



Legends, Tales, and Fables in the Art of Sogdiana (Biennial Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series)

By Boris I. Marshak, V. A. Livshits

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In this survey of more than forty illustrative murals excavated over the last 54 years in Panjikent, a 5th-8th century C.E. town in the Zerafshan Valley in Tajikistan, Boris Marshak discusses the rich repertory of legends, tales and myths of the Sogdians that have come to light and recreates the secular literature of Soghdia, one of the most important regions along the Silk Road. Prior to the Panjikent excavations only small fragments of Soghdian secular literature had been discovered in Soghdian colonies in Turfan and Dunhuang. Prof. Boris Marshak has been participating in this famous archaeological expedition since 1954; and has served as its leader since 1976. Soghdian merchants were the masters of the Silk Road and, therefore, their art and literature included many motifs of Greek, Persian and Indian origin. In Soghdia among the pictorial narrative cycles there were at least three epics: a local version of the Indian Mahabharata, the well-known Roman story of Romulus and Remus, and the Iranian legends of Rustam. The excavation teams have found on the walls of the houses of Panjikent dozens of pictorial representations of parables, fables, fairy tales and anecdotes. In several compositions the author has recognized scenes from Aesop's Fables, the Panchatantra and the Sindbad-nameh. He has compared these subjects with those of the fragmentary Soghdian texts. Marshak's book is an important one for anyone interested in the history of the Soghdia, in Iranian studies in general, in comparative studies in folklore and literature, in studies on the problem of narration in the visual arts, and the history of cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

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