



Ustrushona In Antiquity And The Early Middle Ages: An Analysis Of Written Sources

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the historical and geographical description of the region of Ustrushana based on ancient and early medieval written sources. It examines the names, territorial boundaries, political status, trade routes, and the historical significance of Khavos as reflected in Chinese, Sogdian, and Arabic-Persian sources. In addition, the study evaluates the scholarly importance of these written sources for reconstructing the history of Ustrushana.

KEYWORDS: Ustrushana, written sources, Chinese chronicles, Arabic-Persian sources, Sogdian documents, historical geography, Khavos, Silk Road, Central Asia, source studies.

INTRODUCTION

Ustrushana was one of the most important historical and geographical regions of Central Asia during antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, and valuable information about its political, economic, and cultural life has been preserved in various written sources. In particular, Chinese chronicles, Sogdian documents, and the works of Arabic-Persian authors provide significant information on the geographical location, political status, trade routes, and cities of Ustrushana. A comparative analysis of these sources is of great scholarly importance for reconstructing the historical development of Ustrushana, its interregional relations, and its role along the Great Silk Road. This article examines the written sources on Ustrushana from the perspective of historical source studies and evaluates their significance in reconstructing the history of the region.

In ancient Chinese written sources, the region of Ustrushana is recorded under the names Shuaydushona, Suduyshona, Szebutszyuyna (Szebudana), and Sutulisena, while the Sogdian documents discovered at Mount Mug refer to it as Osrushona. These sources indicate that Ustrushana was geographically situated between Fergana, Chach, and Sogdiana, on the left bank of the Syr Darya River.[1] In 629 CE, the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang, who traveled to India through Central Asia, noted the existence of the Da-sha-chi (Great Sandy Desert) steppe between the principalities of Ustrushana and Samarkand. However, he did not specify whether this territory belonged to either polity. Modern scholars identify Da-sha-chi with the Mirzachul Plain, located between Jizzakh and Zaamin, which is referred to in Arabic sources as the "Steppe of Hunger." [2]

The Chinese traveler Xuanzang, in his work *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* (Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang), described Ustrushana as follows: "...The state of Sao (Ustrushana) has a circumference of 1,400–1,500 li. To the east, it borders the Nami (Syr Darya) River. The peoples

living east of the Western Sea (the Caspian Sea) all worship the Spirit of Desi. During the Daye era (605–617 CE), the young and energetic ruler of Ustrushana dispatched his envoy to China together with the ambassadors of the Ikhshid of Samarkand.”[3].

To date, the history of the material and spiritual culture of Ustrushana during antiquity and the Early Middle Ages has not been comprehensively studied as an independent research topic. Moreover, written sources contain only limited information on the history of this historical-geographical region during these periods. For example, the Chinese chronicler Xuanzang describes a perpetually burning cave located near the city of Yecha and the religious practices associated with it[4]. According to his account, the local inhabitants made sacrificial offerings and performed acts of worship at the burning cave twice a year. Chinese sources also contain information about the ancient writing system used by the inhabitants of Ustrushana. In particular, the Chinese chronicles state that although the peoples living between Dayuan (Fergana) and Anxi (Parthia) spoke different dialects, their writing systems were similar, and they were able to understand one another[5]. These accounts have been confirmed through archaeological investigations at the Chilkhujra site. Wooden tablets recovered from the Early Medieval cultural layers of the settlement bear inscriptions in the ancient script of Ustrushana, which has been shown to be closely related to the Sogdian script[6].

The prominent Sogdian scholar V.A.Livshits, based on his analysis of Sogdian documents, concluded that the region was referred to as "Ustrushana". According to these documents, Divashtich, the ruler of Pancha (Panjikent), dispatched his envoy Farasman to Ustrushana, Chach, and Fergana with a special mission to establish cooperation and form an alliance against the Arabs. In a confidential letter addressed to Divashtich, Farasman reported that Ustrushana and the people of Ustrushana were unwilling to join such an alliance. This document contains the earliest known written occurrence of the terms "Ustrushana" and "Ustrushanians"[7].

At the same time, a number of source studies scholars, including M. Ye. Sergeyenko, V. S. Sokolova, I. V. Pyankov, R. V. Vyatkina, V. S. Taskina, and others, critically examined and translated several works by ancient authors that are of considerable importance for the study of ancient Ustrushana[8]. According to medieval written sources, Khavos, regarded as the northern rustaq (district) of Ustrushana, was located east of Samarkand at the junction of the main transcontinental caravan routes. One route extended through Kurkat to Khujand and Fergana, while another ran directly north to Banakat (Shahrakhiya), then to the major city of Kharashkent (Kanka), and finally through Chinochkat (Chinaz) to Binkat, the capital of Chach. During the medieval period, the Khavos and Binkat routes were interconnected and constituted an important branch of the Great Silk Road. According to V. V. Bartold, two major routes led to the Chirchik River Valley: one passed through Khavos, while the other ran via Jizzakh[9]. Similarly, two routes connected Khavos with Binkat. The first was a shorter route that crossed the Mirzachul Plain and led to the crossing-town of Khushket, whereas the second was longer but safer, passing through Old Khavos[10].

From the capital of Ustrushana, Bunjikat, the route to Khavos passed through the city of Sabot. Caravans traveling to Fergana usually followed the route through Khavos and Kurkat. Likewise, merchants regarded the Khavos–Kurkat route as the most convenient way to reach Khujand and Fergana[11]. The strategic importance of Khavos stemmed from its location at the

intersection of major ancient trade and military routes extending from west to east and from north to south, linking Bunjikat with Bactria[12].

Written information about the Khavos site has been preserved primarily in the works of medieval travelers, historians, and geographers. The 13th-century scholar Yaqut described Khavos as “a village in Ustrushana”[13]. In his famous work *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms* (*Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*), the 9th-century geographer Ibn Khordadbeh recorded the distances from Khavos to neighboring regions and vice versa. Similar information concerning Khavos is also found in the works of Qudama, Ibn Rusta (first half of the 10th century), al-Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal (10th century), al-Sam‘ani (12th century), Yaqut (13th century), and Abu al-Fida (14th century).

At the beginning of the 11th century, Khavos is mentioned in accounts describing the battle between Muntasir, the last representative of the Samanid dynasty, and the Qarakhanid Iloq Khan[14]. The name Khavos also appears in Nizam al-Din Shami’s famous *Zafarnama* (early 15th century)[15]. According to this source, Amir Timur (Tamerlane) himself visited Khavos, and one of the military confrontations between Amir Husayn and Amir Timur during 1367–1368 took place there. Sources further report that in the second half of the 15th century, the renowned poet Abdurahman Jami and the distinguished Sufi master Khwaja Ahrar Vali visited Khavos[16]. In the *Baburnama*, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur recounts that Umar Shaykh Mirza was defeated by Sultan Ahmad Mirza in a battle fought at the settlement of Khavos, located between Shahrukhiya and Ura-Tepa[17].

Based on written sources, N. N. Negmatov classified Old Khavos as one of the cities of Ustrushana and noted that it served as the administrative center of one of its rustaqs (districts)[18]. Although chronicles and various historical accounts consistently mention Khavos as a settlement situated at the crossroads of important trade routes, they provide no direct explanation regarding the origin or etymology of its toponym.

In conclusion, written sources constitute an important and reliable foundation for the study of the history of Ustrushana. Chinese chronicles, Sogdian documents, and the works of Arabic-Persian authors preserve valuable information on the historical geography, political status, cities and rustaqs of Ustrushana, as well as its role within the Great Silk Road network. A comparative analysis of these sources makes it possible to reconstruct more accurately the historical development of Ustrushana during antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, its interregional connections, and its strategic significance in the system of transcontinental trade routes. Therefore, a comprehensive study of written sources is of great scholarly importance for the objective investigation of many aspects of Ustrushana’s history.

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