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Women in Sogdian Para-Documents

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Abstract: A glorious past is what our women in East have experienced which is the path that leads to their power and dignity. Therefore we are concerned with the following questions regarding the Sogdian society: how was the women's participation along the Silk Road, how the remained documents emphasize the importance of their presence and the important question about their identity, when and how they became powerful. Khatun-e Bukhara indicates the high potential of the women's existence in Sogdian era. In order to illuminate women's participation, strong motivation to draw the attention and authority, a link to this particular historic situation and a new grasp of women's lifestyle at that era is essential. This article is an attempt to introduce the women's role in Sogdian land through language, Culture and different social groups.

Keywords: *Sogdiana, Sogdian, Silk Road, Sogdian Women, written Sogdian documents.*

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Introduction

Sogdiana/Sogdia (OP. Suguda-) was a province of the Achaemenid Empire and mentioned in the list of the Behistun(Bisotun) Inscription (belonging to Darius the Great). The land Sogdiana is considered as the second after Airyana Vaeja (land of Aryans) which indicates the importance of the Sogdiana. Sogdiana was located in the north of Bactria, east of Khwarazm, in the south-east of Kangiu(between Amu Darya and Syr Darya).Though the Sogdian states were never politically united, their major central city was Samarkand(Afrāsiāb). The land is now a part of modern Uzbekistan and a province of modern Tajikistan. Sogdians were great traders and played a major role in the trade between China and Central Asia, along the famous Silk Roads (which was an economic and cultural exchange polar across Eurasia) as late as the 10th Century AD. Commerce was very important for Sogdians and they were great merchants. When a child was born, they used to put honey in their mouth and glue in their hands, so that they would speak sweet in future and money would stick in their hands just like glue. Therefore, their language became the lingua franca of trade and they occupied a territory along the ancient Silk Road. The Sogdians spoke a Middle Eastern Iranian language called Sogdian and the language was written in a variety of scripts (derived from the Aramaic Alphabet which was used) and each belonged to one religion (Buddhist, Christian and Manichean).

The existence of these religious manuscripts to the Sogdian language proves the fact that the Sogdians transported not only goods; but also transferred significant cultural thoughts and beliefs with elements of tradition, rituals and literary documents reflected in the Tales and stories of China, Iran and India. So Pelliot (the famous French Scientist in Chinese culture) assumes that Sogdian language was a lingua franca for cultural conceptions due to Christian, Buddhist and Manichean religions. It is said that Sogdians have also translated religious texts, specially Buddhist Sutras to Chinese. They had a key role in spreading religions and aspects of culture along the Silk Road. Sogdian language was replaced by Persian and Turkish. Yaghnabi is the only live document that is left from Sogdian, which is a Sogdian dialect spoken in the Sughd province of Tajikistan (in Zarafshan district).

Research Method

The present study was conducted by applying a bibliographic research Method. The main aim is to establish a literature review in order to have a clear insight of the written sources about women's analyzes of the para-documents. Archeological evidence form the ancient Sogdiana are also analyzed within this framework.

References from the Sogdian Culture and Language

The written Sogdian documents are divided based on subject to two major parts:

1. Religious documents which are mostly found along the Silk Road in Turfan and in Tunhuang (Caves of a 1000 Buddhas) can be described from three perspectives :

a) Buddhist Sogdian Texts are translated from Chinese to Sogdian and are complete texts or fragments such as: Sutras, Jatakas, and Prajnaparmitas texts. The longest known text in Buddhist Sogdian language is Vessantra Jataka, which has a more literary developed style than other texts, and is considered to have been written originally in Sogdian, or rewritten of a Sogdian tale rather than being a translation.

b) Manichean Sogdian Texts are written in Manichean script or Sogdian-Uyghur script. These Texts are translated from Middle Persian and Parthian into Sogdian language. The major documents are held in Berlin and called Turfan –Sammlung (Turfan-collection). No complete text has remained from this collection. The most important documents are Tobe-namehs (letter



of repentance), Tales and Parables, short or long Hymns, the history of Manichean Church, dictionaries and a list of the names of words and the nations, and the Gahshomari(Chronology).

c) Christian Sogdian texts are found in Nestorian Church in Bulayiq (North of Turfan) and mostly translated from Syriac to Sogdian. The missions immigrated in the era of Yazdgerd the 2nd (the Sassanid King, 438-457 AC) from Iran to Central Asia and translated their books from Syriac to Sogdian.

2. Non-religious documents are coins, inscriptions, scripts on silver tools, textiles, ceramics, and precious stones. There are also a number of other documents in different time and places which contain Sogdian language. The most important documents are as follow:

a) Coins: the oldest one belongs to 2nd century and the later one goes back to Qurk, the Samarghand's ruler (711-738).

b) Ancient letters: there are 9 letters written on the paper found in eastern Chinese Turkestan by the British discoverer and archeologist Marc Aurel Stein. The letters point to the events occurred in the early 4th century. These letters are from the aspect of linguistics, letters' corresponding and historical view very important.

c) More than 590 inscriptions found in North Pakistan (Karakorum Highway) belong to 4th century and contain numerous proper names.

d) Mountain-Mug documents: Letters, official letters, 74 economic and juristic documents written in Sogdian are found from the Dewashtij's Archive in Sogdiana around the Mountain of Mug (120 km east of Samarghand), belong to 8th century, and are written on paper, leather and pelt. These documents illustrate the economical, social and jurist situation of that era. They also indicate the proper names, titles and geographic names and places. They are all translated into Russian.

e) There are also a number of other inscriptions found in Kirghizia, Bugut, Karabalgasun, and Ladakh.

Orthography

All known Sogdian texts (except one piece in Brahmi's script) are written in three scripts: Sogdian, Sogdian-Uyghurian, Manichean and Syrian (or Christian Nestorian). Sogdian Manichean texts are written in Manichean, and Sogdian Christian texts are written in Syrian. Sogdian script is a kind of national script and is used in writing all texts (without considering the writer's religious view). Skjærvø(2003:1) recognizes the script in some of the ancient letters(early 4th century) found in the Chinese Great Wall and in the inscriptions located in the North of Pakistan as an Aramaic ancient Sogdian script.

Ideogram

Sogdian script derivates from Royal Achameniden script and the latter is also a derivation of Aramaic script. Thus a number of Aramaic words come to Sogdian with their own writing but with Sogdian alphabets and Sogdian pronunciations. These words are called ideogram and are transliterations in Sogdian manuscripts, for example CWRH means 'self, body' and is pronounced 'yrīw' in Sogdian.

Historical writing/spelling

The Sogdian texts have due their long period of writing, lots of words with historical spelling. There is no evidence of this writing in Manichean and Syriac, for example: 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏 'King' is a derivation of Old Persian *xšāyaθya-, Sogdian 'xš'y' δ, Manichean xšyδ. All of the three Sogdian



Orthographies are indeed derivations of Aramaic Script. They have a lot in common; for example, they are written from right to left and write consonants, but the transliteration system is different. Sogdian alphabet has 22 letters.

Sogdian Women

As worthy cultural documents, old written texts reflect the political, economical and social stance of women in the Sogdian community. This is an attempt to indicate the Sogdian women's place in Sogdiana through the existing documents (texts, manuscripts, fragments and Para-documents, paintings and carvings, cliff wall-scripts and archeological remains). The Turkish and Chinese cultural influences on Sogdians should also be considered. The social position of women is therefore settled as follows:

- 1- Royal women (the noble class)
- 2- Female priests
- 3- Slaves/workers
- 4- Dancers
- 5- Common people

The Noble Class

In more than 15 Manichean and Christian Sogdian texts such as 'Ancient letters', 'Sogdian Tales', Vessantra Jātaka the word: δβ'mpn appears. This word comes from the Middle Persian with the possible pronunciation of δβāmban or δβāmman, and is one of the royal titles. The word is found in Buddhist- Sogdian and other Sogdian texts written in Sutra (another name for the national and official Sogdian script) as: 'δβ'npn(wh), δβ'mpn(w) and δβ'npn and δβ'mb(') n and in Christian -Sogdian texts as: db'mn and b'mn and is derived from *δmām-ban (Av. dāmānō.paθnī- and means 'lady, wife, Queen and King's wife' (Banu, khanum, Shahbanu). This word is in the Middle Persian bāmbišn. Henning (1940, 17, 8b) assumes the word is a loanword in Sogdian, which is derived from Middle Persian. Here are a few examples of different translations:

a) From Buddhist Sogdian

1. 'γw 'zrw' βγγ 'M γypδ δβ'npnwh pr'γw....

This Zurwan Bay (=God) is with his self Bānu (=his wife)(VJ. 910)

2....rty kδ ms ZK mrtym'k ZKw 'nyw γypδ δβ'npnwh 'pδ'ty tk'wysšt....(SCE, 408)

When a man looks at other's self Banu (another man's wife) with a dirty look....

b) Manichean Sogdian

1....c'n'kw γwβw MN δβ'mpnwh mwnw synw pty-γwš...(Tales, p. 483.4.)

When the King heard this from Banu (Queen)....

2....rtβ'n xwt'w zyšy ZKwy δβ'mpnyh z-'k'ncyh m't....(KG., pp. 578-9)

King Revān and his Queen (Bānu), daughter (= Shāhdox), mother.....

c) Christian Sogdian

1.xypt db'mn nyšqr'n c'n....(Sti., 4.8)

....self Bānu (=wife) out of....

2. xypt xw'r 't b'mn xcy....



Self sister and Bānu(=is his sister and wife).....

In an Uyghurian manuscript comes a word similar to Bānu as β'mβwšt (p'mpwšt):

1. γrβt γwt'wt ZYp'mpwštth 'ty γwt'yntn(TM 389 a, v 35 sq)

lots of Kings and... Shahbanus (=Queens) and King's wives

2.rty ZKn γ-rβt xwt'wt ZY p't'xšw'nt kt ZY ''z-tk'rt p'mpwštth ZY xwt'yntn wyspδr'y-t wystwy-rth kw δynh s'r...(KG., pp. 434-436)

And lots of Kings and rulers and Āzādān(=lords), Shahbānus(=Queens) and King's wives , Wīspuhrān(=Princes), Wīsduxtā(=Princesses), who are towards dīn(=religion).....

It is very amazing that we confront two female titles δβ'mpnwh(or p'mpwšt) and γ/xwt'yntn (Gharib, 1995, 4470) which might be wives (γ/xwβw), but there is another female title in Sogdian texts for King's wife which comes in some texts beside the other two titles as γ/x'ttwnh, for example:

rtyms ''n'nt' kδ ZNH γwt'yntn 'PZY γ'ttwnh ZY wysδγwth.....(TSP, 6, 165) and the Ananda , is Shahbānu(=Queen) and Khātun(=second wife of the King) and Wīsduxt(=Princess, King's daughter).....?

The above mentioned titles cannot be considered to possess the same worth and social class; because they can be used together. Usually δβ'mpn(wh)/p'mpwštth takes the first place, followed by γ/xwt'yntn in second place, and the third place goes to x/γ'ttwnh. The x/γ'ttwnh is a title which is stamped beside the King and Queen's image on some of the Sogdian coins.

Titles such as γ/xwt'yn, p'mpwšt/ δβ'mpn in Sogdian texts and especially the female title: wysδwyth or wystwyt (possibly means a Princess who has the right to rule after the King) and another title: z'k'nc(h) (means a Princess who is not going to rule the country after her father), emphasize the importance of women's social and political power. Women like Khatun-e Bukhara who ruled for 15 years, show the respect, and high potential for women's development in Sogdiana and Iranian culture. Before the advent of Islam in Central Asia, Khatun was the title for the Queen of Bukhara. The title was used prominently in the First Turkic Empire and in the subsequent Mongol Empire and is equivalent to Empress or Queen. Khatun had no political power, only a religious power and was considered as the Goddess of Fertility. There are two versions of the word Khatun recorded:

`Qatun` lady (Princess) and `xsatun` a wife of the noble man`.

Clauson (1972, p. 602) considers `Xa:tun` as borrowed from Sogdian xwat'yn (xwateen), in Sogdian xwat'y (landlord, sovereign) and xwat'yn (a landlord's or a sovereign's wife); it is the precise wife; it is the precise meaning of xat:un in the early period. There are a lot of river and mountain names reported which contain Khatun as a part of their names; such as, Qatun bula-y (river), Qatun ajula (mountain). Murzaev (1964, p.10) points to the widespread use of the word Khatun in Siberian place-names and comes to the conclusion that the second meaning of the word Khatun is a `river`.

Unfortunately the fragmental character of written sources and indefinite social distinction of many depicted personages in wall paintings do not allow us to single out the elements of clothes of different ranks of nobility. We can only summarize the information in general and single out the elements which belonged to the noble (Dihkans) and rich merchants. The clothes were made all over of patterned silk fabrics and decorated with lines of pearls with shoulder medallions, short mantles, fixed with heavy gold disks at the shoulders, female gala sleeved coat-breasts made of multi-colored expensive fabrics; not thrown-open garments of the 6th century with beveled short sleeves; dresses with edging flounces and male garments with Sas-



sanid hems having two side cuts; cross-shaped Kushanian pelerine; Turbans; hair-dos with curled hair; gold belts with insets of precious stones for men and sachets decorated with pearls for women; female shoes and stockings decorated with gold brocade and precious stones, male half length boots with long sharp toes. The Sogdian influence in China was still present in the 7th and 8th centuries especially in the capital cities such as Luoyang, and Changán. Aristocratic women in China wore clothes that reflected a western style.

Female Priests

The existence of special words for female priests equivalent to male words emphasizes the fact that women played a great role in the religious community between Sogdians and other ancient nations. This is reflected in the religious texts found from those eras in various Iranian languages, especially Sogdian. The prevalence of Sogdian to other middle Iranian languages is seized because in the Western Middle Iranian languages the gender (masculine, feminine and neuter) is disappeared but the nouns and adjectives and genders are kept in Sogdian (as an Middle Eastern Iranian language). Some of the words pointing to the female religious positions are selected from the texts.

a) Buddhist Sogdian

1. In some of Buddhist Sogdian texts is the word 'wp's'nch (Gharib 1995: 1916) with the possible pronunciation upāsānč and the meaning upāsīkā (pišnešin-bānu) with different orthography 'wβ's'nch (Gharib 1374: 1853) and wp's'nch (Gharib 1995: 10121). The male version of this word is 'wp's'k (Gharib 1995: 1915) and the possible pronunciation upāsē means upāsaka, pišnešin) with different orthographies. He/she follows Buddhism but doesn't leave the house. Their responsibility and duties is to believe 3 jewels of Buddhism (Buddha, Anjoman and the Aeen). They don't commit weapon trade, slavery, butchery, winery etc.

2. šmn'nch (Gharib 1995: 9289) with the possible pronunciation šamanānc means šamanbānu, Buddhist priest. She is a priest who achieves 4 arhatis class, after releasing herself from all dirt and impurities of this world in a form of giving herself sufferings and meditation. Buddha used to be a šaman and in Buddhist texts it is called `Gautama Śrāmaṇa), meaning Great Šaman. A Buddhist Sogdian text (TSP, 6.24) is pointing to 500 rules (ahkaam) due Šamanbānus(= female priests) with pronunciation šamanāncyā.

b) Manichean Sogdian

δyn'βr'nc (Gharib 1995: 3758) pronounced as δēnāβarānč, means dinawarbānu, elected Manichean female (zan gozideye manawi) and the word has two plural forms: δyn'βr'št and δyn''βr''št. The masculine form of this word is δēnāβar. They used to wear special white dresses and lived in Mānestān (or Church) and traveled as missionaries, by walking to the place. They had tough rules and were very dogmatic priests. They were famous putting stamps (or seals?) on their mouths, hands and emotions. They controlled all human feelings.

nywš'k'nc (Gharib 1995: 5937) pronounced as niyōšākānč means niyōšāg-bānu, and there is a version of nywš'qpt'nc pronounced niyōšāk-patānč which means the organizer of female niyōšāgān. They used to be ordinary Manicheans and had a normal life. They obeyed the Elected Manichean Class, and therefore they achieved peace for their own soul. They used to take part in Religious services and had to avoid killing animals. They wished to become elected in their other lives (after their Zadmord). They prayed 4 times a day (the elected 7 times a day), and fasted on Sundays (the elected on Mondays). They had a month fasting and after finishing the month they used to celebrate on Bema (the most holy day in Manichaeism).

c) Christian Sogdian

1. trs'q'nc (Gharib 1995: 9671) and the possible pronunciation tarsākānc means female Christian, tarsābānu and has different orthographies such as trs'q'nc and trs'k'nc, and means someone who fears god and is pointed to christens.

2. šyrqtc (Gharib 1995: 9437) with the possible pronunciation šir-kac or štrəkac means pious woman, holy woman with another orthography: šyrqc. The holy Maria is the greatest holy female. She is known in Christian Sogdian texts with two orthographies mrym and mry'mh.

Slaves/Workers

There were many inns in Turpan (a center of major commercial activity between Chinese and Sogdian merchants). Some provided sex workers with an opportunity to service the Silk Road merchants. The official histories report that there were markets for women at both Kucha and Khotan(→Xin Tangshu 221a:6230 & Susan Whitfield 1999, pp. 138-154). A Sogdian-language contract buried at the Astana graveyard demonstrates that at least one Chinese man bought a Sogdian girl in 639AD. Wu Chen (one of the archeologists who excavated the Astana site) contends that although many households along the Silk Road bought individual slaves, as we can see in the earlier documents from Niya, the Turpan documents point to a massive escalation in the volume of the slave trade. The few documented pairings of Chinese male owners with Sogdian girls raise the question that how often Sogdian and Chinese families intermarried. The historical record is largely silent on this topic, but Rong Xinjiang (2001, pp. 132-135) has found a total of 21 recorded marriages in the 17th century in which one partner was Sogdian, and in 18 cases, the spouse is also Sogdian. The only exceptions are very high ranking Sogdian officials who married Chinese wives. He concludes that most Sogdian men took Sogdian wives, and we may surmise that the pairings between Chinese men and Sogdian women were usually between a male master and a female slave.

Dancers

The Sogdians were avid dancers with a jest for life. They would have been a fun-loving and adventurous people if they were to travel and settle in communities far from their native land. They even danced in the courts of the Tang Dynasty (618-906 CE), and were sought after by royalty for their dancing skills. The Chinese sources describe Afrāsiāb (the ancient Samarkand) as being fertile and producing good horses, and dominant military. The people drank and liked to sing and dance in the streets. There is a bronze Sogdian dancer's figurine which is 14 cm high and belongs to 7th century. It is presently housed in the Shandan Municipal Museum (Gansu Province) in China. Shandon lies between Dunhuang and Lanzhou along the Silk Road, below the border of the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia. Shandon is also situated along the Great Wall of China.

The figure's long nose (though greatly exaggerated in the figurine) is quite noticeable. The large nose was a defining feature of Sogdians, and a large number of Aryans (the Parsees and Iranis of India); even today are distinguished by their large noses. The female-dancers often wore short dresses accompanied with trousers. The upper part of the trousers were of different colors. The most typical décor of plate decorated belts was a line of prolonged the rectangular rimed plates.

In a later period in Sogd, most of all, the clothes of professional female-dancers, musicians, acrobats connected with the wishes of noble spectators - to a significant degree- are presented. Long, widening down dresses having an attached breast part (female-musicians), Sassanid



dresses with a row of flounces along the edge of the hem, and high boots (female-dancers), quilted long sleeved coats for both sexes, tight shirts, of acrobats. A female-dancer on the ossuary from Akkurgan has a very long coat, fastened on the breast only and opening her body up to the level of genitalia.

Common People

The only reference to the common people is their costume. The influence of Sogdian costume spread through the routes of the Silk Road far to the West. The series of authentic images of Sogdians has been found in Chinese Tang terracotta figures. The depictions in wall paintings and terracotta statuettes are the main sources on Sogdian clothes of the 5th-8th century AD.

Thrown-open clothes were worn more often than non-thrown-open ones. Thrown-open clothing was often fastened only in the middle part (there was no belt), and sleeved coats were mostly thrown over shoulders. The similarity of many elements of clothes for men and young girls was typical of Sogdians. The color-range of the shoulder clothing were usually three-colored, dresses and trousers usually were of same shades of red or white.

Single common people in folklore scenes have the analogous silhouettes of clothes as nobles do, but they lack rich ornaments. Sometimes the isolated elements of the costume of the noble class of one of the ancient dynasties are documented for peasants in far urban centers of many centuries later. Common people wore such clothes as the ancient noble class used to wear, but the new generation of nobles would not wear those anymore; for them, these were regarded as old fashioned. The women coiled their hair, and covered their heads with a black scarf to which golden flowers were attached.

Conclusion

Although the Sogdian society and community is thought to be one of the male chauvinistic types; nevertheless, there are ample written or non-written works by women, from various social stances, in the inscriptions and documents, and all this somehow verifies and proves the active participation of women in the capitalist and materialistic Sogdian community, emphasizing the importance of their presence.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they agreed to participate in the present paper and there is no competing interests.

Abbreviations:

KG: Sundermann 1981

SCE: The Sutra of the Causes and Effects of Actions, MacKenzie 1970

Sti: Sogdische Texte, Mueller 1912

Tales: Sogdian Tales

TM: Gershevitch 1954

TSP: Benveniste 1940

VJ: Vessantra Jataka, Benveniste 1946



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