the good things on which the Persians live, and have never tasted the great delights of life. Let us then prepare a feast for them in our camp; let sheep be slaughtered without stint, and the wine cups be filled full of noble liquor, and let all manner of dishes be prepared: then leaving behind us our worst troops, let us fall back towards the river. Unless I very much mistake, when they see the good fare set out, they will forget all else and fall to. Then it will remain for us to do our parts manfully."

Cyrus, when the two plans were thus placed in contrast before him, changed his mind, and preferring the advice which Croesus had given, returned for answer to Tomyris that she should retire, and that he would cross the stream. She therefore retired, as she had engaged; and Cyrus, giving Croesus into the care of his son Cambyses (whom he had appointed to succeed him on the throne), with strict charge to pay him all respect and treat him well, if the expedition failed of success; and sending them both back to Persia, crossed the river with his army.

Meanwhile Cyrus, having advanced a day's march from the river, did as Croesus had advised him, and, leaving the weaker portion of his army in the camp, drew off with his good troops towards the river. Soon afterwards, a detachment of the Massagetæ, one-third of their entire army, led by Spargapises, son of the queen Tomyris, coming up, fell upon the body which had been left behind by Cyrus, and on their resistance put them to the sword. Then, seeing the banquet prepared, they sat down and began to feast. When they had eaten and drunk their fill, and were now sunk in sleep, the Persians under Cyrus arrived, slaughtered a great multitude, and made even a larger number prisoners. Among these last was Spargapises himself.

When Tomyris heard what had befallen her son and her army, she sent a herald to Cyrus, who thus addressed the conqueror: "you bloodthirsty Cyrus, pride not yourself on this poor success: it was the grape-juice - which, when you drink it, makes you so mad, and as you swallow it down brings up to your lips such bold and wicked words - it was this poison wherewith you did ensnare my child, and so overcame him, not in fair open fight. Now hear what I advise, and be sure I advise you for your good. Restore my son to me and get you from the land unharmed, triumphant over a third part of the host of the Massagetæ. Refuse, and I swear by the sun, the sovereign lord of the Massagetæ [note: were the Massagetæ Mithra worshippers?], bloodthirsty as you are, I will give you your fill of blood."

To the words of this message Cyrus paid no manner of regard. As for Spargapises, the son of the queen, when the wine went off and he saw the extent of his calamity, he made request to Cyrus to release him from his bonds; then, when his prayer was granted, and the fetters were taken from his limbs, as soon as his hands were free, he destroyed himself.

Tomyris, when she found that Cyrus had paid no heed to her advice, collected all the forces of her kingdom, and gave him battle. Of all the combats in which the barbarians have engaged among themselves, I reckon this to have been the fiercest. The following, as I understand, was the manner of it:



**Saka Gold deer Pazyryk, Kazakhstan**

First, the two armies stood apart and shot their arrows at each other; then, when their quivers were empty, they closed and fought hand-to-hand with lances and daggers; and thus they continued fighting for a length of time, neither choosing to give ground. At length the Massagetae prevailed. The greater part of the army of the Persians was destroyed and Cyrus himself fell, after reigning twenty nine years. Search was made among the slain by order of the queen for the body of Cyrus, and when it was found she took a skin, and, filling it full of human blood, she dipped the head of Cyrus in the gore, saying, as she thus insulted the corpse, "I live and have conquered you in fight, and yet by you am I ruined, for you took my son with guile; but thus I make good my threat, and give you your fill of blood." Of the many different accounts which are given of the death of Cyrus, this which I have followed appears to me most worthy of credit. [Note: Of course! One can hardly accuse Herodotus of choosing the most sensational of all the myths. Nevertheless, the story as it is, contains bits of information relevant to our study of the Saka.]

In their dress and mode of living the Massagetae resemble the Scythians. They fight both on horseback and on foot, neither method is strange to them: they use bows and lances, but their favourite weapon is the battle-axe. Their arms are all either of gold or brass [note: this is fairly consistent with artefacts uncovered]. For their spear-points, and arrow-heads, and for their battle-axes, they make use of brass; for head-gear, belts, and girdles, of gold. So too with the caparison of their horses, they give them breastplates of brass, but employ gold about the reins, the bit, and the cheek-plates. They use neither iron nor silver, having none in their country; but they have brass and gold in abundance.

The following are some of their customs: Each man has but one wife, yet all the wives are held in common; for this is a custom of the Massagetae and not of the Scythians, as the Greeks wrongly say. Human life does not come to its natural close with this people; but when a man grows very old, all his kinsfolk collect together and offer him up in sacrifice; offering at the same time some cattle also. After the sacrifice they boil the flesh and feast on it [note; sic. Herodotus did say earlier had his stories of the Massagetae had been collected from various source]; and those who thus end their days are reckoned the happiest. If a man dies of disease they do not eat him, but bury him in the ground, bewailing his ill-fortune that he did not come to be sacrificed. They sow no grain, but live on their herds, and on fish, of which there is great plenty in the Araxes [Amu Darya / Oxus]. Milk is what they chiefly drink. The only god they worship is the sun, and to him they offer the horse in sacrifice; under the notion of giving to the swiftest of the gods the swiftest of all mortal creatures.

#### Saka Haumavarga / Amyrgian Sacae :

The Saka Haumavarga along with the Saka Tigrakhauda, are the two Saka nations or peoples most consistently mentioned as part of the Persian Empire. The literature suggests that Hauma-varga describes a defining trait of this Saka group. It is taken to mean that this Saka practiced haoma-drinking Saka. Haoma is the medicinal and health-giving extract from plants. Haoma is associated with ancient Zoroastrian healing practices and if this association is correct, it provides a further connection between at least one Saka group and the Zoroastrian family. Haoma is a regular part of Zoroastrian ritual and why this group should be singled out to bear the name is unclear. Perhaps this is where the practice originated; perhaps, this Saka group were renowned for their knowledge of the haoma curative sciences; we do not know.

Strabo in 11.8.7 refers to the Saka who "drink the juice squeezed out of the fruit of the trees" and adds, "The mountaineers themselves also live on wild fruits."

Haoma is not a fruit juice. It is the juice squeezed out of stems of ephedra found in the mountains mixed with the juice of tender branches of trees such as wild Willow (to combat headaches). Different mixtures are made for different ailments. A mixture made to promote wellness, uses the branches as well as leaves of fruit trees such as the pomegranate. The pomegranate fruit can was probably eaten as a regular fruit and its juice drunk as a refreshment and tonic. There is of course nothing to prevent someone from mixing the juice of the pomegranate's branches, leaves and fruit to make it more palatable. To an outsider, not familiar with the tradition, we can allow for the practice to be seen at fruit-juice drinking.

Strabo in 11.8.7 states: "... they have sheep also, though only a few, and therefore they do not butcher them, sparing them for their wool and milk; and they variegate the color of their clothing by staining it with dyes whose colors do not easily fade.

Herodotus refers to the eastern Saka as the Amyrgioi or Amyrgian. There is some suggestion that the name Amyrg is somehow derived from haoma. That would be a stretch. Amorg is closer to Amord which means undying, but this is just a thought that crossed the mind of this author.

Herodotus in Book 7.64 of his *Histories* mentions the Saka or Amyrgian Scythians as being part of the Persian army: "The Sacae, or Scyths, were clad in trousers, and had on their heads tall stiff caps rising to a point. They bore the bow of their country and the dagger; besides which they carried the battle-axe, or sagaris. They were in truth Amyrgian Scythians, but the Persians called them Sacae, since that is the name which they give to all Scythians. The Bactrians and the Sacae had for leader Hystaspes, the son of Darius and of Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus." The description of pointed hats applies to the Saka Tigrakhauda described above.

Hellanicus (fifth century BCE) refers to the "Amyrgian plain, Amyrgion pedion, of the Sakas" (frag. 65, Jacoby), as well as valleys and mountains. The mountains could well have been home to the Paraetaceni or 'mountaineer' Saka referred to by Strabo 11.8.7).

In describing the haoma drinking custom, Strabo has moved east beyond the Massagetae towards the Jaxartes, the Syr Darya. In describing the mountains, he is moving towards the headwaters of the river as there are no hills leave aside mountains in its lower reaches. The descriptions of the geography of the homeland of the The Saka Haumavarga / Amyrgian Sacae is one of plains, valleys and mountains. The vegetation includes cotton and fruit trees.

The Syr Darya starts in the southern mountains, runs through the Fergana Valley and its plains, enters the broad plains of the Qyzylqum and empties into the Aral Sea via a delta. In the Fergana Valley, since the river runs east to west, one cannot cross it to go over to the east. Therefore, the upper reaches of the Syr Darya and the Fergana Valley are not the places to look for the Saka Para-Darya.

In the Fergana Valley there are reported ruins of a city in the Fergana Valley constructed by Cyrus the Great. On this subject, Sir George Rawlinson in his *Seven Great Monarchies* writes: "Arrian relates that there was a city called Cyropolis, situated on the Jaxartes, a place of great strength defended by very lofty walls, which had been founded by the Great Cyrus. This city belonged to Sogdiana."

#### Saka Women in Leadership & War :

We found an interesting story in *History of Antiquity* by Max Duncker and Evelyn Abbott (Vol 5): "Then Cyrus conquered the Sacae, and took their king Amorges captive. We remember that, according to Herodotus' statement, the proper name of the Sacae was Amyrgians, and in the inscriptions of Darius we found the Saka Humavarka. The name Amorges seems to be borrowed from the Amyrgians. When Amorges had been defeated and taken captive by Cyrus, his wife Sparethra, as she is called in Ctesias, collected the Sacae and took the field with them.

Zarinaea (Zarin is a common Zoroastrian name for women), a princess of the Sacae, had previously fought with great bravery against the Medes, but her achievements are far surpassed by those of Sparethra. With 300,000 men and 200,000 armed women, she went against the Persians, and defeated Cyrus, taking many captives, among whom were Medes of distinction. As a ransom for these Amorges was restored to Sparethra, and there was friendship between Cyrus and the king of the Sacae, and the latter marched with him to the war against the Lydians. Strabo also speaks of a battle in which Cyrus was defeated by the Sacae. Being hard pressed on his retreat he abandoned his camp with large stores of every kind, especially of wine. When the Sacae had enjoyed their spoil, Cyrus fell upon them and massacred nearly all." [This story about using wine in battle sounds suspicious similar to the one related by Herodotus in Book 1. 201-216 and which have include in the section on the Saka Tigrakhauda.]

Fergana :



Map of Eastern Uzbekistan & Tajikistan - Fergana Valley



### **A yurt & nomadic life in the mountains over Fergana**

Fergana is the region at the upper reaches of the Syr Darya river. It consists of a fertile valley surrounded by the Alai, Tian Shan and Turkistan mountains. The Fergana valley is formed by the confluence of two rivers near Namangan: the Naryn and the Kara Darya, coming together to form the Syr Darya rivers. The Syr Darya was known to Greek writers as the Jaxartes or Yaxartes, a name derived from the Old Persian name Yakhsha Arta.

Strabo made an interesting and significant observation in 11.8.7 regarding the Saka who lived in the mountains. "The mountaineers themselves also live on wild fruits; but they have sheep also, though only a few, and therefore they do not butcher them, sparing them for their wool and milk; and they variegate the color of their clothing by staining it with dyes whose colors do not easily fade."

The tradition of dyeing and producing fabrics with variegated colours continues today in Fergana. This age-old art has been taken to new heights to include cotton and silk fabrics that are renowned world wide as khan-atlas fabrics.

Further offsite reading: Ferghana Valley - A Story of Silk :



**Colourful silk thread spinning in Fergana**



### **Colourful fabrics - Fergana**

Fergana is also known for its blue glazed pottery for hundreds of years. 50 kilometres from Fergana city lies the pottery producing town Rishtan, renowned for its ceramics made from local red clay mixed with natural mineral dyes and the ashes of the mountain herbs. The techniques of ceramic production has been gained and passed down over generations.

Colourful silk and blue glazed pottery were popular items traded along the Silk Roads.



**Fergana Potter**



### Fergana glazed blue ceramics

During Strabo's time, the Western Han dynasty (207 BC-9 CE) ruled northern and western China. Their local small and pony-like horses were incapable of carrying armoured soldiers while, Fergana horses, called celestial or heavenly horses, were known for their strength and speed. Han Emperor Wu-ti sent a delegation headed by a certain Chang Ch'ien to Fergana to purchase some of the famed celestial horses, but met with no success. The king of Fergana refused the offered gold and was rewarded with two Chinese invasions, after which the Chinese took back with them over 3,000 horse. Surprisingly, the unsuccessful negotiator Chang Ch'ien was credited with opening the eastern arm of the Silk Roads, a trade route that had been functioning a few thousands of years prior to his futile attempt at trade.

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/saka/saka3.htm>

### Part - 4 :

Eastern-Most Saka: Saka Para-Draya / Saka Para-Sugd :

In the Achaemenian inscriptions we find a Saka called Saka Para-Draya and Saka Para-Sugd. The Greeks made little distinction between the Saka and non-Saka Iranian-Aruans east of the Jaxartes (Syr Darya). But we have enough information to make those distinctions.

The word 'draya' in Old Persian, and 'darya' in Modern Persian, mean both a sea or a large river. Paradraya means over or across-the-sea or across-the-river. The default for most Western writers is that paradraya means across the Black Sea. Our research points to a far greater likelihood that paradraya means across-the-river, and in particular, across the Syr Darya or Jaxartes river. The literature is full of references of the Persian kings having to cross the Amu Darya (Oxus) and Syr Darya (Jaxartes\*) rivers to enter the territory of the eastern-



most Saka. We find no reference that they similarly crossed a sea. Further, we have mention, in an Achaemenian inscription of Darius the Great at Persepolis that mentions of a Saka parasugd, the Sakas beyond Sugd (Sogdiana), which means east across the Sugd whose land was bordered by the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River) on the east.

[Note: \*Jaxartes or Syr Darya - also called the Sihun or Sayhoun in medieval literature and thought to be derived from the Old Persian Yakhsha Arta. See BBC News images.]

Strabo in *Geographia* 11.8.2 states (translation by Jones, our notes in): "But the best known of the nomads [Saka] are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks, I mean the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari [commonly thought as originating in Tarim Basin, Khotan], and Sacarauli, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Jaxartes (Jaxartes or Syr Darya) River that adjoins that of the Sacae and the Sogdiani and was occupied by the Sacae." Once again we hear mention of a nomadic people or Saka who came from a region east of the Jaxartes River, the Syr Darya. Saka-rauli appears to mean a Saka people called Rauli.

Today the lands suitable for nomads east of the Syr Darya are in Eastern Uzbekistan (Tashkent) and Southern Kazakhstan (Shymkent). The Persian Empire lands at one point extended eastward to Kashgar.

#### Saka Language - Middle Iranian :

We know of the language of the Saka via the eastern-most Saka; the kingdoms of Khotan and Tumxuk in what is now Xinjiang, China. The language and dialects are classified as a part of the Middle Iranian family of languages. Other languages in this group are languages of this group are Khwarezmian (Chorasmian), Sogdian and Bactrian. Originally, these languages would have all derived from Old Iranian, the language of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta. According to Litvinsky and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, cited in Wikipedia, both the Saka dialects share features with modern Wakhi and Pashto. Many Prakrit terms were borrowed from Khotanese into the Tocharian languages. The Sakan language is also known as Khotanese. Khotanese itself is linguistically divided into old and new Khotanese. According to E. Leumann & M. Leumann, *Das nordarische (sakische) Lehrgedicht des Buddhismus*, vol I-III and V.S. Vorob'ev-Desjatovsky "Novye sakskoj rukopisi "E" pp 68-71 the old Khotanese is very rich in terms of noun and verb declensions.

According to Elizabeth Wayland Barber in *The Mummies of Urumchi*, p. 202, "When written records began in the Tarim Basin in the early centuries AD, the whole southern chain of oases was occupied by speakers of Iranian, the most prominent being the Sakas of Khotan...".

What is clear is that the Saka did not speak a Turkic language. They were replaced by a people who spoke Turkic languages.

Where Have all the Saka Gone?

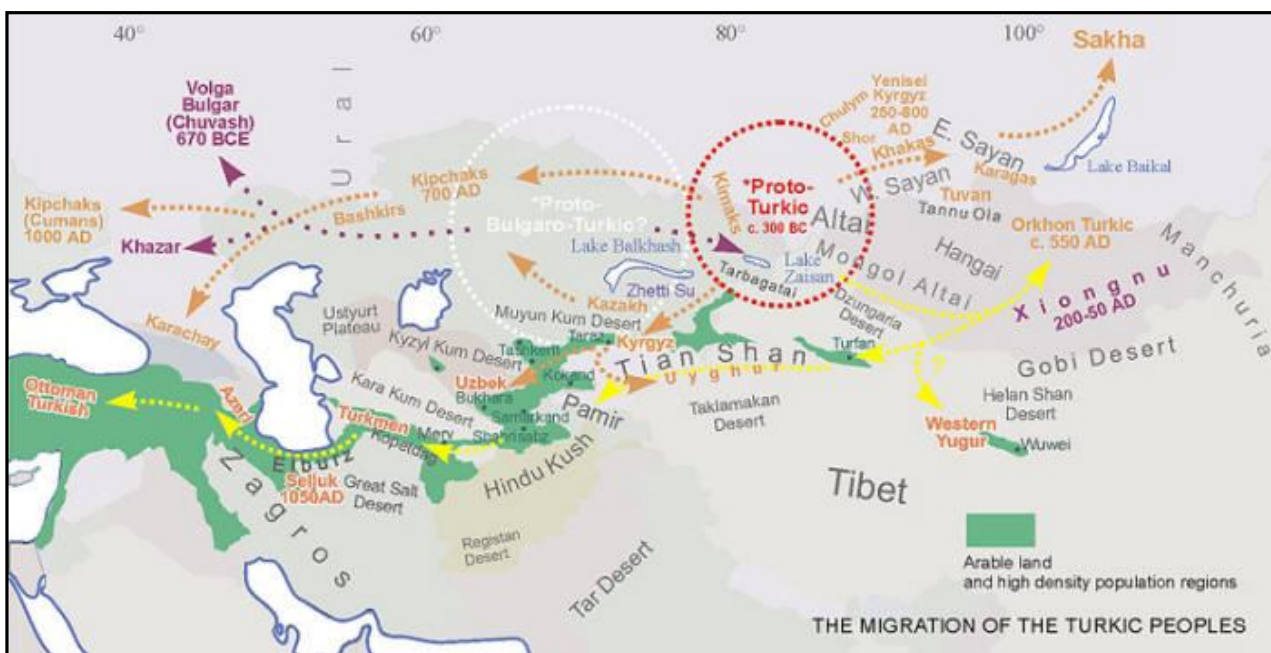
#### Saka & Turkic Peoples :

Today, the traditional Saka lands around the southern banks of the Aral Sea and along the banks of the Syr Darya River (northern Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan), are inhabited by

a people who speak a Turkic/Altaic language and who are sometimes called the Turkoman. These Turkic speaking peoples now occupy an area that stretches from Turkey to Azarbaijan (Azerbaijan), Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan - forming a band in the shape of a dome over the traditional Iranian-Aryan nations. However, the appearance of the Turkic peoples and the establishment of the Turkic language in these areas is a relatively modern phenomenon.

Before the arrival of the Turkic people with Mongolian-like features, the native Saka were a buffer people and their land a buffer region between the Aryan heartland and the northern peoples - peoples from the north as well as from the region of today's Mongolia and Siberia in the northeast.

After 200 BCE and particularly after the turn of the millennium, there is evidence that large groups of people from the north had started to move into the lower Oxus (Khvarizem) region and as well the eastern banks of the Syr Darya River. By 1000 CE, peoples from the Altai region of Siberia (a region also shared with Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan) had established themselves in the old Saka lands east of the Syr Darya or Jaxartes, and by the time it was written (8th and 9th centuries CE), the *Bundahishn*, a Middle Persian Zoroastrian text began to call the region Turkistan. At this point in history, the so-called Altai-Turkic groups had settled in the lands between the Syr and Amu Darya rivers.



### Theory regarding the spread of Turkic/Altaic language and peoples

The migration of the Altai peoples into Central Asia was facilitated by their Mongol cousins. The two groups combined forces that invaded Central Asia. In their armies, the Mongols were the generals while the more numerous Altai-Turks were the soldiers. The Altai-Turks made up the bulk of the invading forces. After the Mongol invasions led by Genghis Khan (c. 1162-1227 BCE), Altai-Turkic peoples quickly poured in to the conquered lands displacing the aboriginal Saka and Turanian inhabitants. When the Mongols left Central Asia and returned to Mongolia, leaders emerged from among the Turks, leaders who became Turkoman/Turcoman kings of the region.

The invaders from the north almost entirely displaced the aboriginal Saka and Turanian-Sogdian Aryan population. That displacement is very evident around the Amu Darya or Oxus River. There the old Zoroastrian kingdom was overrun and a community that supported a large dakhma, a Zoroastrian burial tower, at Chilpik was abandoned. Before they almost entirely displaced the aboriginal residents, the Altai-Turk adopted some of the regions cultural traits such as the celebration of Nowruz or the New Year on the spring equinox.

### Turks & Turan :

Turan, a land mentioned in Iranian legend, occupied lands otherwise known as Sugd, Sogdiana - southern Uzbekistan and northern Tajikistan today. Sughdha was the second nation mentioned in the Vendidad, a book of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta. We also find Sugd mentioned in the Achaemenian inscriptions. In Iranian legend, this land was part of the Iranian-Aryan empire - a part ruled by Tur, one of the three sons of legendary Aryan emperor, King Feridoon. In these legends, we find the name Turanian, and not Sogdian, used for the people who lived in that land. The name Sugd came to be used during the Achaemenian Persian era (700 -330 BCE).

We also find a people called the Tuirya in the Avesta - people who were among the first to accept Zarathushtra's teachings (cf. Lands of Zarathushtra's Ministry.) Many believe that the name Tuirya evolved to Turan.

Given that the name Turkic is similar to the name Turi or Turanian, there is a strong temptation to identify the ancient Turanians, and even the Saka, with today's Turkic/Turkoman peoples.

'Turkic' is a relatively modern word and we find it used in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. Ferdowsi who did not seem to have known about the invasions of the Altai from the north, calls the new occupants of the land Turki or Turkoman, blurring the distinction between the legendary Turanians and the modern Turkic peoples, who have been known historically as the Hun and as Tartars - a people with little or no cultural affiliation with the Saka or Turanians. Turk or Turki could very well be a name given to the new occupants of Turan by the Persians. The Persians did the same with India (Hind) and Hindu. Hind and Hindu are alien words to the Indians. They call their nation Bharat. The name Hind is a Persian word for the people who lived along the Indus. We are as yet unaware of the Turkic peoples calling themselves by that name in antiquity.

While the Saka and Turanians were an integral part of the Iranian-Aryan family, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia are ethnically from the area north of the Aral Sea, the Altai, as well as Mongolia and Siberia. The Turkic people may share linguistic roots but their physical features differ. There is also a distinct difference in the features of the Azerbaijani and Turkish Turkic peoples and those from Central Asia. Sharing a language through, say, conquest (the Kazakhs now speak Russian after their conquest by the Russians) does not always mean a sharing of physical characteristics, aboriginal origins or aboriginal culture.

The aboriginal Saka and Sogdian-Turanian Aryans have been for the main part been displaced by the Altai (Turkic or Turkoman) peoples in today's Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the Altai-Turkic peoples are sometimes associated with the Saka is because they both had the reputation of being predatory.

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/saka/saka4.htm>

## **52. Airyana Vaeja's features :**

Neighbouring Lands :

In our page on Airyana Vaeja in the Zoroastrian scriptures [the Avesta's books of Yasht (13.143 & 144), Vendidad (Chapter 1, 1-16), and Yasna (10.13-14)], we made the following observations regarding the neighbours of Airyana Vaeja:

Sugd / Sogdiana :

The second nation listed after Airyana Vaeja in the Vendidad, is Sukhdho / Sughdha - modern day Sugd in north-western Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan.

Mouru / Margiana :

The third nation listed after Airyana Vaeja in the Vendidad, is Mouru. Mouru is commonly identified with the area around modern Merv and the Murghab / Murgab river and its delta in present-day Turkmenistan - though this identification is by no means certain.

Balkh / Bactria & King Vishtasp :

The fourth Vendidad nation is Bakhdhim / Bakhdhi / Bakhdi / Balkh located in Northern Afghanistan. Among the first "hearers and teachers" of Zarathushtra's message listed in the Farvardin Yasht (13.99) was King Vishtasp. Later texts state that King Vishtasp, a king of the Kayanian dynasty, was king of Bakhdhi/Balkh, and that Zarathushtra died in Bakhdhi/Balkh, killed by a Turanian. In these texts, the Amu Darya (Oxus) river formed the north-eastern border between ancient Bakhdhi and Turan (Sugd). Further upstream, a portion of the Amu Darya river ran through Bakhdhi.

Balkh became the capital city of the Kayanian kings and ancient Airan, the successor state to Airyana Vaeja and the predecessor state to modern Iran.

Today, all three regions noted above claim Zarathushtra as their native son and make some claim to his legacy. The claims include the region being his birthplace, where he received his revelations, where he first propounded his religion, where he composed his message and the scriptures, and where he died. No other region makes these claims to this extent.

What this indicates is, that regardless of the veracity of the claims, there is a strong possibility that Zarathushtra travelled to these regions and that they were within travelling distance of Airyana Vaeja, Zarathushtra's birthplace. By listing these nations separately from Airyana

Vaeja, the Avesta's Vendidad is probably also stating that the three lands were separate from Airyana Vaeja. Since Zoroastrian texts also tell us that Airyana Vaeja was Zarathushtra's native home, we can surmise that while Zarathushtra could have travelled to these lands spreading his message, none of them was his native home.

### Airyana Vaeja's Terrain :

#### Landscape :

The Meher Yasht gives us a most useful understanding of Airyana Vaeja's location. It not only helps us to rule in certain possibilities, it helps to rule out certain lands.

Verses 10.13-14 of the Meher Yasht state that the Aryan land had many mountains, valleys, and pastures (pouru vastraongho) that supported cattle (gave). It was rich in waters (afento), deep lakes (jafra varayo) and wide rivers. The land, while mountainous had alpine meadows and fertile, well-watered vales.

#### Rivers of Airyana Vaeja: Daraja and Daitya :

Mention is made that a significant river Daraja (Darejya), on whose upper banks stood Zarathushtra's father's house, ran through Airyana Vaeja. Another river in Airyana Vaeja is the Ditya, also called Vanguhi Daitya in Vendidad and Daitik in Middle Persian. The Vendidad at 1.2 (see) below and at 2.20 mentions the river Vanguhi Daitya in Airyana Vaeja first as the river of Airyana Vaeja and then as the river where King Jamsheed gained communion with Ahura Mazda, God. The Aban Yasht at 5.17 also speaks of the Vanguhi Daitya in Airyana Vaeja.

Both rivers are mentioned as separate rivers in the Lesser Bundahishn (24.14 - 16, E. W. West in *Sacred Books of the East* Vol. 5, 1897): "14. The Daitya River is the chief of streams. 15. The Daraja river is the chief of exalted rivers, for the dwelling of the father of Zartosht was on its banks, and Zartosht was born there." We read here that Zarathushtra (Zartosht in Middle Persian) was born on the banks of the Daraja River in Airyana Vaeja (Iran Vej in Middle Persian) upon whose banks stood his father's house. The Lesser Bundahishn at 20.32 states, "The Daraja river is in Eranvej, on the bank (bar) of which was the dwelling of Pourushasp, the father of Zartosht (Zarathushtra)."

#### Veh Rivers :

The Avestan word 'vanguhi' stems from 'vanghu' meaning good. It is contracted to 'veh' in Middle Persian. Daitya is said to relate to 'law' i.e. Zarathushtra receiving revealed law from Ahura Mazda, God. In Hindu scriptures, the Daitya are a clan of Asuras.

The river called Vanguhi Daitya in Avestan is sometimes identified as the Veh in Middle Persian Pahlavi texts. In the Middle Persian Bundahishns, the Veh River is in turn identified both as the Amu Darya / Oxus River as well as the Indus River. However, in the Bundahishn, the Daitya river itself that in Avestan passages is accompanied by the word Vanguhi is in the Bundahishn mentioned without the word Vanguhi or Veh. While the Bundahishns state that other rivers that otherwise have their own name are sometimes called Veh, the Bundahishns' Veh River which seems identical to today's Amu Darya / Oxus is the only river in the

Bundahishns that is not directly associated with another name. In other words in the Bundahishns, the river is only named the Veh and we are not told if it had another accompanying or associated name.

Regarding identification of the Veh with the Oxus / Amu Darya River, the Lesser Bundahishn at 20.22 states that "the Balkh river comes out from the Aparsen likely Gk. Paropamisus (interestingly also called the Alburz in some modern maps. ) at the eastern end of the Hindu Kush mountain of Bamikan (likely Bamian/Bamiyan), and flows on to the Veh river." Today, the Balkh river rises in the eastern Hindu Kush in Bamiyan province and flows north into Balkh province. Before irrigation reduced its flow, it was a tributary of the Amu Darya]. The Lesser Bundahishn at 20.22 also states that "The Teremet river flows away to the Veh river." Teremet is identified by West as Tajikistan's Termez today across the Amu Darya / Oxus from Balkh province. Termez would have been the gateway to the northern valley of Bakhdhi/Balkh, a valley that leads to Dushanbe, Tajikistan's present capital.

[Alburz/Elburz/Alborz mountains: Today, the mountains of northern Iran are called the Elburz. Wikipedia also reports, "As recently as the 19th century, a peak in the northernmost range in the Hindu Kush system, just south of Balkh, was recorded as Mount Elburz in British army maps." The name Alborz is said to derive from the Avestan Hara Berezaiti or Hara-Berez, the Hara mountains. Hara-Barez became Har-borz and eventually Al-borz. As did the legendary rivers of Airyana have their source in the Hara-Bareza (meher Yasht 10.14), the Bundahishn continues the tradition of ascribing the source of the principal Veh rivers in the Alborz.]

Middle Persian texts and the *Shahnameh* tell us that the Amu Darya or Oxus river (see map below) formed a border of ancient Bakhdi, and that the border between Airan (the later name form of Airyana Vaeja) and Turan was also the Amu Darya. The Amu Darya river runs from the Pamirs (where it is called the Panj) to the Aral Sea and today, to some extent, forms the border between four nations, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. A portion of the Amu Darya river runs north of present day Balkh in Afghanistan.

Regarding identification of the Veh with the Indus River, the Greater Bundahishn at 11.A.2 as translated by B. T. Anklesaria states, "The river Veh passes on in the east, goes to the land of Sind and pours into the sea in India. There they call it the river Mitran [and also call it the river Indus]." The Lesser Bundahishn translated by E. W. West, at 20.7 states, "The Mehrva River they call the Hendva River...". Hendva would be connected to Hindu. 20.9 also states, "The Veh River passes on in the east, goes through the land of Sind, and flows to the sea in Hindustan, and they call it there the Mehra River." We note that this river is called Hendva, Mehrava, Mehra, Mitran (Mithra/Mitra and Mehr are related words, the former being the older form which seems to be the trend in the Greater Bundahishn. The Lesser Bundahishn starts with the declaration at 20.1 that two rivers flow from the north - from the Alburz (Mountains) - and that the one towards the East is the Veh River.

We are therefore left with two Veh rivers, one identified with the Amu Darya (Oxus) and the other with the Mitran or Mehra (the Indus). Masudi in his Historical Encyclopaedia writes that the "Guebers (sic) i.e. Zoroastrians, felt that the Jaihun (Oxus) was connected with the Indus to form one river, the Veh." The ancients may have perceived the Veh as a mythical circumventing river, one that circumvented Airyana in the east and the west - perhaps even all the way around.

## Rivers Flowing into Neighbouring Countries :

Verse 10.14 of the Avesta's Mehr Yasht, states that the rivers which originate in Airyo shayanem\*, the Aryan abode, flow swiftly into the countries of Mourum [later Margu(sh) (English-Greek Margiana) and eventually Marv located in today's Turkmenistan], Haroyum (Aria in modern Afghanistan), Sughdhem (Sugd in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and Khairizem [Khvarizem beside the Amu Darya (Oxus) River in Uzbekistan]. [\*Note: shayanem is used to denote a few countries/lands/abodes in the Vendidad's list of sixteen nations. As "abode" or "dwelling place", the word may denote a region rather than a country, a region over which the Airya had spread by that time.]

There are very few sets of rivers that meet this description and they all originate in the mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan radiating westward from the Pamirs. Since 1. Bakhthi (Balkh) is a significant omission from this list, 2. Khairizem is a nation not mentioned directly in the Vendidad's list of nations and appears to be a "younger" nation than the Vendidad nations [together with Parsa (Persia) and Mada (Media) also not mentioned], and 3. the Aryan lands are called by a slightly different name than in the Vendidad, one possibility is that this Meher Yasht description was part of the younger Avesta, by time of whose writing, the original Aryan lands, Airyana Vaeja, had begun to move westward along the northern Hindu Kush slopes, towards the Kuh-e Baba, Kuh-e Hissar and Safid Kuh - the northern Afghanistan mountain region south of Balkh. To us it is not without significance that there is a Murgab River in the Pamir highlands of Tajikistan, then in the northern Afghanistan and eventually in Pars.

The larger river flowing into Mourum (Eng-Gk Margiana) is the Murgab River; the main river flowing through Haroyum (Eng-Gk Aria) is the Hari-Rud River; the main river flowing through Sughdhem/Sugd (Eng-Gk Sogdiana) is the Zerafshan River. The Kashka Darya also flows through Sughdhem. Sughdhem was likely bordered by the Amu Darya (Oxus) in the west/south-west and Syr Darya (Jaxartes) Rivers in the east/north-east. There are of course, other smaller rivers. The Pamirs together with the Hindu Kush and its western extensions including the Safeed Kuh and Siah Kuh mountains that border today's Northern Afghanistan are where these rivers originate.

The Lesser & Greater Bundahishns at LB Chapter 20 and GB Chapter 11.A respectively provide additional information. We reproduce here portions of the Bundahishn related to the rivers of Central Asia identified above via the Meher Yasht. However, the Bundahishns only assign the rivers Daraja and Daitya to ancient Iran-Vej (Airyana Vaeja). Regardless, we still see these lands the rivers flow through as part of greater Aryan nation, Iran-Shahr:

LB 13. The Daitya river is the river which comes out from Eranvej, and goes out through the hill-country; of all rivers the noxious creatures in it are most, as it says, that the Daitya river is full of noxious creatures. [Our note: it is significant that the Daitya is noted as "going through hill country".] GB 11.A.7 states "The river Daitya comes out of Eranvej and proceeds to Dutistan." We have yet to identify Dutistan.

The other rivers implied by the Meher Yasht are described by the Bundahishns as follows :

Harirud :

The Bundahishns make no reference to the Harirud originating in Airyana Vaeja as implied by the Meher Yasht. GB 11.A.11 "The Hari-rud flows from the Hapursen range." LB 20.16: "The Haro river flows out from the Aparsen range (Gk. Paropamisus). The source of the Harirud is just across the Hissar range from the source of the Balkh River." The Zend River "passing through the mountains of Panjistan" is a tributary of the Harirud.

Rivers of Sughdhem/Sugd :

GB 11.A.15: "The river Khvajand goes through the middle of Samarkand and Ferghana. They call it the river Khshart/Ashart/Ashard (Jaxartes/Syr Darya)." LB 20.20: "The Khvejand river goes on through the midst of Samarkand and Pargana, and they call it also the river Ashard." Khujand (cf. Khvajand) is currently a Tajik city beside the upper reaches of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes).

GB 11.A.14: "The river Zeshmund, on the side of Soghd (Sugd, Sogdiana), pours back into the river Khvajand." LB 20.19: "The Zishmand river, in the direction of Soghd, flows away towards (from?) the Khvejand river." These two statements are somewhat contradictory and a more critical translations of the originals is required. The river sounds like the Zerafshan. If this is so, the statement should read that the river flows away from the Khvajand (Jaxartes/Syr Darya) and into the Veh, the Amu Darya or Oxus. If not, it denotes another river, perhaps a tributary of the Khvajand.

Curiously, the LB at 20.30 states, "The Kasak river comes out through a ravine (kaf) in the province of Tus (the birthplace of Ferdowsi in Khorasan?), and they call it there the Kasp river; more- over, the river, which is there the Veh, they call the Kasak; even in Sind they call it the Kasak." Translator E. W. West feels "Sind" here is a corruption or misprint of the intended name "Seni" leading the the line reading, "even in Seni they call it the Kasak." Seni is a name mention in the Lesser Bundahishn at 15.29: "the country of Seni, that which is Kinistan/Chinistan". E. W. West further postulates that in this context "Kinistan" may refer to Samarkand the principal city of Sugd. He goes on the identify Seni as the Saini of the Farvardin Yasht at 13.143,144, one of the five lands praised in the Yasht having holy followers. There is today the River Kashka that flows from Sugd today.

Murgab. River of Marv :

LB 20.21. "The Marv river, a glorious river in the east, flows out from the Aparsen range (Gk. Paropamisus)." "GB 11.A.16: "The Marv-rud, the river 'Full of glory,' in Khvarasan (Khorasan?), flows from the Hapursen range." The source of the Murgab is in the vicinity of the sources of the Balkh and Harirud rivers - the eastern extremity of the Hindu Kush Mountains. The mention of the Marv-rud i.e. the Murgab being a river of Khvarasan (Khorasan?) is noteworthy.



### Amu Darya (Oxus), Balkh and Termez Rivers :

As we have stated earlier, the Lesser Bundahishn at 20.22 states that "the Balkh river comes out from the Aparsen (Gk. Paropamisus; interestingly also called the Alborz on some maps today) at the eastern end of the Hindu Kush] mountain of Bamikan (likely Bamian/Bamiyan), and flows on to the Veh river." Today, the Balkh river rises in the eastern Hindu Kush in Bamiyan province and flows north into Balkh province. Before irrigation reduced its flow, it was a tributary of the Amu Darya]. GB 11.A.17 states: "The river Balkh enters the mountain Bamian [from] the Hapursen and pours into the river Veh."

The Lesser Bundahishn at 20.22 also states that "The Teremet river flows away to the Veh river." Teremet is identified by West as Tajikistan's Termez today across the Amu Darya/Oxus from Balkh province. Termez would have been the gateway to the northern valley of Bakhdhi/Balkh, a valley that leads to Dushanbe, Tajikistan's present capital.



**Mosaic of a snake swallowing an object from Central Asia  
dating to the Bronze Age (2500-1500 BCE)**

### Noxious Creatures in Airyana Vaeja's Rivers :

The *Vendidad* at 1.2 (translation by James Darmesteter, SBE, 1898) states: "The first of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Airyana Vaeja, by the Vanguhi Daitya. Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the serpent in the river and winter, a work of the Daevas."

The Greater Bundahishn translated by B. T. Anklesaria at Chapter 11.A.7 & 8 states "The river Daitya comes out of Eranvej and proceeds to Dutistan. Of all the rivers, the noxious creatures abound the most in it. As one says, 'The river Daitya is full of noxious creatures'."

The Indus on its part was known to have alligators which could perhaps have been identified as a form of snake. Captain John Wood in his *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus*, (London)

1872, p. 10-11 describes his encounter with a herd of alligators while travelling up the lower Indus.

### Mountains - Hara Berezaiti, the Hara Mountains :

The Mehr Yasht at 10.13 and 14 states that the Aryan abode (airyo-shayanem) was "where the high mountains (garayo berezanto), rich in pastures and waters, yield plenty to the cattle", and that when the Sun rises above the taro (peaks - see further discussion below) of the Hara, it casts its golden rays down on the abode of the Aryans.

Reading the Zamyad Yasht at (19.1) we are given the impression that the Hara was one of two concentric rings of mountains, or at least ones that "lie all around". Many authors add "encircling the earth" or words to that effect to their translations, but there are no such words in the verse. The Yasht also states two thousand, two hundred and forty four peaks rose from these mountains and names several.

The Aban Yasht at 5.21 states that (King) Hushang paid homage at the "upa upabde" (sometime translated as "base" or "enclosure". Upa means "near". We read "near the environs") of the Hara.

In Mehr Yasht 10.118, we are introduced to the term "Hara Berezaiti". The modern word Alburz is said to be derived from Hara Berezaiti. Hara Berezaiti it is said in the literature became Hara-Barez (in Yashts 5.21 and 17.24) then Har-borz and eventually Al-borz. The word "hara" is said to mean "watch, guard, defence" and is derived from the Old Iranian prefix har- meaning "to pay attention, watch over, protect". The implication is that the Hara Mountains got their name since they served as a defensive wall against invaders or plunderers. Indeed, the Greater Bundahishn at 24.24 notes that every three years, people of non-Aryan nations would gather on the Alburz (Hara) mountains in order to cause harm - perhaps sweeping down into the Aryan lands from ridges and passes. The word "berezaiti" is said to stem from "berez" meaning "height", "exalted" or even "towering". It is also said to have evolved into the New Persian words "boland" meaning "tall" or "high" and "bozorg" meaning "big" or "great". With "berezaiti" as an adjective we are left with the impression that the Hara was a high protective barrier. The one mountain range that fits this description very well is the Hindu Kush. Hindu means resident of the (upper) Indus region and Kush is said to be the same as "kush" meaning "kill". The Hindu Kush is a natural barrier between the Indus and Kabul valleys (to the south) and Wakhan valley (to the north), and by extension the Badakshan/Pamir region.

Nowadays, Alburz/Alborz/Elburz is the name of the mountains in northern Iran. Wikipedia also reports, "As recently as the 19th century, a peak in the northernmost range in the Hindu Kush system, just south of Balkh, was recorded as Mount Elburz in British army maps (i.e. the western arm of the Hindu Kush)." The same mountains are also called the Aparsen (likely Gk. Paropamisus) in the Bundahishn. We are also given to understand that the highest peak of the Caucasus is also called "Elbrus". The poet Ferdowsi's references to the Alburz in his epic, the *Shahnameh*, lead us to the environs of Hind, perhaps meaning the mountains of the Upper Indus, the Hindu Kush, Pamirs, Karakorum and Himalayas - the Alburz or Hara Berezaiti of old. Strabo would call the Hara Berezaiti the Taurus Mountains, a string of mountains that ran from Turkey to the boundaries of China.

The two Bundahishns, the Middle Persian or Pahlavi Zoroastrian texts, see the Alburz (Hara Berezaiti) in two ways (see Lesser Bundahishn 20.1): one the mythical mountains that encircled the earth - the primal mountain range from which all other mountain ranges arose - and two, a specific group of mountain ranges in which two rivers at east and west of the Aryan lands had their source (and according to Zadsparam at 6.21, the source of an additional "great" eighteen rivers). We see these two aspects reflected elsewhere. The Zamyad Yasht reads in a factual manner while some other passages tend to add more fantastic elements. From the Zamyad Yasht we do get the sense that other mountain ranges rise from (perhaps radiate?) from the Hara and that it could conceivably lend its name to connected mountain chains. By the time the Middle Persian Bundahishns and other texts were written, the description is almost entirely mythological as are parallel descriptions in Hindu and Buddhist texts we describe below. In mythology, the Alburz encircled the earth - a band like the Milky Way of the heavens.

As the mythical mountains that surrounded the earth, the Alburz mountains are similar to the Lokaloka of the Hindu scriptures. [Lokalok means "world-no world" and is in Vedic Hindu mythology, a magnificent belt of mountains girdling the outermost of the seven lands (Phl. keshvar / Vedic dvipa) and seas and one which separates the visible world from the region of darkness beyond. The Lokaloka is said to be ten thousand yojanas in breadth and height. The modern equivalent of a yojana is disputed and is thought to be 6 to 15 kilometres making the mythical Lokaloka some 60,000 to 150,000 km. in circumference.]

#### Tera :

The Mehr Yasht at 10.118 talks about the Sun riding rising above the peaks (tara) of the Hara Berezaiti. Tara (also spelt Tera, Terak or Taera) is sometime taken to mean a specific mountain in the Hara. E. W. West translates the Lesser Bundahishn (LB) at 12.2 as "Terak of Alburz" i.e. Tera of the Hara Berezaiti. When West translates 12.4 as "The Terak of Alburz is that through which the stars, moon and sun pass in, and through it they come back", but when B. T. Anklesaria translates 9.6 of the Greater Bundahishn (GB) as "The Tera of Alburz is that through which the Stars, Moon and Sun revolve and through which they come back", it makes more sense to read Tera(k) as the peaks or the space between peaks through which the stars, moon and sun rise and set. Indeed, at LB 5.4. we have "As it is said that it is the Terak of Alburz from behind which my sun and moon and stars return again" and at LB 5.5, "For there are a hundred and eighty apertures (rojin) in the east, and a hundred and eighty in the west, through Alburz; and the sun, every day, comes in through an aperture, and goes out through an aperture."

Ichaporia and Humbach as well as Sethna do not translate "taera" as the name of a mountain but rather as "peak". However, it does make more sense in the contexts above to read it as several or a set of peaks rather than a single peak. But that sense of a single peak rising into the heavens is now embedded in Hindu and Buddhist mythology as well. In the Zamyad Yasht, there is no mythology in the description of the mountains. They are listed quite matter-of-factly and the word "taera" appears buried in the middle of verse 19.6 in a rather obscure manner.

Mary Boyce informs us that when the Khotanese Saka became Buddhists, they referred to Mt. Sumeru of Buddhist legends as *Ttaira Haraysa*, the peak of Hara. Mt. Sumeru in Buddhist

mythology lies at the centre of the earth and according to Anklesaria's translation of GB 5B.1, "Mount Tera is in the middle of the earth."

### Principal Hara Peaks - Mount Hukaria and Daitik :

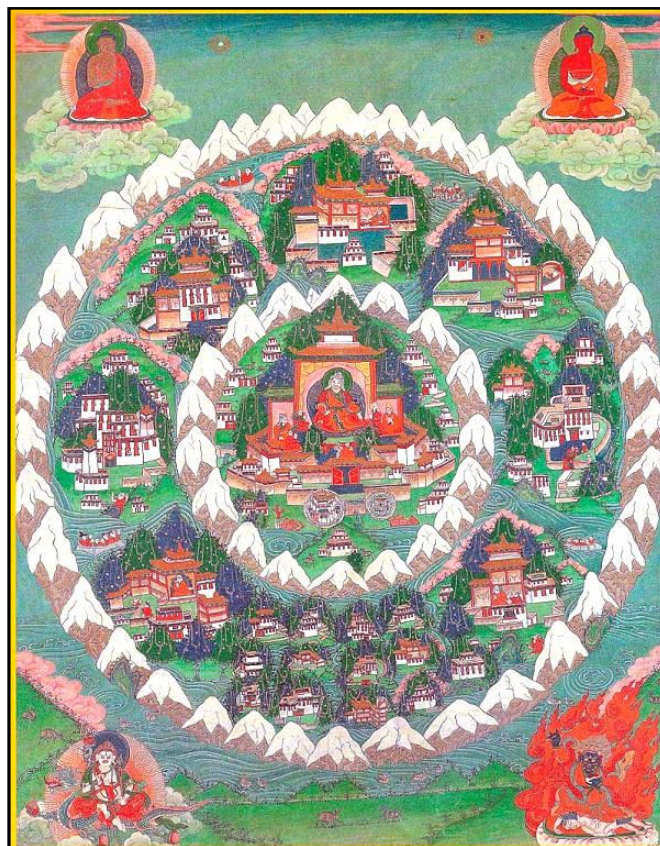
The Greater Bundahishn translated by B. T. Anklesaria (at 17.18) describes the Hukar (Huk-airya in the Avesta) as being the 'chief' of the summits. Huk-airya means the 'good Arya' or the 'good and beneficent Arya' - the environs of which, Airyana Vaeja, was a paradise with ideal conditions: no inclement weather, natural beauty and where the people enjoyed good health. The GB at 9.3 also states that, "As the other mountains have grown out of Alburz, in number, two thousand two hundred and forty-four mountains, that are the lofty Hugar/Hukar (Huk-airya), the Tera of Alburz, the Daitih peak...." We note that the Hugar/Hukar (Huk-airya) is described at both the chief of the mountains as well as lofty (tall - towering above others. At GB 9.7, "The lofty Hugar/Hukar (Huk-airya) is that from which the water of Aredvisur descends from the height of a thousand men." At 9.9, "The Daitih (Chakad-i-Daitik in the Lesser Bundahishn) peak is that which is in the middle of the world, of the height of a hundred men, whereon is the Chinvad bridge; they judge the soul at that place." Much attention is given to "Tera" being the name of a pivotal mountain at the centre of the earth, but in the Daitih we have another contender for this description. The height of a hundred men does not make it a very tall mountain and one suitable perhaps for a significant temple or sanctuary (see the thangka painting below). We could have two versions of the myth, one with a very tall central mountain and the other with a shorter mountain crowned by a temple or sanctuary as depicted by the thangka painting below. Both versions appear to exist currently either explicitly or implicitly, and the shorter version appears to make more sense with reality.

The combined manner in which the Hukar, Tera and Daitik are described in the Bundahishn has resonance with the manner in which Mount Meru, Sumeru, is described in Hindu and Buddhist texts.

### Mount Meru / Sumeru :

The Hindu scriptures, the Veds, refer to the Mount Hara as Mount Meru or Sumeru (the Great Meru), and describe the Himalayas as stemming from Mount Meru which itself stands at the centre of the known world. The Veds also refer to Aryavart as Paradesh, the original country. In the Veds, Bharatvarsh, Ancient India, lay to the south of the Himalayas.

The Wikipedia article on Jambudvip, the environs in which Mount Meru stands, identifies Jambudvip with the Pamir region. In the Veds, each of the four sides of Meru are made of four different precious substances: the south of lapis-lazuli, the west of ruby, the north of gold and the east of silver (or crystal). The Pamir-Badakhshan region was noted for precisely these precious substances and home to the only known lapis mines in antiquity. Further, the lapis mines were in the south of the Pamir region.



**Buddhist thangka showing Shambhala with Mount Meru & a temple in the centre  
The two circular mountain ranges remind us of the description of the Hara and Zeredaza Mountains in the Avesta's Zamyad Yasht "lying all around" - the Zeredaza being the outer range.**

As we have noted above, Zoroastrian texts describe Airyana Vaeja as being mountainous with fertile meadows and valleys. In addition, the opening words of the Avestan Vendidad's chapter listing the sixteen nations, states that if God had not made other countries beautiful in some manner, all the world would have swarmed into Airyana Vaeja on account of its great beauty and - as mentioned elsewhere in the Avesta (see next paragraph) - because of its wise king and good government, law and order, noble people and serenity. Airyana Vaeja was a paradise on earth - a land of peace and serenity, the best place to live and raise a family.

The heavenly nature of Airyana Vaeja during the Jamshidi era (see Weather Change below) reached mythic proportions in Yasht 19.33, the Zamyad Yasht. Then, the weather was neither cold nor hot, there was no untruth and envy, people were undying, water and plants never drying. All because King Jamshid ruled wisely and the people lived honestly. However, when the king lost his grace and the people lost their noble ways, Airyana Vaeja became a paradise lost.

Tibetan Buddhism's book of Kala-Chakra, the Time-Cycle, and Tibetan Buddhism's predecessor religion, Bon, built on and popularized this concept of a lost and hidden paradise on earth, now known to the world as Shangri-La.

[The founding of the Bon religion is ascribed to Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche who was born - by some estimates 18,000 years ago - in the land of Tagzig Olmo Lung Ring. Tagzig, is believed to be a form of the name Tajik. (The name Shenrab sounds Iranian as well.) The doctrine taught by Tonpa Shenrab was spread by his disciples and their student-translators to adjacent countries such as Zhang-Zhung (also Zhangzhung, Shang Shung or Xang Xung - a land north of the Himalayas, which contained Mount Kailash in today's Western Tibet), India (northern Indus valley), Kashmir, China and eventually Greater Tibet. Tonpa Shenrab is reputed to have visited present-day western Tibet once. On that visit he found the people unprepared to receive the entire body of his teachings, but he prophesied that his teachings would flourish in Tibet in the coming ages. The students of his disciples continued his mission and Tibetan Bon scriptures were translated from texts in the language of Zhang-Zhung.

[Bon claims to have spread south to the Indian subcontinent and to have influenced the development of Vedic Hinduism. Perhaps pre-Tibetan Bon was a form of the primordial Aryan religion before Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism. Buddhism in turn evolved out of Vedic Hinduism (c. 400 BCE). Completing a full circle, today's Bon is so heavily influenced by Buddhism that it sounds like a Buddhist sect. Perhaps some scholars may take it upon themselves to try and isolate the precepts of the pre-Buddhism Bon.

[It may be of interest to those studying the weather change in Airyana Vaeja, that pollen and tree ring analysis indicates the Chang Tang plateau in Northern Tibet had a far more liveable environment than it has today - one that supported a primordial civilization - until the climate become colder and drier starting around 1500 BCE, a climate change that caused the population to migrate out of the northern plateau. This authors also feels that the ancient Aryan and Zoroastrian link to western Tibet is further exemplified by the common tradition of exposing the dead to birds. Also see our blog, *Iranian-Aryan Connections with Western Tibet.*]

At the centre of the land of Tagzig (called Shambhala in the Kalachakra) was Olmo Lungring which had at its centre, Yungdrung Gutsek, a four-sided mountain similar to Mount Meru / Sumeru (see above). The mountain is surrounded by temples, cities and parks. To the mountain's south is the Barpo Sogye palace, where Tonpa Shenrab was born. The complex of palaces, rivers and parks with Mount Yungdrung Gutseg in the centre constitutes the inner region (Nang-gling) of Olmo Lungring. The intermediate region (Bar-gling) consists of twelve cities, four of which lie in the four cardinal directions. The third region includes the outer land (mTha'-gling). These three regions are encircled by snow-capped mountains and an ocean.

The mountain Yungdrung Gutsek has nine Yungdrungs (swastikas) ascending like a staircase. It is not without significance that the swastik plays an important symbolic role in both the Bon and Vedic Hindu religions. In Bon, The nine swastiks represent the Nine Ways. The swastik (Yungdrung) itself is a symbol of permanence and indestructibility of the mind-stream, the wisdom of Bon. The full name of Bon is Yungdrung Bon meaning Everlasting Truth.

The four sides of the mountain faced the four cardinal directions. From the four corners, each of which represent four archetypal thought forms, flow four rivers :

- From the thought form of a snow lion flows the river Narazara to the east,
- From the thought form of a horse flows the river Pakshi to the north,

- From the thought form of a peacock flows the river Gyim Shang to the west and,
- From the thought form of an elephant flows the river Sindhu (In Persian: Hindu which later became Indus) to the south.

A few concepts emerge from the description of Tagzig's terrain within which lies the four-sided mountain, Yungdrung Gutsek. First, while our translation states the singular, a four-sided mountain, a mountain in all the related ancient Avestan, Vedic, and Bon texts frequently refers to a group or range of mountains with several peaks. For instance Hara Berezaiti contained two thousand, two hundred and forty four mountains peaks (see above). Next, from the four-sided Yungdrung Gutsek mountain(s) arose several rivers flowing in all the cardinal directions. In addition, this region was north of the northern Indus region. (The ancients used approximations formulated from the accounts of travellers over several generations and good examples of this contention are the maps drawn by classical Western authors such as Ptolemy.)

Tibetan Buddhism's Kalachakra uses the Hindu Vedic legend of Mount Meru (Avestan Hara Berezaiti) and surrounds Mount Meru with the mythic kingdom of Shambhala, a Sanskrit word meaning the land of peace. Shambhal, also spelt Shambal or Shamballa, is said to be the land of the Living Fire and Gyanganj, the home of immortal wisdom and the omniscient wise god of time (descriptions some use for Ahura Mazda, God, in Zoroastrianism). The concept, description and qualities of Shambala coincide with those for Aryavart / Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan homeland, and help provide us with added information on its possible location.

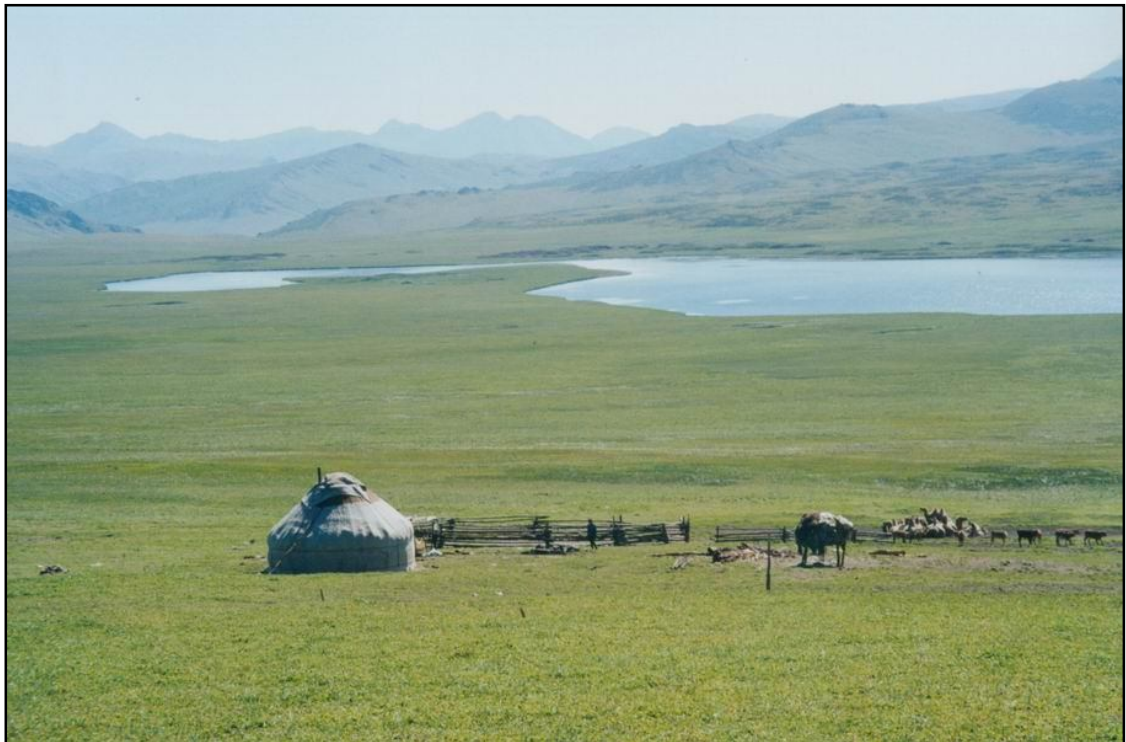
According to the Buddhist Kalachakra, Shambhala, presently hidden to the rest of the world, is a paradise of peace, tranquility, honesty and wisdom. It is home of the primordial and highest spiritual teachings, a tantra of the cycle of time now hidden from us but one that will eventually save the world from evil. Before it adopted Buddhism, the people were followers of the Mlechha, a Yavana or western, religion, some of whom worshiped the sun. Emulating the time periods in Zoroastrian eschatology which uses a cycle of time, as well as emulating the Zoroastrian concept of a final struggle between good against evil, the Buddhist legend states that as time progresses, the world around Shambala will succumb to evil. However, three millennia after ancient Shambhala king first travelled to India and adopted Buddhism, the Shambhalians will emerge to save the world. There will be a epic battle between the righteous Shambhalians and the surrounding evil forces - a battle in which the righteous Shambhalians will prevail and defeat evil forever. As we have noted, this legend closely parallels Zoroastrian legends that presage a final struggle between the forces of good and evil in which the good, the ashavan, will prevail, transforming the world to a paradise, a heaven, on earth - the vahisstem anghuim - the transformative event being frasho-kereti.

Shambhala has both an outer temporal and an inner spiritual meaning. In the outer meaning, Shambhala is a land that is only accessible to the pure in heart. Those with impure motives will lose their way in the intervening deserts and mountains, blinded by storms. Representing the inner meaning, some thangka paintings of Shambhala depict the kingdom surrounding Mount Meru as an eight-petal lotus - a symbol for the heart chakra and an indication that Shambhala is to be found in a person's heart.

This author therefore proposes that since Shambhal, the land surrounding Mount Meru, is identified as the Vedic Aryvart, and since the Vedic Aryavart in turn corresponds to the Avestan Airyana Vaeja (which contains Mount Hara), that the land surrounding Shambhal, Mount Meru and Airyana Vaeja are intimately linked if not the same land. If this author's association is correct, what all four traditions, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Bon and Buddhist, have preserved, is the topography of ancient Airyana Vaeja - a land of fertile valleys and alpine meadows ringed by high snow-capped high mountains.



**Yak grazing in the Fergana Valley adjacent to the Pamirs**



**Yurt in the Pamir meadows**



## Weather Change in Airyana Vaeja During Jamshid's Reign :

(Note: The name Jamshid is a later version of the name Yima-Srira or Yima-Khshaeta, meaning Yima the radiant, in the Vendidad. In the Avesta, Jamshid is called Yima son of Vivanghat, while in the Veds, he is called Yama son of Vivasvant.)

According to Zoroastrian texts as well as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, legendary king of Airyana Vaeja, King Jamshid, initiated the observance of Nowruz, New Year's day on the first day of spring. For King Jamshid to take this step, Airyana Vaeja must have experienced the beginning of spring and the end of winter around the spring equinox or March 21.

Further, Yasna 9.5 (similarly, Vendidad II.I.6) also states that "in the reign of Yima, there was neither cold nor heat" - a temperate climate by definition. Additional references (see \* below), state that the weather in Airyana Vaeja at the outset of the Jamshedi era was equitable. However, the Vendidad and other texts also inform us that a thousand two hundred years into the Jamshedi era, Airyana Vaeja experienced severe and long winters (for a further discussion on the Jamshedi era and the weather change, see our page Aryan Prehistory).

[\*References to King Jamshid/Yima: Vendidad II.I.1-20(41) and II.I.21(42)-43(140); Yasna 9.4-5; Farvardin Yasht 23.130; Aban Yasht 5.25-26; Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.]

## Funerary Practices :

Zoroastrians and Tibetans share the practice of exposing the bodies of their deceased to birds or prey, and to our knowledge they are the only two cultural groups in the world to have employed these practices with any consistency and as an intrinsic part of their traditional / religious rites of passage. Their actual methods employed were quite different and there are no records of the Tibetans using towers of silence, dakhmas. This might indicate that while the conditions under which the ancient Tibetans and Zoroastrians lived were similar, they could have been neighbours but not compatriots.

## Location of Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan Homeland :

These observations, together with observations throughout this web site, point to a location for Airyana Vaeja, the ancient Aryan homeland, in the general vicinity of Tajikistan, southern Uzbekistan, northern Afghanistan, and south-western Turkmenistan - the approximate area in the map below.

More specifically, the observations point to the strong candidacy of the Pamir-Badakhshan region (the areas neighbouring Balkh to the east and north: the upper Amu Darya basin and the Wakhan Valley of eastern Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan), the Hindu Kush to its eastern extremity south of Balkh and bordering the Murgab and Harirud valleys, the Yagnobi, Zerafshan and Fergana valleys, as well as the Alai mountain environs in Western Kyrgyzstan.



## Central Asia with first Vendidad lands and possible Airyana Vaeja /Aryan homeland locale

### Language Proximity of Central Asia with the Upper Indus Supported by Archaeology :

Given that the Rig Ved is commonly thought to have been written in the Upper Indus region, we have yet one more reason to look at the area immediately to the north and north-west of the upper Indus Valley i.e. the Pamir-Badakhshan region as being a strong candidate for the homeland of the ancient Aryans, the so-called Proto Indo-Iranians.

The language of the Rig Ved and the Old Avesta are so close that they are commonly thought to be dialects such as that spoken in two neighbouring provinces and that further, they emerged from a common language philologists call Proto Indo-Iranian, another name for the language of united ancient Aryans.

Panini, the author of a grammar on Classical Sanskrit which was derived from the Vedic language was a resident of Pushkalavati, Gandhar, which is now part of modern-day Charsadda District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan and which included the Swat Valley now in northern Pakistan as well.

In the Swat-Chitral region, numerous archaeological sites have yielded graveyards dating between the second quarter of the second millennium BCE and the late centuries BCE, and with associated features leading the sites to be categorized as the Gandhar Grave Culture. The artefacts excavated from the sites show similarities and links with Central Asian as well as

lower Indus Valley sites. The use of shell, coral and ivory were likely brought in via trade routes from the lower Indus plains and foothills.

A significant rock shelter site was excavated in the spring of 1967 near the township of Ghaligai / Ghalegay located on the east bank of the Swat River, some 12-15 km south of Mingora towards Barikot. At Ghaligai, the Swat Valley is a kilometres wide, flat, flood plain. Here, the river has many branches and frequently changes course. The valley itself is well cultivated and the crop fields slope gently down towards the river. Watercress and pumpkins are popular crops. Hills rise sharply for the valley. The eastern hills separate the Swat Valley from the Indus and Buner valleys while on the other side the western hills lie the Dir and Chitral valleys. The site has provided evidence of uninterrupted occupation for 3500 years starting from the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE. Three Carbon 14 dates of the earliest/lowest level give date from 2970 to 2930 BCE. artefacts from this level include pottery some with their inner surfaces burnished (presumably to make them water-proof from the inside). Some pottery shapes are similar to those found in Turkmenistan sites (Murgab Delta and the Kopet Dag hill base). Other artefacts found at Ghaligai as well as Kili, Gul Hohammad, Sarai Kala, Jalilpur and Gumla show striking similarities and evidence of trade of non-native materials primarily within the Aryan nations but also as far as the Arabian peninsula and China.

In a valley to the west of Ghaligai, archaeological finds at the Balambat site near Timergara (also spelt Timurgarh/Timargarha) and dated to 1500-600 BCE, show links with artefacts found in the lower Indus Valley site Mehrgarh as well as in Central Asian sites. [Balambat lies on the west bank of River Panjkora while Timergara lies across the river on the east bank. The name mean Timurgarh place of Timur (the Mogul king). The Wikipedia page states that fire altars have also been found at Balambat indicating the resident to be "fire-worshippers" (sic). We are not concerned with the insulting language used in the Wikipedia page - rather, indications of the close links to an early Aryan settlement.

#### ARIA :

Haroyu - Sixth Vendidad Nation :

There is a country that the classical Greeks and western authors called Aria (also spelt Arian, Aarii) and which they located around present-day Harirud River (Old Ir. Harayu, Gk. Arios) in north-western Afghanistan's Herat Province. (Note that the classical authors made a distinction between Aryana, all the Aryan lands, and the state of Aria which was part of Greater Aryana.) Ptolemy (90-168 CE) 6.17 and Strabo (63/64 BCE - c. 24 CE) 11.10.1 describe Aria and its location in some detail - a location close to the lands we have identified above for Airyana Vaeja. In addition, the Harirud region or present-day Herat province, are commonly identified with the sixth Vendidad nation Haroyu as well as the Achaemenian nation of Haraiva (a name that could have been derived from Arai-va). It is significant that the majority of inhabitants in Herat city, Herat Province's capital, are ethnic Tajiks, since the Tajikistan region is a strong candidate for the location of Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan homeland. (Also see or page on Haroyu / Aria.)

Aria is a candidate for the middle Aryan nation of Airan, the kingdom that features in the poet Ferdowsi's epic, the Shahnameh, and one that was formed after the Aryan nation had migrated

westward. Were it not for Aria's identification with Haroyu the sixth Vendidad nation, we would be compelled to consider it as the possible location of the original Airyana Vaeja. The border between Airan and its eastern neighbour, Turan / Sugd, was the middle to lower reaches of the Amu Darya (Oxus) river. The Airan of the Shahnameh had Balkh as its capital and therefore would have included the kingdom of Bactria / Balkh / Bakhdhi as a principle kingdom. Airan was bordered by Sistan to the south.

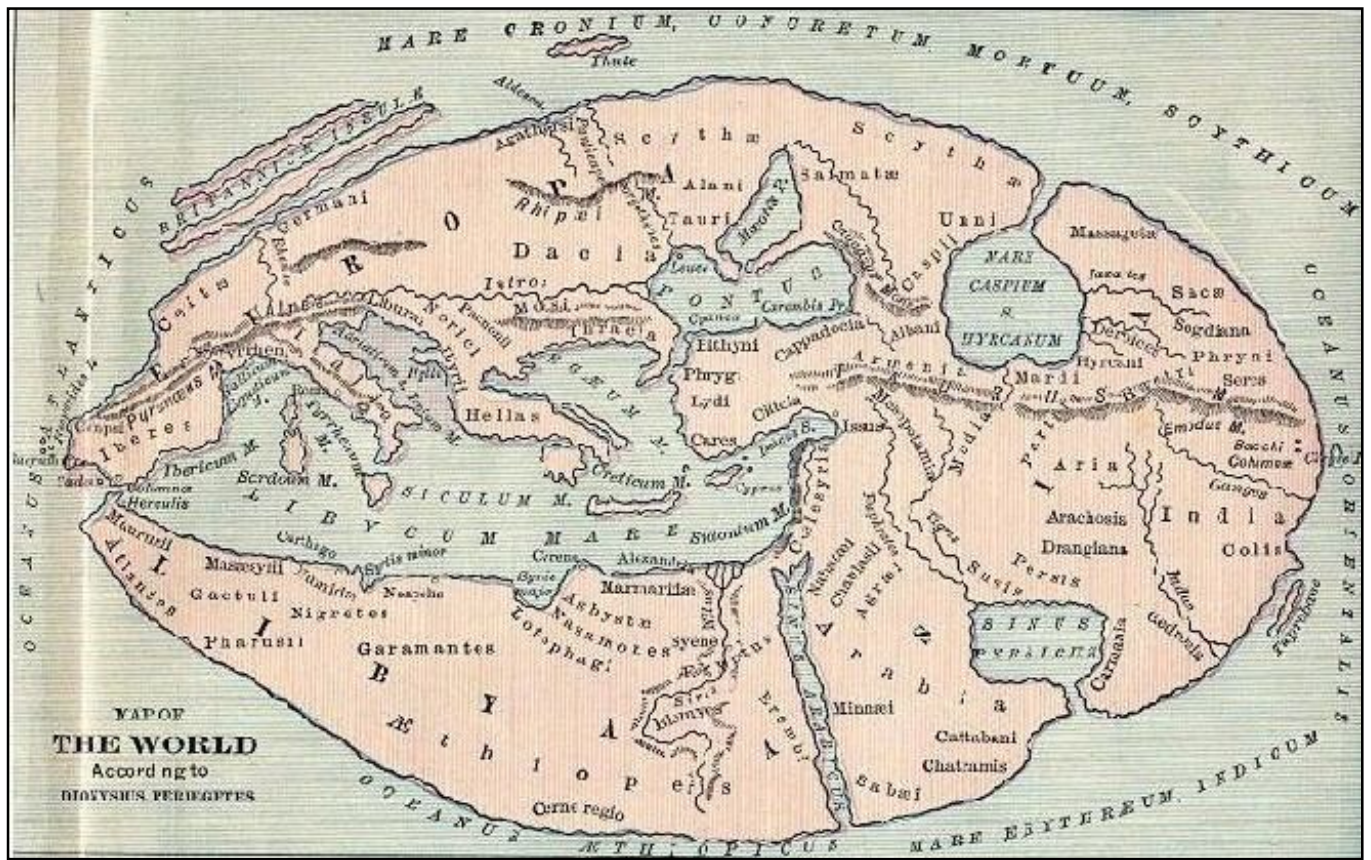
Arrian (c.87-145 CE) in *Anabasis* 4.6.6 states that in antiquity, Aria was considered as particularly fertile and rich in wine. This reference by Arrian to Aria having been particularly fertile in antiquity may refer to the memory of Aria's predecessor nation, Airyana Vaeja (see above), being very fertile and a paradise on earth (rather than the present location). Under the Sassanian dynasty (c.224 - 649 CE), the territory of Airan / Haraiva was transformed to the eastern quarter of the empire called Khurasan, Khur-a (from Khursheed meaning sun) and san (cf. stan meaning the land or place). Together, the name meant land of the (rising) sun. Greater Khorasan extended east to the Amu Darya (Oxus) River.

The maps below show the nations of the region from a Greek / European perspective. The borders and location are approximate at best, and often in error, as they are drawn from the descriptions in the classical texts. They nevertheless provide us with invaluable information. Note the mention of Aria, its location and prominence which is even more sticking in the map of the world according to Ptolemy.

(For a further discussion please see our page on Aria / Airan / Haroyu, and the section on Aryana in our page on Airyana Vaeja, the Aryan homeland.)



1823 Lucas map showing nations c200 BCE



Map based on the descriptions of Dionysius c. 405 BCE



Reconstruction of Ptolemy's map of Aria and neighbouring states

## Westward Migration of the Aryan Nation :

If we are correct in surmising that the centre of the Aryan homeland moved westward accompanied by a contraction in its name, then the seat of the Aryan nation would have moved westward as follows:

- The original ancient Aryan homeland Airyana Vaeja in the eastern Central Asian regions identified above, and more specifically the Pamir-Badakhshan region,
- The early middle Aryan nation Airan, the seat of the Kayanian dynasty, in Balkh (northern Afghanistan),
- The late middle Aryan nation known to the Greeks as Aria, located in Harirud-Khorasan area (north-western Afghanistan / north-eastern Iran) and,
- The modern (2,500 year-old) Aryan nation Parsa, known to the West as Persia, which together with Khorasan became the Iran of today.

### Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/aryans/location.htm>

### **53. Zarinaia :**

ZARINAIA (Gk. *Zarinaia*), legendary Saka queen during the reign of the likewise legendary Median king Astibaras. The original Greek form of her name certainly is *Zarinaia* and not *Zarina* (as previously had been read in Diodorus 2.34.3; cf. Schmitt, 2006, p. 240; 2011, p. 192); and in all probability this Greek form goes back to a two-stem hypocoristic name with the suffix *OIran*. \*-aya- based on a compound name containing *OIran*. \*zari- "golden" (see Schmitt, 2006, pp. 240-42).

All sources of her story found in Greek (i.e., Diodorus 2.34.3; Nicolaus Damascenus, frag. 5; the work by an Anonymus entitled "Courageous women knowing about the art of warfare," par. 2 [Gera, pp. 84–100]; and a short papyrus fragment [P. Oxy. 2330]) clearly go back to Ctesias (frags. 5, 7, 8a, and 8c), who in this case seems to have recounted a genuinely Iranian tale that he had heard at the Persian court (cf. Gardiner-Garden, p. 14). Zarinaia, a strikingly beautiful woman, stood out as both warrior and ruler; her achievements included the foundation of many towns (thus Diodorus). She is said to have been the sister and wife of the Saka king Kydraios, after whose death she married the Parthian king Marmārēs/Mérmeros (thus the Anonymus). We are told by the anonymous writer that, during war with the Medes (presumably that which was occasioned by the Parthians' rejection of Astibaras's rule and their submission to the Sakas [Diodorus]), she was wounded in battle and pursued by the Median Stryangaios (Astibaras's son-in-law), who at her plea spared her life. When Stryangaios later was captured by Marmārēs, she rescued him, killed her husband, and handed over her land to the Medes. Nicolaus describes some details of Stryangaios's secret love for her and relates that she rejected his courtship and admonished him to marital fidelity. Before taking his own life, the unhappy Stryangaios wrote her a farewell letter, which is preserved in part in the papyrus

fragment. When Zarinaia died, according to Diodorus, she was honored with a huge pyramidal tomb by her people (i.e., the Sakas).

The old name of this famous queen was artificially revived in modern times among the Ossetes in the woman's name Oss. *Zærinæ*.

Source :

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zarinaia>

#### **54. Karees qanat ancient water distribution channel :**

What is a Kareez / Kariz / Karez (Qanat)?

A kareez (زى-كار) (also spelt karez / kariz and later called qanat in Arabic) is a combination below and above ground channel system used to bring water to a settlement or fields from a natural source, say an aquifer, mountain spring or lake. Many of the kareez / qanats are ancient and their history is intertwined with the history of Aryan lands. Importantly, the system was sustainable and did not exhaust underground aquifers.

[A jube (also spelt jub), is an above ground gutter (drain, ditch, or rain sewer). Frequently, communities that construct and use the kareez, also employ the jube as part of an urban water collection and management system. Jubes collect rain water in those areas with a significant enough amount of precipitation to cause a run-off. Water collected in this manner, while probably not suitable as drinking water is useful as irrigation water. In Persian, a spring is called sarab meaning the head or start of water or stream or cheshmeh.]

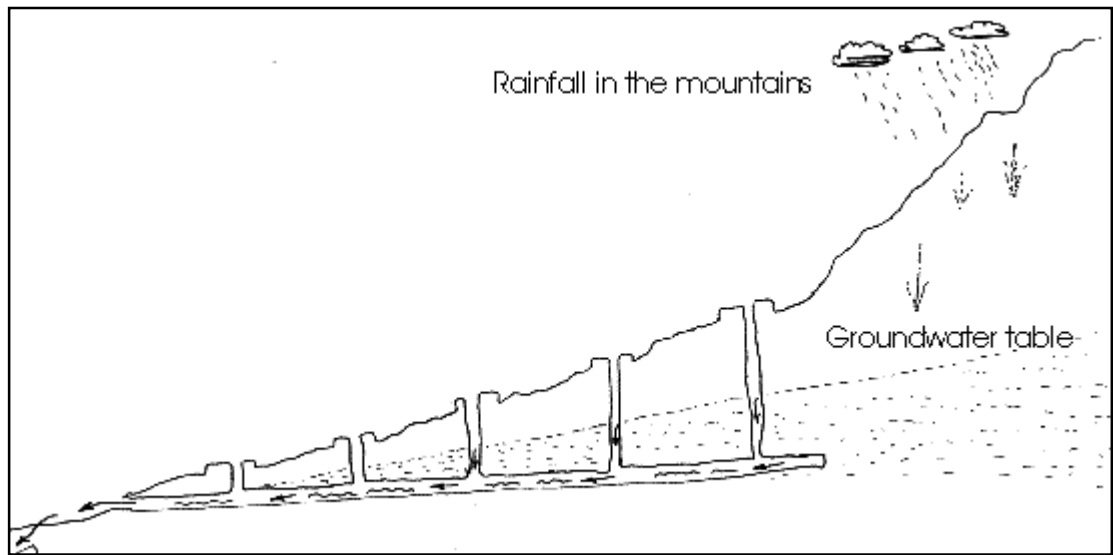
Need for a Kareez / Kariz / Karez (Qanat) :

The kareez are difficult, laborious and time consuming to build and maintain. However, without them normal life in the more arid regions of the Aryan lands and the later Persian empire, including Egypt, would have been untenable. In these lands, as well as the Aryan's Turkic neighbours in Kazakhstan and the Tarim river basin in what is today the far western Chinese Uygur province of Xinjiang - the kareez was, and in many cases still is, the principal method of water supply and distribution. After the Arab conquests of the Aryan lands, the Arabs called the system a 'qanat'. However, the system continued to be called kareez in the eastern Aryan lands including the neighbouring eastern Turkic lands.

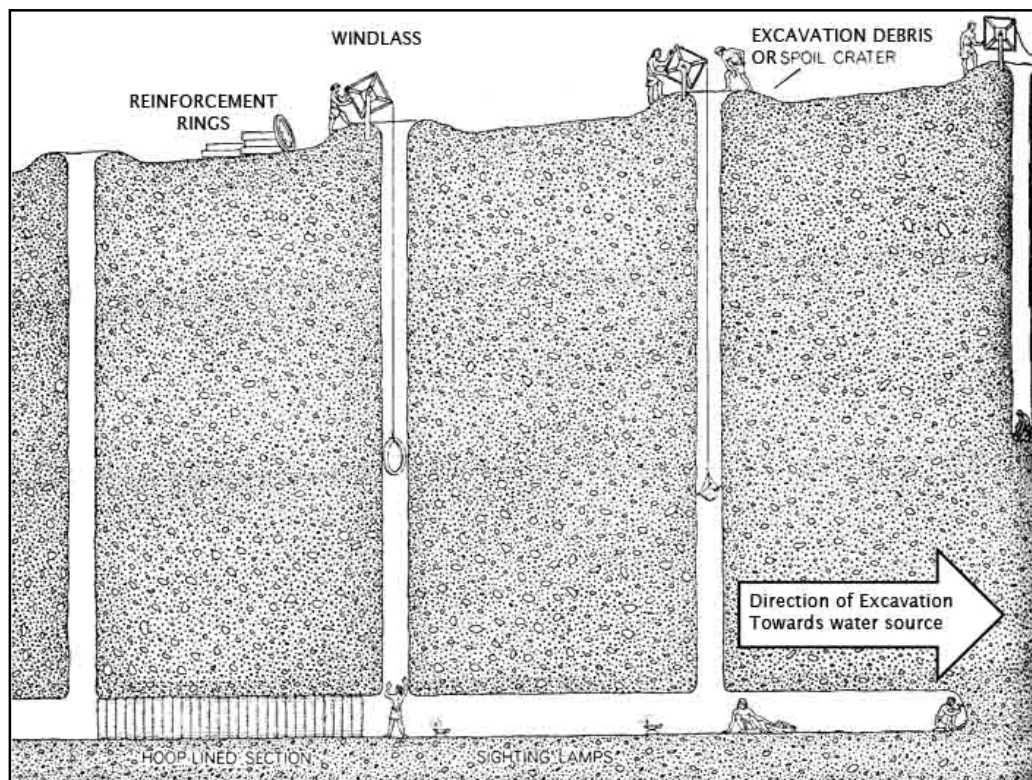
By bringing water down from the mountains where it was stored as snow or collected as rain, the kareez enabled otherwise desolate land to be transformed into an oasis in the desert. But the kareez enabled life in these otherwise desolate areas to rise above mere survival. Indeed, where there was sufficient water brought down for sustenance, the water was also used to create Persian gardens or chahar baghs. The 16th century Tajik writer Makhmud Zainaddin Wasifi, wrote in his book *Amazing Events*, that in the Central Asian oasis town of Sauran (today in southern Kazakhstan), two kareez lines made possible a chahar-bagh whose beauty had never been "seen neither on land neither on sea."

Ancient Persian Achaemenian kings provided an incentive for the construction of karez by issuing a decree granting land use for five generations to anyone who constructed a karez.

Karez / Kariz / Karez (Qanat) Construction :



**Schematic diagram showing the karez (qanat) concept**



**Schematic diagram showing the construction of the underground section of a karez (qanat)**

The construction of a karez / qanat may start with a construction of a reservoir or even a system of stepped reservoirs which contain the spring snow run-off and provide a year round supply of water. Alternatively, a karez they may tap into aquifers or underground streams



that begin at the base of mountains. A karez may even tap in water from a system of interconnected wells. Other sources of water are wells where the water is raised from the water table to the karez using the principle of differential pressure.

Constructing the karez as an underground water channel rather than an above ground canal, helps to prevent evaporation. When the karez enter an agricultural area, they often become above ground channels or streams.

The underground sections are evidenced by excavation craters at the top of shafts that go down to the tunnel. It is not unusual to find several underground karez running parallel to one another, or to find a freshly constructed karez constructed close to an older disused one.

Establishing the size and gradient of the karez requires experience and knowledge of surveying, geology and hydrology. The karez cannot be too steep because the erosion by swift water can cause irreparable damage. Karez tunnels can have a 0.5 to 0.1% slope gradient. A tunnel needs to be of a size sufficient enough to accommodate the water flow as well as a person working and maintaining the tunnel.

Determining the course of the karez also needs an understanding of the geology of the area. Karez construction became a very well-paid profession, knowledge of which was passed down from father to son, the professional being known as muqannis.

Using modern technology, the construction of a karez may not be especially noteworthy. However, in ancient times, in the absence of surveying or mechanical equipment, the development of karez construction techniques and the construction of a network thousands of kilometres in length was an incredible feat.

A typical shallow medium length karez is constructed by a team of 3-4 muqannis. First the team members dig a source well to locate the source of water. Next, they work on the underground tunnel section starting at the destination end where the tunnel emerges above ground and work toward the source well. In this phase they may divide the work as follows: one muqannis to dig the horizontal shaft, one to raise the excavated earth from the shaft, and one to distribute the excavated earth at the top.

Every 20 to 35 metres, the muqannis sink vertical shafts. The distance between the shafts is determined by the excavation effort required to create a shaft, the excavation effort required to carry the tunnel debris back to the shaft and the amount of air needed to sustain a worker. Muqannis carry castor-oil lamps to test the ventilation underground. If the air does not keep the flame alight another shaft is sunk. Future maintenance is also a consideration. Closely spaced shafts make future maintenance easier. Since deeper tunnels require deeper shafts, it stands to reason that deeper karez may have shafts spaced as far apart as practical.

Deeper and longer karez may have several muqannis teams working in cooperation from both ends at once. However, they may complete the work substantially before the final section is excavated allowing water to start flowing.

H. E. Wulff in his article *The Qanats of Iran* states in his April 1968 article in Scientific American that "A qanat about six miles long (cost) between \$13,500 and \$34,000 to build, the

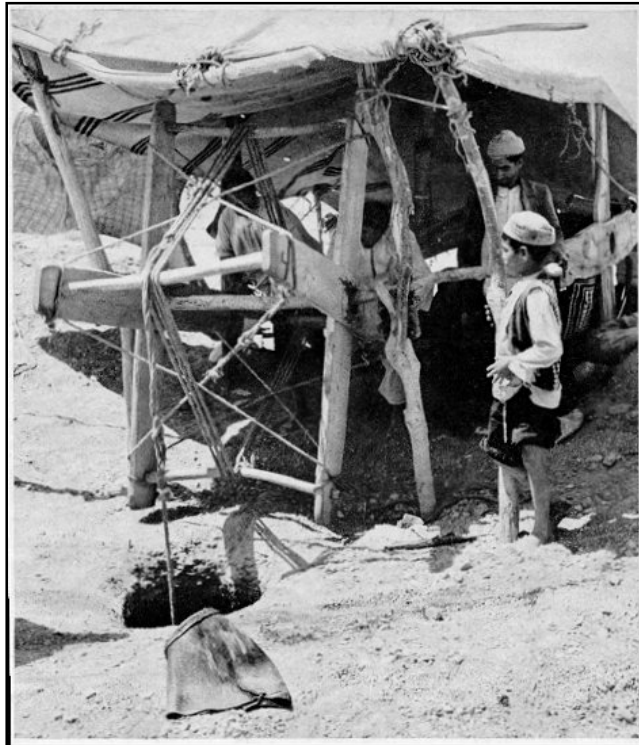
cost varying with the nature of the terrain. For a qanat 10 to 15 miles long the cost runs to about \$90,000."

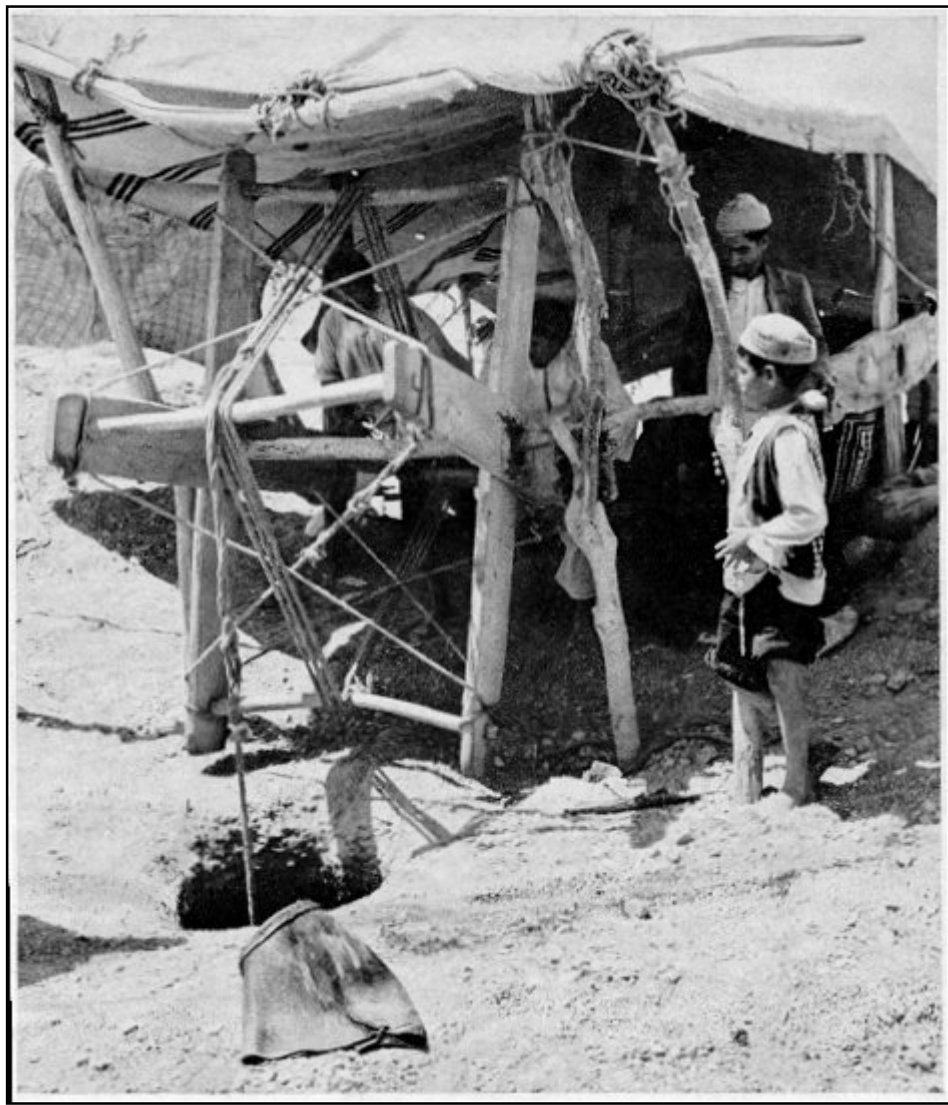


**Kareez in Yazd**



**Model of the digging of a karez tunnel**





Archive photograph of a windlass in operation during construction



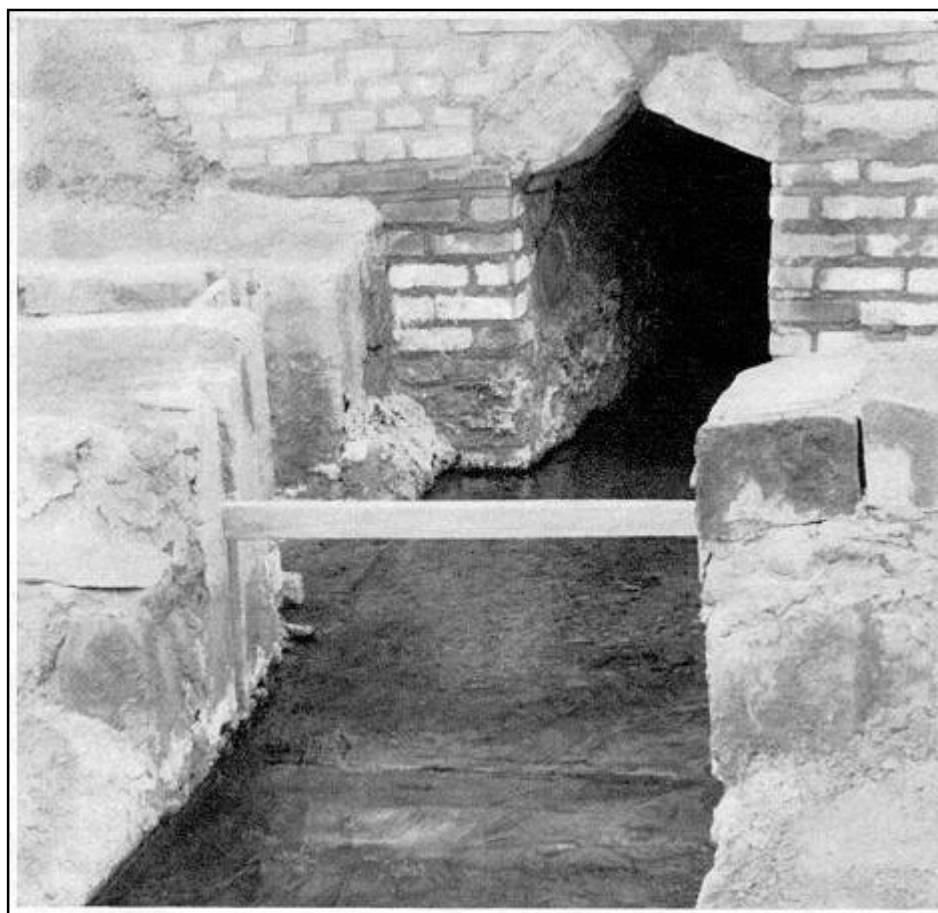
**Recent photograph of a windlass in operation during construction**



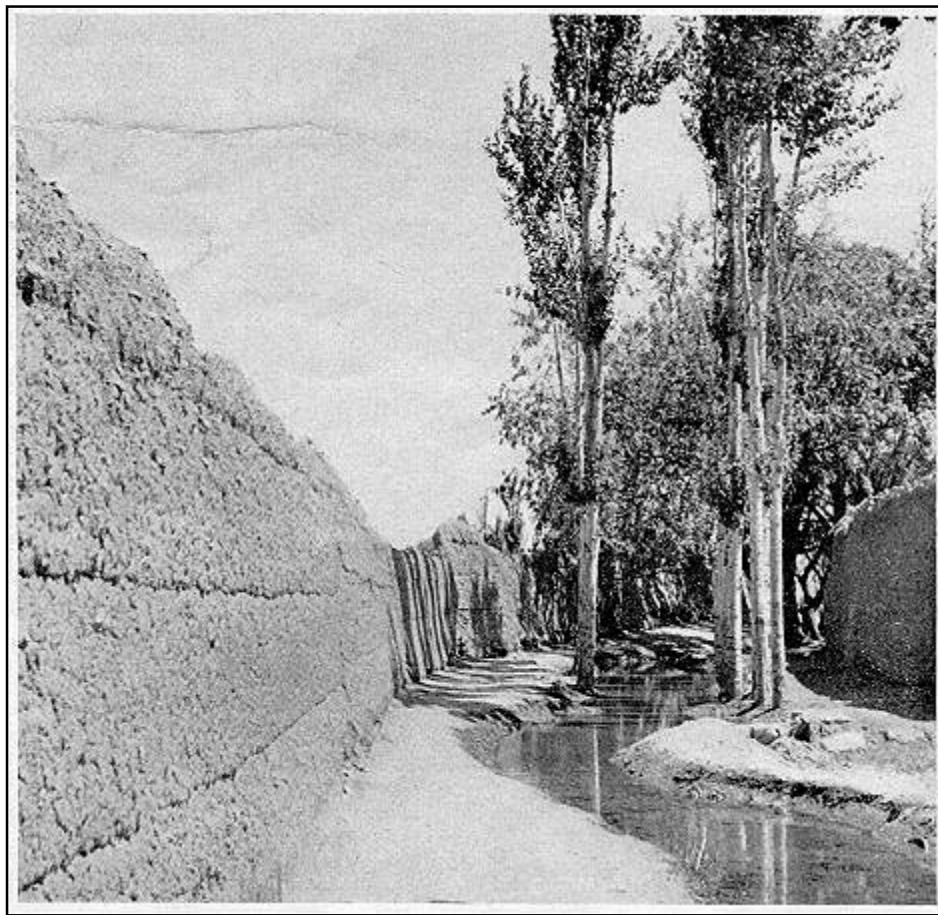
**Excavation (spoil) crater at the top of the shaft from the surface to the karez tunnel**



**A look down the shaft to the water flowing through the karez tunnel**



**Stream from the underground karez emerging above ground**



**Stream from the karez flowing as an above ground stream**

History of Karez :



**Archival aerial photograph of Persepolis.**

**Note the line of dots formed by the debris craters around the karez shafts  
Image credit: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago**

Some of the earliest known karez have been found in north-eastern Iran and ancient Persia. By the middle of the twentieth century, it is estimated that approximately 50,000 karez were in use in Iran. With the advent of modern technology and the ability to dig deep wells, the number declined to 22,000 by the turn of the century. These surviving karez are some 274,000 kilometres in length - all dug out by hand.

There is considerable evidence of an ancient above ground water irrigation system in Central Asia. Author Henry Gubler believes that the transition to the use of an underground channel system may have taken place around 800 BCE when coal miners in north eastern Iran / Central Asia, used underground tunnels in order to extract the water from the coal mines. It is quite plausible that the method of excavating the tunnels started as mining technology. With the observation that the water being drained from the mines, water that was a precious resource in arid regions, could be utilized for other purposes, the technology was probably adopted by farmers to bring water from the hilly regions beside the settlements. The technology would have spread throughout the Aryan lands.

The oldest and largest known operating karez is the Kaikhusrau Karez that supplies water to the north-eastern Iranian city of Gonabad (also known as Gulnabad and Juymand), Razavi Khorasan province, and it still provides drinking and agricultural water to nearly 40,000 people at a rate of some 150 litres per second. The age of the Gonabad karez is estimated at over 2,500 years old and has been declared a UNESCO world heritage site. It has one of the deepest main karez wells - one that reaches down to a depth of more than 350 metres, and its length runs more than 45 kilometres with some reports placing the chain as 70 km. in length.

During the formative years of the Persian kingdoms, King Sargon II (reign c. 722-705 BCE) of Assyria reports the existence of a karez-like water distribution system during his raids on lands south of Lake Urmia. Sargon's son, King Sennacherib, used the technology for a construction of a irrigation system around Nineveh, and for the construction of a karez system to supply water for the city of Arbela.

An aerial photograph taken about the University of Chicago reveals the presence of karez craters at Persepolis (see image to the right). While some of the Persepolis karez may be relatively modern, others may be as old of the capital itself and we await a more definitive dating.

A recent 2008 discovery of a 500 hectare settlement about twelve kilometres from Yazd and nearby a karez-like system may indicate the use of karez that predate the establishment the Achaemenian dynasty and we await further the publication of further research on the subject.

It is during Achaemenian rule and the establishment of the Persian empire, that we see the most consistent use and reports of a karez-like water collection and distribution system. King Cyrus used a karez-like water distribution system in Pasargadae and the palace complex at Persepolis incorporated an underground channel system that was six metres deep in places. A cistern whose walls and bottom were made from stone blocks, was part of the water storage and distribution system in Persepolis. The tank was 23.5 metres square and two metres deep. Achaemenian water collection and distribution technology made possible their legendary gardens mentioned by Lysander to Greek writer Xenophon, and that gave rise to the word



'paradise'.

With the Persian conquests of lands to the south and west of traditional Aryan lands, the karez system reached the region that is today part of Oman and Saudi Arabia by about 525 BCE, and modern Africa (present day Egypt) around 500 BCE. In addition, during Achaemenian era, karez technology spread all along the Aryan trade roads. Near the city of Bam in the southern province of Kerman, we find evidence of full-fledged Achaemenian era karez system that supplied water to an urban settlement. The karez of Mashhad is also believed to have been constructed during the Achaemenian era.

While describing an expedition conducted by Antiochos III against the Parthian king Arsaces III, Greek historian Polybius describes a karez in his *Histories*, X.28. The expedition Polybius describes took place between Rhagai (just south of Tehran) and Hekatompylos (modern-day Shahr-i Qumis), territory that would have been located in Parthia proper. The following is a passage (X.28.2-3) from *Histories* translated by Paton:

"In this region of which I speak, there is no water visible on the surface, but even in the desert there are a number of underground channels communicating with wells unknown to those not acquainted with the country."

Further, "At the time when the Persians were the rulers of Asia they gave to those who conveyed a supply of water to places previously not irrigated the right of cultivating the land for five generations... [so that] people incurred great expense and trouble making underground channels reaching a long distance."

The Parthians and Sassanians continued to use and develop karez technology. The Firozabad ruins of Sassanian gardens can still be seen at Taq-e Bostan near Kermanshah. Another remnant of a Sassanian garden can be found at Taq-e Kisra, Ctesiphon outside Baghdad. There, the pools and orchards were overlooked by massive barrel-vaulted halls known as aywans (a Parthian innovation).

Many ancient karez were destroyed during the 13th-century CE Mongol conquests.

#### Politics & Karez :

The ownership of the numerous karez that dot the landscape varies from private ownership to community ownership. With a long karez, the land under which a karez passes may have several owners and its water is bought and sold. Some landlords endow the karez routes under their lands partially or totally to whole community served.

In many cases, the ownership and distribution rights have developed over hundreds of years. Sometimes, the distribution rights are determined through negotiation through representatives. In the case of a large karez with several users, the distribution of the water is determined by a salaried official known as mirab who is elected by the users or appointed by the government and is paid a certain salary.

In those cases where a karez is (or was) privately owned, the owners became fairly wealthy, since water is a precious resource in arid lands. The rich took the best of the water supply not

just for agricultural purposes but also for the maintenance of ornamental gardens. This also meant that their land holdings were situated at the head of the karez distribution system. The poor had land further down the karez and the poorest subsisted on a trickle of muddy water. The late Shah of Iran tried to change the system of land ownership, by breaking up large traditional holdings of land, angering land owners. The move also inadvertently led to confusion about the ownership of the karez and the responsibility to keep them maintained.

In any event, the creation and use of karez has led to the development of a dedicated set of laws and an accompanying legal system.

In relatively modern Iran, when communities still relied on karez of their water supply, many land holdings (that are public gardens today) had their own private karez water supply. The Dowlatabad garden in Yazd city which was at one time the palace of the Karim Khan Zand (c. 1705- 1779 CE) had its own karez (similarly Bagh-e Fin in Kashan, and the Shazadeh in Mahan had their own karez). When the British established their legation in Iran's capital Tehran, they too had their own karez that brought water from the Alborz Mountains to the north the city.

The introduction of deep wells made possible by modern drilling equipment created a new distribution of wealth. However, this development, regretfully poorly and ineptly regulated, is causing permanent damage to underground aquifers.

#### Karez and Watermills - Flour Making Systems :



**Horizontal water-wheel in a Taft, Yazd, Iran mill**

Where the slope of the hills was steep and where the resulting slope of the tunnel would cause excessive erosion, the ancient engineers turned a potential negative into a positive. They could create underground rock-lined waterfalls to create a sudden loss of height in a lined area thereby reducing the hazard of corrosion by fast flowing water.

The waterfall in turn was used to drive a vertical (potential) water-wheel which turned stone mills that could make flour. Nowadays the system can also generate electricity. Horizontal (kinetic) water-wheels (shown here) were also an option for taking advantage and also reducing the flow rate of the water.

## Karez and Badgirs - Home Cooling Systems :

In regions with hot summers, the karez system with an urban area was integrated with the system for cooling homes. These cooling systems captured (gir in Persian) the hot desert wind (baud in Persian), and then cooled it by directing the breeze over the flowing water in the karez before releasing the cooled air into the rooms of a home.

Yazd, a city in central Iran has a skyline defined by badgirs (pronounced baudgirs) and we explain the system further in Badgir section of our Yazd page.

## Karez and Yak-Chawls - Ice Making Systems :

The badgir in conjunction with a karez had a use in addition to cooling homes. They kept the domed ice-storage pits called yak-chawls cool thereby helping to keep the melting of the stored ice to a minimum.

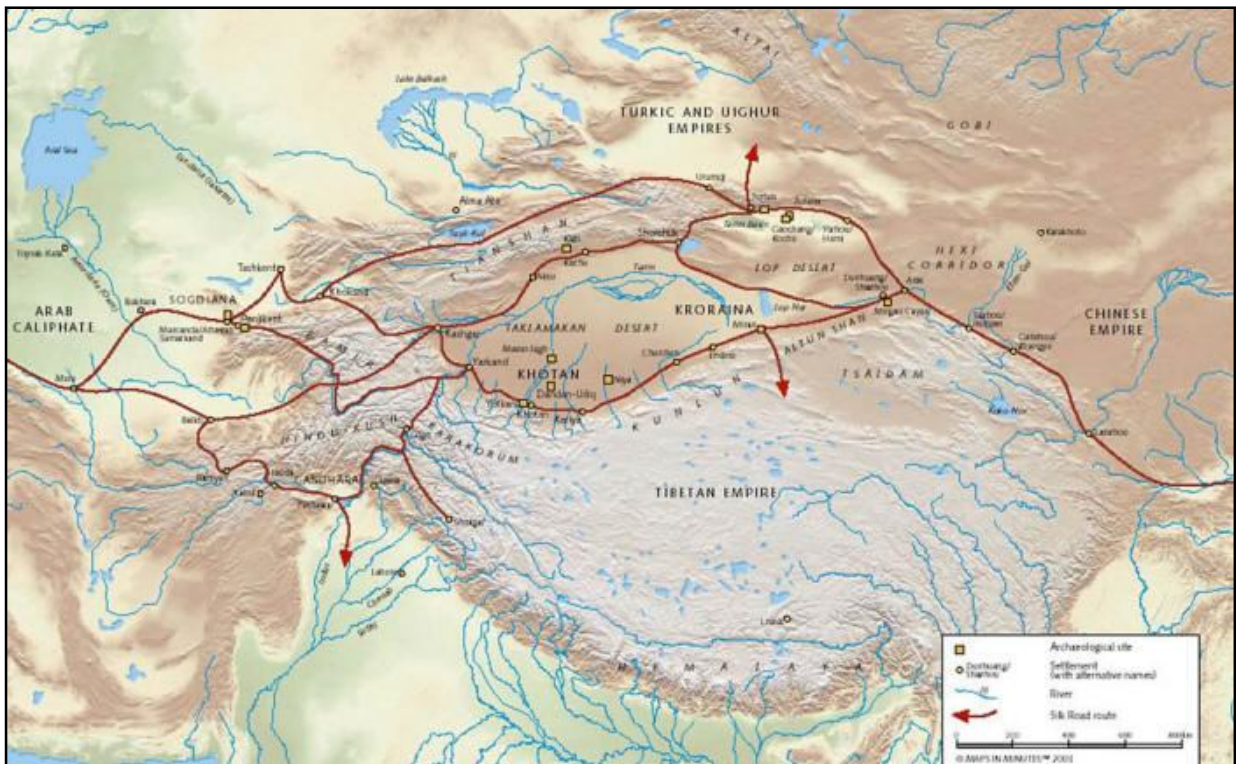
Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/karez/index.htm>

## **55. Tashkurgan, Khotan, Yarkand, Tochari, Phryni & Seres :**

Eastern Extent of Iran-Shahr :

Tashkurgan, Kashgar, Khotan, Yarkand, Turfan, Tochari.



**Aryan trade roads (Silk Roads). Note Kashgar and Yarkand in Khotan**

The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi placed Chin (China) to the east of Airan and also to the east of Turan (Sugd). That Iran-Shahr, the traditional lands of the Iranian-Aryans extended to the east - almost to the gates of Chin (ancient China), is an often neglected fact - perhaps since the dominant of the Iranian kingdoms was Persia in the southwest of Iran-Shahr, and that is where classical Greek writers focused their attention. They do, nevertheless, describe two lands to the east of the Syr-Darya (Jaxartes) River that were part of the Bactrian empire: Phryni & Seres.

The eastern-most lands that from time-to-time became part of the Iranian-Aryan sphere of influence, would in modern times come to be known as Eastern Turkistan. The pattern of historical change appears to be as follows: The Iranian Saka lands and the lands to the east of them were occupied by a Turkic peoples (Afghanistan and Tajikistan being exceptions). When the leadership of these peoples converted to Islam, the population of the lands converted to a large extent as well. The rough extent of previous historic Iranian, Iranian-controlled (control fluctuated), or Iranian-influenced lands can be seen today as those whose populations now embrace Islam. In present-day China, this includes parts of Eastern and Southern Xinjiang Uygur province up to about Khotan/Hotan in the south and the Tarim Basin in China's Xinjiang (Xinjiang) province. Coins minted by Kushan King Kanishk have been found in Khotan and the Tarim Basin was home to the Tochari, the easternmost speakers of Indo-Iranian languages in antiquity. Evidence of Sogdians living in Turfan in the Tarim Basin have been discovered.

We do know that the far reaches of the Iranian empire if not Iranian influence and culture extended to (in the words of Sir George Rawlinson in his *Seven Great Monarchies*), to "the Pamir Steppe, or on the high plain of Chinese Tartary, east of the Bolar range - the modern districts of Kashgar and Yarkand." Kashgar / Kashi and Yarkand in Khotan and presently in the northeast corner of China's Xinjiang (Xinjiang) province, were important terminals on the Aryan Silk Roads. Click here for Photographs of Kashgar.

The Eastern Iranian Pamiri dialects of Sarikoli and Wakhi are spoken across the present Tajik-China border in the Xinjiang (Xinjiang) province of China and where the Kunlun Mountains form part of the Pamir knot. This is where we find the autonomous region of Tashkurgan, a region still populated by ethnic Tajiks and Kashgar / Kashi.

The residents of Tashkurgan and Kashgar were known to have practiced Zoroastrianism and the ruins of a Zoroastrian temple can be found beside the ruins of an ancient fortress in Tashkurgan. Indeed, it is possible that some of the residents of areas in China that practice Islam today could have practiced Zoroastrianism in the past. The original Indo-Iranian inhabitants of this area have to a large extent been displaced by Turkic peoples.



Central and East Asia. Map based on Strabo quoting Eratosthenes. The Emodus is the Himalayas and the Imaus

likely a branch of the Pamirs. Note Phrynes and Seres as being north of the Himalayas.

Phryni & Seres :

Strabo in *Geographia* 11.11.1 states, "Apollodorus (of Artemita, a Hellenic writer of the 1st century BCE) in short says that Bactriana is the ornament of all Ariana. They extended their empire even as far as the Seres and Phryni."

Classical Hellenic authors place Seres and Phryni in a direction east of Bactria and north of India. Little else is said about the Phryni.

Phryni, Tashkurgan & Kunlun Mountains :

In the map above, we see the Saka to the north of Phryni. The eastern Pamirs slopes of Tashkurgan are a good candidate as the home of the Phryni.



**Tashkurgan valley from the fort. Image credit: Tim Thompson at Blogspot**

Tashkurgan is where the Kunlun, Kara Kunlun, Hindu Kush and Tian Shan mountains come together. It is connected to the Wakhan Corridor now in Afghanistan, to the Pamirs now in Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan Province) and the upper Hapta-Hindu, the upper basins of the Indus and its tributaries now in Pakistani-administered Kashmir (Gilgit-Baltistan). The Kunlun mountains are an eastern stem of the Pamirs. It is the eastern-most surviving Aryan enclave today. Its people are the only group within China that speak Sarikoli, a South-eastern Iranian language related to Avestan and Sanskrit.

Given its pivotal location that we have just described, Tashkurgan was also an important junction on the Aryan trade roads also called the Silk Roads.



**The citadel of Tashkurgan overlooking the valley. Image credit: chinabackpacker.com**

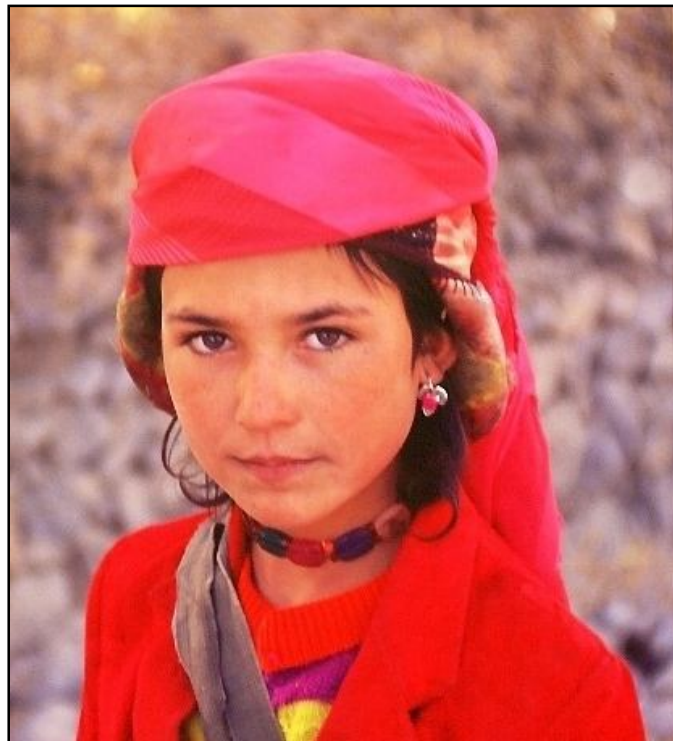
At the northeast corner of Tashkurgan town is a large fortress sitting on a hill that dominates the valley around it. The present citadel is known as the Princess Castle and dates from the Yuan Dynasty (1277-1367 CE). Ruins identified as a Zoroastrian temple are located near the fortress.

Tashkurgan/Taxkorgan means Stone Fortress or Stone Tower. Historically the town was also called Sarikol (ساریکال) or Sariqol (سرقول) and as Varshdeh. Present tradition of Sarikol speaks of King Afrasiyab, the legendary king of Turan in the *Shahnameh*, as the founder of Varshdeh. Today, Tashkurgan is called the Tajik Autonomous County of the Kashgar Prefecture in western Xinjiang, China. The name Sarikoli and Sacarauli are similar and the similarity bears further investigation.

If Tashkurgan / Sarikol was not Phryni, we would have to find another ancient ethnic group or nation with which to find congruence.



**Tashkurgan valley. Image credit: roddo.net**



**A Tajik girl in Tashkurgan. Image credit: dim sum**



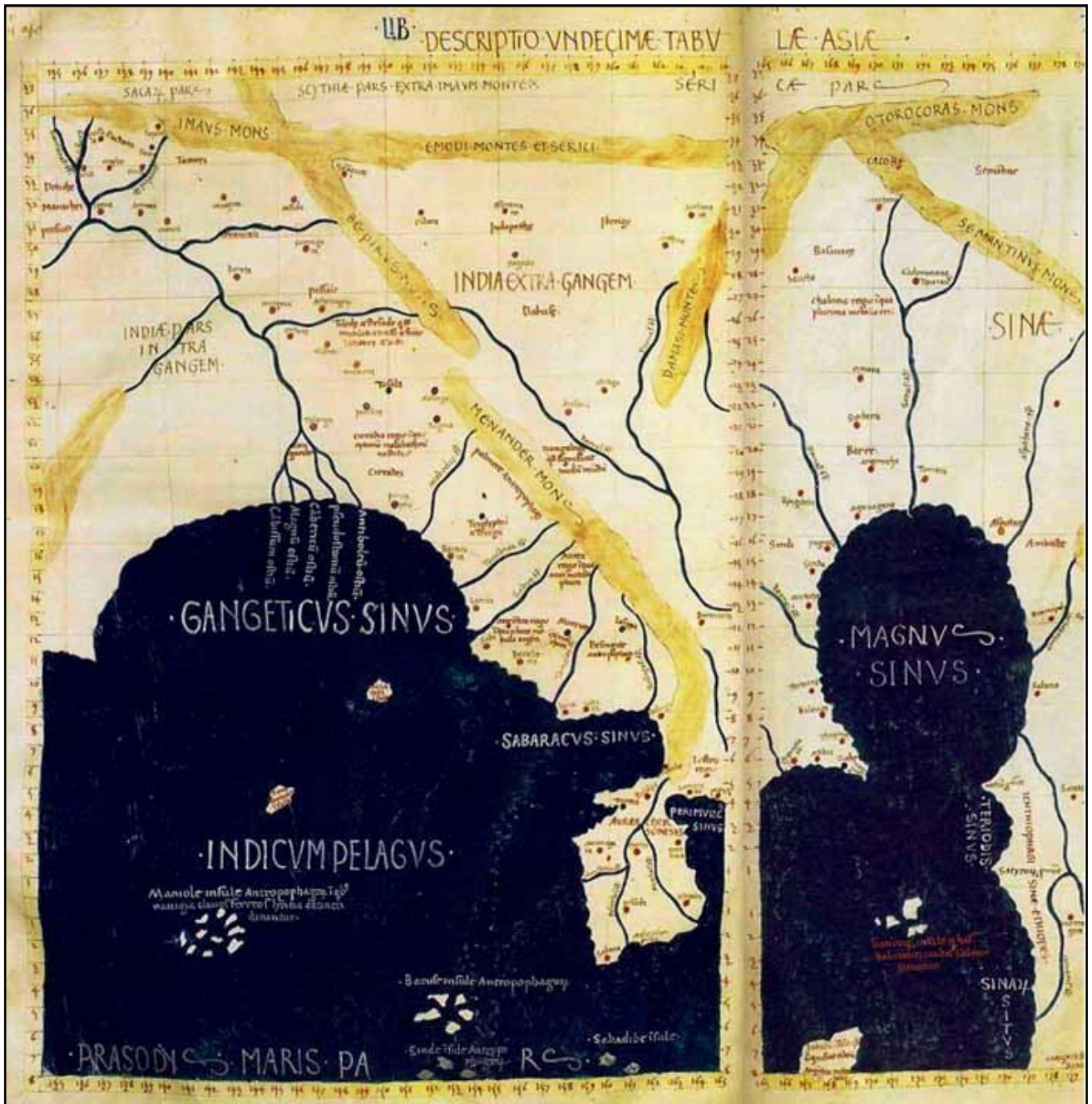


An interesting blend of features. Image credit: [Urud-Undesten at asiafinest.com](http://Urud-Undesten@asiafinest.com)



The modern town of Tashkurgan. Image credit: [Casver at Flickr](http://Casver@Flickr)

Seres :



Ptolemy (90-168 CE) - East Asia. Note Serica (Gk. Seres) near the top-right

The first available account of the Seres, is attributed to the 5th cent. BCE Greek historian Ctesias who in a manuscript found only in the Bibliotheca, refers to them as "people of portentous stature and longevity." Similarly, Strabo in *Geographia* 15.1.34 states, "the Seres, however, are said by some writers to be still longer lived than the Indians whose "life is protracted even to the age of 130 years, that they are temperate in their habits and healthy." In 15.1.37, Strabo states, "All the country on the other side of the Hypanis\* is allowed to be very fertile, but we have no accurate knowledge of it... of the longevity of the Seres, whose lives exceed the age of two hundred years."

[The segment of \*Beas or Biyah / Sutlej (a river in north India and a tributary of Chenab which in turn runs into the Indus) that runs west-east into the Himalayas. Directly north of this segment is Kashmir, to the northwest of which lies the Pamirs.]

Hellenic knowledge of the eastern reaches of the Persian Empire did not exist until Alexander's conquest of the empire. His advance halted at the eastern extremities of the then Persian Empire: India, Fergana and Saka lands bordering the Jaxartes River. Thus Pomponius Mela in *De Situ Orbis* I.2, notes, "In the furthest east of Asia are the Indians, Seres, and Scythians. The Indians and Scythians occupy the two extremities, the Seres are in the middle." Similarly, Ptolemy, a Roman, who in Latin calls the chief city of Seres, Sera and the country Serice/Serica states in *Geographia*, "The inhabited part of our earth is bounded on the east by the Unknown Land which lies along the region occupied by the easternmost nations of Asia Major, the Sinae (China) and the nations of Serice." Further, "The eastern extremity of the known earth is limited by the meridian drawn through the metropolis of the Sinae (China - note the difference between Serice and Sinae. China and Seres are not the same)." [\*\*Note: Serica appears to mean the 'land of silk' and is connected with Serer, those connected with trade in silk. Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833–1905) a German traveller, geographer, and scientist is credited with coining the term Seidentrasse meaning Silk Road in his China, Vol. I (1877), identifies Serica with the Tarim / Yarkant Basin i.e. Khotan.]

Pomponius Mela (1st cent. CE Roman geographer) in *De Situ Orbis* III.7, speaks of the character of the Seres: "The Seres..., a people eminent for integrity, and well known for the trade which they allow to be transacted behind their backs, leaving their wares in a desert spot." Similarly, Pliny (at *The Natural History* 6.24) says, "It was to the effect that the merchandize on sale was left by them upon the opposite bank of a river on their coast, and it was then removed by the natives, if they thought proper to deal on terms of exchange."

Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, translation by John Bostock 6.20 reads: The Seres are of inoffensive manners, but, bearing a strong resemblance therein to all savage nations, they shun all intercourse with the rest of mankind, and await the approach of those who wish to traffic with them (they are open to traders and travellers but not traders and travellers themselves).

Pliny 6.20 contd.: The first river that is known in their territory is the Psitharas, next to that the Cambari, and the third the Laros; after which we come to the Promontory of Chryse, the Gulf of Cynaba, the river Atianos, and the nation of the Attacori (the Uttarakuru north of the Himalayas in Hindu/Buddhist literature ?) on the gulf of that name, a people protected by their sunny hills from all noxious blasts, and living in a climate of the same temperature as that of the Hyperborei.

Pliny 6.20 contd.: Amometus has written a work entirely devoted to the history of these people, just as Hecataeus has done in his treatise on the Hyperborei. After the Attacori, we find the nations of the Phruri and the Tochari (Tarim basin, Khotan), and, in the interior, the Casiri (Kashmiri?), a people of India, who look toward the Scythians, and feed on human flesh. Here are also numerous wandering nomad tribes of India. There are some authors who state that in a north-easterly direction these nations touch upon the Cicones and the Brysari. [Our note: This section describes the Indian Kashmiris and their neighbours to the north, the, Tashkurgan and Khotanese.]

Pliny 34.4141: Of all the different kinds of iron, the palm of excellence is awarded to that which is made by the Seres, who send it to us with their tissues and skins; next to which, in quality, is the Parthian iron.

In our estimation, Serica, the land of the Seres was located around the eastern Tarim / Yarkant basin today in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. As we have stated above Phryni could have been its neighbour in the Pamirs or Tashkurgan. Serica would have extended up to the western extremity of the Great Wall of China which was the border of Chin (Tsin) in ancient times.

### Silk Production :

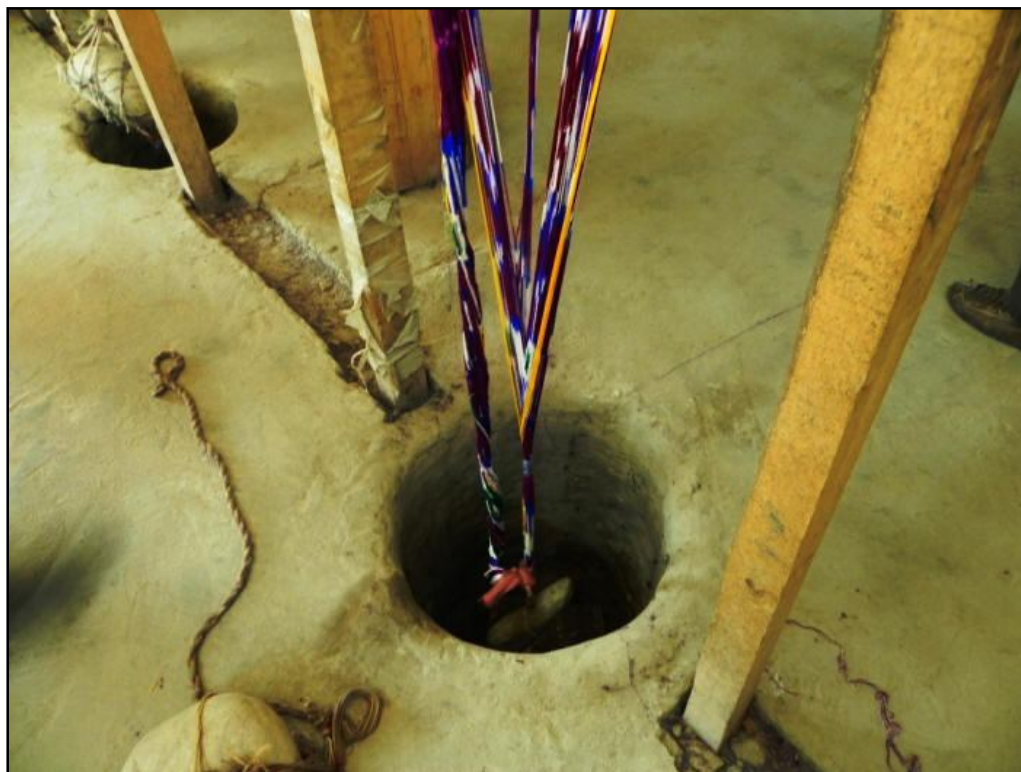
What made Seres (Serica) famous was its fabric, made from either silk or cotton and Seres means 'of silk' in Latin and Greek. The fabric was so noteworthy so as to find mention as a fabric worn by Cleopatra (in the mind of the author) in B. x. 141, of the *Pharsalia*, by Lucan: "Her white breasts are resplendent through the Sidonian fabric, which, wrought in close texture by the sley of the Seres, the needle of the workman of the Nile has separated, and has loosened the warp by stretching out the web." According to Henry Yule (1820-1889, translator of the Marco Polo's travel account) quoting Pliny and Ptolemy states that Seres, "within the confines of Bactria" were known for "silk stuffs, furs, and iron of remarkable quality."

This feature of silk-production leads many authors to speculate wildly (fuelled by Ptolemy's longitude speculations) that the nation referred to is China. But China is listed by Hellenic authors separately as Sinae. Some authors have even suggested the region of modern-day Kashmir. However, Kashmir was very much a part of the upper Indus i.e. Hapta Hindu and was on the south side of the Himalayas, while Seres was north of the Himalayas and perhaps north of a branch of the Pamirs as well. Lands east of Fergana, say Khotan, are a more likely candidates. While China is popularly known for its silk, silk was collected and woven in all these districts. Cotton was grown and wool used as well. The behaviour of shyness when trading with newcomers is a trait ascribed to the Chinese (the Chinese traders were not renowned as travellers as were the world travelling Aryan Sogdians). Perhaps the Khotanese were shy as well.

Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, translation by John Bostock 6.20 reads: The first people that are known of here are the Seres, so famous for the wool (silk?) that is found in their forests. After steeping it in water, they comb off a white down that adheres to the leaves; and then to the females of our part of the world they give the twofold task of unravelling their textures, and of weaving the threads afresh (this describes silk thread extraction). So manifold is the labour, and so distant are the regions which are thus ransacked to supply a dress through which our ladies may in public display their charms.



**Silk thread extraction in Khotan. Image credit: Sam Seyffert at Flickr**



**Silk thread hanging in Khotan**



**Silk thread spinning wheel in Khotan**



**Silk fabric weaving in Khotan**

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/east/index.htm>

## 56. Paisely, Botteh, Aryan Silk and Trade :

Botteh (Paisley) Motif :



**Example of the botteh motif of a termeh fabric  
Image credit: Mehdi Vaez**

The design motif known as paisley in the west is taken from the ancient Aryan botteh (botteh) motif. Botteh is a Persian word meaning bush, shrub, a thicket (a small dense forest of small trees or bushes), bramble, herb. Some would even take it to mean a palm leaf, cluster of leaves (perhaps as a repeated pattern) and flower bud. In Azerbaijan and in Kashmir (in the north of the Indian sub-continent), the name used to describe the motif is buta.

While in recent history, the design is primarily connected to silk and wool termeh fabric and carpets from Yazd and Kerman in Iran as well as woollen scarves from Kashmir, the design can be found in fabric and carpets from throughout the Aryan areas of influence and trade.

## Earliest Known Examples :



### **Silk Twill with Sassanian royal device (senmurv) 6-7th century CE, Victoria & Albert Museum, London**

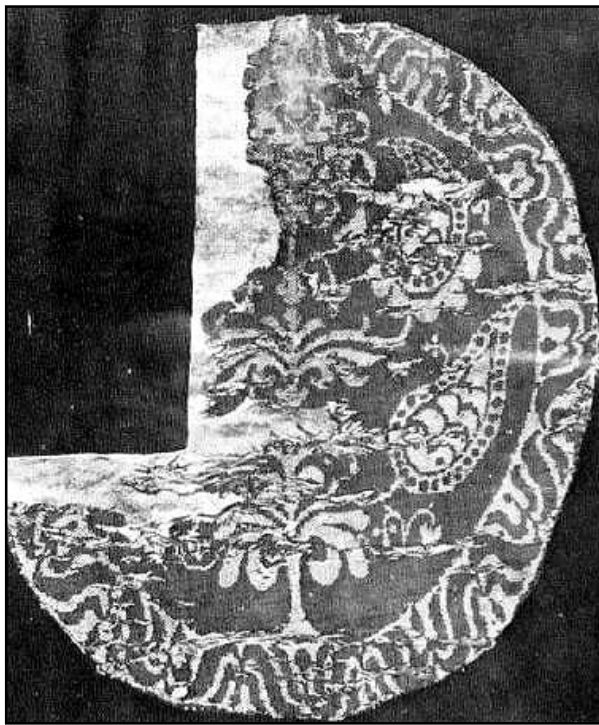
Dr. Cyrus Parham, in an article published in 1999 in *Nashr-e Danesh*, vol.16, no. 4, 1378, Tehran, states "We have a multitude of outstanding examples of this motif in the pre-Islamic and Post-Islamic Iranian arts. We find the first manifestations of this ancient motif in Scythian and Achaemenid art, mainly portrayed as the wings of Homa or Senmurv (Simorgh?), and which lasted in the same manner till the Sassanian period (PL.1a)." Regrettably, we cannot locate the Achaemenid and Scythian examples or images cited by Dr. Parham.

Thanks to the dry climate and sandy subsoil of Egypt, fabric could survive for longer periods than in many other regions. It is in Egypt that we find the earliest known samples of silk garments fragments embellished with what appears to be a predecessor of the boteh motif. The fragments date from the 6th-8th centuries CE and discovered in Akhmim a city of Upper Egypt. During the 6th to 8th centuries BCE, Akhmim (also spelt Achmim or Akhmin) a city situated on the banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt, was within the Greek sphere of influence and its Hellenized name was Panopolis, Khemmis or Chemmis. The motif found on the Akhmim fabrics is not found elsewhere in Egypt. For a brief period, Akhmim was under Sassanian control and has on and off been part of the Persian empire since the reign of Darius the Great (522-486 BCE). In all likelihood, Akhmim was at the western end of the Aryan trade roads, the Silk Roads.

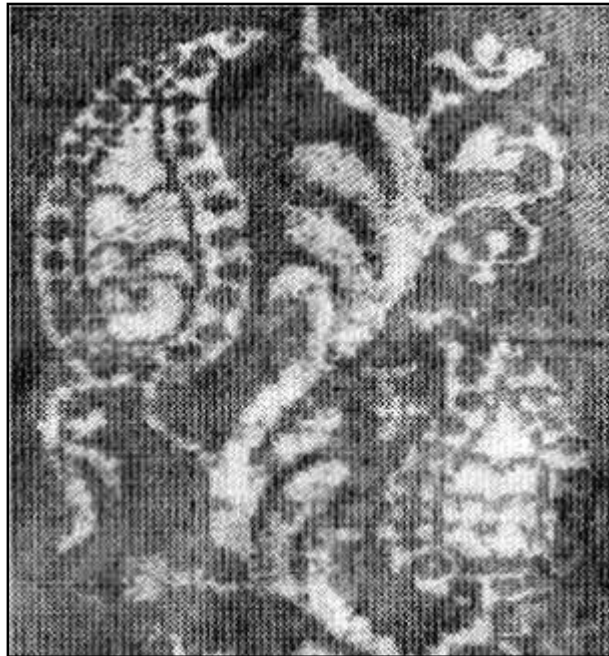
The silk fragments discovered in Akhmim's cemeteries at the end of the 19th century CE, are parts of clothing called the paragauda, the border of women's tunics, and the clavus, the paragauda's circular decoration. The word paragauda appears to have Indo-Iranian origins.

The Akhmim motifs appear to be stylized oversized leaves or fruit attached to a tree or vine. The design elements that are consistent with later (unattached) boteh are the pointed dropping tips (aith at times a sprayed tip), and the border around the motif encasing an internal design.





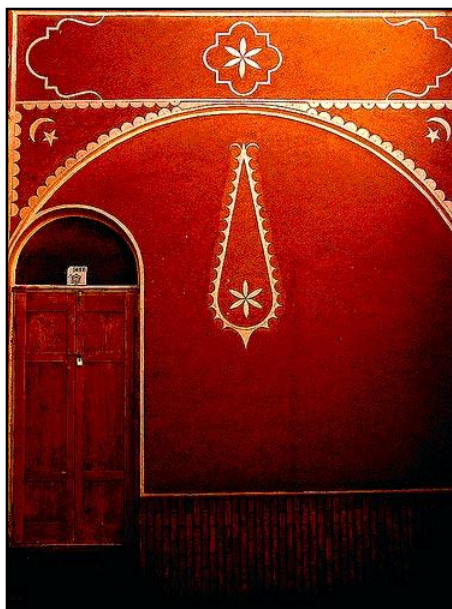
**Silk fabric discovered Akhmim, Egypt and dated to 7-8th cent. CE  
Lyon, musée historique des tissues Soieries Sassanides,  
Coptes et Byzantines V – XI siècles by Marielle Martiniani-Reber**



**Detail of the leaf motif**



**Detail of Cypress motif above door in a Yazd fire-temple**



**Cypress motif in a Yazdi home  
Image Credit: Horizon at Flickr**



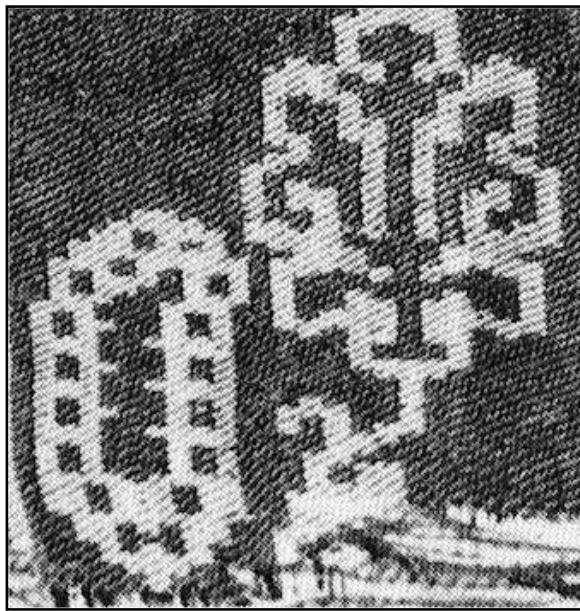
### "Persian motifs" from Stone p. 236

Dr. Cyrus Parham, who we have cited above, states, "In the arts of the final years of the Sassanians, and the early centuries of Islam, we witness certain indications of symbiotic relationship between the cypress and the botteh suggesting that this ancient motif has emerged from the cypress (PL. 1b). From the vantage point of the history of evolution of the botteh, this specimen is quite significant because in spite of the fact that the emergence of this motif from the cypress is conspicuous in the Iranian works of art of the 17 and 18 centuries (PL. 2), a myriad of art scholars tend to disregard this crucial stage of ornamental and symbolic metamorphosis."

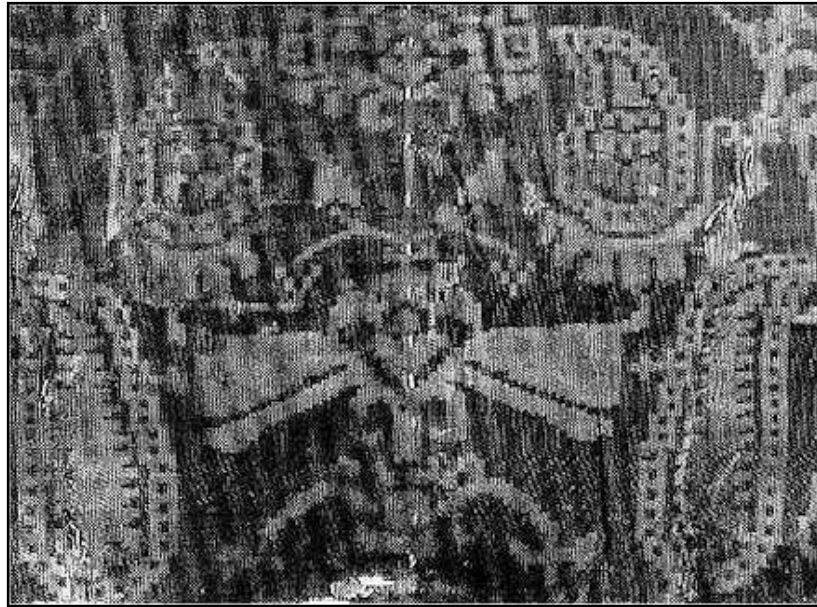
Other articles on the botteh also link the motif to the Cypress and to the significance of the Cypress as a tree of life in Zoroastrian folkloric tradition. In addition, the botteh motif is sometimes referred to as the flame of Zoroaster. We are informed by Fiona Maclachlan that in Azerbaijan, the buta (botteh) is regarded as a symbol of fire.

#### Different Shapes :

There are a variety of different forms of the botteh motif. These different forms could also be related derived shapes and they can sometimes be seen within the same design, be it on fabric, a carpet or an engraving. The fabric fragments from Akhmim display some of the variations.



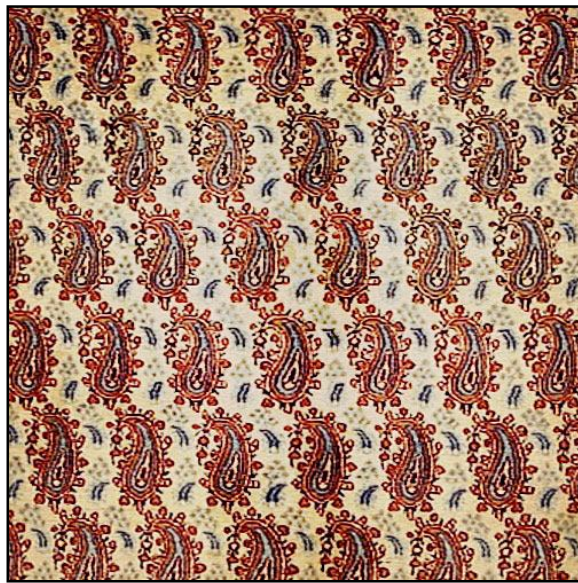
**Boteh design variation 1 from Akhmim, Egypt  
7 - 8th century CE**



**Boteh design variation 2 from Akhmim, Egypt  
7 - 8th century CE**



**Bakhtiyari carpet runner c. 1900 CE**



**Example of a termeh (traditionally made Iranian fabric) with a the boteh motif**



**Other examples of termeh with boteh motifs**

Twinned Designs :

Flower? :

Another variation for the boteh motif is what appears to be a twinned motif that looks like a stylised representation of a blossom. As with the previous variations, this one is also consistent with the variations found in Akhmim, Egypt (see above) from the 7-8th century CE.



**Column capital at the No Gombad ruins  
Balkh, Afghanistan (ninth century)**



**Twin boteh border design from Akhmim, Egypt  
7 - 8th century CE**



**Variation of the twin boteh design at No Gombad, Balkh, Afghanistan**



**Termeh with twinned boteh motifs**



**Cut fig fruit - a resemblance?**

Related to the Yin-Yang Symbol? :



**Close-up of one of the yin-yang like motif in the panel to the right**



**Nishapur (10th century CE) stucco panel containing the yin-yang like motifs  
Note that the motifs are in both the upright and horizontal positions**

The motif looks like one half of the yin-yang symbol, a resemblance that has led to speculation about the symbolism behind the motif. However, except for one relatively modern (10th century CE) use of the motif in stucco work from Nishapur presently in Iran's northwest province of Iran, we do not find any other credible examples of the boteh motif used in a yin-yang manner.

The carved stucco panels were excavated by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Iranian Expedition from 1935 to 1940, with a final season in 1947. Nishapur was a junction on the Aryan trade roads (also called the Silk Roads). The panels are dated to the Abbasid period of Iranian / Central Asian history, a period that followed the Sassanian era. According to the description at the Met's site, "Among the earliest major finds of the excavations in Nishapur was a building complex that included a domed inner room; a vaulted hall, or iwan; and the courtyard onto which it opened. The lower walls of these areas were decorated with carved and painted stucco dadoes of lively and beautiful design, and at least some of the upper walls were polychrome-painted on a smooth whitewash coating over walls" and, "Carved stucco decoration, perennially important in Iranian architecture, is most notably represented by the reconstruction of a small iwan, or hall, of the tenth century (from the mound called Sabz



Pushan), whose dadoes must have given an even more sumptuous visual effect before the loss of their polychrome painting."



**Reconstruction of the hall of a building excavated in Nishapur, called Sabz Pushan 10th century CE. Metropolitan Museum of Art's page on the hall reconstruction**



**Another section of the Samanid hall reconstruction of the hall Metropolitan Museum of Art's lead page on Nishapur**

Nishapur or Nishabur (Persian) :

Also romanized as Nīshāpūr, Nišâpur, Nişapur, Nīshābūr, Neyshābūr, and Neeshapoor; from Middle Persian New-Shabuhr, meaning "New City of Shapur", "Fair Shapur", or "Perfect built of Shapur") is a city in Khorasan Razavi Province, capital of the Nishapur County and former capital of Khorasan Province, in northeastern Iran, situated in a fertile plain at the foot of the Binalud Mountains.



**A Kashmiri bota shawl**

Kashmiri Buta :

The earliest surviving examples of the boteh motif in the weavings of Kashmir, are from the third quarter of the 15 century CE. reportedly commissioned by Sultan Zein-al-Aabedin (d. 1468). This Sultan is the one who, according to Kashmiri historians, geographers and researchers, brought the "decorative designs from Iran to India." The motif has since become a very popular theme of Kashmiri woollen scarves.

Paisley :



**Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland with the previous Anchor thread mill (one of the largest in the world) in the foreground.**

**Image credit: Robert Orr at Flickr**

The western name for the boteh motif is taken from Paisley, a town in western Scotland not too far from Glasgow, which had once specialized in the production of scarves and shawls (from the Persian word *shal*) decorated with the boteh motif.

In the first half of the 17th century CE, the British East India Company introduced boteh shawls other fabric articles made in Kashmir to Europe. Kashmir was a northern Indian kingdom. The imports from Kashmir, especially the women's shawls, became popular throughout Europe, and soon, demand outstripped supply. European weavers in France, England and Holland took advantage of the demand to produce imitations. European hand weaving technology, however, was less sophisticated than the age old hand-weaving techniques of Persia and Kashmir, and the number of colours in the European weave was initially limited to two. While local manufacture made fabrics with the boteh design more accessible in Europe, the original Kashmiri and Persian fabrics commanded a premium in price because of their beauty and superior quality.

Britain took the lead in manufacturing imitation fabrics - especially women's shawls - using the boteh design, when in 1790 and 1792 hand weavers in Edinburgh and Norwich began to reproduce the Kashmir and Persian shawls. Weavers in the town of Paisley joined this growing industry in 1805. In 1812, the Paisley weavers introduced an attachment to their handlooms that enabled them to use five different colours of yarn. This innovation gave the Paisley weavers a competitive edge over weavers elsewhere who were only using two colours, commonly indigo and madder. The Paisley weavers also took special care to imitate the Kashmiri shawls as closely as possible. In order to copy the latest Kashmiri shawl designs, agents from Paisley travelled to London where the Kashmiri shawls were arriving by sea. Within eight days of the arrival of a batch of Kashmiri shawls from India, Paisley imitations were being sold in London for £12 while the original Kashmiri shawls were selling for between £70 and £100.

It wasn't long before the name Paisley became synonymous with the boteh motif and demand for the imitation shawls grew as women all over Britain began to ask for 'Paisleys'. The weavers of Paisley developed a much sought after skill and at the peak of demand of their shawls they became the most highly-paid and well-educated workforce in the country. The high wages attracted more apprentices and at one point in the number of skilled weavers in Paisley numbered 6,000. The weavers worked out of their cottages or in loom-shops holding four to six looms. Paisley had a thriving cottage industry of weavers. Unfortunately, this boom would be short-lived.

With the introduction of semi-automated Jacquard looms in the the 1800s, Europeans gained the ability to mechanically weave fabrics with up to five colors. In addition, shawls could be woven in one piece with bolder designs. The Jacquard loom which used punched cards instead of a drawboy was introduced to Paisley in the 1820's. The drawboy pulled the ropes controlling the overhead harness on the loom when the weaver would called out his instructions. While this development of the Jacquard loom produced a more error free fabric, it also reduced the manpower needed to operate a loom which became larger and more expensive. The development changed what was a cottage industry into a factory based one and the workers were given specific tasks and had to develop a different skill set. Now there was a division of labour and workers had to have specialized skills. By 1860, the Paisley factories were able to produce shawls with up to fifteen colors, but that number was still only a quarter of the colours in some Kashmiri shawls.

Yet another development would hasten the decline of the woven shawl industry in Paisley - fabric printing. The printing of designs onto a fabric - rather than weaving the design - decreased the cost of producing fabric designs. By the 1860s, most hand weavers including those in Paisley, were living in poverty. Many migrated to Canada and Australia.

Through the rise and fall of Paisley's fortunes, hand-woven Kashmiri shawls continued to be synonymous with high quality, many becoming a part of a family's heirloom. At the peak of their popularity, the cost of a high quality Kashmiri shawl in Britain was equivalent to the price of a small house. The East India Company continued to sell them at twice-yearly shawl sales in London.

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/trade/paisley.htm>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nishapur>

## 57. Sogdian trade :

### Sogdian Aryan Trade Along the Silk Roads :

From amongst the sixteen nations of the Vendidad (the Aryan affiliated nations), the Sogdians appear to have become the dominant traders. They have left evidence of their trading activities as well as settlements, along the Silk Roads from Asia Minor to the Indian subcontinent, to the steppes in the north, and in China.

According to Francis Wood in *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (2002). pp. 65–68. ISBN 978-0-520-24340-8], the Sogdians dominated the trade along the Silk Route from the 2nd century BCE until the 10th century CE. Around the 3rd - 4th century CE, the Sogdians left more than 600 inscriptions in the high passes of the upper Indus river, while their Bactrian counterparts left ten inscriptions (Sims-Williams, 1989, 1992).

Sogdian trading activities, however, started much earlier. Some of the Sogdian inscriptions on rocks in the northern Indus (Hapta Hindu) valleys (now in northern Pakistan), as well as artefacts found in Indus Valley settlements and in Central Asia, testify to their activity during the Stone Ages along routes south into the Indian subcontinent.

The Sogdians, and their neighbours, employed the knowledge, skills and connections the Sogdians developed during their wide-ranging travels in several ways. The Chinese and the powerful nomadic Turkic tribes of the steppes often used Sogdian merchants as go-betweens, and their records of these activities give us more information about Sogdian trading activities. During 568-75CE, the Sogdians used their diplomatic influence with the Turks to open up new markets.

In addition, the Sogdians were manufacturers as well. They became proficient in the making of silk fabrics, brocade and blue ceramic-ware.

The Sogdians were therefore traders, manufacturers, artisans, world travellers, adventurers, diplomats, and resolvers of international conflict. The predecessor cities to Samarkand and Bokhara such as Afrasiab, literally and figuratively, became the cross-roads of the world.

### Sogdians and the Silk Trade :

The Sogdians were intimately involved in the lucrative silk trade between the silk manufacturing centres of Tashkurgan, Khotan and Kashgar in the eastern Aryan lands (as well as China) and the markets of Europe. The far eastern Aryan lands east of Tashkurgan, Khotan and Kashgar were known to classical Western writers as Serica meaning 'silk' in Latin.

The Sogdian involvement in the silk trade continued up to the end of the Sassanid-Persian rule in the mid 7th century CE. Henry Yule in an essay included in Captain John Wood's *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus*, (London) 1872 p.xlvi, notes, "The troubles of the time (6th century CE) had interrupted the trade in silk, which the people of Soghd carried on to their great profit, no doubt as intermediaries in the trade from China and Khotan." Further, "...the Sogdians, through Maniakh (cf. the modern Zoroastrian-Parsi name Maneck which Yule thinks

of Turkic origin) their prince, prevailed on Dizabulus\* to open communication with Byzantium, in order that a direct trade might be initiated with the great Western consumers of silk." [\*Dizabulus was a reputed Turkic king of the eastern Aryan lands. According to Menander Protector who we cite below, these Turkic peoples were anciently called Sacae i.e. the Saka. If that is so, we have a confusion here between the early Saka and the later Turkic peoples. The Turkic peoples of Central Asia could very well have been a blended people of the aboriginal Saka and migrant Turks from the Altai region of Siberia.] Yule adds, "These Sogdians... we may suppose to have been the forefathers of the present unwarlike and trafficking (traders) Tajiks of Bokhara."

According to fragments of the end-sixth century writings of Menander Protector, the embassy referred to above was received by Roman Emperor Justin in Byzantium in 568 CE. The Romans were the largest consumers of Eastern silk and the largest potential customers for the Sogdians' wares. Earlier the Sogdians had petitioned Dizabulus to send them on a similar embassy, a diplomatic mission, to the Persian-Sassanian court to allow free passage of their silk trade. But since Dizabulus was a reputedly Turkic, Sassanian king Khosrau I (531-579 CE) what not readily inclined to collaborate with the Sogdians' Turkic overlords who they considered untrustworthy - even though it was the Sogdians who were petitioning the court (there might have been Turkic officials present in the mission as well). [Eastern Aryana succumbed to Turkic inroads likely after a weakening of central Iranian control after Alexander's invasion. Parts would later be brought back under Sassanian-Aryan control but likely never to its full extent.] If the Sogdians caravans were not able to pass through Persian Iran, then the Sogdians may have had to use a route around the north of the Caspian Sea.

In these accounts above, we see a continuation of the ancient Sogdian involvement not just in silk trade along the Silk Roads, but also in the diplomacy and diplomatic concord between neighbouring kingdoms needed to keep the Silk Roads open. We also see how necessary it was for the nations through which the Silk Roads passed to have good relations with one another. While the roads were primarily within the Aryan federation of kingdoms, that compact could be instituted by the Aryan king-of-kings. When the Aryan Empire collapsed first on account of Alexander's invasion and then after the Arab invasion, overland trade was gradually replaced by maritime trade, and the Sogdian domination of the silk trade came to an end.



**Aryan Sogdian Silk Roads showing the Chinese and other cities along the route**

The first Chinese records of Central Asia written during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 ACE) record that the Sogdians were talented merchants. The Sogdians and other Aryans had been trading for millennia before that time.

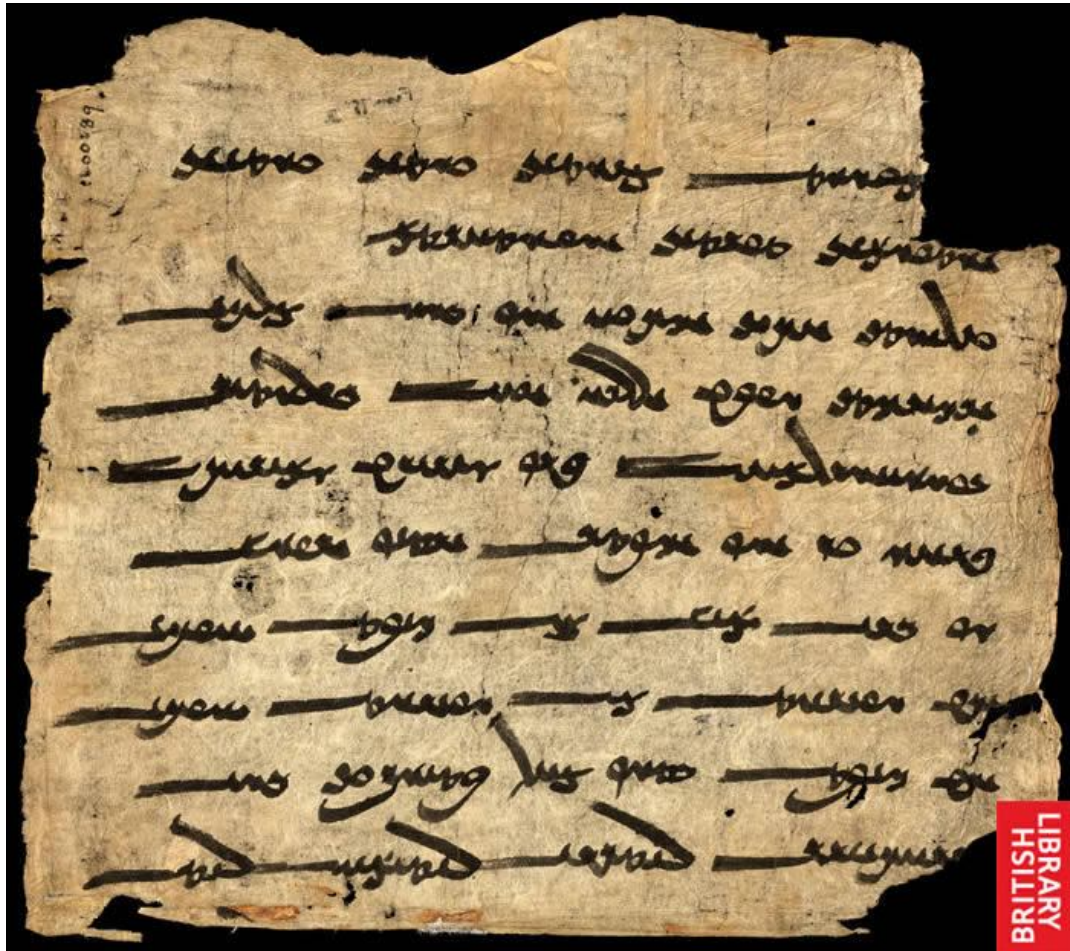
At Turfan, now in north-western China, Chinese documents found in the cemeteries of the city mention several hundreds of Sogdians (de la Vaissière and Trombert, 2004), and a fragment of the customs register regarding the caravans shows that among 35 operations, the Sogdians were involved in 29 (Skaff, 1998, pp. 89-95). This activity is mentioned in sale contracts, records of lawsuits, and census lists. They played a major part in all aspects of life in the oasis, besides its commerce. Two thousand years ago, Turfan was the easternmost of the lands with a substantial Aryan / Sogdian population and at the same time one of the farthest outposts of the Chinese Han empire.

The Sogdians established trading colonies in China dealing in commodities such as gold, silver, camphor, pepper and other spices, musk, wheat, silk, and other kinds of cloth. Evidence of Sogdian settlements in China have been found as far East as the Chinese capital Luoyang. Sogdian letters dating from 313-314 CE discovered in their staging post at in Dunhuang, indicate that there was a substantial Sogdian community settled in Dunhuang. The Sogdian letters indicate that the traders of Dunhuang communicated with a network of subsidiary Sogdian merchants in various places in China. The Dunhuang Sogdians in turn took direction from their principles in Samarkand and one of the letters discovered was from was Samarkand. The Sogdian trade with China grew and some of the exotic products popular later in Tang China (618 - 906 CE) were imported from Samarkand.

There is written evidence that a Zoroastrian temple existed in Dunhuang in the fourth century CE, which was still flourishing in the early 10th century.

Sogdian merchants also went west and were involved in the development of the silk trade giving the name Silk Roads to the trade routes. The trading continued until the sea routes and political instabilities led to a decline in trade along the Silk Roads. They were vibrant, exciting, prosperous, cosmopolitan places to be and their fame spread far and wide to distant lands.

Earliest Known Avestan Manuscript in Sogdian :



**Zoroastrian prayer, the Ashem Vohu  
British Library Or. 8212/84 (Ch.00289)**

The earliest surviving Avestan manuscript (the Avesta being the Zoroastrian scriptures), is a the 10th century CE fragment found in Dunhuang, China (see below). The next earliest extant Avestan texts come from Iran and India and date from the end of the 13th century ACE - three hundred years after the Sogdian manuscript was written.

The manuscript is presently housed in the British Library.

The body of the text is written in standard ninth century CE Sogdian using the Avestan script. It describes Zoroaster addressing God supreme. The preface to the text consists of two lines of the Ashem Vohu prayer written in a dialect that is similar to Achaemenid Old Persian. For example, the standard Sogdian equivalent for the Iranian Avestan *asha* or *ashem* is *rtu* (cf.



Vedic Sanskrit) or reshtyak. The manuscript uses rtm, a form identical with Achaemenid Old Persian rtam.



**Library Cave, Dunhuang, in 1907**

According to the British Library web-page, "This manuscript was one of 40,000 or so books and manuscripts hidden in one of the 'Caves of a Thousand Buddhas' - a cliff wall near the city of Dunhuang (a town on the Silk Road in northwest China) honeycombed with 492 grottoes cut from the rock from the fourth century onwards and decorated with religious carvings and paintings. The secret library was sealed up at the beginning of the 11th century, probably under threat from the Karakhanids who had taken Khotan in 1006.

"The cave was discovered in 1900 by the Daoist monk Wang Yuanlu who presented manuscripts and paintings to local officials, hoping in return for financial support to pay for conservation work. When the archaeologist and explorer Aurel Stein arrived there in 1907, Wang Yuanlu sold him large numbers of manuscripts and paintings which are now in the British Library, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the National Museum Delhi."

Princess Jun Zhezhe Letter :



**Letter written by Princess Jun Zhezhe  
British Library Or. 8210/S.2241 (Ch.00289)**

Zoroastrianism in China was not limited to the Sogdians. The British Library also has a letter written by Princess Jun Zhezhe of the Guangzhou Uyghurs (also spelt Ganzhou Uighurs) to her friend Madame Sikong, mistress of the North House. According to *The Silk Road*, a book published by the British Library and written by Susan Whitfield, Ursula Sims-Williams, British Library, in the letter to Madame Sikong, the princess "mentions lighting a fire in the Zoroastrian Fire Temple in order 'to bring prosperity along the road.'"

The British library does not give us a date for the letter but notes, "This letter in Chinese provides rare evidence of Zoroastrianism in tenth century Dunhuang."

The British library site also mentions "Sogdian merchants and Persian envoys had taken their faith south into India and as far east as China and there were temples in Chang'an (Xian) and Luoyang, but little evidence of local converts."

The Uyghurs are of Turkic origin in the Altai Mountain region where Mongolia, Siberia and China meet.

#### Sogdian Zoroastrian Funerary Couches in China :

Sixth-century CE funerary couches (raised decorated stone benches on which coffins are placed) of wealthy Zoroastrian-Sogdian traders from Central and Northern China, depicting Zoroastrian scenes have been discovered, and are on display in museum around the world. The two sets of panels from funerary couches show a priest wearing the padam (the white mask that Zoroastrian priests wear so as not to defile the flame), a sagdid dog (a dog that is able to confirm death), and deceased souls crossing the Chinvat Bridge to the next life. (Also see our page on Funeral Customs.)

One set of late 6th to early 7th century ACE panels from northern China and the Sui period reside in the Miho Museum in Shiga, Japan (additional page).

#### Source :

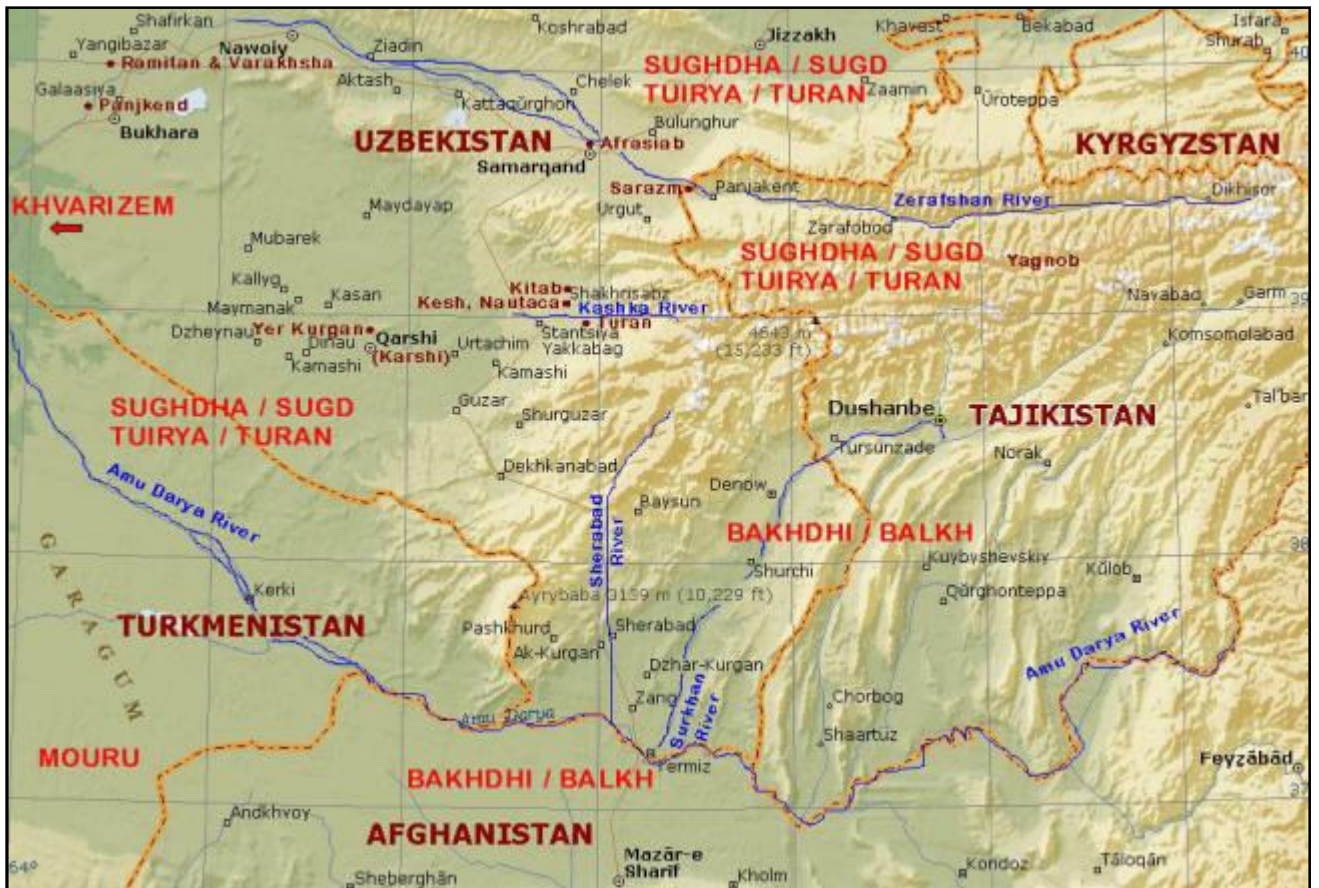
<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/sugd/trade.htm>

## 58. Sugd Turan :

### Sugd / Sogdiana - Tajikistan Region :

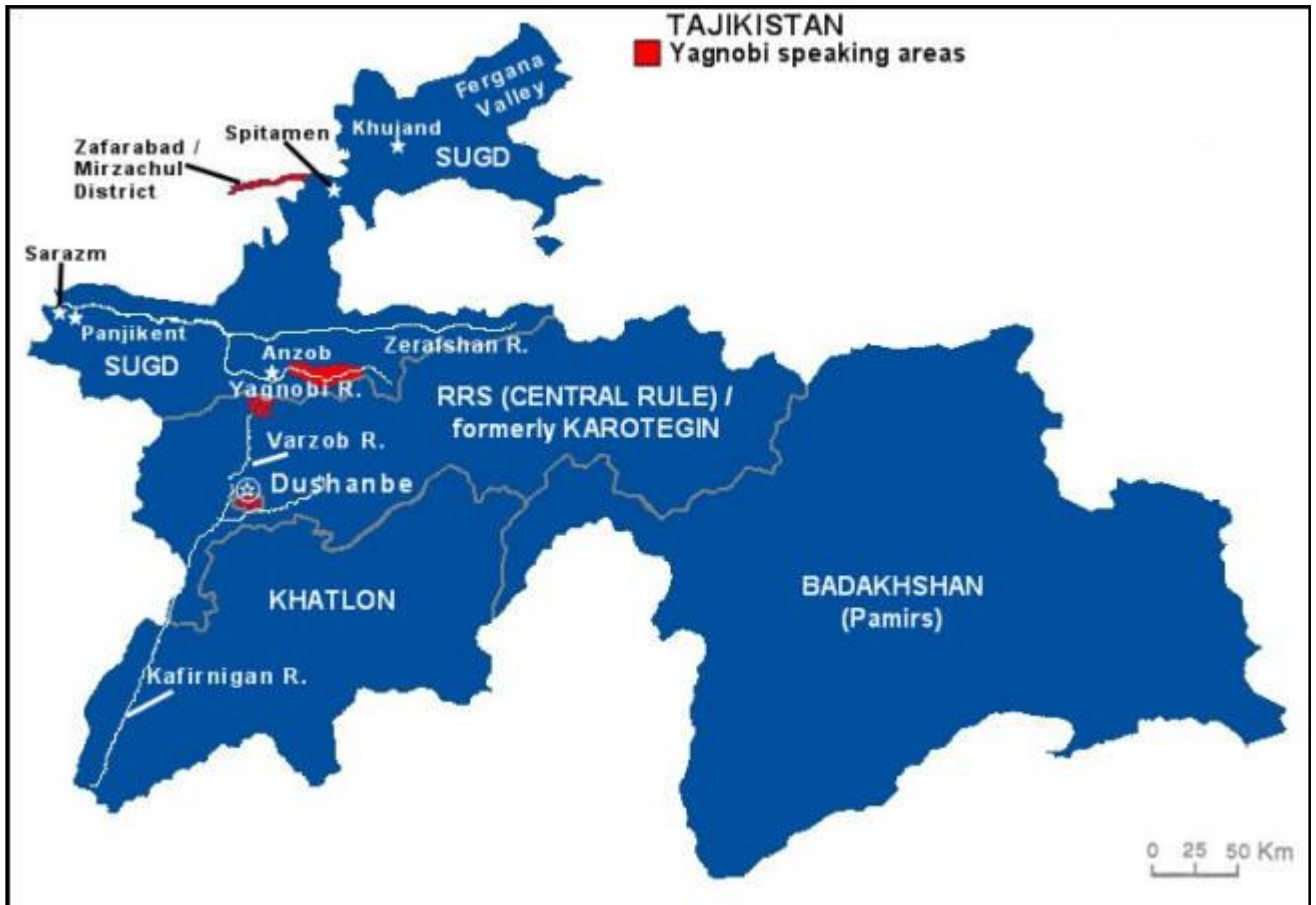
The land of ancient Sughdha (Sugd) and its Zerafshan River valley, straddles the border of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Sughdha is the second nation mentioned in the Avestan Vendidad.

In Tajikistan, the ancient land of Sughdha form present day Sugd (Sughd) province. Sugd province includes the Yagnobi river valley as well as the Fergana / Syr Darya valley in the north.



Map of Turan & Sugd (Tuirya & Sughdha).

Yagnob / Yaghnob :



Zerafshan & Yagnobi rivers in Sugd Province. Yagnobi speaking areas are shaded in red.



Anzob Pass. Photo credit: Tajikistan Photo Gallery by Mikhail Romanyuk

A hundred kilometres north of Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, over the Anzob pass in an eastern spur of the mountains stemming from the Pamirs, lies the mysterious Yagnob (also spelt Yaghnobi) valley. Yagnob is taken to mean ice river and is a reminder of the very cold winters in the upper valley.

A tributary of the Zerafshan river, the Yagnobi river travels westward for 120 kilometres in a valley parallel to and south of the Zerafshan valley. The Yagnobi valley is formed by the Hissar range to its the south and the Zerafshan range in its north. At the end of the valley its swings northward to join the Zerafshan (also spelt Zarafshan, Zeravshan) River at Aini.

Some of the Sogdian traders who plied their trade along the Silk Roads between China and Asia Minor and even resided in China, came from the Yagnobi region of Sugd. The Yagnobi Sogdians have special links to Zoroastrianism. They left behind a legacy including Avestan texts written in Yagnobi Sogdian (see below). Even today, names like Rustam, a legendary Aryan / Iranian name, are common among the Yagnobi. The Yagnobi language spoken today is a dialect of the ancient Sogdian language which died out some time after the 10th century CE.

Nowadays, the Yagnobi people who remain as a distinct ethnic group number a few thousands. During the Soviet era, under the pretext that the Yagnobi were in danger of avalanches, the Yagnobi, in 1970, were forcibly resettled in the desolate plains of the Mirzachul region (Zafarabad) of northern Tajikistan where labour was needed to tend cotton fields. Many of the Yagnobi resisted and they were subjected to much brutality. The Soviets destroyed their villages and homes to prevent the Yagnobi from returning to their homes. Their religious books, the oldest of which was 600 years old, were destroyed and their ethnicity officially abolished. Why the Soviets went to such lengths to destroy the Yagnobi as a distinct ethnic group is a matter of speculation. The Yagnobi were resented by many Islamist Tajiks who felt that they were late in adopting Islam and continued to practice an ancient religion, probably Zoroastrianism or a variant.

Nevertheless, in 1983 and the years following, a few surviving and brave Yagnobis started returning to their ancestral lands. They re-established small settlements and rebuilt their destroyed homes. By 1990, when the Post-Soviet Dushanbe-based Council of Ministers passed the decision to officially re-establish all Yagnobi villages whose populations had been resettled, only about 300 people were living in the Yaghnob valley. The Council asked the Tajik Academy of Science to support the preservation of the Yaghnobi language (Badenkov et al., 1994, pp. 476-84; Gunja, 1996, pp. 68-69).



**Yagnobi Settlement. Photo credit**

[Addition information and images can be found at :](#)

- [Tajikistan Photo Gallery by Mikhail Romanyuk,](#)
- [History of the Yagnobi People,](#)
- [Yaghnob at Tourism in Tajikistan,](#)
- [Yagnob.org.](#) Includes a pdf viewing of *Journey to Sogdiana's Heirs* by Anvar Jamolzoda and,
- [Image gallery at Yagnob.org](#)

In the Yagnob valley, in the vicinity of Kishlak Ravat, is the Kuhi Malik gorge, famous since Herodotus, for its "fiery caves."

Here in the caves are coal deposits that have been burning for 3.5 million years, and in the process a vast underground labyrinth of caverns has been created.

The ever burning underground fires are reputed to have inspired the notion of an eternal flame in Zoroastrianism.

### Yagnob Winters :

The Yagnob canyon is home to the Yagnobi people. When the winter snows come, the road out of the canyon becomes impassable, forcing the inhabitants to patiently wait for the snows to melt, huddled around fires on goatskins spread on the stone floors on their homes. Monica Whitlock of BBC lived with the Yagnobi and wrote a report describing how the Yagnobi are home bound during the winter. Her report paints a picture reminiscent of the Jamshedi era account of the people waiting out a severe winter in a community housing system of connected houses and narrow alleys called a Vara. The cold winters in the canyon and the Yagnobi lifestyle makes the area a candidate (as does the Pamirs) for Airyana Vaeja during the prehistoric Jamshidi era.

### Spitamen :

Interestingly, in the north of Tajikistan's Sughd province, there is a town called Spitamen. It lies on the Aksuu river, and is just south of the famed Syr Darya river. The name Spitamen sounds similar to Spitama, the Avesta word used in conjunction with Zarathushtra's name (his family name?), as in Spitama Zarathushtra.

### Panjikent / Bunjikath :



**Ruins at Bunjikath, Panjikent overlooking the Zerafshan Valley**

After the Arabs invaded Central Asia in the early eighth century CE, local Sogdian rulers of the smaller principalities in the Samarkand-Zerafshan Valley fled 60 km east to Panjikent (meaning five towns, and now in Tajikistan but previously a part of Sughd) located on the River Zerafshan and further upstream.

Today Panjikent (also spelt Panjekent, Panjakent, or Penjikent and derived from the Sogdian Panchekanth) is one of Tajikistan's larger cities. It is home to the poet Rudaki's mausoleum and ancient Sogdian /Zoroastrian ruins. Located on the southern slopes overlooking the city and the Zerafshan Valley - at the edge of the city of Panjikent - is the 5th century CE archaeological site of Bunjikath. In its day, the city was situated on the rim of a high terrace overlooking a fertile, well-irrigated valley.

Description of the site from Encyclopaedia Iranica: "Its (ancient Panjikent's) citadel (see Isakov 1979) is separated by a ravine from the shahrestan or city proper, which lies to the east of the citadel and is surrounded by fortified walls of its own. Two additional walls cross the ravine, linking the shahrestan with the citadel, and creating a unified defensive system around the entire city. The central structure of the citadel is a square fort built close to the northern part of a mountain ridge, which runs from south to north. In the end of the 7th or the early 8th century CE, a square keep was erected in the southeast corner of the fort. At the foot of the fort and to the north of it lies the lower fortification, watered by the abundant Qaynar spring. It shows traces of habitation from the 2nd century BCE. to the 1st century CE This cultural layer contains remnants of ceramics, but none of buildings. To the south of the fort stood a fortified wall, which defended the citadel against attacks from the top of the ridge. There were no buildings between the wall and the fort. On a hilly site to the east of the fort once rose the richly decorated palace of Devashtich (708?-22 CE), which apparently burned down in 722 CE. It was an expansion and an extensive reconstruction of an earlier building, dating from the 6th century CE. Another palace from the 6th century was located in the lower fortifications.

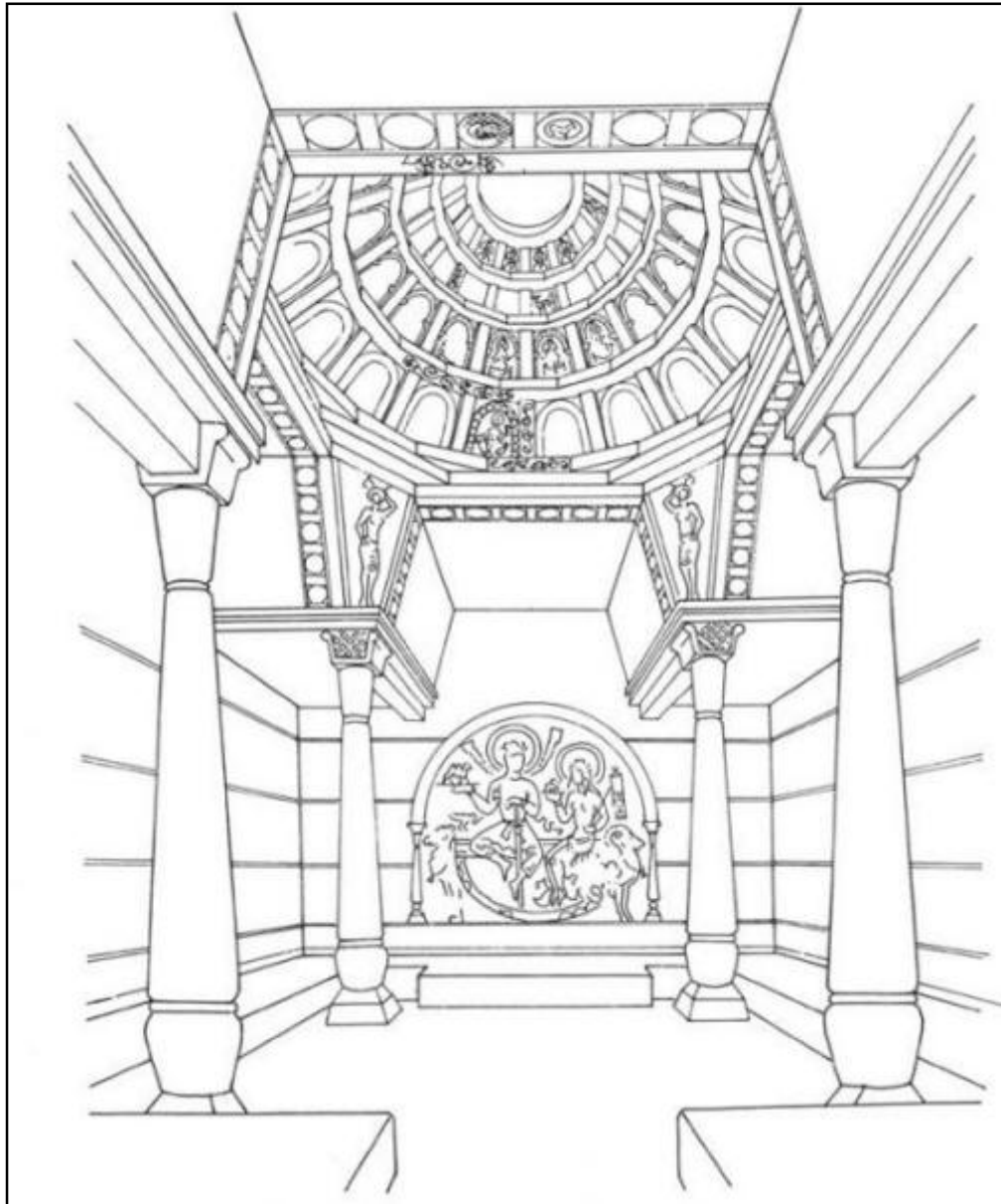
"In the 5th century the area of the city proper (without the citadel) measured about eight hectares. Straight fortified walls defended the settlement: the northern wall running along the rim of the terrace, and the eastern wall perpendicular to it. The southern wall ran straight only where the terrain permitted, and the western wall followed the irregular edge of the hill, departing from the overall regular design. The city walls of Panjikent in the 5th century were ten to eleven meters high, bristling with numerous towers, and punctured by embrasures in a chessboard pattern. Later the walls were made thicker, with fewer towers, a sloping façade, and no embrasures close to the foundations. The residential buildings of the city consisted of several small rooms with low wooden ceilings. All walls were made of sun-dried brick and clay. The streets and alleys intersected at right angles. The land at the city center, where two temples stood, has apparently been dedicated to sacral purposes since the founding of the settlement.

"The architectural style of the temples, which by the beginning of the 8th century CE had undergone many reconstructions, can be traced back to the traditions of Bactria. The two temples are very much alike: each consisted of a central building facing east and surrounded by a yard, which was adjacent to yet another yard to the east, with an exit to the street. A visitor walking from the street towards the main building would have seen the sacred spaces of the two yards open before his eyes one after the other, until, standing in the inner yard, he would have seen not only the portico, but also the interior of the central hall, which—not enclosed by a wall—opened directly onto the portico of the main building. At the far end of the hall there was a door leading to the cella, and on each side of it two niches with clay statues of divinities. A characteristic feature of the Sogdian temple was its openness to the rays of the rising sun and to the eyes of the laity. The passageways to the corridor, which circumvented the hall and the cella behind it opened onto the portico to the sides of the central hall. A space



for the sacred fire was added to Temple 1 only in the late 5th and the 6th century CE.

"The earliest nauses of the necropolis at the edge of the ancient city, with Zoroastrian ossuary burials, date back to the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries CE. At the end of the 5th century the area of the city had grown to 13.5 hectares. New fortifications were built to the south and east, so part of the old walls were enclosed within the perimeter of the new ones, dividing the city into inner and outer quarters. The walls of the inner city were repaired and reinforced in the 6th and the 7th centuries. They were pulled down only at the beginning of the 8th century.



**Reception hall of a 5-7 cent. CE Panjikent house  
(reconstruction by B. Marshak & E. Buklaeva; after Marshak, 2002, fig. 10)**

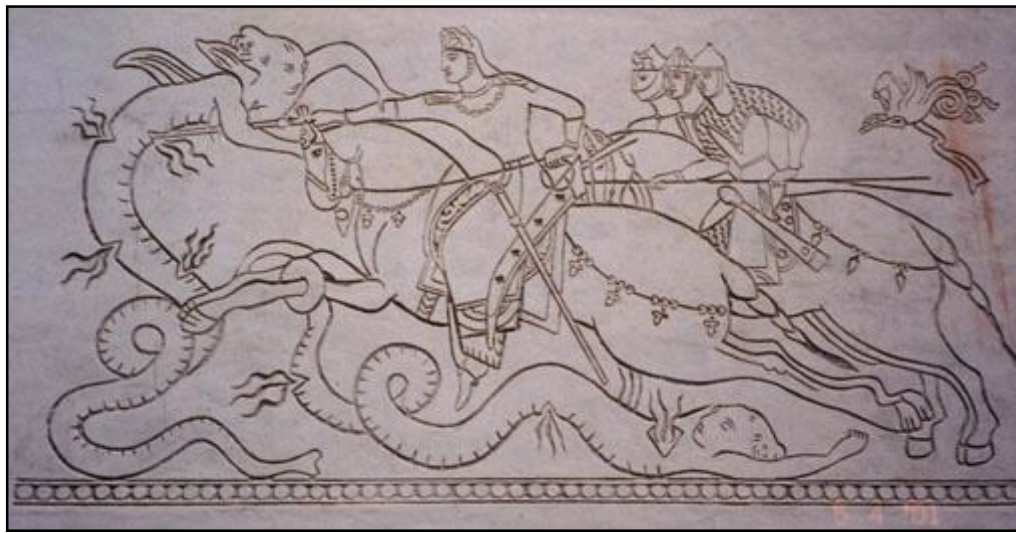
**Image credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica**

"The earliest murals in the palaces of the citadel date from the 6th century. Some of the houses built during the 6th century were two stories high, with vaulted ceilings on the lower floor, and murals on the walls of some rooms. However, during the 5th-6th centuries, no

building in Panjikant could rival the magnificence of the two temples, and even the houses of the most prosperous residents seemed rather humble in comparison. In the 7th-8th centuries, though, it was the houses of the rich that set the tone of urban architecture in the city. The end of the 7th century and especially the first quarter of the 8th century marked the heyday of early medieval Panjikant. At the beginning of the 8th century the spaces between the houses became passageways (covered with vaults in places), over which towered the walls of the neighbouring buildings. Not only the dwellings of the rich, but also those of the poor were more often than not two-story buildings with vaults over the rooms on the first floor. All residential houses from that period—not only those of the rich, but also of the merely well-to-do citizens—were decorated with murals and woodcarvings. Such reception halls were found in more than a third of all houses in the city. The streets were lined with small shops and artisans' workshops, often clustered around the bigger residential buildings. The workshops of the blacksmiths and of other metalworkers are most easily identified among the ruins (Raspopova 1980). The prosperous houses often had a few shops or even a small market built on the master's property. These commercial spaces were wide open to the street, but had no link to the living quarters of the buildings: apparently the tradesmen and small shopkeepers leased the premises from the landowners."



**Ruins at Bunjikath identified as Zoroastrian temples. Credit: Explo Guide**



**Sketch of a relief panel in the ruins at Panjikent. Image Credit: Tirdâd Gorgâni**

The murals and frescoes (some of them 15m long) portraying religious ceremonies and scenes from the famous Persian epics, and which decorated the walls of the now ruined buildings have been removed from the site and are housed in a museum in Panjikent.

In A.D. 722, Arab forces besieged and took the town. The last Sogdian ruler Devashtich together with others who had been retreating from the Samarkand region fled east to a fortress on Mt. Mug in the upper Zerafshan region. The fortress was their last refuge. However, the fortress could not stop the Arab onslaught and there the Arabs captured Devashtich and executed him after holding him prisoner for a few months. At Mt. Mug archaeologists have unearthed a treasure trove of Sogdian documents attesting to the sophistication of the Sogdian administration and legal system.

Additional Reading :

- Once more about peculiarities of the Sogdian Civilization of the 4th-10th Centuries by Boris Y. Stavisky,
- Sogdian Archaeology by Boris Il'ich Marshak and,
- Panjakent at Tourism in Tajikistan

## Sarazm :



**Ruins at Sarazm. Photo: Mary Kay Magistad, PRI , at Flickr**

About 15 km. west of Panjikent (at the border with Uzbekistan), lies the site at Sarazm - the ruins of a far older, and potentially more significant, 4th -2nd millennia BCE settlement that included a palace, fire temples, administration, public and residential buildings. The site is remarkable and is testament to a thriving Bronze Age civilization.

Recovered artefacts include objects made of copper, bronze, lead, silver and gold - items manufactured locally and traded with lands as distant as Mesopotamian and the Indus Valley.

As with Panjikent, Sarazm was built on a south-bank terrace overlooking the Zerafshan valley. There the site stretches in an west-east direction. The discovery of the ruins in 1976 were initiated by a local farmer Ashurali Tailonov who after visiting a museum in Panjikent, informed local archaeologists about a bronze axe he had found not far from his home - an axe that was similar to a bronze axe he had seen during his visit to the museum. That axe had been found in the late 19th century in Yor village, Panjikent district.



**Flattening Stone. Image credit: Sarazm at Tourism in Tajikistan**

Sarazm stands at the transition of the Zerafshan valley from flat western low lands and eastern mountainous regions, and is strategically positioned as a mining, manufacturing and export centre on the Silk roads. It was a large ancient precious metal mining center, and the Sogdians exported the extracted gold and silver east, west and south along the Aryan trade routes. In the process the residents developed one of the largest centers of metallurgy in the Central Asia.

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. The making of an alloy requires a knowledge of metallurgy: how to produce high temperatures, how metals synergistically work together and the proportions needed as well as how the molten alloy can be processed. The copper ore they used for the production of bronze was brought in from deposits located 40-50 km east of the site. The tin ore mines in the upper and lower Zerafshan valleys are the oldest in the ancient world that valued tin as being more precious than silver. One of the tin ore mines was at Mushiston, 40 km east of Sarazm, while another mine was in desert surrounding the lower Zerafshan at Karnab, Uzbekistan, 170 km west of Sarazm. High tin content (8-12%) bronze was expensive to produce and was a prized commodity. The high tin content bronze produced found in Mesopotamia, Oman and Harappa was likely manufactured in Sarazm since there are no other known sources and since the trade routes established by the Sogdians makes this proposition feasible. The bronze found in Oman could have been transhipped via Harappa and carried on coastal boats down the Indus to Oman at the entrance of the Persian Gulf. The bronze artefacts found in Oman as part of a collection of artefacts: pottery and beads from Harappa and bone combs and seals from Balkh. Fragments of large ore-crushing pestles and hammers, foundry forms, melting forges / smelting furnaces, casts, cast crucibles, as well as massive hammers for crushing ore have been found. (cf. *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language* by David W. Anthony)



**Beginning of 2nd millennium BCE  
Arrow and spears heads found at Sarazm  
Image credit: Bronze Age in Tajikistan**

Metal and composite items found at the Sarazm site include armour, axes, daggers, knives, lance-heads, spears, pins, fishhooks, knitting needles, razors, ornaments, jewellery and decorations.

The artisans used their stone cutting expertise to make beads and pendants from agate, onyx, obsidian, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and cornelian. The turquoise came from outcrops in the desert around the lower Zerafshan about 100 km downstream from Sarazm, and from Nishapur in

north-eastern Iran. The processed turquoise was traded into Mesopotamia and the Indus valley.

Also found at the site are stamps similar to stamps found at sites in Mesopotamia, Iran, Baluchistan and the Indus valley. Other items resembling those found in the Middle East, South Turkmenistan and Afghanistan include painted ceramic kitchenware have been unearthed at the site together with six furnaces used to bake twelve forms of containers such as goblets, bowls, and jugs.

Included in the finds are the remains of a woman who was buried in clothes decorated with silver, turquoise, cornelian, lapis lazuli, and jasper beads. Gold beads adorned her hair, and on her arm she had large bracelets made from sea shells. All these items underscore the extent of the international trade in which the 4th century BCE residents were engaged and their wealth.

Only a small portion of the 100-hectare Sarazm site is accessible to archaeologists. Farmed land covers a large part of the potential extent. The site is also bounded in the north and west by the villages of Sahibnazar and Gurach, and in the north-eastern by Avazali. The exposed site includes a palace complex which covers an area of more than 250 square meters, and which consists of a large corridor, a vestibule, two halls circular altars in the center and several auxiliary structures connected by wide passages.

The etymology of the name Sarazm is unclear. Some suggestions are sar-sabz meaning the head of greenery, or sari-sabza meaning green beginning, or sari-zamin, meaning beginning of the land. These names could signify Sarazm's location between the low and high lands.

Source :

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/tajikistan/page2.htm>