

The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism

Edited by

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and

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with the assistance of Anna Tessmann

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CHAPTER 8

Zoroastrianism in Central Asia

Frantz Grenet

Sources

Textual sources providing information on Zoroastrianism in pre-Islamic Central Asia are scattered and few of them can be qualified as primary, i.e., contemporary and from the Central Asian people themselves. The Young Avestan texts, however, originated in Central Asia, though only a few sections explicitly refer to these regions: *Vd* 1 (a general list of “Aryan,” i.e., Zoroastrian countries, probably pre-Achaemenid), *Yt* 10 (the Bāmiyān area), *Yt* 19 (Sistān) (see Grenet, “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Geographical Perspectives,” this volume). In the literature in Eastern Middle Iranian languages (Bactrian, Sogdian, and Khotanese) which have come down to us, only Sogdian literature includes a handful of texts with Zoroastrian religious content (see below), the rest being either primarily secular or belonging to other religions adopted by Sogdians who emigrated to China (Buddhism, Christianity, and Manichaeism). Except for Kushan monumental inscriptions of the 2nd century which shed some light on the royal temples, Bactrian literature consists almost entirely of the archive records from the Rōb kingdom (4th–8th centuries CE), which contain much onomastic material which in its turn provides valuable information about the gods worshiped by the population (Sims-Williams 2010; for Sogdian onomastics see Lurje 2010). Khotanese literature is entirely Buddhist, though from Chinese accounts we know there were also Zoroastrians in Khotan (e.g., “they worship the Heavenly God (i.e., Ohrmazd) and the Law of the Buddha”: *Tangshu*, trans. Chavannes 1903 [1973]: 125).

More data can be gathered from external sources. The historians of Alexander’s campaigns provide limited but precious pieces of information on religious practices in Bactria and Sogdiana. Chinese accounts of the 7th–8th centuries are very detailed and accurate on some points, especially the notices on Sogdian principalities in the *Tangshu*, and the description by the envoy Wei Jie of the customs he observed at Samarkand in

607 CE (see below; sources translated in Chavannes 1903 [1973]). Finally, the Arab conquerors, though recognizing that most people in Central Asia were Zoroastrian (*majūš* ‘Magians’), realized that they had specific forms of worship, including “idol temples” sometimes combined with “fire-temples” (*bayt al-asnām wa-l-nīrān*, see e.g., Balādhurī; de Goeje 1865: 241.16–17). In his *Chronology* (c. 1000 CE) al-Bīrūnī, a Chorasmian by birth, recorded the Chorasmian and Sogdian variants of the Zoroastrian calendar, the festivals, and some funerary practices.

Archaeology and numismatics certainly provide the most abundant and continuous information. The Central Asian territories have been more intensively explored than Iran. The Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan has worked there since the 1920s and local archaeological research was very active in the five Central Asian republics during the Soviet period. In Afghanistan, field work was interrupted in 1979 but has resumed since 2002, while in the Central Asian republics it has continued after their independence in 1991, though on a more limited scale than before. Funerary archaeology, limited in Iran except for Achaemenid royal tombs, was very developed in all regions of Soviet Central Asia (but not in the post-Soviet period because of the concern for not disturbing Muslim graves), providing direct access to the religious beliefs of non-elites. As for temples, the widespread use of mud brick in Central Asia has allowed for better preservation of mural painting and special cultic installations than the stone architecture of Sasanian Iran. Generally speaking, religious iconography, in all sorts of media and locations, including private houses, is considerably richer and more imaginative in Central Asia than in Iran.

Calendars

Until recently it was held that the earliest attestation of the use of the Zoroastrian calendar in Central Asia, and in the Iranian world in general, was in the economic records from Nisa (Turkmenistan), the first capital of the Arsacids, dating from the 1st century BCE. Since then, the archive documents in Aramaic issued by the Achaemenid satrap of Bactria at the time of Alexander’s conquest have been shown to contain Zoroastrian day-names (Naveh and Shaked 2012: 35–36). New research on the Zoroastrian calendar tends to indicate that it was invented under Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE) (de Blois 1996: 49) and adopted in all satrapies, at least for religious and imperial administrative use. In Chorasmia it is documented from the 4th century CE onward by the documents from the palace at Toprak-kala. In Hellenistic and Kushan Bactria it was superseded in official use by the Babylonian calendar (in its Seleucid variant). When the Zoroastrian calendar was reinstated in official records certain month-names of Babylonian origins remained, as attested by the Rōb documents: Nīsān, the name of the third month (which included the spring equinox at the time of the adoption of the Babylonian calendar), Šavat, the alternative name of the first month, and Siwān, the alternative name of the fifth month (Sims-Williams and de Blois 1996 [1998], 2005). Nīsān is found also in the Sogdian calendar. Among the other month-names in both the Bactrian and the Sogdian calendar, only the seventh and eighth (Bactr. *Mīrgān* / Sogd. *Vayānč*; Bactr. *Āb* / Sogd. *Ābānč*), referring to the worship of Mithra and the Waters

respectively, correspond with the MP Zoroastrian ones (*Mihr*, *Ābān*). Other month-names are independent creations. Particularly interesting is the name of the eleventh month: Bactr. *Dēmatrigān*, Sogd. *Žīmatīč*, ‘containing the festival of Demeter’, introduced during the Hellenistic period, possibly in reference to the Mysteries of Eleusis (see below on the image of Demeter at Panjikent). In the Bactrian calendar, *Savul* ‘jar’, astrologically ‘Aquarius’, was eventually introduced as an alternative name for Nīsān during the 1st century BCE, at a time when this month coincided with this Zodiac sign.

In Bactria, the renewed Sasanian influence in the 5th century CE was reflected by the temporary use of the full list of Zoroastrian month-names, as well as by the adoption of the calendar reform of Pērōz I (r. 457–484 CE), which transferred the New Year and the previous Epagomenae from the month Frawardīn to the month Ādur. This reform was ignored in Sogdiana and Chorasmia, and consequently the calendar there fell behind by five days.

On the contrary, day-names, when attested, all correspond to the Zoroastrian calendar where each day is dedicated to a particular god, but they appear to have been borrowed (rather than inherited) from Avestan as they hardly present the expected linguistic sound changes (e.g., Bactr. *Aštād* = Av. *arštātō*, instead of *Rišt*, the usual Bactrian name of this goddess).

The Kushan Pantheon

In Central Asia, Zoroastrian deities are not directly attested (except in personal names) until the 2nd century CE. It has been suggested that the image of the radiant Zeus on coins of Heliocles, the last Greek king of Bactria (after c. 145 BCE), and his successors in Kapisa and Gandhara, hints at an assimilation between Zeus and Mithra, particularly since a hooded cap eventually appears on the god’s head (Bivar 1979). At Ai Khanum, one of the royal cities of Greek Bactria, the main temple, of Irano-Babylonian type, housed in its last phase a statue of Zeus, which could also have been worshiped as Zeus-Mithra (Boyce and Grenet 1991: 165–171). But as a late Achaemenid Aramaic document from Bactria mentions libations offered by the satrap “to Bēl in the temple” (Shaked 2003b: 45–46; Naveh and Shaked 2012: 36, 261), one cannot exclude the possibility of a syncretism: Bēl = Ahura Mazdā = Zeus. On later Kushan coins the name “Ohrmazd” accompanies an image of Zeus Bēlos comparable to those on Seleucid and Parthian coins from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (Grenet 1991: 148 and plate LIX: 3–6).

The first non-Greek deity explicitly named and shown on coins is the Babylonian Nanaia, symbolized by her lion and moon crescent on coins of a local “Saka” (Scythian) dynasty of Western Bactria probably dating from the early 1st century CE (Ghose 2006; a *nanēstāwakān* ‘place for the worship of Nanaia’ was previously mentioned in the Nisa documents). She reappears as chief goddess in the foundation inscription of the temple at Rabatak, together with other gods from whom the Kushan king Kanishka I (c. 127–153 CE) “has obtained kingship” (Sims-Williams 1995–1996, 2004 [2008]). Four of these gods belong to the Zoroastrian pantheon (Ohrmazd, Srōš, Nēryōsang, Mithra), while the two others are quite enigmatic and might belong to the ancestral nomadic stock of the Kushans (the goddess *Umma* ‘the Highest’?, and

Muždwan ‘the Gracious’, depicted on rare coins as a rider god with possible Shivaite overtones; Sims-Williams 1997a).

Nanaia appears also on the selection of five gods shown on Kanishka’s gold coins: First labeled in Greek (Nanaia, Helios, Selene, Hephaistos, Anemos [Wind]), they receive Iranian names, though keeping their Greek iconographic types, when very early in his reign Bactrian becomes the official language: *Nana* or *Nanašao* (see below), *Miuro* (Mithra), *Mao* (Māh), *Athšo* (Ādur), *Oado* (Wād) subsequently replaced in his function of atmospheric god by *Oēšo* (Wēš, i.e., Vaiiu). This selected pantheon, quite different from the list of personal protectors of the king listed at Rabatak, addresses a more common level of religiosity, i.e., deities directly linked to the natural elements (compare Herodotus I.131: “[The Persians] sacrifice to Zeus, calling the entire vault of heaven Zeus, and they sacrifice to the sun and the moon and the earth and fire and water and the winds”; also, the opening invocations in Y 1.16, and the *Niyāyišn*, i.e., everyday prayers to the sun, moon, fire, and water; Tanabe 1995). Nana, depicted as Artemis, appears to fulfil the double function of guardian of the earth and of the water, as shown by her two attributes (wand with lion protome and vase). In addition, her occasional title *šao* ‘ruler’ and the very wording of the Rabatak inscription show her as chief bestower and protector of royalty, a function which was already fulfilled by the Mesopotamian Nana-Ishtar. In her capacity as provider of water, she was probably considered by Zoroastrians as identical with the Avestan goddess Anāhitā, sometimes called “Nana” in Iran (especially in the Syriac *Acts of Martyrs*) and who never appears under her own name in Bactria (except, briefly, on coins of the Kushano-Sasanians, viceroys of the Sasanians in former Kushan territories, c. 280–380 CE). The “naturalistic” selection of Iranian gods continued to figure on the standard gold and bronze issues under Kanishka and his successor Huvishka (c. 153–191 CE), despite occasional changes which did not affect the overall structure: *Athšo* replaced by *Farro* (Farn), *Nana* replaced by *Ardoxšo* (Ašī varj^hhī, the other goddess of plenty and also a protector of the country, compare Bag Ard waxš, ‘frontier guard’ of the Kushan country mentioned in the Manichaean missionary text M 1306; Sundermann 1987: 72).

Already under Kanishka, and even more under Huvishka, other gods of the Avestan pantheon were introduced on occasional issues of gold coins: Under Kanishka, *Orlagno* (Wahrām), *Lrooaspo* (Druvāsp), *Manaobago* (Wahman, see below); under Huvishka, in addition, *Ōoromozdo* (Ohrmazd), *Šaorēoro* (Šahrewar), *Rišto* (Arštāt), *Oanindo* (Wanind), *Teiro* (Tīr) (Rosenfield 1967: 59–103; Göbl 1984: 40–46, 164–172). There was obviously an effort to show devotion to as many gods as possible, taken from the stock of the *yašts* rather than directly from the calendar (though two names, *Athšo* and *Šaorēoro*, are derived from Av. genitive forms and therefore probably represent day-names). As for the other gods, the iconographic types are generally borrowed from accepted Greek equivalents, sometimes to the detriment of theological consistency. Both Druvāsp and Tīr had their gender reassigned as a result of their depiction as Dioscurus and Artemis respectively. Two gods, however, Vaiiu and Wahman (Av. Vohu Manah), were iconographically assimilated with major gods from the Indian pantheon (Grenet 2006 [2010]: 88–89): *Oēšo* (Skr. Vāyu) assumes various types of Shivaite iconography, and still under the Kushano-Sasanians he remained the god most depicted on coins, under a new name or rather epithet *burzāwand yazd* ‘the god who possesses the heights’, obviously aimed at

pleasing worshippers of Vāyu and Śiva alike. *Manaobago* ‘Manā the god’, the only Aməša Spənta depicted except for Šahrewar, had a shorter career. His image appears as a complicated attempt at combining the concept of Wahman (enthroned in Paradise and associated with the moon) with that of Viṣṇu holding the wheel and plough, while a Beotian helmet adds an antiquated Greek symbol of power. As for *Ōromozdo* (Ohrmazd), Huvishka’s coins depicting him as Zeus-Bēlos (possibly also as Sarapis), are extremely rare, which might indicate a reluctance to give human features to the supreme god, despite the fact that he was anthropomorphized in the Sasanian reliefs.

In addition, Huvishka issued rare coins showing two Iranian gods who were not included in the Avestan pantheon. One is Waxš (*Oakhšo*), god of the river Oxus (the Amu Darya) on whom much of the worship to the waters in both Bactria and Sogdiana was obviously concentrated, as attested by his popularity in personal names as well as by his temple at Takht-e Sangīn (see below). The other is Yamš (*Iamšo*), a name derived from *Yama xšāuuā* ‘Yima the King’ or *Yama xšāēta* ‘Yima the Radiant’, shown as an armored king holding a hoak (Grenet 1984a: 253–258). This attribute calls to mind the Avestan legend (*Yt* 19.34–38) of the *xʷarənah* (MP *farn* or *farr*), the principle of royal glory, escaping from Yima in the shape of a hawk; but one should admit that capturing Yima’s image at the very moment he is doomed to downfall and death, though possibly hinting at his resulting function as king of the underworld, does not seem very proper for a god (for in the context of Kushan coins he is necessarily a god), and perhaps another explanation for the presence of the hawk should be sought.

Finally, Kanishka introduced the Buddha on some issues, and Huvishka added a narrow selection of Indian gods, all linked with war. Heracles and Sarapis also appear under Huvishka, with their own names. Such initiatives, dictated by the requirements of a multi-ethnic empire, do not affect the overwhelmingly Zoroastrian character of the official Kushan pantheon.

In the 6th–9th centuries a god called Žun appears in a prominent position in Southern Bactria and Zābolīstān (the Ghazni area), to judge from personal names (including in royal families) and Chinese and Arabic records. His name is plausibly a parallel form to MP Zurwān. This god was served by a particular category of priests bearing the non-Zoroastrian title *kēd* (MP ‘soothsayer, magician’). He might be the god depicted on a painting from Dokhtar-e Nūshīrvān north of Bāmiyān, with Mithraic and additional cosmic attributes (Sims-Williams 1997b: 19–20).

The Sogdian Pantheon

While Bactria (from the 2nd century known under the new name Tokharistān) fell into relative decline after the Hunnish invasions of the 4th and 5th centuries CE, Sogdiana appears to have easily integrated the newcomers into its ruling class. It then emerged as the major commercial power on the Silk Road and experienced an unprecedented artistic boom. In Bactria, Buddhism had by that time imposed itself as the religion of a substantial part of the population, while in Sogdiana its progress was contained due to Zoroastrian resistance backed by local rulers (Xuanzang’s testimony on Samarkand; Beal 1911: 45–46); most of the Sogdian Buddhists resided in China.

This situation resulted in the richest set of religious images ever produced in a Zoroastrian context: At present, twenty-three (or twenty-four) of the thirty gods worshiped in the Zoroastrian calendar and regular prayers (*Āfrīnagān*) have been identified in Sogdian art. This list comprises all the Zoroastrian gods known on Kushan coins, except (given the present state of documentation) Wād and Wanind. The additions are: Four Aməša Spəntas (MP Amahraspandān: Ardwhišt, Spandarmad, Hordād, Amurdād), four deities linked with the afterlife (Srōš – named on the Rabatak inscription but not shown on Kushan coins, Rašn, Dēn, and the collective body of the Frauuašis), Aṗam Napāt (on whom see below), Anāhitā (on a few occasions depicted separately from Nana), and possibly also Xwaršēd, the Sun as distinct from Mithra. This list will probably be supplemented by future discoveries. Images are to be found in a great variety of media including wall paintings, wooden statues, self-standing small terracotta figures, images stamped on ossuaries (but never coins, contrary to the situation in the Kushan Empire). The existence of whole “galleries” of Zoroastrian Sogdian gods can be inferred from two Chinese testimonies, namely a description of Dunhuang mentioning “twenty niches” painted with images of gods in the local Sogdian temple, and the Dunhuang manuscripts from c. 900 CE that record monthly allocations of thirty paper sheets “to paint the Zoroastrian (*xian*) gods” (Grenet and Zhang 1996 [1998]). Many images of deities have been found in the extensively excavated city of Panjikent, east of Samarkand, in temples but also in private houses, for each large house had in its main room an image of the god or gods who were considered personal protectors of the family. As in Kushan Bactria, some of the Sogdian images still echo distant Greek models; this is the case with Mithra, still depicted as Helios on his chariot though the structure of the chariot is no longer adequately reproduced, and Arštāt, probably identifiable on terracotta figurines where she keeps all the attributes of Athena. The Greek element was, by then, residual. Most of the images of Sogdian gods are indigenous creations directly inspired by the religious texts, while several of the most important gods are clearly modeled on their supposed counterparts in the Hindu religion (Grenet 2006 [2010]: 92–94). India, with which Sogdiana had close commercial and cultural contacts, was at that time the richest source for iconographic models, and the convention of the four-handed gods, though not very satisfactory from a strictly Zoroastrian point of view (physical abnormality being in principle considered Ahremanic), nevertheless provided a convenient solution to the necessity of loading the various gods of the Iranian pantheon with symbols of their multiple functions. In certain cases there was a conscious conceptual assimilation between Iranian and Hindu gods, as proved by a short list of gods transmitted in two Buddhist Sogdian texts (*Vessantara Jātaka* 910–935 and *P* 8; Humbach 1975). For the first three gods the Hindu and Iranian names are given together: “Brahmā-Zurwān, Indra-Āḍvay, Mahādeva-Wēšparkar,” there follows for each a short physical description taken from the Indian side: Brahmā-Zurwān has a beard, Indra-Āḍvay has a third eye, and Mahādeva-Wēšparkar has three faces.

Images of Brahmā-Zurwān have not yet been discovered in Sogdian iconography, but there are many images of Mahādeva-Wēšparkar. In fact he is the direct continuation of Vaiiū-Śiva already encountered in Bactria, the name Wēšparkar reflecting the full Avestan formula *Vaiiūš uparō.kairiīō* ‘Vaiiū who acts in the superior region’. In Sogdiana

his syncretic images assume various shapes, some closer to the Indian concept, some closer to the Iranian. A side chapel in one of the temples at Panjikent contained a clay statue of the couple Umā-Mahésvara seated on the bull Nandi, very close to Indian models, except for the cloth covering Śiva's penis with typical Sogdian modesty. Still in Panjikent, one painted image from a private house carries the explicit label *Wēšparkar* and shows deliberate adaptation to the functions of the Iranian Vaiiu: One of the three heads blows a horn, an attribute not usual with Śiva but appropriate to the Iranian Vaiiu in his capacity as god of the atmosphere. This emphasis on the natural elements is confirmed by the figure seated in front of *Wēšparkar*: He is *Apaṃ Napāt*, Indian and Iranian god of the fire which burns within water, as shown by the fire halo surrounded by fish and tritons (Marshak 1990: 307–308; and more generally Grenet 2006 [2010]) (Figure 8.1).

The third Hindu-Iranian god mentioned in the Sogdian lists is Indra-*Āδvay*. *Āδvay* means 'supreme god' in Sogdian, and we know from Sogdian Zoroastrian texts that it was used as an epithet for Ohrmazd (see below). A type of Indra-*Āδvay* has in fact been tentatively identified on a small series of terracotta figures (Marshak and Raspopova 1994 [1996]: 195–198). According to this hypothesis, in order to meet the difficult task of depicting the supreme god, the Sogdian artist combined three models of various

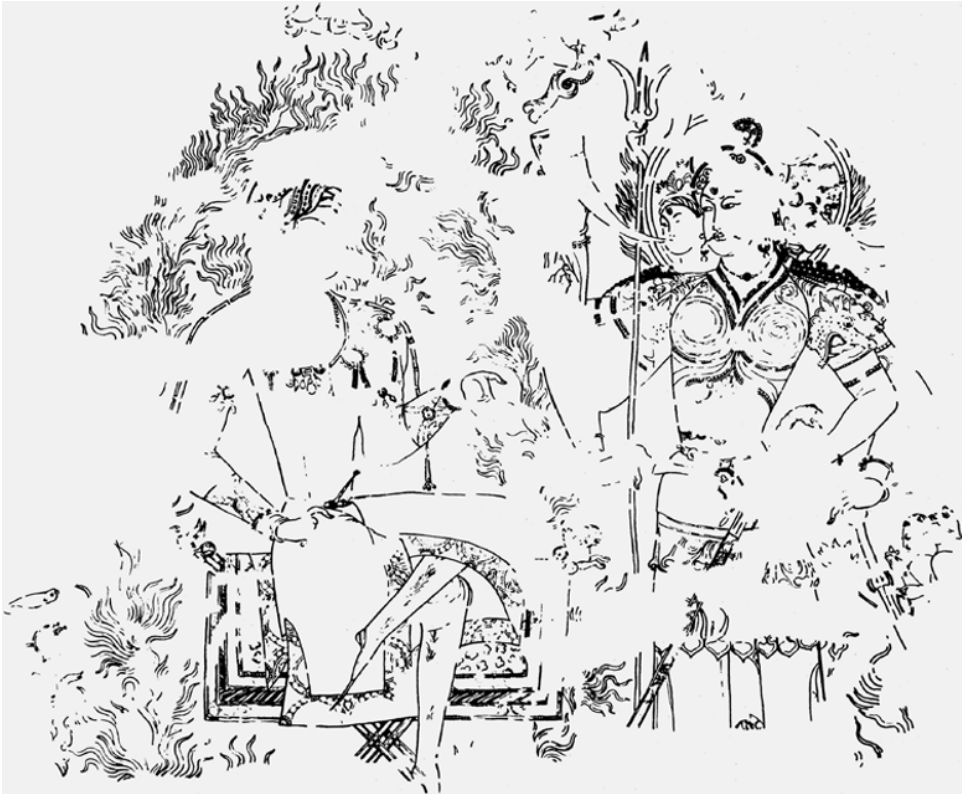


Figure 8.1 Vaiiu (*Wēšparkar*) and *Apaṃ Napāt* on a Panjikent painting, c. 740 CE. © F. Grenet.

origins: Indra (hence the elephant throne), the Iranian king (hence the royal ribbons), King David with his cithara, an allusion to Ohrmazd's function as master of Paradise which Zoroastrian literature calls "the House of Song," while David's iconography was known from local Nestorian communities and contacts with Byzantium.

Other assimilations are not mentioned in Sogdian texts, but can be supposed from the iconography: Kārttikeya with Wahrām (a hybrid image combining Kārttikeya's peacock with the eagle-topped headgear of Wahrām as shown on Kushan coins). We also find another Indian war god (possibly again Kārttikeya) passing for Tīr-Tištīriia paired with Nana as a couple of four-handed gods (Figure 8.2). Nana holds Durgā's mace, in addition to the sun and moon, which have now become her usual attributes in Sogdian and Chorasmian art. Probably they came to be associated as joint protectors of the rain and hunting (in these images Tīr-Tištīriia holds an arrow).

At the same time the Sogdian artists, besides deriving much inspiration from India, showed considerable ability in creating images directly inspired by Zoroastrian texts. One of the most impressive examples is the group portrait of the Aməša Spəntas, shown on a series of ossuaries produced in a small region between Samarkand and Bukhara in the 6th and 7th centuries (Grenet 1986) (Figure 8.3). These images owe little or nothing to Kushan coins that depict two figures of this group, Šahrevar and Wahman, nor do they show any influence from Greece or India. Each member of the group is identified by a symbol of the *Yasna* (s)he will perform at the time of the Resurrection (MP *rist-āxēz*), when each of them will be in charge of the Renewal (MP *frašgird*) of a specific sector of the material creation (compare in particular WZ 35.15–17 and 39). Among the three male Aməša Spəntas, Ardwašiš, guardian of fire, holds a fire-altar; Wahman,



Figure 8.2 Nana and Tīr-Tištīriia on an ossuary from near Shahrisabz (Shakhrisabz), Uzbekistan, c. 7th century CE. © F. Grenet.

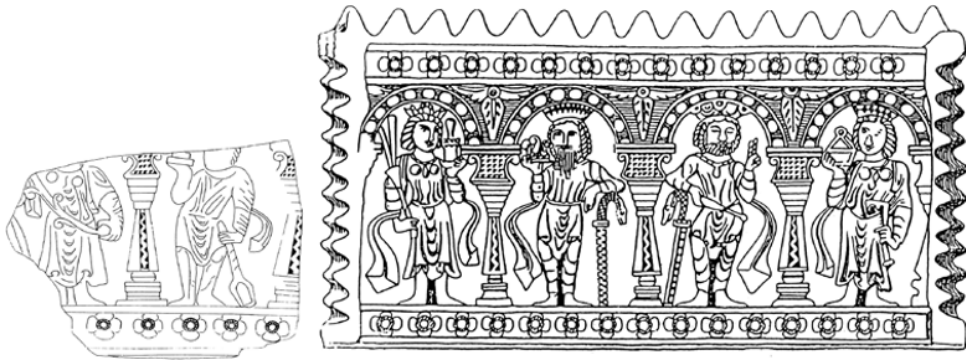


Figure 8.3 The Aməša Spəntas on an ossuary from Biya-Nayman near Samarkand, c. 7th century CE. From left to right: Amurdād, Ardwaḥišt, Hordād, Šahrewar, Wahman, Spandarmad. © F. Grenet.

guardian of animals, a libation spoon (containing animal fat); Šahrewar, guardian of metals and sky, is armored in most versions and holds a symbol of the metallic mountains which are going to melt at the end of time. Among the three female ones, Spandarmad, guardian of the earth, holds an ossuary as she is going to hand over the bones to Ohrmazd; Hordād, guardian of the water, shows the instruments of its purification (*haoma* twigs, mortar and pestle), while Amurdād, guardian of plants, holds the Primeval Plant. Another fine example of theological consistency is a painting from Panjikent, made in the last period (c. 740 CE, already under Arab occupation) and depicting a golden statue carried in procession. The god holds a mace and possibly an incense burner, both attributes suitable for Srōš, but he also comes out of a book. The key to the enigma is a favourite attribute of Srōš: *tanu-māθra-*, which means ‘the one who has the Sacred Word for his body’. Most probably the statue depicted here showed Srōš coming out of a codex containing the *Avesta* or part of it (Vaissière, Riboud, and Grenet 2003) (Figure 8.4). If this assumption is true this image is the earliest material evidence for the existence of written copies of the *Avesta*, two centuries after the reign of Khosrow I (531–579 CE) who is generally credited to have put an end to the exclusively oral transmission of the scriptures.

Waxš and Yima, Iranian but non-Zoroastrian gods already encountered on Kushan coins, are also attested in Sogdian onomastics. Yima possibly had an iconography of his own, though partly borrowed: Several paintings from Panjikent show a gate surrounded with various symbols, which identify it with the Zoroastrian Hell. A character clearly modeled on the Indian god Vaiśravaṇa guards the gate, with one significant deviation from the prototype: Instead of trampling over a demon, he stands in front of him. This recalls Yima whose Frauuaši is invoked in order to prevent demons residing underground from surfacing on the earth (WZ 32.2). It seems, therefore, that the Sogdians borrowed Vaiśravaṇa in order to depict Yima, or at least to fulfil a similar function (Grenet 1995–1996).

Nana presents a particular case, for her Mesopotamian heritage is documented even more clearly in early medieval Sogdiana than in Kushan Bactria, while her Iranian



Figure 8.4 Srōš “who has the Sacred Word for Body” on a Panjikent painting, c. 740 CE. © F. Grenet.

counterpart Anāhitā reappears in the 5th–6th century under her own name (in the onomastics) and her own attributes (on two paintings in the Panjikent Temple II), then vanishes, perhaps definitively absorbed into the figure of Nana. Both a Manichaean Sogdian text and a painting in the Panjikent Temple II show Nana presiding over funerary lamentations, the object of which appears on the painting as a girl (Grenet and Marshak 1998). According to the Mesopotamian myth she should be Geshtinanna, sister of Tammuz, who replaces him in Hell in winter. According to a Chinese record a “heavenly scion,” probably Tammuz himself, was mourned at Samarkand during a summer festival (Wei Jie, account transmitted in the *Tongdian*; Chavannes 1903 [1973]: 133). He may have been known in Sogdian as Taxsič, attested in theophoric names and also in Chinese records where he is mentioned as a very popular god having a pan-Sogdian character. In the Manichaean text as well as in the Panjikent painting the lamenting Nana is associated with Žimat (Demeter), whose name is found as the eleventh month in the Bactrian and Sogdian calendars. It appears that her mysteries inherited from the Greek period had fused with those of Nana.

A few more deities are attested. *Xšum* < **uxšma-kā*- ‘the growing one’, is the New Moon, female counterpart of *Māh*, the Moon god himself, who is male; she is also known in Bactria, as *Šomogo* (Sims-Williams 2010, no. 558). Other “gods” may be no more than epithets of the main deities: *Wanēpat* ‘lord of the forest’ (possibly a companion of Mithra with whom he is associated in *Vessantara Jātaka* 1205–1206), *Darsumat* ‘having a goat skin’, etc. An elderly protector of harvests, the same figure as that known in Tajik folklore as *Bābā-ye dehqān*, appears only in a Panjikent painting (Marshak and Raspopova 1990: 153–157, figure 22). At the other end of the cultural spectrum, *Avyāman* and *Šimnu* are original priestly elaborations from Av. forms **vahiia mainiiuš* ‘the better spirit (of the two)’ and **aša mainiiuš* ‘the worse spirit’, unattested in the extant Avestan corpus (Sims-Williams 2000: 9–12).

Temples

During the last years a few examples of fire-temples (or structures one can interpret as such) have come to light in Achaemenian Bactria even though only one of them, at Cheshme Shafā, contained a monumental stone fire-altar of the “canonical” type (Grenet 2008 [2012]: 30 with figure 1). Still in the Achaemenid period, series of ex-votos on golden leaves were found at two sites (Grenet 2010a): The Oxus treasure, from near the Oxus temple attested in the subsequent period (see below), and the Mir Zakah treasure, to the east of Gardez in Afghanistan, buried in *c.* 230 CE but including stocks from an Achaemenid and early Hellenistic temple whose location is unknown. In both cases an important proportion of objects show worshipers, possibly including priests, carrying ritual twigs (*barsom*) and wearing the mouth cover (*padām*) required when reciting prayers in front of a sacred fire. Though many animals are also depicted on ex-votos, it should be noted that none is classified as Ahremanic in Zoroastrian texts, which seems to indicate that their image was avoided.

In the Hellenistic period, at Ai Khanum, in addition to the main temple possibly dedicated to a syncretistic cult involving Mithra or Ohrmazd, an open stepped platform was erected on the top of the acropolis, which recalls Herodotus’ and Strabo’s descriptions of the “magi” celebrating the cult in high places. Such platforms did not necessarily support a permanent fire and they may rather have been intended for animal sacrifice (Boyce and Grenet 1991: 181–183).

Contrary to the situation observed in former Anatolian satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire, and even more in Sasanian Iran, very few buildings are known in post-Achaemenid Central Asia which can be properly called “fire-temples.” The large temple of the god Oxus (*Wakhš*) at Takht-e Sangīn, on the border of Bactria and Sogdiana, probably built at the beginning of the Seleucid period and which lasted until the 4th or 5th century CE, has been regarded as the prototype of the later Iranian fire-temple (Litvinskij and Pičikjan 2002; *contra* Bernard 1994), but the tetrastyle cella most probably housed a statue of the god; the two so-called *ātešgāh* or fire chambers set within symmetrical wings projecting sideways beyond the main structure are known to have fulfilled this function only during the last period, while for the earlier periods the mixture of animal bones with the layers of ashes is not typical of the Zoroastrian fire cult in which the fire can receive only wood,

incense, and animal fat. Taken all together, examples of fire-chambers where the fire was the sole object of the cult are very rare. At Surkh Kotal (a Kushan royal temple in Bactria), one or two such chambers were erected besides the now discarded central building during the period of direct Sasanian rule (c. 230–280 CE) or the subsequent Kushano-Sasanian period (Schlumberger, Le Berre, and Fussman 1983: 39–45, 147). At Paykend, south-west of Bukhara, a structure with two large square chambers containing central platforms, which existed in the citadel since the 3rd century CE, is interpreted, probably rightly, as a fire-temple (Semenov 1996: 35–56, figures 9–14), but Paykend was always under Sasanian influence and sometimes domination. Deeper inside Sogdiana the image temple at Erkurghan near Karshi received a square fire-platform in the last period (i.e., the 6th century CE) (Suleimanov 2000: 88–111, figures 39–52, 81–84, 87). At Panjikent one of the two city temples, Temple I, was also an image temple, but in the second phase (end 5th or early 6th century CE) the central structure was expanded by a series of rooms built alongside the main platform: a four-columned fire-chamber with a central fire-altar made of clay, flanked by a prayer room with a water container for ablutions. A staircase on the edge of the temple platform provided direct communication between the *ātesgāh* and the main building, possibly implying a ritual connection between the two forms of cult practices within this temple. The excavators assume that embers of the sacred fire were brought in front of the cult images (Shkoda 2009: 27–32, 99–108). However, these rooms functioned for a few decades at the most.

Apart from these examples, all the temples known in Central Asia housed cult images except in Parthia and Margiana, which were almost always part of the Sasanian Empire. Temples with images appear to have been known in the Achaemenid period under the name **bagina-* ‘place of the god(s)’, from which are derived MP *bašn*, Sogd. *vayn*, and the cognate Bactr. *bagolaggo* (< OIr. **baga-dānaka-*). In Iran they were gradually converted into fire-temples by the joint efforts of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the Sasanian administration, but they remained the main type of temple in Central Asia. In this category one can include:

1. In Bactria: The already mentioned Oxus temple; the two dynastic temples at Rabatak (see above) and Surkh Kotal (possibly dedicated to the goddess *Wanind* ‘the Victorious’); the great temple at Dil’berdzhin near Bactra, dating from the Hellenistic or post-Hellenistic period and seemingly dedicated to Wēš from the Kushan period onwards; Ghulbyān (a post-Kushan mountain cave shrine with paintings depicting various gods including Tīr-Tištīria) (Grenet and Marshak 1998: 13–14).
2. In Sogdiana: Kanka (near the citadel of the rulers of Chāch: A temple containing horse skeletons possibly related to the New Year sacrifice to the souls of the royal ancestors described in Chinese records) (Bogomolov and Burjakov 1995); Dzhar-tepe near Samarkand, with a painting showing Nana and Tīr-Tištīria presiding over a hunt (Grenet 2010b: 270–271, figures 9b, 10, 11); the two Panjikent temples.
3. In Chorasmia: No securely identified temple is known, except for in the royal town Toprak-kala, where two putative fire-temples one of which contained offerings of ram horns (to the god Farn?) have been found (Nerazik and Rapoport 1981: 42–56, 140–141).

Among all these temples those at Panjikent are the most extensively studied and the richest in decorative material (Shkoda 2009). Both were built at the time of the foundation of the city, in the first half of the 5th century CE, and from the beginning their combined surface corresponded to one fifth of the walled-in town. They remained continuously in service until the capture of Panjikent by the Arabs in 722 CE. Temple II never contained any specific room for a sacred fire, and its decoration shows beyond a doubt that it was dedicated to Nana: All paintings and clay statues found in the precincts of this temple depict her seated on her lion, or in rare instances we find closely associated deities (Demeter, the Frauuašis, Wēšparkar). Sometimes she presides over battle scenes of a seemingly apocalyptic character as gods take part directly in the battle. Yet, Nana is never depicted in Temple I, the one that temporarily included a fire sanctuary. The deities that can, however, be identified in its decoration belong to the Avestan pantheon: Mithra, possibly Wahrām, and Druvāsp, protectress of horses (shown as a lady holding a small horse, more in accordance with her Avestan gender than the Dioscurus type adopted on Kushan coins). Another painting shows a scene borrowed from the epic stock of the *yašts* subsequently reworked in Ferdowsī's *Book of Kings*, namely the temporary success and subsequent downfall of Zahhāk. After the abandonment of this temple, installations plausibly identified as a *barašnum-gāh* (a place for the great "nine nights" purification) were set in the ruin of the courtyard (Shkoda 2009: 230–231).

Cult implements were found in larger quantity in the temple at Džhar-tepe. They included silver furnishings for a small fire-altar or incense burner, showing personifications of the *haoma*, the Moon, the Fire, and the Sun, and a bronze mace ending with a human head comparable to the bull-headed mace (*gurz*) still used today in the Zoroastrian ritual (Grenet 2010b: 187, 195).

The Clergy and Its Literary Productions

In Bactrian and Sogdian records priests do not figure as prominently as the magi in Sasanian Iran. Two categories of priests are mentioned in Sogdian. The most frequent is *vaynpat*, literally 'master of a temple', a term unknown in Sasanian Iran (except in the Manichaean text M 219 where it means 'idol-priest'), but whose cognates are known in Armenian (*bagnapat*, borrowed from Parthian) and Middle Indian (*bakanapati* or *vakanapati*, borrowed from Bactrian), where it always applies to a priest serving a temple which contains images (Boyce 1975b: 99). The other term, *moypat*, the equivalent of MP *mowbed* 'chief magus', is mentioned only once, in a list of people belonging to the royal court (Mugh Document A-5; Livshits 2008: 213–220). The name of this priest is not mentioned, which might suggest that he is the only holder of this office at Panjikent. As Sogdiana had no higher level of political organization than the various principalities, the local *moypat* might well have constituted the main religious authority among the Sogdian Zoroastrians.

The probable depiction of an *Avesta* codex at Panjikent (see above) indicates that Sogdian priests kept and possibly copied such books. One Avestan text, the prayer *Ašəm Vohū*, has survived, rendered in a form of archaic Avestan transcribed phonetically with improper word divisions (British Library Sogdian Fragment 4). This text is followed by a fragment of another one describing the ascent of Zoroaster to Paradise and the beginning

of his dialogue with Ohrmazd (here called *Āδvaγ*). Many expressions appear to have been culled from the *Avesta*, in particular from the passage in the *Ard Yāšt* where the goddess Aši invites Zoroaster to rejoin her in her chariot, obviously in order to carry him to Paradise (*Yt* 17.21–22). The Sogdian text we have might well derive from a lost Avestan passage that narrated the continuation of this episode. Another Sogdian fragment, kept in Beijing, contains Zoroaster’s questions to Ohrmazd about the reunion of family members in Heaven; in this case the account of the Resurrection in *GBd* 34.9, 14, offers a close parallel in wording (Grenet and Azarnouche 2007 [2011]: 170–171).

Even before these texts were identified, the fact that Zoroastrian magi were credited with a literary activity of their own was known from one passage in Bīrūnī’s treatise on mineralogy where he mentions a “Book of the Zoroastrian Sogdians” (*kitāb al-majūs al-Sughd*), still in circulation in his time and called in their language the *Nawa-pōstē*, probably to be understood as “the Book of the Nine,” i.e., the nine precious stones associated with the nine planets of Indian astronomy. The first part of the long magical Sogdian text known as *P.3* represents a parallel version to this text (Azarnouche and Grenet 2010; Grenet and Azarnouche 2007 [2011]: 171–173). The main part of *P.3* is, however, concerned with rain making by using stones, a specialty of the Turkish culture of Central Asia. In the form it has come down to us the text can be considered as a collage of various elements ultimately compiled in a context of Turkish political domination, possibly the Uighur kingdom in the 8th or 9th century. The Zoroastrian background of the author appears also clearly in the prayer to *Wāδ* (the Wind), in part composed of formulas borrowed from the *Avesta* (“o perfumed South-Wind ... just Wind, perfume-bearer”; compare *HN* 2.7–8; “powerfully blowing, swift”; *Yt* 15.44–45, “red-adorned”; Vaiiu’s golden ornaments in *Yt* 15.57). So, while the Sogdian magi living in Turkish kingdoms in this late period may have appeared as eclectic and practitioners of sorcery, they had not lost contact with the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism.

Marriage Customs

The Zoroastrian practice of *xwēdōdah*, next-of-kin-marriage, is mentioned twice by foreign witnesses. In Curtius Rufus (*Histories* VIII.2.19) we read that at the time of Alexander’s campaign Sisimithres, satrap of Nautaca (today Shakhrisabz in Uzbekistan) had two sons by his own mother, “for among them it is lawful for parents to have intercourse with their children.” In 726 CE the Korean pilgrim Huichao mentions that the Sogdians, like the Persians, “all marry with each other and take their mother or their older or younger sister as their wife” (Fuchs 1938: 450). Despite these sources, we have no way to estimate how widespread the custom was (for *xwēdōdah*, see Skjærvø 2013b).

Funerary Practices

Funerary practices constitute the most eloquent testimony of the continuity and widespread adoption of Zoroastrian principles by the local populations of Central Asia (Grenet 1984b).

From the early Iron Age (end of the 1st millennium BCE), inhumations become very rare in all southern Central Asian countries, most examples being attributable to nomadic intruders. This appears to indicate the widespread abandonment of corpses without further gathering of the bones (an admitted variant in *Vd* 6.5.1). This practice was observed in Bactria at the time of Alexander's conquest, the bones being scattered on the inner slope of the rampart (Strabo 11.11.3). Some post-excarnation grave pits attributable to the local population have recently been brought to light at Dzharkutan in southern Sogdiana (Bendezu-Sarmiento and Lhuillier forthcoming).

Perhaps already during the Achaemenid period (although the chronology is disputed), Chorasmians began to gather bones in jars or in ceramic ossuaries, some of them anthropomorphic. From the 3rd or 4th century CE onward casket-shaped types tend to become generalized in Chorasmia, Margiana, and Sogdiana. This practice of transportable ossuaries differentiates the Central Asian funerary practice from that in Iran, where such objects are very rarely reported and most ossuaries known are rock-hewn cavities. In addition to ceramics, stone is rarely used in Chorasmia, more often plaster. The standard length of an ossuary is approximately 20–24 inches (50–60 cm), corresponding to the femur, the longest human bone. Many ossuaries have perforations, which are likely to have a ritual significance. According to *DD* 17.3–4 “in order that light may come to it a hole is made in it” (the context implied is the moment of Resurrection). The ossuaries were deposited either in pits or in small family mausoleums called *naus* by the archaeologists (according to the word used in Arab sources; the local name was Chor. *frawartik*, Sogd. *frawart-katē* ‘Frauuašis’ house’). In most cases abandoned buildings or ramparts were reused for that purpose. Funerary pits and *naus* always lay outside the inhabited part of the city.

The preliminary excarnation of bones was sometimes carried out in a man-made structure (*daxma*), as prescribed in *Vīdēvdād* (especially 8.1–2), but only three specimens are known to date in Central Asia: At Erkurgan in Sogdiana (a tower structure from the Hellenistic period); at Chil’pyk in Chorasmia (a rock spur surrounded by a wall, very much alike the old *daxma* at Kermān, used by a whole region from the 4th century until the Islamic conquest); at Durmen-tepe in Sogdiana (a tower structure serving the needs of a single family, 7th–8th century). In addition, a Chinese witness mentions an enclosure near Samarkand where a community of untouchables, clearly the *nasā-sālār*, gave the corpses to specially trained dogs, and then gathered them individually (Wei Jie in Chavannes 1903 [1973]: 133). The Mugh contract V-8 most likely concerns the sale of a bipartite *daxma* erected in a marsh (Livshits 2008: 49–58). Nevertheless, traces of excarnation by dogs or birds are rarely reported on bones found in archaeological excavations, and it appears that the canonical practice was used only in some places, presumably those which offered practical possibilities. Most often the bodies were left to decompose naturally on brick benches inside the mausoleum, a mode of disposal which preserved the essential precaution to respect the divine Earth. Bones were subsequently gathered and put in ossuaries. Corpses were similarly disposed of in Bactria, but ossuaries were not used and there were often interferences with customs brought by nomadic invaders. A *daxma* (Bact. *laxmigo*) is, however, mentioned in one Rōb document (Sims-Williams 1997a: 20–21).

Some Sogdian ossuaries bear images showing various gods, or scenes connected with the hereafter: The weighing of the soul at the Činwad bridge (Berdimuradov,



Figure 8.5 The weighing of the soul on an ossuary from Yumalaktepa near Shahrīsabz, c. 7th century CE. The seated gods on top are Ardwahišt (as master of Paradise), Rašn (holding the scales) and probably Srōš (as fighter against the demons of corruption, see the fly-swatters). © Samarkand Institute of Archaeology / MAFOUZ de Sogdiane.

Bogomolov, Daeppen, and Khushvaktov 2008 [2012]) (Figure 8.5), the dressing up of the soul by Wahman, and the Aməša Spəntas performing the final *Yasna* at the time of resurrection (see above). Others depict funerary rituals: The *Čahārom* ceremony (on the fourth day after death), but also lamentations that included self-inflicted wounds. Though prohibited in Zoroastrian literature, these lamentations were accompanied on some Chorasmian ossuaries by blessing formulas of pure Zoroastrian content (e.g., “May their souls [’rw’n] rest in eternal Paradise” [nwš ʔrδm’n]), which suggests that no incompatibility was felt. In the above-mentioned Mugh contract V-8 this practice (Sogd. *xšēwan*, MP *šēwan* ‘lament’) is alluded to in connection with the deposition of the body.

Several elements of the Sogdian funerary iconography were transposed, with a greater wealth of details, on the decoration of funerary beds of Sogdian migrants in China (Grenet, Riboud, and Yang 2004).

After the Muslim Conquest

Only in Chorasmia are there any mentions of systematic persecutions at the time of the Arab conquest. According to Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, trans. Sachau 1879: 42), when Qutayba ibn Muslim took the country in 712 CE he “exterminated their scribes and

executed their priests, and burnt their books and rolls.” In reality, archaeology shows that the mass abandonment of Zoroastrian funerary customs took place only towards the middle of the century, in Chorasmia as well as in Sogdiana, and Bīrūnī also mentions local survivals until his own time.

From Samarkand, during the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–831 CE), the Zoroastrian community addressed the acknowledged leader of the Zoroastrians in Fārs and Kermān to seek advice on the reconstruction of a *daxma* (Dhabhar 1932: 104–105). Arab geographers mention the Zoroastrian community still flourishing in the Samarkand suburb in the 10th century, when it was exempted from the *jezīye* (poll tax) in exchange for the maintenance of the water supply. At Frinkent near Samarkand, the village cemetery attests to the continuance of post-exarnation burial (no longer in ossuaries, only in jars), perhaps until the Mongol invasion (Grenet 1984b: 226, 233). Then all evidence of the Zoroastrian communities disappears from Central Asia, except in the Pamirs and Badakhshān where in the 13th century some people still claimed to follow the teachings of Zoroaster (Scott 1984).

Expatriate Sogdians at Dunhuang in China are known to have maintained Zoroastrian ceremonies until at least the beginning of the 10th century (Grenet and Zhang 1996 [1998]).

Conclusion: Central Asian Zoroastrianism in Perspective

The great diversity of Central Asian, especially Sogdian, religious practices and their significant differences with Persian Zoroastrianism did not escape the attention of foreign witnesses. The Middle Persian treatise *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (ŠĒ 2–7) indicates that Sogdiana was an old Zoroastrian country and even held to be the place where Zarathustra preached; yet his religion had been spoiled during Afrāsiyāb's tyranny, with fire-temples being converted to idol temples (notwithstanding the fact that Afrāsiyāb is held to have ruled far before Zarathustra!). Though in its present state the text dates from the Abbasid period, this statement probably echoes the attitude of the Sasanian clergy towards the Sogdians.

The Chinese, for their part, though recognizing the Persian origin of the religion of the Sogdians, often used a specific terminology for it: The *xian* religion (from a dialectal variant of *tian*, the Chinese word for 'heaven'), while Zoroastrianism in its proper sense was “the religion of Heaven and Fire.” Among the Sogdians themselves one Chinese record, a list of sects in Turfan (Ms. Stein 6551; Grenet and Azarnouche 2007 [2011]: 163), distinguishes between ‘Zoroastrians’ (*huo xian*) and ‘adepts of the mourned deity’ (*ku shen zhi bei*), the last category most probably designating the cult of Nana and Tammuz (Taxšīč?). Such a duality might explain the differences between the two Panjikent temples.

Notwithstanding these apparent differences, Central Asian Zoroastrianism is no less a part of the history of Zoroastrianism than its western counterpart, which was eventually codified in Iran and eventually, exported to India by the Parsis. As far as religious imagery is concerned, it was certainly the most creative.

Further Reading

The scholarly literature on Central Asian Zoroastrianism is very dispersed and there is no general synthesis as of yet, hence the many references given. In the series *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. III, Boyce and Grenet (1991) treat the Hellenistic period; Grenet (1987) and Bernard and Grenet (1991) are collections of essays specifically devoted to religions in Central Asia, but some of them are already outdated. See Grenet (1988) for a bibliographical overview limited to a decade; then consult the annual issues of *Abstracta Iranica*.

Concerning the study of Kushan Zoroastrianism, Rosenfield (1967) had a seminal role, as did Henning (1965) and Humbach (1975) for Sogdian Zoroastrianism. For Kushan Zoroastrianism, see now Grenet (2015). For recent literature, contributions by Boris Marshak and Valentina Raspopova (on Sogdian archaeology), and Nicholas Sims-Williams (on Bactrian and Sogdian philology), should be consulted first. On funerary practices, see Grenet (1984b).