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

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## Chapter Two: Bactrian Local Rulers and Overlords

From many centuries past, the royal race has been extinct. Several chieftains have, by force, contended for their possessions and each held their own independently, only relying upon the natural division of the country. Thus, they constituted twenty-seven states divided by natural boundaries, yet as a whole dependent on the *Tuh-kiueh* tribes.<sup>304</sup>

### Introduction

The chapter presents the political structures existing in early seventh-century Bactria. It argues that these took the forms of local autonomy and overlordship. This political structure was made of several layers of political power functioning in the region. The first layer consisted of local elite members, and households that played an important role in the local administration, tax collection, justice system and the like. The position of these households was based on their members' wealth, social status, and role in administration and law. They executed the orders of the 'local rulers' who made the second layer of this system. The local rulers belonged to elite families and retained a degree of autonomy in their areas. Third, there was a 'local overlord' (e.g., *yabghu* of Tukharistan) who resided in Bactria. In the fourth layer, there was a far-off major political power that can be called the 'ultimate overlord' (e.g., Sasanian *shāhān shāh*, Turkic *qaghān*, and to some extent, the Chinese emperor) whose suzerainty was recognised by the local overlord and local rulers in Bactria. In this system, the local and the ultimate overlord did not impose direct rule in Bactria, and thus the local rulers retained their autonomy in internal affairs.

This was the political structure in place when the Arab Muslims arrived in Bactria. They first followed this model, but then they broke this system to impose their direct rule in Bactria. That caused severe political unrest among Bactrian local rulers, and pushed them to create a regional alliance and unite with the anti-Umayyad forces to stop the Umayyads. This was one of the main reasons that slowed down the pace of the Arab Muslim conquests in Bactria. It created a great challenge for them to control the region, and will be further discussed in chapter four (4.2, 4.3).

The current chapter attempts to unknit this complex political system. It recognises various areas of political control and their local rulers. To do so, it discusses these areas and

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<sup>304</sup> *SI-YU-KI*, 37–8.

their rulers in three parts. The first part describes the local autonomous rulers and their areas of political control. The second part addresses the reasons behind the formation of this system. The final part discusses local Bactrian rulers' interactions with their overlords. This chapter is primarily based on analysing Bactrian documents and numismatic evidence, along with Chinese, Arabic, and Persian reports. The combination of these different sources shed light on the local political autonomy and overlordship in Bactria.

### 2.1. Local autonomy in Bactria

In the early seventh century, many different principalities controlled their respective areas in Bactria. These principalities had autonomy in their local affairs, such as civil and fiscal administration and legal systems. They also commanded their military forces. However, none of these local rulers could unify the entire Bactria under a singular authority.<sup>305</sup> Instead, they recognised the overlordship of the *qaghān* of the Western Turks to whom they paid tributes.<sup>306</sup> This situation is reported by Xuanzang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited Bactria in 630; we already met him in the previous chapter. He reports about Bactria:

From many centuries past, the royal race has been extinct. The several chieftains have by force contended for their possessions, and each held their own independently, only relying upon the natural division of the country. Thus, they have constituted twenty-seven states divided by natural boundaries, yet as a whole dependent on the *Tuh-kiueh* tribes [Turks].<sup>307</sup>

Xuanzang's report highlights an important point. It shows that the local rulers controlled areas that were divided by natural boundaries. These comprised parts of a larger political structure in which the *qaghān* of the Western Turks was the overlord. However, Xuanzang does not explain how the city-states worked within this structure. Likewise, he does not mention how the Western Turks naturalised their authority in the region. This section will explore available sources to explain it.

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<sup>305</sup> Local political autonomy in which power is not centralised in the hands of one political party is also known as political fragmentation. However, I do not use that term in this study because autonomy is more in line with our sources. For a definition of political fragmentation in a modern context, see Gregory R. Weiher, *The Fractured Metropolis: Political Fragmentation and Metropolitan Segregation* (State University of New York Press, 1991), and Richard H. Pildes, "The Age of Political Fragmentation," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no.4 (2021): 146–159.

<sup>306</sup> *SI-YU-KI*, 28; For the Western Turks, see Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 112–140.

<sup>307</sup> *SI-YU-KI*, 37–8; For further information on the book, see Ulrich Theobald, "Da-Tang xiyu ji 大唐西域記," *Chinese Knowledge-de*, <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/Literature/Science/datangxiyuji.html> (accessed on 20 November 2022).

Despite its limits, Xuanzang's report is significantly important. It reflects the political structure made up of local rulers and their overlords. In other words, Bactria was divided into various areas of political control on the ground. By various areas of political control, I refer to specific geographical areas ruled by certain political groups who controlled the economic resources, kept local administrations and military forces to defend the area, and maintained law and order. These areas of political control were in five regions of western Bactria, which was itself divided into four politically controlled areas: Bactria proper, southern Bactria, eastern Bactria, and northern Bactria, which already appeared in the previous chapter as forming distinct geographical zones. Their administrative and political characteristics will be discussed in this section. After this, I will explain the reasons behind political autonomy and overlordship in Bactria.

### 2.1.1 Areas of political control in Bactria

#### 2.1.2 Western Bactria

Western Bactria consisted of four areas of political control. These areas were Badghis, Marw al-Rūd, Gharchistan, and Guzgan. Each of these areas had different rulers. In the early seventh century, Badghis was controlled by the rulers known as the *nizak tarkhān* in the Arabic narratives.<sup>308</sup> The *nizak tarkhān* is not a personal name, but a title referring to a high military commander.<sup>309</sup> The origin of the *nizaks* has been discussed by various scholars; some claimed they were Turks (speaking Turkic languages), others that they were Hephthalites (of Hunish origin speaking Iranian languages), or they were a group that came from the south of Hindukush.<sup>310</sup> However, after analysing the Chinese sources and the Arabic narratives relating

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<sup>308</sup> Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2: 208–209; Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-buldān*, 420; Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 8: 1184–85; Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, 7: 150.

<sup>309</sup> We do not know their personal names. Minoru Inaba argued that *nizak tarkhān* combined Turkic and Iranian appellations, which was common by that time. He gives the example of the *nizak shāh*, the local kings who ruled the areas in the south of Hindukush. According to Inaba, the *nizaks* were given “the Hephthalites appellation because they were a tributary state.” (Minoru Inaba, “Nizak in Chinese Sources,” in *Coins, Art and Chronology II: The First Millennium C. E. in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*, ed. Michael Alram, Debrah Klimburg-Satler, Minoru Inaba and Matthias Pfisterer (Wien: Logo des Akademieverlags, 2010), 199–200); For the political situation in the south of Hindukush in this period, see Minoru Inaba, “From Kesar the Kābulshāh and Central Asia,” in *Coins, Art and Chronology II: The First Millennium C. E. in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*, edited by Michael Alram, Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Minoru Inaba and Matthias Pfisterer (Wien: Logo des Akademieverlags, 2010), 443–55; Minoru Inaba, “The Identity of the Turkish Rulers to the South of Hindukush from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries A. D.,” *Zinbun* 38 (2005): 1–19.

<sup>310</sup> Emel Esin, “Tarkhan Nizak or Tarkhan Tirek? An Enquiry concerning the Prince of Badghīs Who in A. H. 91/A. D. 709–710 Opposed the 'Omayyad Conquest of Central Asia,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 3 (1977): 323–332; Frantz Grenet, “NÉZAK,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nezak> (accessed on 31 October 2021); For the Hephthalites, see Kurbanov, *The History and Archaeology of the Hephthalites*; Étienne de la Vaissière, “The Steppe World and the Rise of the

to Herat and the Badghis region, Frantz Grenet argued that the *nizaks* were the Hephthalites whose main political centres were in eastern Bactria, but they controlled Badghis as well.<sup>311</sup> Grenet's argument can be supported by Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī (fl. third/ninth-century) in a report in which he associated the *nizak tarkhān* with Badghis. Al-Kūfī calls this title *nizak al-Barghashī* which is the corrupted form of *nizak al-Bādghīsī*.<sup>312</sup> The *nizaks* of Badghis were formidable foes to the Arab Muslim conquerors, first in 651–52, then in 710 when the famous *nizak tarkhān* (d. 91/710) led a large-scale revolt against the Umayyads, which will be discussed in detail in chapter four (4.2.1). Hereafter, I will refer to the *nizak tarkhān* simply as the *nizak* of Badghis who had his fortress, led his military forces, and controlled the economic resources of his region.

The Hephthalites had a long political history in Bactria, which explains their objection towards any encroaching political power in Bactria, including the Arab Muslims. Knowing their background helps to understand their interactions with Arab Muslims, reflected in the conquest narratives (*futūh*) explained in the next chapters.

The Hephthalites came to power during the Sasanian conflicts with the Chionites.<sup>313</sup> The Chionites, who later came to be known as the Kidarites,<sup>314</sup> entered Bactria when it was part of the territories of the Kushano-Sasanian rulers (c. 230–365).<sup>315</sup> The Kidarites may have

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Huns,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 175–192; Étienne de la Vaissière, “Is there a Nationality for the Hephthalites?” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute, New Series* 17 (2003): 119–132.

<sup>311</sup> Frantz Grenet, “Regional Interaction, in Central Asia and Northwest India in the Kidarite and Hephthalite Periods,” *Indo-Iranian Languages and People, Proceeding of the British Academy* (The British Academy, 2002): 214–216; The Hephthalites controlled Herat before 651 CE as well (Gibb, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia*, 15).

<sup>312</sup> Ibn al-A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, 7: 148.

<sup>313</sup> The Chionites fought the Sasanians over control of the eastern region. The Chionites are identified differently. For instance, see Frantz Grenet, “KIDARITES,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kidarites> (accessed on 19 December 2018); Rezakhani, “From the Kushans to the Western Turks,” 205; The Chionites may have been part of the Hunish groups, who were, in turn, part of a great wave of mass migration in the middle of the fourth century. La Vaissière proposed that different groups of people known later as the Kidarites, the Hephthalites and the Alkhans came from this massive migration (cited in Rezakhani, *ReOrienting the Sasanians*, 88). Those mass migration currents put pressure on the Sasanians and the Romans (James Howard-Johnston, “The Sasanians’ Strategic Dilemma,” in *Commutatio et Contentio: Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin*, ed. H. Börm, J. Wiesehöfer (Düsseldorf: Wellem Verlag, 2010), 43).

<sup>314</sup> Kidarite is a dynastic designation derived from their king Kidara. See E. V. Zeimal, “The Kidarite Kingdom in Central Asia,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al., (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 123–124.

<sup>315</sup> The Kushano-Sasanian dynasty was a branch of the Sasanian royal house that ruled Bactria.

initially served the Kushano-Sasanians,<sup>316</sup> but gradually replaced them.<sup>317</sup> To remove the Kidarites from Bactria, the Sasanian king Yazdgird II (r. 439–457) personally organised several military campaigns between 442–450 to push back the Kidarites, but he suddenly died, bringing these efforts to a halt.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, his campaign remained unfinished due to the war of succession between his sons Hormizd III and Peroz in 457–459.<sup>319</sup> To win the war of succession, Peroz united with the Hephthalites who already were settled in Bactria (probably in eastern areas) and possibly served the Kidarites.<sup>320</sup> They helped him to weaken the Kidarites and then marched with his Hephthalite allies to claim his father's throne, which he occupied in 459. In return, Peroz gave the region of Marw al-Rūd, including Badghis, to the Hephthalites.<sup>321</sup> Possibly, they served Peroz as subordinate rulers for a while.

The Hephthalites were as ambitious and expansionist as the Sasanians. They did not remain subordinate rulers to Peroz for a long time. They killed him in 484–485 and turned the Sasanian empire into a tributary state.<sup>322</sup> Only with the help of the Western Turks<sup>323</sup> did the

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<sup>316</sup> Grumbates, the king of the Chionites, helped Shapur II (r. 325–379) in his attack on the Romans and the capture of Amida (Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, 16–17; Rezakhani, “From the Kushans to the Western Turks,” 206). Helping the Sasanians may have allowed the Chionites to consolidate their power in Bactria and restore the earlier political order, with Balkh as their capital. For more details, see Grenet, “KIDARITES,” and Rezakhani, “From the Kushans to the Western Turks,” 205.

<sup>317</sup> Rezakhani, *ReOrienting the Sasanians*, 87.

<sup>318</sup> Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 57.

<sup>319</sup> Zeimal, “The Kidarite Kingdom,” 130.

<sup>320</sup> La Vaissière mentions that the Hephthalites were in Bactria a century before they dominated the region (La Vaissière, “Is there a Nationality for the Hephthalites?” 122).

<sup>321</sup> Zeimal, “The Kidarite Kingdom,” 129–130; Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, 24.

<sup>322</sup> B. A. Litvinsky, “The Hephthalite Empire,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al., (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 142; Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 61.

<sup>323</sup> The Turkic empire was first established in 553 and lasted until 682. According to Denis Sinor, it was the first time a nomadic empire bordered simultaneously on the three major sedentary civilisations of Iran, China, and Byzantium (Denis Sinor, “The Türk Empire, Part One: The First Türk Empire (553–682),” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al., (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 327). The Turks were a composition of various nomadic groups that lived from pastoral activity, fishing, and hunting. However, besides these activities, many of them also worked as iron suppliers to Juan-juan rulers, who used that iron for their weapon production (S. G. Klyashtorny, “The Türk Empire, Part Two: The Second Türk Empire (682–745),” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al., (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 331; Nicola Di Cosmo, “The Relations between China and the Steppe: From the Xiongnu to the Türk Empire,” in *Empires and Exchange in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 50). The Turks tried to buy silk from China and thus enter this prosperous trade, but they were refused by the Chinese in 545. However, in 552, the western Wei successfully invaded the Juan-juan, which allowed Bumin (r. 551–552), the leader of the Turks, to establish his rule there, but he died shortly after. The emergence of the Turks created fear in China and forced them to pay a tributary of 100,000 bales of silk annually to keep the Turks at bay (J. Harmatta, “Tokharistan and Gandhara under Western Türk Rule (650–750), Part One: History of the Region,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 3: *The Crossroad of Civilizations: A.D. 250–750*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al., (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), 359). Since they now had large amounts of silk and military power, the Turks decided not only to trade it but also to try and take control of the trade routes that crossed the Hephthalites' territories towards India. Hence, a Turkic empire

Sasanian king Khusrow I (r. 531–579) defeat the Hephthalites and conquer Bactria in 560.<sup>324</sup> The Western Turks were a confederation of various Turkic-speaking groups who lived in the steppes and had interest in transregional trade with India and Iran. To connect to these regions, the Western Turks had to face the Hephthalites getting in their way. Despite their defeat, the Hephthalites were not completely removed from the region.<sup>325</sup> They remained in Badghis and some areas in eastern Bactria. They were reduced to subordinate rulers and recognised the suzerainty of the Western Turks.

The political alliance between the Sasanians and the Turks did not last long, and that provided an opportunity for the Hephthalites to rise again. The Sasanian presence in Bactria did not allow the Turks to connect to India. Thus, the Turks removed their Sasanian allies from Bactria.<sup>326</sup> In between, the Hephthalites tried to free themselves from the Turkic suzerainty by rebelling against them in 581–82, but failed. To revive their power, the Hephthalites united with Wahrām Chubīn (d. 591),<sup>327</sup> the Sasanian general who defeated the Turks, but then the Hephthalites changed sides and joined the Turks to invade Sasanian Iran in 615.<sup>328</sup> The Hephthalites attempted to keep their control in western Bactria, and for that, they participated in the assassination of Wahrām Chubīn and later Wisthām (d. 595–96), the Sasanian general.<sup>329</sup>

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interested in transregional trade appeared between Sasanian Iran and Tang China (Sinor “The Türk Empire, Part One,” 327; Klyashtorny, “The Türk Empire,” 332). The Turks had to invade the Hephthalites and take Bactria to connect to India.

<sup>324</sup> The defeat of the Hephthalites was significant for the Sasanians. They minted gold dinar with the standing image of Khusrow I, decorated with Middle Persian legend “*gyh 'n 'pybym krt' l* Khusrau, the maker of the world without fear”. Possibly, these coins were distributed among the Sasanian nobles to celebrate their victory (Touraj Daryaei, “The maker of the World without Fear: Observation on the Gold Coin of Khorsow I,” *Ancient Iranian Numismatics* (2020): 193).

<sup>325</sup> In the upper Amu Darya region, the Hephthalite local rulers paid tribute to the Turks (Litvinsky, “The Hephthalite Empire,” 147). Some local rulers, like the king of Tirmidh (Vondrovec, *Coinage of the Iranian Huns*, 2: 525), and Gafar, the local king of Bukhara, continued minting their coins (Michael Fedorov, “On the Hephthalites King Gafar,” *Iran* 51, no. 1 (2013): 247–248). This means they did not totally lose their autonomy. The narrative related to Gafar is also mentioned in the *Shahnāma* (see Abu'l-Qāsim Firdausī. *Shahnāma*, ed. Jalāl Khāliqī Muṭlaq (California: Mazda Publisher, 1375/1997).

<sup>326</sup> In order to open this route, the Turks did not invade the Sasanian territory directly but allowed the remaining Hephthalites to initiate the attack. In 588, the Hephthalite local lords attacked the Sasanians and pushed them back to Herat, thus creating space for the Turks to capture Bactria around 590. For details, see Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 67.

<sup>327</sup> The victories of Wahrām in the East were not tolerated by the Sasanian emperor, who publicly humiliated Wahrām and caused the latter’s rebellion in Khurasan. Consequently, with an army now reinforced by Turkish and Hephthalite troops, Wahrām marched towards Mesopotamia against the Sasanian king, who was killed in an internal rivalry in court even before Wahrām’s arrival. Wahrām declared himself king of kings, the saviour of Iran and announced the Sasanians as usurpers and illegitimate rulers. See A. Sh. Shahbazi, “Bahrām VI Čōbīn,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-06> (accessed on 30 January 2019).

<sup>328</sup> Howard-Johnston, “The Sasanians’ Strategic Dilemma,” 63.

<sup>329</sup> Harmatta, “Tokharistan and Gandhara,” 360–61; Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, 110–112.

Even one of the Hephthalite local rulers, the *nizak*, took part in the clash with the last Sasanian king Yazdgird III (r. 632–651), which led to the king’s assassination in Marw in 651.

All these show that the *nizaks* of Badghis were of Hephthalite origins. They were subordinate rulers serving the Sasanian king of kings, but then rebelled and removed the Sasanians from the region. They were the overlords in Bactria from the fifth to the middle of the sixth century. They had great military careers. They killed two Sasanian emperors, fought the Western Turks, and invaded Sasanian Iran but were still subordinate to the Western Turkic *qaghān*. However, they began rising again and expanding to Sasanian Khurasan after the death of Yazdgird, but the Arab Muslims arrived and prevented their expansion. This explains their resistance against the Arab Muslims advancing towards the East. The Arab Muslim conquests became real in Bactria only after they killed the *nizak* and removed his local allies.

The second political area of control was Marw al-Rūd. However, unlike Badghis, the Marw al-Rūd did not have a Hephthalite *nizak* but a *marzbān* (Lit. margrave). In 652, a certain Badhān was the *marzbān* of this area whose ancestors had served the Sasanian kings. The *marzbān* was under the authority of *spāhbed*, the Sasanian governor of Khurasan who served the Sasanian king of kings. Conversely, Badhān had no obligation towards the Sasanians after the death of the Sasanian king Yazdgird III in 651 in Marw. Despite his title, which indicates submission to the Sasanians, Badhān most probably had political autonomy. He was the highest administrative person in the Marw al-Rūd region, possessed personal properties, had a fortress, and commanded local forces. I will discuss Badhān and his political situation in detail in chapter three (3.2.3) because he is an important political figure between Sasanian Khurasan and the *nizak* of Badghis, and the information about him almost exclusively comes from the Arabic narratives.

The third area of political control was Gharchistan, an area to the east of Badghis at the head-waters of the Marw al-Rūd.<sup>330</sup> The Marw al-Rūd crossed through the middle of this region. Al-Muqaddasī mentions that the king of this area was called *al-shār* in his time, and one could not enter his domain without his permission. According to al-Muqaddasī, this area was called the *gharj al-shār*, or ‘King’s Mountain’. However, he adds that local people called their region “Gharchistan”, meaning mountain area.<sup>331</sup> The Arabic *gharj al-shār* could have been the translation of Bactrian *garig-shah* (γαριγοβαο/γοριγοβαο) mentioned in some

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<sup>330</sup> Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 415.

<sup>331</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 309; The *Hudūd al-‘ālam* also mentions that the king of Gharchistan was called the *shār* (*Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 58).

Bactrian coins and documents produced in Guzgan.<sup>332</sup> Whether the *al-shār* was a Turk or Hephthalite is unknown. Similarly, whether Gharchistan was part of the domain of the *nizak* or what other relation might have existed between the *al-shār*, the *nizak*, and the *marzbān* remains unknown. Al- Muqaddasī's report about existing of a sophisticated legal system supervised by the *al-shār* indicates that Gharchistan had its local administration. The sources do not discuss the king's military capacity, but we can assume he could mobilise local forces because entering Gharchistan required his permission.

Guzgan, the fourth and final political region, was a kingdom that stretched from the east of the Marw al-Rūd to Balkh. The king of Guzgan was called *malik al-juzjān* in Arabic.<sup>333</sup> Possibly, he was called *guzgān-khudā* before the conquests because Ibn Khurdhābih listed this title for the kings of Guzgan in the past.<sup>334</sup> Moreover, the term *khudā*, meaning lord or ruler, was not a personal name, but was a title that resembles the Middle Persian *xwadāy* and the Bactrian *χοδδηο*.<sup>335</sup> The term *khudā* was also the title of the kings of the Bukhara region and Chaghaniyan. Arabic and Persian sources do not tell us whether the kings of Guzgan were of Guzgan Turkic or Iranian linguistic groups, and how they controlled their areas. Bactrian documents produced in Guzgan fill this gap. They reveal some information about the identity of the local kings, fiscal administration, judicial system, and local military forces. They show that all of these worked under the authority of the kings of Guzgan.

A royal family called *guzgan* (γωζογανο) ruled over the region of Guzgan. The kings of Guzgan recognised the overlordship of the *qaghān* of the Western Turks.<sup>336</sup> From the numismatics and Bactrian documents, we can identify at least four kings of Guzgan. These are Kanag Guzgan (r. 659–?), Skag Guzgan (r. 675–695), Besut (695–699), and Zhulad Guzgan (699–711).<sup>337</sup> Except for Besut, the other three kings used *guzgan* as their family name,

<sup>332</sup> Malik, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, 1: 71–72; Cribb, “Coinage in Afghanistan.”

<sup>333</sup> Al-Ya' qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, 66; *Hudūd al- 'ālam*, 50–61.

<sup>334</sup> Ibn Khurdhābih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 40.

<sup>335</sup> This can be seen in Bactrian documents no. N, V, X, T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 68–73, 98–105, 116–125, 136–141.

<sup>336</sup> Bactrian documents no. Nn, O, R in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74–79, 80–83, 92–93; La Vaissière remarked that the rulers of Guzgan had their eye on Balkh or had a connection with it. It is unknown if they arranged any military operation to capture Balkh, but they struck coins in the last decade of the seventh century, calling themselves Bactrian kings or kings of Bactria (La Vaissière, “De Bactres á Balkh,” 525; Étienne de la Vaissière, “The Last Bactrian Kings,” in *Coins, art, and chronology II: the first millennium C.E. in the Indo-Iranian borderlands*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse; 412. Bd. Veröffentlichungen der Numismatischen Kommission; 50, ed. Michael Alram, Deborah Klimburg Salter, Minoru Inaba and Matthias Pfisterer. Denkschriften (Wien: Logo des Akademieverlags, 2010), 213–217).

<sup>337</sup> Sims-Williams has suggested different chronologies for the kings of Guzgan. He suggested Besut (r. 689–692), Skag (692–695), and Zhulad (692–694). He mentions that different local rulers possibly controlled Guzgan at the same time. Apparently, Skag, Zhulad and Besut simultaneously ruled. He adds that Guzgan may have been divided

indicating that they may have been from the same royal family.<sup>338</sup> Three Bactrian documents mention Wakhsh, the god of the Amu Darya, in relation to individuals bearing the name *guzgan*.<sup>339</sup> A legal Bactrian document produced in Kalf (possibly modern Keleft on the left bank of the Amu Darya) in 440 of the Bactrian calendar, equal to 662 CE, mentions that certain fines should be paid to the treasury of the “lords of Guzman” (γωζογανοχοηαγγο). While the ‘lords of Guzman’ could, in theory, be a different group of politically dominant figures in the region, it is likely that it refers to lords of the *guzgan* family. This document also shows that Kalf was part of the territory of Guzman. Zhulad, the ruler of Pidud that is mentioned in this document, could have functioned under the authority of the king of Guzman.<sup>340</sup> Importantly, the fact that coins and Bactrian documents were produced in Guzman suggests that the kings of Guzman were local lords whose connection to the region they ruled was firmly established. They are called by the family name *guzgan*, which reflects their connection to the region of Guzman, while they also refer to Guzman as their territory.

The king of Guzman was above other local elites who managed the local administration. Each area had a local authority called a lord (χοηο). For instance, a Bactrian document produced in 705, in Lizg an area in Guzman, mentions that Aspring Kanduran Urbiyan, the lord of Lizg (λιζγο χοηοο) awarded some people in return for their service (ασπασο). The document refers to a certain Hilitber as “the leader of the people of Lizg” (λιζγο καροοαλο) who represented people of Lizg and witnessed the deal with a group of freemen. Based on the use of the title, he was below Aspring in administrative rank, because Aspring is called the lord of

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between two or more rulers and possibly one of them turned to Arab Muslims to seek their help to overcome his rivals. Though this is a great hypothesis and works well with the local political situation in Bactria, it is difficult to support it because of the lack of evidence (Sims-Williams, “The Arab-Sasanian and Arab-Hephthalite Coinage,” 119–120). Here, I follow Cribb’s chronology. Cribb mentioned that the coins of Zhulad were discontinued in 711, and that aligns with the Arabic narratives saying that the king of Guzman passed away in 711 after Qutayba suppressed the rebellion of the *nizak* in Baghlan (personal communication with Joe Cribb SOAS, London, October 2018; Cribb, “Coinage in Afghanistan.”).

<sup>338</sup> Malik says that there is a silver dirham with Besut’s name in Bactrian and a legend in Sogdian. He adds that the word Guzman is also mentioned in Bactrian (Malik, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, 2: 428–29); La Vaissière suggested that Besut might have been the father of Chiqān Chūr Bilgā, the prince of Panjikent. Perhaps Besut’s coins with Sogdian legend mentioned by Malik support La Vaissière’s idea (La Vaissière, “The Last Bactrian Kings,” 214); Sims-Williams suggests that Guzman was the dynastic name (Sims-Williams, “The Arab-Sasanian and Arab-Hephthalite Coinage,” 118).

<sup>339</sup> Three Bactrian documents bear the name of god Wakhsh and the names of Kanag Guzman, Zhulad and Yan Guzman. This raises the possibility of assuming that this family worshipped Wakhsh (Bactrian documents no. Nn, Tt, Uu in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74–79, 104–105, 112–115); Joe Cribb also reflected this idea (personal communication at SOAS, London, October 2018).

<sup>340</sup> Bactrian document no. O in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 80–83.

Lizg.<sup>341</sup> The *karval* (καροοαλο) mentioned in this document was an administrative position in Lizg known from at least 659.<sup>342</sup> Most probably, the *karval* functioned at the district level.

A legal document from Lizag produced in 722 provides more details about the administrative hierarchy in this area. It refers to a certain Rahul as the *karval* of Lizag and then mentions the name of Wiyus the foreman of Wulakh (οολαχο καροδαρο). The fact that Wiyus' name and title appear after that of Rahul's shows that *karval* was higher than *kardar* (καροδαρο). It is reasonable to infer that Wulakh was either a village or part of Lizag. This document does not clarify the responsibility of the *karval* and the *kardar*.<sup>343</sup> However, the *Hudūd al-'alam*, written two centuries later in Guzgan, mentions that the *kardar* was a person who collected taxes for the Farighūnid ruler of Guzgan. The fact that *kardar* mentioned in Bactrian documents and a geographical text produced in Guzgan may create an impression that the Bactrian *kardar* may refer to the same office of a local dignitary who was involved in fiscal administration in Guzgan. It also shows that the title of *kardar* continued to be used in Guzgan after the conquests.<sup>344</sup>

The same document from Lizag mentions that Lizag had a *tudun* (ταδοβο). The *tudun* was a Turkic title of an officer who was sent by the *qaghān* of the Turks to supervise the tributes paid by local rulers.<sup>345</sup> However, in 722, the Arabs had already pacified most of Bactria, and thus, the *tudun* of this document could not have been a Turkic representative anymore.<sup>346</sup> It is likely the *tudun* became the title of a local fiscal officer serving the local ruler. This document indicates that the *karval*, the *kardar* and the *tudun* worked under the authority of Yan-Guzgan, the king of Gar. It is uncertain, but this Yan-Guzgan may have been from the *guzgan* family.

The kings of Guzgan had control over the fiscal administration. It can be seen in Arab-Sasanian coins countermarked by their names and *tamgha*, a stamp associated with the royal

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<sup>341</sup> Bactrian documents no. Tt in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 104–105.

<sup>342</sup> Bactrian documents no. Nn in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74–79.

<sup>343</sup> Bactrian documents no. Uu in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 112–115.

<sup>344</sup> *Hudūd al-'alam*, 59–60.

<sup>345</sup> For discussion on *tudun*, see Jonathan Karam Skaff, “Western Turk Rule of Turkestan’s Oases in the Sixth through Eighth Centuries,” *The Turks* (2002): 364–72.

<sup>346</sup> Bactria was part of the Turkic empire, at least from 590. Ishbara, the son of Tardushad, ruled Bactria with the title *yabghu*. His overlordship was acknowledged as far as Herat in 643. His coins call him *MLKA* or king in Middle Persian and *yabghu*, which may have depicted him as king of both the Turks and Iranians. Vondrovec has published the coins that bear the title of *yabghu* minted on the Sasanian model with the Middle Persian legend *yabgh bahlk'n* (Vondrovec, *Coinage of the Iranian Huns*, 2: 527–28). After his death in 650, the Turks could not unify their forces anymore. So, they looked towards Tang China for help, and in return, the Chinese emperor confirmed the authority of Wu-shih-po of the A-shih-na dynasty (Harmatta, “Tokharistan and Gandhara,” 363). Most probably, the Bactrian rulers were still loyal to the A-shih-na dynasty and the *qaghān* mentioned in our documents after 650 refers to the A-shih-na ruler.

family. The countermark revalidated the coins circulating in Guzgan markets.<sup>347</sup> The payment of fines to the ‘lords of Guzgan’ was mentioned above, which points to another administrative office functioning on behalf of the king. Apart from them, taxes were an important source of income. Two types of taxes, called *tog* (τωγο) and *harg* (βαργο), were collected from the households. Possibly, the *harg* was the “land tax”,<sup>348</sup> and the *tog* was the “poll tax”.<sup>349</sup> Apparently, the *tog* appeared in Bactria during the Hephthalites, who collected it in cash (in the form of coins) and kind (in the form of sheep).<sup>350</sup> Collecting the *tog* in cash continued under the Western Turks. A land sale contract produced in 659 in Lizz mentions that a household had to sell its land to provide money to pay their *tog* belonged to the *qaghān* (χαγαναγγο τωγο) and the *harg* money to the local ruler (χοηοαγγο βαργο).<sup>351</sup> The document does not say who collected the taxes but shows that taxes were levied on households and paid in cash.

Guzgan had its local army led by a military commander called the *spalbed* (σπαλοβιδο). In 675, a certain Kul-waraz was the commander of the army of the Garokan (γαρωκανο σπαλοβιδο) in Guzgan and interacted with the *ṭarkhān* (ταρχανο) a Turkic title meaning commander.<sup>352</sup> After the domination of the Western Turks in Bactria around 590, the *qaghān* of the Western Turks tried to expand his authority over the region. He sent several representatives to the local rulers to ensure payment of the tributes.<sup>353</sup> The *ṭarkhān* mentioned in the letter exchanged between him and Kul-waraz, and the *tudun* mentioned in other documents should be understood in this context.<sup>354</sup> The Western Turks did not establish military garrisons in the region, probably because of their nomadic nature, and stayed outside of the cities. The same letter mentions that the *ṭarkhān* requested a hayfield from the *spalbed*, but the rest of the letter has not survived.

The sources discussed so far show that western Bactria had four main areas of political control. These were Badghis, Marw al-Rūd, Gharchistan, and Guzgan. All these areas had

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<sup>347</sup> Cribb, “Coinage in Afghanistan.”; The name of Skag Guzgan with his countermark appear on the Arab-Sasanian coins too. I noticed it on the silver coin no. AR. 1. 35 57.2 Catalogue Number 126 the British Museum (personal fieldwork, October 2018); Malik has published the coins minted in Balkh by the Umayyad authorities but countermarked by Skag and Zhulad (Malik, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, 2: 462–63).

<sup>348</sup> The *harg* is derived from the Babylonian *iku*, meaning land tax, and it can be seen in several Aramaic documents from Bactria. See Nava and Shaked, *Aramaic Documents*, 30, 71; Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 272.

<sup>349</sup> Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 227.

<sup>350</sup> Collecting taxes in the form of dinar and sheep was appropriate for the Hephthalites’ warlike nature, who had a long history of war with the Sasanians, as discussed in chapter one. Cash would provide salaries and sheep were essential food material for the moving armies.

<sup>351</sup> Bactrian documents no. Nn in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 74–79.

<sup>352</sup> Bactrian document no. jg in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 134–135.

<sup>353</sup> Skaff, “Western Turk Rule,” 371.

<sup>354</sup> Bactrian documents no. S, Uu in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 94–96, 112–115.

different rulers who controlled local economic resources, had their fortresses, and commanded their local forces. The *marzbān* of Marw al-Rūd and his ancestors served the Sasanian emperor (*shāhān shāh*). However, he functioned autonomously after the death of Yazdgird in 651. It is unclear if the *al-shār* of Gharchistan was a Turk or Iranian and to whom he sent his tributes. The *nizak* was a Hephthalite who ruled Badghis, who was ambitious and sought to expand into Sasanian Khurasan. The kings of Guzgan were from a local family, but whether they took the identities of Turk or Iranian is unknown. The *nizak* and the kings of Guzgan recognised the overlordship of the *qaghān* of the Western Turks, and the latter were politically represented by a military commander (*tarkhān*) and a fiscal officer (*tudun*). These individuals were to receive tributes collected for the *qaghān*. The Turks did not build garrisons in western Bactria.

### 2.1.3 Bactria proper

Bactria proper contained the oases of Balkh and Khulm and the area of Gaz, located between Balkh and Bamiyan. Balkh was known as the “Mother of Cities” (*umm al-bilād*) to Muslim geographers.<sup>355</sup> It was the capital of mighty kings (*mustaqarr-i khusruvān*), before Muslims conquered it. It was a heavily fortified city which derived its wealth from agriculture and regional trade.<sup>356</sup> Al-Ya‘qūbī describes it as the most significant and most valued city (*‘azīmat al-qadr*) of Khurasan, and al-Muqaddasī mentions that Balkh was praised as the “Beautiful Balkh” (*Balkh al-bahīyya*) in Persian books.<sup>357</sup> It was not only the Muslim geographers who described the city as such, but also the inhabitants of Balkh, such as al-Balkhī, the author of the *Faḍā’il-i Balkh*, who were also aware of the strategic location of Balkh on the trade routes between India, Sogdiana, and China along with its agricultural prosperity.<sup>358</sup>

Although there was no local king, the sources discuss some other important figures of authority found in Balkh at this time. Xuanzang’s narrative highlights the significance of the Buddhist monastery of Naw Bahar in Balkh. From the Arabic narratives, we learn that two different political figures ruled over Balkh: the *barmak* or the chief of Naw Bahar, and a *spāhbed*, who was a military commander. The *barmak* is a well-known character thanks to his

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<sup>355</sup> Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 420.

<sup>356</sup> Al-Istakhrī, *Al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, 155–56; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-ard*, 373–74; *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam*, 61.

<sup>357</sup> Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-budlān*, 66; Al-Muqaddasī’s description matches the description of Balkh in the *Avesta* (al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 301–2).

<sup>358</sup> Al-Balkhī, *Faḍā’il-i Balkh*, 43–52.

progeny, the *barāmika*, who left a visible footprint in the history of the early Abbasid era.<sup>359</sup> Nevertheless, some words on these figures are essential to know their position when the Arab Muslims arrived in Bactria.

The *barmak* (Sanskrit. *pramukha* meaning chief) was an important religious figure in Balkh.<sup>360</sup> His personal name is unknown, but his family was the keepers of Naw Bahar, the most important Buddhist complex in the eastern Iranian regions. According to Ibn al-Faqīh, the *barmak* family (*al-barāmika*) were people of dignity (*ahla sharaf*) whose religion was idol worshipping (*‘ibādat al-authān*), which may refer to Buddhism. The *barmak* was *sādin al-akbar*, or great custodian of Naw Bahar and regional rulers as far as China and Kabul, who were Buddhists, all respected the *barmak*.<sup>361</sup> The representatives of those rulers visited Naw Bahar, prostrated before the great statue, and kissed the hand of the *barmak* (*faṣayyiru li al-barmak*).<sup>362</sup> All these show the importance of the *barmak* in pre-Islamic Balkh.

The *barmak* controlled the financial issues relating to Naw Bahar and managed its agricultural areas. Ibn al-Faqīh mentions that the *barmak* possessed large estates in a district (*al-ruzdāq*) called Ruwan in Tukharistan, where its people were slaves (*‘abīd kulluhūm*).<sup>363</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh does not clarify to whom these slaves belonged. However, from Hye Ch’o’s reports on donating villages and their inhabitants to a Buddhist monastery in early eighth-century Kashmir, we can derive a parallel example and infer that donating villages and their people to Buddhist monasteries was a common practice in Kashmir and Bactria.<sup>364</sup> This assumption can be supported by Ibn al-Faqīh’s report that the *barmak* who allied with the Umayyads had grown up in Kashmir after his father was killed probably by the Hephthalites.<sup>365</sup> In any case, the

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<sup>359</sup> See Kevin van Bladel, “Barmakids,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/barmakids> (accessed on 24 June 2023).

<sup>360</sup> Bosworth has suggested the term *barmak* had derived from Sanskrit *pramukha* (Bosworth, “The Appearance and Establishment of Islam in Afghanistan,” in *Islamisation de l’Asie centrale. Processus locaux d’acculturation du VIIIe au XIe siècle*, ed. Étienne de La Vaissière (Paris: Association Pour L’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2008), 101).

<sup>361</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 322.

<sup>362</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 323; Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 422.

<sup>363</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 323–24; Ibn al-Faqīh does not provide any information on the location of Ruwan, but there is an area called Rustaq in the Takhar province. La Vaissière mentions that Ruwan was situated in the oasis of Imam Sahib in present-day Kunduz in northern Afghanistan (La Vaissière, “De Bactres á Balkh,” 519). For more detail on the *barmak*, see La Vaissière, “De Bactres á Balkh,” 520–533; Arezou Azad and Hugh Kennedy, “The Coming of Islam to Balkh,” in *Authority and Control in the countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> Century)*, ed. Alain Delattre, Marie Legendre and Petra Sijpesteijn (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 299–300.

<sup>364</sup> *The Hye Ch’o Diary*, 47.

<sup>365</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 324.

*barmak* was a respected person who managed estates in Balkh, and eastern Bactria belonged to Naw Bahar.

The important position of the *barmak* was linked to various factors. He was the keeper of Naw Bahar, physically over the great Buddhist complex, and also fiscally by managing its financial affairs. These elements and the political situation in the early seventh century led to the rise of the *barmak* as an acting ruler in Balkh. La Vaissière has shown that the political vacuum created by the conflicts between the Sasanians and the Western Turks over control of Bactria provided space for the rise of this family to become rulers of Balkh.<sup>366</sup> The fall of the Sasanians, the disintegration of the Turkic empire, and the coming of the Arab Muslims allowed the *barmak* and his sons to act as the actual political authority in Balkh at least from 650 to 725. Moreover, managing these estates required knowledge and administrative skills that the *barmak* must have possessed.<sup>367</sup>

Despite its privileges, the *barmak* did not command any standing military forces at the time of the Arab Muslim conquests. Instead, it seems that the *barmak* had diplomatic skills. He established a good relationship with local and regional rulers within Bactria, like the king of Chaghaniyan, and outside Bactria, such as the kings of Bukhara, Kabul, and Kashmir. Ibn al-Faqīh says that the *barmak* married the daughter of the king of Chaghaniyan and received a lady from the king of Bukhara.<sup>368</sup> This means that in times of danger, the *barmak* depended on the protection given by stronger rulers who were not necessarily Buddhist but respected the *barmak* and Naw Bahar. Xuanzang reports that the dethroned *yabghu qaghān* Si attacked Balkh in the past, intending to plunder Naw Bahar's wealth and possibly establish his own rule in Balkh, but he died suddenly.<sup>369</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-Faqīh mentions that a ruler called the *nizak tarkhān* also attacked Balkh and killed the father of the *barmak* (called the *barmak*) and most of his sons after he allied with the Arab Muslims. These reports show that the wealth of Naw Bahar was an element that attracted other rulers to attack Balkh.<sup>370</sup> Hence, to protect his position, the *barmak* had to keep good relations with other regional rulers.

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<sup>366</sup> La Vaissière, "De Bactres á Balkh," 524–25.

<sup>367</sup> Jonathan Silk has shown the financial affairs managed by the monks in north Indian Buddhist monasteries. That helps to understand the administrative role of the *barmak* in Balkh (Jonathan Silk, *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>368</sup> Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-buldān*, 324.

<sup>369</sup> *SI-YU-KI*, 45.

<sup>370</sup> Le Vaissière, "De Bactres á Balkh," 525.

The *spāhbed* of Balkh is a lesser-known figure. The *spāhbed* is a title referring to a military commander.<sup>371</sup> The office of the *spāhbed* could have remained in Balkh from the Sasanian period when they controlled Balkh, before they lost it to the Turks.<sup>372</sup> Information about him appears only in Arabic narratives relating to the rebellion of the *nizak* in 90/710 in Balkh, discussed in chapter four (4.2.1). The identity of this *spāhbed* is unclear, but he might have been a local elite person who supported the *nizak* against the Umayyads. It is possible that the *nizak* had appointed the *spāhbed*. Ibn ‘Atham al-Kūfī identifies him as al-Shāh b. Nizak, and al-Balkhī refers to him as the *dihqān* of Balkh.<sup>373</sup> Possibly, al-Shāh and the *dihqān* were the same person: the *spāhbed*. The *spāhbed* submitted to the Umayyads in 91/711, and after that, we do not hear about him anymore. The relation between the *barmak* and the *spāhbed* is unknown.

Khulm was a small oasis which was known for its farms and gardens.<sup>374</sup> The political situation in Khulm is not discussed in our sources. What is known is that the land tax in Khulm was based on the amount of water used to grow crops.<sup>375</sup> That indicates the existence of a water management system that must have been controlled by the government. Traditionally, Khulm was controlled by the ruler of Balkh, and most likely, it was part of the domain of Balkh in the early seventh century; otherwise, our sources would discuss it.

It is likely that Gaz was the area to the south of Balkh. The gorge of Chishma-yi Shafa allowed movement between Bamiyan and Balkh.<sup>376</sup> In 630, Xuanzang went to Bamiyan via Gaz and described it as a sandy, hilly, and mountainous area with a bad climate, aggressive people, and robbers who killed passengers for their goods. Nevertheless, Gaz had ten Buddhist monasteries and 200 monks who followed *Sarvāstivāda* tradition.<sup>377</sup> Later, in 675, Gaz was part of the territory of Skag the king of Guzman.<sup>378</sup> Apparently, it came under the authority of the Turks because a Bactrian document dating to 693 refers to the *ser* of the Turks who

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<sup>371</sup> Rika Gyselen, “Spāhbed,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, www. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/spahbed> (accessed on 2 September 2022).

<sup>372</sup> Under the Sasanians, Balkh had officials like the *shahrab*. See A. B. Nikitin, “The Sasanian Šahrab of Balkh,” *Ancient Civilizations* 1, no. 3 (1994): 365–68; For the Sasanian administration, see Rika Gyselen, *La géographie administrative de l’Empire sasanide: les témoignages épigraphiques en moyen-perse* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 152; Daryae, *Sasanian Persia*, 123–133.

<sup>373</sup> Al-Balkhī, *Fadā’il-i Balkh*, 32; Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, 7: 154.

<sup>374</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 303.

<sup>375</sup> *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 61.

<sup>376</sup> The Afghan government changed Gaz to Shulgara as part of its Afghanisation of the Balkh region. For more details, see Mukhtār Vafāyī, *Darra-yi Gaz-i Bastān: Nīm Nigāhī ba Vulusvālī Shulgara Vilāyat-i Balkh* (Kabul: Dustān, 1394/2015).

<sup>377</sup> *SI-YU-KI*, 49.

<sup>378</sup> Bactrian document no. R in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 92–93.

controlled Gaz. The *ser* was a title meaning ‘ruler’. It had a *tudun* or tax-collector and a treasurer. The military situation in Gaz remains unknown.

The above-mentioned reports show that Bactria proper had two areas of political control. The *yabghu* of Turks claimed overlordship in Balkh, while the *barmak* and the *spāhbed* were the actual local authorities. Probably, Khulm was part of Balkh’s political jurisdiction. Gaz was controlled by the kings of Guzgan but then came under the authority of the *ser* of Turks, who functioned under the suzerainty of the Turkic *qaghān*. The relation between the *barmak*, the *spāhbed*, the *ser* of Turks is unclear.

#### 2.1.4 Southern Bactria

All mountainous areas from the north of Bamiyan up to Samangan were within the territory of the kingdom of Rob. Rob’s kingdom and political situation are now known thanks to a cache of Bactrian documents. This part analyses these documents to provide an image of Rob’s political structure and administration.

In the early seventh century, Rob was ruled by the Shaburan family, an old local elite family whose name appears in several Bactrian letters and legal documents. These documents show that this family controlled the region on and off from at least ca. 462 to 747.<sup>379</sup> A Bactrian legal document dating to 407 of the Bactrian calendar, equal to 629 CE, produced in Samangan, mentions that Fruma-rizm Shaburan was the ruler of Rob. He had the Turkic title *tapaghliḡh iltābir* meaning ‘respected chief’, indicating that he recognised the overlordship of the *qaghān* of the Turks.<sup>380</sup> The local rulers of Rob did not have a good relationship with their neighbours, the Hephthalites, who controlled Baghlan in eastern Bactria. Their hostility escalated in the early seventh century, pushing the king of Rob to help Qutayba b. Muslim invade eastern Bactria and kill the *nizak* in 709–710, discussed in chapter four (4.2.1).

The king of Rob was called the *Rob-khar* (ρωβοχαρο).<sup>381</sup> The *khar* was from a noble family and possessed properties such as irrigated land, cattle, markets, and servants.<sup>382</sup> He

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<sup>379</sup> Bactrian documents no. cl, xd, xr in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 88–89, 144–45, 166–67, and documents no. L, N, P, Q, W in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 58–65, 86–73, 84–87, 88–91, 126–135.

<sup>380</sup> Bactrian document no. N in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 86–73.

<sup>381</sup> It is important to note that the *khar* derived from the Old Persian *xšāθriya*, meaning king (Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 231). The *shar* mentioned for Gharchistan is also dialectical variant of the same word. It is unknown when and how the title of *khar* was introduced in Rob, but it continued to the early Islamic period (Bactrian documents no. F, Y in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 38–41, 142–43).

<sup>382</sup> Bactrian documents no. J, L, P in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 48–55, 58–65, 84–87; Also, see document no. dc, jb, cl, ck in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 102–103, 126–127, 88–89, 88–89.

controlled his kingdom with the help of other local elite families. The courts of the *khar* were in Samingan from 629 to 671 and in Malr in the mountains of southern Rob from 517 to 712–713, indicating the existence of two capitals.<sup>383</sup> For unknown reasons, the *khar* did not issue coins in his name but possibly imported coins minted in Balkh and other areas because they had better quality. The Bactrian documents from Rob often refer to fresh and good-quality Persian silver dirhams minted outside of Rob.<sup>384</sup> The *khar* of Rob’s authority was based on a sophisticated administrative system that is known only from the Bactrian documents. This detailed information is not available for any other parts of Bactria, and for its relevance to explain the layers of political powers that formed the political structure in Bactria, I shall discuss it here. It helps us to understand the way the rulers of Rob controlled their region.

The Bactrian documents show that the region of Rob had several administrative divisions. These are the “city” (*βαρο*), the “district” (*οδαγο*), the “citadel/fort” (*λιζο*), and the “borough” (*ανδαγο*).<sup>385</sup> In addition, “village” (*ουαγο*), the smallest unit in the administrative division, should be mentioned.<sup>386</sup> The origin of this administrative division is unknown, but it continued into the early Abbasid period, as Arabic documents from Rob followed it as well.<sup>387</sup> Possibly, other parts of Bactria had the same administrative division because documents from Guzgan, Kadagstan, and Warnu refer to cities and districts the same way they were mentioned for Rob.

The *khar* of Rob controlled his kingdom through a set of offices located in the cities, districts, villages, and fortresses. The civil administration within the city or in the district was organised by the *framalar* (*φραμαλαρο*) or the steward. This title is known in Bactrian documents from ca. 350 and survived to the year 712 during the Umayyad period.<sup>388</sup> The *framalar* worked under the authority of the *khar* and did not possess any military powers. Earlier documents dating from the fourth-century show that the *framalar* often made requests to the commander of the fortress (*λιζοβιδο*) if he needed their support to enforce regulations.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Ryoichi Miyamoto suggested that Malr may have been added to the sphere of the authority of the *khar* of Rob before 629 (Ryoichi Miyamoto, “Étude préliminaire sur la géographie administrative du Tukhāristān,” *Studia Iranica* 48 (2019): 7–8).

<sup>384</sup> For example, see Bactrian document no. P in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87.

<sup>385</sup> Miyamoto, “Étude préliminaire,” 1.

<sup>386</sup> Miyamoto does not include the village, but the Bactrian documents show it was part of the administrative divisions. See, for example, Bactrian document no. V in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 116–125.

<sup>387</sup> This continuity is noticed by Miyamoto; Also see Arabic documents no. 11, 16, 17, 24 in Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 112–113, 122–23, 124–25, 138–39.

<sup>388</sup> Bactrian document no. bb in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 54–55, and document no. U. in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 106–111.

<sup>389</sup> Bactrian documents no. bb, bc in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 54–55, 56–58.

The *framalar* was informed about the situation in his area by lower administrators and used the post network (*φορητιγο*) for communications.<sup>390</sup>

Another administrative position was the *sharab* (*βαοραβο*). The term *sharab* is mentioned in a Bactrian document from 350 and remained an important office till 705, possibly continuing into the early Abbasid period. Bactrian documents show that the *sharab* was an elite person who owned properties and had relations with the ruler.<sup>391</sup> It is usually combined with the term “Pars” (*παρσαβαραβο*), meaning Persian, but it is unknown whether this was a linguistic or political identification.<sup>392</sup> The Bactrian *sharab* recalls the Middle Persian *shahrab* in the early Sasanian administrative system, which was a title given to the city governor<sup>393</sup> or sometimes applied to the governor of a province.<sup>394</sup> It is not certain, but the Bactrian *sharab* may have had an office in the city. The head of the borough was called the *andagbed* (*ανδαγοβιδο*). Possibly, he worked under the authority of the *framalar* of his district. He was recognised as a local authority and witnessed legal documents.<sup>395</sup> Bactrian documents do not elaborate more on this.

A village (*ουαγο*) was the smallest unit in the Bactrian administration system.<sup>396</sup> Linguistically, it may have derived from *wyaka*, and it is presented in Sogdian as *wy'k*, meaning place.<sup>397</sup> The village authorities were fundamental as they connected the village to the rest of the system and collected taxes from their areas. In the middle of the fifth century, *sarlar* (*σαρλαρο*) referred to a person who had property, horses, donkeys, and servants in his household. In times of need, he carried missions with other *sarlar*.<sup>398</sup> In Rob, a *sarlar* was responsible for the tax collection from his respected area and the delivery thereof to the *framalar* of his region. That means the *sarlar* was an authority in the village.

The kingdom of Rob had a *lezbed* (*λιζοβιδο*), meaning commander of the fortress who functioned under the authority of the *khar* of Rob. The *lezbed* could have played the role of today's local police. It is known only from the Bactrian documents dating to the fourth century.

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<sup>390</sup> Bactrian documents no. ca, cp, xc in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 68–69, 94–96, 142–43.

<sup>391</sup> Bactrian documents no. bg, xn, xr, xk in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 64–65, 158–59, 166–67, 154–55, and document ag in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 156–57.

<sup>392</sup> Bactrian documents no. ag, al in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 156–57, 164–65. For *parsig*, see Sims-Williams, *DBII*, 217.

<sup>393</sup> Nikitin, “The Sasanian Šahrab of Balkh,” 376.

<sup>394</sup> Touraj Daryaei, “The Effect of the Arab Muslim Conquest on the Administrative Division of Sasanian Persis/Fars,” *Iran* 41, no. 1 (2003): 198–99.

<sup>395</sup> Bactrian document no. A in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 26–29.

<sup>396</sup> Bactrian document no. V in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 116–125.

<sup>397</sup> Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 213.

<sup>398</sup> Bactrian document no. xe in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 146–47.

In this period, the *lezbed* possessed properties like cattle, and he came from a noble family. He had relations with the *khar*'s family. The *lezbed* controlled all movement coming in and going out with his armed guards and could arrest, detain suspects, and punish them.<sup>399</sup> He supervised chiefs of the fortress guard (*λιζοβιδιγο*), whom each had ten guards (*λασοβιδιγο*) under their command.<sup>400</sup> This decimal organisation may reflect the old Iranian military system existing in the Sasanian army.<sup>401</sup> Like other higher authorities, the commander was assisted by a scribe (*λαβιρο*) to deal with administrative issues. He was expected to be a just man (*μαρδο λαδιγηιο*). He heard complaints and decided to release, fine, or punish the culprits.<sup>402</sup> It is unknown if this local force continued to the Islamic period.

Rob had a *ṭarkhān* in the seventh century. He represented the authority of the Turkic *qaghān*. The position of the *ṭarkhān* could have been inherited from father to son.<sup>403</sup> In 629, a Turkic military commander named Khul-Khan was the *inal ṭarkhān* in Rob. Possibly, *inal* means a trustworthy chief.<sup>404</sup> Khul-Khan was the lord of a certain estate called Wilagaran in Rob, showing how he possessed personal properties in Rob.<sup>405</sup> Whether the Turks had a military garrison in Rob is not known. In any case, the presence of the *ṭarkhān* means the *khar* of Rob recognised the overlordship of the Turkic *qaghān*. Bactrian documents from Rob show that the kingdom of Rob had its local rulers supported by a sophisticated administration system that was filled largely by local elites.

### 2.1.5 Eastern Bactria

It is difficult to provide a clear picture of the political areas in eastern Bactria in the early seventh century. Possibly, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Kadagstan were the main areas of political control. The Hephthalites and the Turkic *yabghu* of Tukharistan were the dominant political groups. After their empire collapsed, the Hephthalites retained some of their military power and their political autonomy under the Turkic overlordship in this region. The areas such as

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<sup>399</sup> Bactrian documents no. bb, bc in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 54–55, 56–58.

<sup>400</sup> Bactrian document no. al in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 162–163.

<sup>401</sup> A. Sh. Shahbazi, “ARMY i. Pre-Islamic Iran,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/army-i> (accessed on 30 December 2022); Also, see Eduard Aloff, “Studies on Mounted Warfare in Asia I: Continuity and Change in Middle Eastern Warfare, c. ca. 550–1350- What Happened to the Horse Archer?” *War in History* 21 no. 4 (2014): 423–444.

<sup>402</sup> Bactrian document no. ba in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 52–54.

<sup>403</sup> Bactrian documents no. P, Q in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87, 88–91.

<sup>404</sup> For discussion the meaning of *inal* see, <https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/article/> (accessed on 8 June 2023).

<sup>405</sup> Bactrian document no. N in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 68–73; Vondrovec mentions that *ṭarkhān* was higher in rank than the local ruler of Rob, but Bactrian documents do not show this (Vondrovec, *Coinage of the Iranian Huns*, 2: 530).

Warlu (*οαρλο*) that probably correspond to Chinese *Huolu* were under the Hephthalites.<sup>406</sup> The plain of Ghuri in present-day Baghlan is also said to have been a Hephthalite-dominated area.<sup>407</sup> The Ghuri area is well irrigated and extensively cultivated and still shows the remains of strong defensive walls that once surrounded the cultivated areas from the south and the west. The Hephthalites also had settlements in Ishkashim in Badakhshan, and Nahrin to the southeast of Baghlan, and used the pastures in those areas. The Hephthalites controlled the main overland trade route from India to the north, which crossed their territory. They had many fortresses that allowed them to control all the main roads between Bamiyan and Tukharistan too. However, they did not have friendly relations with the *khar* of Rob, who controlled the trade route from Bamiyan to Balkh that crossed Samangan.<sup>408</sup> Kunduz may have been controlled directly by the *yabghu* of Tukharistan. Tardushad, the *yabghu* of Tukharistan, resided in Tukharistan. He was the representative of Tong-yabghu, the *qaghān* of the Western Turks who stayed in the Suyab region far to the north in Sogdiana.<sup>409</sup>

The location of Kadagstan is unknown. However, it could have been an area to the east of Baghlan. Whether the rulers of Kadagstan were Hephthalites is not known. However, several Bactrian documents produced after 700 CE show that the Turks controlled this region.<sup>410</sup> The administration in Kadagstan is partially known from the Bactrian documents. In Kadagstan, the highest political figure was the *kadagbed* (*καδαγοβιδο*), meaning the “lord of the household, governor, steward”, which was the title of the ruler of Kadagstan.<sup>411</sup> He recognised the authority of the *qaghān*. It is likely that he served the *yabghu* because the *yabghu* was in eastern Bactria and represented the *qaghān*. No coins with the title *kadagbed* have been found so far, suggesting that he did not issue coins just like the *khar* of Rob.

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<sup>406</sup> For further explanation on Warlu, see Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 242.

<sup>407</sup> Shushin Kuwayama suggests that “Huolu” of the Chinese sources refers to the Ghuri in Baghlan. See Kuwayama, “The Hephthalites in Tukharistan,” 132. However, identifying *Huolu* with Ghuri is not plausible.

<sup>408</sup> Grenet, “Regional Interaction,” 214–215.

<sup>409</sup> Kuwayama, “The Hephthalites in Tukharistan,” 132; For more information on Suyab, see Gregory Semenov, “Suyāb,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/suyab> (accessed 25 July 2022).

<sup>410</sup> Bactrian documents no. T, X, Y in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103, 136–141, 142–43.

<sup>411</sup> Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 197. Several Bactrian letters issued between 420–462 call Keraw Ormuzdan the *kadagbed* (Bactrian documents no. da, db, dc, dd, de in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 100–105). However, three Bactrian documents issued between 475 and 772 in Kadagstan call the *kadagbed* “king of people of Kadag” (*καδαγοβο φαο*). Possibly, earlier, the *kadagbed* was the title of the governor, and then it became the title of the local king. See Bactrian documents no. ed, ja in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 114–15, 124–25, and document no. T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103.

The *kadagbed* was the local ruler of Kadagstan. He had his court (*αλβαρο*) located in a fortress (*λιζο*),<sup>412</sup> and possessed the authority to judge and issue legal decrees.<sup>413</sup> He controlled his area through an administration that is known mostly from the documents produced in the fifth century. Possibly, the form of this local administration continued because we hear the same administrative titles and procedures in later documents. In any case, the *kadagbed* was helped by *nabargbed* (*ναβαραγοβιδο*), a quartermaster.<sup>414</sup> The latter could issue letters and answer petitions on behalf of the *kadagbed*. Probably, his authority came from the *kadagbed*. Apart from the quartermaster and the scribes, the *kadagbed* had a record-keeper (*σιρδαρο*) for specific issues assumed to have been secret.<sup>415</sup> In ca. 430, another administrator called “the counsellor of the elderly” (*καβοονανδαρζοβιδο*) functioned in Kadagstan.<sup>416</sup> It is not sure if he was an old person with knowledge and experience, or if he represented an actual council consisting of several experienced people. A Bactrian protection letter produced in 549 of the Bactrian calendar corresponding to 772 CE in Kadagstan refers to the *kardar* (*καρδαρο*) translated by Sims-Williams as “foreman”, which is the same as the *kardar* operating in Guzgan.<sup>417</sup>

In Kadagstan, the financial issues were organised by the *hamargar* (*νομαογαρο*), meaning accountant or treasurer (with variation *ahmarkar* *αυμαροκαρο*). The *hamargar* had his own seal and worked with the *kadagbed* and could be a witness to a legal or economic document. He had the authority to judge and decide about some issues, like witnessing an undertaking of peace or arbitrating a dispute. This position continued to function until 772 in Kadagstan.<sup>418</sup> The Bactrian *hamargar* recalls the Middle Persian *āmārgar* (accountant) in the Sasanian administration, who worked in provinces, cities and districts. He had his seal and kept financial counts.<sup>419</sup>

Kadagstan had its local forces commanded by a *spalbed* (*σπαλοβιδο*). In 700, the *spalbed* of Kadagstan (*καδαγοστανο σπαλοβιδο*) was commissioned by the Queen of Kadagstan to supervise a deed of a gift given to a local priest.<sup>420</sup> This show the *spalbed* had a connection

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<sup>412</sup> Bactrian document no. F in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 38–41.

<sup>413</sup> Bactrian document no. ea in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 108–109, and document no. Y in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 142–43.

<sup>414</sup> Bactrian document no. ed in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 114–15.

<sup>415</sup> Bactrian documents no. dd, de in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 104–105.

<sup>416</sup> Bactrian documents no. xm in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 156–57.

<sup>417</sup> Bactrian document no. Y in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 142–43.

<sup>418</sup> Bactrian documents no. X, Y in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 136–141, 142–43.

<sup>419</sup> Daryaee, “The Effect of the Arab Muslim Conquest,” 201.

<sup>420</sup> Bactrian document no. T in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 98–103.

to the royal family beyond his military work. In any case, the information about eastern Bactria shows that Kadagstan, Baghlan, and Kunduz were the main areas of political control. Baghlan was controlled by the Hephthalites, who recognised the overlordship of the Turkic *qaghān* who resided somewhere in Tukharistan. Kadagstan was controlled by a *kadagbed* who was loyal to the *qaghān*.

### 2.1.6 Northern Bactria

In northern Bactria, the main political areas were Chaghaniyan, Guftan (Kaftan), Shuman, Akhrun, Quwadhayan, Khuttal, and Tirmidh. In the early seventh century, this region knew several local kings who recognised the suzerainty of the Turkic *qaghān*.<sup>421</sup> The king of Chaghaniyan, known as the *Chaghān-khudā*, resided in the upper part of Chaghaniyan.<sup>422</sup> The *Chaghān-khudā*'s personal name is not given in the Arabic narratives, but the wall painting at Afrasiab in Samarkand commissioned by Varkhuman, the king of Samarkand between 648–651, has a Sogdian inscription on the garment of the *Chaghān-khudā*'s ambassador.<sup>423</sup> It says that Turantash, the king of Chaghaniyan (*cy'nkw xwβw*), sent the embassy with gifts to Varkhuman. Turantash is a Turkic name and could have been a Turk, but this (possible) Turkish king still had diplomatic relations with the king of Samarkand.<sup>424</sup>

Shuman and Akhrun had local kings in 629–30. These rulers were often at war with the *Chaghān-khudā*.<sup>425</sup> This hostility played a crucial role in forcing the *Chaghān-khudā* to unite with the Umayyads and invite them to his region to overcome his local enemies, which is discussed in chapter four (4.3.1). Khuttal had a different local ruler who used the Turks to settle local conflicts.<sup>426</sup> Guftan and Tirmidh had their own local kings. The king of Tirmidh was

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<sup>421</sup> This is reflected in a letter written by the brother of *yabghu* of Tukharistan to the Chinese emperor discussed earlier.

<sup>422</sup> Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "The Rulers of Chaghāniyān in Early Islamic Times," *IRAN* XIX (1981): 1.

<sup>423</sup> For detail on text and images of these wall-paintings, see C. Silvi Antonini, "The paintings in the palace of Afrasiab (Samarkand)," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 63 (1989): 109–144; Boris Marshak, "Le programme iconographique des peintures de la 'Salle des ambassadeurs' à Afrasiab (Samarkand)," *Arts Asiatiques* XLIX (1994): 5–20; Frantz Grenet, "What was the Afrasiab painting about?" in *Royal Naurūz in Samarkand. Proceedings of the Conference held in Venice on the Pre-Islamic painting of Afrasiab*, ed. M. Compagni and É. de la Vaissière, supplément à *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 78 (2005), (Rome, 2006), 43–58.

<sup>424</sup> Vladimir Livshitz, "The Sogdian Wall Inscription on the site of Afrasiab," *Rivista degli studi orientali* (2006): 59–74.

<sup>425</sup> Bosworth, "The Rulers of Chaghaniyan," 1.

<sup>426</sup> *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 72.

called the *Tirmidh-shāh*, whose title appears on coins struck in the Sasanian style.<sup>427</sup> The identity of the kings of Tirmidh is unknown, but the Arabic narratives on the conquests of Tirmidh show that some local elites were against the king and helped the Arab Muslims to remove the king in the late seventh century. However, Tirmidh came under the *Tirmidh-shāh* shortly again, but it was finally incorporated into the Umayyad empire in the early eighth century.<sup>428</sup> Not much is known about the political structure and administration in northern Bactria.

The documentary and literary sources discussed in this part show that many different principalities controlled seventh-century Bactria. The local rulers had different titles, belonged to noble families and managed their areas through administration filled by local elite families. They controlled local economic resources, maintained law and order, and some of them commanded local forces. In other words, they had local autonomy. However, none of these local rulers tried to dominate the whole of Bactria under their rule. Instead, they recognised the suzerainty of an overlord. Except for the *marzbān* of the Marw al-Rūd and possibly the king of Gharchistan, the rest of the Bactrian rulers recognised the suzerainty of the *qaghān* of the Western Turks who resided outside of Bactria. The *qaghān* was represented by the *yabghu* of Turks who resided in Tukharistan and functioned as the local overlord in Bactria. A *ṭarkhān* or military commander and a *tudun* or fiscal officer were sent to different areas in Bactria to receive the tributes paid by local rulers. Our sources do not show if the Turks built any military garrisons in Bactria. If there were any Turkic garrisons in Bactria, then they would resist the Arab Muslims, and we would hear about it from Arabic narratives. The absence of Turkic military garrisons indicates that the Turks did not impose direct control over Bactria. After entering Bactria, the Arab Muslims had to deal with a politically diverse region with many autonomous rulers who recognised the overlordship of the Turkic *qaghān* (Figures 17–18).

This above-mentioned local political autonomy and overlordship did not denote anarchy or political chaos. Local rulers operated according to systems of planning, decision-making, and strategic thinking. They just did so on their own terms and to serve their own needs. Local rulers' political priorities varied, and they also responded to external powers in accordance with these particular socio-political interests. The actions in response to external

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<sup>427</sup> See the coins of the *Tirmidh-shāh* with Bactrian inscription and *tamgha* <https://data1.geo.univie.ac.at/projects/dasantlitzdesfremden/coins/coin155%3Flanguage=en.html> (accessed on 2 November 2021).

<sup>428</sup> Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 418–19; Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 8: 1148, 1159–1161, 1180.

powers could thus differ from one ruler to the next and from one region to the next. Chapters three (3.2.1) and four (4.1.3) will show that local rulers did not hesitate to unite with an external power to overcome their neighbouring rival. At the same time, local rulers sometimes formed a regional alliance to defend Bactria against an invading external power or asked an outsider to help reduce the influence of another external power. This political structure creates several questions. How did this political structure develop in Bactria? Was it an old or a new phenomenon? The next section will provide some answers.

## 2.2. Background of local autonomy in Bactria

The reports discussed so far reflect the existence of many different principalities in seventh-century Bactria. Local rulers controlled their local affairs, such as civil administration, fiscal and legal system, and commanded local forces. This situation has been noticed by Chinese Buddhist travellers who visited the region, and Muslim historians and geographers who narrated the conquests and their aftermath. However, only the Chinese attempted to explain the reasons behind it. In this part, I will discuss the Chinese observation by adding numismatic data and inscriptions to provide an explanation behind this form of the political structure in Bactria. Adopting a comparative approach, I present Sogdiana and Armenia as parallel examples that had a similar situation.

Xuanzang provides an explanation for the political autonomy and overlordship in Bactria. According to him, this form of political structure was caused by two reasons. The first reason was the absence ‘for many centuries’ of a strong king who was able to unify the region under his command.<sup>429</sup> Xuanzang, operating on the basis of the Chinese imperial power structure of his time, assumed the premise of dynastic rule.<sup>430</sup> In his model, once, many centuries ago, such a single ruler did control the area. The second reason was the geography of Bactria, which created natural boundaries between these petty states. What is important here is that Xuanzang noticed the relation between geography and politics in Bactria and recognised the regional political division. The geographical diversity of the Bactrian landscape and its impact on social organisation was the subject of the previous chapter. We learned that the Muslim geographers noticed how the natural landscape impacted human settlement patterns

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<sup>429</sup> *SI-U-KI*, 37–8.

<sup>430</sup> For Chinese imperial power structure, see Ch’ien Mu, *Traditional Government in Imperial China: A critical Analysis*, trans. Chün-tu Hüeh and George O. Totten (Hongkong: The Chinese University, 1982), 37–44.

and political organisation in Bactria. Xuanzang asserts that this was a centuries-old issue in Bactria, but did not elaborate further.

The antiquity of this political tradition is reported by another Chinese historian. Sima Qian (d. 86 BCE), in his *Shi ji* (“Records of the Grand Scribe”), mentions that Zhang Qian (d. 114 BCE), an army general, was sent as part of a diplomatic mission by the emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) to the western regions to convince the chieftains of the *Yuezhi* people, who were settled in Bactria, to help the emperor against the *Xiongnu* who threatened the Han empire.<sup>431</sup> In his mission, Zhang Qian found out that a significant political power did not control *Daxia*, but that many minor local chiefs ruled in this area.<sup>432</sup> *Daxia* was the Chinese name for Bactria.<sup>433</sup> Sima Qian’s report almost echoes the same situation reported by Xuanzang. The *Yuezhi* were a confederation consisting of five groups, each ruled by a *yabghu*. The *yabghu* of Guishuang attacked the rest of the four and established the Kushan empire (first century BCE–third century CE).<sup>434</sup> However, the rise of the Kushan did not remove the *Yuezhi* confederation. The Kushan coinage and their inscriptions refer to Kushan rulers as the *shāhān shāh* (*ḥaovavo ḥao*) or ‘king of kings’<sup>435</sup> indicating that the Kushan emperor was the overlord to other kings in their empire. Bactria was the core part of the Kushan empire as the Kushan king of kings built his dynastic temples in this region.

This form of political rule was possibly already in place before the Kushan period. We can see it in a Greek inscription from Kuliab in northern Bactria in which Euthydemus (c. 230–200 BCE) is called “the greatest of all kings” (πάντων μέγιστον Εὐθύδημον).<sup>436</sup> This title does

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<sup>431</sup> For the *Xiongnu* empire, see Ursula Brosseder, “The Xiongnu Empire,” in *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economics*, ed. Sitta von Reden (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019), 193–203.

<sup>432</sup> Kuwayama, “The Hephthalites in Tokharistan,” 126; Also, see Ma Yong, “Zhang Qian,” *Zhongguo da baike quanshu, Zhongguo lishi* (Beijing/Shanghai: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1992), 3: 1504. [馬雍, 張, 中國大百科全書, 中國歷史].

<sup>433</sup> Huang Jing, “Daxia,” *Zhongguo da baike quanshu, Waiguo lishi* (Beijing/Shanghai: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1992), 1: 186. [黃靖, 大夏, 中國大百科全書, 外國歷史]. Shushin Kuwayama has argued that the absence of a unified political power in Bactria is also reflected in *Han Shu* (Kuwayama, “The Hephthalites in Tokharistan,” 126).

<sup>434</sup> Warwick Ball et al., “From the Kushans to the Shahis,” 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), 345–469; The early history for the Kushans is reflected in Chinese sources. See Yu Taishan, “The Origin of the Kushans,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 212 (2011): 1–22; Also, see Joe Cribb, “Rediscovering the Kushans,” in *From Persepolis to the Punjab—Exploring Ancient Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan*, ed. Elizabeth Errington and Vesta S. Curtis (London: British Museum Press, 2007), 179–210.

<sup>435</sup> Sims-Williams and Cribb. “A New Inscription of Kanishka the Great,” 80; Raziéh Taasob, “Language and Legend in Early Kushan Coinage: Progression and Transformation,” *Dabir* 5 (2018): 71–84; The king of kings political model was already known in Iran from the Achaemenid period as it is attested in the Behistun Inscription.

<sup>436</sup> Shane Wallace, “Greek Culture in Afghanistan and India: Old Evidence and New Discoveries,” *Greek and Rome* 63. no. 2 (2016): 211–213.

not compare him to kings outside the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, which covered both parts of the Amu Darya and expanded to Gandhara but reflects him as *primus inter pares* within the region.<sup>437</sup> The Graeco-Bactrian coinage shows that several rulers often coexisted and controlled the kingdom while one of them claimed to be the king of kings (*ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ*).<sup>438</sup> The Greek inscription and coinage show that political autonomy and overlordship were old phenomena in the region.<sup>439</sup>

If we combine the Greek, Bactrian, and Chinese evidence, it becomes clear that Bactria had not been a politically unified region under one single command, but always housed multiple petty states whose local rulers recognised the overlordship of an overlord. The question is, what can explain this situation? Among our sources, only Xuanzang argued that this situation was the result of the absence of a great king; this allowed local rulers to control their areas independently. In other words, no great king imposed direct control on local rulers. He adds that geography created natural boundaries between these local rulers and helped them to continue their rule. Xuanzang thus suggests that geography and politics caused this situation. His argument is plausible.

The geography of Bactria, as Xuanzang has noticed, is an important element. As discussed extensively in the previous chapter (1.1.2), the physiography of Bactria, which is part of the Makran-Pamir shatter zone, created a diverse landscape. This shatter zone and the resulting diversity in geography, population, and cultural tradition would not allow one single political group to control all political and economic issues. The diverse landscape helped the local rulers to maintain autonomy in their areas.

The absence of a great king, reported by Sima Qian and Xuanzang, had roots in the political situation. Bactria was an interlocutor space between India, China, Iran, and the steppes. Likewise, it was an important part of a great trade network that connected all these regions. The political and military expansions of greater political powers, such as the

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<sup>437</sup> A. K. Narain, *Indo Greek* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1957); Joe Cribb, “The Greek Kingdom of Bactria, its Coinage and its Collapse,” *Afghanistan, ancien carrefour entre l’est et l’ouest*, 2005, available online, [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) (accessed on 7 September 2022).

<sup>438</sup> Taasob, “Language and Legend in Early Kushan Coinage,” 73; Most probably, Bactria had many minor states in this period because we find a reflection of such a political situation in the work of the Greek geographer Strabo, who reproduced parts of *The Parthia* (*Παρθικά*), written by Apollodorus of Artemia. He describes Bactria as *ἐγκρατίδαγοῦν πόλεις χιλίας* “land of a thousand cities” (Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1928; repr., 1961), 7: 4–5).

<sup>439</sup> See Lauren Morris, “Central Asian Empires,” in *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economics*, ed. Sitta von Reden (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019), 53–93.

Sasanians, the Chionites, the Hephthalites, and the Western Turks (and later the Tibetans and, to some extent, the Chinese), would have effects on Bactria. All these powers tried to control this region, and that turned the region into a contested military frontier region. However, controlling a frontier region that had difficult geography and diverse populations was not easy. It required the cooperation of local rulers to maintain the authority of the bigger political powers. At the same time, the local rulers could benefit from the bigger political powers by joining them. Hence, the political rivalries between bigger powers and their need for local allies created a space for the local rulers to retain their autonomy but recognise the suzerainty of the overlords outside of Bactria.

The mixture of the political situation and geographical conditions developed this form of rule, with regional political autonomy combined with overlordship. No great political power disrupted this political structure to impose its direct control over Bactria. We will see in chapter four (4.2.2) that it was the Umayyads who broke this system to keep Bactria under their direct control. The importance of this realisation cannot be underestimated. Acknowledging this helps us understand Bactria's interaction with Arab Muslims. It also emphasises the unique experience of Bactria's incorporation into the Islamic empire, the process of the conquests, and the naturalisation of Islamic rule, which are the topics of the next chapters.

Political autonomy and overlordship were not confined to Bactria. Apparently, regions with a similar situation to Bactria had the same conditions. Sogdiana and Armenia in the seventh and eighth centuries confirm this idea. These parallel examples also support the explanation behind this situation in Bactria provided earlier. I will briefly discuss these two regions without entering into much detail, as a fuller account is beyond the aim of this dissertation.

Sogdiana was a vast region located to the north of the Amu Darya along the Zarafshan River. The Bukhara region, with an arid zone climate, and the Samarkand region, with a semi-arid zone climate, formed Sogdiana. Like Bactria, Sogdiana's geography and climates provided ideal conditions for sedentary and pastoral life. It was an important part of the trade network between India, China, and Iran. Like Bactria, Sogdiana was part of the frontier region between various empires. In terms of political structure, Sogdiana was politically divided. La Vaissière has utilised the term "fragmentation territoriale" for Sogdiana, where several city-states operated independently. However, these city-states recognised the suzerainty of the *qaghān* of

the Western Turks.<sup>440</sup> Local Sogdian rulers had different titles like *khuv* (*xwβw*), *afshun* (*'pš'wn*) and *ikhshid* (*'xšyδ*). These local rulers commanded their troops called *chakar* in Sogdian and paid by taxes collected from their regions. However, none of these local rulers could unify Sogdiana under one rule. The *khuv* or the local noble formed the foundation of Sogdian nobility, and the kings of Sogdiana, particularly its eastern parts, came from this background.<sup>441</sup> In other words, the Sogdian king was the local overlord of a group of *khuv*, but himself recognised the suzerainty of the *qaghān*. Local Sogdian elites were, however, not always loyal to their king, as they did not hesitate to revolt against him.<sup>442</sup> That means overlordship was not permanent and peaceful.

Armenia had a similar situation. It was part of Transcaucasia and contained mountain ranges and rich fertile plains. Like Bactria and Sogdiana, the Armenian landscape allowed both sedentary and pastoral life and attracted nomadic warbands from the northern steppe to cross Armenia for Anatolia or Iranian regions. In late antique Armenia, the *nakharar*(s) or local princes, were well established, controlled their areas and used their local resources.<sup>443</sup> Though they had their castles and commanded local forces, none of them could alone unify the region under its control. The Armenian nobilities were mostly Christians but were part of the Iranian world and had to deal with both Roman and Iranian influences. The Armenian nobility's priority was to maintain their local socio-political power in their areas, and they were resistant to higher authority from within and without who would impose direct control over them.<sup>444</sup>

In the seventh century, Armenia was a frontier region between the Romans and Sasanian Iran. The Sasanians and the Romans tried to control the region, and that forced the Armenian kings to somehow operate between them, cooperating with one power against another, or serving both powers at the same time.<sup>445</sup> Local Armenian kings recognised the overlordship of the Sasanian or Roman emperors. Controlling Armenia was vital for the Sasanians to guard the mainland against the nomadic invasions coming from the region beyond Transcaucasia. To keep the region under control, both the Sasanians and the Romans required the cooperation of

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<sup>440</sup> La Vaissière's proposed term "fragmentation territoriale" is similar to the term "local political autonomy" I suggest for Bactria.

<sup>441</sup> Étienne de la Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra : Élités d'Asie Centrale dans l'Empire Abbasside* (Paris : Association pour l'avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2007), 23–36, 68–75.

<sup>442</sup> Gibb, *The Arab Conquests*, 8–9.

<sup>443</sup> For list of local rulers, see *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, translated with notes, R. W. Thomson, Historical commentary, James Howard-Johnston, assistance from Tim Greenwood, Part I. Translation and Notes (Liverpool University Press, 1999), 138.

<sup>444</sup> *The Armenian History*, xiv.

<sup>445</sup> *The Armenian History*, xi-xiii.

the local Armenian kings and that prevented these bigger powers from imposing direct control over Armenia, which allowed local kings to retain their position. The Armenian local king established good relations with the Sasanian king of kings and often served him by providing his own military forces to fight for the Sasanians. For instance, their soldiers fought against the Hephthalites on behalf of the Sasanian king in 615. The Armenian general Sambat Bagratuni (d. 616–617), who was appointed over Khurasan by the Sasanian king, marched towards Bactria with other *nakharar(s)* and their forces, defeated the Hephthalites and captured Balkh.<sup>446</sup> Like Bactria and Sogdiana, the Arab Muslims faced many local Armenian kings and had to incorporate them into the Islamic empire. It was a process which was slow and difficult, like Bactria and Sogdiana.<sup>447</sup>

The Chinese reports about Bactria and the parallel examples from Sogdiana and Armenia explain the reasons behind local political autonomy and overlordship. They show that a frontier region with diverse geography and populations could experience this situation. Local rulers would retain their civil and fiscal administration, legal system, and command over their local forces. Their overlords did not impose direct rule over these regions, and that helped local rulers to maintain their power. The existence of overlords in this situation raises several questions. What was the nature of overlordship? What mechanisms implemented it? How did the local rulers and their overlords interact? The next part provides some answers.

### 2.3. Overlordship in Bactria

This part discusses overlordship and its mechanisms of implementation in Bactria. It first provides definitions and components of overlordship. Subsequently, it describes how

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<sup>446</sup> *The Armenian History*, 44–46.

<sup>447</sup> The Arab Muslim conquests of Armenia have not received much attention, and a proper comparison between Transcaucasia and the eastern Iranian regions needs to wait for future research. However, this dissertation may help historians of late antique Transcaucasia to find a similar example for a comparative study. I am grateful to Alison Vacca for sharing the draft of her article on Armenia and informing me about the relevant sources. Apart from Sebeos and other local sources, there are a few studies on the process of the conquests. See, for instance, H. Manandyan, “Led invasions arabes en Arménie (notes chronologiques),” *Byzantion* 18 (1948): 163–195; N. F. Posner, “Whence the Muslim conquests of northern Mesopotamia?,” in *A Way prepared: Essays on Islamic Culture in honor of Richard Bayly Winder*, ed. Farhad Kazemi and R. D. McChesney (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 27–52; Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim provinces under early Islam: Islamic rule and Iranian Identity in Armenia and Caucasia Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Alison Vacca, Buldān al-Rān: the many definitions of Caucasian Albania in the early Abbasid period,” in *From Albania to Arrān: the East Caucasia between Ancient and Islamic World (ca. 330BCE–1000 CE)*, ed. Robert Hoyland (Gorgias Press, 2020), 37–84. Alison Vacca, “The Armenian Sources of al-Baladhuri’s *Kitāb Futuh al-buldān*: A Study of the Islamic Incursions into Armenia, Georgia and Albania (22–24 AH/642–645CE),” in *Islam on the Margins: Studies in Memory of Michael Bonner*, ed. Robert Haug and Steven Judd (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 21).

overlordship worked in Bactria. Since we considered the model of political autonomy and overlordship to have been a feature of Bactria's political organisation, which itself came from its geographical condition and subsequent social organisation, we will use examples from earlier periods, namely from the Kushans, Sasanians, Hephthalites, and Western Turks. This part includes Bactrian documents and Chinese, Arabic, and Persian reports to show that this model of rule continued in Bactria despite changing overlords throughout its history, mainly because Bactria remained a frontier region between different political powers.

### 2.3.1 Overlordship: definition and components

Overlordship refers to a situation in which some kings accept the authority of another king.<sup>448</sup> That authority was accepted through peaceful submission or was imposed by military conquest. Historically, overlordship was used as an effective mechanism to unify various regions under one political power. It reduced the injury to the local kings, whom the overlord would benefit from their cooperation.<sup>449</sup> Concurrently, the local lords could profit from being part of a larger political organisation. The idea and practice of overlordship in different temporal and spatial contexts is a known subject among historians.<sup>450</sup> The shared ancient Iranian, Turkic, and medieval European concepts of overlordship are more relevant to our discussion. They provide a helpful framework for understanding overlordship and recognise its components in Bactria.

The idea of overlordship has been studied within the context of Iranian kingship.<sup>451</sup> In this framework, the king of kings (*shāhān shāh*) was the supreme authority in the political

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<sup>448</sup> For detail, see "Overlord," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/overlord> (accessed on 27 Jun 2023).

<sup>449</sup> See Azar Gat, "Rural Petty-State and Overlordship. Missing Links in the Evolution of the Early State," *Anthropos*, Bd. 98, H. 1. (2003): 127–142.

<sup>450</sup> For instance, see Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville, ed. *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>451</sup> For the Iranian kingship, see Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Sacral Kingship in Sasanian Iran," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 2 (1988): 35–52; Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009); Scott Mcdonough, "The Legs of the Throne: Kings, Elites, and Subjects in Sasanian Iran," *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (2011): 290–321; Touraj Daryaee, "Sasanian Kingship, empire and Glory: Aspects of Iranian Imperium," in *Ranj-o-Ganj: Papers in Honour of Professor Z. Zarshenas*, ed. V. Naddaf, F. Ghoshtasp and M. Shokri-Foumeshi (Tehran: Institute for Humanities, 2013), 11–22; Dariush Borbor, "The Role of the King of Kings: An Interpretation in Historiography," in *In Quest of Identity: Studies on the Persianate World*, ed. Mirosław Michalak and Magdalena Rodziewicz (Warsaw: Dialog, 2015), 13–39; Touraj Daryaee, ed., *The King of Seven Climates: A History of the Ancient Iranian World 3000 BCE–651 CE* (California: UCI Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2017); Geo Widengren, "The Sacred Kingship of Iran," in *The Sacral Kingship*, ed. Carl-Martin Edsman (Leiden: Brill, E-Book, 2018), 242–257. The Iranian concept of sacred kingship is like the Chinese divine kingship. For details, see Michel Putt, "Human and Divine Kingship in Early China: Comparative Reflections," in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nichole Brisch (Chicago: The

structure. The king of kings' divine glory (*farr*), lineage, and connection to specific deities shown on their coins, inscriptions and rock reliefs distinguished him from the subordinate kings. The king of kings has been viewed as the sacred being, the performer of justice, and the protector of the empire. Local kings who came from local elite families acknowledged his overlordship by seeing themselves as servants (*bandag*) of the king of kings, paying homage, presenting gifts and tributes, accompanying him in his hunting and drinking parties, and providing him with military aid. While, in theory, the king of kings was considered the highest authority in the Iranian empire, he did not interfere with local kings' internal issues. Hence, the local kings controlled their areas.

The nomadic empires like the Turks also had the concept of overlordship. For instance, the Western Turk empire had several layers of power. The *qaghān* (also called *yabghu-qaghān*) was the supreme ruler in the power structure. The *shad* and *tegin*, who were the Turkic princes, and other officials called *iltābir*, *tudun*, *tutuq*, and *tarqan* were under the authority of the *qaghān*.<sup>452</sup> The Western Turks were a nomadic confederation, often imposing indirect control on conquered regions. The *qaghān* sent his representatives to secure tributes from local rulers who recognised his suzerainty. In some cases, the *qaghān* bestowed Turkic titles to the local rulers and sent them royal brides to incorporate them within the Turkic confederation.<sup>453</sup> Like the Iranian cases, the *qaghān* did not interfere in local rulers' internal affairs. That allowed the local rulers to control their areas. We will see that Bactria was part of the Iranian and Western Turkic empires in different periods, and thus experienced both Iranian and Turkic overlordship.

The medieval European overlordship should be understood within the European context. However, it reflects some similarities to the Iranian overlordship that help us recognise different types of overlordship.<sup>454</sup> In the medieval European context, the pope was the overlord to many local kings. The relations between the kings and the pope have been defined with the

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Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 199–212, and Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>452</sup> For the Turkic political structure, see Gaybulla Babayarov, "The Imperial Titles on the Coins of the Western Turkic Qaghanate," in *History of Central Asia in Modern Medieval Studies: In Memoriam of Professor Roziya Mukhinova* (Tashkent: Yangi Nashir, 2013), 330–348.

<sup>453</sup> See Skaff, "Western Turk Rule of Turkestan's Oases," 364–72.

<sup>454</sup> See, for instance, Benedict Wiedemann, "Papal Overlordship and *Protectio* of the King, c. 1000–1300" (PhD diss., UCL, 2007); Robin Frame, "Overlordship and Reaction, c. 1200–c. 1450 (2009)," in *The North Atlantic Frontier of Medieval Europe: Vikings and Celts*, ed. James Muldoon (London: Routledge, 2009), 103–122; Alice Taylor, *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland 1124–1290* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Rebecca Thomas, "Three Welsh kings and Rome: royal pilgrimage, overlordship, and Anglo-Welsh relations in the early Middle Ages," *Early Medieval Europe* 28, no. 4 (2020): 560–591; Benedict Wiedemann, *Papal Overlordship and European Princes, 1000–1270* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

terms *feundum* and *vassalus*. The local kings offered their kingdoms to the pope and became his vassals (feudal-lordship), and that allowed the pope to gain symbolic rights over their kingdoms. Nevertheless, the pope could not change anything in those regions. Similarly, if the local kings put themselves under the protection of the pope (protection-lordship), the pope still had no right to interfere in their local affairs or change the local kings. Theoretically, the pope looked like the supreme authority, but in practice, the local kings were the authority in their areas. In both cases, the local kings viewed the pope as a sacred figure (Christ's representative) and a judge, acknowledged the pope's superiority, paid homage, presented gifts and tributes, and provided him with military aid in case of need. Local kings under the pope's protection could legitimise their rule by being loyal to the pope and using the pope's power to condemn or remove their internal rivals. Hence, overlordship benefitted both local kings and the pope.<sup>455</sup>

The above-mentioned cases show that overlordship was common in sedentary (Sasanian, medieval European) and nomadic (Western Turks) political structures. The *shāhān shāh*, the *qaghān*, and the pope were the supreme authority. The local kings submitted to them and came under their protection. The local kings recognised the overlord's suzerainty by performing rituals like paying homage and presenting gifts and tributes. They also rendered services like providing military aid to the overlord. Though the overlord was the supreme authority, he did not impose direct control over local rulers' areas. Similarly, he did not change local kings or interfere in local rulers' internal issues. This form of overlordship was practised in Bactria before the Arab Muslims conquered the region and introduced direct control, which was fundamentally different. The Arab Muslim control is discussed in chapter five (5.1, 5.2). We should know how overlordship was practised in Bactria to comprehend this difference.

### 2.3.2 *Rituals of overlordship*

Bactrian local rulers acknowledged their overlords by performing certain rituals and rendering services. The ritual included recognising the overlord in administrative letters and legal documents produced in their areas, visiting the overlord, attending his drinking party, and offering money as a mark of honour, prostrating before him, and kissing his hand. Rendering services included providing military aid. Each of these methods requires some explanation.

Bactrian local rulers recognised the suzerainty of their overlords in words. Acknowledging the overlord is often expressed in specific formulas regularly mentioned in the

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<sup>455</sup> This summary comes from Wiedemann, "Papal Overlordship and *Protectio* of the King".

opening part of administrative letters and legal documents produced in Bactria. A few Bactrian letters and legal documents produced during the Sasanians, the Hephthalites, and Western Turks' domination in Bactria clarify this point.

A letter issued by Kerdir-Wararan, the ruler of Rob, possibly in 458, elucidates his relations with the Sasanian king of kings Hormizd III (r. 457–459). In this letter, Hormizd is (spelt as Ohrmuzd in the document) praised with the formula “glorious through Ohrmuzd” (*ωρομοζδοφαραχο*).<sup>456</sup> However, once Hormizd was defeated by his brother Peroz (r. 459–485) in the war of succession, the local kings of Bactria recognised Peroz as their new overlord. In a letter to some officials issued in 239 of the Bactrian calendar (461–62 CE), Meyam, the king of Kadagstan, referred to himself as “the king of the people of Kadag, the governor of the famous and prosperous king of the kings Peroz.”<sup>457</sup> In this letter, Meyam is called king (*βαιο*), but he recognised Peroz as the king of kings (*βανανοβαιο*). Similarly, in 465, Kerdir-Warhran, the *hasht-walg* (*αβτοσαλγο*) of Rob, recognised the overlordship of Peroz in his letter by adding the formula “true to Peroz” (*παρωζοραβτο*), showing his loyalty to the Sasanian king.<sup>458</sup> Kerdir-Warhran was not the king of Rob, but the *hasht-walg*, an official title known from the Kushan inscription of Rabatak.<sup>459</sup> These letters show that the local king and other high officials recognised the Sasanian emperor in their letters.

The regime change did not stop recognising the overlords in official documents. Bactrian letters used the same formula to acknowledge the overlordship of the Hephthalites after they defeated Peroz and killed him in 485. In the same year, Kilman, who succeeded Meyam as the king of Kadagstan, recognised Hephthalite overlordship. In his letter, Kilman is praised as “the king of the people of Kadag, the governor of the famous (and) prosperous *yabghu* of Hephthalites” (*ναμοοινδαδο αβζοδο ιηβαδαλο ιαβγο, καδαγοβιδο, καδαγανο βαιο*).<sup>460</sup> Kilman was a local king (*καδαγανο βαιο*), but he was called the governor of the Hephthalite *yabghu*. In the same year, Sart-Khwadewbandan, the ruler of Rob, recognised the overlordship of the Hephthalite *yabghu* in his letter by adding the formula “the glorious *yabghu* of Hephtal” (*φαραχο ηβοδαλο ιαβγο*).<sup>461</sup> He is called the ruler of Rob and the scribe of the Hephthalite lords

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<sup>456</sup> Bactrian document no. cl in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 88–90; The same formula for Hormizd is mentioned in another document. See Bactrian document no. cm in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 90–91.

<sup>457</sup> Bactrian document no. ea in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 108–109.

<sup>458</sup> Bactrian document no. ck in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 88–89.

<sup>459</sup> Nicholas Sims-Williams, “The Bactrian Inscription of Rabatak: A New Reading,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series 18 (2004): 58.

<sup>460</sup> Bactrian document no. ja in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 124–125.

<sup>461</sup> Bactrian document no. jb in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 126–127.

(*ἠβοδολοχοροαγγο λαβιρο*). Possibly, he served the *yabghu* as a personal scribe, which was an honour to be mentioned in his letters.

Once the Hephthalites were defeated by the Sasanians and the Western Turks, Bactrian local rulers acknowledged the *qaghān*'s overlordship. At least two legal documents reflect this situation. The first is a contract of undertaking produced in Samangan in 407 of the Bactrian calendar, corresponding to 629 CE. It shows the relation between Fruma-rizm Shaburan, the ruler of Rob and the *qaghān*. The *qaghān* is praised with the formula "prosperous in glory" (*ιαβζοδοσοφαρανο χαγανο*).<sup>462</sup> In the second legal document dating to 669, the *qaghān* is again praised with the formula "prosperous in glory."<sup>463</sup> These letters show that this praising formula remained the same.

Bactrian rulers viewed the king of kings as the ultimate judge. They visited the overlord to solve their problems in case of a quarrel. For example, a Bactrian letter, possibly written in 350 in the Rob region, explains that two hostile local lords had to visit the court of Ohrmizd (perhaps the Kushano-Sasanian king) for judgment. This required taking an oath that they would not harm each other or destroy their cities.<sup>464</sup> The negotiation between these local lords did not solve the problem, and only the overlord's decree could be the solution to end their quarrel.

Recognising the overlord required visiting him, paying homage, and presenting gifts. Some evidence from the Kushan, Hephthalite and early Islamic periods shows its continuation despite the regime changes. The first evidence is a Bactrian inscription on a silver dish that mentions that Nukunzuk visited Kanishka -after the king's return from his campaign in north India- and presented him with the silver dish.<sup>465</sup> The second one is a Bactrian document produced possibly between 465–484 in Kadagstan when the Sasanians and the Hephthalites contested the region. It is a list of expenditures belonging to an elite person with the authority to hand over a city. This person visited a high authority in a drinking session and paid eight dinars as an "offering and mark of honour" (*ναμωσογανο οδο πιδοφαρο*).<sup>466</sup> The identity of this high authority is not clear. It could have been a Sasanian or a Hephthalite king. Bactrian rulers continued this tradition after the Arab Muslims arrived. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that local elites of

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<sup>462</sup> Bactrian document no. N in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 68–73.

<sup>463</sup> Bactrian document no. P in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 84–87.

<sup>464</sup> Bactrian document no. xp in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 162–163.

<sup>465</sup> Sims-Williams, "A new Bactrian inscription from the time of Kanishka," 257.

<sup>466</sup> Bactrian document no. al in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 164–165.

Balkh and the king of Chaghaniyan visited the Arab Muslims and recognised their overlordship by paying homage and giving them gifts and tributes.<sup>467</sup>

Prostration before the overlord and kissing his hand is reported by al-Ṭabarī. In his narrative related to Qutayba b. Muslim's conflict with the *nizak tarkhān* in 91/710, al-Ṭabarī mentions that the *nizak* and some other rulers called *al-subl* and *al-shud* (a corrupted form of Turkic title *shad* and *sülü*) visited the *yabghu* of Tukharistan. While Qutayba was witnessing, *al-shud* called himself the servant of the *yabghu* (*ʿabduhū*), prostrated and kissed his hand. Then, he kissed the hand of *al-subl*. The *nizak* kissed the hand of *al-shud*. This report shows that the *yabghu* was the overlord, and prostration was performed explicitly for him.<sup>468</sup> That was already known in Bactria because a few Bactrian documents show that prostration (*σπρο ναμωσο*) before the king was common in Bactria.<sup>469</sup> Bactrian rulers continued this tradition later for their Umayyad overlord. Again, it is al-Ṭabarī who explains that local rulers from Bactria and Herat prostrated before Asad al-Qasrī (d. 120/738), the Umayyad governor of Khurasan and praised him as their overlord.<sup>470</sup> Apart from this ritual, Bactrian kings rendered service to the overlord, which is the subject of the next section.

### 2.3.3 Rendering service to overlord

Collecting and delivering tributes to the overlord's representative was a type of service (*ασπασο*). At least three Bactrian documents mention that taxes (*τωγο*) were collected for the Hephthalite *yabghu* and then later for the Turkic *qaghān*.<sup>471</sup> These could have been poll taxes collected in cash because some households sold their land to provide money. Apparently, local authorities collected taxes and delivered them to the overlords' representatives. On some occasions, the local rulers also sent their representatives with tributes to the court of the overlord. In his description of the Hephthalites in eastern Bactria, the Chinese traveller Sungyun (fl. sixth century) mentions that the Hephthalite king received tribute from more than forty

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<sup>467</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 5: 2903; Also, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 9: 358.

<sup>468</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 8: 1224; Interestingly, there is evidence from the *yabghu*'s side that reflects his position in this system. It is the Chinese translation of a letter possibly written in 718 by the younger brother of the *yabghu* of Tukharistan to the Chinese emperor. According to the letter, Bactria had different local rulers who recognised the authority of the *yabghu*. The letter adds that the *yabghu*, his father and grandfather were the overlords in the region. The *yabghu* himself recognised the suzerainty of the Chinese emperor. The *yabghu* sent gifts to the emperor, and in return, the emperor honoured the *yabghu* with a special decree to legitimise his rule over Bactria. The emperor also gave a high title to the *yabghu*'s brother to show his kindness to him (Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue*, 200–201).

<sup>469</sup> Bactrian documents no. bg, jb, jh in Sims-Williams, *BDII*, 64–65, 126–27, 136–37.

<sup>470</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 9: 1636–38.

<sup>471</sup> Bactrian documents no. I, J, Nn in Sims-Williams, *BDI*, 44–47, 48–55, 74–79.

countries, from Khotan to Sasanian Iran. Sung-yun adds that the representatives of these regions brought tributes and visited the Hephthalite king, whose throne was on a large carpet. Possibly, they prostrated before the king after their names and titles were announced.<sup>472</sup>

This system of local autonomous rulers in relation to overlords also existed at a higher political level.<sup>473</sup> The regional overlords, such as the Kushano-Sasanian rulers and the Hephthalites before their rise to power, were themselves in a dependency relationship with greater powers such as the Sasanians. Features of this relationship would have echoed the relation between local Bactrian rulers and their regional overlords as well. Supporting the overlords in their wars was part of the services expected from the overlord's subjected allies. The Kushano-Sasanian king Peroz and, later, the Chionite king Grumbates accompanied the Sasanian emperors in their war against the Romans. Similarly, the Hephthalites first recognised the overlordship of the Sasanian king Peroz and helped him in his war of succession. The Hephthalites and other local kings in the east had light cavalries that were very mobile on the battlefield and helped the Sasanian heavy cavalries in the war against the Romans.<sup>474</sup> However, the Hephthalites stopped paying service to the Sasanians after they defeated and killed Peroz. With their victory, Bactrian local kings shifted their sides and acknowledged the Hephthalite's overlordship. That means overlordship was not permanent but depended on the overlord's actual military power.

The ritual of overlordship described so far invites an important question. How did the overlords treat the Bactrian local rulers? That is not well known. However, as pointed out, the *qaghān* sent officials like the *ṭarkhān* and *tudun* to ensure the payment of tributes. The *qaghān* bestowed Turkic titles like *tapaghliḡ iltābir* to local rulers.<sup>475</sup> This means that the *qaghān* treated Bactrian rulers like tribal chieftains incorporating them into the Turkic political structure. Another piece of information comes from the letter of the *yabghu*'s brother to the Chinese emperor mentioned earlier. It says that the emperor was kind to the *yabghu* and sent him a decree to legitimise his rule in Bactria. The emperor bestowed a Chinese title to the

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<sup>472</sup> *SI-UY-KI*, xc–xcii.

<sup>473</sup> The Sasanian rock relief at Rag-i Bibi in Baghlan shows a Kushan local king standing before the horse of his overlord the Sasanian king Shapur I (r. 240–270). Possibly, he offers an arrow to the king (personal observation, September 2006); Also, see Frantz Grenet, Jonathan Lee, Philippe Martines and François Ory, “The Sasanian relief at Rag-i Bibi (Northern Afghanistan),” in *After Alexander Central Asia before Islam*, ed. Joe Cribb and Georgina Herrmann (The British Academy, Oxford University Press, 2007), 243–256.

<sup>474</sup> Shahbazi, “Army,”

<sup>475</sup> Inaba has argued that *iltābir* was the Turkic title given to the Turkic tribal leaders (Inaba, “The Identity of the Turkish Rulers,” 1–19).

*yabghu*'s brother symbolising the incorporation of the *yabghu*'s brother into the imperial structure.<sup>476</sup>

The examples from the Iranian, Turkic, medieval European, and Bactrian documents and Arabic narratives clearly explain overlordship. Overlordship refers to a situation in which a political power establishes dominance in a region, imposes its suzerainty over local lords, and demands tribute from them. It also applied to the condition when local lords voluntarily submitted to another lord and accepted his suzerainty. In both cases, the local rulers performed certain rituals and rendered services to the overlord. They praised the overlords in their letters and defined their relation as subordinate rulers to the overlords. They visited the overlords in person, sent letters and embassies with gifts, and attended the overlords' courts (and drinking parties). They collected tributes from their areas and, in return, delivered them to the overlords. In times of need, they mobilised local military forces to help the overlord in his war in other regions. The overlord bestowed titles to the local rulers to bring them into a larger political structure. Some local rulers used the overlord's power to legitimise their rule or remove their internal enemies. Hence, overlordship benefitted local rulers and the overlords.

In the case of the Bactrian region, the overlords did not impose direct control over Bactria. The overlords did not appoint or change local rulers, nor did they interfere in local rulers' internal affairs. As a result, the local rulers retained their autonomy. Except for the Sasanians, who fought the Chionites that, required building massive defensive walls and garrisons in Bactria, the Turks did not establish any military garrisons in the region.<sup>477</sup> Perhaps, this is one of the reasons that we do not hear anything about the Turks defending Bactria against the Arab Muslims. In any case, the local rulers also understood the importance of being part of a larger system at the regional and imperial levels. Being related to a more significant power far away from their areas would give them political prestige and facilitate their economic incomes because the local and international traders would move between these regions.<sup>478</sup> This

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<sup>476</sup> Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue*, 200–201.

<sup>477</sup> Haug has argued that the Sasanians invested in massive military defensive projects that had to be paid for by the imperial treasury (Haug, *The Eastern Frontier*, 57); Also, see V. A. Gaibov, G. A. Koshelenko, and G. V. Terebeleva, "Material for the archaeological map of northern Afghanistan: The Murghab River Valley," *Afghanistan* 2, no. 2 (2019): 195–232; I think, the fort of Qala-yi Zal may have been built in this period.

<sup>478</sup> The *Hudūd al-‘ālam* describes this situation in fourth/tenth century Guzgan. It says that Guzgan was controlled by some local rulers who recognised the overlordship of the Farighūnid king Muḥammad b. Aḥmad and paying taxes to him. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad was the regional overlord in Guzgan but recognised the suzerainty of the Abbasid caliph (*mawlā amīr al-mu‘minīn*) as the ultimate overlord (*Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 52, 59–60). The *Hudūd al-‘ālam* mentions the same situation for northern Bactria. It says that local elites of each area followed their local ruler (*andar farmān-i amīr-i nāḥiyyat-i khīshand*), and the local ruler obeyed the Samanid king, who was the region overlord (*Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 72). The Samanid kings recognised the authority of the Abbasid caliphs on their

model of overlordship was practised during the domination of the Sasanians, the Hephthalites, and the Western Turks in Bactria. The following chapters will show that the Arab Muslims broke this system to impose their direct control over Bactria.

## Conclusion

More than ten local principalities coexisted in early seventh-century Bactria. These were the principalities of Badghis, Marw al-Rūd, Gharchistan, Guzgan, Gaz, Rob, Kadagstan, Chaghaniyan, Quwadhian, Akhrun, Shuman, Guftan, Tirmidh, and Khuttal. Balkh was a separate case. There was apparently no local king, but as a Buddhist shrine city, it was controlled by the *barmak*, the keeper of Naw Bahar, and a *spāhbed* who was a military commander. Except for the rulers of Marw al-Rūd and Gharchistan, other local kings recognised the overlordship of the *qaghān* of Western Turks. The *qaghān* did not reside in Bactria, but his *yabghu* stayed in Tukharistan. A military commander (*tarkhān*) and a fiscal officer (*tudun*) were sent to different areas in Bactria to receive tributes collected by local authorities. Due to their nomadic nature, the Western Turks did not build any military garrison in Bactria.

The relations between local rulers and their overlords are defined by acknowledging the overlords in official letters and legal documents, paying homage, and rendering services to the overlords. The overlords did not appoint them or remove these local rulers, but enforced a hierarchical relationship in existing local power structures. That means the overlords did not disturb local political autonomy in Bactria, and also did not interfere in internal power relations in the region. Hence, the local rulers retained autonomy in their civil administration and legal system and commanded their forces. The overlordship was not permanent, and local rulers also rebelled against their overlords. This was the condition when the Arab Muslims entered Bactria

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coins in their Friday prayer sermons and sent gifts to the caliph. The obverse of the Samanid coins shows this hierarchy. The name of God is above the text, followed by the Prophet's name, then the caliph, followed by the name of the Samanid king. For the coins, see [https://en.numista.com/catalogue/samanid\\_dynasty-1.html](https://en.numista.com/catalogue/samanid_dynasty-1.html) (accessed on 14 June 2023); For general information, see C. E. Bosworth and Yolande Crowe, "Sāmānids," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/samanids> (accessed on 14 June 2023). The caliph legitimised the Samanid power by sending them a robe of honour, flag and official decree. In the case of conflicts among the Samanid rulers, they accepted the caliph's judgment. For discussion on the caliph's relation with the Samanid kings, see Jahānbakhsh Thavāqīb, "Sāmāniyān va Niẓām-i Khilāfat-i 'Abbāsi," *Kayhān-i Andīsha* 83 (1378/2020):138–152. These examples are significant. They show that recognition of the authority of an overlord was necessary for being part of a larger political structure on a regional and imperial level.

in 652. The next chapter will answer the questions of what brought the Arab Muslims to Bactria, and how Bactrian rulers received them.

