MONKS AND MERCHANTS
Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China
Gansu and Ningxia, 4th–7th Century

Annette L. Juliano
and
Judith A. Lerner

With essays by
Michael Alram, Chen Bingying,
Albert E. Dien, Luo Feng, Boris I. Marshak

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., with The Asia Society
8. Sogdian Ancient Letter II

Written by Nanaivandak in June/July c. 313 CE
Excavated 1907, at "TXII.a," a guard post on the Chinese frontier wall to the west of Dunhuang
Letter: ink on paper; inner wrapper: silk; outer envelope: ink on hemp (?)
Letter: 41.5 x 24 cm; cover: 14 x 9.5 cm
British Library, London, Stein Collection
Findmark TXII.a:2; signature Or. 8212/95 (letter); 8212/99.1 (outer envelope).
99.2 (outer wrapper), 99.3 (paper fragments formerly adhering to the envelope)

This document, never before publicly exhibited, is the most important of a group of letters excavated in 1907 by Sir Aurel Stein at the site "TXII.a" to the west of Dunhuang, a guard post on the wall guarding the western border of China. These documents are known as the Sogdian "Ancient Letters" because they are the earliest surviving texts written in Sogdian, a language of the Iranian family formerly spoken in Sogdiana, present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The "Ancient Letters" represent the contents of a mailbag lost in transit (perhaps confiscated by the Chinese authorities) from China to the west. Written by Sogdians in Xinjiang and Gansu and addressed to their compatriots in Sogdiana or Loulan, the letters provide a unique glimpse into the lives and activities of the Sogdian merchants. They refer to Sogdians resident in Luoyang, the Chinese capital city, and in some of the major staging posts on the route to China: Dunhuang (where the Sogdians may have had their own Zoroastrian temple), Suzhou (Jiuquan), Guzang (Wuwei), and Jincheng (Lanzhou) (see Map 2, p. 30). Apart from two letters sent by a woman abandoned in Dunhuang by her husband, the letters are chiefly concerned with commerce, naming many commodities including gold, silver, camphor, pepper, musk, wheat, various kinds of cloth (though surprisingly not silk), and perhaps white lead (a costly product, used both as a cosmetic and as a drug).

This particular letter was written by Nanaivandak, a Sogdian agent stationed in Gansu, perhaps in Jincheng, and addressed to his partners in Samarkand, the capital of Sogdiana, more than two thousand miles to the west. Possibly because of the distance it had to travel, the letter was protected by an inner wrapper of brown silk and an outer envelope of coarse fabric, the latter bearing instructions for the delivery of the letter. After a florid greeting (§1) naming both Varzakk and his father Nanaivandak, of whom is addressed individually in a later paragraph, Nanaivandak gives news of his associates in various Chinese cities (§2) together with a report on the deteriorating political situation in China. The momentous events described—a severe famine in Luoyang, the flight of the emperor, fighting between the Xiongnu (translated here as Huns) and the Chinese, and the sack of the cities of Ye (307 CE) and Luoyang (311 CE)—are also known from Chinese sources and make it possible to date the Ancient Letters to the years 313–314 CE.

The writer's interest in these events is of course centered on their commercial implications (§3) and their disastrous personal consequences for him and the other Sogdian merchants (§4). Since he considers himself to be "on the point of death," Nanaivandak asks his correspondents Varzakk (§5) and Nanaivandak (§6) to look after a large sum of money that he had left on deposit at home and to invest it on behalf of the "orphan" Takhshivandak, presumably his son. He also gives instructions (§7) for dividing the property of Takut, who may be his father. Finally (§8), a note written on the back of the letter gives a date according to the regnal years of an otherwise unknown ruler, perhaps a prince of Samarkand. The date probably corresponds to June or July 313 CE.

Fig. A. The outer envelope bearing written instructions for delivery of the letter to Samarkand. The British Library, London, Or. 8212/99.1 (photo courtesy of the British Library)
Translation:

(§1) To the noble lord Varzakk son of Nanaidhvar of the family Kanakk, 1,000 and 10,000 blessings and homage on bended knee, as is offered to the gods, sent by his servant Nanaivandak. And, sirs, it would be a good day for him who might see you happy and free from illness; and, when I hear news of your good health, I consider myself immortal!

(§2) And, sirs, Arrmatash in Juquan is safe and well and Arsach in Guzang is safe and well. And, sirs, it is three years since a Sogdian came from “inside” [i.e. from China]. I settled Ghatamash, and he is safe and well. He has gone to ... and now no one comes from there so that I might write to you about the Sogdians who went “inside,” how they fared and which countries they reached. And, sirs, the last emperor, so they say, fled from Luoyang because of the famine and fire was set to his palace and to the city, and the palace was burnt and the city [destroyed]. Luoyang is no more, Ye is no more! Moreover ... as far as Ye [these same Huns [who] yesterday were the emperor’s subjects! And, sirs, we do not know whether the remaining Chinese were able to expel the Huns [from] Changan, from China, or whether they took the country beyond. And [...] in there are a hundred freemen from Samarkand ... in ... there are forty men. And, sirs, [...] it is] three years since [... came] from “inside” ...

(§3) And from Dunhuang up to Jincheng ... to sell, linen cloth is going [=selling well!], and whoever has unmade cloth or woolen cloth ...

(§4) And, sirs, as for us, whoever dwells in the region from Jincheng up to Dunhuang, we only survive as long as the ... lives, and we are without family, old and on the point of death. If this were not so, I would not be ready to write to you about how we are. And, sirs, if I were to write to you everything about how China has fared, it would be beyond grief: there is no profit for you to gain from it. And, sirs, it is eight years since I sent Saghak and Farnaghat “inside” and it is three years since I received a reply from there. They were well ..., but now, since the last evil occurred, I do [not] receive a reply from there about how they have fared. Moreover, four years ago I sent another man named Artakhvandak. When the caravan left Guzang, Wakhushak ... was there, and when they reached Luoyang ... the Indians and the Sogdians there had all died of starvation. And I] sent Nayan to Dunhuang and he went “outside” [i.e. out of China] and entered Dunhuang, but now he has gone without permission from me, and he received a great retribution and was struck dead in the ...

(§5) Lord Varzakk, my greatest hope is in your lordship! Pesak son of Dhruwaspvandak holds ... staters of mine and he put it on deposit, not to be transferred, and you should hold it ... sealed from now on, so that without my permission ... Dhruwaspvandak ...

(§6) [Lord] Nanaidhvar, you should remind Varzakk that he should withdraw this deposit, and you should both count it, and if the latter is to hold it you should add the interest to the capital and put it in a transfer document, and you should give this too to Varzakk. And if you think it fit that the latter should not hold it, then you should take it and give it to someone else whom you do think fit, so that this money may increase. And, behold, there is a certain orphan ... and if he should live and reach adulthood, and he has no hope of anything other than this money, then, Nanaidhvar, when it is heard that Takut has departed to the gods, the gods and my father's soul will be a support to you, and when Takhisvandak is grown-up, give him a wife and do not send him away from you ... And when you need cash, then you should take 1,000 or 2,000 staters out of the money.

(§7) And Wanrazmuk sent to Dunhuang for me 32 vesicles of musk belonging to Tekut so that he might deliver them to you. When they are handed over you should make five shares, from which Takhisvandak should take three shares, and Pesak should take one share, and you should take one share.

(§8) This letter was written when it was the year 13 of Lord Chirthswan in the month Taghmich.

NS-W

THE SILK ROAD IN GANSU AND NINGXIA 49
The Merchant Empire of the Sogdians

Judith A. Lerner

Men of Sogdiana have gone wherever profit is to be found.

Xin Tangshu (New Tang History)

The impetus for the cross-cultural exchange that marks the period between the fourth and seventh century was mainly economic, facilitated by the activities of merchants and their caravans. Although Persians, Syrians, and Indians, among others, engaged in the trans-Asian trade, the main actors were the Sogdians, an Iranian people who inhabited the region of Transoxiana (in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) in Central Asia. This dry but fertile land incorporated the two great rivers of the Amu Darya (known to the Greeks as the Oxus and to the Arabs as the Jaxartes) and the Syr Darya (the Jaxartes, or the Sayhun). While the traditional center of Sughd was the region between these rivers, dominated by the city of Samarkand, Sogdiana was actually larger, defined by those areas where the Sogdian language was spoken. It extended west to the oasis cities of Bukhara and Paikend, not far from the Oxus, east to the Ferghana Valley, and northeast to Shash (present-day Tashkent, Uzbekistan) and beyond, to Semirechye (in present-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) in the foothills of the Tian Shan Mountains that mark the border with Xinjiang (Chinese East Turkestan).

Unlike the Sasanian Empire in neighboring Iran, with its centralized system of government, Sogdiana was a land composed of small city-states rather than a single polity. It functioned as a feudal society with an active and important mercantile class (see Chapter 7). Although Samarkand was its most important city, and at times dominated the area, the Sogdian city-states developed independently, with local princes sometimes owing allegiance to more powerful rulers. Perhaps as early as the fifth century, and certainly by 510, Sogdiana came under the domination of the Hephthalites, a nomadic people who had moved west from northwest China and, by the mid-fourth century, had penetrated into eastern Iran and northwest India, alternating between being allies and enemies of the Sasanians. In the middle of the sixth century, Sogdiana fell to the Turks, another nomadic group, who joined with the Sasanians to defeat the Hephthalites. Dividing the former Hephthalite lands with the Sasanians, the Turks established their empire (baghārastā) in the northern portion of Hephthalite rule, stretching from the Black Sea to the Chinese border and including Sogdiana. Throughout these vicissitudes, the Sogdian city-states, despite the initial ravages of conquest, appear to have thrived.
The basis of Sogdiana's economy was agriculture, relying on artificial irrigation from its major rivers. However, agriculture alone could not ensure Sogdiana's prosperity, and from at least the early centuries CE it relied on trade. With the Late Roman–Early Byzantine and Sasanian Empires to its west, the Russian steppes and Perm region to its north (the "Fur Road"), Bactria (present-day Afghanistan) and India to its south, and China to its east, Sogdiana was ideally located to establish the vast trade network that allowed its citizens to serve as the prime middlemen in the exchange of goods, as well as ideas, from one civilization to another. Thus, from at least the third century, Sogdian merchants were traveling regularly to and from the upper Indus River region (present-day Northern Pakistan), where they met their Indian counterparts arriving from Kashmir or from the lowlands of Gandhara. They traded textiles and other wares in the north Caucasus and, from the mid-sixth century, had direct trade relations with Constantinople. Sogdian trading activity to the east in Xinjiang and in China proper was well-established by the early fourth century CE, as attested by the so-called Ancient Letters, dating to 311 (no. 8), and by contemporary Chinese chronicles. The Sogdians’ overlords, whether Hephthalites or Turks, supported their mercantile activities by making the roads safe, as the successful trade established by the Sogdians also benefited them; even before Turkic rule, nomadic mercenaries protected the Sogdians’ caravans.

So dominant were merchants of Sogdian origin that the Sogdian language became the lingua franca of the Silk Road. The Khotanese applied the term stil (Sogdian) to any merchant, regardless of his ethnic origin. The Chinese viewed the Sogdians as a merchant race and told anecdotes to illustrate their sharpness:

Mothers give their infants sugar to eat and put paste on the palms of their hands in the hope that when they are grown, they will talk sweetly and that precious
objects will stick [to their hands]. These people are skillful merchants; when a boy reaches the age of five he is put to studying books; when he begins to understand them, he is sent to study commerce.

They excel at commerce and love profits; from the time a man is twenty, he goes to neighboring kingdoms; wherever one can make money, they have gone.5

Yet the Sogdians were not the only merchants who plied the Silk Road, despite their apparent control over it. Traders from other nations—Persia, Choresmia (the region northwest of Sogdiana), Syria (mainly from Palmyra), and India attached themselves to the Sogdian caravans.6 Of these nationalities, it would seem that the Persians, coming from one of the most powerful countries in the known world, would have been far more dominant.

Established in 224 CE, Sasanian Iran was a centralized state, ruled by a King of Kings, whose supreme authority was based upon his claim to divine descent and whose sovereignty was supported by Zoroastrian clergy (fig. 1). According to the Zoroastrian texts, Sasanian society was divided hierarchically by professions: priests, warriors (the nobility), scribes, peasants, and artisans. Merchants were ranked at the bottom of the “lower” professions, although commercial activity was regarded as a necessary and legitimate pursuit.7

Sasanian trade seems to have been in large part state-supported. Like its predecessor, the Parthian state, the Sasanian central government established a monopoly on those sections of the trade routes that passed through Iran, thereby preventing direct contacts between the Sogdian caravans and the trading centers of Byzantium in the West.8 After unsuccessful attempts to gain Sasanian permission to travel through Iran to sell silk directly to the west, the Sogdians appealed to their new overlords, the Turks, to enter into a trade agreement with Constantinople; the Turko-Sogdian embassy to Constantinople of 568 resulted in the opening of a new trade route across the Caucasus, avoiding Iran.9

Fig. 1. Investiture of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I (r. 224–241 CE) by the god Ahura Mazda, rock relief at Naqsh-i Rustam, Iran. The Sasanian King of Kings right to rule was divinely granted, here symbolized sculpturally by Ahura Mazda, on the right, handing Ardashir a diadem. (photo: Judith A. Lerner)
There is some dispute regarding the degree to which the Sasanians and Sogdians acted in concert or in competition in the Silk Road trade. That they were in competition is attested by the Sasanians' closing their territory to foreign caravans, but it seems that, until the middle of the sixth century, the Sogdians dominated the overland route across Central Asia, while the Sasanians' state-supported trading network developed the maritime route to the East (see Chapter 1). With the ascension of Khosro I (r. 531–579) to the Sasanian throne and his reassertion of a strong centralized rule, the Sasanians began to expand their influence in the overland China trade. The annexation of former Hephthalite territories gave the Persians a firm foothold in Central Asia, while successive diplomatic delegations to the Chinese court helped to establish and strengthen Persian influence, political, and, most likely, economic. While these missions began in the middle of the fifth century, evidence of direct Persian overland trade with China does not appear until late in Sasanian times and after. Not until the Tang period is there evidence of a number of Persians trading with and settling in China. This number increases, so that at the height of the Tang (prior to the rebellion of the general An Lushan in 755), Persian merchants and artisans were as active as Sogdians in China—however, these are no longer “Sasanian” Persians, but Persians now living under Arab rule. This absence of a direct Persian trade until relatively late in the Sasanian period may explain the paucity of actual Sasanian goods found in tombs in China contemporaneous with the period. With the exception of Sasanian coins (see Chapter 9 and nos. 93–95) and glassware found in pre-Tang Chinese tombs (no. 30), there is little that can be identified as purely “Sasanian” (an example is the ring from Li Xian's tomb, no. 32). Such metalwork as the silver hunting plate from the Northern Wei tomb of Feng Hetu (d. 504) is only Sasanian in appearance and was most likely made east of Iran; the silver wine cup from another Northern Wei tomb, that of Li Xizong (d. 540) and his wife, has Roman rather than Sasanian affiliations. Indeed, as the historian Shih Hsi-yen has observed, “[T]he well-established indicators of Sasanian silverwork are to be found among Chinese discoveries.” Only with the upswing in diplomacy between the Sasanian and Chinese courts does Sasanian art begin to impact on Chinese art, and then, not until the Tang period. It would seem that the Sasanian influences observed in Tang sumptuary and other arts—textiles (no. 110), ceramics (no. 111), and gilded bronzes (no. 119)—resulted from the gifts or “tribute” brought directly to the Chinese court by the Persian diplomatic mission rather than from the goods brought as items of trade.

The “exotic” objects buried with Chinese officials or found in hoards or temple deposits made their way along the Silk Road, not necessarily moving from their places of origin or manufacture directly to some ultimate destination, but traded from one town or entrepôt along the route to another. Thus, the silver platter, elaborately decorated with intertwined ivy and grape leaves and the image of Dionysus reclining on a feline (no. 115), was made somewhere in East Roman territory, exported to Bactria where it acquired its inscription, and then brought to Ganju; the ewer in Li Xian's tomb (no. 31) was fashioned in Bactria and transported to China, most likely intended for the market in the capital, Changan, but first was acquired by Li Xian as it passed through the border station of Dunhuang. Of course, the possibility should also be considered that the ewer was a royal gift to Li Xian from the founder of the Northern Zhou, Yuwen Tai or his son, the emperor Wudi, who spent part of his boyhood in Li Xian's home.
To move these goods, merchants in the Sogdian cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Shash contracted with caravans to transport them. No doubt the shipment was accompanied on the journey, for all or part of the way, by a deputy from the "home" office, but other Sogdians served as local agents or regional representatives for their masters in Sogdiana. Such an agent in 311 CE wrote home to his master in Samarkand about the Xiaoguo's destruction of the Chinese capital at Luoyang and told of the fate of some of his compatriots who were on trade missions in China (no. 8).

For the purposes of local trade and to ensure the continued movement of merchandise to its destination, Sogdians founded a string of settlements along the Silk Road: from the western part of the trade route in Xinjiang, such as at Gaochang and Toyok (in the Tufan area) and Hami on the northern route and at Khotan on the southern,20 into China proper and the oasis cities of Gansu (such as Dunhuang and Wuwei), in the capital cities of Changan and Luoyang, as well as in major inland centers such as Yangzhou, the entrepôt at the southern end of the transport canal joining the Yellow River to the Yangtze.21 At Yuanzhou (present-day Guyuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region), an important administrative center on a branch of the Silk Road leading north to Datong, a Sogdian colony was established in the fifth century (see Chapter 8).

Living in their own communities, these foreigners—some large-scale traders, others local shopkeepers, and even artisans—were controlled by their own headmen and subject to their own laws.22 A member of each foreign community, known as sahao, presided over the
community's civic and religious affairs and had Chinese official rank; the forefathers of several of the Shi family buried at Guyuan held this office (no. 83; translation of Shi Shewu's epitaph). Like the Sasanians, the Sogdians were Zoroastrians, but in contrast to their western neighbors, they did not practice Zoroastrianism as an organized state religion. This seems to explain the worship of patron deities by individual families and communities, as well as that of non-Zoroastrian divinities. Several of the gods of the Zoroastrian pantheon, including the highest, Ahura Mazda, were equated with and assimilated into different Hindu deities, while the ancient Mesopotamian deities Inana/Ishtar and Tammuz have their counterparts in Sogdian religious imagery (fig. 2). Sogdian mourning rituals and Hindu-style iconography were departures from the strict Zoroastrianism as defined by Sasanian belief and practice. Yet the Sogdians considered themselves Zoroastrians; as such, Sogdian emigrants living in the colonies along the Silk Road would have adhered to the religious practices of their homeland, although little evidence of such practices in China has survived.

For example, the Zoroastrian proscription against inhumation for fear of polluting the earth (one of the four sacred elements) led to the exposure of the dead body and the subsequent placement of the bones in clay or stone ossuaries (ostodana). In Sogdiana (as well as Choresmia) the ossuaries, often elaborately decorated, were placed in mausoleums or kept at home (fig. 3). Some three hundred examples of such ossuaries have been recovered from sites across Sogdiana and Choresmia, and into Xinjiang, their decoration reflecting local artistic and religious traditions; however, none has yet been found in China. Instead, it is possible that the elaborately carved and painted stone funerary couches, which come from tombs of Sogdians or other Central Asians, and of which number 106 is one of four...
known from northwest and north China (along with a recently discovered stone sarcophagus), may have served to protect the bodies from direct contact with the earth (fig. 4).

Nonetheless, the Sogdians had temples and revered the sacred fire; indeed, accounts from the Tang period tell of Chinese fascination with the Zoroastrian temples and the ritual dancing—associated with the Sogdians—that took place there. Before the Tang, the official recognition of Zoroastrianism in China is linked to the arrival of the Persian embassies; this is not surprising, however, since these were official contacts rather than private trade missions and, as such, are mentioned in the Chinese dynastic histories. Thus, Zoroastrianism was officially recognized early in the sixth century; there may even have been a Zoroastrian priest at the Northern Wei court.28

Despite the syncretistic nature of their religion, and the religious tolerance that they practiced, the Sogdians in their homeland were not always well disposed toward Buddhism, and the Buddhist faith never truly flourished there.29 This is ironic since the Sogdians are credited with being the major translators of the Buddhist sutras into Chinese (as well as being the translators of Manichaean and Christian texts). Apparently, some of the Sogdians who were exposed to Buddhism while passing through Bactria, northwest India, or Xinjiang on their way to China were so attracted to Buddhism that they became converts (no. 67), with some even becoming monks who spread the new faith eastward (see Chapter 2 and note 1 of this chapter).

There may be another reason why Sogdians involved themselves in translating Buddhist texts. As traders, they were conversant in many other languages, and many were literate; they could thus function commercially as translators. It is possible that to please their Chinese hosts and as a source of income Sogdian scribes translated Buddhist texts. Shi Heden, whose ancestors were Sogdian, worked as a high-ranking translator in the Imperial Secretariat (no. 80c).

Because cultural exchange invariably accompanies the commercial kind, the Sogdians, as the major trading group, were also major transmitters of ideas and traditions. Not only were the luxury products of the West (including those of Sogdiana) that were brought by the Sogdians’ caravans of value in their own right, such products were a source of new artistic ideas and religious imagery for the Chinese. Thus, Sogdian metalwork had a strong influence on Chinese metalwork as well as on ceramics (no. 111).30 Further, the safety provided by the Sogdians’ caravans for traveling monks and pilgrims allowed new ideas to spread across the Silk Road and into China. People other than monks and pilgrims also traveled in the caravans, some exporting their services, others exported as actual products, that is, as “gifts” by local rulers or as slaves. Sogdian acrobats, dancers, and musicians were greatly valued by the Chinese, the dancers from Shash being in greatest demand (nos. 81, 82).
Notes
1. Jettmar 1991, p. 252. Jettmar proposes that a trade fair had been established at a specific site in the region where merchants of the different countries could meet; Sims-Williams 1996, pp. 52ff. Evidence of trade activity in this region consists of the more than six hundred short rock inscriptions in Sogdian at sites on either bank of the Indus; associated with these inscriptions are those in Indian languages as well as some in Chinese, Tibetan, Bactrian, Parthian, Middle Persian, Syriac, and Hebrew. The monk Kang Senghui, who is credited with introducing Buddhism to southern China, came from a Sogdian family that had settled in India; his father was a merchant in south China, where Senghui was born (Byochi 1955, p. 39).
2. Hannerstad 1955–57, pp. 433, 449; the account of the Turkish–Sogdian embassy to the Byzantine court that opened up direct trade is in Blockley 1983, fragment 10, 1 (pp. 111–15). See Kunstetter 1996, pp. 202–3, for possible evidence of a Sogdian colony or trading outpost in the north Caucasus, though probably not earlier than the eighth century. The kinds of textiles that moved across this route are shown in Jerusalemakas and Borkopp 1996.
5. Chavannes 1903, pp. 133 n. 5, 134. These passages from the Tang histories are often misquoted.
7. de Menasce 1973, pp. 75–76 (bk. 3, chap. 69). Because the دشمار (Deshmar) is a ninth-century and therefore post-Sasanian, Zoroastrian text, it may not accurately reflect the social structure that existed in Iran under Sasanian rule. Listed among the dignitaries of the Sasanian court in the third century CE, is a "master of the market" (مَزارِح = "bezzar"). I am grateful to P. O. Skjaervo for these references.
8. See Lukonin 1983, p. 740, for the Parthians' control of the trade routes. The Sasanians had maintained an absolute monopoly on silk traveling to Byzantium.
9. See note 2 above, and Chapter 9 n. 32; also Sine 1990, pp. 302–3.
10. Grenet 1996, p. 75. For a contrasting view, see Frye 1993, pp. 75, 77. For the establishment by the Sasanian state of a network of fortified trading posts to control the maritime trade, see Kervran 1994, pp. 325–31; Pulleyblank 1991, p. 428, for the role of the Persians in pre-Tang maritime trade.
11. The first known mission to the Northern Wei capital took place in 455. Nine successive Sasanian delegations visited the Northern Wei court between 461 and 522, to the contemporary southern dynasties, Liang, in 533 and 535, and to the Western Wei in 555. The object of these missions was to strengthen Persian influence in the east as a counter to the Hephthalite power or to impress the Chinese court with the power of the Sasanian ruler. The Northern Wei sent an envoy to Persia c. 470; one hundred years later, in 567, a Chinese delegation visited the Persian court, and in 615 the Sui emperor sent another, which was then accompanied back to China by a Persian delegation. These diplomatic exchanges ended with the 638 Persian delegation to China seeking aid against the invading Arabs. Aid was refused, but the Tang emperor granted refuge to Feiwei, the heir to the deposed and murdered Sasanian king. Yurdjurd III (c. 632–651).
12. By the early part of the eighth century, the Tang government was already experiencing difficulties, and the coup d'etat staged by An Lushan, though quickly put down, certainly quickened its demise. Interestingly, An Lushan was the son of a Sogdian father and a Turkic mother (Mair and Skjaervo 1991, pp. 466–67).
13. It is often difficult to determine from the Chinese sources if a Persian from Iran is actually intended or a person who is Iranian. The Chinese used the term 普氏 (Bo-er) to designate Persians, but they also used it for any people coming from the Persian Gulf area, Iranians as well as Arabs. Similarly, the Chinese called the Sogdians 索度, but they also used the more generalized designation, 羌 ("barbarian"). This term, which, under the Han had been applied to the nomadic horsemen of the north, came to refer to all Iranians: Persians, Sogdians, and natives of Western Turkestan (Xinjiang) (Schafer 1951, p. 409; and Pulleyblank 1952, pp. 318–19).
15. Harper 1990, pp. 51–59. Harper believes that the plate was "made east of Iran in a region strongly influenced by Sasanian culture and art". Wessen 1983, figs. 4, 5.
18. The lack of purely Sasanian objects in Chinese tombs calls for a reassessment of the tendency to attribute any vaguely Western, i.e., Iranian, style or motif to "Sasanian influence." While somewhat over-
stating the case, Souren Melikian-Chirvani remarked perceptively almost twenty-five years ago, “Iranian metalwork itself provides remarkably little evidence to support the contention” that “Sasanian silver actually had an influence over Tang metalwork.” (Melikian-Chirvani 1976, p. 12).

19. Louis 1999, p. 79. Yuwen Tai had given Wu Hui to Li Xian as his bride, accompanied by sumptuous gifts; further, as emperor, Wu Zong had paid Li Xian the honor of two personal visits to his home: could the emperor have been a gift on one of those occasions? (Anazawa in Marzahn and Anazawa 1989, p. 51).


22. Twitchett 1979, p. 30. A parallel for these local merchant communities, and their relationship to the private firms they represented, based back in Sogdiana, may be drawn with the Old Assyrian colony at Kanesh, which flourished in the nineteenth century BCE in Anatolia as a trading center for the city-state of Ashur, in northern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). The traders were “organized in a cityum, a term that denotes both the physical reality of a special merchant quarter and the community of traders in the town. This was led by a royally appointed man through whom the contacts with the central authorities were regulated” (Larsen 1987, p. 49). Regarding foreign artisans in the colonies, An Jayao notes evidence of Bactrians making glass in the Datong area in the mid-fifth century, while, in Chang’an, a Sogdian glassblower earned the admiration of the Sui emperor Wudi (An 1984, pp. 23–24).

23. The saka has traditionally been identified as a Zoroastrian religious official, but this view has recently been questioned; by the Sui and Tang periods, it seems to have been an official title of the administrators of the Central Asian and Persian immigrant communities in the various localities, who was typically of Iranian ancestry. Of non-Chinese origin, the term has been thought to derive from satt-pau (Khorezmian, spata “leader, captain”) or from sattahād (Sogdian “caravan leader”), or Sanskrit, sattahaka (Luo 2000, pp. 165–91; Dien 1962, pp. 335–43).


25. Grenet and Marzahn 1996, pp. 5–18. In Mesopotamia, the cult of Nana/Nanana was linked from the second millennium BCE to that of the goddess Isana/Ishtar (Grenet and Marzahn 1996, p. 7; see Black and Green 1992, pp. 168–9 [Isana], p. 174 [Nanaya]).


27. Grenet 1986, pp. 236–37, with a map showing the distribution of ossuaries from Margiana and Choresmia in the west along the northern branch of the Silk Road in Xinjiang in the east. I am grateful to Lin Mecun for informing me of three specific sites in the Turfan area of Xinjiang that have yielded ossuaries (Teyok, Jiaosai, and Karashahir); he notes that the round wooden box from Kucha, found by the Orani Mission, may be considered a Buddhist reliquary, the color scheme of the painted decoration, according to Boris Marshak, is akin to that of Sogdian painting (although the style and iconography is Kuchan: Kazulapov and Marshak 1999, p. 68). To these containers should also be added the round box in the Musée Guimet, also from Stének 1995, nos. 99, 100, and that from Kalpin, Xinjiang (Ma, C, and Zhang 1994, no. 69; pp. 40, 216). On the southern route, a possible ossuary—a tubular clay container with lid, containing the bones of an adult skeleton—is attributed to Shanshan (an ancient oasis kingdom comprising Niya, Miran, and Loulan; ibid., no. 68, pp. 40, 215). Recently, a rectangular house-shaped ceramic container in the Palace Museum in Beijing has been identified by Shi Anchang (Shi 2000, pp. 80–81) as an ossuary “probably excavated from a cemetery of Sogdian immigrants in China,” this attribution needs to be more fully explored.


29. Grenet 1994, p. 47. Although a Buddhist sutra has been read on a ceramic vessel found at Panjikent, according to Boris Marshak, no true Buddhist cult iconography has been recorded in Sogdiana (Marshak and Raspapova 1990, pp. 131–53). See also Marshak and Raspapova 1997/98, p. 298ff. In addition to Zoroastrianism or Mazdaitism, religions that were followed in Sogdiana were Hinduism, Manichaeism, Christianity, and Judaism.

30. For Sogdian vessels found in China, see Marshak 1995, pp. 105–6.