Sogdiana (or Sogd) is a region in Central Asia that was populated by Sogdians, people speaking and writing in an Eastern Iranian language. According to Greek and Roman authors, Sogdiana included territories between two rivers, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. Khoresm, which occupied the Amu Darya delta, was not part of Sogdiana. Later Sogdiana, beginning at least in the first and second centuries CE, occupied a smaller territory. Thus its southern border was no longer along the Amu Darya but along the Zeravshan mountain range. Ferghana and Ustrushana, situated between Chach (the Tashkent oasis), Ferghana and Sogdiana, did not belong to Sogdiana, although the inhabitants of Ustrushana wrote and, perhaps, spoke the Sogdian language. Big Tokharistan, a successor of Bactria, was located south of the Zeravshan mountain range. It is not clear, however, whether the Sogdians populated all the lands which Greek and Roman authors attribute to Sogdiana. It is possible that these authors referred to administrative boundaries of the Achaemenid Empire, ignoring population distribution in the area. According to archaeological convention, any monument located in the lower Zeravshan and Kashkadarya River valleys (but not to the south or north-east of this territory) is defined as Sogdian regardless of the date. I should note, however, that prior to the first and second centuries CE, in archaeological terms, there is no difference between Sogdian culture and cultures to the south of the Zeravshan mountain range. This said, in the present article, following the established convention, Sogdiana denotes the region including the Zeravshan and Kashkadarya River basins. Clearly, the archaeology of Sogdiana is dated no earlier than the first millennium BCE, when Sogdians emerged on the historical stage. How-
culture, although it did not eliminate old traditions completely. Some invaders settled on deserted and fertile lands and took up agriculture. Mountain people, always in need of additional land, participated in this process as well. Pottery has always been a typical product among them, right down to modern times [Peshchereva].

In the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, settlements with semi-huts were replaced by large cities, among them Kok-tepe (with an area of 100 hectares; the name is the modern one) and Samarkand (220 hectares; the ancient town was Afrasiab). The study of these sites by the Uzbek-French expedition demonstrates that the process of erecting city walls in Samarkand and Kok-tepe and shrines in Kok-tepe included large-scale works [Rapin, Isamiddinov and Khasanov]. According to Isamiddinov’s reasonable hypothesis, irrigation canals in Samarkandian Sogdiana, the length of which was more than 100 km, were built at about the same time as the cities. With some changes, these canals survived until the present. Three important factors facilitated this socio-economic transformation: rapid population growth on fertile land, military organization of a newly established state ruled by those who not long before were nomads, and the advanced cultural traditions of the Bactrian-Margiana culture, which still survived to some degree.

A new stage in cultural development in Sogdiana began in the seventh and the sixth centuries BCE. Its characteristics were found in Bactria, Margiana, northern Parthia, and, somewhat later, in Khoresm as well. These characteristics (for example, cylinder cone-shaped pottery made with the use of the potter’s wheel and the production of large, rectangular, unbaked brick) did not spread beyond the territories in the northeast of Sogdiana. It has been argued that these lands were included in the same state in the seventh and the sixth centuries. However, it is not clear yet what was this state’s major political and administrative center. Even before this period, a new large urban center, the remnants of which are now called Er-kurgan, emerged in southern Sogdiana. In 1950, Aleksei I. Terenozhkin developed relative and absolute systems of chronology of Sogdian pottery and other specimens that were dated between the sixth century BCE and the end of the eighth century CE. Cultural change (as much as it can be assessed by archaeologists) did not occur immediately after Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khoresm were conquered by Cyrus the Great and became part of the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the second half of the sixth century BCE. New elements (in particular, open forms of pottery - cups and bowls, characteristic of Iranian culture) spread only in the fourth century BCE during the late Achaemenid and the early Hellenic periods. During the Hellenic period, semi-huts were built along with unbaked brick constructions. The Kurgancha settlement in southern Sogdiana, which was excavated by M. Khasanov, dated the fourth and the third centuries BCE, is characteristic of this trend.

Neither Persian influence during the Achaemenid period nor Greek influence in the Hellenic epoch had an immediate impact on the Sogdian culture. Greek forms in the Afrasiab pottery, including “fish plates” and kraters appeared in the third century BCE during the rule of the Seleucids, not right after Alexander the Great’s conquest of Sogdiana in the 320s BCE. Nomads conquered Sogdiana in the end of the third century. Greeks may have returned to Sogdiana in the first half of the second century, but by mid-century, the nomads took it over again. Ancient oriental elements prevail in the architecture of the Greek period. A typical example is the Afrasiab city wall. It was built from large unbaked bricks of a type unknown in Greece on which were written the names of the makers in Greek letters. Unbaked brick constructions were typical of Sogdiana during its whole history. The French-Uzbek expedition excavated at the Afrasiab citadel a large storehouse for grain that belonged to the state or the temple. This storehouse had been built in the time of Greek rule and then was burned, most likely during the nomadic conquest.

Burial sites of the nomadic population near oases date from first centuries BCE to the first centuries CE. Artifacts produced by sedentary masters, including pottery made on the potter’s wheel, were popular among pastoralists. During the period between about the late second and the first centuries and the first and the second centuries CE, tall goblets became a widespread item, and iron arrowheads replaced those made of bronze. The urban culture of Samarkand, Er-kurgan, and other cities and settlements dating from this period is well explored. However, in contrast with the situation for Er-kurgan, the later period from the end of the second to the fourth centuries is not well studied for Samarkand. Under
the rule of the Kushan kings in the sec-
ond and the beginning of the third cen-
turies, urban life flourished in Tokhari-
stan. Sogdiana, on the other hand, de-
clined during the same period, although the
depth of the decline should not be
exaggerated. The Sogdian "Ancient Let-
ters" show that in the beginning of the
fourth century many Samarkandians
lived and traded in China, mailing and
receiving letters from their hometown.
A public temple of the gods with two
pillars made of burnt brick in the main
hall was built around the third century
in Er-kurgan.

At least from the second century BCE
to the first century CE, there were also
smaller fortified buildings, often with a
square main floor. These buildings had
towers at the corners of the square floor
or in the middle of each side. In the
latter case, the floor plan of the build-
ing is cross-like. These tall, two-story
constructions were built for military
defense and were not suitable for liv-
ing. Sometimes walls were built around
the central fort, and the space between
the fort and the wall was filled with
dwellings. Similar forms in rural forts
emerged much earlier in Iran (Shakh-
i-Kumys). They were also found in
Ferghana, Ustrushana, and Chach. In
Sogdiana, citadels in small rural settle-
ments were expanded so that the origi-
nal four towers and spaces between
them were transformed into inner quar-
ters around which new walls with eight
towers were erected. In the fifth cen-
tury, there were landlords’ palaces near
citadels. These palaces were fortified,
and, by the sixth and the seventh cen-
turies, actual castles emerged with a
tripartite system of military defense.
Each palace consisted of a residential
tower, often built around the old fort
tower, as well as the inner and outer
systems of reinforcement. In most
cases, warriors inhabited residential
towers and masters stayed in the in-
ner yard, while the outer wall served
to defend dwellings of subordinate
landowners and tenants.

Iurii Iakubov discovered a settlement
in the upper reaches of the Zeravshan
River (Gardani Khisor) dated to the end
of the seventh or beginning of the
eighth centuries that was built entirely
around the master’s palace. Later,
when these palaces were abandoned
by their inhabitants, they eroded into
flattened hills, hundreds of which have
survived in Samarkandian Sogd and
in the upper Zeravshan Valley.

Very little is known about the struc-
ture of ancient Sogdian cities. The so-
called palace of Er-kurgan is similar to
houses of wealthy urban residents in
Hellenic and Kushan Bactria. The
streets of Er-kurgan crossed at 90 de-
gree angles, making square blocks.
However, it is uncertain when we
should date this systematic design. In
Samarkand of the third to fifth cen-
turies, a wall separated the northern
third of the city that was densely filled
with houses from the other part of
the huge area, which was only sparsely
settled. Starting with the sixth century,
houses of aristocrats were built be-
tween this wall and the ancient outer
palisade. In the fourth century, some
Huns conquered Sogdiana and founded
a new Samarkandian dynasty. Later,
by the end of the fourth century and,
especially, in the fifth century, the
population of the country rapidly in-
creased. In the fifth century, new
urban centers such as Panjikent were
built, which included both citadels and
cities proper laid out in a regular plan.
The city walls dating from that period
were tall with frequent towers and
many loopholes. They looked impres-
sive, but were ill suited for military
defense. The Hellenic (Bactrian) tra-
dition survived in the architecture of
temples in Panjikent and Jar-tepe (be-
tween Panjikent and Samarkand). Be-
inning in the third century BCE,
stamped terracotta statuettes ap-
ppeared, specifically those depicting a
seated Hellenic goddess. In the first
centuries CE, largely female votive
figurines became widespread. Terracotta icons depicting a god or god-
dess in a temple niche were typical in
Samarkandian Sogd in the sixth cen-
tury. Right up to the fifth century,
Sogdian coins imitated Hellenic types.
In the fifth century and especially in
the sixth century, Sassanian silver
coins began to circulate in Sogdiana.
Local imitations of Sassanian drachmas
also date from the same period.

In general the fifth century marked a
number of important changes. A Zor-
orastrian House of Fire was added to
one of the two temples in Panjikent.
An altar with the perpetual fire ap-
ppeared as well in the fifth century in
a temple in Er-kurgan. This is also the
period when the first vaulted, surface
burial chambers were constructed in
Panjikent to hold the ossuaries in which,
according to Zoroastrian custom, the
bones of the deceased were collected.
Such chambers and ossuaries were
common in Samarkandian and
Bukharan Sogdiana in the sixth and on
down to the eighth century.

Growing prosperity in Sogdiana resulted
in the emergence of a new type of
dwellings for aristocrats in the seventh
and the eighth centuries. These dwell-
ings were divided into three parts: liv-
ing quarters, quarters for the domestic
economy, and ceremonial public rooms.
The ceremonial halls were decorated
with wall paintings and wooden reliefs
and statues. Houses of the elite in
Samarkand and Panjikent were similar
to the palaces of the Sogdian rulers at
Varakhsha and Panjikent, albeit smaller
in size, and the homes of the wealthy
urban residents resembled those of the
aristocrats. Standards of living among
ordinary citizens improved as well.
Professional builders constructed two-story
houses with complex vaulting both for
nobility and ordinary inhabitants.
In the seventh and first half of the eighth
centuries the bronze coins minted in
Samarkand, Panjikent and other cen-
ters had square holes in the center (imi-
tating Chinese designs) so that they
could be strung on cords. The abun-
dance of these coins is an indication of
the growth of retail trade in these cit-
ies.

The pottery of the third to the sixth cen-
turies speaks to emergence of local
schools that developed distinct forms
(at Tali Barzu near Samarkand [layers
1 to 4, G. V. Grigoriev’s excavation];
earlier layers of Panjikent). In the sev-
enth century, a new style of pottery,
imitating the designs on silver dishes,
emerged in new pottery centers such
as Kafyr-kala near Samarkand (G. V.
Grigoriev’s excavation). This develop-
ment reflects urban dwellers‘ attempts
to affect the lifestyle of wealthier coun-
terparts. In the periphery, however,
especially in mountain regions, pottery
was still hand-modeled and burnt in a
fire rather than being made with a
potter’s wheel and fired in a furnace.
Urban citizens used hand-modeled pot-
tery as well, including dishes for meal
preparation. Many artisan shops, in-
cluding those whose masters worked
with metal, were found in Sogdian cit-
ties such as Panjikent.
The houses of peasants who lived in the mountains were different from urban dwellings, resembling the houses of Mountain Tajiks in the twentieth century. In the plain, and especially in proximity to cities, there were houses which more or less corresponded to urban norms. The architecture of fortified residences was similar to that of the houses of wealthy citizens.

In the Sogdian decorative arts images of the gods were formed under the Greek influence, to which were added Iranian elements in the fifth century and, in the sixth century, Indian elements. Secular narrative painting was used to illustrate literature of different genres, such as epics, fairy-tales and fables that used local, Iranian, Indian, and Greek plots. Feasts and other celebrations, and equestrian hunts were favorite themes in this painting. Occasionally, artists utilized events of recent history. The mature Sogdian style of the seventh and the eighth centuries was dynamic, and featured a bright and harmonious palette. Among the mineral pigments ochre predominated, and Badakhshani ultramarine was used for the backgrounds.

In the eighth century after several military actions the Arabs conquered Sogdiana, which became one of the richest parts of the Caliphate. However, economic prosperity was combined with cultural assimilation. In the second half of the eighth and the ninth centuries, urban citizens adopted Islam. Simultaneously Persian (Tajik) language replaced Sogdian, although for a long time afterwards inhabitants of rural areas continued to speak Sogdian.

The Uzbek-French expedition [Frantz Grenet, Ivanitskii, Iurii Karev] discovered in Samarkand two palaces of Arab vicegerents dated to the 740s or 750s. Their architecture is not Sogdian. Under the Arabs, local principalities gradually lost autonomy, and noblemen and wealthy merchants abandoned small towns such as Panjikent. However, it was a time of the rapid growth of large cities, such as Samarkand and Bukhara, which then became administrative centers. In the ninth century, Sogdiana lost its ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, although many elements of Sogdian material culture are found in materials dating from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. This is why, starting with the ninth century, it is impossible to speak of Sogdian culture on the territory of Sogdiana itself at the same time that it survived until the eleventh century among Sogdian immigrants who resettled in eastern Central Asia and China.

### About the Author

Dr. Boris Il'ich Marshak has headed the Central Asian and Caucasian Section of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg since 1978, the same year in which he assumed direction of the archaeological excavation at the important Sogdian town of Panjikent (Tajikistan) where he had been working since 1954. The leading expert on the archaeology and art history of Sogdiana, he is a fellow of many international learned societies and has lectured widely around the world. His books include *Sogdian Silver* (in Russian) (Moscow, 1971) and most recently *Legends, Tales, and Fables in the Art of Sogdiana* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2002).

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(For additional references, see the annotated bibliography by Frantz Grenet in this Newsletter. There is some overlap between the two listings, but the editor felt it important to reproduce Dr. Marshak's selection in its entirety.)


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