

# “ZANDANĪJĪ SILKS”: THE STORY OF A MYTH

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For over fifty years the concept of “Zandaniji silks” set forth by Dorothy Shepherd, a textile historian, in her 1959 article “Zandaniji Identified?” published together with linguist Walter Henning (Shepherd and Henning 1959) has directed the study of medieval silk textiles. A series of silks from European churches and rock graves in the North Caucasus thus have been identified as zandaniji. Localization of the place of those textiles’ manufacture and their dating served as the basis for far-reaching historical conclusions: an uninterrupted development of silk weaving in Sogdiana from pre-Islamic times; an existence of a Sogdian school of silk weaving as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE; production of “zandaniji silks” in China, etc. Even though it has now been proven that the original reasons for defining “Zandaniji silks” were erroneous (Sims-Williams and Khan 2008), a number of scholars still maintain the idea that zandaniji described by medieval authors as cotton fabrics were in fact silks. Meanwhile, the analysis of the way Shepherd supported her concept shows that it was initially built on rejection of the original written evidence about the cotton nature of zandaniji. The main goal of this article is to outline how a misleading chain of argument was created. To do so requires looking in detail at the story of the non-existent “Zandaniji silks” in order to stress the importance that there be a new comparative analysis of all sources for the study of silks identified as zandaniji.

The story began when Shepherd discovered an ink inscription on a silk piece at Huy cathedral (Belgium). Henning’s decipherment of this inscription, which he claimed was in Sogdian, revealed the word “Zandaniji” – the well-known medieval textile named after a village in the vicinity of Bukhara. Based on this context, Shepherd attributed the Huy silk and textiles from the treasuries of European churches similar to it by technique and design (and previously considered to be the works of Eastern Iranian workshops) to “Zandaniji silks”. She divided them into two groups, Zandaniji I and Zandaniji II, and believed that they were manufactured in the same center near the city

of Bukhara in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. One of her supporting arguments for naming this place was the absence of relevant information: “We do not have evidence of a comparable weaving industry in the other regions of Central Asia and we can only infer from the silence of the sources that it did not exist.” The dating was based on an assumption that “in Islamic times, weaving, including silk weaving, was an important industry in Sogdiana, especially in the region of Bukhara, and there is every reason to believe that it had enjoyed an uninterrupted development from pre-Islamic times” (Shepherd and Henning 1959, p. 20).

These conclusions of Shepherd’s on the nature of zandaniji textiles, their early date, and the place of their manufacture were supported by Anna A. Ierusalimskaia and received further development in her work where she proclaimed that there was “a school of artistic silk weaving in Sogdiana” and identified a new group of silks, “Zandaniji III,” among its products. Ierusalimskaia included a large number of silk pieces found at the medieval rock cemeteries in the North Caucasus (Ierusalimskaia 1972, pp. 6, 7, Appendix 1; Ierusalimskaia 1992, p. 13).<sup>1</sup> Following Shepherd, Ierusalimskaia suggested that the Sogdian center of silk weaving appeared later than the other major Near Eastern and Byzantine centers, “whereas the first records about it are dated only to the 6<sup>th</sup> century” (Ierusalimskaia 1972, p. 5). She dated the main body of the North Caucasian “Zandaniji silks” within the range of the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> to first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ierusalimskaia 1972, p. 7) or the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ierusalimskaia 2012, p. 100). Ierusalimskaia considered silks from the rock graves at Moshchevaia Balka to be essential for determining the chronology of that site and for the dating of textiles found at similar cemeteries (Ierusalimskaia 2012, pp. 96-97).

Despite its being repeated and still accepted today as an indisputable truth, the statement about the production of silks in pre-Islamic Sogdiana is not supported by any convincing evidence. “Every

reason” that allowed Shepherd to talk about the appearance of silk weaving in Bukhara in that period, and Ierusalimskaia to suggest the 6<sup>th</sup> century for the functioning of the silk weaving center in the area remained outside of the framework of their studies. In fact, the earliest source mentioning silks from Bukhara cites a work written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the Arab historian al-Balādhuri; the rest of the medieval texts containing evidence on the weaving industry and its production (mainly of cotton) from Transoxiana are dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and later (Serjeant 1946, p. 121-27). Regarding specifically zandaniji, all 10<sup>th</sup>-century sources describe it as a cotton fabric, not a silk one. Notwithstanding all the known evidence from the medieval texts, the deciphered inscription was given precedence, and scholars either rejected the cotton nature of zandaniji textile, offered various explanations for such a discrepancy, or did not discuss it at all.

From the very beginning, Shepherd herself chose to avoid this issue. Summarizing the evidence from the medieval texts, she concluded that none of them talks about the nature of zandaniji fabric, “Nowhere do we find a clue to the kind of cloth that Zandaniji was” (Shepherd and Henning 1959, p. 16).

However, this conclusion contradicted an account given by Narshakhi, the 10<sup>th</sup>-century author who in his work, “The History of Bukhara,” described zandaniji as a cotton cloth. Shepherd’s desire to explain this discrepancy resulted in her tendentious selection of English translations of the medieval sources. While she cited excerpts from works of Nizam al-Mulk, Yāqūt al-Hamawī, and Atā-Malik Juvayni in Robert B. Serjeant’s translation, she conveniently quoted a passage from “The History of Bukhara” (the earliest and, as Shepherd herself pointed out, the “main source” on zandaniji) in Richard N. Frye’s translation (Shepherd and Henning 1959, p. 15). Describing zandaniji, Frye chose to use the word “cloth”: “Zandana has a great citadel, a large market place, and a grand mosque. Every Friday the prayers are performed there, and there is trading (the same day). The specialty of the place is Zandaniji, which is a kind of cloth made in Zandana [my emphasis – Z.D.]. It is fine cloth and is made in large quantities. Much of that cloth is woven in other villages of Bukhara, but it is also called Zandaniji because it first appeared in this village. That cloth is exported to all countries such as Irāq, Fārs, Kirmān, Hindūstān and elsewhere. All of the nobles and rulers make garment of it, and they buy it at the same price as brocade” (Shepherd 1959, p. 16). Using the general term in the description of zandaniji that does not clarify the nature of textiles, Frye nevertheless noted in comments that most New Persian “dictionaries de-

scribe it as a coarse white cloth usually made of cotton” (Narshakhi 1954, p. 115).

Serjeant offered a different version of zandaniji’s description, but it was not discussed by Shepherd, who merely commented in a footnote: “Serjeant, op. cit., p. 123, translates this passage with slight variations” (Shepherd and Henning, 1959, p. 16). Such a wording left the impression that differences were so small that they were not even worth mentioning. In reality, Serjeant indicated that zandaniji was a fabric made of cotton. In his translation, textile from the village of Zandana was “called zandaniji, which is to say muslin (kurbās)” (Serjeant 1946, p. 123).<sup>2</sup> Thus, for the word describing zandaniji Serjeant chose “muslin” but he also included transliteration of the Persian term, where the Persian text of “The History of Bukhara” that served as the only source for English translations uses the word “kurbās” (کرباس) (Nerchakhy 1892, p. 14).<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to Serjeant, who thoroughly analyzed medieval written sources mentioning Islamic textiles, it is known that kurbās (kurbās) was woven from cotton: Ibn Isfandiyyār (12<sup>th</sup> century) wrote that bales of silk “were sold in Baghdad and the money spent on cotton cloth (kurbās) which was divided among the poor”; an anonymous author of “Hudūd al-Ālam” (compiled at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century based on writings of the 9<sup>th</sup> century) mentioned “cotton textiles (kurbās)” manufactured in the cities of Rayy, Kāth, and Bust (Serjeant 1946, p. 103, 106, 129, 134).

Early religious Islamic texts also provide evidence that kurbās was made of cotton yarn. A hadith of the 10<sup>th</sup> century compiled by ash-Shaykh al-Kulayni describes the biography of Alī ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhammad, called at-Tātūrī, “He was called at-Tātūrī because he sold a cloth known as at-Tātūrī. In Misr [Egypt] and Damascus they called someone who sold *kurbās* (a fine cotton cloth) and white cloth at-Tātūrī” (Al-Kāfī 2007, p. 48). As is well established, the term “kurbās” itself is connected with the widespread usage of the word *karpasi*, the Indian name for cotton clothes, a word that is traced back to the Sanskrit root “karpasa”, i.e. “cotton” that was passed into many languages with the same meaning (Pelliot 1959, I, pp. 433, 435; Mazzaoui 1981, pp. 9-10).<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the term “kurbās” that identified zandaniji as cotton textiles rejected the definition of zandaniji as silk ones.<sup>5</sup> For centuries, zandaniji preserved its association with cotton. J. A. Vullers’ *Lexicon Persico-Latinum Etymologicum* described “zandapīčī,” a variant of zandaniji, as “a wide robe of white cotton” (Serjeant 1946, p. 124). But Shepherd, unable to prove that zandaniji were silk textiles, doubted both Vullers’ explanation and Frye’s comment. She wrote: “These definitions seem not to

be supported by the evidence in the texts and perhaps are derived, by inference, from the reference in the *Siyāsat-Nāme* where it said that zandanijī was “used for the clothing of slaves of the lowest rank at the Samanid court.” She suggested that over time, from Narshakhi, when “Zandanijī was an important and valuable fabric – fit for a king” to Nizām al-Mulk (his *Siyāsat-Nāme* was written at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), fashion could have changed or the quality of this fabric diminished, because *Siyāsat-Nāme* describes zandanijī as being “used for the clothing of slaves of the lowest rank at the Samanid court” (Shepherd and Henning 1959, p. 16). At the same time, Shepherd ignored the clear indication of the cotton nature of zandanijī provided by Narshakhi, and she based her conclusion on the alleged poor quality of zandanijī mentioned in *Siyāsat-Nāme* on an incorrect interpretation of the social status of people who wore clothes made from it. Slaves who wore zandanijī robes were the ghulām, the soldiers who served as caliphs’ guards and who were directly subordinate to them. Caliphs paid attention to clothes for the ghulām no less than they did for the mufrid; the ghulām, not the slaves of the low rank, as stressed by Shepherd, were eligible for zandanijī robes (*Siaset-name* 1949, pp. 99-100). From the text of *Siyāsat-Nāme* it follows that zandanijī was less prestigious than other textiles which were used to make clothing for the ghulām. “There was a rule that was followed from the days of the Samanids: the ghulām were promoted in ranks gradually, according to the years of service, achievements, and merits”; the ghulam of the first year of service “wore garments of Zandani cloth,” and after a while received richer and more luxurious dresses (*Siaset-name* 1949, pp. 110-11). Also, according to Nizām al-Mulk, this rule was already in force at the time when Narshakhi wrote “The History of Bukhara.”

Trying to prove the silk nature of zandanijī, Shepherd appeals to Narshakhi’s evidence that this fabric was bought to make clothes for the rulers and nobility, and that “they paid as much for it as for brocade.” However, his text tells us only that the cost of zandanijī competed with gold-woven textiles, while the fact that they were in demand by the privileged strata of the population confirms their high quality. The cost comparison of the two types of textiles, the cotton and brocade, is understandable: the processing of raw materials and manufacturing of cotton fabrics was time-consuming, and for this reason labor costs for the manufacturing of cotton textile justified its high price. As is known from the medieval texts, Central Asian workshops produced rather a wide assortment of cotton fabrics. Some of them were not inferior to silks in quality or price. Perhaps, this explains why Shepherd disregarded an excerpt cited by Serjeant from a

work of the Arab geographer of the 12<sup>th</sup> century al-Idrisī, where the description of zandanijī echoed the one given by Narshakhi. In it, the author tells about splendid cotton textiles manufactured in the village of Widhār near Samarkand that were very popular among the elite of Khurāsān: “They make there (in Widhār) stuffs called Widhāri, woven of cotton, and made with an astonishing art; they are employed raw and without being cut. There is not a prince, minister, or cadi in the whole of Khurāsān who does not wear one in winter over his clothes. The beauty of these stuffs is evident and their splendor is famous. They are of color approaching yellow saffron, soft and light to the touch, but nevertheless very thick, excellent in their wearing qualities, and durable. The price of a robe varies from three to twenty dinars according to the quality. In short, it is impossible to find anything better, whether as regards beauty, whether as regards solidity” (Serjeant 1946, pp.125-26). Earlier than this account, Narshakhi wrote that zandanijī of good quality was exported from the village of Vardāna (Narshakhi 1897, p. 24). He also noted that zandanijī was more popular than similar textiles produced in Khurāsān workshops: “It is surprising that weavers from Bukhara left for Khurāsān, took with them all necessary staff for weaving these fabrics, set up workshops there and produced textiles, but in both appearance and quality they were far inferior to those woven in Bukhara. There was no tsar, amir, rais, or official who would not wear clothes made out of this fabric. It was made in red, white, and green colors. Presently, zandanijī is more famous in all regions than these textiles” (Narshakhi 1897, p. 30). It seems from the evidence of contemporaries that zandanijī fabrics indeed were so popular and well known that none of the authors considered it necessary to describe them in detail, though the color range of Khurāsān textiles woven by the Bukhara craftsman was indicated by Narshakhi, and al-Idrisī left the detailed description of Widhāri cotton fabrics.

Soon after Shepherd and Henning published their article, Russian scholars Aleksandr M. Belenitskii and Ilona B. Bentovich, generally accepting their conclusions, drew the readers’ attention to the fact that the definition of zandanijī as a silk fabric contradicts the evidence of written sources, where it is described as a cotton one. They suggested the following explanation: “As it is obvious from the cited descriptions [“The History of Bukhara” – Z.D.], at least from the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century zandanijī was a cotton fabric. Meanwhile, they inform us that it was valued highly. Unfortunately, the texts known to us do not provide a reason for changing the raw material or any indication when it could happen. We assume that delivery of the raw silk from China, if did not stop completely, cer-

tainly decreased significantly. It is very possible that it was a reason for the switching the mass weaving to cotton" (Belenitskii and Bentovich 1961, p. 77).

The problem brought out by the Russian scholars made Shepherd admit twenty years later, in her article "Zandaniji revisited," that the word "zandaniji" in Narshakhi's work "specifically refers to cotton" but with a question, "whether the term had been applied to silks before the tenth century and only later transferred to cottons from the same region, or if the author of the inscription on the Huy silk used the term in error." However, this consideration did not change Shepherd's conclusions about the dating of the Huy silk to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and its Sogdian origin (Shepherd 1981, p. 109). Defending the usage of the term "zandaniji" she wrote: "Whether right or wrong, the adoption of this term in the extensive Russian literature on this group of silks since the publication of my article in 1959 has by now firmly established it as a pseudonym, at least, which may serve as a convenient designation for this particular group of silks from Sogdia" (Shepherd 1981, p.109).

Up to 1981, when Shepherd published this article, "the extensive Russian literature" consisted only of several articles authored by Ierusalimskaia and few other Russian scholars, who relied on her studies. Shepherd herself continued to refer to the medieval silks as zandaniji textiles, without any explanation of how this term should be treated, as a pseudonym or as a real identity. Anyway, she had no doubt that she and Ierusalimskaia had identified a special group of silks from Sogdiana, as Shepherd continued to insist some two decades after her initial article: "The original bases for attributing these silks to Sogdia were the presence of a Sogdian inscription on one of them and the fact they had been found both to the east and west of Sogdia and would seem logically to have been exported from there. The large number of these textiles now recorded as having been found in the graves of Alan tribesmen in the northern Caucasus, directly astride the northern silk route between Sogdia and Byzantium, would seem to provide conclusive proof" (Shepherd 1981, p.108).

I would emphasize here that an ink inscription, given its possible chance appearance on any stuff, is a weak argument for the attribution of a single textile piece, much less for the attribution of a large group of silks. The argument for the localization of a textile manufacturing center based on the places of the pieces' discovery also sounds more than strange. It is not clear at all how silks found in the North Caucasus defined by Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia as zandaniji "would seem to provide conclusive proof" of their weaving in Sogdiana.

In her writings Ierusalimskaia does not discuss the issue of the inconsistency between "zandaniji silks" and the written sources. She states that Narshakhi in "The History of Bukhara" related that "at the same price as brocade" zandaniji textiles were bought at European courts (Ierusalimskaia 1972, p. 6). Though Ierusalimskaia claims that she quotes Narshakhi's work in the translation done by Serjeant (Ierusalimskaia 1972, p. 44, endnote 17), she uses Frye's version of the text that was obviously borrowed from Shepherd's article. Moreover, these quotes are distorted: Narshakhi did not specify the nationality of nobles who bought zandaniji, but said that "All of the nobles and rulers make garments of it, and they buy it at the same price as brocade." As already mentioned, Frye and Serjeant translated the second part of this sentence slightly differently (cf. Shepherd and Henning 1959, p. 16 with Serjeant 1946, p.123). Obviously, she read neither the original work of Serjeant on Islamic textiles, nor the Russian translation of "The History of Bukhara" done in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where zandaniji are described as cotton textiles.

Scholars who recognized the conflict between the texts describing zandaniji as cotton textiles and identified medieval silks also tried to find evidence on the silk nature of zandaniji textiles in medieval sources. Thus James C.Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell quoted the evidence left by the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Persian historian Ata-Malik Juvaini in his story about three persons who went to the Mongols with "gold-embroidered fabrics, cottons, zandanichi and whatever else they thought suitable" (Juvaini/Boyle 1958, p. 77). When one of these persons tried to defraud Genghis Khan with overpricing, he was detained but later he was let go, and "for each piece of gold-embroidered fabric they should be paid a *balish* of gold and for every two pieces of cotton or *zandanichi* a *balish* of silver (Ibid.). According to Watt and Wardwell, Juvaini's descriptions confirms that zandaniji were not cotton textiles, for the reason that "Juvaini mentions Zandaniji along with gold-embroidered textiles and cotton," and the amount Genghis Khan "was willing to pay for the merchants' textiles. Clearly, Zandaniji textiles were valuable and, by implication in Juvaini's text, were not cotton" (Watt and Wardwell 1997, p. 28). Later, the same conclusion was reached by the Chinese scholar Shang Gang. He pointed out that Juvaini and Rashid al-Din (who retold this story after Juvaini), by naming zandaniji individually in the same list with other cotton textiles, provide evidence that zandaniji was not woven from cotton: "In this case, cotton fabrics are mentioned alongside Zandaniji, which clearly shows that these are different cloths" (Shang Gang 2007, p. 35).

However, the fact that zandanijī are mentioned separately from other cotton textiles in fact does not prove that they were other than cotton.<sup>6</sup> Zandanijī textiles deserved a special mention for their special qualities that distinguished them from other cotton fabrics. As pointed out by Yāqūt al-Hamawī in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, zandanijī were well known (Serjeant 1946, p. 124). Moreover, the argument of Watt and Wardwell that the price paid for zandanijī distinguished it from cotton fabrics simply contradicts Juvainī's account. The Mongol ruler ordered to pay the same price for zandanijī and cotton textile, but this price was less than for gold-embroidered fabrics. Besides that, the price, which would be paid by Genghis Khan to merchants, should not be treated as a fact. In Juvainī's story the amount that was many times higher than the real cost of the fabrics emphasized the generosity of the Mongol ruler.

In their attempt to support the existence of zandanijī silks, Watt and Wardwell combine two opposite statements: "Assuming that in the beginning zandanijī textiles were silks," "Zandanijī may eventually have come to designate cotton cloth (Belenitskii and Bentovich, 1961, c. 77-78), but that does not seem to have happened until after the Mongol period" (Watt and Wardwell, 1997, p. 28). Not doubting Narshakhi's evidence, they nevertheless question his work written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Watt and Wardwell's technical analysis of silks revealed significant differences in groups classified as zandanijī. However, their acceptance of the inscription on the Huy silk as documented evidence prevented them, despite their own observations (see below), from rejecting the existing classification of the early medieval silks. They continued to treat zandanijī textiles as silks woven in Sogdiana, and even considered *sa-da-la-qi* fabric mentioned in the *Yuanshi* to be a transliteration of the word "zandanijī." This, despite the fact, as they stressed, that there is no information on *sa-da-la-qi* in other Chinese sources, and there is "no means of telling whether it is anything like the Sogdian silks which have been called *zandanijī*" (Watt and Wardwell 1997, p. 140). Faced with the apparent inconsistency between the identified "zandanijī silks" and the evidence of medieval authors, rather than undertaking critical analysis of Shepherd's "discovery," these scholars fell back on rather shaky arguments and explained the issue by the specificity of translation of the written sources. They noted: "The earliest historical reference to Zandanijī textiles occurs in al-Narshakhi's history of Bukhara, which dates from the tenth century (al-Narshakhi, 1954, p. 15-16). Narshakhi's use of the word *kirbās* in reference to Zandanijī textiles has

sometimes been translated as 'muslin' (e.g., Serjeant 1972, p. 99), leading some scholars to conclude that by the tenth century, at least, Zandanijī was a type of cotton (Belenitskii and Bentovich 1961, c. 77; Shepherd 1981, p. 108). This, however, may be too specific a translation of the term *kirbās*, which Richard Frye translates more generically as 'cloth' (al-Narshakhi 1954, pp. 15, 16)" (Watt and Wardwell, 1997, p. 28).

There is no question that Richard Frye is right in understanding *karbās* as cloth. However, the term "cloth" by itself does not indicate a raw material and therefore cannot attest to either the cotton or the silk nature of zandanijī. This should be obvious for specialists in textiles. The preference for the general term instead of the specific name of the fabric, the raw material for which is well known, is a deliberate denial of the cotton nature of zandanijī, and contradicts the evidence of the source.

The artificial concept of "Zandanijī silks" skewed the direction of their study. Arguments based on secondary sources and speculative conclusions "materialized" the non-existent textiles. As a result, the myth about zandanijī silks produced new versions of itself. For example, Remo Faccani extrapolated the definition "zandanijī silks" on "Tartar cloth" from papal inventory books. He states that silk "turcheschi" cloths or hangings brought to the West in the late Middle Ages, were characterized as zandanijī, as though Wardwell had indicated as much (Faccani, 1995, p.155). However, Wardwell, who compiled the list of records regarding textiles from these books, nowhere in her publication identifies them as zandanijī and does not indicate "Tartar cloth" is a synonym for it.

In the last decade, some Chinese scholars have tried to find information on zandanijī in Chinese sources from different periods and looked for names of textiles that, in their opinion, are transliterations of the word "zandanijī". So, Shang Gang suggested that such could be "*sa-da-la-qi*" and "*zan-tan-ning*" (Shang Gang 2007, pp. 26, 30, 34), even though nothing could be said about them except that these cloths are mentioned in written sources.<sup>7</sup> Shang Gang also widened the chronological span and geographic areas of manufacture of "zandanijī silks" beyond medieval Sogdiana. He attributed to zandanijī silks textiles with different weaving technique and stylistic elements of décor, and came to the conclusion that "zandanijī production lasted nearly 800 years in Central Asia as well as in China. Over such a long period of time and across such vast spaces in its development, design elements as well as techniques changed from time to time and place to place" (Shang Gang 2007, p. 33). This statement is based solely on "circumstantial evidence"

consisting of an unproven assumption based only on another unproven assumption (Shang Gang 2007, p. 34). Since Shang Gang discusses only silk textiles that, as now has been proven, cannot be treated as zandaniji textiles, there is no need to comment on his reasoning.

Feng Zhao, the specialist in the history of Chinese textiles, maintains that documents he discovered at Dunhuang from the late Tang period to the era of the Five Dynasties include the word *sha-sha-na-jin* (沙沙那锦) and suggests that it represents the transliterated word "Zandana." Another term for zandaniji, *zan-dan-ning* (贊丹寧), also the transliterated form of zandaniji, appears in the Chinese historical sources from the Liao dynasty (Zhao 2012, p. 300).

Since the documents are not published, it is as yet unclear what was the context in which the terms *sha-sha-na-jin* and *zan-dan-ning* were used and whether there is any real basis for seeing them as equivalents for zandaniji. But while Feng Zhao admits the strictly hypothetical character of his suggestion for these two names, he has no doubt that *sa-da-la-qi* is zandaniji: "With the beginning of the Yuan period, Chinese historical sources especially note a type of textiles called *sa-da-la-qi*. It is generally accepted that this is zandaniji" (Zhao, 2012, p. 300).

It is hard to agree with such an argument. The use of terms *sa-da-la-qi* and *zandaniji* as synonyms by some specialists is not a proof of the identity of these two textiles known from the medieval texts. As Watt and Wardwell noted (1997, p. 140), "According to the *Yuanshi*, in the year 1287 a Jamal al-Din (Zhamala-ding) directed (or arrived with) artisans to weave *sa-da-la-qi* in the same workshops as those for silks. A separate superintendency was subsequently established for the production of *sa-da-la-qi*." This information, even indirectly, does not connect Chinese textiles with zandaniji. And there are no grounds to discuss the similarity of weaving techniques of these textiles, since there is no information about *sa-da-la-qi* and about zandaniji.

In sum then, this brief outline shows that the artificially created myth on the existence of zandaniji silk weaving in early medieval Sogdiana was built upon biased interpretations of the historical evidence with the aim of buttressing a refusal to recognize that zandaniji textiles were originally made of cotton.<sup>8</sup> That said, a majority of scholars recognized the work of Shepherd on zandaniji as her great achievement, at the same time that her conclusions (and those of Ierusalimsakaia) were already beginning to be met with some criticism from specialists in historic textiles.

The critiques paid less attention to the contradiction between the attribution of the Huy silk and evidence of the written sources, but focused instead on dating

of silks, their classification, and localization of the centers of their manufacture. Soon after the publication of "Zandaniji Identified?" Donald King rejected the dating of the Huy silk based on the character of the inscription. He noted that the early date (7<sup>th</sup> century) is at odds with other features of the silk, and dated it to the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the same as other similar textiles in the groups of Central Asian silks he discussed (King 1966, p. 48-49). While accepting the name of zandaniji for a group of the early medieval silks, Anna Muthesius doubted there was justification for defining a separate group Zandaniji III, which in fact was not significantly different from Zandaniji II. Also, she considered them as products of several Central Asian workshops, not one (Muthesius 1997, pp. 94-98). Citing numerous differences in technical and stylistic features of silks Shepherd believed had come from the same workshop, Hero Granger-Taylor argued that they were manufactured in different weaving centers. She also challenged Shepherd's dating of the silks in question (Granger-Taylor 2002, pp. 314-16).

Watt and Wardwell indicated there are serious distinctions between the groups defined by Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia, which might be explained by the latter's different approaches to the analysis of these silks: Shepherd had based her study of silk textiles on technical characteristics, while Ierusalimskaia considered the silks' style and dating. Admitting that both approaches are not free of controversy, Watt and Wardwell demonstrated significant discrepancies in their classification of the silks. One of them is that Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia included in the same group textiles of different weaving traditions, with z-twisted warps and untwisted warps: "z-twisted warps are characteristic of weft-faced compound twills produced in Iran and Byzantium, while lighter fabrics woven with untwisted warps occur in silks of the same structure produced in China" (Watt and Wardwell 1997, p. 22). This fact puts into question not only systematization of silk textiles offered by Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia, but their attribution as well.

In 2006 Boris I. Marshak and Valentina I. Raspopova published their thorough analysis of Sogdian art in regard to "Zandaniji silks," in which they demonstrated that the proclaimed style and iconography of "zandaniji textiles" are completely alien to the Sogdian cultural tradition (Marshak 2006; Raspopova 2006). In his article, Marshak also expressed the possibility of a different reading of the ink inscription on the Huy silk.

Despite the conclusive results presented by Marshak and Raspopova, there have been attempts, based solely on assumptions, to explain the discrepancy between

the written sources (where zandaniji are described as cotton fabrics) and the speculative concept of "Zandaniji silks." In attempting this, Richard Frye listed several hypotheses. The term "zandaniji" could be applied to different fabrics woven in similar techniques or to fabrics with similar design or coloring. In order to explain the absence of zandaniji silks on the territory of Sogdiana and lack of any information about them in the medieval texts where zandaniji is described as cotton textiles, Frye suggested that "the silk cloths of Zandaniji were generally sent abroad from Sogdiana, while the fine cotton and other textiles were the Zandaniji of the home population" (Frye 2006, p. 80). Other scholars still accepted the attribution of the Huy silk as zandaniji, though they also suggested a possibility of Central Asian and Eastern Iranian centers where zandaniji and similar silks could be manufactured (Otavský 2011, pp. 15, 327). Ierusalimskaia completely disregarded the results presented by Marshak and Raspopova in her monograph whose analysis of medieval silks from the North Caucasus constitutes the core of her discussion of the artifacts found there (Ierusalimskaia 2012).

One would think that the last nail in the coffin of Shepherd's erroneous conclusion was driven when, finally, the Huy inscription received a correct reading. This was the work of Nicholas Sims-Williams and Geoffrey Khan, who established beyond any doubt that the inscription on the silk piece is written in Arabic, it does not contain the word "Zandaniji", and in fact has a very different meaning. It translates: "Belonging to 'Abd al-Rahman, the commander, (acquired) for thirty-eight dinars less a third" (Sims-Williams and Khan 2012, p. 210). The style of script allowed them to date the inscription to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which lies within the range obtained by the radiocarbon analysis, 780–980 CE (Sims-Williams and Khan 2012, pp. 209 – 11). This incontrovertible evidence notwithstanding, the term zandaniji continues to be applied to the early medieval textiles found at sites along the Silk Road (Zhao and Wang, 2013; Rtveladze 2015, p. 357). Even in cases when the initial erroneous reading of the inscriptions has been admitted, researchers continue to follow the classification of "Zandaniji silks" (Schorta 2016, p. 59, 62; Muthesius 2015, p. 78; Muthesius 2016, p. 59-63) or attempt to tie both cotton and hypothetical silk production to the same workshops (Compareti 2015, p. 40).

## Conclusion

Critical observations and conclusions made by Watt and Wardwell, Marshak and Raspopova attest to the fallacy of the classification of "Zandaniji silks." It is now firmly established that the silk piece from Huy has no relation to zandaniji textiles and was

produced in the 9<sup>th</sup> century in a workshop at a not yet determined location, more likely than not, as suggested years ago by Otto von Falke, in one of the Eastern Iranian workshops (Falke, 1936, p. 20; fig. 110). The systematization of silk textiles offered by Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia – already subjected to well-grounded criticism by specialists from various angles – is mistaken and requires re-evaluation. The cultural and chronological attribution of silks discussed by Shepherd and Ierusalimskaia has turned out to be baseless as well. An analysis of artistic and technical characteristics of silk textiles included in groups of Zandaniji I, II, and III has revealed that they were woven in different workshops. The detailed localization of these workshops should be a topic of future investigations (Mackie 2015, p. 64).

The story about zandaniji silks shows how inaccurate conclusions, accepted and used by scholars without any critical reasoning, created a myth that dominated despite their incompatibility with the historical evidence. It is not Shepherd's fault that her "discovery" of "Zandaniji silks" was based on Henning's mistaken deciphering of the inscription. But from the very beginning she preferred to circumvent the problematic issue by using Frye's loose translation of the description of zandaniji in "The History of Bukhara" and persisted with her idea of zandaniji silks, which was unconditionally supported and developed by Ierusalimskaia. The myth about the existence of zandaniji silks thrived due the tendentious interpretation of written sources in order to reject the fact that zandaniji fabrics were made of cotton. This fact had been established in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Narshakhi, who lived in Bukhara and provided a firsthand account about these textiles. The adherence to the fictitious conclusions about zandaniji textiles led to the erroneous attribution of the numerous silks found at the North Caucasian archaeological sites and in medieval European churches, textiles whose place and time of manufacture in fact has yet to be determined. Besides the wrong attribution of this significantly large collection of silks, an acceptance of the idea about the existence of an established school of art weaving in medieval Sogdiana led to the false belief about the production of zandaniji silks in China as well. In order to correct all these inconsistencies and errors, characteristics of medieval cotton textiles, the zandaniji mentioned in the medieval sources, should be freed from any mythological identification with silk textiles, and the cultural and chronological attribution of "Zandaniji silks" re-considered.

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#### NOTES

1. Kept in the collections of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and the State Historical Museum in Moscow.

2. "That which comes from it is called zandanīdjī, which is to say muslin (kirbās) from the village of Zandana, which is both good and plentiful, but many of the villages of Bokhara weave better cloth, and they call it zandanīdjī because it first made its appearance in that town. This cloth is exported to all the provinces such as Iraq, Fars, Kerman, and Hindustan. All the nobles and kings make robes (djāma) of it and buy its brocade at a high price" (Serjeant 1946, p.123). The last part of the sentence in Serjeant's translation differs from the version done by Lykoshin and Frye. Dr. Maya Petrovich, whom I asked for consultation, confirmed the correctness of the latter authors, i.e.: "and buy it at the same price as brocade".

3. I would like to thank Dr. Maya Petrovich and Dr. George Malagaris for checking the textile terms used in the Persian version of Narshakhi's work.

4. According to Serjeant, karbās was equated with muslin (Serjeant 1943, pp. 91, 88, 89; Serjeant 1946, pp. 119, 121, 123, 124, 139; Serjeant 1951, p. 83). These cotton muslins should be distinguished from "mosulins" made from silk and gold manufactured in Mosule that was mentioned in "The Travels of Marco Polo" (Polo 1824, p. 20); I.M. Minaev suggested that those mosulins were named after the city but that the term did not always refer to the same textile (Polo 1955, p. 253).

5. In the more detailed Russian translation done by Nil Lykoshin, zandanījī has been described precisely as a fabric made of cotton: "From there, the so-called 'zandanījī', i.e. cotton textiles called so because they are made in this village, are exported ... Cotton textiles are exported from there to all regions" (Narshakhi 1897, pp. 23-4)

6. There are similar cases, when textiles of the same nature recorded in the same list could be found in medieval sources as well. For example, treatise "Hudud al-'Alam" recorded "cotton stuff (kirbās)" and "cotton" (Serjeant 1946, p. 106).

7. The article "Zandanījī in China" by Shang Gang is published in the catalog of the exhibition "Road of Silk. 5000 years of the Art of Silk" in Chinese, English, and Russian. The English and Russian versions of the catalog use the word zandanījī. The Chinese version of the catalog uses the

word *sa-da-la-qi*. The sentence, "It is generally believed that zandanījī textiles had already been transformed to cotton products before the arrival of the Mongol empire" (Shang Gang, 2007, p. 35) clearly shows the extrapolation of Narshakhi's information about zandanījī textiles on sa-da-la-qi textiles, though there is no evidence about the latter but for its being named in *Yuanshi* and the above-mentioned baseless assumptions.

8. It should be mentioned that as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian scholars identified zandanījī with *zenden'* of historical texts. In his work on some historical textiles, Konstantin A. Inostrantsev expressed an idea about the similarity of *zenden'* of the late medieval sources with *zandanījī* mentioned in Narshakhi's work. Though Inostrantsev was aware that Narshakhi described zandanījī as a cotton fabric, he considered a possibility that Old Russian *zenden'* could be silk. He borrowed this notion from P. I. Savvaitov, though the latter did not provide any proof for it, as Inostrantsev noted (Inostrantsev 1901, p. 84). Meanwhile, Vladimir K. Klein, who examined clothes kept in the Kremlin Armoury and inventory books which describe the textiles of these clothes as *zenden'*, was able to prove that *zenden'* was cotton (Klein 1925, p. 69). Also, Artemii V. Artsikhovskii stated that the word *zenden'* in a birch bark document (found in a layer of the late 14<sup>th</sup> - early 15<sup>th</sup> century in Novgorod) meant the cotton fabric. He concluded that this fact supported Narshakhi's evidence on the cotton nature of zandanījī textiles (Artsikhovskii and Borkovskii 1958, p. 60). All these scholars used the Russian version of "The History of Bukhara" where, as mentioned above, Lykoshin had translated *karbās* as cotton textiles. However, the idea that *zenden'*/zandanījī were silk textiles has been revived by Remo Faccani (Faccani 1995, p. 156). In his opinion, the usage of "cloth" chosen by Frye is more correct than Lykoshin's "cotton," and cast doubt on the quality of the latter's work. He cited Frye's opinion that the Russian translation "leaves much to be desired" and (again with reference to Frye) the opinion of Nikolai Veselovskii, who, in his review written soon after the publication of Lykoshin's translation, warned readers to be cautious in using this work (Faccani 1995, p. 154). Probably Faccani did not check the text of Narshakhi in Persian, and also did not read Veselovskii's review, which in fact expressed a positive opinion of Lykoshin's work. Commenting on some incorrectly understood words in a story about the coinage in Bukhara, Veselovskii wrote: "We believe, however, that one can find few such examples; on a whole, we must recognize the work as conscientious, and comments placed in footnotes as extremely useful for understanding Narshakhi's story" (Veselovskii 1897, p. 468). In its turn, the English version of "The History of Bukhara" done by Frye has been somewhat criticized. In his review, Arthur J. Arberry wrote: "Unhappily Dr. Frye's knowledge of Persian is not always as impressive as his bibliographical erudition and the version is marred by some inaccuracies" (Arberry 1955, p. 605). It is obvious that the evaluation of translations of ancient texts is not a way to clarify some questionable places in these translations, for which one should address the original sources.