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 110. Simpson and Herrmann, 141.
 111. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs*, p. 139f.
 112. Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, p. 143.

WOMEN IN PRE-ISLAMIC CENTRAL ASIA: THE KHATUN OF BUKHARA

Richard N. Frye

Despite the paucity of sources, archaeologists in Central Asia have uncovered representations of the female form in cult objects and on coins, inferring an elevated status for at least elite women.

It is very difficult to write about the ancient history of Central Asia because of the extreme lack of information, and to find out about women in this place and time is almost impossible. Since written records are not found until the aftermath of the conquests of Alexander of Macedonia (c. 334-23 BC), and are then exceedingly rare and consist of only a sentence or two, we must rely on archaeology to tell us something from which we have to interpolate. Although the remarks below are highly impressionistic, it is to be hoped that at the least they may give a few indications about life for women in ancient Central Asia. General remarks will be based on the rare finds of material culture and on general theories about ancient societies. These remarks will serve as a prelude to the story of the queen of Bukhara.

In prehistoric Central Asia, large quantities of clay "mother goddess" figurines have been found in excavations, some of them crude, but others quite artistic.¹ Not only have figurines been found, but also moulds for their mass production, indicating that their popularity was extensive in Central Asia. The exact importance and meaning of the figurines can only be surmised, but obviously they had religious significance. Whether these figurines were peculiar to Central Asia or similar to objects found elsewhere in the Eurasian world is not germane to the subject of this paper, but presumably the concept of a "mother goddess" was widespread in both paleolithic and neolithic times (see figure 1). Because of this phenomenon, a

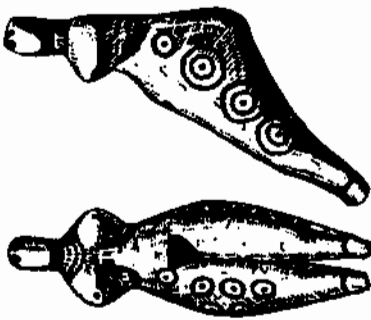


Figure 1: Female Figure from Yalagach, Turkmenistan; Namazga II period. From *Central Asia* by V.M. Masson and V.I. Sarjanidi. Copyright 1972, © Thames and Hudson Ltd. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

simplistic but appealing theory has developed about the nature of the society of prehistoric peoples, which presumably would also apply to our area.²

In essence, the theory proposes that society in prehistoric times was primarily matriarchal. The main concern of people then was the quest for freedom from want. In a tribe, clan, or extended family, the chief occupation of the male members was hunting and gathering food so that it could survive. Since men at times lost their lives in hunting, or in accidents, continuity for the family rested with the female members who gave birth to future leaders of the group, and who "held the fort," so to speak, when the men were gone.

With the development of agriculture, in what has been described as a "neolithic revolution," followed by irrigation, which expanded the arable land, hunting and gathering no longer remained the chief source of food for the family, clan, or tribe. Women assumed considerable burdens of care for the fields and for society in general. With more time available for themselves, men turned from hunting game to hunting their fellow men, and the search for freedom from want became a quest for freedom from fear. Quarrels over land and water, and then wars, emerged in Central Asia. No longer are great numbers of female figurines, with stylistic and exaggerated physical

features, to be found in archaeological excavations, but when female figures are portrayed, whether representing a goddess or a mortal woman, they show a woman not as the procreator of the race, or as a mother figure, but rather as an object of beauty. One may assume that at this time the matriarchy changed into a patriarchy. From such meager finds of archaeology, we also may assume a change in the status of women as a result of the coming of patriarchs as defenders of the family, clan, or tribe against enemies, rather than as mere leaders of bands of hunting men seeking to find enough food for all.

Complementing the above remarks is the suggestion that the sequence just mentioned had a parallel in religious development from polytheism to monolatry and finally to monotheism, which ended with "our father who art in heaven," rather than "our mother." Be that as it may, it is apparent that many aspects of society became more and more male-dominated, even though in the realm of religion echoes of the ancient revered position of the mother goddess continued to reverberate, as found in the ancient Elamite religion,³ in Hinduism and, much later, in the cult of the Virgin Mary in medieval Christendom. We may suspect that a similar process occurred in Central Asia in ancient times. A female feature in various mythologies around the world was the concept of earth as "mother earth," but this raises another fascinating and extensive debate which will not be discussed here.

Admittedly, these views are both speculative and simplistic, but they appear reasonable and not contradictory to any conclusion drawn from the evidence of the figurines, or the apparent development of settled society in Central Asia from the fifth or sixth millennium BC to historic times. For Central Asia, history begins with the Achaemenid Empire in the sixth century BC, even though that history may be described not as a whole cloth with many holes, but rather as fragments of a net which hardly even fit together.⁴ Let us turn from these general remarks, however, to more tangible evidence for reconstructing a picture of women in this vast area in ancient times.

It should be mentioned that in ancient Iran, and presumably also in Central Asia, goddesses played an independent role in the hierarchy of deities and not simply as consorts of the gods. The most prominent of the goddesses of the Iranian peoples was Anahita, who not only was a

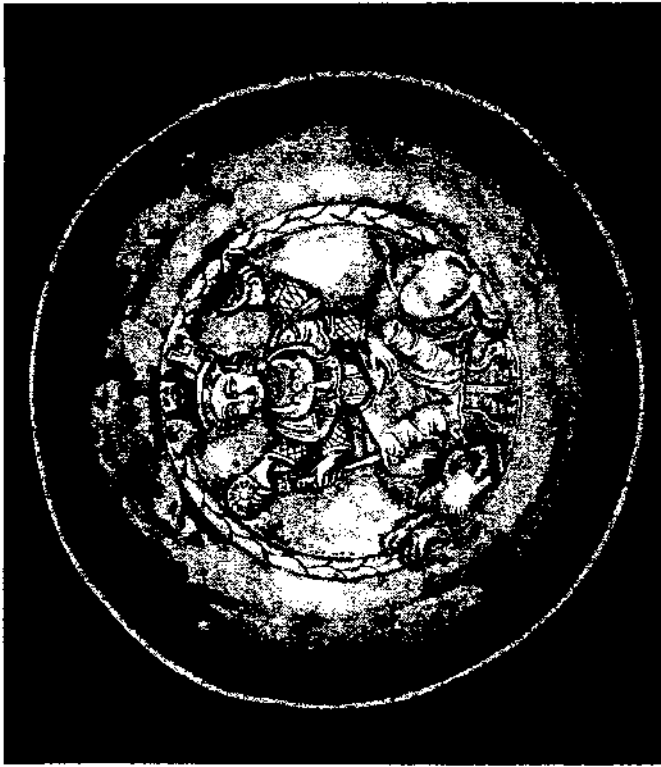


Figure 2: The goddess Nanaia or Ardoxsho [Anahita?]. The bottom of a silver bowl, provenance unknown, possibly Sogdian. Courtesy of The British Museum.

counterpart of Aphrodite in the Classical pantheon, but also seems to have absorbed features of the Semitic or Babylonian Ishtar.⁵ Anahita had a Yasht, or chapter, of the Avesta dedicated to her, and in it she is portrayed as beautiful, riding in a chariot, and aggressive in nature. Another female deity mentioned in the Avesta was Ashi, also in a chariot but not as fierce as Anahita (see figure 2).⁶ Again, it is not my intention to describe the ancient Iranian female deities, who also prevailed in Central Asia, but merely to indicate a change in the nature of the goddesses, probably the result of the invasion and spread of the Iranians over Central Asia and the plateau which bears their name. Inasmuch as the Indo-Iranians or Aryans were warlike, as we gather from the Rigveda and the Avesta, so their deities assumed a more martial aspect than the deities of the native peoples, such as the Elamites and Mannans on the plateau and the Dravidians in the sub-continent. Furthermore, they may have had to fight harder in conquering their future homelands than other Indo-European speakers in sparsely-populated Europe.

The conquest of Central Asia by Alexander of Macedonia opened the area to Hellenistic influences and contacts which were to provide more information about the history of that part of the world, although our sources are still most meager. Until the coming of the Arabs and Islam, our main sources for the past of Central Asia are the coins of the Bactrian Greeks and their successors.⁷ Not only are goddesses shown on some of these coins, but also at times queens, either together with their husbands or as sole rulers. The most noted of the last was a queen called Agathocleia, who probably assumed a sole rule after her husband's death in the second half of the second century BC.

Unfortunately, the identification of most of the Greco-Bactrian rulers is difficult, and the dates of their reigns are unknown and subject to speculation. The majority of the female figures on the coinage, however, were Greek goddesses. Since, however, the Bactrian kingdom at times extended into India, we later find Indian deities portrayed on the coins as well as Greek and Iranian. The Indian goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, as well as Sarasvati, goddess of music, are found on various coins from the northwest of the sub-continent, and presumably the Bactrian Greeks in a process of syncretization honored these local deities even if they did not identify them with their own.

It is interesting that Saka rulers, such as Maues and Azes, who succeeded the Bactrian Greeks, placed the Greek goddesses Niké and Pallas Athena on some of their coins,⁸ while the Kushans, who followed them, mostly chose Iranian deities like Nanaia and Ardoxsho whenever they included goddesses on their coinage, although they too did not neglect Greek and Indian deities.⁹ What conclusions may one draw from the coinage?

We may suppose that the important position of queens, attested among Hellenistic rulers to the west, also obtained in Central Asia. Likewise, the importance of goddesses in the pantheons of both Greeks and Iranians, as revealed on their coins, was current in Central Asia. Furthermore, after the demise of the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms, their successors seem to have maintained in some fashion this tradition. But what of the common folk? Was the position of women any better under the nomadic successors of the Greco-Bactrians? Under the Sakas, Kushans and other invaders from the north, such as the Hephthalites, with an even worse situation in regard to sources than that for the Greco-Bactrians, we can only guess at an answer

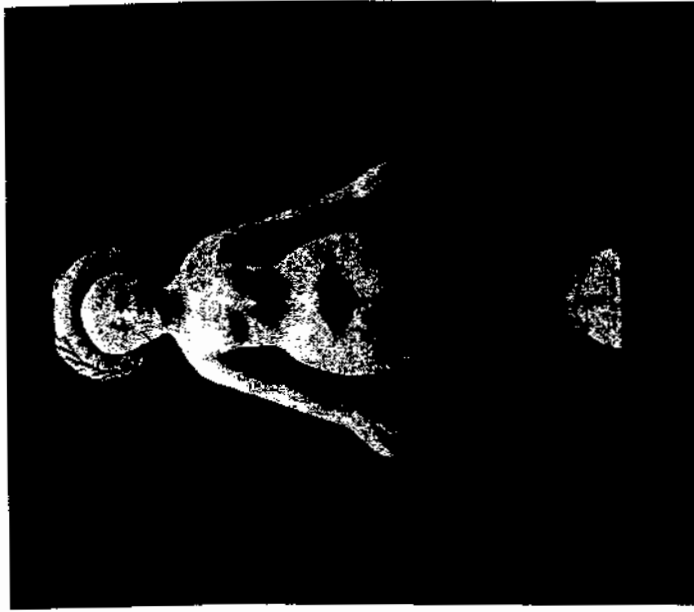


Figure 3: *Fertility Goddess. Early Kusan period, Gandhara, reportedly Charsada, 1st century AD. Terra cotta, H 26.7 cm. ©The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1977-58.*

to this question, based on general observations and on sparse notices in Chinese dynastic histories.

It should be noted that the production of small clay female figurines (see figures 3 and 4) continued down to the Arab invasions of Central Asia in the seventh century. Before that time, however, we find a number of female figurines, each holding a mirror in her hand, and sometimes a goblet instead of a mirror. The mirror goddesses, if they may be so called, seem to have been current in the Kushan period of the first few centuries of our era, and such figures have been found in some quantity especially in the oasis of Merv and elsewhere. Again, the meaning of these figurines is enigmatic and open to speculation, but we may suppose that a religious significance is probable. The Kushans were nomads before they settled in Bactria, and nomads had different concepts of women than did settled folk.



Figure 4: *Kneeling Figure. Afghanistan; 4th-5th century. Stucco with traces of pigment. H 12 1/8 in. (30.8 cm) 1979.4. Courtesy of The Asia Society (New York), Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Photography by Lynton Gardiner.*

Inasmuch as nomads led a hardy life, in many ways similar to the prehistoric hunters and gatherers, we may assume that nomadic women were more important in society than their settled sisters. For nomadic women even had to assume leadership in combat if their husbands were killed. It is no wonder that legends about the Amazons related to the Caucasus region, or even to Central Asia, rather than to more settled areas (see figure 5). Even today, nomadic women do not wear veils in Iran and Afghanistan, as do sedentary women in towns and villages, and everywhere they are more independent than the womenfolk of settled regions. They not only assumed positions of leadership and authority, but also in their social position they seem to have had greater freedom than their urban sisters. Several features of society in the centuries before the Arab conquest suggest this.

It is only in ancient Central Asia, presumably among nomads or possibly mountaineers, that we hear of polyandry, whereas everywhere

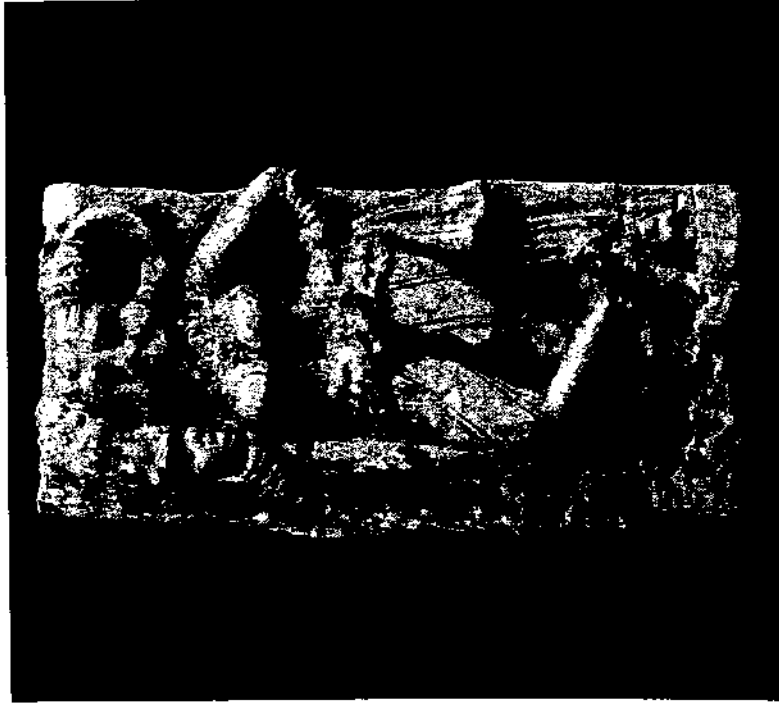


Figure 5: *Young Woman with a Spear. India, Begram, Kushan period, 1st-2nd centuries. Ivory, 9 x 3.8 cm. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Fund, 1985.106.*

else in the settled realms polygamy reigned. The post-Han dynastic histories of China tell of the practice of polyandry among the Hephthalites. Whether this was widespread or simply restricted to the ruling stratum, as was the practice of binding the heads of male infants to make their skulls elongated and deformed, is unknown. Chinese sources did, however, comment on the important position of women among the barbarians of Central Asia. Just what this meant, however, is not explained. When we remember that Cyrus II, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, was killed in 530 or 529 B.C. by the forces of a Saka queen (Tomyris, widow of a chieftain of the Massagetae), we understand that the ability of women to lead men in battle was not the least of the characteristics of elite nomadic woman.¹⁰

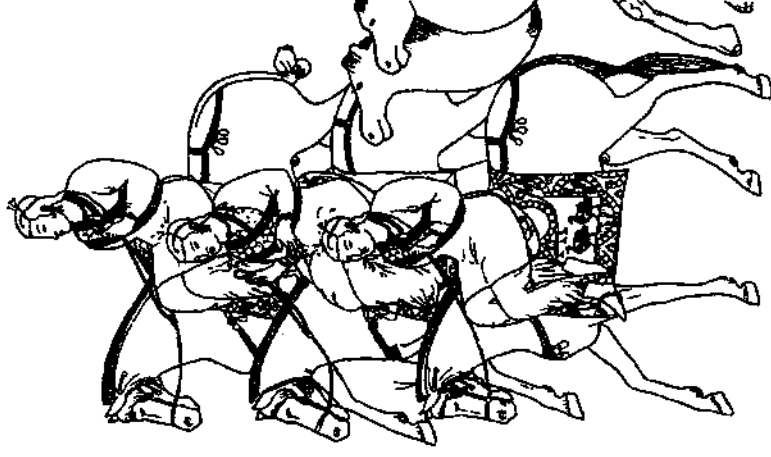


Figure 6: *Horsewomen Riding in the Embassy. Sogdian figures from Afrasiab near Samarkand.*

Lest the impression be conveyed that all women in ancient Central Asia enjoyed an honored and privileged position in society, another side of the coin may be inferred. Girls and young women were bought and sold as slaves more frequently than were males, except perhaps for male prisoners of war after surrender. One small index of the inferior position of women with respect to men is a comparison of the costumes worn by both sexes, as revealed in wall paintings from various pre-Islamic sites in Central Asia. The elaborate textiles used for the clothes of men contrasts starkly with the more simple attire of the presumably upper-class women represented in paintings (see figures 6 through 9).

On the other hand, if we compare the legal position of women in Zoroastrian law with earlier and later practices, there is no doubt



Figure 7: Sogdian figures from Afrasiab near Samarkand.

that it was superior to women in later Islamic law, especially regarding inheritance. In such matters, the loosely-organized local Zoroastrianism of Central Asia was similar to the centralized and hieratic Zoroastrian church of Iran. Obviously, however, in both Zoroastrianisms, a concubine would not command either as much respect or as much influence as a chief wife in polygamous societies of Iranian or Central Asian towns. Female children were considered as chattels to be bought and sold rather than as individuals with rights. Only occasionally did an exceptional woman rise to a position of authority. In Central Asia, the most prominent woman in early history was called the *Khātūn* of Bukhara in Arabic sources relating the conquest of Central Asia by the Muslims.¹¹ The word has been claimed as Turkic in origin, but also as the Sogdian word for queen or lady [wife of a lord].¹²

Tales were related about this woman such that there developed what may be termed a "*Khātūn* legend" attached to the early Islamic raids into the land across the Amu Darya. The great Islamic historian *Ṭabarī* did not even mention her as a sovereign ruler, only noting that a certain *Qabaj Khātūn* was the wife of the ruler of Bukhara in the year 54/674. In effect, *Ṭabarī* rejects the story of a ruling queen

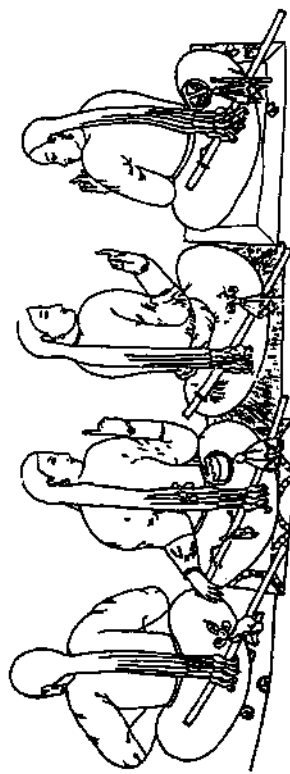


Figure 8: Sogdian figures from Afrasiab near Samarkand.

of Bukhara at the time of the Arab conquests, and because of the authority of *Ṭabarī*, modern scholars have tended to dismiss the story of the *Khātūn* as a fabrication. There is no doubt that a legend developed about the *Khātūn* of Bukhara, but the question remains whether there is any truth in the accounts of her, the most detailed of which exists in the Persian translation of an Arabic history of Bukhara by *Narshakhi*.¹³ Let us briefly examine his account.

When a ruler of Bukhara called *Bidūn* died, his son *Tughshāda* was an infant, so that his mother the *Khātūn* acted as regent and ruler for fifteen years. She ruled wisely, but during her reign the Arabs came to Bukhara. The Arab general, *ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād*, defeated the forces of the *Khātūn* in 53-54/673-74 and took both tribute and prisoners.¹⁴ The next year, *Saʿīd b. ʿUthmān* led another raid into the oasis of Bukhara and was also successful in obtaining booty and hostages. Several stories are related about the *Khātūn*, about how she became enamoured of *Saʿīd*, and about how when he became sick she brought him two old dares as medicine, whereupon he loaded several camels with dates and sent them to her.¹⁵ Another story tells how some nobles of Bukhara were opposed to *Tughshāda*, saying he was not the son of *Bidūn* but a bastard,

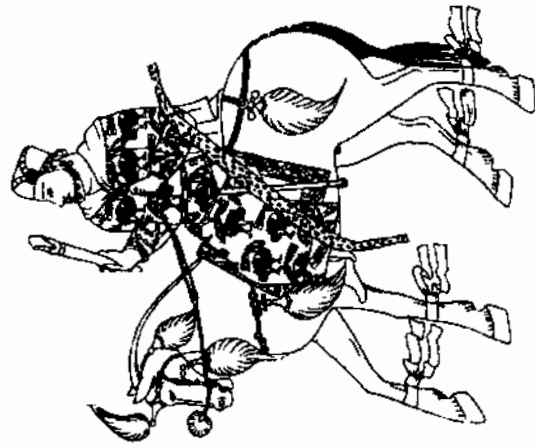


Figure 9: *The Rider at the Embassy's Head. Sogdian figure from Afrasiab near Samarkand.*

whereupon the *Khātūn* sent them as hostages to Sa'īd who took them to Medina.¹⁶

Although several scholars have denounced the story of *Khātūn's* rule as inconsistent with the chronology of the history of Bukhara during the period of the Arab raids, there is no reason to suppose that she and her rule were simple fabrications. First, stories are not invented unless to prove some point, political or otherwise, and the historians Balāghūrī and Ya'qūbī, who mention the *Khātūn*, would have no motive for creating a legend. Second, such a woman hardly would be praised if she had not been capable and wise. Admittedly, *Tughshāda* would have had to have had a long life from the early 670s to the time of the last Umayyad governor of Khurasan, Naṣr b. Sayyār (121/738), but it is not impossible. Olga Sminova proposes a son of *Tughshāda* with the same name to fill the time-gap, based on coins which are different, but in my opinion this explanation is not necessary.¹⁷ In any case, I see no need to reject the historicity of *Khātūn* even though some of the details of stories about her may be fabricated or exaggerated.

Perhaps the best tribute to this queen of Central Asia was the remark by *Narshakhī* that "it was said that in her time there was no

one more capable than she. She governed wisely and the people were obedient to her."¹⁸

NOTES

1. On the figurines, see the writings of V.A. Meshkeris, especially her *Koroplastika Sogda* (Dushambe: Donish, 1977). See also V.M. Masson and V.I. Sarianidi, *Central Asia: Turkmenia before the Achaemenids* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1972), plate 9, female figurine from Dashlidj-depe (Namazga I period); plate 10, female figurine from Yalangach-depe (Namazga II period); plates 26-29, female figurines from Kara-depe (Namazga III period); and plate 42, female figurine from Altrin-depe (Namazga V period).
2. This theory is particularly associated with the writings of Marija A. Gimbutas. For example, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 B.C., Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); and *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).
3. For the feminine element in Elamite religion, see Jack M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995) vol. 2, pp. 1029-30, and vol. 3, pp. 1959-64.
4. For surveys of ancient Central Asia, see David Bivar in *Central Asia*, ed. Gavin Hambly (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 19-62; and Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia: From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996). For more detailed discussion, see Denis Sinor, ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and vols. 1-3 of the *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1992-96).
5. See M. Boyce, M.L. Chaumont, and C. Bier, s.v. "Anāhid," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 1003-11. For an example of a terracotta statuette of the goddess, see A. L. Mongait, *Archaeology in the USSR* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) plate 17a. This statuette was discovered in pre-Islamic Afrasiab (ancient Samarkand), where moulds were also discovered for mass-producing the statuettes. Similar statuettes have been found in nearby Tali-Barzu. See also V.A. Meshkeris, *Terrakoty Samarqandskogo muzeia* (Leningrad: Institut istorii imeni Akhmada Donisha Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoi SSR, Gosudatstvennyi Ermitazh, 1962).
6. B. Schlerath and P.O. Skjaervø, s.v. "Asi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 2, pp. 750-51.
7. W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 1951); and A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

8. See John M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Art of the Kushans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), plates XIV and XV, no. 267, goddess Niké [Maues]; no. 269, goddess Athena [Azēs I]; no. 271, goddess Demeter [Azēs II]; no. 273, goddess Tyche (?) [Azilises]; and no. 280, goddess Athena (?) [Gondophares], and pages 121–37. See also P. Gardner, *Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British Museum: Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India* (London: British Museum, 1886).

9. Rosenfield, pp. 60–103.

10. Herodotus, I: 105–16. Among celebrated Central Asian women of antiquity were Roxana, daughter of the Bactrian chieftain Oxyartes, whom Alexander the Great married and who bore him his heir, and Apama, daughter of the Sogdian chieftain Spitamenes, whom Seleucus married. These Macedonian marriages with women from the Iranian farther east were probably intended as acts of political reconciliation. See W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 326. Celebrated in a rather different way was the queen of Khotan, 'the desired one,' who played a part in the surreptitious acquisition by Khotan of silk-worms from China and whom Sir Harold Bailey assumed to be a Saka. Harold W. Bailey, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1982), p. 5; but see also M. Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), vol. 1, pp. 229–30, and vol. 2, plate 63.

11. H. A. R. Gibb, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia* (London, 1923; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970); and R. N. Frye, s.v. "Bukhara," 31(2), vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–), pp. 1293–96.

12. I. Gershevitch, *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 18, para. 133, and B. Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary* (Teheran: Farhang Publications, 1995), p. 440, no. 10825. K. Shiratori, "The Title *Katun*," *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 1 (1926): 34–39, argues for an East Asian origin. See also R. N. Frye, *The History of Bukhara, Translated from a Persian Abridgement of the Arabic Original by Narshakhi* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1954), n. 38, pp. 110–11. [Hereafter, *Narshakhi*].

13. See Frye, above.

14. *Narshakhi*, pp. 9–10 and 37–38.

15. *Narshakhi*, pp. 38–40.

16. *Narshakhi*, p. 39.

17. O. I. Smirnova, *Ocherki iz istorii Sogda* (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR. Institut vostokovedeniya, 1970), p. 279, where the Arabic, Chinese, and Sogdian sources are correlated.

18. *Narshakhi*, p. 9.

ZAYNAB BINT 'ALI AND THE PLACE OF THE WOMEN OF THE HOUSEHOLDS OF THE FIRST IMAMS IN SHI'ITE DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE

David Pinault

This chapter analyzes portraits of Zaynab and other women from Shi'ite sacred history in sources ranging from medieval devotional literature to contemporary lamentation-poetry recited in annual Muharram rituals.

Shi'ite devotional literature of both the medieval and modern eras shows particular reverence for a number of women belonging to the family of the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'ite Imāms. All these women are associated in one way or another with the occurrence perceived by Shi'ites as pivotal in world history: the death of the Imām Husayn, grandson of the Prophet, at the battle of Karbala (which took place in the year 680 AD). Appreciation of the devotional portrait of the women of *āhl al-bayt* [the Prophet's family and his descendants] requires some familiarity with the seventh-century conflicts that culminated at Karbala.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CALIPHATE

Left unsettled at the death of Muhammad in 632 was the question of succession to leadership of the Islamic community: to whom should power devolve, and how should a ruler's qualifications be determined? One party favored the process of election by a circle of councillors and community leaders; the other espoused the cause of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, cousin of the Prophet, who had married the Prophet's daughter Fātima. The latter group referred to themselves as *shī'at 'Alī* ['Alid partisans/supporters of 'Alī'] or simply as *al-shī'ā*. They maintained that the Prophet himself, guided by divine