



Boris Il'ich Marshak

July 9, 1933-July 28, 2006



Photo courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum

Boris Il'ich Marshak, one of the preeminent scholars of Central Asian culture, died in Panjikent, Tajikistan, on July 28, 2006, and was buried the following day just outside the walls of that important Sogdian city to whose excavation he had devoted his life's work. He was 73 years old.

Since 1979 Dr. Marshak had been the Head of the Central Asian and Caucasus Section of the Oriental Division of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. This year marked the twenty-eighth anniversary of his assuming the direction of the important excavations at Panjikent, where he began his career in archaeology in 1954. The highlights of his distinguished career and publications may be found elsewhere (in the Russian *Wikipedia* and in the Festschrift *Eran ud Aneran* [Transoxiana 2003]). He was honored by

membership in the Academies of many countries and visiting professorships and fellowships at prestigious universities around the world. Those who have benefited from his wisdom and scholarship describe him as a teacher *par excellence*, 'one of the greatest archaeologists' of modern times, and 'the last of a great generation.'

Few scholars have acquired the breadth of knowledge he possessed of the cultural interactions across Central Asia in the first millennium of the Common Era. He was known for his advocacy of a distinct Sogdian culture within the larger world of Iranian culture; he contributed to the understanding of relations between Central Asia and China. His *Sogdian Silver* (1971), which he gave us permission to post on Silk Road Seattle shortly before he left for his summer's excavation, remains the authoritative study of the subject. His *Legends, Tales and Fables in the Art of Sogdiana* (2002) offers an evocative interpretation of the striking murals uncovered by the Panjikent expeditions, sketches from which frame this page. As he wrote in the conclusion to that publication of the Ehsan Yarshater Lectures he delivered at the University of London, 'I foresee the criticism that my imagination has been too vivid at times.' His death has deprived us of a man who felicitously combined rigorous and cautious scholarship with a vivid imagination, and, in the words of

a colleague, 'still had a lot of things to say.'

I regret having met him only once, when in his quiet way he charmed an audience here in Seattle and stimulated colleagues and friends in conversations during social occasions. When he left, our first thought was when we could hope to have him return and stay longer, since even that visit of a few days so enriched our lives and programs.

We share our deep sense of loss with his family: his wife Valentina Ivanovna Raspopova, a distinguished archaeologist who worked alongside him at Panjikent, his daughter Maria who works in the Hermitage Museum, and his grandson.

Daniel Waugh

