A study of some deities in Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian Coinages

Dr. Christine Frohlich:

In ancient North-Western India, the Indo-Scythian and the Indo-Parthian coinages (1st c. B.C.- Ist c. A.D.) are often considered only as a historical source. They are indeed the more abundant one, the more complete and the only one through which it is possible to reconstruct a chronology and a king's succession. But Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins have more to say than historical dates. Their iconography informs us about their conception of kingship, when depicting the king on horseback holding a spear or a whip, but also about their religious preferences. Both aspects, either on their coin obverses or reverses, are essential to understand their relationships with contemporary or nearby civilisations such as Scythian, Parthian or Indian civilisations.

There is no place here to deal with both aspects, even to pretend to study all deities appearing on Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian issues. A good part of them are taken from the Indo-Greek coinage, their predecessors, as for Athena and Zeus. However some gods are a good example of how foreign deities were modified, emptied out of their signification or even introduced; some of them indicate how a syncretism between several religions begins during the Indo-Scythian and the Indo-Parthian periods, a syncretism which is developped and amplified later on under the Kushan power (IIInd-IVth c. A.D.).

The majority of the deities represented on Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins are of Greek origin. Some of them find parallels in Gandhara art. Even if they keep their Greek aspect, they sometimes are "indianised". Some other Greek deities combine Greek and Indian features. Indian deities were also introduced by the Indo-Scythians, sometimes with Greek features. Eventually there are unidentified gods which associate Greek, Iranian and Indian characteristics.

Thus this study raises two questions: firstly, it seems that the syncretism observed during the Kushan period indeed began earlier, during the Indo-Scythian and the Indo-Parthian periods. Secondly, the large range of deities found on these two nomadic dynasties issues have often no parallels before or after this period. It is possible that beyond syncretism, Indian, Iranian and Greek elements were added to their own cultural substratum that we do not know in other respects.

Not the Buddha but Zeus on the gold token from Tillya-tepe

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On the obverse of the gold token excavated by V.,Sarianidi from the tomb No. 4 of the Tillya-tepe burials in northern Afghanistan is struck a unprecedented image of a Zeus-like naked and bearded man turning a wheel (Sarianidi 1985, pp.188-89, 250, pl.131). V.,Sarianidi and G.Koshelenko did not identify this naked man but simply described him as the figure or silhouette of naked man (Sarianidi/Koshelenko 1982, p.315). However, this naked and bearded man was identified for the first time, by G.Fussman as the Buddha Shakya-muni (Fussman 1982, pp.167-168:1987, pp. 71-72). This identification followed by D.W.Mac Dowall (Mac Dowall 1987, p.173). Furthermore,
R.Brown tried to search for its proto-type or model admitting the identification of the Buddha (Brown 2000). According to M.Taddei, “the human figure, not displaying those marks that will later identify the body of the Enlightened One, surely testifies to one of the earliest attempts at an anthropomorphic representation (of the Buddha)” or “the nude man pushing a wheel certainly reflects a Buddha type which eventually failed, though it can still be recognized in some mature Gandharan reliefs” (Taddei 2003, vol.2, pp.499, 594).

It seems to me that the identification of the man concerned as the earliest anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha Shakya-muni is prevailing among the many scholars of the South Asian archaeology and arts. However, I cannot agree with this kind of identification. In my opinion, the Zeus-like figure is not the Buddha but simply Zeus. Therefore, this naked man is not the earliest image of the Buddha. In the following I will try to refute the so-called prevalent identification.

1) Reinterpretation of the Kharoshthi legend of the obverse of the gold token:
The relevant Kharoshthi inscription on the obverse is deciphered as “dharmacakrapravatata” by G.Fussman and “dharmacakrapravatana” by V.V.Vertogradova respectively (Fussman 1987, p.71; Sarianidi/Koshelenko 1982, p.315). However, the last “ko” and “na” are not correct but these two characters are actually “ti” according to A.Sadakata’s new reading (dharmacakram pravatati)(Sadakata 1998, p.229). In fact G.Fussman doubted the reading “ko” in his first decipherment (Fussman 1982, p.166, [ko?]). Following A.Sadakata’s new reading, the relevant inscription should be transliterated in Sanskrit as “dharamacakra(m)pravartati”. It means therefore that (he) turns (or is turning) the Wheel of Law. The subject of this sentence is “he”, which must be the Buddha Shâkyamuni. G.Fussman and others regarded the bearded and naked man as the Buddha, but this Zeus-like man is not the subject of this sentence. This man is added only to show that the wheel is to be turned or pushed, because the simple depiction of wheel does not convey the idea of being turned. If this man were the Buddha, the name of the Buddha such as Shakamano must have been inscribed as the subject of this legend. Furthermore, without the name of the Buddha nobody would not have been able to understand that this Zeus-like man was the Buddha. The image of the naked Zeus had been introduced to Central Asia by Diodotos in the late 3rd century A.D. and the dressed image of Zeus was handed over to Gandhara through Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian coins. Therefore, many Buddhists of Gandhara and adjacent regions must have identified the relevant bearded man as the image of Zeus.

Based upon the new reading of the relevant legend, I will concluded that the naked man concerned is not the earliest anthropomorphic image of the Buddha but Zeus himself.

2) Gesture of the turning and pushing the wheel:
R.Brown compared the naked man pushing a wheel with the standing Buddha image depicted in several Gandharan reliefs depicting the First Sermon (Brown 2000, figs.11, 12 ). In these reliefs the Buddha touches the wheel of the Law by the right hand. Therefore, R.Brown interpreted that the gesture of the right hand goes back to that of the Zeus-like naked man of the Tillya-tepe token. This interpretation was followed by M.Taddei (Taddei 2003, pp.594-595). However, in my opinion, the gesture of touching something by the right hand signifies the manufacturer or owner
in Gandharan Buddhist art. This is already demonstrated by the Gandharan image of Vishvakarman (Tanabe 1995/96). Vishvakarman is depicted with the right hand on the roof of the palanquin which he manufactured for carrying the infant Shâkyamuni to the palace of Kapilavastu. Therefore, the right hand of the Buddha touching the Wheel of the Law does not allude directly to turning, but shows that the Wheel is created by the Buddha or that it belongs to the Buddha. In a relief depicting the First Sermon now in the possession of the Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum in Kamakura, Japan is represented the Buddha touching slightly by the right hand the shaft of the tri-ratna column supporting the Three Wheels. It means the relevant column symbolizing the First Sermon belongs not to others but to the Buddha. Taking into consideration these reliefs, I conclude that there is no direct relationship between both pushing hands of the Zeus-like man and the right hand of the Buddha.

In conclusion, no anthropomorphic image of the Buddha Shakyamuni did exist before the Kushan period.

**Greek and Graeco-Roman jewellery from Bactria and Gandhara**

Chantal Fabregues

The cities of Taxila-the Bir mound and Taxila-Sirkap in Gandhara and the Tillya tepe tombs in Bactria yielded a most impressive, and hence always referred to, amount of pieces of jewellery. Among them are ornaments of Greek or Graeco-Roman origin or descent. Further examples of such ornaments occur at various other sites in Gandhara, in various necropolis on the right bank of the Oxus and, as I could discover from the study of it I have been offered to undertake, among the material Charles Masson collected at Begram. Some more classical ornaments of unspecified provenance in Bactria and Gandhara are held in museums throughout the world while others are part of private collections. Gandharan sculptures exhibit some specimens.

My paper is concerned with putting them together in order to show, firstly, their importance in number and their variety in types, which makes of them another elements pointing towards the importance of Western classical influence in the areas under consideration, secondly, that some of them originate from a specific place in the Greek or Roman world and bespeak therefore particular trade currents, and thirdly that their representation on Gandhara sculptures is scarce what suggests that Western Classical culture influenced a small part only of the Gandharan population.

**Vajrapani in the narrative reliefs**

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A comprehensive documentation of the representations of Vajrapani in narrative art has been compiled as a "by-product" of a project currently running at the Institute of Indology in Munich (working title: "Buddhist stories of conversions in Indian art and literature"). The comparison of the reliefs (many of them yet unpublished) with the textual tradition allows to argue conclusively that the meaning of Vajrapani in Buddhist belief has so far been understood inadequately. Not only was the role he played much more important than has been assumed, but it also differs significantly from the common interpretations: Vajrapani was not the "guardian angel" of the Buddha but a violent fighter for conversions. Often it was through Vajrapani's
merciless actions which are frequently depicted that the Buddha could demonstrate his mercy.

Hieratic, hierarchical reliefs and stelae from Sahrī-Bahlol: a typological study
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While almost one hundred and fifty years have passed since the major Buddhist center of Sahrī-Bahlol was initially surveyed, the site remains one of the least well understood complexes of the Greater Gandharan Buddhist tradition. That Sahrī-Bahlol is of importance to the history of Buddhism in the region is attested by the recovery of many of the tradition’s most significant sculpted pieces, providing evidence of major developments that is largely absent from other sites in the northwest. With scholars disagreeing on numerous points of interest, little progress has been made over the years, and, in the absence of new excavation, as the site is currently occupied, it is through detailed analyses of the sculptural tradition that the answers to many of the outstanding issues may be addressed.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate a discrete corpus of hieratic, hierarchical reliefs and stelae in terms of iconographic content, stylistic characteristics, and relative chronological period. These sculptures may be classed as theophanies and visions of paradisiacal realms associated with Mahayana traditions, which were seemingly introduced at Sahrī-Bahlol sometime during second century and continued as a major focus through the fourth or fifth centuries. The primary subject of these sculptures is a large image of a Buddha shown in a tripartite relationship with two Bodhisattvas. The Buddha is seated in padmāsana (lotus sitting attitude) and displaying dharmacakra mudrā (gesture of setting on motion the wheel of the Law). These works vary in the settings depicted, complexity, and the total number of figures which are included in the overall iconographic program. In addition to these characteristics, four types of lotus daises, distinguished by both iconographic and stylistic features have been identified.

As no systematic analysis of the known corpus of these reliefs and stelae has hitherto been advanced, this effort provides new opportunities to understand and more precisely define one of the most influential components of the enduring visual language developed in Greater Gandhara during an exceedingly vibrant period in its history.

Indo-Scythian Buddhists in Han Dynasty China: The visual evidence and its significance
Dr. Martha L. Carter

Conclusions: During the Augustan Era the Roman Empire saw the beginning of a demand for silk from the Far East that reached unprecedented levels by mid first century. At the same time in China a series of natural disasters and civil unrest culminating in a temporary loss of imperial power caused its network of military outposts protecting land trade routes across Xinjiang to collapse. Due to these conditions, demand surpassed supply and the price for Chinese silk climbed steeply, causing merchant middlemen of the Indian subcontinent to use other routes to China by sea and land. It seems very likely that the earliest known Buddhist art in China was created as the result such contacts in the northern coastal area of Jiangsu and in the
south in Sichuan.

The first reliable reference to Buddhists in China comes from the Later Han Annals' report of a prince Ying who ruled a small portion of northern Jiangsu in the mid-first century AD and held feasts for Buddhist laymen and monks. In the same vicinity of Jiangsu near the modern port of Lianyungang a rocky hill has been found covered with a variety of Buddhist imagery carved in crude low relief. Some carvings show figures of foreigners who appear to be Indo-Scythians. It is reasonable to postulate that there was a settlement nearby of Indo-Scythian Buddhists who first arrived by sea during the early first century. Other remnants of the earliest Buddhist art in China occur in central Sichuan, one near Leshan in an Eastern Han era rock cut tomb with a relief of a seated Buddha above the entrance, and in small Buddha images on funerary 'money trees'. Again, stylistic details suggest influences from an Indo-Scythian environment. During the first century an increased number of sea traders from India plied the Bay of Bengal to Burma where they bartered with caravaneers who had trekked the difficult passes through Yunnan to Sichuan for silk. Indo-Scythian Buddhists appear to have been among them.

*The Gates to the Darel Valley from the Singal Valley, the Batakhun & the Yajur Passes: field research in northern Pakistan in tracing Fa Hsien’s route from Pamir to Darel, 2003 & 2004.*

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This paper focuses on our field work on the Batakhun and the Yajur Passes, the two gates to the Darel Valley from the Singal Valley, conducted as part of Tsuchiya/Ajmad field research. The field research of the Singal Valley (2001) covered almost the entire valley except for its head beyond the Patharo Chowki. The field work in the Darel Valley (1998-2000) started from the mouth of the valley on the Indus, towards Pouguch and Rajikot, but was halted at Junishal. The area between Patharo Chowki and Junishal has remained a no man’s land for non-Darelis. In our present field work (2003, 2004), we could finally cover the two gates to the Darel Valley, the Batakhun and the Yajur Passes, as the first scientific field work ever to have been made of this area.

*‘Grid-Planning’ at Taxila*

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Sir John Marshall’s excavations at Taxila between 1912 and 1934 revealed a distinctive, regular street-plan, which he attributed to the influence of Greek theories of town-planning, brought to the region by the Indo-Greeks. Marshall’s conclusions are, however, compromised not only by the uncertain chronology of the regularly-planned portion of the site, but also by the contemporary archaeological milieu within which he worked, which was often overenthusiastic in its attribution of Graeco-Roman characteristics to South Asian sites.

This paper seeks to place Taxila within its wider context – South Asian, Hellenistic and Central Asian – and consider the urban layout of Taxila alongside that of comparable sites. Comparison of Greek and Indian architectural theory, as presented in textual sources, with the archaeological data, makes it clear that a regular ‘grid-plan’ was in fact the ideal in both South Asian and Greek systems, but seldom
comprehensively applied in practice. Instead, we should look at the possible pragmatic reasons for Taxila’s ‘grid-plan’, with reference both to the history of occupation of the site itself, and to the circumstances of the foundation of regularly-planned cities elsewhere.

The 2003 field research found the area linking the Singal and the Darel valleys, surrounded by mountains, to be a high plateau, rich with pasture, streams and lakes and the glacier covered Kini Chish Mt.(4949m). Many families from Darel spend summer grazing cattle and growing maize. The Yajur Pass was found to be a regular route to reach Darel, more popular than the well-known Batakhun Passes. Because of the gradual ascent along the Kolibari stream and the relatively easy descent to the Darel Valley, the Yajur Pass was preferred by general traffic with cattle and with loaded animals.

The 2004 field research covered the entire Batraith Valley, the high plateau and the Batakhun Pass. The Darel side descent of the Batakhun Pass is extremely steep, rugged and dangerous, only used for emergency. The Batkhun area and Darband at the head of the Darel Valley was found to have formed a defensive system, protecting the entire Darel Valley, including Pouguch, a possible Buddhist establishment, where Fa Hsien could have made the pilgrimage.