ARABOSOGDICA: PLACE-NAME IN TRANSOXIANA AS WRITTEN IN ARABIC SCRIPT*

Among all of the non-Persian Iranian toponyms of Mawarannahr that have come down to us thanks to medieval sources (some 1,000 items [1]), the vast majority (80—90%) are those mentioned in Islamic Arabic, Persian and Turkic sources. This multilingual group is united by certain general characteristics — a single cultural environment, a great deal of mutual influence, and, most important, a single tradition of writing. The transmission of Sogdian glosses through the Arabic script is the topic of the present article.

The Persian and Turkic varieties of writing are far better suited to Sogdian phonetics than their Arabic precursor. The Arabic alphabet with all additional Persian letters (p, č, ž, g and φ, Arabic ʃ with three dots — fāʾ ’ajami, fāʾ muthallath, found in some early New Persian and Turkic texts) can correctly convey virtually all Sogdian consonants. But the Arabic alphabet itself could have served the needs of Sogdian no worse than could the Buddhist (Sogdian-Aramaic), Christian (Nestorian) or Manichaean writing systems (cf. the various difficulties in conveying Sogdian egalitarian scripts with these writing systems). Moreover, one should bear in mind that Persian texts, especially the early ones that are most important for us, often lack all of the necessary diacritics, making them the functional equivalent of Arabic-alphabet texts. Additionally, some Arab authors — especially al-Samʿānī (henceforth, Sam.) — often indicate “special” Persian letters in the headings of their dictionary entries [2].

The preceding comments on the means Arabic script possesses to convey Sogdian sounds would hold if the authors of the sources used here [3] had written coherent Sogdian texts rather than individual glosses in a language they appear not to have known at all [4]. Taking into account the slips of the pen that inevitably creep into manuscripts, many words are difficult to recognize. For example, a village in the land of the Qarluq on the way to Barskhan (a city on Lake Issyk-Kul), Qudama (206) calls كمینکت — كومپگك (Kermīnḵt — Komīṅgḵt [5], Gardizī — کومینگگک [6], خیمسار — خیمگسار, 5). Only by juxtaposing all of these forms can we reconstruct the name with reasonable surety as كومینگگک, Sogdian *kmīr ’r+khnḥ/karmūr-ka’0/ ’Red Town’ [7].

However, in other cases variant spellings reflect not so much errors and carelessness in transcription, but various ways of conveying the sounds [8]. For example, the well-known settlement and palace of the Bukhār-khudāts to the west of Bukhara, usually referred to in the archaeological literature as Varakhsha, is given in the most varied forms in Islamic sources: Afraxšā, Abruṣxa, Awruxšā, Faraxšā [9]. This allows one to reconstruct the name as Sogd. *Afrahšē. This article treats precisely such means of conveying Sogdian sounds in Arabic script.

1. Consonants [10]

1.1 Back. We know that Sogdian had three back consonant phonemes (k, ɣ, x) and one allophone (g<k in the both) sound, later contracted to xu. The Arabic alphabet has letters for the third sounds, but lacks a letter for the fourth (g), so the ng group was conveyed in two ways: with -nj (cf. Arab. štrn, štrng) or (more rarely) with nk. The latter spelling was more typical of Persian usage. Cf. the numerous place-names in -sank/-sanj, the majority of which go back to Sogd. sang ‘stone’; some of them, however, proba-

* For the transcription of Sogdian glosses in Arabic script, we use Greek letters δ, x, θ, γ, β for the fricatives; emphatic k is given as q, and with the exception of specially discussed cases we omit regular Arabic endings (tanwin) and give the usual feminine ending (αιτ") as -a. Where possible, transliteration is accompanied by vowelized transcription. The voiced affricative given as ʃ. The author is most grateful to Prof. V. A. Livshits, Prof. B. I. Marshak, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences I. M. Steblin-Kamensky and Dr. V. Yakubovich for reading the drafts of this paper and valuable remarks on it. If you are interested in the subject of this paper, you are welcome to contact the author at pavlvaliria@mail.ru.