

JÁNOS HARMATTA

ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN CENTRAL ASIA

When Darius III was killed by Bessus and his conspirator-companions, Alexander the Great regarded as his most urgent task not their pursuit and punishment, but at first, by a great military operation directed to the south, he wanted to insure the southern provinces of Eastern Iran, because this territory had great importance as line-of-communications area in his campaign against the usurper Bessus, who ascended the throne and assumed the name Artoxerxes in the meantime. Obviously, in this operational plan, Alexander was led by strategic considerations indeed. This is proved by the fact that after the battle of Issus he did not consider the pursuit of Darius III the most urgent task either, but at first he conquered Phoenicia and Egypt, in order to deprive the Persian fleet of its operational bases and to insure his lines-of-communications in this way.

Arrian (*Anab. Alex.* III. 25) describes concisely Alexander's military operations in South-Eastern Iran. These were rendered difficult by the resistance of the Persian governors as well as by the discontent of the staff officers of the Macedonian army who were dissatisfied with the uncertain object of the campaign and with the behaviour of the king, which began to be similar to that of the oriental monarchs. Moreover, Arrian relates how Alexander arrived at the Hindukush mountains, regarded by the Greeks as a range of mountains, identical with the Caucasus and therefore called by them Caucasus indeed. The Macedonian king also founded an *Alexandria* (today Begram¹) here which served as an important operational base for his Indian campaign later. Arrian describes the difficulties of the crossing through the Hindukush, but he does not tell which pass the army of Alexander marched through. He has given, however, the name of *Drapsaka*, the first greater settlement, at which Alexander arrived after crossing the Hindukush. Hereby, it becomes doubtless that he crossed the Hindukush by the Xāvak pass², lying 3545 metres above sea level.

¹ R. GHIRSHMAN–T. GHIRSHMAN: Bégram. Recherches archéologiques et historiques sur les Kouchans. Le Caire 1946. 15 foll.

² W. W. TARN: Alexander the Great. I. Cambridge 1951. 66, FR. SCHACHERMEYER: Alexander der Grosse. Wien 1973. 677.

The town of *Drapsaka* (< Old Iranian **Draṣṣaka*-) played an important role even later and appears by the names *Lrafo* (< Old Iranian **Draṣṣaka*-) and *Andēzo* (< Old Iranian **Ham-daiza*-) in the inscriptions of the Kušāṇa kings³, while its actual name is *Qunduz* (< **Kuḥan-dēz* 'Old Fortress'). From Drapsaka, the Macedonian troops marched via *Aornos* (probably identical with present-day Taš-quryan⁴) to Bactra (to-day Balḥ), then from there they went to the Oxus (= Amu-darya river), because by crossing the river together with his mounted troops, consisting of Iranian nomadic Dahae, Bessus had escaped to Sogdiana.

Because of the breadth (6 stadia = 1110 metres), the depth, the strong current of the river and on account of the loose ground of its bed, the Macedonian army could not build a bridge across the Amu-darya. Besides, after crossing, Bessus had the boats burnt. Thus, the Macedonians crossed the river in nomadic manner: on leather bottles, sewn together from leathers used as flaps of tent (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* III. 29, 2–4). Here, we can observe for the first time in the course of Alexander's campaign that he tried to apply certain elements of the tactics of the Iranian equestrian nomads. He developed the cavalry into a battle-deciding branch of army and later he also employed Iranian nomadic cavalry in his armed forces.⁵

After crossing the Amu-darya and capturing Bessus, beside the Sogdian landlord Spitamenes and the revolting Sogdians who attacked the Macedonian army, Alexander ought still to fight against two Iranian nomadic peoples, viz. the Scythians, called Massagetae who were neighbours to the Sogdians and nomadized between the Amu-darya and the Sir-darya, and the Scythians living beyond the Sir-darya, before he could begin the conquest of India. In these events the town of *Nautaka* where Alexander spent the winter and rested his troops (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* IV. 18, 2), played an important part, as did *Gaza*, *Kyrupolis*, *Alexandreia Eschate* and *Bagai* as well as the river *Iaxartes* (= Sir-darya), beside whose name *Tanaïs*, based on a geographical mistake, the name *Oxantes*, unknown before, also appears for it with Arrian. Important historical persons are the Sogdian landlords *Sisimithres*, *Chorienes*, *Ariamazdes* and the Scythian tribal head *Satrakes* as well. Interpretation and ethnic origin of all these ethnic and proper names, as well as place-names are not made clear so far. Nor has the exact location of their historical scene been identified. The historical maps of the scholarly literature are often based on mere guesswork. Let us examine these problems one after the other.

According to the report of Arrian, the Scythians, living between the Amu-darya and the Sir-darya, were called *Massagetae* (IV. 16: *Σκυθῶν τῶν Μασσαγετῶν καλουμένων*), while the professional literature considers them *Sakas*, just like the Scythians nomadizing beyond the Sir-darya river. This scholarly practice is based on the usage of the Old Persian inscriptions, which only mention the ethnic name *Saka*. However, we must not forget that the Old Persian epigraphic texts distinguish four Saka tribes or peoples: 1. *Sakā tayaīy paradraya* "Sakas who are living beyond the

³ J. HARMATTA: The Great Bactrian Inscription. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 12 (1964) 453 foll.

⁴ W. W. TARN: op. cit. 66.

⁵ FR. ALTHEIM: *Weltgeschichte Asiens im griechischen Zeitalter*. I. Halle/Saale 1947. 186, Fr. SCHACHERMEYER: op. cit. 425.

sea" (= European Scythians), 2. *Sakā haumavargā* "Sakas worshipping the Hauma" (= in Central Asia, the Ἀμύρριοι Σάκαι of the Greek geographers), 3. *Sakā tigraxaudā* "Sakas who wear the pointed cap" (between the *Araxša* = Amu-darya and the Sir-darya rivers), 4. *Sakā tayaiy para Sugdam* "Sakas who are living beyond Sogdiana (= beyond the Sir-darya river)".⁶ As we can state on the basis of this survey, the Persians used the ethnic name *Sakā* in the same general sense of "any Northern Iranian nomadic people" just as the Greeks used the ethnic name, *Σκύθαι*, as was observed and noted by Herodotus in his work (VII. 64 οἱ γὰρ Πέρσαι πάντας τοὺς Σκύθας καλέουσι Σάκας "for the Persians call all the Scythians Sakas")⁷. Therefrom it follows that the Persian term *Sakā* did not have any exact ethnic value. Accordingly, its use by the modern professional literature has no justification either.

In the quoted passage, however, Arrian says that these Scythians, living in the neighbourhood of the Sogdians between the Amu-darya and the Sir-darya rivers, were called *Massagetae*. Consequently, the name *Μασσαγέται* may be the individual denomination, the proper name of this Iranian nomadic people. But a clear judgement in this matter is impeded by the fact that Arrian (III. 28, 8) describes the *Dahae* (Δάαι) as living on this side of the Tanais = Sir-darya, i.e. between the Sir-darya and Amu-darya rivers. From this report it follows that the Massagetae were identical with the Dahae. This evidence furnished by Arrian has escaped the attention of historical research so far, even though its reliability can be proved from the linguistic viewpoint as well.

The origin of the Old Persian ethnic name *Dahā* (= Greek Δάαι, Latin *Dahae*) is clear: it is identical with Khotan Saka *daha-* "man"⁸, i.e. it belongs to the group of ethnic names with the meaning "man" and obviously represents the proper name of the Dahae used by themselves. For the interpretation of the other name of the Dahae, viz. *Μασσαγέται*, several attempts were made: 1. <*mas-saka-ta "Great Sakas"⁹, 2. *masyaka-ta "Fish-eating (men)"¹⁰, which are, however, unacceptable on account of either semantic or phonological difficulties. In any case, on the basis of these interpretations, it can be presumed that the root of this denomination was **Massaga*, while the element -ta represented either the sign of the plural or the antecedent of it, viz. the collective formative syllable. As concerns the root **Massaga*- or **Maššaga*- (the Greek spelling *Μασσαγε*- can be interpreted in this way, too), it can mostly be connected with Avestan *maša-*, *mašya-*, *mašyāka-* "man", while the element -ta may be identical with the sign of plural *-tā of the Eastern Iranian languages or with its antecedent, the collective formative syllable, indeed. Taking into consideration that the language of the Avesta came into being in the territory of Bactria, we can regard the ethnic name **Mašyagatā* > **Maššagatā* as the Bactrian denomination of the Dahae. Accordingly, as a matter of fact, it was the Bactrian translation of the ethnic name *Dahā*, meaning "men". Thus, the Iranian nomads, living on the territory of the

⁶ R. G. KENT: Old Persian.² New Haven 1953. 133 (DB V. 22), 137 (DNa 25, 25–26, 28–29), 147 (DH 4–5).

⁷ J. HARMATTA: Quellenstudien zu den Skythika des Herodot. Budapest 1941. 47 foll.

⁸ H. W. BAILEY: Dictionary of Khotan Saka. Cambridge 1979. 155.

⁹ R. N. FRYE: The History of Ancient Iran. München 1984. 207.

¹⁰ J. MARQUART: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Eran. II. Leipzig 1905. 78.

Qizil Qum in the neighbourhood of the Sogdians, used the ethnic name *Dahā* as their self-denomination, while translating this name, the Bactrians called them *Maššagatā*, and lastly their name in Old Persian was *Sakā tigraxaudā*. All three denominations are well intelligible from the historical viewpoint. Their Old Persian denomination was based on the general idea "Northern Iranian nomad" of the Persians, who only perceived little differences between the individual Iranian nomadic tribes. The self-denomination of the Dahae was only known to the Sogdians who had permanent contact with them. From the report of Arrian it follows that at the time of the campaign, led by Alexander to Central Asia, the Sogdians still maintained close contact with the Dahae who themselves needed it, because restricted to the Qizil Qum they could not insure the conditions of life for themselves, as was quickly noticed by Alexander, too. On the other hand, promising rich booty, the Sogdian Spitamenes could easily obtain military aid from them. Consequently, here an interesting symbiosis came into being between the sedentary Sogdians and the nomadic Dahae – a relation which strongly differed from the policy of the Ancient Persian Great Kings against the nomads. The latter tried to keep off the nomads from their empire by means of punitive military expeditions and of vassal princes, appointed at their head. This was the object which Darius I wanted to realize by his military expeditions against the European Scythians and the Sakas wearing the pointed cap.¹¹ Essentially, the same object was also in the view of Alexander the Great, when he launched his campaign against the nomads living beyond the Sir-darya.

The name of the latter was not preserved by the historians of Alexander, but in the course of later historical events which led to the ruin of the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom, their name appears in the historical sources. From the different forms, preserved with greater or smaller deformations, their name can be restored as **Sakā raukā* "Saka kings" or "Royal Sakas"¹². Their inscriptions, prepared in Sanskrit or Gāndhārī Prakrit, furnish some evidence for their language. These linguistic data prove that these Iranian nomads were Sakas, indeed, and they spoke a language similar to Khotan Saka.¹³

The experience, obtained by Alexander in his fight against the Dahae and the Sakas, became exemplary for his successors, the Diadochi, as well. He tried to defend the Iranian territories, developing agriculture, sedentary culture, and later, Greek urbanization, partly by preventive military blows, partly by the foundation of *Alexandreia Eschate* (today Xoǧand¹⁴) on the Sir-darya against the predatory invasions of the nomads. Similarly, his successors continued to launch preventive military expeditions against the nomads on the one hand, and to fortify the frontier defence by fortresses and fortification systems, transformed later into coherent *limes* on some territories, on the other hand. Afterwards, these defence systems spread to Europe and Eastern Asia, too, for keeping of the nomads, and divided the Ancient

¹¹ J. HARMATTA: Darius' Expedition against the Sakā Tigraxaudā. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 24 (1976) 15 foll.

¹² H. W. BAILEY: *op. cit.* 365.

¹³ J. HARMATTA: The Language of the Southern Sakas. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 32 (1989) 299 foll.

¹⁴ Б. Г. ГАФУРОВ–Б. А. ЛИТВИНСКИЙ: История таджикского народа. I. Москва 1963. 255–256.

and Early Medieval World into a southern, more developed zone and a northern undeveloped one.¹⁵

Beside the well-known important centres such as *Baktra* (today Balh), *Marakanda* (Samarkand) and *Kyropolis* (on the Elamite Persepolis Fortification Tablets *Kurišti*, its Sogdian name being *Kurkat* "City of Cyrus"¹⁶ = today Ura-Tübe¹⁷), *Nautaka* played a great role as a strategic base in the military operations of the Macedonian army. Historical research has not succeeded to clarify the geographical location of *Nautaka* so far, but the opinion has become generally accepted that we have to look for it in Sogdiana.¹⁸ In reality, however, we dispose of a whole series of evidences for it which has escaped the attention of historical research hitherto. By help of these evidences the geographical location of *Nautaka* can be determined exactly.

The earliest evidence for *Nautaka* occurs in the inscription of the Taxila silver scroll, dated from year 136 of the Old Saka Era.¹⁹ This date corresponds to 70/71 A. D. The passage concerning *Nautaka* runs as follows: *Urajhakena Imtavhriaputrana Bahaliena Noachae nagare vastavena*. Its translation is the following: "By **Hurāzaka*, of the **Ṛtafriya*-sons, the Bactrian, the resident of the town of **Noachaka*". The inscription was written in Gāndhārī Prakrit, its author was, however, an Iranian and on the basis of his epithet *Bahalia* (< **Bahalika*- < **Bahlika*-) he was of Bactrian origin and resident of the town of *Noachaa*. In Gāndhārī Prakrit, the form *Noachaa* goes back to the antecedent **Noachaka*- and taking into consideration that this form is the name of a Bactrian, i.e. Iranian town, on the basis of Iranian historical phonology, we can restore its Old Iranian form as **Navāthyaka*-. Without doubt, this form can be identified with the Greek spelling *Naútaka* as far as it reflects a form **Navātaka*- or **Navāθaka*-.²⁰ According to the testimony of the inscription on the Taxila silver scroll, *Nautaka* was lying – contrary to the assumption generally accepted – not in Sogdiana, but in Bactria. This mistake of historical research is connected with the cartographic ideas of the Greek geographers who regarded the Oxus river (= Amu-darya) as the frontier between Bactria and Sogdiana. As the oriental sources prove, however, the Barsun-tau mountains and the pass leading through them, the *Dar-i Āhanīn*, the "Iron Gate" was the frontier between the two lands, i.e. the territory of Sogdiana only included the valley of the Zerafšān river.

The other evidence for *Nautaka* is furnished by the Middle Persian work *Šahrīstānīhā-i Ērān* (ch. 8) and runs as follows: *BYN b'hl Y w'myk štr'st'n' <Y> nw'čk' spndy't Y wšt'sp 'n BRH krt*²¹ = *andar Bahl i vāmīg šahrīstān i Navāčag Spandīyād i Vištāspān pus kird*. Its translation is the following: "In the splendid Bactria, the

¹⁵ J. HARMATTA: The Wall of Alexander the Great and the *Limes Sasanicus*. Bull. of the Asia Inst. 10 (1996) 79 foll.

¹⁶ W. BARTHOLD: Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion. Oxford–London 1928. 166.

¹⁷ Б. Г. ГАФУРОВ–Б. А. ЛИТВИНСКИЙ: op. cit. 255.

¹⁸ Б. Г. ГАФУРОВ–Б. А. ЛИТВИНСКИЙ: op. cit. 245.

¹⁹ ST. KONOW: Kharoshthi Inscriptions with the Exception of those of Aśoka. CIInd Vol. II. Part I. Calcutta 1929. No. XXVII.

²⁰ J. HARMATTA: Sino-Indica. Acta Ant. Hung. 12 (1964) 18.

²¹ J. MARKWART: A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānshahr. Roma 1931. 10, J. MAKRWART: Wehrot und Arang. Leiden 1938. 143 foll.

town of *Navāčag* was built by Spandiyād, the son of Vištāsp". The Middle Persian form *Navāčag* also goes back to Old Iranian **Navāthyaka*-.

The third occurrence of this place-name can be found in the geographical work of Pseudo-Mowes Xorenac'i in the form *Dzi Navāzak*, which is borrowed from a Middle Persian phrase *Dīz-i Navāzag* "the fortress of Navāzag".²² In Middle Persian, from the form *Navāčag* developed *Navāzag* regularly.

Lastly, the fourth evidence comes from an enumeration of Ibn Ḥurradādbih which describes the route leading along the valley of the Surxan-darya.²³ This route started from Termez, from where at a distance of 6 farsaxs was Čarmangān, from there again at 6 farsaxs lay Dārzangī, then at 7 farsaxs was *B.rnǧī* which is unidentified so far. This place-name occurs, however, in the form *Naužān* in the Hudūd al-Ālam.²⁴ Taking into consideration that the final *ālif* and *nūn* could come into being by the break of the vertical stroke of a final *kāf*, we can restore the original, correct form of the place-name as **Naužak* or **Navažak*. This form could go back to the antecedent **Navāthyaka*- as well. As concerns the origin of this place-name, obviously, it is a compound, whose first component is Old Iranian *nava*- "new", while its second element is Old Iranian (Avestan) *aθā*- "habitation, settlement". Thus, the meaning of the place-name **Navāθaka*- > Greek *Naútaka* will be "New Settlement". In the case of the other data concerning this place-name, we have to start from the form **Navāthyaka*-, inasmuch as the suffixed form *aθya*- of the word *aθā*- forms the base of the compound.

According to the enumeration of Ibn Ḥurradādbih, *Naužak* ~ *Navažak* (= *Naútaka*) lay at a distance of 19 farsaxs (= c. 106 kilometres) from Termez, somewhat to the north of present-day Šurči, at a place from where the pass, leading through the Barsun-tau, the "Iron Gate" of Central Asia was easy to access. At this place is the gorodišče Dalverzin-tepa lies today, where Albaum and Pugačenkova²⁵ executed archaeological excavations. On the basis of their results, this fortress dates back to the beginnings of the Hellenistic Age.²⁶ Accordingly, it may belong to the group of cities, founded by Alexander. In any case, the Macedonian king had chosen the valley of the Surxan-darya with an excellent sense for his strategic line-of-communications area. This is the sole valley of the right-side tributaries of the Amu-darya forming a plain c. 60 kilometres broad which could provide the Macedonian troops with agricultural products. From strategic viewpoint, Nautaka was an excellent military base as well, because the Barsun-tau mountains provided shelter from the unexpected raids of the Iranian nomadic Dahae and at the same time the pass *Dar-i Āhanīn*, the "Iron Gate" insured easy access to the more important Sogdian cities.

From among the Sogdian settlements, mentioned in the relation of Arrian, *Kyropolis* and *Alexandreia Eschate* have already been discussed above. The rest,

²² J. MARQUART: *Ērānšahr*. Berlin 1901 82.

²³ V. MINORSKY: *Hudūd al-Ālam*. "The Regions of the World". A Persian geography 372 A. H.-982 A. D. Translated and Explained by ~. Oxford-London 1937. 313.

²⁴ V. MINORSKY: *op. cit.* 114.

²⁵ Г. А. ПУГАЧЕНКОВА: *Халчаян*. Ташкент 1966. 23 foll.

²⁶ Г. А. ПУГАЧЕНКОВА: *op. cit.* 22 foll.

Γάζα and *Βαγαί*, could have been identified by earlier historical research as well. *Gaza* was one of the seven Sogdian settlements, kept by the revolting Sogdians (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* IV. 2.). From the report of Arrian it becomes clear that *Gaza* was lying between *Kyropolis* and the Sir-darya river. This settlement existed even in the Middle Ages, it was called *Γαζακ* and its exact geographical location was indicated by the Arab geographers. It was lying at a distance of 6 farsaxs from Xoğand.²⁷

As concerns *Βαγαί*, Arrian (*Anab. Alex.* IV. 17,4) describes it as follows: ...ἐς Βαγάς, χωρίον τῆς Σογδιανῆς ὀχυρόν, ἐν μεθορίῳ τῆς τε Σογδιανῶν γῆς καὶ τῆς Μασσαγετῶν Σκυθῶν ὀκισμένον. On the basis of this passage, it is doubtless that *Βαγαί* lay on the western frontier of Sogdiana in the neighbourhood of Buxāra. Consequently, it can be identified with the medieval settlement of Fağdiz or Fağāndiz (< Sogdian Bay-diz or Bayān-diz "Fortress of Bay or Bayān"), mentioned by the Arab geographers²⁸ as lying somewhat to the north-west of Buxāra.

The name *Ὀρξάντης* of the Sir-darya may be particularly interesting from the viewpoint of Iranian dialectology. *Ὀρξάντης*, reflecting an Iranian prototype **Vorχšānt* or **Vorχšānd*, may go back to an Old Iranian form *Varu-χšayant*- "ruling over wide (land)" and be connected with the ethnic name *Ξάνθιοι* or *Ξάνδιοι* (Strabo 438 and 442,5 < Old Iranian **χšayant*- "ruling, royal"), the name of a Daha tribe, nomadizing to the north of Lake Aral. Thus, on the basis of its phonological development, *Ὀρξάντης* (**Vorχšant*-) may be the Daha name of the Sir-darya river.

The reliability of the reports concerning the campaign into Central Asia, recorded by Alexander's historians and preserved by Arrian and other Greek authors, is proved beyond any doubt by the linguistic and historical analysis of the topographical data. The study of the Sogdian proper names, preserved similarly by Arrian and Strabo in connection with Alexander's campaign, can also confirm this result. *Χορήνης* (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* IV. 21.), the name of a Sogdian landlord, can be explained as a Sogdian compound **xwr-y'n*, consisting of the Sogdian words *xwr* "sun" and *y'n* "favour", hence **Xvaryān* "Having the favour of the Sun". *Σισιμίθρης* (Strabo, 443, 52), the name of another Sogdian landlord, reflecting a Sogdian form **Šišimiθra*-, is again a compound whose first component may be Sogdian **šiš*- "to adhere, stick, cling, be devoted" (cf. Saka *šāš*-, *šiš*- "to adhere"²⁹ < Old Iranian *sray/sri-s*-), while its second element is the name of the god Miθra. Accordingly, the meaning of this proper name is "Devoted to Miθra". The third Sogdian proper name *Ἀριαμάζης* (Strabo, 443, 54) may be the Greek transcription of a Sogdian form **Aryamazda*-, whose meaning might have been "Noble Wisdom" or "Having noble wisdom".

On the other hand, the name of the Scythian leader *Σατράκης*, killed in the battle, fought against Alexander beyond the Sir-darya, reflects a Saka form **Šatrak* or **Šaθrag* which goes back to Old Iranian **Xšaθra-ka*-, being an abridged form of Old Iranian **χšaθra-pati*- "commander". The phonemic change *xš*- > *š*- points to a proper name of Saka origin.

²⁷ W. BARTHOLD: op. cit. 167.

²⁸ W. BARTHOLD: op. cit. 123.

²⁹ H. W. BAILEY: op. cit. 410.

The historical importance of Alexander's campaign into Central Asia can be seen in the fact that in his person ancient civilization came up for the first time against the equestrian nomads of Eurasia, and the experience, obtained in the course of this conflict, determined its behaviour and defence against them for a millennium. It was Alexander the Great who took the first step in Central Asia to construct the mighty system of *limes*, stretching from the Atlantic through Eurasia as far as the East China Sea.

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities
H-1364 Budapest P.O. Box 107