

Preface

The present volume collects ten papers dealing with a variety of scripts and languages in pre-Islamic Central Asia, with topics ranging from history and archaeology to philology, linguistics and palaeography. The papers are organized alphabetically by author, starting with a reconsideration of the cultural-geographical concept of “Bactria-Tukharistan” and closing with a new edition of the Ayrtam inscription.

Most of the papers not only cross several academic fields and historical regions but also widely explore documents and texts written in Bactrian, Khotanese, Tumshuqese, Sogdian, Tocharian B (i.e. Kuchean), Gāndhārī, Sanskrit, and even Chinese and Old Uyghur. Given the diverse disciplines and scholarly traditions in this collection, we have not attempted to uniformise terminology or style, and we only systematised the references and abbreviations to a limited extent.

We would like to express our most sincere thanks to Agnes Korn for initiating the idea of this volume following the panel “History and culture of pre-Islamic Afghanistan” moderated by Ching Chao-jung and Inaba Minoru of the *Tenth European Conference on Iranian Studies* (ECIS 10), which was organized by the Societas Iranologica Europaea and hosted by Leiden University (August 21–25, 2023). We took this opportunity to invite contributions of several researchers who either presented individual papers at the same conference or actively took part in the discussion. Thanks go to Pavel B. Lurje, who generously prepared the English translation of his recent Russian paper on the so-called “Unknown script” for this volume and gave a special online lecture during a monthly meeting of the collaborative research unit “Socio-economic base of ancient traffic in Inner Asia in the light of Chinese and non-Chinese sources” (Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University) on May 14, 2025.

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The editors