
TURKMENISTAN AS A CENTRAL ASIAN CENTER OF ANCIENT ORIENTAL CIVILIZATION

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It is in order to conduct the International Conference "Ancient Margiana as a new centre of the world civilization" in the independent and neutral Turkmenistan. In the first place, for the last years all requirements for such representative meetings of the world science luminaries have been created. There are built many first-class hotels, conference chambers equipped with the most modern multi-media facilities, and the most important, invaluable archaeological finds (which are hardly the main subject of interest for the foreign visitors) are available to survey under the vaults of beautiful palaces constructed for the Turkmenistan National Museum and the Fine Arts Museum named in honour of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi. In the second place, exactly Turkmen leader was an initiator of tradition to conduct annual conferences on the humanities. Three of them touched on archaeology and historical and cultural monuments of Turkmenistan directly: one was dedicated to the Anau sensational finds of the wheat grains earliest in the world, the second — to the Sultan Sanjar's epoch and the third — to the Kunya Urgench heritage.

Now the turn came to familiarize international community with the results of our researches at the Gonuredepe site, in the yelayat of Mary, and to determine the place of ancient Turkmenistan in the world history through the prism of newly discovered archaeological facts.

I had the luck to be privy to the discovery and investigations of the legendary country of Margush. I would like to express my very sincere gratitude to the much-esteemed President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi for his sensitive attention to our work, for his invaluable contribution in the opening for whole world of the inexhaustible profoundness of the Turkmen spirituality, which has been living for five thousand years already on this blessed land. You have stated all this with amazing mastery in the Rukhnama.

For the many years of my work in the Turkmen land I came to the deep persuasion that modern Turkmenistan was the only one Central-Asian centre of the Ancient Oriental civilization, where ideology of Zaratushtra had been formed.

The first efforts by Southern Turkmen tribes to colonize the Murgab ancient delta, which has presently disappeared in the Karakum sands, date from the Eneolithic period (IV B.C.), but they turned out to fail. That is why no efforts have been made till the last ages of III B.C.

The next attempt (being more successful) is referred to the later Akkad period (2250-2000 B.C.). The population left those places approximately in the middle of II B.C., due to the Murgab natural migration westwards. Mouru or Margush, Margiana ancient country, as the intermediate place between Mesopotamia and the Indus valley, has been formed and flourished here, in the basin of Murgab ancient delta for about thousand years. It turned out to have played a key role both in palaeoeconomy and in the Middle East culture as well.

Various monumental palaces and temples, the richest royal necropolis, and ancient artworks earnestly prove that one more center of the ancient world culture, which has previously been unknown, does exist here. It may rightfully be named as "the Central Asian one". Having got such data, we closely approach the concept whether Margiana, III-II B.C, may be called as "civilization" provided that a written language has not existed therein. In the opinion of C. Renfrew, a civilization assumes the following: 1) a social stratification; 2) professional craft; 3) a permanent central organization, which is based on palaces and temples, or municipal community (Renfrew, 1973). In other words, based on the opinion of such competent specialist, a written language is not obligatory to identify "civilization."

It should be also noted that construction of such monumental structures as Margiana palaces and temples required thousands and even millions of bricks (which were to have been made, dried in sunlight and supplied to the building site). It was impossible to be implemented free of applying even elementary "accounting written language", being so necessary to monitor and to report construction. Tokens, which have been found at the main gates of the Palace of North Gonur, were most likely to serve for similar purposes.

After a cylindrical seal with a cuneiform Sumerian inscription and a Harappan one with an ancient Indian inscription were found there was no doubt that the Margush country had existed at the end of III — the first half of II B.C. And Margush played an important role in the Middle East system and presented one more center of the world culture.

All together historical, literary and linguistic data for the latest decades sufficiently evidence in favor of Avesta being of the Eastern-Iranian or Central-Asian origin, otherwise. Moreover, over-year systematic research and mainly large-scale archaeological explorations in the east of present Turkmenistan during last 35 years, resulted in discovering the Margush country, previously quite unknown. This fact allowed to put forward and to ground a new theory that Central Asia and ancient Margians, in particular (together with other Central Asian regions, which have been slightly studied from the archaeological point of view), may be the motherland of the Zoroastrian religion itself.

As it is presently becoming clear, the Margush country represents an ancient historical area with strongly marked pagan faiths, most of which logically continues in Zoroastrianism — a further world religion.

Despite this issue being quite controversial, most specialists consider Zaratustra to be a product of Indo-Iranian environment, otherwise of those Indo-Aryans, who have led a nomadic life in the Central Asian vast steppes for ages. Meanwhile, the Avesta book narrates that the cardinal virtue of Zoroastrians is diligent farming and land cultivation. Being fully aware of what kind of audience I am presenting this statement, I purposefully omit linguistic and religious-philosophic aspects of Zoroastrian issue. As an archaeologist I would try to emphasize archeological witnesses. This statement is not so much to disprove old theories of Zoroastrianism origin, as to provide new evidences, based on real data from excavation of Margiana archaeological site, previously quite unknown for the world science.

INDO-EUROPEANS AND DOMESTIC HORSE

It is well-known that specialists consider domestic horse to be a main sign in identifying Indo-Iranians. This idea generated a lot of research literature but has not promoted studies of the Indo-European issue. It is sufficient to remember what kind of sensation radiocarbon data of a supposedly domestic horse from Dereievka around IV B.C. has made, which in fact turned out being referred to the Scythian period!

Presently, remains of six horses have been found at the North Gonur capital site in Margiana. One of them has been buried at the Gonur necropolis (with a head and tail being cut). The other young horse has been buried inside a mausoleum made of madbricks, being surrounded with funeral ceramics and decorated with two beads. Alongside of the tomb there was built undoubtedly the cult double oven intended to do sacrifices (Fig. 1). Thus, it is highly indicative that horse is regularly mentioned in Avesta among animals, which have been sacrificed by kings and heroes (Boyce, 1989, p.151). This fact must be compared with a foal burial at the territory of the Gonur royal necropolis.

The just mentioned young horse without head and tail, found at necropolis, unintentionally reminds of the ancient Indian ritual *asvamedha* which is considered to be "... possible one of the most outstanding" among other ones (Mallory, 1991, p.135).

Remains of three other domestic horses have been found in the elite tombs. Among them: one young horse in one undoubtedly royal sepulcher (tomb N 3200); second also young one being was buried outside to the cist 3310 jointly with other sacrificial animals; and lower jaw of the third one was placed together with other sacrificial animals, buried outside the cist 2900. Moreover, there were found in royal graves partially rotted wooden wheels from four-wheeled wagons or chariots. They had no spokes and consist of three solid parts connected with two transversal laths (Fig. 2). The wheels themselves may have one-sided plugs, though and two-sided ones were typical for Gonur, being proved by ceramic models thereof. All the wagon's (or chariots') wheels from the royal necropolis were upholstered with six bronze rims (or tires), which were fixed to the wheel with special massive rivets.

As it is seen by the obtained data, horses which have been found in the royal necropolis belonged to the last centuries of III B.C, as far as the foregoing foal from the mausoleum might have been buried a little bit later, i.e. at the eve of II B.C. It is greatly obvious a close and even identical similarity of composite bronze rims of

Bactria, Margiana and Elam. Artifacts from all these territories are so similar to each other that they seem to have been made by one master. Thus, there are forcible evidences to consider the Margianian, Bactrian and Elamian horses being ones of the most ancient domesticated horses all over the Ancient East.

Thus, it may be emphasized that Southern Turkmenistan was also the homeland of domesticated horse. In the space of millenia the Turkmen people was able to breed the beautiful Akhalteke horse by dint of selection.

TEMPLES

Four temples (the Northern Gonur Fire Temple, the Gonur temenos, Togolok-1 and Togolok-21), built like individual monumental buildings devoted to the Fire and Soma-Haoma, have been excavated in Margiana during last decades. The wide-scale excavations at the North Gonur have now discovered a unique for all Central Asia palace-temples ensemble with some temple complexes inside (Fig. 3, 4). Those complexes do not have their own defensive walls. But all of them are connected with each other by common passageways, and, when it was possible to identify, devoted to various gods.

It was noted long time ago that Temples have not been mentioned in Avesta. That fact caused M. Boyce to make a well-defined conclusion that Zoroastrians did not know temples at all till the Parthian-Sassanid period, and they made their public worships outdoors in an empty place. However, academician M. Dandamaev and V. Lukonin noted that a doubtless Tepe-Nushi-Djan Fire Temple in the Western Iran, belonged to the beginning of the I B.C and located on the way of famous Assyrian companies Eastern o the East, has also not been mentioned in the Assyrian annals. These researchers have directly resumed that "it was the earliest temple building in Iran among known till present, which is apparently existed even before the Zoroastrian reform" (Dandamaev and Lukonin, 1980, p.90). And it should be agreed upon.

B.A. Litvinsky and I. Pichikyan (2000, p. 242-247) paid a special attention to this complicated and extremely principal issue. They were quite clear to prove that Djarkutan monumental building has been a typical temple at least in the middle of II B.C.

Such palaces weren't mentioned anywhere in Avesta, though a doubtless palace has been recently excavated in the center of North Gonur ensemble. There were small and provincial palaces (e.g. Adji-Kui) in Margiana too. All these data eliminate any doubts in existing monumental secular buildings.

It should be taken into consideration that all the Margush country excavated antiquities were belonged to the pre-Zoroastrian or pagan period, and that Zaratustra might had abolished those constructions (as, for example, temple supposedly for the Soma-Haoma drink worship). However, direct archeological data have not yet been available therefore. Quite the contrary, we have to be surprised as many pagan cults and traditions, which became famous thanks to the excavations of the Margush country monuments, have their continuation in the Zoroastrian religion. Apparently, it is more likely to see centuries-old existence of pre-Zoroastrian traditions therein, which have been reformed by Zaratustra and included into his study.

SOMA-HAOMA TEMPLES

There are three temples devoted to a stimulating drink like Soma-Haoma known presently. The earliest one in the whole Margiana system (the eve of the II B.C.) was found in spring of 2006 close to a royal necropolis at the North Gonur south-east outskirts. It is likely not by chance located outside the complex external encircling wall. By other words, this temple as left outside and wasn't included into the palace-temple ensemble by construction of the encircling by-pass wall.

This is a small temple, which design principle presents "a yard bypassed with corridors". Big pithoses, being covered with a thick gypsum layer, which goes onto the floor, have been found at one of the rooms, preventing infiltration of internal liquid (it is likely a Haoma) outside (Fig. 5). All the other building's rooms have also floors being covered by gypsum. Fragments of cult vessels with figures of people (hands aside), animals, frogs and fish stuck thereon have been found here. Taking into consideration general plan and a set of findings, it may be concluded that the describing building presents a small temple, which is referred to preparing a stimulating drink like Soma-Haoma.

The next small temple is located at the territory of Gonur temenos. A central part of that building also presents "a yard bypassed with corridors". The cult ceremonies with spiritual libations being of great importance took part here. It is proved by a built-in later "white room" (# 137), where Soma-Haoma drink was produced.

The place is notable for intact "ceramic supports," directly connected with Soma-Haoma making process (mostly of hemp as it was identified by Prof. of Moscow State Univ. N. Meyer-Melikyan), as well as for fragments of doubtless cult vessels with sculptural friezes on a locking ring, which have been found here. A prominent flat stone with a semi-round protuberance in the center, which was used to squeeze (and not to grind) alkaloid plants, has been found here.

All the other Temenos internal territory is occupied with common dwellings used as residence place for people, whose whole life was related with serving Temenos. There were over 30 large vessels and the so-called trays, coated with a thick layer of gypsum inside rooms thereof, as well as lots of fossil hemp remains found inside a repair-coating. As it is known, alkaloid plants are of bad odour to get out of which it is necessary to soak them out in special vessels (pithoses or trays). Only following that procedure they are suitable for making a stimulating juice, which is called as Haoma in Avesta and Soma in Rigveda (see: Meyer-Melikyan in Sarianidi, 1998).

Togolok-1 rural temple and especially Togolok-21 "classical" temple also present temples, which are related to Soma-Haoma production and cult libations. Data thereabout have been already published and do not need being described in details. We would only like to note that, similar to Gonur Temenos their central part forms "a yard bypassed with corridors". "The white rooms", where a stimulating drink was made, and fossil remains of alkaloid plants (such as ephedra and hemp), as well as poppy pollen have been found in gypsum coating thereof, are located close with central rooms (Meyer-Melikyan, 1990, p.203-205, Fig. CV-CVIII).

In fact, all artifacts required to produce Soma-Haoma were found during archeological excavations of Togolok-21 "Cathedral" temple. Besides fossil alkaloid

plants such as ephedra and hemp (as well as lots of pithoses and "trays", where they got soaked and lost a heavy odour), many stone graters and mortars have been found there. Ceramic supports, strainers to filter juice, as well as cult vessels with sculptural friezes on a locking ring, and lots of other items additionally complete a specific set of Margiana temples' inventory, eliminating any doubt that all temples contained full set of tools and initial material to make stimulating drink.

Obviously, he stuck sculptural friezes on locking rings and figurines on internal surface of cult vessel bottoms shouldn't be considered as thoughtless fantasy of ancient craftsmen. It presents "quotations" or "summaries" of those myths, which have been widely spread among the Margush ancient people and which related to Soma-Haoma juice worship.

Haoma is presented in the Avestian texts as "the Tree of Immortality", which grows at island in the Vorukasha Ocean. It is protected against dev's frogs and lizards (snakes) with saint fish Kara. It may be compared with the foregoing terracotta figurines from the religious vessels (frogs, snake-lizards and fishes), which have been found while archeological excavations of Soma-Haoma Temples. If we remember that these vessels filled with Haoma look like a water mirror-like surface (a sea model), where frogs and lizards-frogs swim, then fishes may demonstrate those fish-guards which are narrated about in Avesta who keep snaky dragons and frogs off that peaceful tree roots. It should be added that only on those cult vessels the images in the form of a central tree (the immortality tree?) with goats on both sides thereof have been scratched in order to suppose that those vessels with liquid in depicted a sea like the Vorukasha one.

As it is known Soma-Haoma production and usage are the main part in Zoroastrian public worship, which is fully complied with the above-mentioned archeological situation in Margiana, where Soma-Haoma temples compose the most part of Margush temples.

A YARD BYPASSED WITH CORRIDORS

"A yard bypassed with corridors" architectural block in the Margiana temples, which has already been mentioned, forms a basic layout principle, always located in the temple's center (Gonur Temenos, Togolok 1 and Togolok 21). The present layout principle is considered to be of Syrian origin (Habiba Kabira IV mill. B.C.), which got to Central Asia, including Margiana, with newly arrived tribes.

BLIND WINDOWS

Blind windows are deadlight wall niches framed with toothed breast from both sides. As a rule, they start 35-40 cm high from the room's floor and are likely to reach the ceiling. "The blind windows" are located at special and sign, preferably cult rooms, but they do not serve as altars.

SANCTUARY WITH "BLIND WINDOWS" AND FIREPLACES THEREAMONG

"The blind windows" are always located in the interior of the rooms and surely considered as the sign architectural blocks of internal decor, being clearly of religious purpose. The earliest blind windows have been known in Mesopotamia in Tepe Gavra (IV B.C.), while the latest ones in Tepe Nushi-Jan (Midia), where they are referred to the beginning of I B.C. It is greatly indicative that an altar at the Tell Brak Mesopotamia temple has got "a blind window" form, being flanked with small semi-columns from both sides and stairs in front of it.

There are sanctuaries with five such "blind windows", two of them flank a cult double oven located among them from both sides, e.g. in the North Gonur Fire Temple (where they are located in a separate sanctuary). Similar sanctuaries have been dug in Godin Tepe (Western Iran), where they are dated to the eve of IV-III B.C., as well as in Till (Anatolia, Assyrian period), including that area into the region, where they have been spread till Mari and the Central Asia, and Margiana too. Apparently, all similar "innovations" had entered Margiana with new coming tribes, which brought them in the form of "architectural memory".

VARA

The "vara" term, which means "castle" and "country house", has been applied in archeological literature for a long time. It was traditionally considered that it is a fortified rectangular monument, which was mentioned in Avesta. However, when Dashly-3 "round temple" was excavated in the South Bactria, professors B. Brenties and K. Yetmar have independently made conclusion that it might have been a round (and not rectangular) form with three concentric bypass walls. They compared it with the Avestinian Vara. That idea was supported by A. Parpola, a famous indologist, who has directly marked "that very close compliance". Without going beyond, he supplements this similarity with Rigveda data, where a fort also consisting of three round bypass walls is mentioned.

Earlier professor G. Tucci made an effort to compare the second monumental building, which was located at the same Dashly-3 site with a mandala, where crowning of Indo-Iranian divinities took place. It is proved by the fact that, by the opinion of G. Tucci, rooms located in the middle of each four front sides of the monumental building, form capital letter "T" in the layout, which are available not only in mandala-like buildings, but might have been of the same purpose too. It should be added that a similar "T" — letter layout is present in the Northern Bactria at the Sapallitepe site, proving their layout and typological likeness, where a cult-religious similarity is hidden.

The present issue has been recently considered by academician I.M. Steblin-Kamensky, who distinctly demonstrated that in fact Vara means a round and not a square building with three circular walls with 9 passageways in the first one, six in the middle one and three in the last one. In his opinion it is closely corresponds to Dashly-3 Temple archeological design. The central part here is also separated from the adjacent peripheral one with three concentric walls, though the external wall has not got any passageways, but nine miniature "turrets" with passageways coming

through to the adjacent bypass gallery. Moreover, it should be noted that two other round walls have also got some poorly-preserved passageways, an exact number of which has not been clearly stated.

Thus, a central part of Dashly-3 Temple consisted of three concentric walls with passageways and "turrets", embodying two sanctuaries with podiums and cult chamber altars, which are put on small platforms, as well as so named "cells", jointly forming a sacral part of the whole temple complex.

Central round building of Dashly-3 is totally surrounded with surely common households, consisting of poorly and improperly built dwellings and lots of utility houses, which dwellers like those ones of Gonur temenos are probably to have served the central temple. To a certain extent, the whole layout, which has been dug, reminds the Vara of Avesta, where Yima, the first human being, has built "houses for people and cattle-pens". Digging that peripheral part of Dashly-3 monument thirty years ago, I unintentionally paid attention that buildings, being elements thereof, greatly differed with their much carelessness (while constructing thin walls, etc.) not only from its sacral part, but from common houses as well.

As noted by academician B.A. Rybakov, nine "turrets" may indicate nine months of pregnancy. This is proved by citation related to Vara: "...And bring the sperm of all males and females, who are the greatest and best ones at this land, there, behind the wall ... And make all being couples, while people are staying in Vara". All those observations may imply Vara's relation to the idea of general fertility of every kind.

Anyway, purpose of both monumental buildings in Dashly-3 as original temples, at the present is beyond any doubt, emphasizing this site as a cult center of the whole Southern Bactria, and to a certain extent reminding of Gonur-Depe palace-temples ensemble.

FIRE ALTARS

The fire altars of Margiana temples, in a full compliance with Avesta, are always not high and "located at the sight level of a sitting person" (not over 0,5 m high). All the altars, which have been found, are divided into two basic types — rectangular and round ones. The first ones have been dug at the mainland in the form of rectangular chambers, being lined with fossil bricks and always elongated into one chain from three (Gonur Temenos) up to four (Fire Temple of North Gonur) and even five (Togolok-21) chambers respectively. It may be assumed that an inextinguishable or otherwise "perpetual" fire, which was prayed to, fired there, or it has been a sacred substance. M. Boyce was quite right noting that the Fire having bright and alive image, caused worship easier than wooden and stone idols (M. Boyce, 2003, p.103).

Moreover, if we refer to the excavated Margiana Fire Temples, it is always possible to state that the fire altars, though being located inside temples, are always at the internal yards (Gonur temenos) or "light shafts" (Togolok-21), i.e. in the open air. A general layout scheme has been well known: the fire altars stood in temples, but always at locations inaccessible for uninitiated (at secluded premises, behind the high and blank walls), and certainly in the open air. Indeed, Zoroastrians were recommended not to look at fire directly, as they should have protected eyes. Although M. Boyce was deeply sure that there is no any reference to the fire, located at a

special place, in the ancient part of Avesta, this did not testify yet that the Indo-Iranians did not have fire altars.

The second type demonstrates round altars, but of various scale ("big" and "small"), intended for making sacrifices (Togolok-21). The big altar, being dug at the virgin soil (3 m deep), is of semi-spherical internal surface with a small fireplace in the center thereof. The fat meat pieces, which were put at the altar edge, were melting with fire, naturally flowing along the altar spherical surface down to the central fireplace, where they got in touch with decay coals. The fire flared up and rose to the sky with a smoke. It is amazing that antique authors (Onesicrite and Strabon), as well as XVII century travelers, kept practically the same description of sacrificing made by Iranians.

The analysis (which has been made at Moscow State University) of a fat "spot", found at semi-spherical surface of the Togolok-21 altar, found out that it was of a fat consistency. The fat was mixed with small peaces of carbons and cattle bones. A bone tube (with a face and very big eyes engravings) for a cult libation has been found here at the altar entry. These facts give forcible arguments to assume that sacrificing and cult libations to various deities of Margush pagan country took place in the "large altar". Remembering that there are a great number of cult double-ovens (see below) intended for making sacrificing at the North Gonur, and only one similar oven has been found at Togolok-21 Temple later, then a tendency to unite different cults and making them at one altar may be assumed.

The second or "small" altar (with a flat and not spherical bottom) at Togolok-21 turned out to be compact filled with an ash and pieces of burnt branches, carbonized animal bones (sheep or goat) being alloyed thereto. Later the over-burnt animal bones were applied by ancient Margush people for cult purposes, especially in funeral rituals. The latter event resembles descriptions of ancient authors (Onesicrite and Strabon) and XVII century travelers in details, specifying the sacrificing to fire procedure made by ancient Iranians, when small pieces of fat meat (omentum) were directly put to the burning coals. The bones were carbonized and alloyed to coals due to a great heat.

PAVI

The double so-called "platforms" or "pavi" otherwise, which are mentioned in Rigveda, are situated close to rectangular altars. They present rectangular lining areas, which walls do not originally exceed half a meter. Thus, these structures were uncovered from top and were located "in the open air". In accordance with ancient believes gods were sitting on such close areas, and a fire was made in altars (Gonur Temenos and Togolok-21) in favor thereof.

"CONTAINERS OF SACRED ASH"

It is surely not by chance that containers lined with raw bricks, which have been dug at the virgin soil (or vice versa built-up on the day light surface) are located close to the earliest altars of the Fire Temple of North Gonur, as well as to the Gonur Temenos altar area. Being round or rectangular while archeological digs, they were

filled with a pure white ash. B.A. Litvinsky and I. Pichikyan (2000, p.337-340) gave detailed descriptions of similar containers. Such containers, conditionally called as "containers of sacred ash", were composed of a ritual pure ash, which was likely filtered through a special cloth, being later distributed to temples of lower category. As it is known, the ash cult takes a significant place in Zoroastrianism practice, and there is even an expression stating that "ash is a fire garb". A special attention to ash is the most important element of the fire Zoroastrian cult. Even the fire temples are perceived as ash accumulation places.

Leaving such worship structures, the Margush population have tightly blocked containers up with raw bricks from top in order to prevent a possible damage thereof by people and animals in future.

CULT DOUBLE-OVENS

The double-ovens (sometimes three-chamber ones) for making sacrificing food demonstrate a specific architectural difference typical for the North Gonur palace-temples ensemble. All of them are of the same type and divided inside into two chambers with a transversal partition, where the little one was always greatly burnt inside and presents a fire-chamber. The second bigger one is slightly burnt and presents "an oven". A low partition (it does not reach a ceiling), dividing them, is between the "fire-chamber" and "oven" (Fig. 6). That construction prevented fire flames entering oven from the fire-chamber and, thus, a fire direct contact with sacred item (preferably with raw bloody meat). Otherwise, fire-chamber of such design allowed cooking sacred meat free of contaminating the "pure" element of fire with "unclean" bloody meat.

Indeed, all of those ovens present altars to cook sacred meat. As a rule, they are located on the premises' floors and put on small platforms only in some public buildings, standing them out among other ones.

BURIALS

It is generally known that a burial ceremonial is the most conservative one in the human mind of all the nations. Zoroastrians do not serve as exclusion there from. "The intention to protect saint elements (firstly, ground, air, water and fire) against contamination" is based on their burial rituals (Maytarchiyani, 1999). The excavations of Gonur necropolis discovered about 3000 graves dated to the end of the III and the first half of the II B.C. They would be published in the nearest future by anthropologist prof. N. Dubova. Various important observations, which may be explained from the point of view of Zoroastrian burial rituals, have been found while excavations.

The most died in Gonur have been buried at shaft graves (about 85%), and only a small part (about 11%) have been buried at the outskirts of necropolis in ordinary pit graves with poor funeral offerings. A specific feature of some pit graves is that they have been complete burnt inside (till bright red) before the dead one is buried. And it was proved by documents that lots of graves do not have osteological material at all, or there are only separate human bones (totally those structures amount to

196, and the bone remains have been found in 47 of them). Such burnt graves with whole human skeletons have been found less, but in this case practically all of them bear evidence of pathological processes. Thus, three dwarves have been found in three graves of that type (remains of one more dwarf was found in a royal sepulture # 3230) and one child suffered with batrocephalia (for more detailed information see: N. Dubova, 2004). The fact that hunchbacks were considered as "dirty" is proved by Avesta, where it is more than once said as follows: "Let there hunchbacks be neither in front, nor behind ..."

Otherwise, the dead ones, with physical defects when alive, were buried in the burnt graves, as far as they might have been buried only at the outskirts of graveyards. In order not to profane ground as "pure elements" with those deceased, the graves had been initially burnt with fire inside and only following that procedure the crippled persons ("unclean", otherwise) were buried (for more detailed information see: V. Sarianidi, 2001). There is a situation being identical to that one stated above, when double cult ovens-altars have been applied while sacrificing. M. Boyce doubted that "fire" as "clean elements" could not have been used for making clearance from pollution, but this concept is denied with a whole complex of data, which have been obtained while archeological excavations at the North Gonur ensemble.

Bones of dogs and even a whole skeleton of a dog have been found in some burnt graves, which may show a dual attitude to that animal.

There are all grounds to assume the existence of complicated funeral rituals typical among ancient Margush peoples. One of the evidence of that is "the complex of funeral rituals" at the North Gonur palace. A rough-made "gap" or "breach", through which a body of a dead was taken out after all the funeral rituals have been completed, is located in that complex close to a main entrance. The Vendidate directly specifies as follows: "and when birds will fly to, plants will grow up, puddles will spread around and the wind will dries the ground out, then let Mazdayasniyts make a gap in this house".

The ritual ablutions of dead, which was held in the special room of the complex, took a major place in the Gonur rituals. The contaminated water after being used was discharged by means of special drainage, which consisted of three ceramic pipes being put together, which has been found in "the complex of funeral rituals" of Gonur palace during digging.

A small micro-complex, with one room supposedly being an early dakhma, which has presented a dakhma-masoleum, by the fair opinion of academician B. Litvinsky, is located at the same palace, in the ruler's residence. The bones of no less than ten human beings, which were chaotically mixed, have been found at the North Gonur palace dakhma. The last dead was put onto the room floor in a writhed pose (but beheaded!) and an entry was blocked with bricks "on a dry basis" in order to easy demolishing it while burying next dead. Clear traces of clayey rainy leakages have been kept on the floor close to walls inside this premise. It is likely suppose to be a special construction of that premise overhead-cover, giving an opportunity for birds of prey to enter inside.

A typical partition seal originated from Bactria and handled to me for publication by R. Garner, my friend and famous collector, evidently testifies the practice of putting corpses onto dakhma (Fig. 7). The seal obviously kept a subject composition of two

dead, lying in a writhed pose (a pose of Margiana dead ones), whose heads were being pecked out by birds in pray, and a dog was sneaking up to the feet. The whole picture reproduces an idea of skeletons skinning out.

An amulet with a dead being depicted in a writhed pose with bent legs, who was tortured by a horned monster from above has been found in Togolok-21 temple. This monster absolutely resembled a horned one, which has been depicted at one of the Syro-Hittite cylinder (Fig. 8). It has not been proved, but possibly this picture demonstrates a famous Zoroastrian episode, when corpse fly Nasu attacks just dead man. The amulet with engraved composition, depicting a person lying on the dais with writhed legs, being tortured by the eagle from the above, originates from the city of Kandaghar (Afghanistan). It is likely not by chance, that such birds (possibly, vultures) always peck human heads to pieces. Burials with heads cut off in some Gonur graves may be compared therewith.

It is clear that the foregoing data are not enough to confirm the burial dakhma existence in Margiana, but the seal and amulet images mentioned above make such assumption most probable. There is no doubt that dakhmas have existed in Bactria, which is documentary proved by Greece ancient historians. Thus, such rite has most probably existed in Margiana too.

Finally, chamber tombs, which have been found in Gonur necropolis, present a pattern of common houses (more precisely bedrooms), which was exclusively typical for Indo-Europeans and, particularly, Indo-Iranian funeral constructions, by the opinion of M. Gimbutas and afterwards of Jones-Blay. As a rule, they are two-chambered (the first chamber served as a burial one, and funeral items were put into the second one), and interiors thereof depict an interior of common dwellings. Totally, 47 tombs have been found at Gonur necropolis; they have certainly originated from the North Gonur royal sepultures (especially tomb # 3235). Those Gonur burial structures trace to tombs of the middle Euphrates basin, which also depict dwelling patters (Halava, Lidar, Hadidi, etc.) All those tombs both in Syria and Margiana belong to a local elite, and present family burial-vaults with a collective successive burial custom. Such tombs are especially demonstrative in Barsip dated by the middle — second half of III B.C. and thus preceded the Gonur tombs. Such burials are also demonstrative in the Tall Tutgul grave yard in Syria (2600-2100 B.C.), where, like in Gonur, shaft burials (Strommenger and Kohlmeyer, 1998, p.51) have been practiced in parallel with chamber ones.

The Gonur sepultures in the form of houses (Hypogaeum) are close enough to resemble the Syrian "Hypogaeums", and, have mostly been transferred to Margiana by new tribes arrived from the far West. Such chamber tombs have lived up to the Akheminidian period, identifying this area jointly with the Northern Syria into the historical region, where similar funeral traditions have been earlier born and longer lived until.

SECONDARY GRAVES

While archeological excavations of practically all chamber tombs and single shaft ones, it was mentioned that they have not got any skeletons, but just contain "bone medley", consisting of tiny bone fractures and bone "powder". It makes an impression

that the situation was created after the remains, which have been already rotten, were removed and transferred to another place. Such "secondary" graves have been earlier marked out by D. Tucci in the Northern Pakistan (the Swat river valley). He writes: "They are empty, except some tiny fractures, which is likely to state that a dead has lied in the burial ground for a certain period and later released therefrom" (Tucci, 1977, p. 26). Moreover, such "secondary" burial places have been marked in Bactria, Tajikistan and Belujistan, i.e. in the BMAK existence zone.

Avesta considers a corpse dig-out to be a "worthy job". Thus, Ahura-Mazda replies to question "Who was the first to mostly satisfy this land?" with "When remains of ... dead ones are more dug" (Videvdad, 3 and 12). I am far from making a direct comparison between the foregoing archeological facts and observations, and Videvdad data, but it is unlikely to ignore such uncommon funeral rites as "secondary" burials are and not to compare them with Margush population funeral rites.

WATER TEMPLE

As it is known, Zoroastrians are named both fire- and water- worshippers at the same extent. They make their daily sacrificing and praying only in favor of fire and water.

A Water Temple is located in the southern part of the North Gonur palace-temple ensemble, with a large and likely a natural waterpool (180 m long, 85 m wide and 1,5 m deep), which was filled with water taken from the Murgab river by drainage system of ceramic pipes. Numerous rooms connected with common passageways, some of which have cult double-ovens, which were put onto the low platforms, are located in a line along the southern coastal area. The discovered complex of premises presents a real Water Temple, which has been located close to a main water-pool.

The fact that wide terraces, where new premises with cult ovens inside have been erected on, have been dug down the coast (and, thus, close to water) as far as the water-pool was gradually becoming shallow, specifies a direct functional relation of pond water and coastal complex of buildings. Otherwise, cult premises were being built following water escape, giving a possibility to priests to constantly staying close to the water and to make religious ceremonies without any problems.

A small water-pool with a hollow mud-bricked-made filter, being filled with a great deal of rush, is located close to a large (main) basin. Water was coming to the filter from a large water-pool via a special gutter. Muddy water from the Murgab filled a filter with water via the gutter; it was being settled there and then flew out being purified and transparent through a special hole in another wall. Such water might have been used for religious ceremonies, and to cook cult food as well. In any way, water is to be treated before the God of Rains drinks it (Rack, 1998, p.108). At least, water-pools intended for sacrifice to water, must have always been arranged in the late Zoroastrian temples.

Any existence of complicated water-lifting structures may be supposed due to remains of ceramic pipes and burnt bricks, which have been kept till digs between both water-pools' cross dike. It allowed pumping water to a small basin from a large one.

Waters in Avesta are directly called as "Ahura-Mazda wives", and one of the most ancient yashts is devoted to Ardivi Sura, who is rivers' and waters' goddess. Thus, there are all grounds to suppose that water and water flows' worship was widely spread among Indo-Iranians (see: Litvinsky and Pichinyan, 2000, p.312-324). It is known that the natural lake is connected with the temple at one complex in Tahti Suleymane site, which greatly resembles the situation, which has been found at the North Gonur ensemble. Meanwhile, the temple and the lake are surrounded with a common wall, making a single architectural complex. A similar situation is found in Kuhi-Hvadja, where the temple is located at the lakeside, and in Djarkutan (Northern Bactria) as well, demonstrating a similar situation, which has existed at the middle of II B.C.

SQUARES OF COMMUNAL EATING

Three broad squares (the largest had more than 500 m²) existed consequently inside the North Gonur Palace-temples ensemble were excavated. All of them are open, smooth and had no one construction like altars or sacrificial places. The squares were covered by black ash-ground cultural level (more than 0.5 m thick) mixed with a large amount of animal bones and ceramic fragments. There were water pools close to each such square, where raining water from the near plain came through the special channels. These basins could use for cult washing. In the same place close to the squares there are enfilades of small rooms with a lot of cult described above double-ovens inside them.

All these archaeological facts together show that so named "communal eating", which were named Iza in Avesta by Iranian Zoroastrians and Ida in Rigveda by Indian Zoroastrians, took place at these squares. Meat cooked by especial way for roasting in the cult double-ovens was served to all members of "communal eating" seated in the square. It was consumed by them "with particular concentration of mind and spirit" (M. Boyce). By the opinion of the most part of linguists, Ida/Iza was a divine power which is present in a meal and to which all who take part in "communal eating" join.

DUALISM OF BACTRIAN-MARGIANIAN GLYPTIC AND SPHRAGISTICS

The Bactria and Margiana glyptic and sphragistics are the unique phenomenon in the system of the whole Middle East. Though most of such items are decorated with ordinary geometric ornaments, there are big amulets with complicated and obviously subject compositions, presenting "quotations" or "theses" of those myths, which have been spread in the Margush society in III-II B.C. and generally understood by every citizen.

In the opinion of P. Amie, "the phallic symbolism", which is depicted in compositions with real snakes and fantastic snake dragons thereon being always in a confronting position, is considered to be a major topic of such narrative compositions of the Bactrian-Margiana glyptic. As a rule, they chase peaceful even-toed animals (more rare birds) and usually try to catch their rear legs in order to possess their "vivifying sperm", which personifies a general fertility and life prolongation idea.

A continuous thoroughgoing fight for exercising a right to possess "a vivifying sperm" is always between them. There are weighty arguments to consider snakes personifying positive forces towards a human being, while the snake dragons symbolize negative forces (towards a human being). Thus, the snake dragons, eating each other up, are depicted on stone amulets (sometimes on the copper-bronze seals). It is well-known that creatures, which eat up those one similar thereto, are of common aversion. As a rule, the snake dragons are depicted with wide-open jaws, angry-goggle eyes and sometimes with wings and a horn on the nose.

Taking the same compositions into consideration, snakes personify positive forces towards human beings (see: Sarianidi, 1998a). Thus, such compositions with snakes and snake dragon fight depicted thereon, finally, demonstrate a fight between good and evil forces.

This general topic of Bactria-Margiana glyptic is traced at lots hundreds and even thousands of seals and amulets. This is a unique concept of Good and Evil forces' fight. It should be noted that snakes are winners on some amulets while snake dragons are on the other ones. Thus, we may conclude that victory has not been foreseen as it depended from many factors. The composition, depicting a fight between snakes and fantastic snake dragons, express a specific feature of further Zoroastrianism: a distinctly defined dualism, namely, a fight of good and evil, which, indeed, is a universe substance.

Besides those characters, images of fantastic winged animals are famous as well. They are always shown as running away from snake dragons in panic (with widely open jaws), lying under stomachs thereof and always trying to catch their back legs.

KERSASPA

A small, but exclusively important group of seals and amulets with single-type images, which reproduce a heroic character of the ancient Iranian epos, are worthy to be paid attention to among really immense group of Bactrian-Margiana glyptic and sphragistics images (Fig. 9). It is characterized as follows in Avesta: it has got an upright and curly (our spacing) hair, furious and brutal appearance". There is almost no doubt that this is a wordy description of Kersaspa at all the amulets mentioned above. M. Boyce (1989, p.102) thinks that legends thereabout have been born in the Eastern-Iranian world, possibly in Seistan.

Despite origination of those images (Bactria or Margiana), they always reproduce a male image of hero with hard and slight curly head hair, being always divided into two strands, with eyes being greatly goggle and round because of fury, with fluffy moustaches and long side-whiskers, combed into two sides. The hands usually end not with palms, but with snake-like heads; and once such personage has had a snake-like belt.

Presently over dozens of such amulets with similar images have been known, originated both from Bactria and Margiana (Sarianidi, 1998a, ## 51-53, 905-907, 912, 927 and 1235). They reproduce general image of Kersaspa, who is considered to be "the greatest Avestinian hero" (M.Boyce), who has committed lots of heroic feats.

Due to Avesta Kersaspa is a brave warrior, who is always eager to fight against devil incarnates. Indeed, he has killed a horny snake Servar, which has eaten people up. With this regard it should be noted that images of horny snake dragons with widely open jaws are known both in Bactria and Margiana; meanwhile, they are often shown with a head set hack and a darkly bared jaw as if in a "defensive" and fighting-off pose against dangerous risk approaching them. It should be noted that M. Pottier (1984, Fig.42, # 312) was the first to suggest considering this fantastic image as a horny snake dragon, Servara by name, which retained underground waters. And only after his death water came back to people.

The above mentioned archeological facts are surely to witness that similar (otherwise, identical) subject compositions have been spread in glyptic and sfragistics of Bactria and Margiana. These compositions, which themes and images reflect common mythological ideas, being very popular in the Bactria-Margiana environment, and which later after being reformed were included into Avesta, a sacred book for every Zoroastrian.

A BULL-HEAD MACE

A bull head made of marble, being perfectly formed, is of exclusive value among findings made at Margiana temples. It is greatly indicative that a backside of that head is not much damaged, is thoroughly polished and has got three holes at the edge to be fixed onto the stick-base. Otherwise, the head resembles a wand, which was fixed onto the stick-base. Such wands are applied by the present Zoroastrian priests during youth dedication into the Zoroastrian religion; their images are published even at every work devoted to the Zoroastrian religion (M. Boyce, 2003, Fig.6).

To complete my brief presentation, I would like to state that I distinctly realize that the conference participants might subject basic ideas of provided information to a great criticism. For my part I would like to ask my opponents: is there many archeological proofs in favor of the foregoing new theory anywhere in the whole Middle East system, besides Margiana?

I hope that the archaeological material, which we obtained, is able to convince those who still questions the real importance for science of the archaeological discoveries at Gonurdepe of last years. New facts and incontestable evidences, obtaining from the continued excavations in Margiana, will lead, I sure, to reconsider some established views on the remote past of humankind. Therefore, the number of people, first of all foreign scientists, which will appreciate deservedly the place of ancient Turkmenistan in the system of the early civilizations of our planet, become much more.

The next steps in the wide propaganda and popularization in the world of the Turkmen great heritage, which hardly earliest part are the finds from Margiana, will be, as I hope, their exhibition in the Paris Louvre, Greek museum of Binaki, Moscow State Museum of the East and other largest world museums. Millions of people will see these treasures and know about that valuable contribution which Turkmenistan makes to the world culture.

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