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An Introduction To Manichean Sogdian



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My thanks to all of my students who have actively noted typos, inconsistencies, etc.

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NOTE

This version of the Introduction has been corrected and minimally updated to be more reliable. A problem with the preceding version was that, as I had moved texts about, the glossaries had not all be updated. I have tried to update them here, but there may still be words in the wrong place. The complete glossary at the end should help.

I would have liked to update and complete the bibliography, but time is in short demand. A complete online bibliography of Sogdian studies would be useful.

Many of the Sogdian texts had to be retyped, since they were originally typed in a right-to-left mode, which was no longer available after Mac OS 7.5. To obviate potential typos when the text is typed backward, I decided to simply use the photos from the Berlin Turfan collection.

I hope I will find time to add intros to Buddhist and Christian Sogdian by and by.

INTRODUCTION

The Sogdians and their language.

Sogdian is an Eastern Middle Iranian language, like Khotanese and Choresmian (Khwarezmian), as opposed to the Western Middle Iranian languages Middle Persian, with Parthian and Bactrian in the middle. The Eastern Middle Iranian languages are closely related to the Old Iranian language Avestan, the Western Middle Iranian languages to the Old Iranian language Old Persian. The modern Iranian language Yaghnobi is the descendant of a variant of Sogdian.

We have Sogdian texts in four different alphabets: Old Sogdian Aramaic, Sogdian-Uighur, Manichean, and Nestorian Christian scripts. The Old Sogdian Aramaic script is used in a group of letters (the *Ancient Letters*) discovered near Dunhuang, which date from the beginning of the fourth century,¹ and in graffiti on rocks in northern Pakistan. The Sogdian(-Uighur) script is the most common, being used for secular documents, as well as Buddhist and Manichean texts. The Manichean script is a Syriac script, related to Estrangelo and the Nestorian script. The Nestorian script was used for Christian texts.

The center of ancient Sogdiana was around the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in present-day Uzbekistan. Many Sogdians were merchants, however, and traveled east as far as China, bringing with them the Sogdian language. The Manicheans and Christians, as they fled before the persecutions of the Sasanian state from the third century on, must have settled for a while in Central Asia, learning Sogdian, before continuing east, even to the farthest reaches of Chinese Turkestan and beyond into Mongolia.²

In early times the Sogdians must have been the neighbors of the Tokharians, who borrowed numerous words from an Iranian language, possibly proto-Sogdian.

The “Ancient Letters.”

These are letters written on paper discovered by the British discoverer and archeologist Marc Aurel Stein in eastern Chinese Turkestan. The letters contain references to events that took place in the early fourth century and can therefore be dated to that time.³

The letters from Mount Mug.

This is a collection of letters and administrative, economic, and legal documents written in the Sogdian script from the archives of King Dēwāstīč found at Mount Mug east of Samarkand (8th cent.).

The graffiti on the Karakorum highway.

These are a large number of inscriptions written in a script similar to that of the “Ancient Letters” found on rocks in northern Pakistan. They consist mostly of names.⁴

Inscriptions.

The most important inscriptions other than the Karakorum Highway inscriptions are those found in

¹ Go to <http://idp.bl.uk/> and SEARCH THE IDP DATABASE for Sogdian.

² See La Vaissière, 2004, 2005.

³ See Sims-Williams, 1985.

⁴ Sims-Williams, 1989, 1992.

Kirghizia, Bugut, Karabalgasun, and Ladakh.

Buddhist texts.

This is the largest corpus of Sogdian texts. It contains complete or fragmentary Buddhist texts, *sūtras*, *jātakas*, *prajñāpāramitā* texts, and other, most of them translated from Chinese.

Manichean texts.

There are numerous Manichean texts in Sogdian, some written in Manichean script but most of them in Sogdian-Uighur script. Some of them have parallel texts in Middle Persian or Parthian, of which they are expanded translations.

Christian texts.

Almost all the Christian texts were found at a Christian Nestorian monastery at Bulayīq north of Turfan. Most of the texts are translations from Syriac.

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SYMBOLS

<i>italics</i>	transcribed letter or word (roughly: "as pronounced")
< >	transliteration value (value in Latin alphabet of letter(s) in Sogdian alphabet)
[]	1. in grammar: phonetic transcription; 2. in text: missing text in manuscript
/ /	phoneme (see lesson 1)
{ }	allophone (see lesson 1)
*	1. before non-English word: restored word; 2. before English word: uncertain meaning

INTRODUCTION

TABLE OF SCRIPTS USED FOR SOGDIAN

Phonemes	Sogdian 1		Manichean		Christian	
a (ə, ɨ)		’, ’-		’, -∅		’
ā		’(’)-, -’		=		’
-ǎ		-h (-h)		-h (-h)		h
b		ḅ		b		b
β		β		β		b
č		c		c		c
c (ts)		-		-		c
d (nd)				d (t)		d (t)
δ		δ		δ		d
ě		y		y		y
f		p, ḅ, β		β, ḅ		f
g				g		g
γ		γ		γ		’
h				h		ḣ
ĩ		y		y		y
ɨ		’-		’-		’-
ǰ		c		ž		c
k		k, q		k, q		q
l						
m		m		m		m
n		n		n		n
ō		w		w		w
p		p		p		p
r		r		r		r
s		s		s		s
š		š		š		š
t		t		t, †		t (θ)
θ		δ		δ		θ (t)
ũ		w		w		w
w		w		w		w
x		x		x		x
y		y		y		y
z		z		z		z
ž		z, z		j		ž

