



The Chivalry Culture of Great Khorāsān in the 8th-9th Centuries

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Abstract

The article reviews chivalry traditions, developed in ancient Iran, and their transition and transformation to the country's post-Islamic history. The author analyses the cultural mechanisms, which provided this movement, and argues that its roots and prerequisites should have taken place in Great Khorāsān at the very turn of the 'Abbāsīd revolt in the middle of the century CE. This was a period when an external call activated forces and facilities, preserved in the stratum of Iranian knights, to become the basis for the later military evolution within the new circumstances. The cultural importance of Khorāsān for the Iranian state and rule at the turn of the Muslim era is reflected in written texts. The early muslim period in Great Khorāsān was a special time as Iranian predominance mingled with multicultural traditions in the boundary region. The topic is presented in a wide context including Iransian literary, artistic, and artisanal sources, helping to visualize the historical background of Iran. This is based on philosophical doctrines for Iranian cultural development proposed by contemporary scholars.

Keywords: Great Khorāsān, Marv, Chivalry Culture, Descent, Crucible Steel, Banner, Innovativeness.



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Introduction

An outstanding Russian scholar, Sharif M. Shukurov in one of his last books, “Khorāsān. The territory of Art”/ “Horasan. Territotiya iskusstva”, sheds new light on Iranian Royal art by stating and proving it to be a reduced image of a large and holistic style of chivalry art (Shukurov, 2016: 69). Thus, he refers to the complexity of problems, ideas, and features of the culture of knighthood in Iran, which along with poetry, philosophy, science, and art was one the most prominent constituent elements of Eastern Iranian culture on the territory of Khorāsān. As one of the most intriguing areas of investigation in the field of Iranian studies, Khorāsān has received much attention from different scholars, whose works laid the basis for understanding it as a cultural concept and phenomenon of the so-called Great Khorāsān rather than a political union or a region (Rante et al., 2020). Admittedly, in different times Khorāsān province comprised greater lands on the north-eastern part of Iran, western and southern parts of Central Asia, and the territories of modern Afghanistan, but the borders of this vast region were never firmly fixed and territory boundaries depended on the military strength of those who ruled Iran. The traditions and lifestyles of peoples, inhabiting these lands both before and after the Arab invasion, contained a strong military tradition, which is reflected in the languages spoken there and is evident in historical accounts, in literary, artistic, and artisanal sources. So, it is a very evident and not the only reason to perceive the military concept as one of the main unifying forces in Great Khorāsān.

Shukurov discusses the topic of knighthood as a component of innovative concept and argues it to be immanent and crucial for Iranian culture in general. The scholar shows that the national chivalry discourse in post-Muslim Iran reached its apogee during the reign of the Sāmānids (875-999 CE). Their conceptual task was to forge the ethnical stratum and perspectives of the past, present, and future into tempered forms of poetry, philosophy, and art for the Iranian culture with a lasting impact formed after the Arab invasion (Shukurov, 2016: 49). The Sāmānid state managed to become an extremely important landmark in the history of Great Irān because, by that time, different aspects of Iranian culture were ready to take a new major step. In that state, the chivalry component, which was always a part of other cultural tendencies, performed an essential part in the process of development. The military affairs turned into a place, where already in the 8th century, features of the Iranian national culture arose for the first time after the Arab invasion with added vigor. The process happened on the north-eastern frontiers of the Muslim state, in the province of Khorāsān and nearby lands, which appeared to become the only place the proper context could be shaped.

The cultural importance of Khorāsān

The cultural importance of Khorāsān for the Iranian state and rule at the turn of the Muslim era is reflected in written texts, such as on the last days of Sāsānian shah Yazdagird (for the list of primary sources see: Marín-Guzmán, 1994). According to various legends

recorded in written sources such as al-Balādhuri's "Book of the Conquest of the Lands"/ "Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān" and al-Ṭabarī's "History of Prophets and Kings" /"Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk", Yazdagird fled to Khorāsān to assemble troops for fighting against those, who had been taking power in his realm (al-Balādhuri, 1916: 315-316; al-Ṭabarī, 1990: 2876). Coming to Marv with his ring, his baldric decorated with precious stones, his sword, and his royal diadem (al-Ṭabarī, 1990: 2872, 2882; al-Balādhuri 1916: 315-316), he was involved in military conflicts with the Eftalits or Turks (al-Ṭabarī, 1990: 2873; al-Balādhuri, 1916: 315-316). He also established the sacred Zoroastrian fire, erected a building for it, and organized a garden around it. Later, he was killed (al-Ṭabarī, 1994: 2682). Even these brief accounts constantly stress the military context in Khorāsān, and Marv with its fortified structure in particular, as an important place that was suitable for taking refuge, gathering an army, fighting against the enemies, and organizing the divine presence. All these prerequisites were necessary for an Iranian shah who was connected with Iranian national traditions, including the sacred ones. All these requirements could be found in this region, and even the legends themselves reflected the outstanding role of these events and practices within the Iranian culture in the early Muslim period, even mythologizing them (see: in this respect: Meletinsky, 1976). During Umayyad's reign (661-750 CE), Khorāsān acquired the formal status of a separate governorate in the state and preserved its position as an important military region. Its military forces were commanded by a special chief who was appointed by a caliph himself (Kennedy, 1999). Simultaneously, Marv was the capital of Umayyad Khorāsān and the seat of its governor from 673 to 830 CE, and it was also the base of military expeditions.

The early Muslim period in Great Khorāsān was a special time as Iranian predominance mingled with multicultural traditions in the boundary region. These traditions co-existed with the Arabic military culture and started to encounter the ideas and norms of Islam. A quite similar situation seems to have taken place on another border in the region, Irāq, where the Iranians, Greeks, and Arabs lived closely together and disputed the religious questions and where shu'ūbiya forces were strong. In some way, it also looked like the atmosphere in the South of the Arabian Peninsula in the 6th century, when members of the Iranian aristocracy settled in Yemen and were among the first Iranians to accept Islam (Khorasani 2006: 34). The Arabic military culture in Khorāsān was quite strong. It is understandable, as the ruling class was Arabic. The Arab population was large, as Umayyad Caliph Mu'āviya sent 50 thousand Arab warriors with their families to Marv, Nīshāpūr, Balkh, and other towns and villages (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 94). Obviously, the Arab warriors preserved their tribal organization, while the inter-tribal wars they were constantly engaged in, helped to maintain a link with their former home (Sharon, 1983: 68). Nevertheless, for the prevailing regional culture these Arab customs seem to have been quite extrinsic, and this became evident in the military affairs, as early as in the anti-Umayyad revolution started in 748 CE.

The revolt is associated primarily with Abū Muslim, though there had been other active participants before him (for detailed information see: Rante et al., 2020). As a native Iranian named Behzādan, Abū Muslim took part in an uprising in Khorāsān to establish a new Muslim rule under the Abbāsids (Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 34). Frequent rebels happened in the region during the Umayyad rule (see, for instance, al-Balādhuri, 1924: 413-418). The uprising of khavārij with its main seat in Sīstān in the 8th-9th centuries CE (Pigulevskaya, Yakubovsky, Petrushevsky 1958: 96) and other turbulent events (Rante et al., 2020) show that the local society was ready to accept this appeal (for detailed information, see: Sharon, 1983; Rante et al., 2020), although the foundation for the revolution had been laid by the two previous revolts in Kufa and Basra with Iranian participation (Zakeri, 1995: 227-228; Khorasani Moshtahg, 2006: 33). During the short-lived armed revolt in Khorāsān, Abū Muslim managed to gather an efficient army, attracting fighting forces united under the black standards and banners that were sent by the ‘Abbāsīd head Ibrāhīm ben Muhammad (Zhukovsky, 1894: 12; Rante et al., 2020). These forces, who had got their reasons to fight against the Muslim Arabic regime, were very different. Among the most numerous participants were peasants, consisting of both Muslims and non-Muslims (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 98; Rante et al., 2020). They were both Iranians and non-Iranians, mostly Turks and Arabs, including even the Yemenite troops (Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006:33). The latter troops had considered themselves Iranians since the time of Anūshīrvān (Zakeri, 1995: 255; Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 33). At the same time, between the Arabs, residing in the villages in Khorāsān, and the Persians there was a strong sense of solidarity, which gradually deepened in each succeeding generation (Sharon, 1983: 68). In this sense, such a solidarity is understandable, and Sharon referred to a passage from al-Jāhīz’s “Virtues of the Turks”/ “Manākib at-Turk” that the military men from Khorāsān who later came to Syria were recognized as “foreigners in their speech, their dress, their customs and very often in their outward appearance” (Sharon, 1983: 68). Another part of the revolting army consisted of the citizens of Marv, which like other cities was attractive for both the Arabs and the early non-Arab converts who tended to mingle closely with other Muslims. It also included tradesmen and artisans (Kennedy, 1999). It was the beginning of the process, which would become stronger later, in the 9-10th centuries CE, when lots of peasants who lacked lands moved to cities to search for job opportunities as artisans (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 104; Shukurov, 2016: 69).

In this respect, it is important to take into consideration that in Central Asia the majority of the tradesmen were Sogdians, who resided in Marv, as the ostraca found in Erk Kala and dated to the late Sasanian period contains texts in Sogdian (Herman et al., 1994). So, the Sogdians, who organized merchant corporations in the city (Nurulla-Khojaeva, 2017), lived in a prestigious quarter and were members of the aristocratic class, which was familiar with military culture. A famous 8th-century mural, known after Alexander

Belenitsky as “The merchants”, from a domestic sanctuary of a rich man’s dwelling in Panjikent (Room 10, Sector XVI) shows feasting people dressed in gorgeous Chinese silk garments and armed with small thin daggers (Fig. 1). The daggers are fastened to their belts together with purses, narrow cases, and small pieces of fabric (Expedition Silk Road 2014: 183).



Fig. 1: A fragment of a mural “Merchants feasting”, first half of the 8th century, Panjikent, Sogd, Room 10, Sector XVI, The State Hermitage museum collection, №CA-16216 (©The Hermitage copyrights).

The hilts of these daggers were represented with a thick layer of paint resembling rough ray skin. This is an indication of the status of the dagger wearer (Fig. 1A).

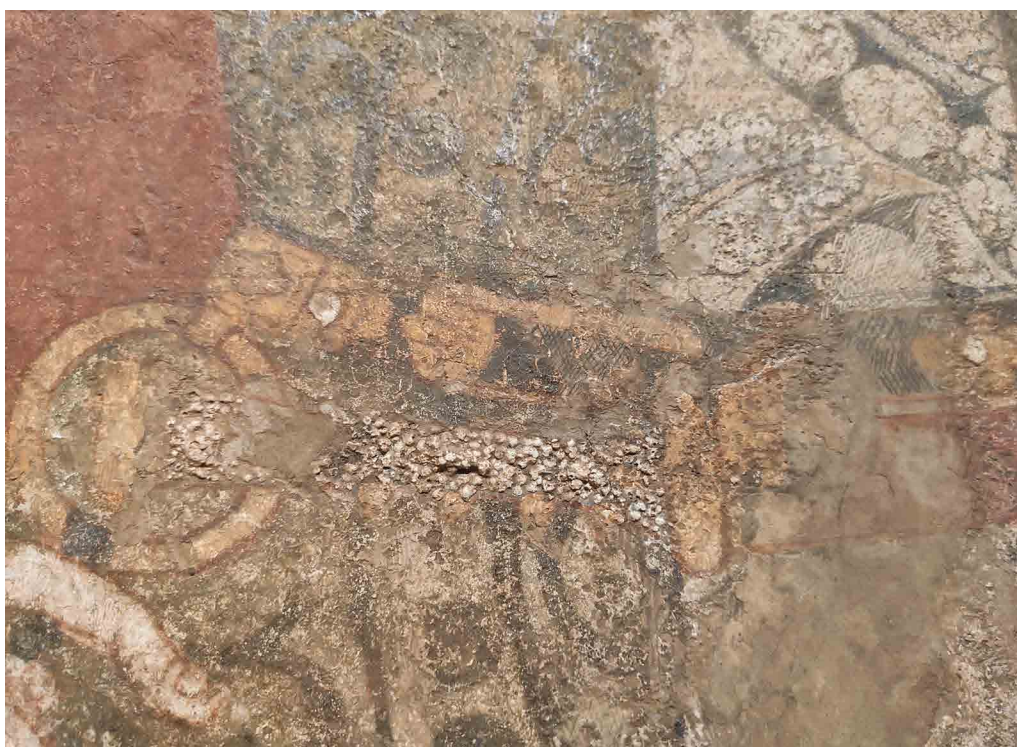


Fig. 1 A: A fragment of a mural “Merchants feasting”, first half of the 8th century, Panjikent, Sogd, Room 10, Sector XVI, The State Hermitage museum collection, №CA-16216. Detail (©The Hermitage copyrights).

Besides, their belts are ornamented with yellow elements representing golden plaques. These were signs of aristocratic society in Sogdiana. It is important to take into account that in the Sogdian culture “Royal life” was treated not in terms of “official grandeur, but as a reflection of the luxurious life of affluent men”, while the artists served the demands and interests of a martial and aristocratic society (Azarpay, 1981: 27, 102). In later times, the Sogdians kept their privileged position, as they were among those, who converted to Islam quite early, in the 7th century CE. They continued to belong to the high classes of society and were appointed along with the Arabs and Persians (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 99) as heads of units in the Abū Muslim’s army (Nurulla-Khojaeva, 2017). The Sogdians were experts in making weaponry: among the swords used in Central Asia and the Middle East, there was a type called the *sughdī* (pers. ‘Sogdian’), which was single-edged (al-Sarraf, 2002), while the Sogdian mail armor presented to a Chinese emperor at the beginning of the 8th century CE, was taken as a base in the Chinese army equipment (Nurulla-Khojaeva, 2017). So the Sogdians were among those, who constituted the upper classes of early Muslim society, the very same aristocratic chivalry (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 98), called *aspbarān* in Persian. Literary the word means ‘horse leaders’, and the Sogdians were famous for horse breeding and selling them mostly to China at the turn of the 8th century CE. In China, they were called “heavenly horses” and regarded as the symbols of the Chinese emperor’s power (Mukhammadiev, 2018).

The *aspbarān* and *āzādegān*

The image of *aspbarān* is brilliantly reflected in the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, where they were praised for courage and bravery after their triumph in Yemen, and hence, among the Arabs this word seems to have denoted a hero, and it is understandable why they attracted attention of new Arabic rulers (Zakeri, 1995: 98). Simultaneously, the term *aspbar* acquired another meaning, *dihqān* (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 98), that is ‘a member of minor landed gentry’ (Livshiz, 1990), or even more often ‘a big landlord’ (Materiali po istorii turkmen i Turkmenii, 1939: 69), who after the Arab invasion converted to Islam in order to preserve their social status or even reach a higher status in comparison with the previous times (Zakeri, 1995: 98; Tafazzoli, 2000: 48). In the early Muslim times, a distinct high-rank social group emerged who probably primarily obeyed pro forma the norms of Islam and at the same time continued to regard themselves as bearers of old Iranian noble traditions, naturally incorporating military aspects of those traditions. The Sogdians were active participants of the group, and in this respect, it is understandable that the all walls of the audience hall of the richest house in Panjikent, the famous “blue room” (Room 41, Sector VI), dated to around 740 CE, was decorated with scenes of knighthood (see: Fig. 2).

It shows among the rest the exploits of Rostam that were circulated in Sogdia in prose as it is understandable from the surviving text from Tung-Huang, probably, dated



Fig. 2: A fragment of a mural of “Blue Room”, Ca. 740, Panjikent, Sogd, Room 41, Sector VI, The State Hermitage museum collection (©The Hermitage copyrights).

to the post-Islamic period, written in the Sogdian language (Azarpay, 1981: 95-97). There was a separate cycle of these narrated stories in Eastern Iran in the pre-Islamic period (Shukurov, 2016: 72), while Panjikent itself was a city of not only commercial importance, but military and political significance as well (Azarpay, 1981: 95-97).

Simultaneously, Iranian knights called themselves *āzādegān*, literally meaning ‘the freeman’ (for more details, see: Zakeri, 1995: 30, 44, 101-112). In this respect, Shukurov states that it is noteworthy that the idea of *āzādī*, pers. ‘freedom’, and being born into this social stratum was a crucial factor and a sign of civilization for the Iranians (Shukurov, 2016: 69). The *āzādegān* embodied the entire national idea of a free warrior, strong, clever and brave, whose life consisted of feats and feasts, pers. *razm-o-bazm*. Hence, the members of this group joined the Abū Muslim’s army. They did not merely represent the pre-Islamic Iranian national culture, which was strong in the times of the Sāsānid dynasty and continued to be strong in the time of the revolt, but they showed it in the new historical context, pinpointing the new religion that seems to have been of special importance for Abū Muslim. Whatever Abū Muslim’s concrete religious consideration and the truth of his background were, it is doubtless that he was seriously and sincerely *amīr al-Mohammad*, as he called himself on coins minted in 748 CE in Nīshāpūr after he had left Marv (Rante et al., 2020). He managed not only to find new forces to support a new-coming establishment bringing the members of the Persian sect of *khurramīyya* to his army (Marín-Guzmán, 1994), but he also founded an independent state with its new religious concept. Abū Muslim offered the power in the state first to the sixth Imām of Shiites, Ja’far al-Šādiq, and when he was rejected, he gave it to ‘Abbāsīd Abū ‘Abbās ‘Abd Allah Safah as a descendant of Prophet Mohammad (Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 34). ‘Abd Allah Safah accepted the invitation in 750 CE. Prophet Mohammad seems to have been of special interest not only to the Abbāsids but to Abū Muslim personally. As al-Ṭabarī, says, two of the black banners of Abū Muslim’s army were called “Shade” and “Cloud” (al-Ṭabarī, 1985: 1954). It was probably a continuation of the Prophet’s

habit to give a name to everything he owned, and particularly of his black banner called “Eagle” (al-Ya‘qūbī, 2018, III, 2: 97). According to al-Ṭabarī, Abū Muslim’s banners symbolized the appeal covering the earth like a cloud to support the descendants of ‘Abbās and the constant governance by them like an eternal shade of the earth (al-Ṭabarī, 1985: 1954). Furthermost, in early Muslim times a hadith was composed that stated that Prophet Mohammad foresaw the suffering that would be the destiny of his family after his death. He said that salvation would come from the East when the local people would arise and bear the black banners, which would lead them to a final victory against the rule of tyranny and restore justice (‘Athamina, 1989). Nobody knows the specific date of this story, which is “a complete and utter sham” (‘Athamina, 1989). ‘Athamina states that even scholars of the 9th and 10th centuries knew it already to be a fake story (‘Athamina, 1989). It seems plausible that this ḥadīth represents the same existing ideas (Rante et al., 2020), as it tended to present the East, which is Great Khorāsān, as a place of refuge for the early Abbāsids as it was for Yazdagird and the members of his family, who are said to have been buried in Marv by the end of the 7th century (Zhukovsky, 1894: 11). In this way the periods of pre- and post-Muslim Iranian history of Khorāsān come together in an entire coherent context, which is supported with the idea of Royal presence in Khorāsān.

In the period of the early ‘Abbāsids, Khorāsān, after the Sāsānid times, was ruled by royalty. The first occurrence was in the period from 793 to 796 CE when caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd appointed his *vazīr* al-Faḍl b. Yakhyā the Barmakid as a governor of Khorāsān (al-Ya‘qūbī, 2018, I, 304). The second time was when at the beginning of the 9th century caliph al-Ma’mūn chose Marv as his short-time capital, as he had previously been a governor of the region and the Khorāsān troops helped him gain victory over his brother (Nicolle, 2002: 14; Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 36). The royalty, nonetheless, was imbued with Iranian nobility traditions. Al-Faḍl, Hārūn’s foster brother, came from the famous Buddhist family of Balkh, and his assignment as a governor was special news, as Khorāsān governors were still chosen mostly from the leading Arab families of the region because the position had special importance in the caliphate (Kennedy, 1999). As for caliph Ma’mūn, he was a son of a Persian woman and her master, caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 111). Hārūn was a famous warrior, who started numerous military campaigns and camp constructions, simultaneously, he practiced military games of mostly Iranian and Indian origin like chess, *birjās*, polo, and backgammon (al-Ya‘qūbī 2018, Ia, 48). Ma’mūn, who lived in Marv, “was interested in astrology, he emulated the ways of the kings of the Persians, and was fond of reading ancient books” (al-Ya‘qūbī, 2018, Ia, 51). Al-Faḍl, in his turn, proved to be an able and beloved administrator (Abbas, 1988), who tended to support the *dihqāns* (that is *asparān* and *āzādegān*), rather than inhabitants of Arab descent. Later, this powerful group managed to become a main opponent of the Arab settlers in the region, and the tensions between the parties were severe (Kennedy, 1999). In some sense, all these

prepared the way for the upcoming future, when Ma'mūn, who left Marv to Baghdād in 818 CE, finally appointed his general, Ṭāhir b. al-Husain, the descendant of a family in Bushang (modern Ghūryān, west of Herāt) as a governor (Kennedy, 1999). Ṭāhir later claimed independent rule and started the Ṭāhirid dynasty (821-873 CE), the first Persian dynasty in the region. Thus, he showed the strength of the Iranian military aristocracy in Khorāsān. Probably, it was he who constructed the most famous buildings in Marv, Greater, and Lesser Keys Kalas, which show the Iranian elements of architecture (for detailed information, see: Kennedy, 1999; Herrmann, 1999: 55, 58).

The Iranian Royal ideas circulated in Khorāsān even in earlier times. It is well known that a Khorāsān governor of 738 CE, Asad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Qasrī encouraged the Persians to celebrate Nowrūz and Mehregān and once invited local dignitaries, both Persians and Arabs who followed the Sāsānid traditions, to the feast in Balkh. They presented the same gifts to him following the traditions of gifts given to the Iranian shahs (Zakeri, 1995: 259; Khorasani, 2006: 33). Al-Ṭabarī, states that the gifts of the amīrs and dihqāns valued at a million dirhams and consisted of "a fortress of silver, a fortress of gold, pitchers of gold, pitches of silver, and large dishes of gold and silver... and silk garments of Marv, Kūhistān, and Herāt... Among what the dihqāns brought was a ball of gold" (al-Ṭabarī, 1989: 1636). Scholars thought that the fortresses were meant to refer to models (al-Ṭabarī, 1989: 168), but taking into account the whole list of presents that corresponded with the ones of the Sāsānians, it is possible to consider them with certain caution as diadems shaped as fortresses. This could refer to the shape of the merlons seen on the Iranian shahs' headgear as they are shown on the reliefs and silverware in more than one example. The exact appearance of Iranian shahs' real crowns is still unknown though (Ionescu, 2017). As far as the golden ball is concerned, it probably refers to a small ball of 7,5 cm with a hollow interior and set with diamonds, rubies, spinels, and emeralds from the Iranian Crown jewelry collection (Meen & Tushingham, 1968: 95). This golden ball is depicted on three portraits of Fath 'Alī Shāh, where it is shown lying on the floor. When the ball is shaken it rattles, so the scholars (Meen & Tushingham, 1968: 95) propose that the ball could have been used for entertainment purposes. However, taking into consideration the symbolic nature of the Royal gifts in Iran, it is very probable that both balls stood for a *chogān* (polo) ball as a reminiscence of the knight activity.

Summarizing the facts in the early Muslim history of Khorāsān and analyzing the way it developed, it is plausible to conclude that the region appeared to preserve its old status as a place of refuge, a region to gather an army, a location to fight against the enemies, a place to establish a Royal residence, even a divine presence in the form of salvation, and land to have the final rest, minding that Hārūn ar-Rashīd was buried near Tūs. This atmosphere seems to have laid the basis for the innovativeness of the Iranian culture, which crystallized first in the Sāmānian times and later periods. Simultaneously, getting back to the 'Abbāsīd court culture, it is essential to keep in mind that the famous

role of Iranian culture in the newly made state is rooted, among other things, in the Khorāsāni knighthood, *aspbarān*, and *āzādegān*. In this respect, it is remarkable that the new capital, Bagdad, was constructed by people who hailed from Khorāsān, and its shape probably originated from circular fortified Marv *qūhandiz*, which the caliph visited shortly after the revolt (Kennedy, 1999). Besides, high positions at the court of the early ‘Abbāsīd caliphs were acquired by the noble Khorāsānians (Pigulevskaya et al., 1958: 100), who were knights. Mostly they were the sons of the *dihqāns* who made up the special regiments of the ‘Abbāsīd army and lived there until at least the 9th century CE (Zakeri, 1995: 100; Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 35). Sometimes they are called *abnā’* that means ‘descendants’ in Arabic (Bosworth, 1983; Rante et al., 2020). Originally, they were the sons of Sāsānian chivalrous men, but in early Muslim times there were at least three distinct groups that could be called *abnā’*. Thus, the members of these groups were not necessarily the direct descendants of the old Iranian aristocracy, and not all of them were even chivalrous men (Crone, 1998). In the times of the early ‘Abbāsīd period, the actual “pure blood” seems not to have been very important, although there were certainly people of ancient Iranian aristocratic families. The idea to be sons of prominent fathers, who participated in heroic events, was more important. The Arabs witnessed *abnā’* during of *aspbarān* in 6th-century Yemen during the conquest, when an Arab commander, Said ibn Uthmān, made peace with Samarkand citizens, forcing them to give him as a pledge of allegiance sons of their noblemen, and the “sons of the kings of as-Sughd” who stood by Khutaiba ibn Muslim (al-Balādhuri, 1924: 411, 424). So, for the Iranian knights of the early Muslim period, the idea of *abnā’* was not a remote heritage, but a feature that was actively transmitted from one generation to the other. It was another leading conceptual idea of the Iranian culture (Shukurov, 2016: 70), as these descendants were the means for transforming the national Iranian traditions and character in the future. Probably, this particular idea of *abnā’* among other factors helped Abū Muslim gather an army for the descendants of ‘Abbās family (al-Ṭabarī, 1985: 1954) and even the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad as it was declared in his slogans (Nurulla-Khojaeva, 2017: 119-139). In my humble opinion, this concept naturally contains another idea the one of brotherhood, as these *abnā’* to some extent were brothers (in Persian *barādarān*). This idea, as Nurulla-Khojaeva states, was the basis for the internal world organization of “universal” empires, such as the Achaemenes and the ‘Abbāsīds. The title of *shāhānshāh* is the most evident symbol in this respect (Nurulla-Khojaeva, 2017: 119-139). It is the very concept that distinguished the royal members from less praised sons of *āzādegān*, as brothers do not necessary presume equal positions. While the same royal people were always the center of knighthood (Shukurov, 2016: 73). From another viewpoint, it was important for each king from as early as the Achaemenids to be a son of his father and grandfathers, and these sons were specially brought up to become kings. The Pahlavi text “Khosrow and a page”/ “Husrav ut *rētak*” describes the skills, in which a noble *dihqān* son, *rētak*, as a king’s assistant or

a page should have been knowledgeable. The first skills were certainly military skills such as riding, archery, lance and mace throwing, swordsmanship, etc. (see: Zakeri, 1995: 80-81).

Consequently, for the Iranian knighthood, the particular time of the revolt and the early Abbāsids period were of special importance. Notwithstanding the difference in the scholars' treating and commenting on the term *abnā'*, the participation of the sons of Iranian heroes at the court of the Abbāsids meant their involvement in the ruling affairs of the newly organized Muslim state and the incorporation of Iranian high-class way of life and education into the upper-class life. This ensured a continuity of their ideals and way of life. As it is well known, it was supported by translations of Persian books, including "Kalila and Dimna", composed in the genre of "mirror for princes", by ibn al-Mukafa' during the reign of the second caliph of the dynasty, Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr (r.754–775 CE) (al-Ya'qūbī, 1a, 2018: 46; Moshtahg Khorasani, 2006: 35). In this respect, it seems also possible that other nations, apart from the Arabs, could have also resided in estates like Qaṣr al-Khair al-Sharqī that had been founded by the Umayyads but continued to function further with its military functions, agricultural territories converted into gardens, and also the adoption of the Sāsānian decorations (Grabar III 1976: 5-18). In any case, a more flexible approach should be taken into consideration for explaining historical developments from the Umayyad period to the 'Abbāsīd period (Grabar III, 1976: 5-18).

The Iranian Impact and Influence

The scale of the general Iranian impact of the Sāsānian times on the culture and art of Muslim rulers is known in architecture, for instance (see: Grabar II, 1976: 33-62; Bier 1993: 57-86), while the contribution of the Eastern regions, such as Great Khorāsān, and particularly chivalry ideas, to the Sāsānian artwork and culture, and then later to other areas are less known. It occurred both conceptually by applying the ideas of chivalry and the Royal art, and artistically by using an image of a "Royal life" in the Tāq-e Boṣṭān scene of a boar hunt (Compareti, 2016). It is argued that this scene is among the ones that were made during the first stage of the grotto by a Sāsānian military leader of Parthian origin, Bāstām, who began his career in Khorāsān. Besides, his dress is ornamented with a pseudo-simurgh image. This particular image was borrowed for the dress decoration of an equestrian made later at the order of a Sāsānian king (Compareti, 2016). Hence, the image of pseudo-Simurgh stems from the Sogdian artistic convention with the meaning of *xwarrah* (mid. Pers. 'glory') (Compareti, 2016). It was of particular importance for the aristocrat who participated in the hunt as the main hero. Next to taking part in feasts and fighting in battles, hunting was the acme of Iranian aristocracy and knighthood life (Lukonin & Trever 1987: 60). Later, this particular image was used again on the metalwork, which is cautiously dated to post-Sāsānian period or connected with Central Asia (Compareti, 2016) and on the silk tapestries of approximately the

same period, which seems to be also connected with the Eastern regions (Compareti, 2015). That is the vivid visual link between the pre- and post-Muslim eras evidenced by the artistic conventions utilizing the chivalry culture of the Great Khorāsān.

Simultaneously, these particular artifacts by themselves were connected with the upper classes as al-Ṭabarī, mentioned that silverware and silk garments from Herāt and Marv were given as honorary gifts (al-Ṭabarī, 1989: 1636). Textile production is also linked with military culture. Citing al-Maqdisī, Zhukovsky states that “The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions”/ “Ahsan al-taqāsim fī ma’rifat al-aqālim” written in 985 CE reminds 1300 cloaks as a part of a tax from Marv. What time this tax belongs to it is difficult to say (Zhukovsky, 1894: 25), but it was not later than the second half of the 10th century. Silverware, cautiously dated to the early Muslim period, contains next to the images of pseudo-sīmurgh, other scenes that were common in previous times. These scenes show either a hunting or combat scenario between a predatory bird and a quadruped animal and represent the relevant concepts for the upcoming periods with their royal and knighthood ideas. Another actual idea was the continuity of generations (that is the “abnā’ concept”). This is probably why the image of motherhood is shown in the gilded silver bowl (Fig. 3). This last concept was also underlined in the verses of Iranian poets (Shukurov, 2016: 69-70).



Fig. 3: Plate with a lioness and lionets, 7th-8th centuries, Iran, The State Hermitage museum collection, № S-22 (©The Hermitage copyrights).

The preserved silverware dating to the early Muslim time points to the evident continuation of the traditions, but the changes as well (Lukonin, Trever 1987: 98-99). Along with stylized variants of represented characters and the general tendency to symmetry, the way the compositions were organized was quite special – a scene or its main hero (a kind of eagle in combat scenes, for example) is trying to occupy almost the entire space of the object, usually shown on traditional bowls and plates (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Plate with an eagle and gazelle, 7th-8th centuries, Iran, The State Hermitage museum collection, № S-298 (©The Hermitage copyrights).

The composition leaves no space and its main heroes seem to be “flying” over the universe, marked just with a tree and/or water, feeding it (Fig. 3), but the same tendency is seen on the silver plates that were made in Great Khorāsān (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Plate with ibex, 8th century, Sogd, The State Hermitage museum collection, № S-1 (©The Hermitage copyrights).

Later, this would be the main feature of compositions on the famous Nishāpūr ceramics, where the main heroes were knights and birds (Shukurov, 2016: 74-75). The birds could be presented as different species though and knights could be shown either on foot or if mounted then on a horse not in motion, but within the same “ongoing bodily existence” (Shukurov, 2016: 74). On another famous silver bowl from the Hermitage Museum collection (Fig. 6), which according to the paleographic analysis seems to have been made not earlier than in the 7th century or, better in the 8th or 9th centuries (for literature summarizing the dates, see: Bollók, 2015), the hunting composition continues in the familiar manner of showing a frontal hunter, sitting on a “galloping horse” and shooting backward.



Fig. 6: Plate with a horseman hunting, 8th century, Sogd, The State Hermitage museum collection, № S-247. (©The Hermitage copyrights)

This presentation was widely used before, during, and after the Sāsānian period. The main differences are the rigid saddle with stirrups, the saddle cloth with a definite leopard design, the horse harness with a pendant of a type found in Altin Kazgan hoards, and the hunter’s dress - a short kaftan with turnbacks and high boots. All these features, along with the belt and sword, were gilded. In this respect, al-Ya‘qūbī’s words about caliphs al-Mu‘taṣim and al-Mu‘tazz seem to be important. He says that al-Mu‘taṣim’s dominant interests were “horsemanship and imitating the Persians. He

wore garments with narrow sleeves... He wore long boots and square caps... He was the first caliph who rode on uncovered saddles and used Persian utensils, and the people imitated him". (al-Ya'qūbī, 2018, Ia: 56). As for al-Mu'tazz, he "was the first caliph who rode out with gold ornaments; the caliphs used to ride out with light ornaments of silver on their belts, swords, saddles, and reins". (al-Ya'qūbī, 2018, Ia: 56). Simultaneously, the shape of the horseman sword hilt indicated possibly a single-edged sword, representing the already-mentioned *sughdī* sword. It was described in later Muslim sources (al-Sarraf, 2011). Further, the diadem and scabbard decoration showing a circle and a dot in its center represent the Eastern lands. The bowl maker seems to have been very well acquainted with the tendencies in the military culture of his days.

Patterned Steel and Collaboration of the Artisans and Customers in Great Khorāsān

The collaboration between artisans and their clients seems to have developed in the cities of Great Khorāsān in the Muslim era. This collaboration is perfectly evident in steel production, a craft, which is directly connected with military affairs. Archaeological excavations were conducted in Marv first by South-Turkmenistan Multidisciplinary Archaeological Expedition (YuTAKE), set by Mikhail Y. Masson in the 1940s and working until the late 80s to the early 90s, and later by International Marv Project (IMP), started in 1991 CE. They brought to light the traces of metallurgy in the city, including the production of patterned crucible steel. The excavations of the industrial area of the Gyaaur Kala, the part of the city, developed in the late Sāsānian period to the early Muslim era, revealed two circular sunken furnaces filled with cylindrical lidded crucibles, containing iron, heated to produce steel. Based on an analysis of the associated ceramics, they could be dated from the 9th to the early 10th centuries (Herrmann, Kurbanakhatov et al., 1994). Although no earlier evidence was found, probably because all the furnace industries are thought to have been extramural, scholars are inclined to see this craft as the continuity of local Sāsānian industry (Lang, 1998).

Based on the results of archeological excavations, the presence of iron forging in Marv in the Sāsānian period can be confirmed, although it seems that the industry was not meant for military purposes, but for the jewelry production as the workshops were intramural (Simpson, 2014: 1-28). Further the archaeological results indicate that the workshops in Marv were active even after the city had lost its position as a regional capital during the Ṭāhirids. The metal of any type, whether precious or not, is said, to have been scarce in Marv (Simpson, 2014: 1-28), but the iron ore was mined in other parts of Central Asia, for example, in Ustrūshana, in the Mink district, near the city of Marsmanda, or in the precinct of Aspbāra, and processed mainly locally in Zarafshān (for further information and references, see: Mukhammadiev, 2018: 29-34). The transportation of raw materials to other cities with the iron industry was a possibility

(Papahristu, 2006: 141-209). The same situation could be encountered in Panjikent, which was located far away from the places of iron ore mining, but possessed a great iron industry (Belenitsky et al., 1973: 69-93; Raspopova, 1980).

The archaeologists, who worked in Marv, consider the steel found in its workshops to be probably associated with *fulād* as mentioned by al-Kindī (De Hammer Purgstall, 1854) and later by al-Bīrūnī (al-Biruni, 2011: 279-291). A technical investigation of two 6th-century blades from the Sāsānian period kept in the collection of the British Museum, reportedly found in the Dailamān region of northwest Iran, shows that they were also made of crucible steel (Simpson, 2014: 1-28). None of them though had a special visible pattern that was almost a necessary feature of Iranian blades of patterned crucible steel in later Islamic periods and that constituted the pride of Iranian blacksmiths. Khorasani cites Feuerbach, who argues that in the British Museum collection there is a Sasanian sword with a visible pattern (Khorasani, 2006: 93), but evidently, it was not a general rule, but a sign that the technology was already known. This pattern was already mentioned in al-Kindī's (De Hammer Purgstall, 1854) and al-Bīrūnī's treatises (al-Biruni, 2011: 286-287), and along with the methods and centers of steel production, this pattern manufacturing appeared to be among the most important topics of discussion by both scholars. Investigations show that this pattern was called *jowhar* in Arabic and *gowhar* in Persian, literary meaning 'jewel' and 'pearl', and incorporated additional ideas and concepts within the Muslim religion and culture (Malozyomova, 2023). These ideas and concepts concerning the Absolute were based on the Arabic notion and by the 9th century CE, they had been developed and established in the Islamic state. They were manifested in the literary tradition, the texts of the Holy Quran above all, and Arabic poetry (a good number of verses were provided by al-Bīrūnī in the chapter "Pearl" of his mineralogy treatise (al-Biruni, 2011: 126-193). They also continued an existing development of Iranian science and culture, such as the manufacture of high-quality blades made of patterned crucible steel mentioned in scientific treatises, such as Mohammad ben Maṣṣūr's "Goharrnāme" (Khorasani, 2021), and certainly Persian poetry (Ivanov, 1979; Malozyomova, 2023). In this respect, it is important to remember that poets in the Middle Eastern culture represented the ultimate truth (Shukurov, 2016: 71). Besides, based on the treatises by al-Kindī and al-Bīrūnī, it is safe to assume that in the early days, these ideas penetrated the crafts of making patterned crucible steel and forging blades in Iran, thus showing these crafts to be ahead of Muslim culture development. In other words, it was the very time when Iranian blacksmiths started to make high-quality steel and blades within the context of Islamic religious philosophy, and handed them to the members of Iranian aristocracy, *aspbarān* and *āzādegān*, who, in their turn, were capable to comprehend their cultural quality and value. Hence, both parts of this "dialog" comprised an audience who acquired a special position in the Islamic culture. The atmosphere in the state at the turn of the 9th century, during

the Hārūn ar-Rashīd educated reign, assisted the Eastern Iranians, who considered the wide domain of intellectual work - literature, science, philosophy, sublime theology, architecture, miniature – as places of mental existence (Shukurov, 2016: 71).

Marv Affairs and Impact

Getting back to Marv, of special importance is Simpson's postulate that integrated central planning teams must have been a feature of the city administration. It means that civilian and military needs and responsibilities must have been intermingled. Further, archaeological evidence from the oasis, as well as the city of Marv itself, indicates that considerable resources should have been invested in the military infrastructure (Simpson, 2014). This situation allowed the collaboration between artisans and their customers to combine traditions, philosophy, religion, science, and technology, which is vividly seen in military culture and weapons production. Founded in the 6th century BCE, Marv became an important and independent artisan, trade, and cultural center (Herrmann, 1999: 14). Masson states that Marv was among one of the rare cities, which preserved its importance for two historic periods – antiquity and the Middle Ages (Masson, 1990). The case with the patterned crucible steel, along with the whole way of chivalry culture development in Great Khorāsān, shows the continuance of the traditions that could take place only by catering to the local needs and requirements. There was probably another example of such correspondence, connected with religion and warfare, which also formed in the mid-8th-century Great Khorāsān and is still relevant in both local regional culture and Iranian culture in general. It concerns the aforementioned Abū Muslim's black banners.

Al-Ṭabarī, says that the standard and banner "Shade" and "Cloud" correspondingly were attached to poles about 16 and 13-meter long (al-Ṭabarī, 1985: 1954). These lengths could certainly be an exaggeration, but this exaggeration should have been based on something. It is possible to presume that these standards were longer than an average military banner and were hardly used on battlefields, but, based on al-Ṭabarī's explanations, they had mostly a symbolic meaning. The poles of different lengths seem to have been preserved in Iranian military culture at least in the middle of the 15th century, as they are seen in miniatures. For example, one depicts the battle between Khosrov and Bahrām Chūbīn from the manuscript of Nizāmī's "Khamse" made in Herāt in 1431 CE (Fig. 7).

It is known that as a source of precise information on historical objects, Persian miniatures should be treated with great caution (Malozyomova & Kurochkin 2018), but scholars use them (Moshtagh Khorasani & Singh 2013a; 2013b; 2014), and minor scenes could be cautiously consulted to gain an understanding of a general image of objects and usually nothing more. On the above-mentioned miniature, banners, depicted on the background, are obviously of three different lengths: the first and shortest are ordinary military colors with little banderols, while the other two are considerably



Fig. 7: Nizāmī, “Khamse”, Herāt, 1431, The State Hermitage museum collection, №VP-1000 (©The Hermitage copyrights).

longer and were wisely chosen by the artist as pieces to extend the frames of the miniature that was an essential feature of the miniature painting of that time (Shukurov, 2022: 162-173). The second type looks more like standards than banners as they have narrow ribbons and peculiar finials in the shape of mythological creatures. The third type has also a big finial of an unusual shape and a large fabric attached. These last two variants are famous *tūghs* and *‘alams* correspondingly. *Tūghs* and *‘alams* were quite profoundly studied (see, for instance: Terletsky, 2007; Calmard & Allan, 1985). *Tūghs* used to occupy an important place in the military culture of Turks in pre-Muslim times. They served as the celestial apex in rituals (in this case they were very long) and as an insignia of military power. They have preserved in the Muslim culture of Central Asia as long poles, which since at least the 14th-century have marked important places, mostly graves of outstanding people, mainly *shāhids*, *vālīs*, and so on. It must be noted that this custom is not practiced by Sunni Muslims. *‘Alams* represent structures on high poles, completed with green, black, and red cloths and adorned with feathers. In Moghul India the finials of *‘alams* even resembled the form of a falcon (Zebrovski, 1997: 332). Today they participate” with “are used in Shiite Muharram rituals that are practices connected with the Shiite confession, military affairs, funerary culture, and Prophet Mohammad’s *abnā’*. Nonetheless, *‘alams* also seem to have prototypes in the pre-Islamic culture, the Iranian one. It is certainly not the place to study cultural connections of *tūghs* and *‘alams*, as the topic deserves a special study, but there should have been a reason for both objects to participate in religious and military culture in post-Muslim Iran and, in particular, Great Khorāsān, thus clearly showing the innovativeness of Iranian culture, which Shukurov writes about. In case of *tūghs*, the investigations show that they commemorated the banners of Arab soldiers as well as the banner, given to Prophet Mohammad by Jibra’īl (Terletsky, 2007). As far as *‘alams* concern, they probably combine several allusions. First of all, thanks to the feathers they remind the military and Royal culture of the Sāsānids. Their sword scabbards were often ornamented with feather designs, presuming, perhaps, the image of a predatory bird or even mythological Varagn (Khorasani, 2007), while their banners were finished with eagle wings, remounting to the Parthians banners and even blazons with an eagle. Besides, it is noteworthy that the *‘Abbāsīd* banners had finials that looked like the finals of the Sāsānids standards (Ackerman, 1939). They were probably the combination of old sacred Iranian traditions (on the motif of spread wings, famous in the official culture of the Sāsānids, see Compareti, 2010) and allusions to Prophet Muhammad’s black banner “Eagle”. *‘Alams* and *tūghs* seem to have inherited these allusions and even stressed them with their high length, which seems not to have been studied, though there was a simple and certainly true proposal for it to be an important feature for objects to be seen from a distance (Terletsky, 2009).

In the collection of the State Hermitage Museum, there is an object made of blackbird feathers placed on a background of leather and metal to look like a predatory bird wing.

Its appearance makes us think that the item was used as an ‘alam finial. It is one of the oldest pieces of such a type that appeared in Russia approximately in the late 18th century. It is noteworthy that later, it was attached as a finial to quite a long pole along with a Persian banner of the early Qajār era (Fig. 8) (Malozyomova, 2016: 85-89).



Fig. 8: A banner, Iran, 18th-19th centuries. The State Hermitage museum collection, №3H 5371. (©The Hermitage copyrights).

It shows that even in 19th-century Russia, the oriental traditions comprised both ancient Iranian and Arabic ones were comprehensible. So, both tūghs, and ‘alams, which have got roots in the ancient Iranian and Turkish cultures (Malozyomova, 2019), acquired new significance over time (Girs, 1930). They could be the continuation of Prophet Mohammad’s standard which image was transmitted via the symbolic banners of Abū Muslim’s army. Nevertheless, the most important sign of the intimate combination of cultures is language and the art of text composition. It was already in the late 8th-century Marv, when the Persian language, which would incorporate a lot of Arabic loan words, showed the mutual connections between the Arabic and Persian cultures in the context of the royal and hence chivalry culture. Valentin Zhukovsky states that a certain ‘Abbās greeted Ma’mūn, who had come to the city, with a poem in Persian, in which he not only praised Hārūn ar-Rashīd’s son as a governor but claimed

himself to be the first who used the Persian language for the panegyric, although the language was far from this type of genre. He also said that Persian would acquire beauty and tidiness through the ruler's praising (Zhukovsky, 1894: 13). Later, this interaction between two cultures on the national Iranian background, incorporating chivalry traits, developed into the unique culture of an Islamic state, the state that shows a predominance of Iranian features in Great Khorāsān in the 9-10th centuries. This was demonstrated in the verses by Rudakī and by Ferdowsi in his "Shāhnāme" with its overwhelming idea of Iranian knighthood representing the ideals of asparī and āzādī.

Conclusion

Summarizing all the aforementioned facts, it is plausible to assume that already in the very early Muslim period, Iranian chivalry culture demonstrated strong facilities for innovation, which possibly laid the foundation for the country's development in later periods. Further, the analysis shows that the traditions of Iranian chivalry culture, passing from one generation to the other, were very stable. This strengthens the idea of ancestry and kinship which were essential, along with the concept of freedom that was crucial for Iranian knights, who were warriors, landowners, and horsemen. Simultaneously, the norms of the new religion forced changes that are reflected in the items connected with the knighthood. This proves cultural flexibility and, hence, the existence of a strong Iranian culture in general. It is possible that new research could complement, correct, or change the conclusion and ideas presented here.

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فرهنگ جوانمردی خراسان بزرگ در سده‌های هشتم تا نهم میلادی

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چکیده

این پژوهش به بررسی آئین‌های جوانمردی، ریشه‌دار و توسعه‌یافته در ایران باستان تا به چگونگی انتقال و برخی تغییرات آن به دوران اسلامی می‌پردازد. نگارنده، ساختار فرهنگی که به برپایی آن انجامید، دلایل سرچشمه‌های آغازین و نیز پیش‌زمینه‌هایی که منجر به پیدایی آن در خراسان بزرگ به میانه سده هشتم میلادی با شورش عباسیان فرجامید، را به تحلیل خواهد کشید. این دوره برابر با آن رخداد فرامرزی (عباسیان) بود که ناگهان نیروها و برخی امکانات گروه‌های دهقان‌نژاد ایرانی را فعال کرد تا زمینه‌ساز تحولات نظامی بعدی در شرایط جدید شود. بی‌گمان پس‌زمینه‌های ایران پیش از اسلام، یعنی گروه‌های ایرانی ساکن در این منطقه در شکل‌گیری، آنچه پس از اسلام رخداد، مؤثرترین بوده است. گروه‌های ایران شرقی همواره در تاریخ‌سازی و فرهنگ‌آفرینی یکی از مهم‌ترین‌ها بوده‌اند. «بلاذری» در فتوح‌البلدان و تاریخ طبری (و دیگران) از فروپاشی شاهنشاهی ساسانی، فرار «یزدگرد» به خراسان، نبرد وی با اعرابی که سرزمینش را فتح کرده بودند، سخن گفته‌اند. موضوع نبردهای وی با ترکان، توصیف سپاه و رزم‌افزارهای سپاه ایران از راه این منابع قابل فهم است.

کلیدواژگان: خراسان بزرگ، مرو، فرهنگ سوارکاری، هبوط، پولاد بوته‌ای، بیرق، نوآوری.



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مقدمه

بتازگی، «شکوروف»، نویسنده روس، در یکی از کتاب‌های خود (۲۰۱۶) به نام خراسان، به موضوع هنر جوانمردی پرداخته است. خراسان بزرگ روزگاری شامل بخش‌های بیشتری (به نسبت امروز) در شمال شرق، غرب، جنوب آسیای میانه تا به بخش‌هایی از افغانستان امروزی بوده است. مرزهای خراسان بزرگ هرگز مشخص نبوده است و حدود و ثغور مرزهای آن به قدرت نظامی ایران بستگی داشت. سنت توانمند نظامی مردمان این کران از راه میراث زبانی، ادبی و هنری آنان از پیش تا به پس از اسلام قابل فهم است؛ بنابراین قدرت نظامی یکی از عوامل وحدت بخش خراسان بزرگ بوده است.

با وجود این، نخستین واکنش به امویه در خراسان به خیزش «ابومسلم» برمی‌گردد؛ هرچند دیگر خیزش‌ها (پیشین) چون خوارج با خاستگاه اصلی خود در سیستان از آمادگی جامعه برای چنین خیزش‌های خبر می‌دهد. ابومسلم در خیزش خود در خراسان، تلاش کرد سپاهی کارآمد را رهبری کند. این نیروها که در نبرد با حاکمان عرب بودند از تنوع مختلفی برخوردار بود. روستاییان (کشاورز) بسیاری از مسلمان و غیرمسلمان در کنار هم می‌جنگیدند؛ از ایرانی تا به غیرایرانی، چون ترک‌های بسیار و عرب تا به یمنی‌ها. یکی از این گروه‌ها، دهقانان سغدی نژاد بوده است. سغدیان ایرانی در این کران جغرافیایی، به عنوان گروه‌های نجیب‌زاده و با پیشینه طولانی بازرگانی، جایگاهی مهم داشتند؛ آنان به سده هفتم میلادی به اسلام گرویدند. دهقانان سغد نژاد هم ازسوی ایرانیان و هم ازسوی اعراب در واحدهای مختلف نظامی ابومسلم خدمت کردند. آنان خداوندگاران ساخت رزم‌افزار بودند. شمشیرهای معروف به «شمشیر سغدی» در تمامی آسیای میانه و خاورمیانه از شهرت برخوردار بوده است. شمشیرهای سغدی یک لبه بوده است و در ارتش چین به آغاز سده هشتم میلادی مورد استفاده قرار گرفته است. در تصویر ۶، نقش یک سوارکار، سوار بر اسب درحال تاختن، بازتاب صحنه شکار، نقش شده از روبه‌رو، به تاریخ سده هفتم میلادی یا شاید بهتر سده‌های هشتم تا نهم میلادی دیده می‌شود؛ هرچند این گونه نقش‌ها از روزگار ساسانی تا پس‌اساسانی شناخته شده است؛ اما سوارکار باید، با توجه به نوع قبضه، شمشیری تک‌لبه را حمل نماید.

از این‌روی، سغدیان در آغازین زمان دوران اسلامی، طبقات نجیب‌زاده جامعه اسلامی را شکل می‌دادند که نوعی جوانمردی اشرافی بود که بدان در زبان فارسی «اسپ‌بران» گفته می‌شد. تصویر اسپ‌بر در شعر عرب جاهلی آشکارا قابل فهم است؛ آنجا که در گشایش یمین، به نقش اسپ‌بر اشاره و در حد یک قهرمان به پیدایی می‌آید. هم‌زمان، اسپ‌بر در گستره معنایی دهقان نیز به کار رفت! جایگاه ارزشمند اجتماعی دهقانان سغدی نژاد از راه نقاشی‌های پنجمند بسی قابل فهم است. افزون‌تر، ایرانیان اشرافی (نجیب‌زادگان) خود را «آزادگان» نیز نامیدند؛ آزادگان ایرانی، بخشی از سپاه ابومسلم را شکل داده است. گروه آزادگان تجسم یک جنگجوی آزاده، نیرومند، باهوش بود که زندگیش در رزم و بزم می‌گذشت؛ شوالیه ایرانی، «آزادگان» نام‌داشت. در نخستین سده‌های اسلامی، سغدیان همواره بخشی از گروه‌های ی به ظاهر مسلمانی بودند که در عمل پیرو ساختار باوری ایران باستان بوده و دارای تفکر نظامی‌گری سنتی و قدیم بودند؛ افزون‌تر، آنان نیز در شمار پیوستگان به سپاه ابومسلم بودند. سپسین‌تر، «طاهر»، بنیان‌گذار دودمان «طاهریان» (۸۲۱-۸۷۳ م.)، متکی به نیروی نظامی‌گری دهقانان ایرانی نژاد بود.

بایسته بیادآوری است که بیشتر بازرگانان آسیای میانه سغدتبار بودند؛ آن‌چه از میراث نوشتاری ساسانی متأخر از «ارک قلعه» به دست آمده، گواه این موضوع است. سغدیان اشراف‌زاده که طبقات بالای جامعه از آنان بود، به خوبی با فرهنگ نظامی‌گری و رزم آشنا

بودند. نقاشی دیواری متعلق به سده هفتم میلادی، که به عنوان «نقش تجار» شناخته می‌شود، بازتابی از اقامتگاه یک مرد ثروتمند در پنجکنت (اتاق ۱۰، بخش شانزدهم) با گروهی از مردمانی که در یک مهمانی هستند. آن‌ها ملبس به لباس‌های ابریشمی چینی و مجهز به خنجرهای نازک کوچک هستند. این رزم‌افزارها، با رشته‌های نازک و کوچک پارچه به کمر بند آنان دیده می‌شود (Expedition Silk Road, 2014: 183). دسته این خنجرها با یک لایه ضخیم از رنگ پوشیده شده که طرح پوست سفره ماهی را یادآور است. این موضوع، نشان ارج و رتبه بالای صاحب خنجر بوده است. نقاشی‌های اتاق معروف به «اتاق آبی» در پنجکند گواه این شواهدی است. افزون‌تر، سغدیان، هنر ساسانی را در سده‌ها پس از اسلام در آسیای میانه نگه داشتند. نقش سیمرغ، بر روی لباس خسرو دوم در تاق بستان به دور از نظرات متفاوت، یکی از نقوش روایی یافته از سوی سغدیان بود که بعدها بر روی رزم‌افزارها نیز نقش شد؛ نقش سیمرغ در هنر سغدی در معنای «فره» به کار رفت!

بحث و تحلیل

هرچند محوطه‌های باستان‌شناختی در آسیای میانه چون مرو به صنعت آهنگری دوره ساسانی مهر گواهی زده‌اند، اما چنین به نظر می‌رسد که این آهنگری در خدمت صنایع نظامی نبوده است. این صنعت در تمامی دوران شکوفایی مرو تا به دوران طاهری، دوره فروپاشی، فعال بوده است؛ هرچند انواع فلزات، قیمتی و ارزان، در مرو کم‌یاب، اما سنگ آهن از دیگر معادن آسیای میانه به دست می‌آمد و به شهرها (مورد نیاز) ارسال می‌شد. باستان‌شناسان به شمشیرهایی از کارگاه‌هایی در مرو برخورد کرده‌اند که می‌تواند یادآور گزارش «الکندی» و سپس «بیرونی» درباره «فولاد» آنجا باشد. مطالعه فنی بر روی دو شمشیر برآمده از بوتۀ فولاد، از مجموعه موزه بریتانیا، آن‌ها را به دوره ساسانی، به دست آمده از منطقه دیلمان، شمال غرب، ایران منسوب کرده است. هرچند هیچ‌یک از آن شمشیرها، دارای طرح پولاد گوهردار و مشهود خاصی نیستند که تقریباً یکی از ویژگی‌های ضروری تیغه‌های فولادی، این طرح پولاد ایرانی به دوره‌های اسلامی بود و آهنگران ایرانی بدان می‌بالیدند. «منوچهر مشتاق خراسانی» به نقل از: «فاریاخ»، می‌گوید بعضی از شمشیرهای ساسانی دارای طرح پولاد گوهردار هستند؛ اما این ادعا به طور کلی نمی‌تواند درست باشد، ولی وجود این شمشیرها با طرح پولاد گوهردار می‌تواند گواه ادامه حیات یک تکنولوژی ریشه‌دار باشد. پیش‌تر گفته شد که و بیرونی در مورد ویژگی این دست شمشیرها به اندازه کافی گزارش داده‌اند. مطالعه جدید نشان داده که پولاد گوهردار همان است که در عربی بدان «جوهر» و در پارسی بدان «گوهر» می‌گویند. این باور (به کارگیری اصطلاح عربی جوهر) با تمرکز بر «عربی‌شدگی» به سده نهم میلادی ایجاد شد. این باور در سنت ادبی و از همه مهم‌تر به کارگیری جملاتی از قرآن، فراوان به کار رفت. این دست باورهای دینی، در ادامه گسترش دیگر دانش‌های ایرانی چون صنعت ساخت تیغه‌های مرغوب از فولاد بوتۀ ای طرح‌دار حتی در گزارش‌های علمی نیز به کار رفت؛ کتاب گوهرنامه «محمد بن منصور» یکی از این منابع است (Khorasani, 2021). برخلاف گزارش‌های الکندی و بیرونی، نمی‌توان نادیده گرفت که در همان آغازین گسترش اسلام در حوزه فرهنگ ایرانی، این دست باورها به صنایع و هنر صنعتگران، به ویژه آنان که بر روی فولاد بوتۀ ای کار و یا در زمینه آهنگری فعال بودند، اثر خود را گذاشته بود؛ به عبارت دیگر، این درست همان زمانی است که آهنگران ایرانی شروع به ساختن فولاد و تیغه‌های مرغوب تحت تأثیر فلسفه دینی اسلام کردند اما آن رزم‌افزارها را به دست اشراف ایرانی چون «اسپ‌بران و آزادگان» سپردند؛ این دو گروه، ارزش و اهمیت این رزم‌افزارها را به خوبی می‌دانستند.

نتیجه‌گیری

با توجه به تمامی منابع و مستندات، می‌توان تصور کرد که فرهنگ جوانمردی ایران در نخستین طلوع دوران اسلامی، از امکانات قوی برای نوآوری‌های بسیاری برخوردار بوده است؛ این خلاقیت‌ها احتمالاً بخشی از پایه‌های توسعه کشور به دوران بعدی بوده است. پاسداشت فرهنگ ایرانی «دهقانی» بنابر شواهد، از نسلی به نسل دیگر، بسی استوار خود را در تاریخ نشان داده است. باور به پیشینه نیاکانی و روحیه آزادگی دهقانان ایرانی کمترین دلیل خدمت آنان به عنوان جنگاوران، پیاده نظام و سواره نظام (در خدمت ارتش) بوده است. با وجود این، دین جدید (اسلام)، موجب تغییراتی بر این نظام (دهقانی) شد که از راه میراث آنان قابل درک است.