Framing the conquest: Bactrian local rulers and Arab muslim domination of Bactria (31-128 AH/651-746 CE)

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Chapter One: Conceptualising the Region

> [In Balkh] all products of the tropical areas are available, but the date palm does not grow there…There is much snow in Balkh and the areas around it. Water freezes there, and [thus] it can be counted as part of the cold climate areas [too].[127]

Introduction

This chapter gives general remarks on the region of Bactria. It provides an overview of the geography and political conditions in the region when the Arab Muslims entered it. It shows how Bactria as a regional entity is a result of the geological conditions that created a shatter zone with a very diverse landscape characterised by mountains and valleys, rivers, and deserts. This has created a population dispersed into small communities that settled in the few and confined spaces that provided the conditions that could sustain them, connected via a network of roads that extended even far beyond the region, but nevertheless separated from each other leading to a political organisation of autonomy and overlordship. The extensive and dense network of routes in which Bactrian settlements figured led to an endless stream of goods, people and ideas in the region, contributing to the population's cultural diversity. This chapter builds a foundation for understanding Bactria's main areas of political control, their local rulers, and their interactions with the Arab Muslims discussed in the next chapters.

This chapter is organised into two parts to explain the geographical and political characters of Bactria. The first part will discuss how Bactria is part of the Makran-Pamir shatter zone (Figure 2). As a result, Bactria has the geographical and environmental character of a shatter zone.[128] This part shows that Bactria was divided into smaller units, and within these smaller units, the population was even further divided and diversified. That makes it different from the rest of the early Islamic empires like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The second part discusses the impact of the shatter zone. It will show that geography and climate influence human settlement patterns and their political organisations. Knowing these characteristics is crucial in understanding the dynamic process of the Arab Muslim conquests and their areas of political control in Bactria.

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[127] Abū al-Qāsim b. Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ* (Beirut: Manshurāt Dār Maktaba al-Ḥayāt, 1992), 376.
[128] The term "Shatter Zone" has been utilised by Luce in his study of the Umayyad Khurasan (Luce, "Frontier Process," 4).

I shall start by enumerating the various sources consulted for this chapter. Information on Bactria prior to the conquest is scattered in different documentary and literary sources, in numismatics studies, and in archaeological reports. Synthesising this information allows us to envision a clear picture of the region. Only a concurrent reading of these sources brings out the shatter zone characteristics and a full appreciation of the frontier zone's function that explain the specific socio-political situation in Bactria on the eve of the conquests.

1.1. Geography of Bactria

1.1.1 Name and location

Throughout its history, the region this dissertation calls Bactria has been referred to by different names. Despite this lack of consistency, it can be roughly described as comprising the lands between the Marw al-Rūd river in the west to Badakhshan in the east, the Hindukush to the south and the Hisar mountains to the north, with the Amu Darya flowing through the middle of it (Figure 3). The city of Balkh forms the main settlement and political centre. A discussion on the name and location of Bactria clarifies why this study calls this region Bactria.

The name of Bactria came to us via the Greek *Βάκτρα* (with the variants *βακτρία βακτριανή*).[129] It was already known in Old Persian (*Bāxtri*) itself as an adaptation of the Median (*Bāxθrī*). The Median *Bāxθrī* is derived from the proto-Bactrian *Bāχδī* attested in the *Avesta.*[130] The proto-Bactrian *Bāχδī* was the name of this region, but gradually developed to *βαχλο*. Then, *βαχλο* became the name of the main city in Bactria.[131] The term *βαχλο* and its Middle Persian form *Bʾẖl* may have led to the Arabic and the New Persian name of Balkh.[132] Hence, the proto-Bactrian *Bāχδī* was the source of all other forms in different languages.[133]

Bactria as a region with Balkh as its main political centre was known in the Achaemenid period (550–330 BCE). Bactria was a satrapy (*Bāxtri\xshachapāvā*),[134] and the authority of its

[129] Burzine Waghmar, "Between Hind and Hellas: the Bactrian Bridgehead (with an Appendix on Indo-Hellenic Interactions)," in *Indo-Hellenic Cultural Transactions*, ed. Radhika Seshan (Mumbai: The K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2020), 187.
[130] Nicholas Sims-Williams, "Bactria-Balkh: Variation on a Place-Name," in *Acta Iranica: Études de Linguistique Iranienne in Memoriam Xavier Tremblay*, ed. Eric Pirart (Peeters, 2016): 273. Waghmer argued that Bactria could either mean "share" or the "land belonging to the *bāxδra* river." (Waghmar, "Between Hind and Hellas," 188).
[131] A Bactrian document produced in the late fourth century refers to the city of Balkh as *βαχλο* (Bactrian document no. cd in Nicholas Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 74–75).
[132] Sims-Williams, "Bactria-Balkh," 274.
[133] Sims Williams, "Bactria-Balkh," 273.
[134] Darius Inscription at Behistun, Column 3, Lines 11–19. For the full text, see https://www.livius.org/sources/content/behistun-persian-text/behistun-t-24 (accessed on 15 May 2023).

satrap, who resided in Balkh, reached both southern and northern parts of the Amu Darya. Some Aramaic documents produced in Achaemenid Bactria attest to this.[135] They refer to Bactria as *baḥtry* (בחתרי). The same name is applied to the city of Balkh.[136] Similar information about Bactria is echoed in the works of Greek and Roman historians. They situated Bactria between the Hindukush and the Amu Darya (Oxus in Greek).[137] However, sometimes, they included northern parts of the Amu Darya as part of Bactria, for example, in Strabo's writings.[138] These reports imply that Bactria was controlled through Balkh.

While Bactria remained famous among Roman historians who wrote about the eastern Iranian regions, a new toponym appeared in Bactria. It was not a local name (like proto-Bactrian *Bāχδī*), nor was it associated with this region (like Greek *βακτρία*). In the first century BCE, new groups of people, known as Tukhari, conquered Bactria and settled there.[139] They gave their name to the areas they settled, and that was likely limited to the eastern parts of Bactria. These groups later established the Kushan Empire (first century BCE-third century CE).[140] The evidence for the name Tukharistan (*τοχοαραστανο*) used in this period comes from an inscribed silver dish presented by Nukunzuk to the Kushan King Kanishka I (r. early second century CE) after the king returned from his Indian campaign.[141] Tukharistan is also mentioned in two Bactrian documents produced in Rob in southern Bactria in the fifth century when the Hephthalites (late fifth to late sixth century) controlled the region.[142] Beyond the general observation that the Tukharians took control of the area and introduced the name Tukharistan to the region, the silver dish and the Bactrian documents do not describe the geography of

[135] The Aramaic document no. A4 [Khalili IA 1] shows that Akhwamazda (ruling in the fourth century BCE), the Achaemenid satrap of Bactria, ruled the region from Balkh. Further information can be found in Joseph Naveh and Sahul Shaked, ed., *Ancient Aramaic Documents from Bactria (fourth century B.C.E). Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum Part 1: Inscriptions of Ancient Iran* (London: The Khalili Family Trust, 2006), 93–99.
[136] Aramaic documents no. A8 [Khalili IA 11] and no. C1 [Khalili IA 21]. See Naveh and Shaked, ed., *Ancient Aramaic Documents*, 108–116, 174–185.
[137] These are Herodotus (fifth century BCE), Strabo (62 BCE–24 CE), Arrian (c. 86–160), Pliny (c. 23/24–79), Ptolemy (c. second century), and Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 330–395).
[138] All these reports can be found in William Smith, ed., *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (London. Walton and Maberly, 1854). It is available online: www. perseus.tufts.edu
[139] P. Leriche and Frantz Grenet, "Bactria in the Avesta and in Zoroastrian tradition," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bactria#pt2 (accessed on 28 November 2022).
[140] The chronology of the Kushan dynasty is disputed. However, there is a consensus that the Kushans ruled between the first century BCE and the third century CE. See Joe Cribb, "Numismatic evidence and the date of Kaniṣka I," in *Problems of Chronology in the Gandhāran Art*, ed. Wannaporn Rienjang and Peter Stewart (Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2018), 7–34.
[141] Nicholas Sims-Williams, "A new Bactrian inscription from the time of Kanishka," in *Kushan Histories: Literary Sources and Selected Papers from a Symposium at Berlin, December 5 to 7, 2013*, ed. Harry Falk (Beremen: Hempen Verlag, 2015), 261.
[142] See Bactrian documents, no. eh and jb in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 122–23, 126–27. For the Hephthalites, see Aydogdy Kurbanov, *The History and Archaeology of the Hephthalites* (Bonn: Habelt Verlag, 2013).

Tukharistan, nor do they tell us about its political boundaries. Most probably, Tukharistan was confined to the eastern parts of Bactria.

A helpful description of Tukharistan in the early seventh century is presented in Chinese records. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (600–662) visited it in 629–30 on his way to India.[143] According to him, the *Tuhuolu*, the country of Tukharians, was 1,000 in 3,000 *li* (a Chinese measure possibly equal to 300 meters). The T'sung-ling mountains (Pamir mountains) formed its eastern boundary, and in the west, it touched *Po-li-sse* or Persia. The great "snowy mountains", meaning the Hindukush, were located to the south and to the north, the "Iron Gates" formed its border. The Amu Darya flowed through the middle of this country.[144] Xuanzang refers to Balkh (*Poho/Fuhe*) as Rājāgṛiha or the royal city.[145] A century later, the Korean Buddhist pilgrim Hye Ch'o, who visited this region around 725–26, made a similar description of it and situated Tukharistan between Bamiyan to the south, Badakhshan to the east, and Persia to the west.[146] In his account, Balkh (*Fudiye*) was the capital of this region.[147]

From these reports, we might ask the question of why the seventh-century Chinese reports call it the land of Tukharians and not Bactria. The reason is that the Chinese traditionally used the term "Daxia" (大夏) for the Amu Darya region. It is already mentioned that the Tukhari people settled in this region and formed the Kushan empire. From the Yuan Wei period (386–535), the Tukhari people were called *Tuhuolu* (吐火羅). Then, in the Tang period (618–927), the region of Daxia was identified with *Tuhuolu*. In other words, *Tuhuolu* became a popular reference for the region where the Tukhari people lived.[148] When Xuanzang and Hye Cha'o visited Bactria, they simply called it *Tuhuolu*, which was already known to them. Their transcription of Balkh (*Fuhe*, *Fudiye*) corresponded to how they pronounced "Balkh" with an additional suffix.[149] Associating Bactria with certain people was not confined to the Chinese. It is also echoed in the Middle Persian and Armenian sources. From the third century, the Sasanians identified Bactria as the country of the Kushans (*Kūshānshahr*) and Balkh as their

[143] For his biography, see Benjamin Brose, *Xuanzang: China's Legendary Pilgrim and Translator* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2021).
[144] *SI-YU-KI*, 37.
[145] *SI-YU-KI*, 44; Sims-Williams mentions that *Fuhe* represents Bactrian *βαγδο* (Sims-Williams, "Bactria–Balkh," 279).
[146] *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 51–52.
[147] *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 52; According to Sims-Williams, *Fudiye* also represents *βαγδο* (Sims-Williams, "Bactria–Balkh," 279).
[148] Yu Taishan, "The Earliest Tokharians in China," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 204 (2010): 7–13.
[149] Sims-Williams, "Bactria-Balkh," 279.

political centre.[150] This definition was adopted in the Armenian sources.[151] The seventh-century historian Sebeos called Bactria the country of the Kushan with the city of Balkh as its political centre. He identified Tukharistan only with the eastern parts of Bactria.[152] In these reports, the land of the Tukharians or the country of the Kushans is the same, and that is Bactria. Balkh was its political centre.

With the Arab Muslim conquests of the eastern Iranian regions and the formation of Umayyad Khurasan, Tukharistan was identified with the eastern parts of Bactria. It was not used as a toponym for the entire Bactria. The Arabic geographic accounts compiled in the early Abbasid period divided Bactria into two distinct parts: Balkh and Tukharistan. Each of them had its administration (*al-dawāwīn*). They also used Balkh as a specific name for the city (*madīna*) of Balkh.[153] The combination of Balkh and Tukahristan formed a great *kūra* also called Balkh.[154] Al-Yaʿqūbī described it as "Greater Balkh" (*Balkh al-ʿuẓmā*), which covered all lands between the Marw al-Rūd and Badakhshan.[155] Thus, Balkh became a toponym for the entire region of Bactria and a specific name for its political centre, which was the city of Balkh. Tukharistan was the eastern part of the greater Balkh.

The combination of all these reports shows continuity in undersetting Bactria. More or less, these reports describe Bactria as a region covering both parts of the Amu Darya. They all

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[150] Touraj Daryaee, *Šahrestānīha ī Ērānšhr: A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History* (California: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 3–4, 13.
[151] Josef Marquart, *Ēranšhr: nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenaʿci* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1901), 49–66; For more detail on this text, see A. de Jong, "The Beginning and the End of the Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71: (2008): 53–58.
[152] R. W. Thomson, trans., *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, commented by James Howard-Johnston and Tim Greenwood, Part I. The Translation and Notes (Liverpool University Press, 1999), 15, 52–53.
[153] For instance, in his report about the east (*khabar al-mashriq*), Ibn Khurdhādbih (fl. 300/913) mentioned that Balkh and Tukharistan were part of the same quarter (*rubʿ*) during the Sasanian period (Ibn Khurdhādbih, *Kitāb al-masalik wa al-mamālik*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 18). We will see in chapter three (3.1.1) that the Sasanian Khurasan was divided into four administrative quarters (*arbāʿ*), and Balkh was one of them that included Tukharistan. Equally, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Faqīh al-Hamadānī (fl. second half of the third/ninth century) ascribes Balkh and Tukharistan forming one region (Abī Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī (Ibn al-Faqīh), *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1885), 321–22). Al-Yaʿqūbī expanded Balkh to the cities of Tukhairstan and put all of them in one region (al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 115–122). Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Istakhrī (fl. 300/912) wrote that Tukharistan is related to Balkh (*yattaṣilu bihā*). Though he adds that they had different administrations, he does not explain the administrative differences between the two districts (Abī Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Fārsī al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, ed. Muḥammad Jābir ʿAbd al-ʿĀl al-Ḥīnī and Muḥammad Shafīq Gharbāl (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1381/1961), 145, 155). A similar report is given by Ibn Ḥawqal (d. c. 367/977). He describes Tukharistan as part of Balkh despite having different administrative units, cities, and areas (Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 361). Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Muqaddasī (second half of the tenth century CE) describes Balkh and Tukharistan together, indicating his understanding of them as one region (Shams al-Din Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Madbūlī, 1411/1991), 295–296).
[154] Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 145.
[155] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 66–70.

refer to Balkh as the political centre of Bactria. The Sasanian *Kūshānshahr* (and its Armenian form) or Chinese *Tuhuolu* associated Bactria with the Tukhari people who settled and ruled there. They did not create a new name for the region. Similarly, the Arabic reports did not invent any name for Bactria but simply called it Balkh, which was already known. They also clarified that Tukharistan was in the eastern part of Bactria. Hence, the current study does not use *Tuhuolu*, *Kūshānshahr* or Tukharistan for this region but calls it Bactria. Two reasons can be mentioned here. The term Bactria is linked to the proto-Bactrian *Bāχδī*, which is the root of all other names like *baḥtry*, *bāxtri*, *Bʾḥl, baxl*, and Balkh. It is not an exonym but a name that originated in Bactria. Secondly, Bactria is a well-known name in modern scholarship and using it prevents any confusion. This study describes Bactria as a region stretching from the Marw al-Rūd river in the west to Badakhshan in the east, the Hindukush to the south and the Hisar mountains to the north, with the Amu Darya flowing through the middle of it. It uses Balkh to refer to the main city in Bactria. Establishing the name and location of Bactria paves the way to discussing its geography.

1.1.2 Bactria as part of a shatter zone

The historical Bactria discussed earlier was located in the eastern part of the Amu Darya Basin, which itself is part of the Makran-Pamir shatter zone.[156] This shatter zone runs "from the southwest to the northeast, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the steppes of China."[157] A shatter zone is a geological terminology that applies to a region with extreme geographical diversity. The shatter zone is created by tectonic collisions that form a "massive system of mountain chains" and the resulting "volcanic activity rifting and fracturing" it further.[158] As a result, a landscape with extremely different natural elements fragments it geographically. Being part of the Makran-Pamir shatter zone, the region that hosted historical Bactria has the geographical characteristics of a shatter zone as well. In this region, high mountains, long and narrow valleys, deserts, oases, marshy areas near the rivers, and low hills are all situated in a close geographical space. The extreme geographical differences affected human activities such as food production, settlement patterns, social interconnections, relations with other regions, trade networks, and political organisations. In the seventh century, the Arab Muslims entered

[156] The western part of the Amu Darya Basin rans to the Khwarazm region.
[157] Luce, "Frontier Process," 4–5.
[158] Sophia R. Bowlby and Kevin H. White, "The Geographical Background," in *The Archaeology of Afghanistan from Earliest Times to the Timurid Period*, ed. Raymond Allchin and Norman Hammond, rev. ed., ed. W. Ball (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 16–17.

this region that was geographically diverse and politically divided. The complicated geography and political divisions influenced their activities in Bactria.

Geographically, the region of Bactria can be divided into five areas. These are western Bactria, Bactria proper, southern Bactria, eastern Bactria, and northern Bactria (Figure 3). The reason behind such division is that the natural landscape of each of these areas is different. Similarly, each of these areas was controlled by different political groups, which will be discussed in the next chapter (2.1). Recognition of these five areas helps to identify those different political groups and their interactions with the Arab Muslims discussed in this dissertation (chapters three, 3.3, and four, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). To recognise these areas, this present section consults various sources, such as Arabic and Persian geographical descriptions. The importance of these reports is that most of the Muslim geographers mentioned in this chapter visited Bactria, and there is a consensus in their reports. However, the problem with their work is that they pay more attention to the cities and roads connecting them and occasionally discuss the countryside. The satellite images and contemporary geographical descriptions are also added because the natural features have not changed much, and they confirm most of the historical descriptions.

1.1.3 Western Bactria

Western Bactria consisted of all the areas between the Marw al-Rūd river (Per. Marvab or Marw river) and Balkh.[159] Geographically, western Bactria is characterised by high mountains to the south and the Kara-Kum Desert to the north. In this region, a very high elevation suddenly drops "between four and six thousand feet into a stony plain about twelve hundred feet above the sea level."[160] The Marw river (and its tributaries) originates from the high mountains to the south and passes through the narrow valleys before reaching the Kara-Kum desert, which creates the large inland delta in Marw.[161] It stops after creating this massive inland delta that is extensively cultivated. In Badghis, where the Marw river crosses towards

[159] Al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 148; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 365; Nabī Sāqī has kindly informed me that Marvab is also mentioned in a Persian document from pre-Mongol Ghur (personal communication, 2020).
[160] Luce, "Frontier Process," 39.
[161] For detail on Marw inland delta, see Barbara Cerasitti, "Remote Sensing and Survey of the Murghab Alluvial Fan, Southern Turkmenistan: The Coexistence of Nomadic Herders and Sedentary Farmers in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age," in *Proceeding of the 7th International Congress on Archaeology of the Ancient Near East 12 April-16 April 2010, the British Museum and UCL, London. Volume 2 Ancient & Modern Issues in Cultural Heritage Colour & Light in Architecture, Art & Material Culture Islamic Archaeology*, ed. Roger Mathews and John Curtis (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 539–58.

the north, the high mountains of Tirband-i Turkistan are located. The two small rivers of Shirin Tagab and Sar-i Pul, which originate in the Hindukush mountains, form two small oases at Andkhuy and Shaburghan but soon disappear in the desert.[162] The Amu Darya becomes very narrow at Kalif, an area located northeast of Andkhuy, creating a natural crossing point. Hence, nature has formed distinctive areas in western Bactria: high mountains and plains. Badghis and Gharchistan are characterised by high mountains and narrow valleys. Guzgan has both mountains and plains. It can be divided into two parts: Lower Guzgan and Upper Guzgan.[163] The Lower Guzgan is closer to the Kara-Kum desert, while the Upper Guzgan is distinguished by its green hills and high mountains to the south (Figure 4).

The Arabic and Persian geographical accounts from the Abbasid period described the geography of western Bactria and are similar to the above-mentioned observation. The fourth/tenth-century anonymous writer of *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam min al-mashriq ilā al-maghrib* ("Boundaries of the World from the East to the West") written in Persian in Guzgan mentions that this region was called Guzgan in his time, and that it was a vast region between the city of Balkh and the area called Gharchistan. The Amu Darya was to the north of it, and the Ghur region was to the south.[164] Arabic geographical accounts described Guzgan (Ar. *al-Juzjān*) as a vast area (*al-nāḥiya*) between Balkh and Gharchistan, but they did not expand it to Ghur.[165] However, they all agree that Badghis, Marw al-Rūd, and Gharchistan and Guzgan were the main areas in western Bactria.

The Muslim geographer described Badghis as a mountainous area (*ʿalā jabal*). This area had few rivers. Only the lower areas that had access to rivers produced agricultural products. The cultivated lands on the slope of the mountains were rain-watered (*mabākhis*). The bigger cities were in the plain areas, and the smaller ones were in the mountains. All buildings were constructed with mud brick (*ṭīn*).[166] The people of Badghis were warlike.[167] Like Badghis, Gharchistan (*gharj al-shār*) was a mountainous area (*al-jibāl*). However, the

[162] P. Leriche and Frantz Grenet, "BACTRIA," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bactria (accessed on 13 October 2021).
[163] R. Hartmann, "Djuzdjan," *Encyclopedia Islam, Second Edition*, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/djuzdjan (accessed on 9 October 2021).
[164] Sayyid Jalāl al-Din Ṭihrānī, ed., *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam min al-mashriq ila al-maghrib* (Tehran: Maṭbaʿa-yi Majlis,1352/1073), 59.
[165] See, for instance, al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 148, 152–53; Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 116; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 365–70; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 398.
[166] Al-Istkharī refers to eight cities in Badghis (al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 152); *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 57; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 368–69; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 308; ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl b. Nūr al-Dīn (Abū al-Fidā), *Taqwīm al-buldān*, ed. Mc. Guckin de Slane (Paris: A L'imprimerie Royale, 1840), 455.
[167] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* mentions that Badghis had 300 villages (*Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 57).

rivers allowed cultivation on lands around them. It produced rice (*arz*) and raisin (*zabīb*) that were exported to Balkh and all over Khurasan.[168] The people of Gharchistan were farmers and conducted animal husbandry.[169] Marw al-Rūd was in the lower area (*dāman-i Kūhistān*).[170] The Marw river watered gardens and agricultural fields (*basātīn wa kūrūm*). It was a prosperous area, and its cities and villages were in plain areas near the river.[171] Guzgan had both mountains and plains. The lower area produced agricultural products, and its desert dwellers had many camels and sheep. The hilly areas provided grassland for horses. It had more cities and villages than Badghis, Gharchistan, and Marw al-Rūd. Buildings were constructed with mud bricks. The bigger cities were in plain areas near the rivers.[172] The people of the mountainous areas were warlike (*jangī*), and the people of the plain areas were peaceful (*sāda dil*).[173] These reports show that Muslim geographers observed different landscapes and their impact on the human settlement patterns in western Bactria.

1.1.4 Bactria proper

Bactria proper contains the Balkh oasis, located between the sharp cliffs to the south and the Amu Darya to the north. Several natural splits in these cliffs allow the rivers of Balkh and Khulm to enter the northern plain and form the oases of Balkh and Khulm. A strip of the Kara-Kum Desert, which reaches this region, does not let the Balkh and Khulm rivers join the Amu Darya. The strong winds move the sand of the deserts south of the Amu Darya, creating temporary mounds that do not allow any kind of human settlement, including the building of irrigation canals between the oases and the Amu Darya. The Balkh oasis is the gift of the Balkhab or Balkh river originating in the Hindukush mountains and "debouches onto the Bactrian piedmont. Here it has formed a huge alluvial fan of more than 2,000 km^2, on which it splits into divergent arms so as to form a real inland delta."[174] This wide alluvial fan is known

[168] Al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 153; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 371; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 309.
[169] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 58.
[170] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 58
[171] Al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 152–53; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 369; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 314.
[172] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* refers to fourteen cities in Guzgan (*Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 59–61); Al-Istkharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 153; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 398; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 370.
[173] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 59–61.
[174] D. Balland, "Balkhāb," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/balkab-the-river-of-balk (accessed on 17 January 2020).

as the *hazhdah nahr* or eighteen canals.[175] The Balkh river fed a network of irrigation canals providing an extensive agricultural space.[176] To the east of Balkh, the small oasis of Khulm is located. This small oasis is fed by the Khulm river, which originates in the Hindukush and passes into the narrow and long gorge of Khulm. The location of Khulm near the natural pass makes it the main gateway to southern and eastern Bactria (Figures 5–8).[177]

The Arabic and Persian geographic accounts reflect similar information. The *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* mentions that the Balkh river originates in Bamiyan and flows towards Balkh. Before reaching the city, it divides into twelve canals that carry water to all villages of Balkh. The oasis of Balkh produces sugarcane, lotus flowers, and some tropical fruits.[178] The city of Balkh was located in this oasis (*fī mūstawā*), and the nearest mountain was to the south. Balkh was a great city, protected by defensive walls (*al-sūr*). The desert to the north of the oasis was difficult to cross because it was dry and sandy (*al-rumāl*), and buildings in the area were made of mud bricks. The city of Balkh had a large population. It was a great trade centre located in the middle of Khurasan (*wasaṭ Khurāsān*), and traders brought to it commercial things from all other regions.[179] In contrast to Balkh, Khulm was a small oasis. The river of Khulm was divided into various canals that watered the villages. It did not have a great city like Balkh.[180]

1.1.5 Southern Bactria

Southern Bactria is covered by mountains.[181] The density of mountains did not allow any substantial space for agriculture except on the riverbanks, which formed the scarce cultivable lands in this region. Even today, almost all the villages and towns are located along small rivers. Only in the open valley of Samangan was more cultivation possible, which provided space for

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[175] In the pre-Mongol period, the Balkh river had twelve branches, but possibly after the Mongol invasion, six new branches were added (*Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61); For the change in the direction of the Balkhab and its canals, see Étienne de la Vaissière, "Early Medieval Central Asian Population Estimates," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60, no. 6 (2017): 788–817; Ilhāmih Miftāḥ gives similar discussion. S Ilhāmih Miftāḥ *Gughrāfiyā-yi Tārīkh-ī Balkh, Jayḥūn va Mużāfāt-i ān* (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh-i ʿUlūm-i Insānī va Muṭālīʿāt-i Farhangī, 1376/2000), 47.

[176] For further information, see Éric Fouache, Philippe Marquis, and Roland Besenval, "Novuvelles découvertes en Bactriane 2007–2009," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académire des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 153, no. 3 (2009): 1033–1044; Paul Wordsworth, "The hydrological networks of the Balkh Oasis after the arrival of Islam: a landscape archaeological perspective," *Afghanistan* 1.1 (2018): 182–208.

[177] Barthold, *Turkestan*, 67.

[178] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61; Ibn Ḥawqal also mentioned the tropical fruits (Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 376).

[179] Al-Istakharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 155; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 373–74; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 295–302; Abū al-Fidā, *Taqwīm al-buldān*, 461; Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, 115–16.

[180] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 303; *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61.

[181] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61.

developing small towns. The narrow valleys to the south of Samangan did not allow the development of cities, but many fortresses were built in the mountains (Figure 9-10).[182]

The Arabic and Persian documents do not offer much information about southern Bactria. The reason is that the writers paid attention to the main urban areas, and southern Bactria did not have large urban centres. These accounts often refer to southern Bactria as al-Rub wa al-Samanjan. Al-Istakharī and al-Yaʿqūbī mention it without any details.[183] Only al-Muqaddasī says that Samangan did not have many agricultural areas but had animals for hunting (*ṣayd*).[184] He does not refer to any specific area, but the fourth/tenth century Ghaznavid historian Abū al-Faḍl al-Bayhaqī mentions that Piruz Nakhchir (modern Piruz Nakhchir) in Samangan was a great hunting area.[185] The main source of information on southern Bactria is the Bactrian documents. They show that agricultural production was not abundant in this area. The main towns were in lower areas around the river, and smaller settlements in the form of fortresses were scattered in the mountain areas.[186]

1.1.6 Eastern Bactria

Eastern Bactria contains all areas from the Hindukush mountains to the Amu Darya in the east of Balkh. Similar to western Bactria, eastern Bactria has high mountains, low and green hills, and plains. The natural division in this area starts between the Khulm river and the west of the Surkhab river (modern Kunduz river), where a range of lower hills gradually reaches the high mountains.[187] The rivers of eastern Bactria -Surkhab, Kokcha, and Panj- join the Amu Darya. The Surkhab river is the longest and biggest river that originates from the Hindukush. The Khanabad river joins it. The Surkhab, Kokcha, Panj, and Khanabad rivers irrigate major agricultural areas in this region. The Kara Kum Desert reaches here, but it cannot prevent the Surkhab river from joining the Amu Darya. The desert did not allow the development of any major urban areas between Khulm and Qala-yi Zal, or from Qala-yi Zal to Imam Sahib. In general, eastern Bactria is characterised by densely cultivated areas in Talaqan, Kunduz,

[182] Personal observation, 2002 and 2006.
[183] Al-Istakharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 155; Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 122.
[184] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 303.
[185] Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar Fayyāż (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Firdausī, 1383/ 2005), 252, 524.
[186] See chapter two, section 2.1.1.
[187] Shushin Kuwayama, "The Hephthalites in Tukharistan before 558," in *Across the Hindu Kush of the First Millennium: A collection of the Papers* (Kyoto University: Institute for Research in Humanities, 2002), 125.

Baghlan and Imam Sahib; low hills that separate these agricultural areas from each other; high mountains to the east of it; and the rivers that join the Amu Darya (Figure 11).

Eastern Bactria is the area that the Muslim geographers identified as Tukharistan. They recognised its complex geography and divided it into two parts: Upper Tukharistan (*al-ʿulyā*) and Lower Tukharistan (*al-suflā*).[188] Ibn Khurdhādbih and al-Yaʿqūbī mention that Upper Tukharistan was near Badakhshan.[189] Al-Istakharī, al-Muqaddasī, and Ibn Ḥawqal's reports describe it as an extensively cultivated area (*zuruʿun kathīra*).[190] The biggest cities of Tukharistan were located in this part.[191] The Lower Tukharistan extended to the high mountains. Baghlan was its major agricultural area. Al-Muqaddasī noticed that the mountains divided Baghlan into two parts of Upper Baghlan and Lower Baghlan.[192] Lower Tukharistan had lesser and smaller cities that were in the mountains. The *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* mentions that Tukharistan produced grain, fruits, flocks of sheep and good horses. Different groups of Turks lived around urban areas.[193] Apart from its geographical features, the Muslim geographers noticed interconnectivity within the cities in Tukharistan, Tukharistan's connection to the rest of Khurasan, and with the Kabul region. To them, eastern Bactria was between Khurasan and India.

1.1.7 Northern Bactria

The areas to the north of the Amu Darya are different from the southern parts. A quick look at satellite images from this region shows that the Hisar mountain range stretches in an east-west direction and continues to the south dropping in elevation before it ends near the Amu Darya. The rivers of Surkhan Darya, Kafirnihan, Wakhsh, and two other smaller rivers of Qizilsu (meaning red-water) and Shirabad, originating from the Pamir and Hisar mountains, are all north-south oriented and join the Amu Darya. The modern Surkhan Darya and Khatlan provinces form northern Bactria (Figure 12).

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[188] Al-Hamadānī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 321–22; Modern scholars followed the same logic of dividing this region (Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Calphate*, 428; Barthold, *Turkestan*, 68–69).
[189] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 122; Ibn Khurdhādbih, *Kitāb al-masalik wa al-mamālik*, 34.
[190] Al-Istakharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 156; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 303; Agricultural activities, urban development, and pastoral life were practised since ancient times in eastern Bactria. See Francfort, et al., "The Development of the Oxus Civilization," 117–125.
[191] Al-Istakharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 156.
[192] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 303.
[193] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61.

The Surkhan Darya Valley is the biggest part of this region. To the west of it, a natural split in the mountains allows the Shirabad river to pass it and forms the main gateway to the Qarshi region. The historical Chaghaniyan was located in the Surkhan Darya Valley.[194] The gorge which allows the Shirabad river to pass the mountain was called the Iron Gate (*bāb al-ḥadīd*) in historical and geographical sources. It was a strategic gorge that connected Bactria to Sogdiana.[195] To the west of it, mountains create natural high walls, and to the east of it, lower dry hills separate it from the historical Quwadhiyan (modern Qubodiyon). A strap of hills also ran in the middle of the Surkhan Darya Valley. The historical Shuman and Akhrun were located in the north of this valley.[196] The southern part of the Surkhan Darya allowed the development of Tirmidh (modern Termez): a large urban area located immediately on the bank of the Amu Darya. To the west of the Surkhan Darya Valley, modern Khatlan is located. The historical Khuttal (also called Khatlan) was located in this province. Unlike western and southern Bactria, northern Bactria has no deserts or oases. Instead, it has broad and green valleys and plain areas irrigated by the rivers. The plain areas are excellent spaces for agriculture.[197]

The Arabic and Persian geographical accounts describe northern Bactria as a green region with many rivers. Al-Istakhrī and Ibn Ḥawqal refers to five rivers originating in the Pamir and Hissar mountains that joined the Amu Darya (*al-jayḥūn*). They mention that the Amu Darya does not benefit any agricultural areas in Bactria, but waters the lands in Khwarazm.[198] Al-Istakhrī, Ibn Ḥawqal and al-Muqaddasī divide northern Bactria into two main areas: Khuttal (*al-Khuttal*) and Chaghaniyan (*al-Ṣaghāniyān*). Chaghaniyan was located to the west of Khuttal. A portion of a mountain continuing to the Amu Darya separates the two areas. Chaghaniyan was the name of the area and also the main city in this area. The rivers allowed densely cultivated areas and also provided suitable areas for birds that were hunted by locals. Most of the cities were located in plains, and the important building was made of brick (*al-ājur*).[199] Chaghaniyan produced saffron and furs that were exported all over Khurasan.[200]

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[194] Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 394.
[195] *SI-YU-KI*, 36; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 423; Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 70.
[196] Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 373, 393; *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 71–72; Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 167.
[197] For instance, the Panj river that cultivated from an ancient time. This area was a meeting point between peoples of this region with those who came from India already in the Bronze Age (Henri Paul Francfort et al., "The Development of the Oxus Civilization north of the Hindu Kush," in *The Archaeology of Afghanistan from Earliest Times to the Timurid Period*, ed. R. Allchin and N. Hammond, rev. ed., ed. W. Ball (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 159).
[198] Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 167; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 393.
[199] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 283.
[200] Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 387.

Chaghaniyan was a strategic place. The Iron Gate was located in the west of this area.[201] It connected Bactria to Sogdiana and was described by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang who visited it in 630. Xuanzang mentions that this gorge had walls and "double wooden doors, strengthened with iron and furnished with many bells hung up".[202] Thus, it was a strategic location. Any army that wanted to pass the Iron Gate to reach Sogdiana required either the cooperation of the king of Chaghaniyan or control of the area militarily. The Umayyads understood the value of this strategic place and kept good relations with its local king, which will be further discussed in chapter four (4.1.3). The Muslim geographers described Khuttal as a mountainous area (*bi ajmʿaūhū jibāl*). However, except Iskandara, all other cities were in plain areas (*fī mustawā*). The buildings were made of mud bricks. They mention that Khuttal had many rivers that irrigated lands and gardens (*dhawāt anhār wa ashjār*). It produced good horses and flocks of sheep (*mawāshī*).[203] Hence, Chaghaniyan produced more agricultural products, and Khuttal produced more fruits and cattle.

The Muslim geographers located Tirmidh to the south of Chaghaniyan. It was a great urban centre on the bank of the Amu Darya. The city was densely populated, had many markets, and was protected by defensive walls (*al-sūr*). The area of Tirmidh was watered not by the Amu Darya but by the river coming from Chaghaniyan.[204] Two smaller areas of Shuman and Akhrun were located in the north of Chaghaniyan. They were smaller than Tirmidh but were rich cities because they exported saffron.[205] The historical Guftan may have been located in this area.[206] Al-Muqaddasī mentions that Quwadhiyan was near Chaghaniyan and located north of the Amu Darya. Quwadhiyan had many settlements (*shadīd al-ʿimāra*), and the mountains were around this area.[207] In general, Chaghaniyan and Khuttal formed northern Bactria. It was a prosperous area.[208] There was no desert in northern Bactria. Most cities were interconnected and located in the plains. Northern Bactria was connected to the rest of Khurasan, Sogdiana, and Tibet.

The above-mentioned description of the five areas shows geographical diversity in Bactria. The Muslim geographers noticed the region's complex landscape. They highlighted

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[201] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 70; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 423.
[202] *SI-YU-KI*, 36.
[203] Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 167; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 374; Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 390–91.
[204] Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 167.
[205] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 284; Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 167.
[206] Barthold, *Turkestan*, 74.
[207] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 390.
[208] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 71–72.

the impacts of different geography and climates on human settlement patterns and political organisations. They also recognised Bactria's interconnectivity and its multireligious society. Though they described different landscapes in each of the five areas in Bactria, they categorised the entire region of Bactria into two climate zones: cold (Ar. *bilād al-ṣūrūd*; Per. *sardsīr*) and hot (Ar. *bilād al-ḥār*; Per. *garmsīr*). They also categorised the human settlement patterns into two main areas related to the mountains (Ar. *jibāl*; Per. *kūh*) and plains (Ar. *ṣaḥrā*; Per. *dasht*). The plains included the oases (Ar. *mustawā*; Per. *hāmūn*). In terms of roads and trade networks, they described the whole of Bactria as one single economic zone connected to the rest of Khurasan, Sogdiana, India, and China. The combination of all these unique features in one region made Bactria different from the rest of Khurasan or other parts of the Islamic empire.[209] The sources discuss the relationship between geography, climates, and their impacts on settlement patterns which themselves influenced political organisation in Bactria, and depict a clear picture of what kind of region the Arab Muslims conquerors entered in the seventh century. This is beneficial to recognise how these areas came under Arab Muslim rule later in the eighth century. This part follows the categories mentioned by the Muslim geographers and views the whole of Bactria as one great region.

1.2. Impacts of the shatter zone

As it is mentioned earlier, the Arabic and Persian reports show that Bactria had two different climates: hot and cold. The deserts and the oases had hot climates, and the mountain areas had cold climates.[210] Satellite images attest that western parts of Bactria have features of arid zones, where the dry land is more and precipitation is less. In contrast, eastern and northern Bactria have characteristics of semi-arid zones with more grassland and rainfall that covers all regions from the east of the Aral Sea to the northwest of the Indian subcontinent.[211] The high mountains of the Hindukush, Hisar, and Pamir play vital roles in the pattern of temperature and precipitation. Most rainfall happens between October and April in the lower areas, and snowfall

[209] The Muslim geographers' descriptions of Iraq, Syria and Egypt differ from Bactria. Their reports show that none of those regions have the complex geography of Bactria.
[210] Al-Muqaddasī compares the weather in Balkh with Iraq saying they are simlar. The hot climate and abundant water in Balkh Oasis were the reason for tropical products and lotous flowers reported by Xunzang in 630, and then by Ibn Ḥawqal in the fourth/tenth century (*SI-YU-KI,* 44; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 376).
[211] For detail information about the Arid Zone, see David S. G. Thomas, ed., *Arid Zone Geomorphology: Process, Form and Change in Drylands*, 3rd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

occurs in the high mountains. All rivers of Bactria originate from these mountains.[212] Hence, Bactria has both arid zone and semi-arid zone climates.

The climate and the distribution of resources were directly related as they affected the agricultural possibilities and wildlife. The physiography of Bactria is such that the plain, oases, foothills, marshy lands around the rivers, and the high mountains situated at a close distance provided space for agricultural life in the plains, oases, and low hills, and pastoral communities fringing the mountains.[213] The Muslim geographers' reports attest to this. They mention that the majority of the irrigated lands (*mazāriʿ*, *basātīn*) were in the plain areas, oases, and around the rivers. In these areas, different varieties of agricultural products were harvested. In contrast, the mountain areas produced less grain. The cultivated lands on low hills depended on rainwater (*mabākhis*).[214] The grazing areas in the foothill of the mountains provided pastures for flocks of sheep.[215] In short, the geography and climate of Bactria provided habitation for both sedentary and nomadic populations.[216]

1.2.1 Settlement patterns: sedentary and pastoral life

The climate, geography, and resources impacted settlement patterns in Bactria. Because the plains and oases had bigger surface areas and could produce more food resources, they had larger populations.[217] The majority of cities and villages were thus located here.[218] The Muslim geographers often refer to these areas with the term *shadīd al-ʿimāra*, meaning densely constructed. In contrast, the mountain areas had fewer and smaller cities and thus smaller populations. The Muslim geographers add that buildings were made of mud bricks (*ṭīn*), and

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[212] In the spring and early summer, the rivers reach their highest flow and look muddy. Floods and erosion happen at this time of the year, affecting the areas around the river's course (Bowlby and White, "The Geographical Background," 18–20). It is worth noting that by the middle of the summer, the water runs slower again, and it becomes cleaner.

[213] Bowlby and White, "The Geographical Background," 15–19.

[214] See, for instance, Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 376; Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 150–158.

[215] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 60–62.

[216] The semi-steppe conditions with its grazing lands in eastern and northern Bactria attracted people from the steppe beyond the Syr Darya River throughout the ages. For the nomads' interaction with sedentary areas in central Asia, see Jáno Harmatta, B. N. Puri and G. F. Etemadi, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 2: *The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250* (Paris: UNESCO, 1994);
For instance, the Balkh oasis was created by the ever-flowing Balkhab river, which formed a vast alluvial fan of more than 2,000–2,700 km^2 that could be extensively cultivated. La Vaissière proposed the population to have been about 300,000 to 400,000 for the Balkh oasis, which could have even been 500,000 in its heyday (La Vaissière, "Early Medieval Central Asian Population," 805).

[218] The people of the plain areas as the *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* mentions were mostly farmers, traders, or had industries. They were peaceful people (*sāda dil*). However, most people in the mountain areas were warlike (*jangī*). The *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* does not explain any reasons for it.

the cities were protected by defensive walls (*al-sūr*).[219] Xuanzang's report about the massive defensive walls of Balkh that stand to this day, and the remains of great walls around almost all pre-Islamic cities in Bactria, show that building walls around cities was an old practice in the region. Not only the cities but the entire oasis of Balkh was protected by walls from attackers and also the desert's moving sand.[220] These mud-brick walls confirm the Muslim geographers' observation (Figures 13–15). The material for them was easier, cheaper, and quicker to produce than baked bricks.[221] Though the buildings made of mud bricks are warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, they are vulnerable to heavy rain and flood.[222] Once the buildings are destroyed, they turn into dust; it is not feasible to restore them. Remains of ruins near each other in Bactria show that people abandoned the cities if they were destroyed by natural calamities or war and constructed a new place near the older settlements.

1.2.2 Interconnectivity

The Muslim geographers highlighted the interconnectivity between the cities in Bactria. Almost all of them described the distance between the cities. However, they do not offer much information about the cities' relationship with their hinterlands. They show that the cities were located near each other and one could travel from one city to another.[223] Their reports describe

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[219] See, for instance, al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, 66–7.

[220] Étienne de la Vaissière, Philippe Marquis and Julio Bendezu Sarmiento, "A Kushan military camp near Bactra," in *Kushan Histories: Literary Sources and Selected Papers from a Symposium at Berlin, December 5 to 7, 2013*, ed. Harry Falk (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2015), 242–254.

[221] Production, transportation, and the use of mud brick are more accessible and faster to work with than stone. Therefore, mass production of mud brick in various sizes was possible. For instance, the mud bricks used in the defensive walls of Qala-yi Zal in eastern Bactria are 40 by 40 cm. A mud-brick building resists the winter cold and the summer heat; thus, it was used for centuries as the primary building material in Bactria. Though the mountains were nearby, Bactrians hardly used stone for construction. Even today, people who live in villages in northern Afghanistan have to make sure that their houses (made of mud bricks) have a fresh layer of insulation made of mud mixed with straw (*kāhgil*). This insolation protects the building from rain and snow.

[222] Despite all its benefits, mud brick is fragile to water and can be destroyed by floods. For instance, the Amu Darya changed its course in the northeast of Ai-Khanoum and created many smaller streams that joined each other near the Greek city of Ai-Khanoum. This river destroyed half of the Kohna Qala (personal observation, July 2004). Similarly, the shift of the river caused the destruction of the fortified city of Tirmidh and the small islands that once existed in the river. Like floods, earthquakes could reshape the landscape. An Arabic report mentioned by Qudāma b. Jaʿfar shows that a water spring was created by an earthquake in 203/819 near Balkh. The water was enough for irrigation, and a new village was formed around it (Qudāma b. Jaʿfar, *Al-kharāj*, 107); Rocco Rante has recently argued that the same thing happened in Bukhara Oasis in the course of time (personal communication, Leiden University, 22 August 2023).

[223] For instance, al-Istakhrī mentions that in his time, travelling from the Marw al-Rūd to the city of Balkh would take twelve days through the cities of Talaqan, Faryab and Shaburghan. Then, two days from Balkh to Khulm; from there to Samangan two days; from Samangan to Baghlan two days. From Balkh, one could go to Tirmidh in two days and then travel to Chaghaniyan in four days. One could continue travelling to Shuman, which would take two days or return to Tirmidh and go to Qawadhiyan, which would take two days (al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 158, 160, 189–90; Similar report is reflected in Ibn Khurdhādbih, *Kitāb al-masalik wa al-mamālik*,

the city of Balkh as an intercepting point in Bactria. For instance, Abū al-Fidā clarifies the centrality of Balkh further. He mentions that Balkh is in the middle of Khurasan (*wasaṭ Khurāsān*) and is interconnected to all cities around it.[224] The *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* calls Balkh the trade port of India (*bārkada-yi Hindūstān*).[225] Al-Yaʿqūbī depicts the whole of Bactria as one region (*Balkh al-ʿuẓmā* or greater Balkh) when it comes to trade, and says that the main overland trade routes between Marw to India, Marw to Tibet, and Sogdiana to India all crossed through Bactria.[226] The interconnectivity within Bactria and Bactria's connection to India and China was not confined to Muslim geographers' reports. Xuanzang's description of the Bactrian cities and their close distance are similar to the Arabic reports. He travelled from China to India by crossing Bactria in 630.[227] A century after him, Hye Ch'o crossed Bactria from India to China.[228] Thus, Bactria was part of a great regional overland trade network, and this allowed different groups of people and materials to move in and out.[229] These reports recall Joseph T. Arlinghaus' argument that a shatter zone is a "route area".[230] Though the rugged terrain and many mountains created small pockets of human settlements, it did not prevent their connection.

1.2.3 Religious diversity

The geographical location of Bactria between Sogdiana, India, China, and the western parts of the Iranian plateau had a significant impact on this region.[231] It turned Bactria into an

32–34); Similar description is given in Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 378, and al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 344–49.

[224] Abū al-Fidā, *Taqwīm al-buldān*, 461; Similar report is given in al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 65–71.

[225] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 61.

[226] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 65–71.

[227] *SI-YU-KI*, 36–49.

[228] *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 39–58.

[229] *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 57–62; The connection between Bactria and other neighbouring regions date to the ancient time. The archaeological excavations from various confirm that the 'Oxus Civilisation' (2500 BCE to 1400 BCE) was contemporary to the 'Indus Civilisation' and they developed symbiotic economic and cultural relations. At the same time, Bactria had relations with the Kopet Dagh region, the Aral Sea area, the steppes, the Caspian region in Iran, the northwest of India and Baluchistan, the Indian Ocean zone, and Mesopotamia (Francfort et al., "The development of the Oxus Civilization," 157–58). The excavations conducted by the Soviet-Afghan archaeological team in Tilliya-Tepe in western Bactria revealed a connection between Bactria, the Steppe and India and China (see Sarianidi, *Bactrian Gold*). The excavated conducted by DAFA in the Greek city of Ai-khanoum in eastern Bactria revealed a great Greek city that was connected with India and also Greece (see Paul Berard et al., "Campagne de foullie 1978 á Ai-Khanoum (Afghanistan)," *Bulletin d'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* 68 (1980): 1–104).

[230] Cited in Luce, "Frontier Process," 4.

[231] Bowlby and White, "The Geographical Background," 25.

'interlocutor space' connecting these regions.[232] As a result, migrants, travellers, merchants, missionaries, and armies crossed or settled in Bactria throughout history.[233] The constant movement of people created a colourful human mosaic in the region. At the same time, as noticed by Haug, the tectonic collision turning the area into a shatter zone created a complex geographical configuration with natural barriers between the region's inhabitants, allowing for the "creation of a variety of ethnic, linguistic, social and ideological differences within a small space."[234] As a result of the constant traffic of people from neighbouring places and the existence of settlements separated from each other, Bactria had always had a diverse population. Different groups of people who spoke different languages and followed different cultural traditions lived in this region.[235] This is reflected in Muslim and non-Muslim sources related to Bactria.

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[232] Apparently, an interlocutor space is a more convenient term than 'crossroad' for Bactria. For a discussion on Central Asia as an interlocutor space, see Prajakti Kalra, "Locating Central Eurasia's inherited resilience," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2022): 235–255.

[233] See Holly Pittman, "Bronze Age interaction on the Iranian Plateau: From Kerman to the Oxus through seals," in *The Iranian Plataea during the Bronze Age: Development of Urbanization, Production and Trade*, ed. Jan-Waalke Meyer, Emmanuelle Vila, Marjan Mashkour, Michèle Casanova and Régis Vallet (Paris: Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2019), 267–288; Jan-Waalke Meyer, Emmanuelle Vila, Régis Vallet and Marjan Mashkour, "The urbanisation of the Iranian Plateau and adjacent areas during the Bronze Age: Concluding thoughts." in *The Iranian Plateau during the Bronze Age: Development of urbanisation, production and trade*, edited by Jan-Waalke Meyer, Emmanuelle Vila, Marjan Mashkour, Michèle Casanova and Régis Vallet (Paris: Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2019), 347–56; B. A. Litvinsky et al., ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996); For relation between India and central Asia, see Jos Gommans, *Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[234] Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 26.

[235] Bactria was a microcosm reflecting a much bigger world that stretched from India and China to Macedonia. Concrete evidence for this connectivity and diversity comes from documentary and literary sources, numismatics, epigraphy and archaeological finds. For instance, Aramaic documents, Greek textual items, Bactrian documents, Sogdian written works, Middle Persian and Arabic documents, Hebrew, Judeo-Persian, and New Persian texts and inscriptions have all been found in different areas in Bactria. They attest to the diversity of Bactria's population. For Aramaic documents, see Naveh and Shaked, *Ancient Aramaic Documents*; For Greek documents, see Laurianne Martinez Sève, "The Spatial Organization of Ai Khanoum, a Greek City in Afghanistan," *American Journal of Archaeology* 118, no. 2 (2014): 267–283; The Sogdian name is attested in Bactrian documents (Bactrian documents no. X. W in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 136–141, Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 212); For Middle Persian in Bactria, see Dieter Weber, "The Pahlavi letter Doc. 129 of the Khalili collection," in *Studies in the Chronology of the Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*, with contributions by Harry Falk and Dieter Weber, ed. Nicholas Sims-Williams and François de Blois (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018), 99–108; For Arabic documents, see Khan, *Arabic Documents from Early Islamic Khurasan*; For Judeo Persian and New Persian, see Ofir Haim, "What is the "Afghan Genizah"? A short guide to the collection of the Afghan Manuscripts in the National Library of Israel, with the edition of two documents," *Afghanistan* 2, no.1 (2019): 70–90; Khwāja Muḥammad, Mirzā and Nabī Sāqī, *Barghā-yi az yak Faṣl yā Asnād-i Tārīkh-i Ghur* (Kabul: Intishārāt-i Saʿīd, 1388/2010); Said Reza Huseini, "The *Muqaddam* Represented in the pre-Mongol Persian Documents from Ghur," *Afghanistan* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 2021): 91–113; Similarly, coins with different scripts represent traces of different communities in Bactria (see Klaus Vondrovec: *Coinage of the Iranian Huns and their Successors from Bactria to Gandhara (4th to 8th century CE). Studies in the Aman ur Rahman's Collection* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014).

Muslim geographers describe Bactria as a multi-religious region. Al-Muqaddasī mentions that followers of various schools of Islam (sing., *madhhab*), many Jews (*yahūd kathīra*), some Christians (*naṣārā qalīla*) and followers of different schools of Zoroastrianism (*aṣnāf al-majūs*) lived in Bactria. Apart from them, there were people whose religion was considered heretical (*al-zandiqa*). The administration of each area was based on the religious regulations of its inhabitants (*al-ʿamala fī hādhihi al-mawāḍiʿ ʿalā madhhabihim*). Each group had its jurists, meaning there was religious autonomy. In some places like Gharchistan, the king (*al-shār*) prayed twice during Eid, each time according to a different *madhhab* to represent his subjects. In case of disputes between any religious groups, the rulers interfered to control the situation.[236] Al-Muqaddasī's report indicates that the rulers in Bactria did not unify the region under one specific religion, but rather patronised all of them.

The coexistence of various religious groups was not new to Bactria, nor was it confined to the fourth/tenth-century Muslim geographers' observations. Religious diversity already existed when the Arab Muslims entered Bactria. Followers of Buddhism, Iranian religions, Christianity and Judaism lived in Bactria. A brief explanation of these different confessions and the areas where they were practised is warranted. Likewise, it enables us to recognise which religious groups interacted with Arab Muslims.

1.2.4 Buddhism

Buddhism was popular in seventh-century Bactria. Many *stūpas* and *vihāras* existed within and outside urban areas.[237] Xuanzang reported the existence of active Buddhist communities in different areas of Bactria when he visited them in 630. His report shows that to the north of the Amu Darya, except in Wakhsh and Khuttal where worshipping Zoroastrian and old Iranian deities were popular, Buddhist communities lived in Chaghaniyan, Kulab, and Quwadhiyan.[238] However, Hye Ch'o's report on Khuttal and archaeological excavations show that both Wakhsh and Khuttal had Buddhist communities during the seventh and eighth centuries. For

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[236] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 323, 336; Other authors also confirm existing of different religious groups in Bactria. See *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 58, 59; Al-Istakharī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 153.

[237] See Boris A. Litvinsky and Tamara I. Zejmal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepa, Tajikistan: History and Art of Buddhism in Central Asia* (Rome: ISIAO, 2004).

[238] *SI-YU-KI*, 39–40; The Buddhist sites in northern parts of the Amu Darya are largely excavated. See for instance, IPAEB Preliminary Report of International Pluridisciplinary Archaeological Expedition to Bactria undertaken between 2007–2012. The reports are available online, http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/handle/2445/11504 (accessed on 1 December 2022); Kazim Abdullaev, "The Buddhist Culture of Ancient Termez in Old and Recent Finds," *Parthica* 15 (2013): 157–187.

instance, Ajina Tepe preserved the remains of a great monastery based on a four *iwān* layout, and Kafyr Kala and Khisht Tepe had smaller temples.[239] Xuanzang mentions that Tirmidh had ten *sanghārāma* or Buddhist monastery with 1000 monks altogether.[240] To the south of the Amu Darya, Guzgan, Gaz, Balkh, and Samangan also had Buddhist communities.[241] The city of Balkh was the leading Buddhist centre in Bactria. According to Xuanzang, it had 100 convents and 3,000 monks altogether who studied the religious teachings of *Hīnāyāna* Buddhism.[242] The *Hīnāyāna* encouraged its followers to seek individual salvation by following the teachings of Buddha.[243] The words of the Buddha and their commentaries are important for this group. Outside the city's southern wall,[244] a great Buddhist complex existed that is known as the Naw Bahar.[245] The main monastery, called *navasanghārāma*, hosted a grand statue of Buddha and a specific hall for the relics attributed to Buddha. People visited them and offered

[239] Litvinsky and Zejmal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepa*, 181–84.
[240] *SI-YU-KI*, 39, 49; For arechelogical excavations in Buddhist sites, see IPAEB Preliminary Report; Pierre Leriche, Sakirdzan Rasulevic Pidaev et al., *Mission archélogique franco-ouzbèque de Bactriane septentrionale. Rapport 10 (2002)*, Halshs-00604184, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/hashs-00604184 (accessed 12 October 2021).
[241] *SI-YU-KI*, 39, 49; Archaeological surveys and excavations in the region confirm Xuanzang's reports about the presence of Buddhist monuments. See Paul Bernard, Roland Besenval and Philippe Marquis, "Du 'mirage bactrien' aus réalités archéologiques: nouvelles fouilles de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (DAFA) á Bactres (2004–2006)," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 150 e année, n. 2 (2006): 1217–1229; The ruines of stupas are visible in diffèrent places in Balkh, Dawlatabad, Chahrkint and Marmul (Personal survey 2004–2009).
[242] *SI-YU-KI*, 44; *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 52.
[243] Renato Sala has argued that not all Buddhist sects, but only a few of them gained ground in the eastern Iranian regions. These were namely *Sarvāstivāda*, *Mahāsāṃghika*, *Dharmaguptaka*, and *Saṃmitīya*. Sala adds that the *Sarvāstivāda* focusses on "the *Abhidharma* and supports the existence of all phenomena" in the past and present, which makes it realistic towards existence. The *Sarvāstivāda* spread towards Bactria during the Kushans, and quoting Sala, it "played the central role in the diffusion of Buddhism in Central Asia." (Renato Sala, "The spread of Buddhism from Gandhara to South, West and East Central Asia (I BC-XIV AD)," in *Religions of Kazakhstan and Central Asia on the Great Silk Road. Materials of the International scientific and practical conference 12–13 June 2017* (Almaty: Service Press, 2017), 250). Sala adds that the *Dharmaguptaka* is derived from the *Mahāsāṃghika* and emphasises the supramundane nature of the Buddha. Magic and esoteric rituals and venerating relics and stupas are important in this sect. It existed in Central Asia from the first century CE and remained there till the eighth century. The *Saṃmitīya* preached the restoration of the concept of the soul. Among these sects, the *Sarvāstivāda* was most popular in Bactria (Sala, "The spread of Buddhism," 250).
[244] See Rondy S. Young, "The South Wall of Balkh-Bactra," *Journal of Archaeology* 59, no. 4 (1955): 267–276.
[245] This Buddhist complex was known the Naw Bahar in Arabic and Persian sources. For the Arabic sources, see Jalīl al-ʿAṭīyya, *Akhbār al-Barāmika: li muʾallif min al-qarn al-rrābiʿ al-hijrī/al-ʿāshir al-mīlādī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa li al-Ṭibāʿa wa al-Nashar, 1427/2006); For the Persian sources, see Muḥammad Ṣādiq Sajjādī, *Tārīkh-i Barmakiyān* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Doctor Maḥmūd Afshār, 1385/2006). The *barmak* (Sanskrit. *parmakh*, *parmukha* meaning chief) was the keeper of the Naw Bahar and managed its financial affairs. According to Ibn al-Faqīh, the Persians (*ʿajam*) compared the Naw Bahar with the Kaʿba and the *barmak* with the leader of the Quraysh tribe. People visited the Naw Bahar, offered donations, covered the grand stupa with silk fabric, and put flags on it. Local kings of the region also visited Naw Bahar and prostrated before the great statue. There were 360 chambers around the stupa where the servants and the guardians of Naw Bahar resided, and they served according to their tenure (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 323). Naw Bahar, in particular, and Buddhism, in general, continued to operate in Bactria after the Arab Muslim conquests. The Korean Buddhist monk Hye Ch'o, who visited Bactria in 725, mentions that the country was under the Arabs, but the locals were predominantly Buddhist (*The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 52).

their donations. Xuanzang noticed that in this Buddhist complex, there was an old monastery that hosted various groups of people. There were scholars who authored books and reproduced the *śāstra* or commentaries on *sūtra*. Apart from them, there was a group of the *arhat*, or the great master, who possessed four degrees of holiness and performed miracles by exhibiting their spiritual capabilities.[246] Beside them, there were priests who were busy with their daily duties in the monastery. The Buddhist priests were known for their knowledge of Buddhism and medical expertise.[247] Apart from this complex, there were other Buddhist monuments in the Balkh oasis where statues of Buddhas and donors were erected (Figures 16).

Xuanzang reports that the Buddhists of Balkh linked their community directly to the Buddha. They claimed that two Bactrian merchants visited the Buddha and received his teachings. The authenticity of this story is not certain, but it clearly shows that Buddhism has been practised for a long time before he visited Balkh.[248] It also shows that Buddhists of Balkh claimed a direct relation with the Buddha in the early seventh century. The same mechanism can be observed to be at work in the Islamic period too. The pre-Mongol author of *Faḍāʾil-i Balkh* claimed a direct connection between Balkh and the Prophet Muḥammad and his successors.[249] When Bactrians accepted a religion that originated outside of Bactria, they tried to internalise it by imagining a direct connection with its origin.

1.2.5 Worshipping Iranian deities

Worshipping the images of old Iranian deities was popular in seventh-century Bactria.[250] Making the images of gods and placing them in a temple called *baglan* (*βαγολαγγο*), "the image

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[246] The *arhat*, as Dāryūsh Shāygān argued, was not only about individual salvation, but it was a tradition to free humans from all kinds of worldly things and adorn them with heavenly qualities. The *arhat* willingly accepted to suffer by performing difficult practices to purify his soul (Dāryūsh Shāygān, *Adyān va Maktabha-yi Falsafi-yi Hind*, 7th ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1389/2010), 9); Azad suggested that the existence of many *arhats* in *navasanghārāma* and people's high respect for them indicates that the *Śrāvakayāna* was practised in *navasanghārāma* (Azad, "The Beginning of Islam in Afghanistan," 53); The *Śrāvakayāna*, meaning "listeners", was a name given to those who listened to the Buddha's teachings and practised them to become an *arhat* (see "Śrāvakayāna," *Oxford Reference*, https://www.oxfordreference.com (accessed on 28 December 2021).

[247] At least two Bactrian documents produced in c. 700 in Guzgan reflect this. These address a Buddhist monk called Rahulabhadra as a revered doctor (*πιζαγγο*), knowledgeable (*λαβδδιλανι*), wise (*πιδοβασιιο*), and the one who possessed Shamanic (*βμαναγγο*) power. Although this document does not deal with healing the sick, these titles suggests that monks were expected to have that power (Bactrian document no. Ji in Sims-Williams, *DBII*, 138–139).

[248] DAFA excavation in Tepe Zargaran has revealed the remains of an old Buddhist stupa. See Roland Besenval et Philippe Marquis, "Le rêve accompli d'Alfred foucher à Bactres: nouvelles fouilles de la DAFA 2002–2207," in *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Letters* 151, no. 4 (2007), 1847–1874.

[249] See al-Balkhī, *Faḍāʾil-i Balkh*, 11–26.

[250] I use worshippers of old Iranian deities rather than Zoroastrians. The reason is that the gods mentioned in the documents were not Zoroastrian deities. There is no evidence showing how a Bactrian at this time defined his

shrine", was an old tradition in Bactria.[251] Information on this image cult mostly comes from Bactrian documents. They show that different Iranian deities such as Wakhsh (*οαχβο*), Ram-set (*ραμοσητο*), and Zhun (*ζονο*) that were non-Zoroastrian deities were worshipped in western, southern, and eastern parts of Bactria. Their names are mentioned in some legal documents produced between 659–747 CE.[252] Their images were made and kept in *baglan*.[253] The deities' names were also popular personal names among Bactrians.[254] People visited the temples, worshipped the images of gods, and possibly delivered donations.[255] Bactrian documents refer to some gods that were widely worshipped in seventh century Bactria.[256] Wakhsh was one of

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faith to the followers of other faiths. However, there are written sources about other regions. See, for example, A. de Jong, "Zoroastrian Self-Definition in Contact with Other Faiths," in *Irano-Judaica, V. Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages*, ed. by Shaul Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2003), 16–26.

[251] Frantz Grenet has suggested that the *baglan* was, in fact, the *bagina* or the image shrine borrowed from Mesopotamia, becoming the dominant form of eastern Zoroastrianism in Bactria after the Greek conquests (Grenet, "Zoroastrianism in Central Asia," 130–131); The Bactrian term *baglan* mentioned in the Kushan inscriptions found in two monumental royal Kushan image temples of Rabatak and Surkh Kotal are located in present-day Samangan and Baghlan. See Nicholas Sims-Williams and Joe Cribb, "A New Inscription of Kanishka the Great," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 4 (1995/96): 75–142.

[252] Bactrian documents no. O, P, Q, R, S, Ss, Tt, Uu, V, U in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 80–83, 84–87, 88–91, 92–93, 94–95, 96–97, 104–105, 112–15, 116–125, and see Bactrian document no. ji in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 138–39.

[253] Bactrian documents no. P, Q, Tt, V, W in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87, 88–91, 112–15, 116–125, 126–135.

[254] Nicholas Sims-Williams, *Bactrian personal names. Iranisches Personennamenbuch. Band II, Mitteliranische Personennamen. Faszikel 7* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 65–66.

[255] Paying money to the temple is mentioned in Bactrian document no. al in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 164–65.
Four terracotta painted panels now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art show images of the Iranian and Indic deities Shiva/Wesh, Farr, and Ohrmuzd. The provenance of these panels is unknown, but they may have been from Bactria and date to the third century CE. They contain holes in their corners, meaning they were originally part of a temple's interior wall decoration (Kathryn Calley Galtiz, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Masterpiece Paintings* (New York: The Met, 2016), 121).

[256] The Bactrian documents are limited. Therefore, the names of the gods mentioned in them do not cover all Iranian gods that were worshipped in Bactria. The Kushan coins are the best sources of information on the Iranian gods known in Bactria. The names and images of *αρδοχβο*, *ατβο*, *λοορασπο*, *μαναβαγο*, *ορλαγνο*, *οαδο*, *φαρρο*, *ωρομ*, *βαορηορο*, *ριβτι*, *οανινδο*, *τιρο*, *οαχβο* (the god of the Amu Darya), and *ιαμβο* (the god of the underworld) are depicted on Kushan coinage. See Grenet, "Zoroastrianism Among the Kushans," 219–221; Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images*, 129, 166–67; At least four great Kushan image temples are known from Bactria. The Rabatak and Surkh Kotal were built on natural hills in eastern Bactria and had monumental inscriptions with the names of Kushan emperors and deities. Grenet has shown that the temple in Rabatak was dedicated to *ομμα* and *νανα*, the goddesses venerated by the Kushans, and hosted other gods as well, including Iranian and Indian gods. He argued that among the seven gods mentioned in the Rabatak inscription, *ομμα* and *μοζδοοανο* were Scythian; *νανα* was originally the Babylonian Ishtar introduced to Bactria in the Achaemenid period, representing Avestan Anāhitā; *αορομοζδο*, *σροβαρδο*, *ναρασαο*, *μιρο* were Zoroastrian gods (Grenet, "Zoroastrianism Among the Kushans," 211–212, 229, and Grenet, "Zoroastrianism in Central Asia," 131). D.T. Potts rejected Grenet's identification of *νανα* with the Babylonian Ishtar. According to Potts, the Bactrian *νανα* was not the diffusion of Ishtar, but instead, she was the diffusion of Mesopotamian Nana, who became prominent in Bactria by the end of the third millennium BCE and remained very prominent in Bactria to the Kushan period. Potts refers to Victor Sarianidi's excavations in Tillya-Tepe in western Bactria, in which a golden belt with images of Nana unearthed was found. It indicates Nana's importance among the royal families in Bactria (D. T. Potts, "Nana in Bactria," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 7 (2001): 23–35); In regard to the Scythian root of *μοζδοοανο* Humbach has suggested that *μοζδοοανο* could have been a tribal god of the Kushan (cited in Nicholas Sims-Williams, "A Bactrian God," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Africa Studies* 60, no. 2 (1997): 336–338); It is worth noting that Grenet added that the temple in Surkh Kotal was initially dedicated to *οηβο*, the deity known from the Kushan coins. Two other older temples of Wakhsh in Takht-i Sangin in present-day Tajikistan and the

them and is often called the "king of gods" (*βαγανο βανο*).[257] He was the god of the Amu Darya and had an old temple near Quwadhiyan.[258] A Bactrian land sale contract produced in 436 of the Bactrian calendar, corresponding to 659 CE, in Guzgan in western Bactria refers to Wakhsh as "the wonderful, the granter of favours (and) granter of wishes, whose renown have reached the whole earth."[259] Expanding Wakhsh's grace to the whole earth in this praising formula does not mean this god was a universal deity, but indicates that Wakhsh was a great deity in Bactria. The fact that his name appears in legal documents made in Guzgan, Rob, Kadagstan, Kalf, and Warnu shows he was widely worshipped in Bactria. The name of Wakhsh mentioned in the opening part of the legal documents produced between 659–729 CE may indicate his importance as the guardian of promises made between the different parties.[260]

Ram-set, the "spirit of Ram" was another god worshipped in Bactria. His name appears only on three Bactrian documents. Two Bactrian legal documents produced in the Marogan market in Samingan between 660–689 CE,[261] and a document made in a market at Amber in Guzgan.[262] These documents create the impression that a specific place made for this god within market spaces. It was called *nishalm/nashalm* (*νιβαλμο/ναβαλμο*). The different functions of the *baglan* vis-a-vis the *nishalm* are not understood.[263] Having a special place within the market also creates the impression that Ram-set was associated with the commerce. Apparently, the Sogdian community of Bactria worshiped Ram-set.[264]

Zhun was another deity in Bactria. His name was commonly used for personal names. For instance, Zhun-lad ("given by Zhun") and Zhun-bandag were personal names in Bactria.[265] The mural known as Dukhtar-i Naushirwān (also known as Nigār), located in present-day

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Hellenistic temple in Delbarjin in the north of Balkh may have turned into an image temple during the Kushan period (Grenet, "Zoroastrianism Among the Kushans," 220–230).

[257] Bactrian document no. O and Tt in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 80–83, 104–105.

[258] It is located in Takht-i Sangin in Tajikistan. See Grenet, "Zoroastrianism Among the Kushans," 219–221; Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images*, 129, 166–67.

[259] Bactrian document no. Nn in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74.

[260] Bactrian documents no. Nn, O, P, Q, R, S, Ss, Tt, Uu, V, U in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74–79 ,80–83, 84–87, 88–91, 92–93, 94–95, 96–97, 104–105, 112–15, 116–125, and see Bactrian document no. ji in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 138–39.

[261] Bactrian document no. P in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87.

[262] Bactrian document no. Ss in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 96–97.

[263] Bactrian documents no. P, Q, Tt, V, W in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87, 88–91, 112–15, 116–125, 126–135.

[264] Ryoichi Miyamoto has suggested that the Sogdian community who settled in Bactria in the seventh century brought the cult of Ram-set to Bactria (Ryoichi Miyamoto, "Notes on the Bactrian contract mentioning God Wakhsh and God Ram-set" Presentation at 10 European Conference for Iranian Studies (ECIS 10), Leiden University, 22 August 2023.

[265] Sims-Williams, *Bactrian personal names*, 65–66.

Samangan, which was part of the kingdom of Rob, is said to have been the image of Zhun.[266] This deity was allegedly also worshipped in Kabul. There was a temple made for him at Khair-Khana in Kabul before 603 CE, however, when the Alkhans led by Mihirakula returned to Kabul from Kashmir after they were defeated by the Indian forces, the temple lost its importance.[267] Instead of Zhun, the cult of the sun god Surya became important. Apart from Kabul, Zhun was important in Zabulistan when the Arab Muslims arrived in that region. Historians reported that they entered Zhun temple and harmed his statue by removing the gemstones decorating the statue's eyes.[268]

1.2.6 Christianity and Judaism

A Nestorian Christian community lived in western parts of Bactria. Christianity spread to Bactria via Herat and Marw because of the existence of the bishoprics in these cities.[269] Herat was a bishopric mentioned in the Counciliar Acts of the Nestorian Christian Church from 424 to 585 CE, becoming a metropole and organising its bishoprics into Badghis and Bushanj (in western Bactria) controlled by the Hephthalites. Upon the Christians' request, the Hephthalite king asked the Sasanian king and the Patriarch Mār Aba I (in office from 540–552) to send one

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[266] Markus Mode argued that the painting in Dukhtar-i Naushirwān is dedicated to the god Xurmazd/Ohrmazd and was executed by the Sogdians, who traded in the region and moved between Sogdiana and India in the late seventh and early eighth centuries (Markus Mode, "The Great God of Dokhtar-e Noshirwān (Nigār)," *East and West* 42, no. 2/4 (December 1992): 473–483). However, it is not necessary to look for a foreign identity for this god. Sims-Williams identified the meaning of Kamird as "chief, head" as a title for Zhun (Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 197). The god Zhun was worshipped in this region in 700 and is reflected in a Bactrian legal document (Bactrian document no. T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103). Hence, I think if we consider the fact that Nigār is far from Sogdiana and the god Zhun was worshipped in the Rob region where the mural is made, it is difficult to accept Mode's suggestion. Possibly, the god of this painting should be Zhun and not Xurmazd/Ohrmazd.

[267] Minoru Inaba argued that the lower part of the Khair-Khana temple was made for Zhun. Later, the upper part was built for Surya (Minoru Inaba, "Revisiting Khair Khana: a consideration on the history of 6th–7th centuries in Afghanistan" Presentation at 10 European Conference for Iranian Studies (ECIS 10), Leiden University, 22 August 2023.

[268] Sims-Williams, "Nouveaux documents sur l'historie et la langue de la Bactriane," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Letters* (1996): 647–648; Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *Sīstān under the Arabs: From the Islamic Conquest to the Rise of the Ṣaffārids (30–250/651–864)*, (IsMEO-Rome, 1968), 34–35.

[269] Christianity found a home in Sasanian Khurasan, and the Church of the East sent missionaries to these regions as early as ca. 334 CE. Clifford Edmund Bosworth argued that the migration of Christians towards the eastern regions of the Sasanian empire accelerated after the split within the Eastern Church in the middle of the sixth century "into Monophysite or Jacobite and the Nestorian factions, each with a different view of the human and divine attributes of Christ" and the fall of the Nestorian centres like Edessa to the Jacobites. Bosworth added that the Christians of Khwarazm celebrated Hazirān to commemorate the coming of Bār Shabbā to Marw, who converted a Sasanian princess and wife of the *marzbān* of Marw. The *marzbān* was the Sasanian title for the margrave in the frontier region of Khurasan. The Chalcedonian Christians or Melkites also had a community in Khwarazm (Bosworth, *Sīstān under the Arabs*, 8–9). Also, see the discussion about Christianity in Bactria in Litvinsky and Zejmal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepa*, 173–74.

of his priests to Bactria.[270] Apparently, that further spread Christianity in the region. Later, during the war between the Sasanian king Khusrow II (r. 590–628) and Wahrām Chubīn (d. 591), who rebelled against the king, the Christian Hephthalite soldiers who joined Wahrām had crosses on their forehead; this astonished Theophylactus Simocatta (fl. 620) who reported it.[271] Likewise, from the middle of the sixth century to the middle of the eighth century, the Christian authorities in Marw sent missionaries to other cities in the east. These Christian missionaries converted many Turks.[272] All this information that comes from the historical narratives indicate that the Nestorian community lived mainly in Badghis. So far, no archaeological excavation has been conducted to find traces of churches in Bactria. Therefore, we cannot assume that other areas in Bactria had a Nestorian community.[273]

The reports of the fourth/tenth-century Muslim geographers highlighted the existence of a Jewish community in Bactria. Almost all reports on Khurasan mention the city of *al-yahudiyya*, located between Faryab and Shaburghan in the Guzgan region.[274] The sixth/twelfth-century geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī identified this city with Maymana in Faryab. He added that it was called *Jahudān al-kubrā* or the great Jewish city, but the Muslims called it *al-maymana*, meaning the blessed city. He mentioned that the Jews came to this region before the Islamic period. Yāqūt also refers to Jahudhanak, an area in Balkh that was named after its Jewish residents.[275] These geographical reports do not provide details about this community, but they reflect the reality that Jewish community was big enough to have a city named after

[270] Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The life of Baršabbā," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barsabba-legendary-bishop-of-marv-and-founder-of-the-christian-church-in-eastern-iran (accessed on 12 October 2018).
[271] Bosworth, *Sīstān under the Arabs*, 8–9.
[272] More information is given by Barbara Kaim and Maja Kornacka, "Religious Landscape of the Ancient Merv Oasis," *Iran* 54, 2 (2016): 47–72; G. Koshelenko, "The Beginnings of Christianity in Merv," *IA* 30 (1995): 55–70; Also, see Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). A number of Turkic tribes had also converted en masse to Nestorian Christianity (see D. Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London: East and West, 201); C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of the Assyrian Church* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
[273] We also do not know anything about the plan and structure of churches in Bactria. Some ostraca, with middle Persian texts from Marw, show that a local church received materials from the local people who lived around it. A similar situation could have existed in western Bactria, where the Christian community lived. For the church in Marw, see A. B. Nikitin, "Middle Persian Ostraca from South Turkmenistan," *East and West* 42, no. 1 (1992): 114–116. It is worth noting that the Christians used Syriac for religious texts but also employed Sogdian and Middle Persian for translations, commentaries, and discussions among Christians in the East (Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, "The Languages of Christianity on the Silk Road and the Transmission of Mediterranean Culture into Central Asia," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 206–215).
[274] Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 153; Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 65; *Ḥudud al-ʿālam*, 60; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣurat al-arḍ*, 370.
[275] Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1397/1993), 2: 193–94.

them. They also show that Jews lived mainly in the cities of Maymana and Balkh.[276] One more religious group might have existed in Bactria at this time: that of the Hindus. Material evidence of their presence remains unpublished and unstudied.[277]

The combination of the above-mentioned Arabic and non-Arabic sources highlights Bactria as a multi-religious region. The non-Arabic reports show that in the early seventh century, the Buddhist community lived on both sides of the Amu Darya in the different areas of Guzgan, Gaz, Balkh, Samangan, Tirmidh, Chaghaniyan, Wakhsh, Khuttal and Quwadhiyan. They had their stupas and monasteries, and Buddhist monks were associated with writing commentaries, healing the sick, performing miracles and preaching asceticism. The worshippers of Iranian deities existed in various areas in Guzgan, Gaz, Rob, Kadagstan, Kalf, Warnu, Wakhsh and Khuttal. They had their image shrines, but whether they produced religious texts or preached asceticism is unknown. Only a document from Kadagstan, dating 700 CE, shows a priest (*κηδο*) was expected to heal the sick.[278] The Arabic geographic reports show that a Jewish community lived in Balkh and Faryab. A Nestorian community existed in Badghis. Details about their religious activities are unknown. Interestingly, Muslim geographers do not refer to any Buddhist community. That might indicate that they did not see any active Buddhist community when they visited Bactria. However, they encountered Zoroastrian community. Apart from these reported communities, we do not know much about other religious communities existed in Bactria. It is possible that a community of Manicheans lived in Bactria too as we have a reference about Tish the king of Chaghaniyan who sent a Manichean *mōčak* (lit. teacher) in 719 as his ambassador to China. *Mōčak* was the title given to a high-ranking figure in the Manichean religious organisation. That also shows the

[276] There is more information about the Jewish community living in Ghur and Bamiyan. A short Judeo-Persian inscription in Tang-i Azao, an area to the southeast of present-day Chisht dating to 752–53, confirms that Jews lived in this area. It highlights that they spoke Persian but used Hebrew script for writing (W. B. Henning, "The Inscription of Tang-i Azao," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 20, no. 1/3, Studies in honour of Sir Ralph Turner, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies 1937–57 (1957): 335–342). Many Hebrew burial inscriptions and Judeo-Persian documents from Ghur and Bamiyan show that Jews had large populations in the region. They may have had relations with the Jewish community in Maymana and Balkh. For details about the Hebrew burial inscriptions, see Erica C. D. Hunter, "Hebrew-script tombstone from Jām, Afghanistan," *Journal of Jewish Studies* LXI, no. 1 (2010): 72–87; For the Judeo-Persian documents, see Haim, "What is the "Afghan Genizah?" 70–90.

[277] The unpublished reports of Brahmi inscriptions from a cemetery in Badghis show that a Hindu/Buddhist temple possibly existed in this region, and later its materials were displaced and reused. At least one stone beam bears Brahmi and Arabic inscriptions. Probably, the temple was still in place in the Islamic period, and people added an Arabic inscription to it. In addition, several column bases with Arabic inscriptions are existed but have not been published. Thanks to Jonathan Lee, who showed me his photographs of these unpublished materials (personal communication 8 October 2021).

[278] Bactrian document no. T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103.

connection between Manicheans and local rulers.[279] Apart from that a Bactrian document from Turfan has information about Manicheanism.[280] Nevertheless, the areas they lived and how they organised their community are unknown.

1.2.7 A place for all religions

The reports discussed so far reflects the presence of various religious communities in Bactria. As it is already mentioned, al-Muqaddasī's report shows in fourth/tenth century Bactria, each religious group was free to follow its regulations. He gives the example of the king of Gharchistan who- instead of imposing one *madhhab* in his area- prayed twice to satisfy different religious groups in his domain.[281] This attests to the fact that followers of two different *madhhabs* lived together and the king respected them. Not only a geographic report but also two Bactrian documents support the idea of coexistence of various religious groups. These documents related to land sales produced in the Rob region in 729 and 747 CE clearly mention that the buyers have the right to build a monastery or temple, place of burial or crematorium on the purchased land, and no one could object to it. The local authorities witnessed and sealed them, representing their approval.[282] Sectarian conflicts and the disruption of religious places or communities might have happened, but our sources do not show any examples. Thus, it is possible to use the term religious "openness" in its loose meaning in the Bactrian context, unless new evidence comes forwards attesting to the opposite.

The policy of religious openness reported by the Muslim geographers and mentioned in Bactrian documents was not new to Bactria. It was an old tradition at least going back to the Kushan period in which the Kushan kings patronised all religious communities in their territory.[283] This policy could have been the outcome of three factors: a) the shatter zone that created natural division and maintained different communities in their respective areas; b) the nomadic rulers, like the early Kushans or the Turks, did not impose their traditions on people;

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[279] Litvinsky and Zejmal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepa*, 171.
[280] Nicholas Sims-Williams has discussed this document in his talk "Manichaeism in Bactria," Presentation at 10 European Conference for Iranian Studies (ECIS 10), Leiden University, 22 August 2023.
[281] Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 323.
[282] Bactrian documents no. V, W in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 116–125, 126–135; Bactrian document T shows that Bag-azyas asks Kamird-far to perform service to god Kamird and also other gods. However, the document does not reveal the names of these gods (Bactrian document no. T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103).
[283] For discussion on Kanishka's religious policy, see Litvinsky and Zejmal, *The Buddhist Monastery of Ajina Tepa*,146–47. I do not agree with their conclusions on the Kushans' religious policy, interpreting it as a way to attract trade with other regions because the Kushans unified the eastern Iranian regions with norther India and controlled the overland trade routes between Iran, India, and China.

and c) they accepted and respected this diversity by manifesting themselves as protectors of all religions.[284] There is no evidence reflecting Kushans and Turks to have been forced any specific religion in Bactria or other parts of their empire. This situation was temporarily interrupted by the Sasanian attempts to impose their form of Zoroastrianism in Bactria.[285] Nevertheless, it survived and continued in the region,[286] lasting until the Islamic period despite regime changes. Religious openness likely provided harmony between different religious groups and created spaces for syncretism, blending different religious elements. Hence, it is not surprising to see various deities in the image temple of Rabatak in Bactria, Greek and Iranian gods joining the Buddha in Gandharan art, or the images of many different deities appearing on Kushan coinage.[287] This makes Bactria different from other regions like Sogdiana that had not much knowledge of Buddhism,[288] or western parts of the Sasanian empire in which

[284] Jos Gommans and I reached the same conclusion in two related articles about the Mughals (Jos Gommans and Said Reza Huseini, "Neoplatonic Kingship in the Islamic World: Akbar's Millennial History," in *Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence*, ed. Azfar Moin and Alan Strathern (Columbia University Press, 2021), 192–222, and "Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica in the Making of *Ṣulḥ-i Kull*: A View from Akbar's Millennial History," *Modern Asian History* (2022): 870–901).

[285] The Sasanian attempted to impose fire worship in Bactria, which was not free from violence. Touraj Daryaee called the early Sasanian attempt to impose its religious view "militant piety", which changed later to religious tolerance (Touraj Darayee, "Ardaxšīr Pābagān and Early Sasanian Miltant Piety," Paper Presented at the "Ninth European Conference of Iranian Studies (ECIS 9)" Institute of Iranian Studies, Freie University, Berlin, September 9, 2019); The inscription of Kerdīr, the highest Zoroastrian authority in the early Sasanian priestly association, proudly refers to the victory of Mazdayasnism and the destruction of other religious places. See Philippe Gignoux's articles, "Le mage Kirdir et ses quatre inscriptions," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 133ᵉ année, no. 3, (1989): 689–699, and *Les Quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdir. Textes et concordances*, *Studia Iranica*. Collections des Sources pour l'Histoire de l'Asie Centrale pre-islamique. Serie II. Vol. i. Studia Iranica, Cahier 9. (Paris, Association pour l'Avancement des Etudes Iraniennes, 1991); For Grenet's discussion on Kerdīr's propaganda, see Frantz Grenet, "Relegions du monde iranien ancien," *Annuarie EPHE, Section des sciences religieuses*, t. 111 (2002–2003): 153–158; The Sasanian soldiers possibly left the Middle Persian graffiti in the Buddhist complex at Qara Tepe in Tirmidh (B. Staviskii and T. Mkrtychev, "Qara-Tepe in Old Termez: On the History of the Monument," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute 10, Studies in Honor of Vladimir A. Livshits* (1996): 226–228); The DAFA excavations conducted in 2004–2006 in Tepe Zargaran in Balkh unearthed the remains of Buddhist monuments destroyed and later used for making water canals within the city of Balkh. See Besenval et Marquis, "Le rêve accompli d'Alfred foucher à Bactres," 1849–1866; The Sasanian added new chambers for the sacred fire to the Kushan image temple in Surkh Kotal and the temple in Delbarjin in Balkh. For more details, see Grenet, "Zoroastrianism in Central Asia," 140; A. D. H. Bivar discussed two small fire altars found in Balkh that may be from this period (A. D. H. Bivar, "Fire-Altars of the Sassanian Period at Balkh," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17, 1/2 (1954): 182–183).

[286] Fabrizio Sinisi discussed the way the Sasanian redressed the local gods in Sasanian iconography (see Fabrizio Sinisi "The Deities on the Kushano-Sasanian Coins," *Electrum* 22 (2015): 201–225). However, the Kushano-Sasanian kings did not necessarily disturb the religious composition in the region. The same coins of the Kushano-Sasanians show that those deities rendered in the Sasanian style were already part of the Kushan pantheon. They adapted to eastern Iranian society by recognising their local gods, but only now re-dressed them in the Sasanian style. Possibly, the Sasanians realised that they had to compromise with local religious views if they wanted to rule over Bactria.

[287] See Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, 60–172.

[288] Xuanzang does not refer to any Buddhist community in Sogdiana (*SI-YU-KI*, 32–35); Similar observation can be found in *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, 54.

there was Christian martyrdom and the persecution of Manicheans.[289] The legacy of Kushan religious tolerance continued in Bactria even after this region became part of the Umayyad and then the Abbasid empire. Al-Muqaddasī's report reflects this legacy.

1.2.8 Political organisation

It is already mentioned that diversity in geography and different climates had impacts on settlement patterns in Bactria. The plains and oases hosted a higher number of populations, and the mountain areas had fewer inhabitants. Each of these areas developed a different political organisation. The idea of "plain and mountain" as two distinct zones of political power is proposed by Jürgen Paul in his study of the Seljuq empire under Sultan Sanjar (r. 1096–1157 CE). Paul argues that Sanjar's empire was not centralised but was an amalgamation of various zones of power, in which the plain and the mountain areas had different political and military leadership.[290] Similar patterns of fragmented political control can be observed for an earlier period in Bactria.

In Bactria, the oases formed a large state. They were the hub of agricultural production capacity based on the development of an advanced irrigation system. That capacity allowed them to become wealthy because they "were large enough to produce sufficient surpluses for a large state to base its power on the revenue derived from them", quoting Paul.[291] The attachment of people to the land, and the government's control over it, particularly through water management projects, enabled the government to maintain and expand production. The government maintained its stability through administration and protected the cities with massive defensive walls. However, the oasis cities were subject to raids and conquests, which affected their administrative operation differently. If conquered, they were often integrated into the more extensive administrative system by the stronger political powers.[292] However, if the conquering powers were nomadic invaders who often lacked administrative systems like those developed in the oasis, then the urban areas in the oasis continued the earlier administrative

[289] Perhaps for this religious tolerance, we see the Manicheans migrating towards the east. This idea comes from the Q&A session with La Vaissière (Étienne de la Vaissière, "Manichean Road," Online presentation, After Rome and Further East Seminar organised by Oxford University (13 May 2021).
[290] Jürgen Paul, "ʿAbbāsid Administrative Legacy in the Seljuq World," Working Paper Series of the ERC Project The Early Islamic Empire at Work: The View from the Regions Towards the Centre, No. 1 (Hamburg, 2015): 1–18.
[291] Paul, "ʿAbbāsid Administrative Legacy," 13.
[292] The integration of Bactria into the Achaemenid, Hellenistic and Sasanian empires can be mentioned here. The Aramaic documents, Greek and Middle Persian documents from Bactria support this idea.

regulations to serve the new power.[293] Control of the oasis cities was important for any political power invading Bactria. Anyone who could control the oasis cities in Bactria could control the overland trade routes that connected Bactria to India, China, and Sogdiana.

The mountain areas with many narrow valleys did not have much space to develop or expand urban areas. Life in the mountain areas was "seasonal sedentarism", in which many people moved to the higher areas in the summer to feed their animals and returned to the lower areas in the villages in the winter.[294] The villages often formed along the rivers and had small populations, and minor agricultural production provided fewer taxes to be dispatched. However, this way of life would allow people to escape the summer heat and the winter cold. Apparently, this lifestyle has affected the political order gradually and created the idea of having winter and summer capitals in the region.[295] The political situation was different in the mountains. Paul has argued that the mountain areas had their own military and political leadership. Unlike the urban centres in the oasis, the mountain areas were controlled by local rulers who had roots in those areas. They were not necessarily appointed by the rulers of the urban centres or by imperial administrations, but they held hereditary rule and possessed skills for cultivating land (though not much).[296] Unlike the urban centres, these local rulers were autonomous and had their fortresses in the mountains.[297] The network of fortresses with local lords would not allow the kind of unified political situation as it applied to the urban centres in the oases.[298]

From an imperial perspective, control of the urban centres in oases was crucial, but controlling the mountain areas was less important. The political model of rule in the regions like Bactria and the whole eastern Iranian region was similar to the "Swiss cheese" model proposed by Thomas Barfield for modern-day Afghanistan, and was discussed by Haug for

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[293] The Chionites, Kushans, Hephthalites and Western Turks can be mentioned as examples. For the organisation of nomadic states, see David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentation of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[294] Ghur provides a good example. See David Colin Thomas, *The Ebb and Flow of an Empire: The Ghūrid Polity of Central Afghanistan in the twelfth and thirteenth century* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2018), 72–106.

[295] Al-Muqaddasī mentions that the kings of Guzgan moved to Garzivan (Ar. *al-Jurzawan*) in the summer and returned to Amber in the winter (al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 370). This practise continued in the region. The Ghurids spent their summer in Firuzkuh and winter in Zamin Dawar (see Thomas, *The Ebb and Flow of an Empire*, 21).

[296] Paul, "ʿAbbāsid Administrative Legacy," 16.

[297] For instance, al-Muqaddasī mentions that the king of Gharchistan stayed in his fortress and ruled independently (*mustaqillia bi nafsihā*). His fortress was in the mountains (al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 309).

[298] Paul, "ʿAbbāsid Administrative Legacy," 14–16; Later Persian sources report the coexistence of many independent local rulers in mountainous areas in Guzgan and Ghur (*Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, 59–61, Minhāj al-Dīn ʿUthmān b. Sirāj al-Dīn al-Juzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Capitan William Nassau Lees and Mawlawis Khadim Husain and ʿAbd al-Ḥai (Calcutta: College Press, 1864), 30–67, 347–49).

pre-Mongol Khurasan.[299] Haug suggested that it is essential to understand "the state perspective" in which the productive regions, those that can deliver more taxes, were worth controlling, and other areas with less economic value could be left to themselves.[300] He adds that though the mountain areas were counted as part of the domain of the rulers, who conquered the region and were stationed in the oasis, they remained under the actual control of local rulers. The circle of control was limited to the urban centres in the plains and the oases. Taxing the mountain areas could have been more expensive and riskier.[301] Thus, the mountain areas were often left to their original rulers. Chapters three (3.3.6) and four (4.2.2) will show that the Arab Muslims focussed only on taking the oasis cities and left the mountain areas to their local rulers.

The diverse geography, different climates, and their impacts on human settlements and political organisations discussed so far highlight two crucial issues. The first is that various groups of people who followed different religious traditions lived together in Bactria. The second is that political organisations were different in the plain and mountain areas. As Haug has argued, shatter zones were usually locally divided and caught in the middle of conflicts between the more significant political powers around it.[302] In other words, it functioned as a frontier region in which different political powers contested its control. In such a complex situation, one local political group could not control all political and economic affairs alone, but different confederations had to be formed. In other words, if any state is formed, it is a 'stockholding' cooperation.[303] This will become clearer in chapter two (2.1) when we see how different principalities ruled their respective areas in Bactria and interacted with more considerable political powers in general. Chapter four (4.2, 4.3) will then show how the Umayyads incorporated Bactria into Umayyad Khurasan, and the way Bactrian rulers dealt with the Arab Muslims in particular.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted Bactria's geographical features and their socio-political impacts. It showed that Bactria's physiography is part of the Makran-Pamir shatter zone located between Iran, India, the steppe, and China. The shatter zone, which was created by tectonic collisions,

[299] Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 408.
[300] Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 31.
[301] Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 31.
[302] Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 26–27.
[303] Thanks to Petra Sijpesteijn for explaining this specific form to me.

created intensive geographical diversity in the region. The idea of a shatter zone helped us to recognise five areas in Bactria with different geographical features. It also showed that Bactria had the conditions of arid and semi-arid climates that allowed sedentary life in the plain areas and pastoral life in the mountains.

Bactria was a well-connected region. Though it had a diverse landscape, it never halted interactions between its inhabitants with those in neighbouring regions. Over time, different groups of people settled in different areas in Bactria, mixed with other communities that already existed, and gradually created a diverse population in the region. The people of Bactria followed different religious orders and cultural traditions that developed in the region or were brought to Bactria from other regions. Diversity in populations and religious orders created harmony and religious tolerance in Bactria. The rulers of Bactria patronised different religions in their territories.

The diverse geography influenced political organisation in Bactria. The plains and oases produced more agricultural resources and had higher populations. The agricultural surplus supported the central government in expanding the urban areas protected by defensive walls. However, these cities were often raided and conquered by other bigger political powers. In contrast, the mountains had less agricultural surplus and smaller populations. They provided fewer taxes compared to the plain areas. Their rulers were personally rooted in the areas they oversaw, lived in their fortresses, and were not disturbed by the conquerors who imposed their control over the oases cities. Thus, this system continued for a long period, spanning the pre-Islamic and post-conquest periods. The next chapter will examine who were the local rulers in the plains and mountains of Bactria when the Arab Muslims entered Bactria.