

# SOME NOTES ON SOGDIAN COSTUME IN EARLY TANG CHINA

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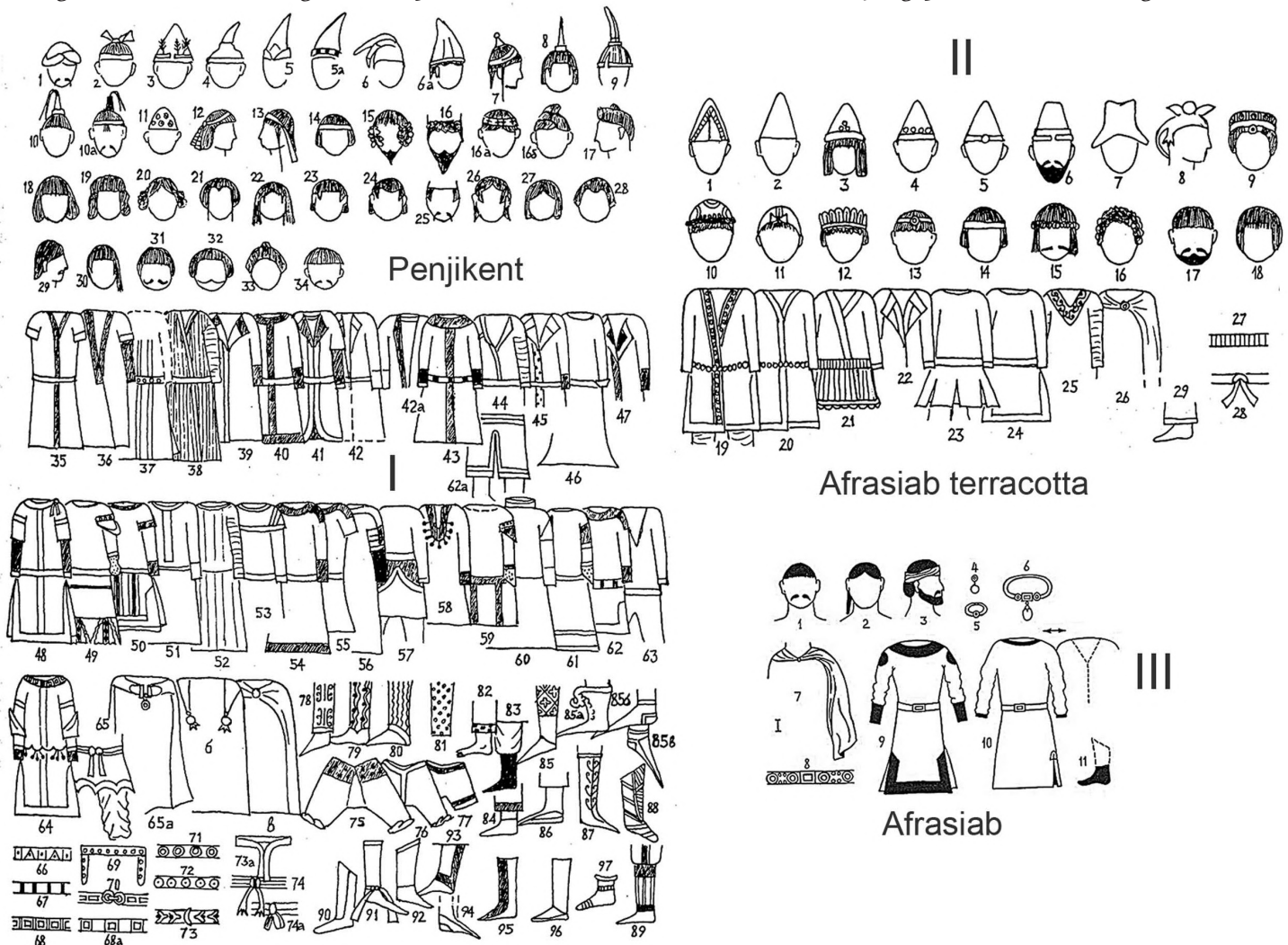
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The significant cultural role of the Sogdians in China in the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE is well known. Indeed, it even is exaggerated in some current scholarship. Despite long years of studying Sogdians in China through their various artistic representations, currently almost any foreigner from Central Asia is considered to be a Sogdian but without careful analysis of supporting evidence. Furthermore, such an important marker of ethnic identity and cultural contacts as traditional costume is not always accurately discussed.

To date, the costume of Sogdians of the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE has been well studied for their homeland in the regions of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Panjikent. Beginning in 1995, over the course of more

than a decade I have systematically analyzed it for that period and as well for the earlier period of 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century CE Sogdia (Yatsenko 2006b: 197-201; Figs. 151-153) in the comparative context of the costume of neighboring peoples (Yatsenko 2004, 2006a, 2006b: 296-98, 321, 330-31, 337, 344, 350, 361-62; Figs. 180-188) [Fig. 1]. It seems to me that only the systematic examination of costume through hundreds of micro-elements of silhouette and décor and with reference to the function of costume (inter alia, in ritual) in conjunction with the entire known complex of such micro-elements among neighboring peoples can lead to correct conclusions and can hope to elucidate the ethno-cultural specifics of the costume array of each peo-

Fig. 1. Male costume of Sogdia in the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Source: Yatsenko 2004, Fig. 3; Yatsenko 2006b, Figs. 180-181.



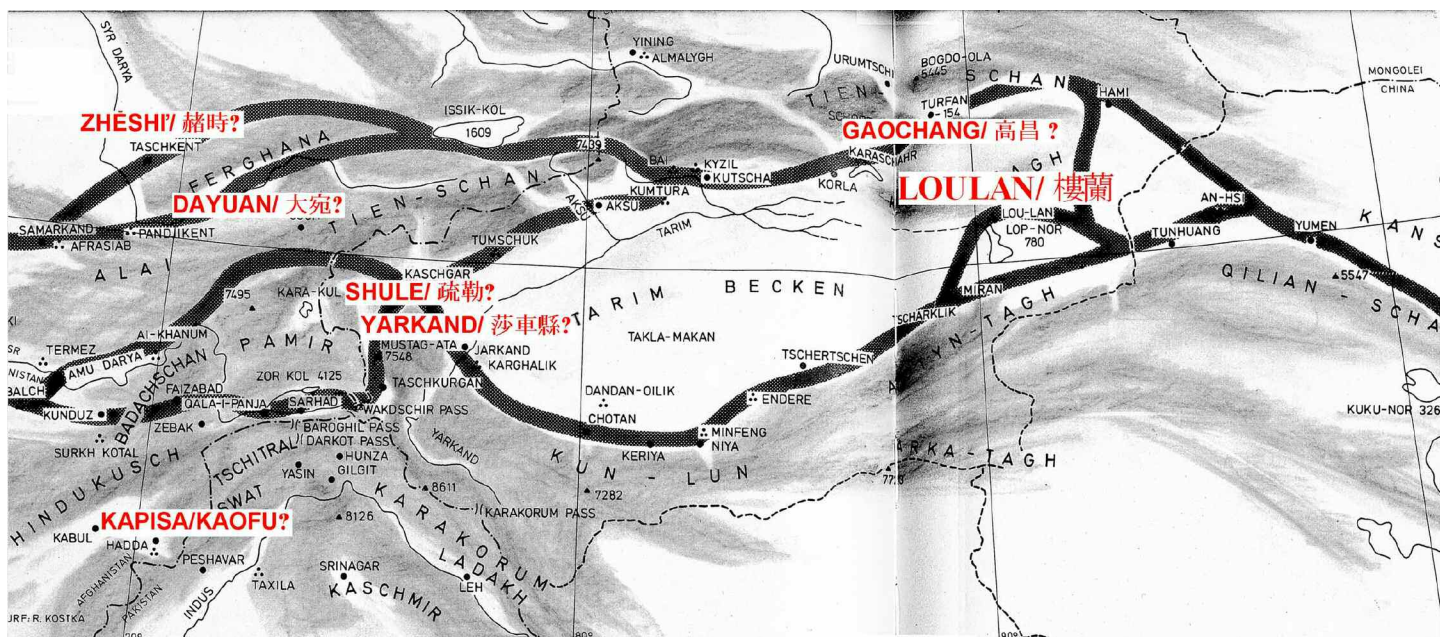


Fig. 2. Map showing the location of peoples active in the Silk Road in the 6th-8th centuries whose costume still has not been studied.

ple. The conclusions of authors who have saved time and effort by studying Sogdian costume through some selected examples of depictions, without analyzing thoroughly what is known about their inter-relationship and without detailed comparison with the attire of neighboring peoples, now appear to be problematic (Bentovich 1980; Naymark 1992; Kidd 2002).

The iconography of reliable and *probable* depictions of Sogdians in China has been examined over the last two decades in many important publications (see esp. Lerner 2003, Rong 2005, Kegeyama 2005, Sun 2014, and Cheng 2016). There also are a number of detailed multi-colored, well preserved depictions, especially those on the mortuary bed of An Jia (An Qie), who died in 579 (Shaanxi 2003), and in a series of *mingqi* 冥器 burial figurines (see, e.g., Valenstein 2014; Yatsenko 2012, 2017, 2018). However, the costume of Sogdians in China long was of little interest to me (Yatsenko 2006b: 245-47).

Eleven years ago in 2008, Professor Michael Sanders from California wrote me requesting that I assist in determining the ethnic attribution of individuals in mortuary Chinese figurines (*mingqi*) from his collection. Initially, I was not optimistic that this was possible. Substantially earlier I had had occasion to read older American and Italian exhibition catalogs (Mahler 1959, Schloss 1969), in which the determination of specific ethnic charac-

teristics of the costume of foreigners was boldly asserted and with a considerable amount of fantasy, devoid of attention to the actual attire of people. Fortunately, curiosity prevailed, and I am still now the victim of the task which Michael set for me. There are many objective difficulties in studying the costume of Central Asian foreigners in Early Tang art. While we know from written sources precisely which peoples actively participated in trade and in leisure activities in China back then, unfortunately, the costume of many important peoples among them is very poorly studied or is even entirely unknown for their homelands [Fig. 2]. So there is good reason for me to be uncomfortable while attempting the correct identification of a number of representations.

### Sogdian Costumes on *mingqi* Burial Terracotta

As I have observed in a previous study, it is clear that most male “western barbarians” depicted in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries are *ethnic Sogdians*. Significantly less frequent are men from Tocharistan and Early Turks (Yatsenko 2009: Figs. 17, 20-24), and only in isolated instances, from the Chach, Khotan, and Kucha oases (Yatsenko 201: 111, n. 4; 2017: 183-84). The appearance and attributes of Sogdians in *mingqi* often correspond to the stereotypes held by the majority of Chinese about the mentalité and professional occupations of this people, views in part influenced by Confucian be-





Fig. 3. The elements of male aristocratic costume depicted in Sogdians mortuary beds in China. Source: Fig 3.1 (Grenet & Riboud 2007, Fig. 3), Figs. 3.2, 3.3, 3.5 (Shaanxi 2003, Figs. 183, 185, 191, 193-195), Fig. 3.4 (Sun 2014, Fig. 1-16).

lief (Yatsenko 2010: 101 and figs. 13-14; 2017: 177-178). These *mingqi* depict only males from among the inhabitants of Central Asia.

It has been possible to identify only some of the images by analysis of their stylization, the frequent depiction of everyday or work clothes without bright decorative elements, or the foreigners' borrowings of Chinese elements such as *putou* 幞頭 headwear (caftans wrapped over from left to right in Chinese fashion). This is not surprising, since in China it was common to depict ordinary merchants, musicians, dancers, or servants.

Very few representatives of the Sogdian aristocracy made it into China, and the status-defining elements of their costume (specific headwear, furs, the exten-

sion of the right sleeve below the hand when resting) were depicted at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, prior to the start of the Tang Dynasty [Fig. 3]. Frequently the *mingqi* figurines lack national headwear and depict only simple forms of clothing which were widespread in several neighboring regions. This makes it impossible to identify which of the two most popular neighboring and similarly garbed groups of Central Asian oasis inhabitants (Sogdians or the various peoples of Tocharistan) are shown in these images (Yatsenko 2017: 179, 183) [Fig. 4.I]. In other cases, identification is hindered by rare types of headwear, which cannot today be connected with any of the peo-



Fig. 4. Terracotta *mingqi* depicting "western barbarians" with uncertain ethnic identification. Fig 4.I depicts Sogdians or Tocharistan peoples (with *putou* headwear); Fig. 4.II shows them with unique headwear. Source: Yatsenko 2017.





Fig. 5. Sogdian costume on mingqi. Fig. 5.1: a caftan with the left lapel; Fig. 5.2: a caftan with short sleeves; Fig. 5.3: a textile belt. Source: Yatsenko 2017.

ples of Central Asia [Fig. 4.II]. However, one should not underestimate the attention and effort to achieve precision on the part of Chinese potters. For example, the caftans and shirts of Sogdians more often than not are red, less frequently yellow, and the high boots are white or black, as was the case in the Sogdian homeland. Even in these details the Chinese craftsmen were very precise (Yatsenko 2017: 187).

My work with a series of Chinese *mingqi* has enabled me now to delineate eight elements of costume [Figs. 5, 6] which can confidently be connected with ethnic Sogdians, since they are known in depictions of the local inhabitants of

Sogdia and are unattested in neighboring regions (Yatsenko 2017: 180–82, Figs. 3–7, 9; 2018: 37–39). They are as follows:

1. A caftan with a single left lapel [Figs. 1.I.44; 5.1].
2. A caftan with short sleeves and a shirt with long sleeves [Figs. 1.I.35–36, 48; 5.2].
3. A decorated textile belt which is unknown in Tocharistan [Figs. 1.I.73a–74a, II.28; 5.2].
4. Headwear in the shape of a high cone (its lower edge is sometimes folded up for comfort) [Figs. 1.I.5a, 6a; 1.II.2; 6.4].

5–6. Head coverings similar to military helmets or imitating them (they are worn by unarmed individuals in peaceful situations); on the crown of one is a vertical spike [Figs. 1.I.7–9; 6.2–3].

7. A simple head sweat band for youthful caravaneers employed in physical labor [Figs. 1.I.14, 16a; 1.II.14; 6.4].

8. A short hairdo of youths with two spherical knots at the temples [Figs. 1.I.20; 6.5].

No less interesting for the identification of Chinese Sogdians are other observations. For men who have one to three clearly delineated ethnic Sogdian elements of costume, there are also six specific ele-

Fig. 6. Sogdian costume on mingqi. Fig. 6.1: a high conical hat; Figs. 6.2 and 6.3: headwear imitating a helmet; Fig. 6.4: headband on a boy; Fig. 6.5: a boy's hairstyle with two spherical projections on the sides. Source: Yatsenko 2017.







Fig. 7. Costume details of Sogdians in China that are unknown in Sogdia. Fig. 7.1: a short winter caftan made of sheepskin; Fig. 7.2: costume of a probable ritual actor; Fig. 7.3: a kitchen apron on a young male; Fig. 7.4: long leggings for riding; Fig. 7.5: a headdress with specific décor; Fig. 7.6: a cylinder-shaped cap. Source: Yatsenko 2017.

ments unknown in Sogdia [Fig. 7]. For whatever reason, in official Sogdian art either it was not customary to depict them (e.g., attire for cold weather, travel, kitchen work, etc.), or they are characteristic precisely for those Sogdians who settled in China. These six elements are:

1. A sheepskin jacket suited for caravaneers in cold weather [Fig. 7.1].
2. A very interesting long shirt with sleeves that widen at the bottom. Worn together with it is a specific headdress with a mask (which leaves only the eyes visible) [Fig. 7.2]. There is no reason to think that this individual, which is held in the Museum of Oriental Art in Turin, is a priest. Such clothes and headwear are unknown in Zoroastrian Iran or in Mazdean Sogdia, Khorezm, Ferghana, and Chach. Possibly this is the depiction of an actor engaged in some kind

of ritual performance (Yatsenko 2017: 187).

3. Kitchen aprons for youths [Fig. 7.3].

4. Long leggings for travel and dirty work, tied to the belt [Fig. 7.4]. They were widespread in Central Asia until recent times, but to depict them in the official art of their countries was in earlier times not acceptable.

5. A headdress with specific décor, in several instances depicted only on wine traders (in Tang China they almost always are attired in Sogdian dress) (Yatsenko 2017: 184) [Fig. 7.5].

6. A cap shaped like a cylinder narrowed at the top [Fig. 7.6], often depicted on the heads of Sogdian aristocrats in China (Yatsenko 2012, Figs. 7.1, 8.3, 10.2-3; 2017, Fig. 10). It is rare on the *mingqi* but known on figurines of the musicians [Fig. 3.1, 5]. While not found in Sogdia, it was used in Buddhist Chaganian, the neighboring part of Tocharistan (Yatsenko 2006b: Fig. 195.3).

This comfortable head covering could have been borrowed by the Sogdians in China from the merchants of northern Tocharistan, who lived there as well.

## Sogdian Costumes on Chinese Wall Paintings

In contrast to the *mingqi*, on murals reliable depictions of ethnic Sogdians in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries are very rare. Only some male individuals—merchants—can confidently be included in that group. The most interesting are the caravaneers who lead camels. One of them (Cheng 2016: 96, Fig. 2-20) [Fig. 8.1] has three specific elements of the costume of Sogdia: the high conical headdress, a caftan with the left lapel, and shoes with very long leggings [Fig. 1.1.85]. In another analogous scene (Cheng 2016: 115, Fig. 2-43) [Fig. 8.2] we see the first two of these elements. For the isolated figure of a seated man (Cheng 2016: 92, Fig. 2-14) [Fig.



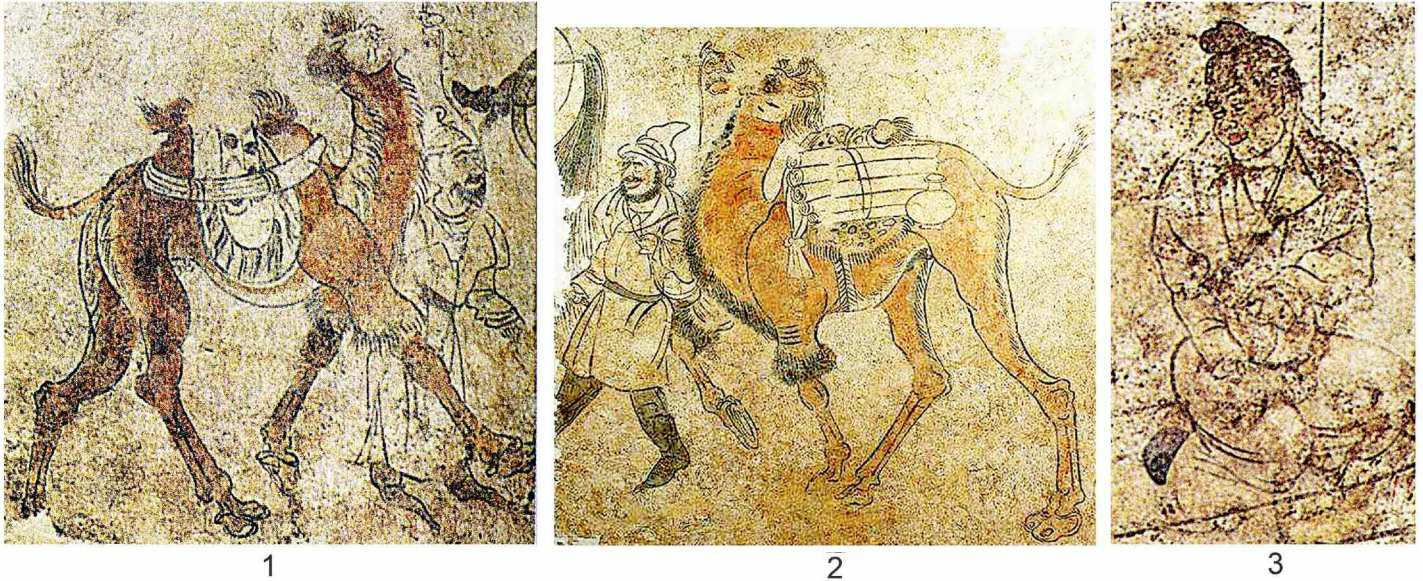


Fig. 8. Individuals wearing Sogdian costume in murals. Source: Cheng 2016, Figs. 2-14, 2-20, 2-43.

8.3], a caftan with the left lapel was sufficient for his ethnic identification (although his appearance is Sinicized—he wears a *putou* and his caftan is fastened on the right).

### Sogdians in Stone Sculpture in Chang'an

It is just as rare to find authentic Sogdians in their ethnic costume among such artifacts. On a funeral statue (Sun 2014: 84, Fig. 1-48) [Fig. 9.1] the caftan of a servant is fastened up to the top. But were we to unbutton it, we would undoubtedly have a left lapel. A cap like the one he wears also sometimes is encountered among ordinary individuals in Sogdia [Fig. 1.1.11].

Another artefact is a lantern pillar for a Buddhist monastery donated by 66 individuals from the Palace Music School (741 CE) now

in the Beilin Museum (Ge 2017, Figs. 1-2, 24-27). On its upper part are images of four musicians. The costume of three of them has no concrete ethnic attribution (although it is clear that all are “western barbarians”). But the ethnic identity of one musician with a *sheng* [Fig. 9.2] is emphasized by a very specific headdress with a projection at the

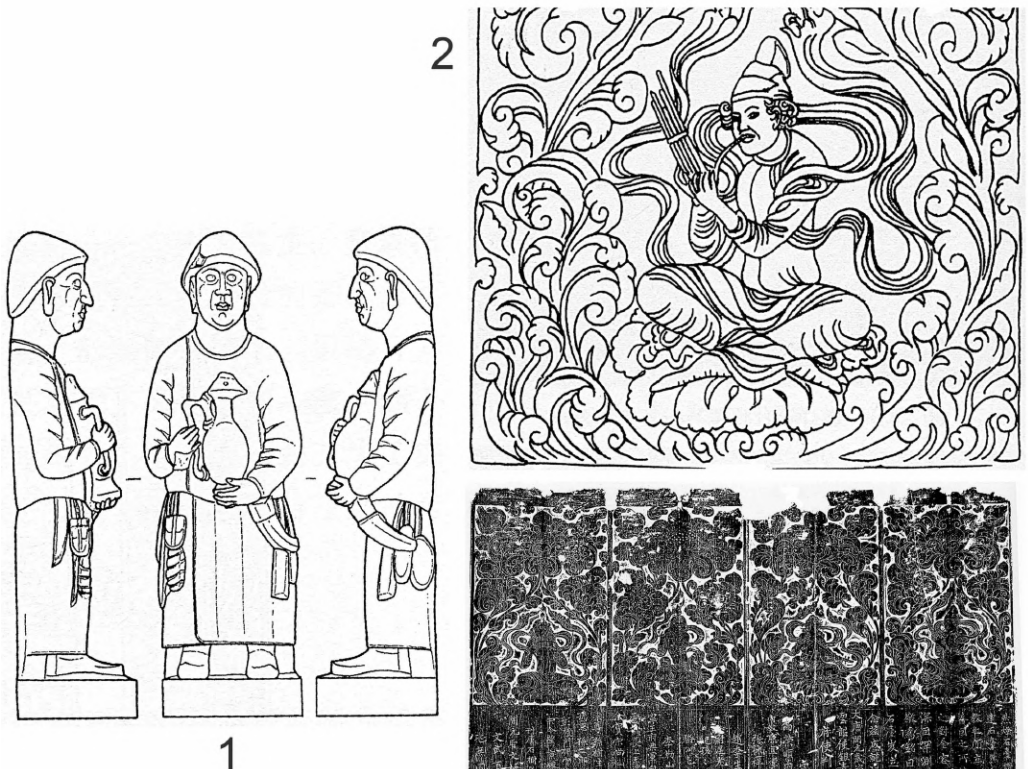


Fig. 9. Sogdians depicted on stone artifacts from Chang'an. Source: Fig. 9.1 (Sun 2014: 84, Fig. 1-48), Fig. 9.2 (Ge 2017, Figs. 1-2, 24-27).



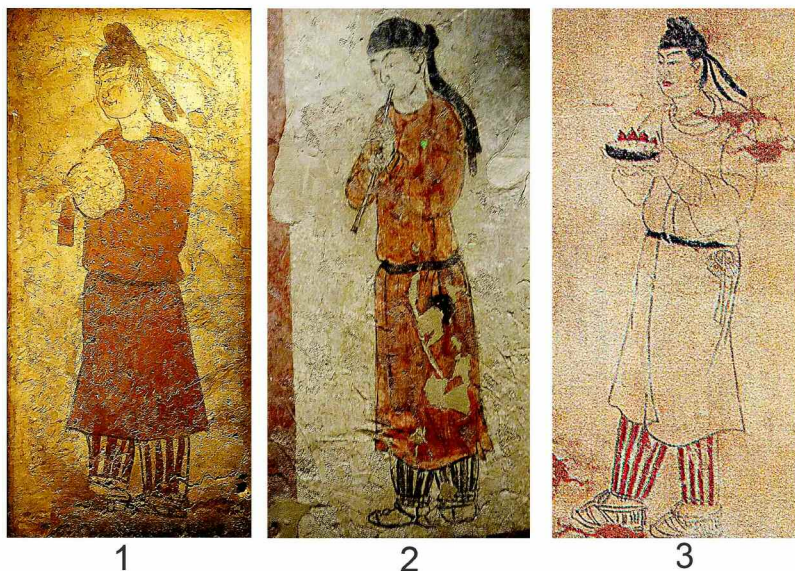


Fig. 10. Sogdian influence on the décor of Han servants' trousers. Source: Fig. 10.1, 10.2 (author photos, Shaanxi Historical Museum), Fig. 10.3 (Cheng 2016, Fig. 2-101).

top, through which a narrow braid has been threaded. This headwear is known and often depicted only in Sogdia [Fig. 1.I.10-10a].

### Sogdian Influence on Han Costume?

Unlike the costume of the early Turks (Yatsenko 2009), the costume of Sogdians exerted little influence on the Han peoples, even in the capital, where the infatuation with foreign fashion at the time was very noticeable. Mostly we see only reverse influence. But there is an exception to that rule, all instances of which date to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This is in the trousers of Han servants (men and women), which exhibit a series of thin vertical stripes (most frequently red). They are known in the tomb murals of two sons of Tang Emperor Gaozong (649-683), who died in 674 and 684, respectively [Fig. 10.1-2]. They are depicted also on other wall paintings of that time (Cheng 2016: 184, Fig. 2-101) [Fig. 10.3]. Such decoration of trousers is well known in Sogdia [Fig. 1.I.79-80].

### Conclusions

Which types of art works are the more representative and reliable sources of information on the costume and appearance of Chinese Sogdians? At first glance, the wall painting of the graves of the capital elite (often created by well-known artists, who employed a varied color palette, a wide range of poses, usually depicted concrete individuals, etc.) is deemed to have the greatest value. In contrast, the *mingqi* terracottas are less varied in iconography, replicated standard types, and have a smaller

range of colorants and glazes. In fact, though, we observe just the opposite. It is the *mingqi* which more fully and precisely capture the external appearance and costume of ordinary Sogdians.

One can confidently establish a series of elements of costume which are markers of the Sogdians. Several such elements were unknown in Sogdia, but unquestionably were worn by Sogdians in China. Most often it sufficed for the potter or painter to depict one specific element of Sogdian costume (detail of the caftan, specific type of headwear or hairstyle) in order that the patron and observers could establish the ethnic identity. Something similar occurs with representatives of contemporary diasporas in many countries. The influence of Sogdian costume on the Han people is almost entirely undetectable. On the other hand, Sogdians in China were influenced by the costume of the Han, the Early Turks, and to some extent the peoples of Tocharistan.

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