

A SOGDIAN PRECURSOR OF OMAR KHAYYAM IN TRANSOXANIA

VLADIMIR LIVSHITS

Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences,
St. Petersburg

By late 60's of the 6th century the Turkic Kaganate had made its way into the system of political and economic relations of the major states of the time: Byzantium, the Sasanian Iran, China. The headquarters of the West-Turkic Kaganate was in Suyab (on the river Chu). Having become the political leader in Central Asia and taken control of the trade along the Great Silk Road, the Turkic Kagans established close relations with the Sogdians. The political and economic links with Sogd had determined the specific character of the villages and cities in Transoxania. The written sources and the archaeological evidence attest to the Sogdians having been scattered along the Silk Road, maintaining active contacts with the Turks. As a result of this intensive interrelations between Sogdians and the Turks during the 6th-early 9th centuries the mentioned area has become the home for the formation of an original cultural complex, which can be rightly designated as a Turkic-Sogdian symbiosis.

The Turkic heads or patrons of the Sogdian urban communities are mentioned by the Sogdian inscriptions on the rims of *khums* found on several sites in the Chu river valley.¹ The Sogdian writing and written language prior to the creation (on the Sogdian basis) of the Old Turkic writings, the Runic and Uighur, were in official use in the Turkic states at the Transoxania and the North-Western Mongolia. That is attested, for instance, by the Turgesh coins having the legends, which are Sogdian in writing and language.

There was a similar situation in other early Turkic states. The epigraph to Taspar-Kagan also describing the major events of the First Kaganate, was compiled and drawn in the Sogdian language on the

¹ V. A. Livshits, "Sogdijcy v Semireč'e: lingvističeskie i epigrafičeskie svдетель'stva", *Krasnaya Rečka i Burana*, Frunze, 1989: 78-84; idem, "Sogdijskaya nadpis' na venčike xuma iz Ak-Bešima", *Suyab-Ak-Beshim*, St. Petersburg, 2002: 128-133.

shores of the Orkhon, at the time of the First Kaganate, in the late 6th century. In the Turkic principalities of Tokharistan in the 6th-7th centuries the Sasanian coins used to be over stamped with Sogdian letters of the Turkic titles and names.

The Sogdian language did not cede its ground in Transoxania even in the 9th-10th centuries when the Arabic letters overran the area. The latest of the precisely dated Sogdian relics are known to be related to early 11th century.

By the late 40's of the last century the archaeological works in the Chu valley were thought to have yielded a single fragment of the Sogdian inscription on the handle of a clay jar from the site of the Krasnaya-Rečka. Preserved in this fragment is only one word, on paleography, 9th-early 10th century.

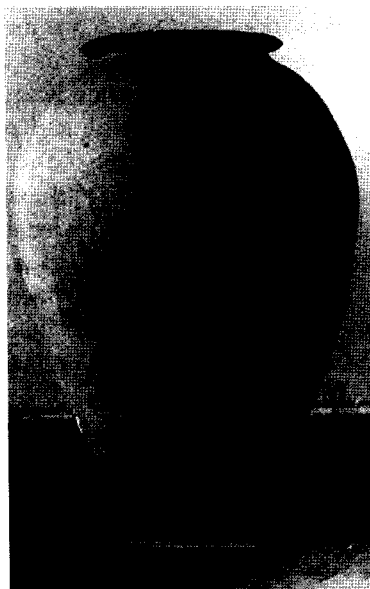


Figure 1.

By the present time there are two groups of Sogdian inscriptions from Transoxania: on pottery and on rocks in two gorges of the Talas river valley. These are equally consequential for both philological and historical studies: found in them are previously unknown Sogdian lexical units as well as grammatical features pointing to their dialectal nature (similar features are shown by the Sogdian monumental inscriptions in North-Western Mongolia: those of Bugut and Karabalga-

sun). The inscriptions from Transoxania abound in Old Turkic and Arabic proper names occasionally accompanied by the Sogdian titles. These inscriptions retain data enabling judgments to be made on the historical and confessional settings wherein the monuments originated.

Added to the eight Sogdian inscriptions on *khum* rims, found in Chu Valley sites and published by the author of this paper,² is one more (see figure 2), discovered by V. D. Goryacheva in Krasnaya-Rečka in 1988, however, deciphered only recently. The text inscribed on the rim edge of a *khum* (see figure 1) with the calligraphic late Sogdian cursive typical for the Transoxania relics of the 8th-early 9th centuries, contains a single circular line occupying most of the rim:

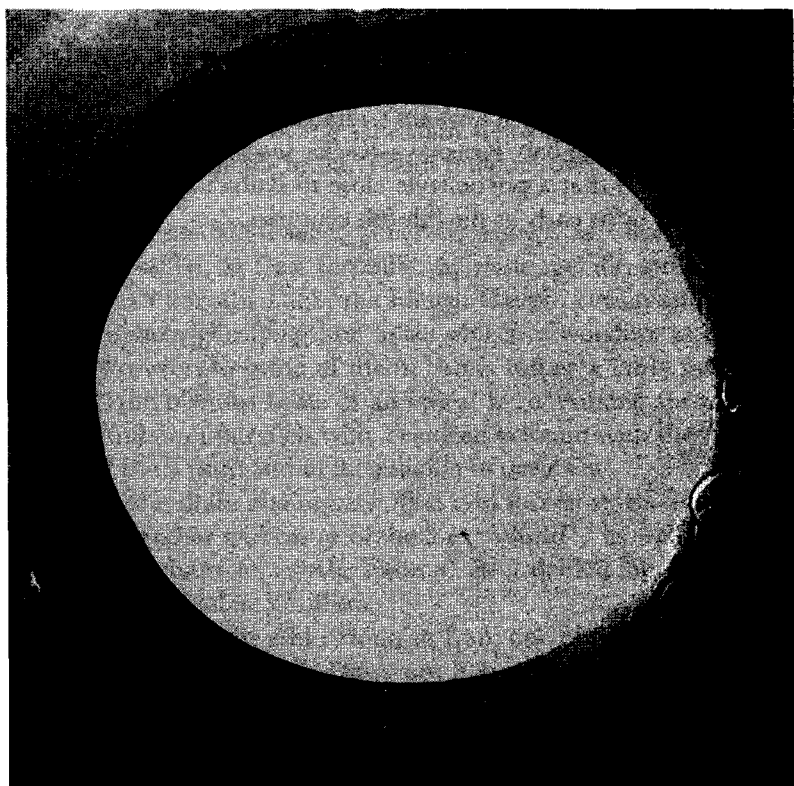


Figure 2.

'ḏy xw 'ygy ʔḏʔp L' šm'r xyp (?ḏp?) ʔznuw w'n L' kysy 'rt mryt xw'r.

18

² See V. A. Livshits, "Sogdijcy v Semireč'e ...".

The following transcription and translation (the form *xyþ/šyþ* remains obscure) can be suggested:

āḏē xō ēčē yešīþ nē šmār xēþ (?) yaznu wān nē kēsi ert marti xwār

“The one who failed to discern a damage will also never see (whatever) wealth (at all). Then, drink, o man!”

It can be noted that there is an alliteration in the text: *šmār-xwār*, although I would not dare call it poetic. Up until now only several specimens of the Manichaean Sogdian verses are known, tonic in structure, based upon alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables having no rhyme. What is striking is the substantial proximity of the text drawn by an unknown Sogdian writer, with the motifs of the Ruba’is by Omar Khayyam, who lived later, in the 11th century, however, as noted by V. A. Zhukovskij,³ highlighted a complicated history of composing the lyrical and philosophical quatrains in Persian poetry. I was unable to find among the Khayyam’s quatrains a precise meaningful equivalent of the Sogdian Krasnaya-Rečka inscription; it can, however, be suggested that a poetic style close to Ruba’i had been known to the Sogdians by as early as the 8th-9th centuries.

³ V. A. Zhukovskij, “Omar Xayyam i stranstvuyuščie četverostišiya”, *Al-Muzafariyya*, St. Petersburg, 1897: 325-363.