

Religions and Trade

Religious Formation, Transformation and
Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West

Edited by

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2014

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WHEN THE GREEKS CONVERTED THE BUDDHA: ASYMMETRICAL TRANSFERS OF KNOWLEDGE IN INDO-GREEK CULTURES

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ναμο ο βοδο
ναμο ο δουαρμο
ναμο ο σαργο¹

1. THE MEETING OF HELLENISM AND BUDDHISM AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRADE AND CONQUEST

Following the theme of this volume, this article will revisit the documented effects of Hellenistic conquests and commercial activities on the development of new forms of religious knowledge at the core and fringes of Indo-Greek communities. It will be shown that international trading centres and routes substantially enhanced the frequency and intensity of cultural exchange between Greek travellers and settlers in the Hellenistic East, following the campaigns of Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.), and Indian and Central Asian laymen, ascetics and missionary Buddhist monks. The flow of commodities broke through not only geographical borders, but also ethnic, political, linguistic and personal barriers. In fact, there are numerous contact points and levels of interaction between traders, institutions and religious communities that foster unprecedented crossings between material culture and ideology and between the material value of items and their symbolic capital as personal and cultural artefacts, and ideological markers.

¹ Greco-Bactrian inscription at Jağatu, Afghanistan, of the Sanskrit refuge formula to the “three-jewels” (triratna): *I go for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha*; Helmut Humbach “Two Inscriptions in Graeco-Bactrian Cursive Script from Afghanistan,” *East and West* 17 (1967): 25–26. I am most grateful to the Käte Hamburger Kolleg, Ruhr University Bochum, for supporting and encouraging my research on Hellenism and Buddhism in Central Asia, and to all my colleagues at the Consortium for their inspiring presence during the completion of this article, especially Adam Knobler, Andreas Bedlin, Dan Martin and Christopher Beckwith for their stimulating discussions and valuable suggestions. My warm thanks go to Professors Y. Karunadassa and Ven. Guang Xing at the Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, for their feedback and insights.

In order to fully appreciate the intellectual and material reciprocity that transpired between Indo-Greeks and Buddhists, it may be useful to frame their historical encounters as synchronic and diachronic processes that unfolded because of geographical proximity, trading exchange, cultural compatibilities, and wider political developments in the region. Drawing from the fields of archaeology, numismatics, art history, epigraphy, and literary sources preserved in Greek, Latin, Indian, and Tibetan, we can assess the intensity of their interactions and reconstruct their joint contributions to the unique development of Buddhism in the Hellenistic East.

In the first section, I shall track Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia and NW India and examine how at different times and because of trade, the Hellenes of the East remained in close historical contact with their Mediterranean cousins and with their Indian and Central Asian neighbours. In the second section, Alexander's policy of integration between East and West will serve as a prelude to the meeting of Pyrrho of Elis with Indian ascetics—some of them in all probability Buddhists who had a decisive impact on the philosophical orientation of Pyrrhonism. In the third section, I will offer an overview of the encounters between Buddhist missions and Greek communities in the Mauryan Empire vis-à-vis the alleged impact of Buddhist missionaries as attested by the Greek edicts of Aśoka. Drawing from the evidence presented, in the fourth section I will argue for the formation of Greco-Buddhist art as an endemic development initiated by Indo-Greeks who had converted to Buddhism. In the final section, I will address the phenomenon of cultural conversion among the Indo-Greeks to Buddhism and of Buddhism to Hellenism drawing some instructive insights from Kroeber's theory of stimulus diffusion. I will conclude that the fusion of Hellenism and Buddhism is the side effect of an asymmetrical recreation of religious and cultural horizons neither exclusively Indian nor uniquely Greek.

1.1. *The Macedonian Legacy of Alexander in Bactria and India*

As early as the sixth century B.C.E., cross-cultural exchanges between Greeks, Indians and Persians are documented in the Persian Empire that fostered the international movement of people and goods from the eastern coast of the Aegean all the way to the Persian satrapy of Bactria in modern-day Afghanistan.² The well-known voyage of Carian Scylax of

² Greek communities on the Mediterranean coast of the Persian Empire and in Bactria are attested and apart from special cases of envoys and delegations there are at least nine

Caryanda in 517 B.C.E., written in Greek in a book lost to us, describes his passage from the Kabul River in Paskapyrus (perhaps Peshawar) to the Indus River and through the Arabian Sea to Suez.³ The circulation of Greek coins in Bactria before Alexander's arrival "suggests that long-distance commercial contacts were fostered right through the Persian period."⁴

Alexander III of Macedonia arrived with his army in Persian Bactria in 330 B.C.E., leaving behind three thousand five hundred cavalry and ten thousand infantry to safeguard the fortified towns he had established in what came to be known among Greek and Latin authors as the 'land of a thousand cities,' a flourishing centre of Hellenistic culture. It is said that nearly seventy newly founded cities were named Alexandria after the Macedonian conqueror but not all of them have been discovered. The Hellenistic towns he established in the Hindu Kush range, namely Sagala (Śākala) and Taxila (Takṣaśīlā), are shown by excavations to have been located on strategic positions along the ancient western trade routes that linked Sānchī, ancient Vidiśā, with Ujjain.⁵

Along with the migration of Greek populations, names of places and legends of origins translocated in new environments forging historical

records documenting journeys undertaken by Indian parties to Persia; see Adrian Bivar, "The Indus Lands," in *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean C. 525 to 479 B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 207. It appears that the first Bactrians to face Alexander were not in Bactria but "two thousand military colonists in Asia Minor who fought at the Granicus River in 334 B.C.E.;" see Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 45.

³ The exact geographical locations mentioned in the voyage of Scylax have been a subject of debate among historians; see Klaus Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1989), 41–46, and Bivar, "Indus Lands," 200–204. As shown by Duncan Derrett, "Homer in India: the Birth of the Buddha," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2:1 (1992): 47–57, according to Plutarch (45–120 C.E.), Dio Chrysostom (40–111 C.E.), and Aelian (174–235 C.E.) Greek themes exerted their fascination among the Indians. India continued to cast its spell on Greek travellers and writers up until the sixth century when the Greek Nestorian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes (literally, 'he who has sailed to India') composed the *Christian Topographia* (Χριστιανική Τοπογραφία), a work that offers vivid descriptions of his supposed voyages to Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and India; see John McCrindle, *Kosma Aiguptiou Monachou Christianikē Topographia*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1897.

⁴ Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria*, 28. Holt (ibid.) notes the abundant evidence for the heavy traffic of lapis lazuli that was mined in the Badakhshan Mountains of eastern Bactria to India and Mesopotamia.

⁵ Vidiśā, near Sānchī, seems to have played an important part in the economic relations between the Greek kings of the northwest and the Indian rulers of the towns along the western trade route as indicated by the inscription erected by Heliodorus, an inhabitant at Taxila, who served as the Greek ambassador of King Antialcidas at the Śunga court.

continuity with mainland Greece where there had been little to none.⁶ Hence, some Hellenistic towns were given names derived from Greek royalty such as Antiochia in Persis, Seleucia on the Eulaeus, and Laodicea in Media, while others were assigned toponyms of places back home like Pella, Dion, and Amphipolis.⁷ The Macedonian colonies implanted by Alexander and maintained by his successors, the *diadochoi* (Grk. διάδοχοι), were not merely trading posts and military garrisons. Many of them became vibrant cities with Greek socio-political institutions cultivated by the arrival of specialized migrant workers to fill administrative posts and to provide Hellenic scientific and technical expertise.

The fortified city of Ay Khanum is one of the best examples of a centre of Hellenistic particularity in Bactria. This royal city, whose Greek name is lost to us, was founded around 300 B.C.E. by Alexander's general, Seleucus I Nicator (c. 358–281).⁸ Ay Khanum, or “Lady Moon” in Uzbek, occupied a site of about 1.5 square kilometres wide on a strategic position along the trade routes on the Oxus River. It featured typical components of a *polis* mixed with Hellenistic and Persian artistic and architectural styles. The palace was adorned with Greek antefixes opening into an impressive forecourt surrounded by four Corinthian limestone colonnades of one hundred and eight pillars. From the enclosure one entered various buildings including, for example, official reception halls, a double chancellery section, a large bath house with a floor mosaic made of river pebbles, two private residences, and an inner courtyard with sixty Doric columns. Like many Hellenistic cities of that size, it had a large semi-circular theatre built against the inner slope of a sixty meter high acropolis where,

⁶ The ‘Alexandrias’ of Asia maintained contacts with the Mediterranean basin, as seen in the case of Clearchus of Soli, who around 275 B.C.E. visited the city of Ay Khanum and left behind a copy of Delphic maxims. Suchandra Ghosh, “Understanding Transitions at the Crossroads of Asia: c. Mid Second Century B.C.E. to c. Third Century C.E.,” *Studies in History* 23, no. 2 (2007): 302, discusses the migration of Greek legends during the Indo-Greek period and draws our attention to the previous birth-story of the Buddha, the Ghata Jātaka No. 454, which bears striking similarity with the Greek myth of Danae.

⁷ Apostolos Mposdroukis, “Oi Poleis ton Diadoxon tou M. Alexandrou stin Eggus kai ti Mesi Anatoli,” in *O Ellinistikos Politismos stin Anatoli*, ed. Potitsa Grigorakou (Athens: Politistikos Omilos Palmyra, 2009), 40–42.

⁸ Some scholars identified Ay Khanum with the ‘Alexandria of Oxus,’ but in fact its ancient name remains uncertain. Others contend that it is Eukratidia, named after the Greco-Bactrian king Eukratides I Megas (171–145 B.C.E.), who is credited with the largest gold denomination ever issued in antiquity. For references concerning the ancient name of Ay Khanum see Rachel Mairs, *The Archaeology of the Hellenistic Far East: A Survey. Bactria, Central Asia and the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, c. 300 BC–AD 100* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2011), 10.

in all probability, performances of Dionysian dramas and comedies were staged, and which also served as the *agora* (Grk. ἀγορά) for social and commercial gatherings.⁹ Ay Khanum also housed a gymnasium dedicated to the Olympian god Hermes and the Pan-Hellenic hero Heracles comprising an inner courtyard and a series of rooms built for the physical and intellectual training of the youth. The discovery of several crowned statuettes of Heracles confirms his cultic prominence in Bactria and other areas of Central Asia and NW India.¹⁰

1.2. *The Development of Hellenism in Central Asia*

Alexander's conquests in Central Asia mark the introduction of Hellenism in the East. Like all *isms* the term presents its own problems of definition embroidered in a medley of discourses concerning periodization, ethnicity, and language. In this study Hellenism designates a political and cultural enterprise, roughly from the fourth century B.C.E. to the second century C.E., which is made evident along an intricate mosaic of trading routes connecting vibrant Hellenistic cities in Central Asia and NW India including Kandahar, Alexandria of Oxus, Alexandria Eschate, Begram

⁹ Paul Bernard, "The Greek Colony at Ai Khanum and Hellenism in Central Asia," in *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 88–89. The Neo-Pythagorean Apollonios of Tyana writes of his visit to Taxila around 46 C.E. where he met the King Phraotes and the inhabitants of a Hellenized settlement who spoke fluent Greek and could converse on the *Iliad*, the play *Heraclidae*, and Greek philosophy; Osmond De Beauvoir Priaulx, "The Indian Travels of Apollonios of Tyana," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 17, (1860): 70–105.

Though his travel accounts should be treated with caution, the popularity of Greek plays can be inferred by the size of the theatre in Ay Khanum which was capable of seating five thousand spectators. The discovery of a fragment of a locally manufactured vase found near Peshawar depicting a scene from Sophocles' *Antigone*, is one of several references to the performance of classical plays in the regions under Macedonian control. According to Bruno Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 117, probably the first Greek drama ever performed in India was the satirical play *Agen* staged during the feast of Dionysos at the military camp of Alexander on the banks of the river Hydaspes during his Indian campaign. The case of the Sophytos inscription is most telling since the author cultivated in his youth the virtues of Apollo and the Muses, the patrons of Greek theatre and culture. Rachel Mairs, "Greek identity and the settler community in Hellenistic Bactria and Arachosia," *Migrations and Identity* 1 (2008): 35, adds that the "literary style of the inscription also betrays him as a man familiar with the Homeric epics, and not above the flowery style and ostentatious use of recherché vocabulary that are the hallmarks of many works of Hellenistic literature."

¹⁰ Elizabeth Errington and Joe Cribb, *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformations of Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992), 99–103.

(Alexandria of the Cacausus), Taxila (Sirkap), Gyaur-Kala (Alexandria of Margiana), Bactria at Termez, Ay Khanum, and Bactria (Balkh).¹¹

A degree of cultural and racial fusion is implicit in the Hellenistic constitution of Central Asia. The so-called “Greco-Bactrians” (250 B.C.E.–c. 125 B.C.E.) and “Indo-Greeks” (180 B.C.E.–10 C.E.) reigned during distinct periods of history and over specific territories that encompassed populations of pure and mixed descent—Macedonian, Indian, Persian and Central Asian stock.¹² The parallel use of Greek, Aramaic, Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts attests to the multilingualism that prevailed in these regions.¹³ Persians and Indians adopted Greek names for a variety of reasons, while many Greeks took on Indian names.¹⁴ The stone inscriptions and ostraca

¹¹ There are many sites excavated in Central Asia that date to Hellenistic times, including Afrasiab, Khojand, Kobadian, Takht-i Sangin, Tepe-i Dinstan, Emshi-tepe, Tepe Nimlik, Dilberjin, Herat, Charsadda and Shaikan Dheri. For a detailed list see Paul Bernard, “The Greek Kingdoms of Central Asia,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta, (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1994), 103–104. For some estimates the Hellenistic period starts after the death of the Macedonian king in Babylon in 323, while its ending seems to vary according to the geographical regions in question; see Gary Reger, “Hellenistic Greece and Western Asia Minor,” in *The Cambridge History of the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Walter Scheidel et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 460. For a discussion of chronological and geographical delimitations of Hellenism in the Far East see Mairs, *Hellenistic Far East*, 9.

¹² Concerning the designations ‘Greco-Bactrian’ and ‘Indo-Greek’ Mairs, *Hellenistic Far East*, 10, notes: “It has become customary to refer to the Greek kingdoms north of the Hindu Kush as ‘Graeco-Bactrian’ and those in the Indian Subcontinent as ‘Indo-Greek.’ These designations are, for obvious reasons, unsatisfactory . . . The conventional distinction between the two terms is intended to be (loosely) chronological and geographical, and the flexibility in their usage should be borne in mind.”

¹³ A. Narain, “The Greeks of Bactria and India,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History* eds. I.E.S. Edward et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1989) 419. For instructive examples and case studies of Greek bilingualism in the ancient world see J.N. Adams et al. eds., *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197–392. It is important not to define the Greeks of the East exclusively by virtue of their classical education *paideia* (Grk. παιδεία) and association with a single *polis* (Grk. πόλις). They were spatially and temporally distant from mainland Greece, and their ethnic identities were challenged over time, reconstituted by shifting political, economic and social conditions. The possible conversion of the Greek ambassador of the Indo-Greek King Antialcidas to Brahmanism around 110 B.C.E. is indicative of such a break from Hellenistic traditions; see John Irwin, “The Heliodorus Pillar at Besnagar,” *Purātattva, Bulletin of the Indian Archaeological Society*, no. 8 (1978): 166–176. For a critical study on the subject of Greek identity in Hellenistic Bactria and Arachosia see Mairs, “Greek Identity.”

¹⁴ A funerary Greek inscription from Kandahar, which dates to the second century B.C.E., offers a good example. It was sponsored by an international trader, a culturally-Greek Indian who Hellenized his Indian name Subhuti into Sophytos; see Paul Bernard et al., “Deux Nouvelles Inscriptions Grecques de l’Asie Centrale,” *Journal des Savants* (2004): 231–232. According to Mairs, “Greek Identity,” 34, the use of non-Greek names in

in Greek from the Treasury at Ay Khanum in Bactria are not the only example.¹⁵ At the excavated site of Takhti-Sangin in present-day Tajikistan, amid the discovery of fine Hellenistic portraits of Seleucid monarchs and of Alexander the Great in the guise of Heracles, a Greek inscription was made by an Iranian for his votive dedication to the river deity Oxus.¹⁶

The enduring prestige of Greek culture is attested by the adoption of Greek currency, iconography and reproduction of elite symbols and structures by the Śakas, the Parthians and the Kuṣāṇas who succeeded as rulers of the Greeks in Central Asia and NW India. The compelling design, purchasing power, and symbolic capital of Hellenistic coinage account for its wide circulation and imitation across the commercial routes linking the East with the West. Moreover, it stimulated the diffusion of Greek technology, science, astronomy, architecture, medicine, religion and the arts.¹⁷

The liquidation of the Achaemenid treasuries,¹⁸ the exploitation of natural resources, and various commercial investments formed a major source of revenue for Hellenistic states built on prosperous colonies and extensive trading networks. The Hellenistic *poleis* raised money by imposing taxes on agricultural production, collecting import and export dues,

Greek texts in Hellenistic Bactria suggests that the adoption of dual personal names was not a common strategy.

¹⁵ Some of the personal names recorded in these mediums are Greek and others are of Iranian origin; see A.K. Narain, "On Some Greek Inscriptions from Ai-Khanum," *Annali* Vol. 47 (1987): 269–293. The Greek epigraphic corpus from Central Asia is collected in F. Canali De Rossi *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente Greco: Un Repertorio* (Bonn: Habelt, 2004), 285–413.

¹⁶ The inscription runs: 1. Εὐχὴν 2. ἀνέθηκεν 3. Ἀτροσώκης 4. Ὁξῶι, which translates: Atrosokes (an Iranian name) dedicated his votive offering to Oxos; see János Harmatta, "Languages and Scripts in Graeco-Bactria and the Saka kingdoms," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1994), 407.

¹⁷ For detailed numismatic studies in the region see Osmund Bopearachchi, *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques: Catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1991) and Amarendra Lahiri, *Corpus of Indo-Greek Coins* (Calcutta: Poddar-Publications, 1965). Bernard, "Greek Kingdoms," 125, explains that the distribution of silver coins is a good indication "both of their use as international currency beyond the borders of the countries in which they were issued, and of the geographical range of the country's commercial activities. The area in which Graeco-Bactrian tetradrachms are found . . . reached as far as Syria-Mesopotamia with finds at Baarin, Susa, and the Kabala hoard in Caucasia. Indo-Greek coins circulated as far as the heart of the Ganges valley at Panchkora."

¹⁸ Alexander seized, mostly from Persepolis and Susa, roughly one hundred and eight thousand talents in the form of about three hundred and twelve tons of gold and two thousand tons of silver; see Reger, "Hellenistic Greece," 471.

and from the sales of land, citizenship and priesthoods.¹⁹ During this period, we discern a striking increase in the international and national slave market and an unprecedented growth of banks and private money-lending institutions. Regional and transregional guilds traded in raw material (i.e., timber, metals, wool, cannabis, coal-tar, flax, marble, dyes), edible goods (i.e., salt, oil, wine, honey, dried fruits, grains, spices, fish, birds and animals), household goods (i.e., papyri, parchment, textiles and coloured cloths, wool, glassware, carpets), and luxury items (i.e., pearls, gold, silver, precious stones, scents, and ivory).²⁰

With the trafficking of commodities, many fortune-seekers, emissaries, translators, officials, soldiers, artists and others migrated to the East encountering in all probability Indians who would have gone West in search of new prospects. There are some intriguing references to Buddhism spreading from Central Asia to the West, along the Persian Gulf and across the Iranian plateau to the Mediterranean.²¹ The famous Greek orator and historian, Dion Chrysostomos (c. 40–c. 112 C.E.), during his address

¹⁹ Reger, "Hellenistic Greece," 464.

²⁰ For relevant studies see Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941); Robertus Van der Spek, "The Hellenistic Near East," in *The Cambridge History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Walter Scheidel et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 409–433; and Alexander Despotopoulos, "Megas Alexandros / Ellinistikoi Xronoi," in *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous*, ed. Georgios Christopoulos et al. (Athens: Etairia Istorikon Ekdoseon), 475–480.

²¹ For a discussion of the evidence on the spread of Buddhism westwards see David Scott, "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," *East and West* 40 (1990): 43–77, and A. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Buddhist ritual in the literature of early Islamic Iran," in *South Asian Archaeology, Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, ed. Bridget Allchin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 272–279.

While there are indications for the westward spread of Buddhism in earlier times, it was re-introduced in Iran by the Mongol Īl-Khāns during the thirteenth century. For Russell Webb, "The Early Spread and Influence of Buddhism in Western Asia," *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (1993): 73, "the intrusion of the Mongols put a temporary check to rampant Islam and even reversed the declining fortunes of Buddhism. A grandson of Genghis Khan, Hülegü (1217–1265), conquered Persia from 1253 and established the Il-khan dynasty with the capital of Marāgheh (later Tabriz). His son, Abagha (d. 1282), was Buddhist and married a Christian. Their son, Arghūn (ruled 1284–1291), endeavoured to establish Buddhism as the state religion but his final effort to stabilize the westernmost territorial limit of Buddhism was completely undone by his successor who became known as Maḥmūd Ghāzān (1271–1304). Although educated by bhikṣus, he was persuaded to embrace Islam prior to his coronation in 1295—if only to legitimize his rule in the eyes of the predominantly Muslim population." Inter-marriage between Muslims and Buddhists was not uncommon among the royalty in the NW Himalayas; see Georgios Halkias, "The Muslim Queens of the Himalayas: Princess Exchange in Ladakh and Baltistan," in *Islam-Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, eds. Anna Akasoy et al. (Surrey: Ashgate Publications, 2011), 231–252.

to the people of Alexandria (*Oratio* XXXII. 40), confirms the residence of Bactrians and Indians in Egypt when he writes: “I see among you, not only Greeks [Ἑλληνας] and Romans, Syrians, Libyans and Cilicians, and men who dwell more remotely, Ethiopians and Arabs, but also Bactrians, Scythians, Persians, and some of the Indians, who are among the spectators and are always residing there.”²²

2. ALEXANDER AND PYRRHO: THE PHILOSOPHER IN ARMS AND THE GREEK BUDDHA

Alexander owed his education to the towering figure of Greek philosophy, the polymath Aristotle of Stageira (384–322 B.C.E.). However, unlike his teacher who had envisioned a world of Hellenic hegemony over the ‘barbarians,’ Alexander aspired to ethnic integration—a task he meant to accomplish by promoting intermarriage among Greeks, training Persian youth in Macedonian fashion and employing foreigners in his army and public administration. It is recorded that he encouraged ten thousand soldiers to take Persian wives in Iranian mode and himself set an example by marrying a Persian princess and on another occasion the eldest daughter of the Bactrian chief Oxyartes, Roxana, on the eve of his march to India. In line with his vision for the creation of an ecumenical empire, his policy of cross-cultural integration aimed at preventing and pacifying ethnic tensions in his settlements, a propaganda that may have had a wider appeal among the people he conquered than among his Macedonian compatriots back home.²³

²² *Dio Chrysostom* III, trans. James Cohoon and Henry Crosby (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932–1951), 209–211. Webb, “Buddhism in Western Asia,” 64 n. 22, suggests that Chrysostomos’ reference (XXXV, 23) to a class of Indian merchants in Alexandria, held in low repute by their countrymen, were in fact Buddhists who were regarded as heretical by the Brahmin establishment of the Śunga dynasty. At any rate, after the dissolution of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom we may reasonably assume that a number of Bactrian Greeks went to the south of the Hindu Kush Mountains to join Greek settlements, while others returned to lands nearer to their places of origin transmitting their acquired beliefs and knowledge of different religious practices. As recorded by Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E. to 50 C.E.), the presence of early Buddhist settlements in the West could explain the unusual convictions of an active sect in Alexandria of Egypt, the Therapeutai, whose doctrines and practices resemble Buddhist ideas; see Erik Seldeslachts, “Greece: The Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism,” in *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. Ann Heirman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 158–160.

²³ See Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander*, trans. E. Iliff Robson (Loeb Classical Library, 1967), 7.4.4–8. Intermarriages also served as diplomatic missions and Alexander’s example was followed by his general Seleucus who married Apama, the daughter of a Sogdian warlord

Alexander was unusually open to foreign religious influences and over the course of his lifetime he embraced many non-Greek deities and practices, sacrificing to the Egyptian gods while in Egypt and rebuilding the temple of the god Bel in Babylon.²⁴ He travelled with his mobile court, a think tank composed of Macedonian captains, scientists, artisans, architects, engineers, physicians, historians, translators, and remarkably also philosophers. The historian Strabo (c. 63/64 B.C.E.–c. 24 C.E.) reports that Alexander arrived in India with the philosopher Onesicritus whom he dispatched to interview Indian sages and report back to him about their native systems of beliefs. Reportedly Calanus, a leading figure among the Indian ascetics, called by the Greeks *gymnosophists* ('naked sophists'), spent two years in Alexander's company.²⁵

Alexander and the philosophers at his court had knowledge of Indian religions comprising brahmins and *śramaṇs*, the so-called *samanai* (Grk. σαμαναί) in the Greek sources. This observation was corroborated by many references in the centuries following his death.²⁶ After Alexander's

Spitamenes (Grk. Σπιταμένης). A side effect of intermarriage was the creation of blood-ties with Asia so that Alexander's troops would not wish to return to Greece. This cultural mixing may not have been seen in a favourable light among conservative Macedonians back home keen to preserve the 'Greek purity' and guard it against foreign influence from the 'barbarians.' The murder of Alexander IV and Roxane demonstrates how the ambitions of Alexander's generals overshadowed their commitment to the great king's plans and progeny. As aptly noted by Holt, *Alexander the Great*, 99, "if Alexander did dream of mixing east and west into one world government, it is certainly beyond question that his generals—and most others of his generation—did not."

²⁴ Paul Christesen and Sarah Murray, "Macedonian Religion," in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, eds. Joseph Roisman et al. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 435.

²⁵ Megasthenes's account of the Calanus story is probably also founded on Onesicritus, see Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature*, 99. Strabo, *Geography*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Loeb Classical Library, 1969), 63–65, reports that after falling ill, Calanus decided to end his life by setting himself on fire at Susa amid great honours by Alexander and his generals.

²⁶ John McCrindle, *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great as described by Arrian, Q. Curtius, Diodorus, Plutarch and Justin* (New York: AMS Press 2004 (1896)), 7–8, furnishes a substantial list of writers on India who reported on their visit either in the company of Alexander, or some years after his death, or who were at least his contemporaries. It is likely that some of these *śramaṇs* may be broadly identified by what we understand today as Buddhists. For a discussion and interpretation of the sources see Richard Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmins in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 99–114, and Paul LeValley, "Naked Philosopher-Ascetics: Some Observations on the Shramana Religious Spectrum," *Sophia* 39, no. 2 (2000): 143–158. In fact, we know little about the appearance and practices of early Buddhist ascetics, but we find some clues in Buddhaghosa's *Purification* where he describes a set of optional ascetic rules for forest monks, thirteen *dhutanga* practices said to have been instigated during the times of the Buddha. The aim of the *dhutanga* is to perfect the qualities that arise from contentment with a strict renunciant life-style, including practicing in cemeteries, sleeping in all places, and so forth.

campaigns in the East, India remained a point of reference not only for travellers and writers of fiction, but also for Hellenistic poets like Posidippus of Pella. Indian themes figured in Greek public festivals, like the great procession at the Ptolemaia that featured a float representing Alexander's return from India with "Indian women dressed as captives on display," "Indian hunting dogs," and "all-white Indian cattle."²⁷

The biographer Diogenes Laertius reports that Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–c. 270) travelled with his mentor Anaxarchus to India in the entourage of Alexander and was greatly influenced by the *gymnosophists*.²⁸ In contrast to Plato, who regarded self-knowledge as the supreme virtue and the means through which one reaches not only sound answers but also happiness (Grk. εὐδαιμονία), Pyrrho maintained that the entire dialectical enterprise possessed little value. For him happiness is not attained through dialogue but through the recognition of the indeterminate nature of phenomena and the attitudes we adopt towards them. His gnoseological mistrust marked a noticeable turn in the direction of philosophical inquiry in Greece.²⁹

His ethical doctrines resonate with the Buddha's suspicion of beliefs and dogmas concerning the "self" (Skt. ātman) as a "source of true knowledge." Pyrrho and Buddhists employed the tetralemma against reified views so that one cannot say with certainty of any one thing "that it is," or "that it is not," or "that it is and is not," or "that it neither is nor is not." The

²⁷ Kathrine Gutzwiller, *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 282. Indian hunting dogs were a well-known breed in the West before Alexander, and the Molossian dogs were perhaps their descendants, see Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature*, 164.

²⁸ Writing in the early third century C.E. but using older sources, Diogenes Laertius (IX, 61–62) reports: "Afterwards he [Pyrrho] joined Anaxarchus, whom he accompanied on his travels everywhere so that he even forgathered with the Indian Gymnosophists and with the Magi. This led him to adopt a most noble philosophy, to quote Ascanius of Abdera, taking the form of agnosticism and suspension of judgment. He denied that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that there is nothing really existent, but custom and convention govern human action for no single thing is in itself any more this than that. He followed these principles in his actual way of life, avoiding nothing and taking no precautions, facing everything as it came, wagons, precipices, dogs, and entrusting nothing whatsoever to his sensations. But he was looked after, as Antigonus of Carystus reports, by his disciples who accompanied him. Aenesidemus, however, says that although he practiced philosophy on the principles of suspension of judgment, he did not act carelessly in the details of daily life. He lived to be nearly ninety"; see Anthony Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13.

²⁹ For a detailed treatment of Pyrrho's philosophy and its relation to later tradition see Richard Bett, *Pyrrho: His Antecedents and his Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

method of the fourfold negation poses antinomies in order to make them disappear and posits the disturbing uselessness of metaphysical theorization; the consequence being the cessation of mental wandering so that a certain tranquillity of mind can supervene.³⁰ According to passages attributed to Pyrrhonism, the systematic “suspension of judgment” (Grk. ἐποχή; epoche), leads to “verbal abstinence or silence,” (Grk. ἀφασία; aphasia)—a contemplative process of cultivation that culminates in “an undisturbed mental state” (Grk. ἀταραξία; ataraxia), an inner and outer tranquillity.

Pyrrhonism shows remarkable affinity with Indian Buddhist thought in its unusual teleology (Grk. τέλος; telos) and methods to attain the goal of philosophical contemplation. The affinities between them are all the more striking when we examine Pyrrho’s use of the term *pragmata* (Grk. πράγματα; pragmata) that has been generally glossed over as ‘things.’ The relevant passage translated by Long and Sedley reads:

Pyrrho of Elis... himself has left nothing in writing, but his pupil Timon says that whoever wants to be happy [εὐδαιμονήσειν] must *consider these three questions*: first how things [πράγματα] are by nature? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who have this attitude?

According to Timon, Pyrrho declared that things are equally indifferent [ἀδιάφορα], unmeasurable [ἀστάθμητα] and inarbitrable [ἀνεπίκριτα]. For this reason neither our sensations nor our opinions tell us the truth or falsehoods. Therefore for this reason we should not put our trust in them one bit, but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering, saying concerning each individual thing that it no more is than is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not.³¹

It has been pointed out elsewhere that there is a semantic range of meanings in Pyrrho’s employment of the term.³² A careful study reveals that

³⁰ Seldeslachts, *Final Frontier*, 134, writes: “The quadrilemma is, to be true, only evidenced in Indian texts from much later times than that of Pyrrho. In essence, the quadrilemma is a sceptical device, not in the first place a Buddhist one. Probably, both Pyrrho and Buddhism were influenced by Indian scepticism.” Adrian Kuzminski in his “Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka,” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 4 (2007): 488, points out that Aristotle was aware of the tetralemma and mentions it in his *Metaphysics*, but nevertheless considers it pointless since it proves nothing.

³¹ Italics and brackets are mine, 14–15. The translation of the Greek text as “must consider these three questions” is at best misleading. The text reads: εἰς τρία ταῦτα βλέπειν, which literally means “seeing, observing, or looking, at these three.”

³² Christopher Beckwith in “Pyrrho’s Logic: A re-examination of Aristotle’s Record of Timon’s Account,” *Elenchos* (2011): 10, problematizes the usual translation of πράγματα as things arguing that the term “is ethical in intent and refers primarily... to ‘troubles, conflicts’, etc... which arouse emotions or passions... There is no reason to think that here,

Pyrrho's use of the term *πράγματα* is not restricted to physical objects but to a whole range of phenomena, which are designated by their nature 'equally' (Grk. ἕπ' ἴσης) 'without differentiation' (Grk. ἀδιάφορα), 'without measure' (Grk. ἀστάθμητα), and 'beyond the scope of reasoning and judgment' (Grk. ἀνεπίκριτα). It follows that upon observing (Grk. βλέπειν) and examining the dispositions we hold towards phenomenal reality, we ought to mistrust our senses and suspend our judgments and opinions concerning their truth value. This training in *seeing* beyond the phenomenal deception of our senses leads to the Pyrrhonian state of calm (Grk. ἀταραξία), a state that invites comparison with the *nibbānic* realization propounded in the early Buddhist sermons (Pāli. sūttas).

Pyrrho's employment of the polysemic term '*πράγματα*'—which generically describes 'things' in Greek as it does in English—may have been a translation of a non-Greek notion that was in wide currency among Hindus and Buddhists in India at the time. Given the context of its usage, *πράγματα* serves as a good translation of the polysemous term *dhammas* (in the plural), which has multiple significations, and was understood in Buddhist texts also as 'objects of consciousness.' For example, in the manner described in the *Satipatṭhāna-sūta* and the commentaries, one trains to observe *dhammas* as *dhammas*, that is to say, apprehend their arising and passing without assigning to them a defining essence (Pāli. nissattatā)—they 'are soul-less' (Pālinijjīvatā) and empty (Pālisuññatā).³³ Buddhaghosa who is considered an authority by early Buddhists, alludes to several images and similes drawn from the Nikāyas (collection of Buddhist texts) in order to illustrate the manner in which *dhammas* are non-hypostasized entities beyond differentiation, since they are "things that vanish almost as soon as they appear—like dew drops at sunrise, like a bubble on water, like a line drawn on water . . . things that lack substance and always elude one's grasp—like a mirage, a conjuring trick, a dream . . ."³⁴

or anywhere, Pyrrho refers to *pragmata* as neutral physical objects viewed essentially as geometrical abstracts, natural phenomena such as mountains, stars, etc., with no real connection to human beings, as in the 'dogmatic' approach to philosophy, which he explicitly and sharply criticizes."

³³ Rupert Gethin, "He who see Dhamma sees Dhammas: Dhamma in Early Buddhism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 523, argues that the word *dhamma* was already in use in the Nikāyas "in a sense of a basic quality, both mental and physical, a plurality of which in some sense constitutes experience or reality in its entirety." The meaning of "thing" as *dhamma* is associated particularly with the plural usage *dhammas* that refers to the things that constitute the world of experience as perceived by the mind.

³⁴ Gethin, "Dhamma in Early Buddhism," 525–526.

Withdrawing from the affairs of the world and disregarding social conventions was a usual practice among many Indian ascetics, and it appears that Pyrrho spent his life much in the same way in solitude, leading an austere life detached from the pointless seduction of through sensual pleasures. In fact there are several anecdotes, shared by his disciples and contemporaries, which made Pyrrho into a cult image of an illuminated sage, a ‘Greek Buddha.’

[Timon says] This, O Pyrrho, my heart yearns to hear, how on earth you, though a man, act most easily and calmly, never taking thought and consistently undisturbed, heedless of the whirling motions and sweet voice of wisdom? You alone lead the way for men, like the god who drives around the whole earth as he revolves, showing the blazing disk of his well-rounded sphere.³⁵

And in the *Pyrrhonian Arguments*, the philosopher Aenesidemus reports:

As for him who philosophizes according to Pyrrho, besides being happy in other respects, he is wise in knowing above all that nothing has been grasped securely by himself. And as to whatever he does know, he is clever enough to assent no more to the affirmation [of these things] than to their denial.³⁶

Admittedly Pyrrhonism does not, as it may be reconstructed based on the accounts of his devoted disciple Timon, represent any known formulation of early Buddhism. However, given Pyrrho’s protracted exposure to Indian philosophical currents and *śramaṇic* practices, his system of thought may arguably represent the first attestation of early gnoseological and soteriological objectives of Buddhism in Greek sources.³⁷

³⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Sextus Empiricus*, II.1, 1.305. Elsewhere we read, “He led a life consistent with this doctrine, going out of his way for nothing, taking no precaution, but facing all risks as they came, whether carts, precipices, dogs or what not, and, generally leaving nothing to the arbitrament of the senses;” Diogenes Laertius, *Pyrrho* (IX, 61–62).

³⁶ Brad Inwood, and L.P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 183.

³⁷ There have been several studies pointing in this direction; see Everard Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” *Phronesis* 25, no. 1 (1980): 88–108; and Adrian Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

3. THE SELEUCID EMPIRE AND THE MAURYAN-GREEKS

The birth of Buddha Śākyamuni, the architect of the tradition known as Buddhism, may be dated to sometime in the fifth century B.C.E.³⁸ For a long time his religious movement does not appear to have spread beyond the Middle Ganges where he spent most of his life.³⁹ However, a century later the regional constitution and provincial outlook of Buddhism was to undergo a profound metamorphosis through the formation of the Mauryan Empire (c. 320–180 B.C.E.) and its direct contact with Greek civilization.⁴⁰

The first emperor of the newly formed Indian empire was Chandragupta Maurya (Sandrokottos in Greek texts), a contemporary of Alexander the Great, who spent his early life and received his education at Taxila, one of the greatest learning centres in India at the time. Although of humble origin, he succeeded in consolidating his power in Magadha and in overthrowing Greek rule in NW India.⁴¹ It has been suggested that in

³⁸ For a detailed treatment of sources and current debates on the dating of the Buddha see Heinz Bechert, *When Did the Buddha Live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995).

³⁹ There is a story, preserved in several versions, that forms an exception to this commonly held assumption. It tells of Trapuṣa and Bhallika, two merchants from Bactria, who became the first lay followers of the Buddha. They subsequently ordained as Buddhist monks and built *stūpas* and monasteries in Central Asia. However, in the absence of any archaeological evidence for a Buddhist presence in Bactria during the Buddha's time, it may very well be that this story postdates the period in question.

⁴⁰ The Mauryan system of governance was a comparatively new feature in Indian politics in that it united many small Indian kingdoms, promoted more or less tolerant public policies, and fostered the spread of non-Brahmanic religions like Jainism and Buddhism. It also fostered international trade along the overland routes with neighboring countries like Bactria, and across Persia to the Mediterranean ports. Romila Thapar, "Ashoka and Buddhism," *Past and Present* 18 (1960): 48, notes that the Nandas had ruled an empire before the Mauryas for a short period, but it was not nearly as extensive and did not include such a variety of peoples and cultures as that of the Mauryas.

⁴¹ Justin in his *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* (B.XV, Ch. IV) reports: "The author of this liberation was Sandrocottus [Chandragupta] . . . stimulated to aspire to regal power by supernatural encouragement; for, having offended Alexander by his boldness of speech, and orders being given to kill him, he saved himself by swiftness of foot; and while he was lying asleep, after his fatigue, a lion of great size having come up to him, licked off with his tongue the sweat that was running from him, and after gently waking him, left him . . . Some time after, as he was going to war with the generals of Alexander, a wild elephant of great bulk presented itself before him of its own accord, and, as if tamed down to gentleness, took him on its back, and became his guide in the war, and conspicuous in fields of battle. Sandrocottus, having thus acquired a throne, was in possession of India, when Seleucus was laying the foundations of his future greatness; who, after making

his youth Chandragupta joined Alexander the Great before founding his empire.⁴² Whatever may be the truth of the matter, there is no doubt that Chandragupta was familiar with the Greeks and encouraged intimate relations with the Seleucids, his Greek neighbours and heirs of Alexander's cities in Central Asia. He concluded a war treaty with Seleucus I Nicator (c. 358–281 B.C.E.) and sealed it in exchange for marriage rights (Grk. *ἐπιγαμία*) and five hundred elephants.⁴³ Not long after, Megasthenes was assigned to the Mauryan court as the Greek ambassador and spokesman for Seleucid interests that included Greek communities annexed by the Mauryan Empire. Greek diplomats from the Hellenistic world continued to reside at the Indian court,⁴⁴ but it is not clear if Indian missions were sent to Hellenistic courts prior to the reign of King Aśoka (c. 268–233 B.C.E.).

a league with him, and settling his affairs in the east, proceeded to join in the war against Antigonus.”

⁴² Seldeslachts, “Final Frontier,” 134, argues that the diplomatic understanding reached between Seleucus and Candragupta goes back to their common past as officers serving under Alexander. He writes: “For Candragupta such a past is not commonly acknowledged as a fact, but I consider as correct the bold old hypothesis of H.C. Seth according to which Candragupta is identical with Sisikottos, a young political refugee from India who joined Alexander. This identification fits with what is known from Indian sources about the young Candragupta. It also gives sense to the information of the Greek historian Plutarch (ca. A.D. 46–120) that Sandrókottos (Candragupta) as a young man had met with Alexander, and that later, as a king, he still cherished a great worship for him. Finally, it is in my opinion supported by the fact that in a Jaina Prākṛit source Candragupta is referred to as *Sasigutta*, a form which like Sanskrit *Candragupta*, Prākṛit *Camdagutta* means ‘protected by the moon.’ Now, *Sasigutta*, or a closely related form, must lie at the basis of Greek *Sisikottos*.”

⁴³ Following Strabo's assessment (XV), G.P. Carratelli and G. Garbini, *A Bilingual Graeco-Aramaic Edict by Asoka: The First Greek Inscription Discovered in Afghanistan*. (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Esterno Oriente, 1964), 11, suggests that *ἐπιγαμία* was a *jus connubii*—an agreement that would authorize mixed marriages between Greeks and Indians. It would have been “an important measure reflecting the concern felt about overcoming the obstacle of the caste system that was spreading, which would enable the Greeks to participate actively in the life of the Maurya empire and have an established social position.”

⁴⁴ Friendly relations continued between India and the West. Chandragupta's son Bindusāra asked Antiochos I to send him sweet wine, figs and a philosopher. There are sources that mention a certain Deimachos of Plataea who was dispatched from the court of Antiochos I to serve as the Seleucid ambassador to Bindusāra, and of Dionysios from the court of Ptolemaios Philadelphos II of Egypt sent to an unnamed Indian king who might have been either Aśoka or his father Bindusāra; see Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature*, 99–100, and Demetrios Vassiliades, “Greeks and Buddhism: Historical Contacts in the Development of a Universal Religion,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 36, no. 1–2 (2004): 141.

Aśoka was also acquainted with Greeks residing at his father's palace and while serving as viceroy in Taxila, a thriving Hellenic settlement from the times of Alexander.⁴⁵ He inherited a large empire but continued to wage wars of expansion until the conquest of Kalinga (Orissa), the horror of which is said to have impelled him to embrace Buddhism and organize the Mauryan Empire according to Buddhist precepts. He respected other religions and creeds of faith, yet his conversion to Buddhism and open support of the Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*) is attested by a careful study of all the major and minor edicts he issued. Drawing from a mixture of legends and historical facts, his figure exerted enormous influence across Asia, influencing a number of Buddhist rulers in South and East Asia to pattern their states after his own.

There is regrettably little written in traditional Indian literature about Aśoka. For example, the Purāṇas simply list his name probably on account of his overt preference for Buddhism. On the other hand, there are many sources in Pāli, Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan in which he figures as one of the greatest patrons of Buddhism that India has ever known. The *dharmacakra* (wheel of *dharma*), the symbol of the 'righteous state,' is found in association with a number of his edicts and features most prominently on the Lion Capital of Sarnath, which was to be adopted nearly two millennia later by the independent Republic of India as its national flag.

During their travels in the North West fringes of India, the Chinese pilgrims Sungyun (521–581 C.E.) and Xuanzang (629–645 C.E.) witnessed many Buddhist reliquaries (Skt. *stūpa*) whose foundation was attributed to Aśoka.⁴⁶ These narratives are collaborated by the *Aśokāvadāna* of the *Dīvyāvadāna* that describe in detail how Aśoka convened a great assembly of about three hundred thousand monks and announced his donation of a thousand million pieces of gold to the Buddhist *sangha*.⁴⁷ The Tibetan historian Tāranātha (1575–1634) refers to generous donations granted by the king to Buddhist monastic communities in Thogar (Tib. tho-gar), the Tibetan term for the Hellenistic areas of Tokharistan-Bactria. Tāranātha

⁴⁵ W. Tarn, "Notes on Hellenism in Bactria and India," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 22, (1902): 274. George Woodcock, *The Greeks in India* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 17, glossing over the practice of polygamy prevalent among Indian kings, suggested that since Candragupta, or more likely his son Bindusāra, was married to the Greek treaty-bride, Aśoka's blood-line may have been partly Greek.

⁴⁶ David Scott, "Ashokan Missionary Expansion of Buddhism Among the Greeks (In N.W. India, Bactria and the Levant)," *Religion* 15 (1985): 137–138.

⁴⁷ Kanai Hazra, *Buddhism in India: A Historical Survey* (Delhi: Buddhist World Press, 2009), 36–37.

writes: "Towards the end of his life the king [Aśoka] took the vow to donate one hundred *crores* [100 × 10,000,000] of gold to the Buddhist communities of each [of the following countries, viz.] Aparāntaka, Kashmir and Thogar. He donated in full to the Buddhist communities of Kashmir and Thogar and also made offerings of other things equal to that amount."⁴⁸

In order to propagate rules based on morality, equality and righteousness (Pāli dhamma; Skt. dharma), he employed several official languages and scripts derived from Aramaic, namely Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī, and also used Greek and Aramaic in public inscriptions carved on polished rock or stone. His pragmatism was likely to have been inspired by the Buddhists who propagated their teachings in the languages spoken in different regions. In what may have been the earliest of these inscriptions issued in 258 B.C.E. Aśoka declares himself to have been a lay Buddhist disciple for more than two and a half years, and by the eighth year of his reign he publicly expresses remorse for the massacre in Kāliṅga and denounces the taking of lives.⁴⁹ In the twelfth year of his reign, he issued another series of edicts that prescribed: 1) No votive offerings are to be made with living beings (animal sacrifice is prohibited), while the killing of animals for food has been restricted and will henceforth cease so far as the royal kitchen is concerned; 2) Medical services for men and animals are to be established throughout the kingdom and medicinal herbs have been distributed and planted for this purpose. This has been done throughout the empire and its borders, including the Coḍas (Coḷas), Pāṇḍyas, Sātyaputras, Keraḍas, and as far as Sri Lanka and its neighbours.⁵⁰

3.1. *The Greek Edicts of Aśoka in Kandahar*

Aśoka's major edicts in northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan were written in Greek and Aramaic because of the prevalence and importance of Greek and Persian settlements in the Mauryan Empire and its borderlands.⁵¹ The presence of the Greek script was noted by Indians as

⁴⁸ Tāranātha, *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, trans. Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 65.

⁴⁹ The primary moral principle of Buddhism and Jainism, i.e., 'abstention from taking life,' is stated in the Greek version of Edict XIII and in the bilingual Greek-Aramaic edict issued in Alexandria of Arachosia.

⁵⁰ A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 244.

⁵¹ Two sets of Aśokan edicts at Shahbazgarhi and Mansera on the upper Indus were rendered through an Aramaic-derived alphabet (Kharoṣṭhī), while summaries of edicts in Aramaic have been discovered at Taxila and Kandahar; see Scott, "Buddhist Attitudes," 433–434. Fergus Millar, "Looking East from the Classical World: Colonialism, Culture, and

early as the fifth century B.C.E.,⁵² and it remained in use during the reign of the philhellenic Parthians,⁵³ during the rule of the Śaka kings who used it in their titles and coin-legends,⁵⁴ and by the Kuṣāṇas who utilized the Greek language for the administration of their own empire and the Greek alphabet to write the Bactrian language.⁵⁵ The refined use of spoken and written Greek (cursive and capitals), attested in parchments, ceramic jars, vases, and inscriptions, indicates that Greek was adopted in intellectual life serving as a shared language of trade and administration across Central Asia. The discovery of papyrus fragments of a Greek philosophical treatise and the Delphic precepts inscribed in limestone in the burial monument of an eminent citizen in Ay Khanum, a certain Kineas, reflect a linguistic

Trade from Alexander the Great to Shapur I," *The International History Review* 20, no. 3 (1998): 518, explains that "both the languages and scripts used by Aśoka suggest that monumental writing in India owed its origins to the influence of the Achaemenid empire, in which Aramaic was widely used as an official language, and of the Seleucid empire, in which Aramaic was still used alongside the primary language, Greek."

⁵² Pāṇini of Gandhāra called it *Yavanānī*; see Narain, "Greeks of Bactria and India," 388–389.

⁵³ Greek was a common and established language used for public documents in the Parthian empire—a practice that continued during the Sassanids, the successors of the Parthians in the early third century. Millar, "Looking East," 522–23, refers to a long Greek text that Shapur I left at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis to commemorate his wars against Rome and explain the principles of his civil government. This document "may be regarded as the ultimate testimony to the long lasting legacy of Alexander's conquests six hundred years earlier."

⁵⁴ The Śakas in India occupied provinces that had been ruled by the Indo-Greeks since the time of King Menander. They inherited and continued to use Greek political and administrative institutions. According to B. Puri, "The Sakas and Indo-Parthians," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1994), 205, "the Sakas at Taxila followed Greek ideas in town planning, copied Greek prototypes in their architecture and were inspired by Greek forms in minor arts and crafts. Among Saka buildings at Taxila the temple of Jandial has a typical Greek plan with classical moulding and Ionic columns. Greek in concept are the small stupas dated by coins to the period of Azes I and II... Subsequently Indian influence becomes increasingly noticeable, and there is a mingling of Greek and Indian motifs."

⁵⁵ The Greek phrase *διὰ Παλαμήδου* (by Palamedes), a Greek architect or mason mentioned in a Bactrian inscription from Surkh Kotal provides evidence for the survival of the Greeks and their language up to the end of the second century C.E. during the Kuṣāṇa empire; see Harmatta, "Languages and Scripts," 408. According to Millar, "Looking East," 518–519, the reign of Kuṣāṇa Emperor Kaniška offers some of the most remarkable evidence for the long-lasting influence of Greek in Afghanistan and North India. Kaniška's coins "show a transition from the use of royal titles in Greek to ones in Iranian language conventionally labelled 'Bactrian.' But the script used continues to be Greek... The truly remarkable new find is an extensive inscription of the first year of Kaniška's reign, found in 1993 in Rabatak in Afghanistan, and written in Bactrian using this version of the Greek alphabet. The text, proclaiming the king's assumption to power, with divine favour, and recounting the cities in northern India which he ruled, records explicitly that 'Kaniška the Kushan [*Kanēshke koshano*] 'issued a Greek edict and [then] put it into Aryan.'"

development similar to that found in documents from the Mediterranean basin.⁵⁶

A Greek version of the end of Edict XII and the beginning of Edict XIII (inscribed on a block of limestone) was discovered in 1963 in Kandahar. Old Kandahar has a long history of settlers. It has been identified with Alexandria in Arachosia after the discovery of the first Greek pre-Aśokan inscription on a special *temenos* (Grk. τέμενος) dedicated to the cult of its founder Alexander the Great.⁵⁷ In the late fourth century B.C.E. it passed from Seleucid to Mauryan control only to be brought under the reign of the Greco-Bactrians in the first half of the second century. It would appear that a public building in the city had once housed all fourteen Aśokan edicts written in Greek, a practice that was undertaken elsewhere in the Mauryan Empire utilizing Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī.⁵⁸

Edicts XII and XIII bear evidence for the high culture of the Bactrian Greeks that is comparable to other Hellenistic centres of civilization. Edict XII informs us that in the Mauryan Empire there were frequent debates between different philosophical schools or religious orders (Grk. διατριβάς), a situation that was also not uncommon among Greek philosophers. What is unusual is that a powerful ruler like Aśoka should make a public proclamation to instruct philosophers and monks not to disparage each other's doctrines, but to accept and learn from each other's teachings. While the principles of *dhamma* would have been acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect, given Aśoka's expressed commitment to Buddhist precepts and the *sangha*, his edict of toleration for

⁵⁶ Bernard, "Aī Khanum and Hellenism," 95. For a translation and discussion of the philosophical treatise of Ay Khanum that reads like an Aristotelian response to Plato's theory of ideas, see Jeffrey Lerner, "The Aī Khanum Philosophical Papyrus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 142 (2003): 45–51.

⁵⁷ N. Oikonomides, "The [τέμενος] of Alexander the Great at Alexandria in Arachosia (Old Kandahar)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 56 (1984): 145. For a discussion of sources see Carratelli et al., *Graeco-Aramaic Edict*, 18–24.

⁵⁸ Oikonomides, "The [τέμενος] of Alexander the Great," 145 n. 2, explains that inscribing important texts "on the long wall of a roofed building where the citizens could read them protected from the sun or rain is a very old Greek tradition." He cites the Law Code of Gortyn in Crete and the Law Code of Drakon and Solon in the *Basileios Stoa*, the Agora of Athens as the earliest examples, and the "*Momentum Ancyranum*" as one of the latest. He concludes that "a *stoa* in the agora of Alexandria in Arachosia donated by Aśoka seems a logical possibility for the origins of the rectangular stone inscribed with parts of two of his edicts." For a linguistic comparison of the Greek with the Prakrit versions of the edicts see R. Norman, "Notes on the Greek Version of Aśoka's Twelfth and Thirteenth Rock Edicts," *A Half-Century of Irano-Indian Studies* (1972): 111–118.

all religions seems to have been an attempt to indirectly facilitate the spread of Buddhism across his empire and at its borders.⁵⁹

Edict XII

[εὐ] σέβεια καὶ ἐγκράτεια κατὰ πάσας τὰς διατριβάς ἐγκρατῆς δὲ μάλιστα ἐστὶν ὅς ἄγ γλώσης ἐγκρατῆς ἦι. Καὶ μῆτε ἑαυτοὺς ἐπα[ι]νώσιν, μῆτε τῶν πέλας ψέγῳσιν περὶ μηδενός· κενὸν γάρ ἐστιν· καὶ πειράσθαι μᾶλλον τοὺς πέλας ἐπαινεῖν καὶ μὴ ψέγειν κατὰ πάντα τρόπον. Ταῦτα δὲ ποιοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς αὐξοῦσι καὶ τοὺς πέλας ἀνακτῶνται· παραβαίοντες δὲ ταῦτα ἀκλεέστεροί τε γίνονται καὶ τοῖς πέλας ἀπέχθονται. Ὅτι δ' ἂν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπαινῶσιν, τοὺς δὲ πέλας ψέγῳσιν φιλοτιμότερον διαπράττονται, βουλόμενοι παρὰ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐκλάμψαι, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον βλάβου[σι] ἑαυτοὺς. Πρέπει δὲ ἀλλήλους θαυμάζειν καὶ τὰ ἀλλήλων διδάγματα παραδέχεσθαι[ι]. Ταῦτα δὲ ποιοῦντες πολυμαθέστεροί ἔσονται, παραδιδόντες ἀλλήλοις ὅσα ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐπίσταται. Καὶ τοῖς ταῦτα ἐπ[α]σκοῦσι ταῦτα μὴ ὀκνεῖν λέγειν ἵνα δειαμείνωσιν διὰ παντός εὐσεβοῦντες.

Observance of piety [dhamma] and self-control [should be exercised] towards all philosophical orientations. He who possesses self-control is in control of his tongue. And they should neither praise themselves nor degrade others in any respect, for it is meaningless. Following this, they better themselves and win [the respect] of others; transgressing this, however, they will be without fame and become despised by others. For should they praise themselves and belittle others, they behave with much zeal wanting to impress others, [but in effect] they do much harm to themselves. There should be an acceptance of others and of their teachings. Doing this they will become more knowledgeable sharing with one another that which they know well. And towards those who practice [these edicts] do not tire educating them [about the aforementioned] so that they will remain in piety forever.

The following lines of the Greek Edict XIII are not a literal translation of the Indic versions but a local adaptation that preserve a striking testimony of Aśoka's remorse over the slaughter in Kalinga.

Edict XIII

Ὅγδῶμι ἔτει βασιλεύοντος Πιοδάσσου κατέστρεπται τὴν Καλίγγην. Ἦγ ἐζωγρημένα καὶ ἐξηγμένα ἐκείθεν σωμάτων μυριάδες δεκαπέντε καὶ ἀναίρεθσαν ἄλλαι μυριάδες δέκα καὶ σχεδὸν ἄλλοι τοσοῦτοι ἐτελεύτησαν. Ἀπ' ἐκείνου τοῦ χρόνου ἔλεος καὶ οἰκτος αὐτόν ἔλαβεν· καὶ βαρέως ἤνεγκεν δι' οὗ τρόπον ἐκέλευεν ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων σπουδῆν τε καὶ σύνταξιν πεποιοῦται περὶ εὐσεβείας. Καὶ

⁵⁹ It is worthwhile to note that the term *dhamma* has many meanings both in Buddhism and Brahmanism, an ambiguity that Aśoka would not have found objectionable. In later bilingual Indian-Greek coins, *dharma* is equated with the Greek word *dikē* (δική), right or justice and is not restricted to *eusebeia* (εὐσέβεια).

τοῦτο ἔτι δυσχερέστερον ὑπέλιψε ὁ βασιλεύς·καὶ ὅσοι ἐκεῖ ὠϊκουν βραμνεαὶ ἢ σραμνεαὶ ἢ καὶ ἄλλοι τινές οἱ περὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν διατρίβοντες, τοὺς ἐκεῖ οἰκούντας ἔδει τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως συμφέροντα νοεῖν, καὶ διδάσκαλον καὶ πατέρα καὶ μητέρα ἐπαισχύνεσθαι καὶ θαυμάζειν, φίλους καὶ ἑταίρους ἀγαπᾶν καὶ μὴ διαψεύδεσθαι, δούλοις καὶ μισθωτοῖς ὡς κουφότατα χρᾶσθαι, τούτων ἐκεῖ τῶν τοιαῦτα διαπρασσομένων εἰ τις τέθνηκεγ ἢ ἐξήκται, καὶ τοῦτο ἐμ παραδρομῆι οἱ λοιποὶ ἡγεῖνται, ὁ δὲ [β]ασιλεύς σφόδρα ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐδυσχέραινεν. Καὶ ὅτι ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσίν εἰσιν . . .

In the eighth year of his reign, Piodasses [Aśoka] destroyed Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were taken prisoner and sent into exile, and another hundred thousand disappeared and almost the same number died. From that time onwards, compassion and sadness overcame him and he was heavily distressed by the ways [he had acted]. Thereafter, he ordered to abstain from living beings [ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων] and without delay and with effort he established [the observance of] piety, and this was very difficult. And the King further considered that those living there, as many *brāhmaṇas*, *śramaṇas* and others debating the *dhamma*, should keep in mind such things that are of interest to the King. Their teachers, fathers and mothers should not be ashamed of them but admire them; and they should not deceive their friends and partners, nor avoid hearing the needs of slaves and those hired by them. And all those who are living under such conditions if any of them died or left, and those following them disregard these [the edicts], the King would show his displeasure with a heavy hand. And all that there is with the other peoples . . .⁶⁰

It is remarkable to read a written expression of Buddhist-inspired moral precepts in Greek and be told, from a complete version of Edict XIII issued in Brāhmī script at Kalsi, that Aśoka dispatched international missions consisting of *dhamma* commissioners from major towns (*dhamma-mahāmātras*) to the Greek rulers in Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epirus.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The English translation of texts and use of brackets are my own. The phrase 'ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων' literally means to 'abstain from sentient beings,' in the sense of killing them, harming them, and so forth. Harmatta, "Languages and Scripts," 405–407, who provided without translation the Greek texts of Edicts XII and XIII reproduced here, notes on the basis of stylistic features that two different translators were employed, both of whom were erudite and versed in Greek philosophical terms used by Plato, Xenophon, Isocrates and Aristotle. The edicts were formerly kept at the Kabul Museum but their present whereabouts are unknown. For a bibliography and related literature see Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts: A Source-Book with Bibliography* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2006), 244–245.

⁶¹ We can get a fair idea of the obligations of the local *mahāmātra* from Aśoka's Minor Edict II which concerns their duty in conveying the king's orders to subordinates; see Falk *Aśokan Sites*, 57. The *mahāmātra* is to tell the *rajūka* to spread the rules of conduct recommended by the king to the people in the settlements of the provinces and the countryside, stressing that he only repeats the words of the king. Furthermore, the *mahāmātra* is to

The conquest by *dhamma*, this has been won repeatedly by Aśoka both here and among all borderers, even as far as six hundred *yojonas* where the Yonaking [Greek king] Antiyoga [Antiochos II, Theos of Syria, 261–246 B.C.E.] rules, and beyond this Antiyoga, (to) four kings named Tulamaya [Ptolemaios II, Philadelphos of Egypt, 285–246 B.C.E.], named Antikini [Antigonos Gonatas of Macedonia, 283–239 B.C.E.], named Maka [Magas of Cyrene], named Alikyashudala [Alexander of Epirus, 274–240 B.C.E.]... Likewise here in the king's territory, among the Yonas... everywhere [people] are conforming to Aśoka's instruction in *dhamma*.⁶²

In the absence of western records we cannot confirm whether Aśoka's missionaries ever reached their destinations. Nevertheless, it is clear from Edict XIII that he was keenly aware of the strategic importance of Greek communities and had accurate knowledge of the Hellenistic rulers far beyond the political sphere of influence of the Mauryas. The Mauryan Greeks and those in neighbouring Greco-Bactria occupied vital centres of commerce that linked the Mauryan capital Pāṭaliputra with Asia Minor, facilitating the circulation of trade in both directions, from the Ganges valley to the Punjab, Taxila, Pushkalavati, and Alexandria of the Caucasus, and onwards towards Persia and the Mediterranean Sea.⁶³

Edicts V and IX acknowledge the Greeks as the king's subjects devoted to the *dhamma*,⁶⁴ while Edict XIII states that there is no country, except the Yonas, where the Indian caste system does not exist.⁶⁵ The language of Edict V from Shahbazgarhi is explicit in this respect: "In times past *mahamatras* of dharma did not exist. But *mahamatras* of dharma were

instruct the teachers of four groups that comprise elephant trainers, the scribes, the *yugyas* and the *brāhmaṇas*, to educate their pupils to adhere to the traditional behaviour. The Buddhists are not mentioned among the groups to be instructed.

⁶² The brackets are mine; translation from the Kalsi version by Eugene Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 178.

⁶³ Even before Alexander's campaigns, India was famous in Greece as a country full of gold; see Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature*, 171–176. The Greek playwright Sophocles (496–406 B.C.E.) mentions in *Antigone* a profitable trade in gold from India; "Make good profits, drive your trade, if you will, in the amber of Sardeis and the gold of India"; translated by Demetrios Vassiliades, *The Greeks in India: A Survey in Philosophical Understanding* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2000), 30.

⁶⁴ The end of Edict XIII confirms that Aśoka's Empire comprised different ethnic communities and that the Greeks addressed in his imperial edicts were his own subjects, unlike their Greek neighbours in Bactria who were under Seleucid sovereignty.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the same observation is reiterated by Buddha Śākyamuni in the *Assalāyana Sutta*, a text possibly dating to Aśoka's times or later. [The Buddha] "What do you think about this, Assalāyana? Have you heard that in Yona and Kamboja [Greece and Persia] and in other outland countries there are only two castes, masters and slaves, and that masters become slaves and slaves masters?" *Majjhima Nikāya*, II, translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, et al., 764.

appointed by me when I had been anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing dharma, in promoting the dharma, and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to dharma among the Yonas [Greeks], Kambojas [Persians] and Gandharas, among the Rathikas, among the Potinikas and whatever other western borders of mine there are.”⁶⁶

Even if the proclamations in the Aśokan edicts are somewhat exaggerated, the fluent use of Greek in inscriptions excavated in Alexandria in Arachosia demonstrates the presence of an educated Greek community familiar with Aśoka’s predilection for Buddhist morals and precepts. According to Scott’s observations:

One is neither faced with a servile translation from Indian forms, nor a barbarized, corrupted, local form of Greek. With the Kandahar inscriptions in Greek we are instead faced with a polished Greek writer who was familiar with both Hellenic and Buddhist worlds. Perhaps it was a local member of the Greek community who had been employed as a translator for this new imperially encouraged message. Since the author seems so familiar with both worlds it may be suggested that it was actually a fairly cultured Greek convert to Buddhism who was responsible for this.⁶⁷

Among the extant epigraphic sources in Kandahar we find a Greek-Aramaic bilingual inscription discovered in 1957 near Cehel Zina. It was written on an implanted rock along the old road to the ancient city and has no precise counterpart anywhere else. The Greek part of the inscription, fourteen lines (50 cm × 50 cm), is not a servile translation of the Prakrit version of Aśoka’s first minor edict and differs considerably from the Aramaic section.⁶⁸ The fluent use of standard Hellenistic language and vocabulary (*koine*) shows that it was adapted to the cultural needs of a Greek audience.

Δέκα ἐτῶν πληρῆ[...]ων βασιλεὺς Πιοδασσης εὐσέβειαν ἔδειξεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου εὐσεβεστέρους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐποίησεν καὶ πάντα εὐθηνεῖ κατὰ πάσαν γῆν· καὶ ἀπέχεται βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐμψύχων καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ δὲ ἄνθρωποι καὶ ὅσοι θηρευταὶ ἢ ἀλιεῖς βασιλέως πέπαινανται θηρεύοντες· καὶ εἴ τινες ἀκρατεῖς πέπαινανται τῆς ἀκρασίας κατὰ δύναμιν, καὶ ἐνήκοοι πατρὶ καὶ μητρὶ καὶ τῶν

⁶⁶ Text translated from the Karoṣṭhī version by Hulzsch, *Inscriptions Asoka*, 56. The Kamhojas refers to the people north west of Gandhara that spoke a semi-Iranian language. They were regarded by the Indians as semi-civilized and may have been direct descendants of the Achaemenids and heirs of a declining stage of Persian civilization in Central Asia.

⁶⁷ Scott, “Buddhist Attitudes,” 435.

⁶⁸ Carratelli et al., *Graeco-Aramaic Edict*, 5.

πρεσβυτέρων παρὰ τὰ πρότερον καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ λώιον καὶ ἄμεινον κατὰ πάντα ταῦτα ποιούντες διάξουσιν. (*vacat*)⁶⁹

The above version informs us that after ten years have passed since his coronation, King Aśoka, known by his title ‘benevolent-looking,’ Piyadassi (Skt. Priyadarśin), showed the *dhamma* (Grk. εὐσέβεια) to men (εὐσέβειαν ἔδε[ι]ξεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) by personal example, and from that time onward he made men ‘more pious’ (εὐσεβεστέρους) and ‘everything on earth’ (κατὰ πάσαν γῆν) ‘prospered’ (εὐθηνεῖ).⁷⁰ The King (βασιλεὺς) ‘refrained from sentient beings’ (ἀπέχεται τῶν ἐμψύχων) and so did others—those who were hunters and fishermen similarly refrained from taking life. And those who were ‘intemperate’ (ἀκρατεῖς) ceased being intemperate to the ‘best of their ability’ (κατὰ δύναμιν), and obeyed their parents and elders.

There is not much in the edict that would have sounded strikingly foreign to the ears of a Greek audience. The prescription to abstain from ‘consuming sentient beings’ (Grk. ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων) was introduced into Greek philosophy by the sixth century philosopher Pythagoras of Samos who had preached similar tenets. Similarly, observing principles of morality was at the heart of Delphic maxims. On a monument erected in honour of a founding hero of Ay Khanum by the name of Kineas we find the last five maxims (of a series of one hundred and fifty maxims in Apollo’s sanctuary at Delphi) donated by Clearchus of Soli in the Hellenistic city. Copies of the Delphic precepts are not unique to Ay Khanum, but circulated in the Greek speaking world as well as among educated Romans.⁷¹ Those copied in Ay Khanum read: ΠΑΙΣ ΩΝ ΚΟΣΜΙΟΣ ΓΙΝΟΥ, ΗΒΩΝ ΕΓΚΡΑΤΗΣ, ΜΕΣΟΣ ΔΙΚΑΟΣ, ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΗΣ ΕΥΒΟΥΛΟΣ, ΤΕΛΕΥΤΩΝ ΑΛΥΠΟΣ. In translation: “In childhood practice good manners, in youth practice self-control, in middle-age be just, in old age be of right counsel, and at death have no regrets.”

⁶⁹ Transcription and translation of the Greek text in Carratelli et al., *Graeco-Aramaic Edict*, 29–39. For a bibliography and related literature see Falk, *Aśokan Sites*, 242–243.

⁷⁰ The idea that a righteous and just ruler causes ‘everything on earth to prosper’ (κατὰ πάσαν γῆν εὐθηνεῖ) finds an exact parallel in Homeric hymns and in early conceptions of Buddhist kingship; for an analysis of Buddhist notions of kingship see Georgios Halkias, “The Enlightened Sovereign: Buddhism and Kingship in India and Tibet,” in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Steven Emmanuel (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 491–511. Compare with Homer, Ode XIX: *As the fame of some blameless king who, like a god, maintains justice; to whom the black earth brings forth wheat and barley; whose trees are bowed with fruit, and his sheep never fail to bear, and the sea gives him fish;* Evelyn-White, *Homeric Hymns*.

⁷¹ N. Oikonomides, “The Lost Delphic Inscription with the Commandments of the Seven and P. Univ. Athen 2782.” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 37 (1980): 179–183.

The Delphic importance placed on self-control (*enkrateia*) is a central theme for Hindus and Buddhists and one that is taken up again in the Greek edicts of Aśoka. Self-control and tranquillity of mind were later embraced by the Greek School of Stoicism, whose founder was Zeno from Citium in Cyprus. As we have seen before, it is likely that Buddhist philosophical ideas travelled to the Hellenistic world through the teachings and doctrines of Pyrrho of Elis. Recent philological studies of the Greek edicts and inscriptions from Afghanistan purport that Buddhist philosophy and ethics exerted their influence on the Hellenistic traditions of Bactria spreading from there to the larger Greek world.⁷²

3.2. *The Conversion of the Indo-Greek King Menander to Buddhism*

Through imperial initiatives, the expansion of transcontinental trade, and the activities of charismatic Buddhist monks, Buddhism spread across the Indian subcontinent and beyond its southern and northern borders where the Greeks were politically, culturally and economically prominent. Indian Buddhists defended and formulated their religious ideas through their contact with foreigners and prevailing religious traditions, like Hellenic deity cults, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Brahmanism. Over the centuries the Yona (Skt. Yavana, from Ionians known to the Persians as Yanna) laid the foundations for the creation of a cultural market that reflects not just a fusion of religions and cultures, but the celebration of their newly acquired faith. In fact, Aśoka's edicts are highly suggestive of organized attempts to introduce Buddhist ethics among the Hellenic people of Asia.

The adoption of Buddhism among the Indo-Greek elite classes is attested by the celebrated conversion of Menander (c. 155–130 B.C.E.), the greatest of all the Indo-Greek kings of the Euthydemid dynasty who ruled over much of Afghanistan and Pakistan and whose conquests extended in

⁷² David Sick, "When Socrates met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 17 (2007): 253–278, argues that the Greek translations of Indian terms namely, *εὐσέβεια* and *εγκράτεια* (self-control) and their interpretation in Bactria influenced the development of these concepts in Hellenistic traditions. Furthermore, there is a growing body of research suggesting that Buddhism exerted its influence on the Pagan and Christian Gnostic communities that flourished in the Hellenistic Near East; for a critical discussion of the evidence see Seldeslachts, *Final Frontier*, 149–158. For a discussion of the spread of Buddhism westward see Webb, "Buddhism in Western Asia," and Scott, "Buddhist Attitudes," 433, and "Face of Buddhism."

the east as far as the river Ganges and Palibothra (Pataliputra).⁷³ The story of Menander's conversion is narrated in the well-known Buddhist text, the *Milindapañha* (Milinda's Questions) preserved in Pāli, and in Chinese translations under the title, *The Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra*.⁷⁴ In the Pāli version we read that his capital was situated at Śākala (Sialkot) in the Punjab, "a great centre of trade... situated in a delightful country... abounding in parks and gardens... splendid with hundreds of thousands of magnificent mansions which rise aloft like the mountain peaks of the Himalayas [and with] streets filled with elephants, horses, carriages, and foot-passengers... crowded by men of all sorts and conditions, Brahmans, nobles, artificers and servants [and]... teachers of every creed... the resort of the leading men of each of the differing sects."⁷⁵

The *Milindapañha* is a Buddhist philosophical dialogue between King Menander and the otherwise unknown Buddhist monk Nāgasena, who may have been an Indo-Greek monk of Gandhāra.⁷⁶ It appears that it was not unusual for Indo-Greeks and Buddhists to engage in philosophical debates, while it has been put forward that several key portions of this Socratic-type dialogue are connected thematically and, to some extent, in their specific language to the twelfth and thirteenth edicts of Aśoka.⁷⁷

⁷³ Narain, "Greeks of Bactria and India," 409.

⁷⁴ There are two versions of the Chinese text (T32, no. 1670 (a) and (b)). For an English translation and noted differences between the two Chinese versions see Guang Xing, "The Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra," *Journal of Buddhist Studies* 5 (2007): 113–216. Guang Xing notes that the fact that it is called a *sūtra* "shows that its transmitters regarded it as an authoritative text equal to the words of the Buddha."

⁷⁵ The translation from the Pāli version is by Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda* (New York: Dover, 1963), 50. As we have seen, in the Greek edicts of Aśoka the term *dhamma* was translated as *eusebeia*, but Menander adopted in his coins the word *dhammaka*—translated in Greek as *dikaioi* (just)—and included a wheel similar to the Buddhist *cakra*. For the Buddhist tradition, King Menander, like Aśoka and Kaniṣka, is considered a protector and patron of Buddhism.

⁷⁶ Woodcock's hypothesis that Nāgasena was part of the Indo-Greek *saṅgha* of Gandhāra, is substantiated by one reference in the *Milindapañha* where it is said that he was a student of the Greek monk Dharmarakṣita. Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 378, puts forth the following argument: "The transmission story is historically possible, if Dharmarakṣita lived past the end of Aśoka's reign and converted Nāgasena, who then lived into old age before meeting Menander; or it may be slightly off in a way that is common in the sources, namely, that Nāgasena may have been converted by a disciple of Dharmarakṣita, perhaps one who has taken the same name." Pāṇini's passing reference (*Ganapatha* 178) to shaven-headed *yāvanas* lends credence to the Buddhist ordination of Greeks.

⁷⁷ Sick, "Socrates met the Buddha," 271–275.

There are other currents of continuity at work in the relation of the *Milindapañha* with Greek philosophy. Scott explains:

Menander himself is described as a cultured king skilled in rhetoric. Indeed the presentation of the actual conversations between Menander and Nagasena evokes something of the well-established Socratic mode of questions and answers. The repeated interventions by Menander to pose various wise, and also obscure, questions, goes beyond Indian literary patterns where the norm would have been for Menander to have only posed questions at the very start rather than throughout. On the other hand this pattern was a familiar Greek one, and Tarn has gone so far as to argue that there existed an earlier Greek text of the 'Questions of Menander,' from which the later Pali and Chinese versions stemmed.⁷⁸

Like the Indo-Greek King Agathocles before him, the Yavana King Menander was attracted to Buddhism,⁷⁹ and according to the *Milindapañha* and later traditions, he devoted himself to the Buddhist teachings and attained *arhatship* (enlightenment). According to Marshall, the Greeks and Buddhists were brought together by Menander because they had a common enemy, the commander in chief Puṣyamitra (184–148 B.C.E.) who assassinated the last Mauryan emperor, Brihadratha, ruling over a much diminished empire, and seized the throne.⁸⁰ In the Buddhist tradition, Pushyamitra had gone to Sākala and exterminated many Buddhist monks, an event that suggests that among the subjects of King Menander there were Buddhists. However, since the *Milindapañha* refers to Sākala as Menander's capital, it is possible that Menander, or an earlier ruler like Demetrius, had taken this important city from Pushyamitra.⁸¹

Plutarch reports that after Menander's death his relics were distributed, like those of a Buddhist 'wheel-turning monarch' (Skt. cakravartin), across

⁷⁸ Scott. "Buddhist Attitudes," 436–437. Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 83 n. 292, states that "Greek influence has been postulated frequently [but] erroneously" and that "there is no traceable Greek influence on form or content of the purely Indic dialogue, derived from Upaniṣadic traditions." Without further discussion it is hard to see how he arrived at this conclusion.

⁷⁹ For Narain, "Greeks of Bactria and India," 406, Agathocles was "the first Yavana king to possess Taxila and initiate a forward policy of extending patronage to Indian religions and cults, both Buddhist and Brahmanical." On a unique coin issued by him, there is a depiction of a Buddhist *stūpa* and the legend 'Akathukreyasa'; on the reverse there is a depiction of a tree inside a railing with the legend Hirañśame.

⁸⁰ John Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 21.

⁸¹ H. Dodwell, *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 54.

his capitals in Buddhist monuments (Skt. *stūpa*) erected to enshrine them.⁸² An inscription on the Bajaur relic casket, dated to the reign of Menander at the main *stūpa* of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, suggests that both monks and lay people considered the essence of the Buddha to be contained within the relics.⁸³ It is curious that the word *stūpa* is a Sanskrit word for “a knot or tuft of hair, the upper part of the head, crest, top, or summit.” The word is etymologically related to the Greek *stupos* (στύπος) meaning “stem, stump, block.” It is curious that the practice of the Macedonians to construct elaborate burial chambers covered by earthen tumuli resemble Buddhist funerary monuments, while the manner in which the dead bodies of the Macedonian monarchs were disposed of is strikingly similar to the way the remains of a Buddha and the universal wheel-turning king were treated. In Macedonian fashion, the dead were cremated and wrapped in purple cloth and then placed in gold chests along with many offerings.⁸⁴ The royal treatment of Macedonian kings accords with the distribution of the Buddha’s relics described in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sūtta* (5.11):

But, Lord, what are we to do with the Tathāgata’s [Buddha] remains? Ānanda, they should be dealt with like the remains of a wheel-turning monarch. And how is that, Lord? Ānanda, the remains of a wheel-turning monarch are wrapped in a new linen-cloth. This they wrap in teased cotton wool, and

⁸² Plutarchus, *Moralia*, 52.28. There are also passing references that Menander would erect a Buddhist *stūpa* in Pāṭaliputra; see Vassiliades, *Greeks in India*, 59, 119.

⁸³ See N. Majumdar, “The Bajaur Casket of the Reign of Menander,” *Epigraphia Indica* 24 (1932): 1–7 and Gregory Schopen, “On the Buddha and his Bones: The Conception of a Relic in the Inscriptions from Nāgārjunikoṇḍa,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 4 (1988): 527–537. Hazra, *Buddhism in India*, 46, accounts for sources which show that Buddhism continued to flourish in Menander’s kingdom. He writes that Menander is said to have “constructed a monastery named Milinda and gave it to Nāgasena. The Shimkot casket inscription refers to the patronage of Buddhism by the people during the rule of King Menander. It describes ‘The establishment of the relic of the Buddha by one Vijayamitra during the reign of King Menander on the fourteenth day of the month of Kārtikeya.’” The first reference to Buddhists in Greek literature is attributed to the Greek theologian Clement of Alexandria (150–218 C.E.) who quotes the ethnographer Alexander Polyhistor (c. 100 B.C.E.). It has been suggested that Polyhistor’s work on India derives from Megasthenes’ *Indica*, a work no longer extant; see P. Almond, “Buddhism in the West: 300 BC–AD 400,” *Journal of Religious History* 14, no. 3 (2007): 237–239. Clement is the first extant western source to mention the name of the Buddha. In the *Stromateis* (I, 15), he writes: “among the Indians are those philosophers also who follow the precepts of Bouta [Βούττα/Buddha], who they honour as god on account of his sanctity.” In the same work, III, 194, he refers to the worship of the *śramans* who hold “a certain pyramid beneath which, they think, lie the bones of a certain god”—a clear reference to a Buddhist reliquary, the *stūpa*.

⁸⁴ See Christesen and Murray, “Macedonian Religion,” 439.

this in a new cloth. Having done this five hundred times each, they enclose the king's body in an oil-vat of iron, which is covered with another iron pot. Then having made a funeral-pyre of all manner of perfumes they cremate the king's body, and they raise a stupa at a crossroads. That, Ānanda, is what they do with the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, and they should deal with the Tathāgata's body in the same way.

3.3. *The Conversion of the Greeks to Buddhism and their Missions: Historical References*

It is unlikely that Menander's support of Buddhism was a pious reconstruction of a Buddhist legend, for his deification by later traditions resonates with Macedonian religious trends that granted divine honours to monarchs and members of their family and worshipped them, like Alexander, as gods.⁸⁵ It is no coincidence that similar motifs highlight the Buddha's deification and his funereal rituals are commensurate with those of Macedonian kings and universal monarchs. The evidence is in favour of the conversion of King Menander to Buddhism, which is neither an isolated historical incident nor an invention of later traditions. Rather, it is a part of a gradual and successful conversion of the Greeks to Buddhism and of Buddhism to Hellenism, a process that was begun by King Aśoka and attests to the proselytizing importance of his Greek edicts. The conversion of the Greeks occurred prior to Menander's reign as recorded in historical sources and chronicles written in Pāli. They preserve an account of the so-called "Third Buddhist Council"—said to have been convened by Aśoka in his capital to settle disputes over Buddhist doctrines and monastic conduct under the extraordinary leadership of the *thera* Moggaliputa Tissa, the alleged author of the *Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*).⁸⁶

The early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka may be reconstructed from two Sinhala chronicles, *The Great Chronicle* (*Mahāvamsa*) and *The Chronicle of the Island* (*Dīpavamsa*). These draw from older sources and no doubt contain legends but also include a great deal of historical

⁸⁵ Christesen and Murray, "Macedonian Religion," 441–442.

⁸⁶ The number of Buddhist councils actually convened is in dispute; see Charles Prebish, "A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils," *Journal of Asian Studies* XXXIII, 2 (1974): 239–254. The *Kathāvatthu*, the fifth book of the Pāli Abhidharma corpus, lists two hundred and nineteen different controversies covered in twenty-three chapters with no apparent order but with a dialectical approach consisting of a complex series of statements and counter-statements.

information prevailing in India.⁸⁷ Here we read that among the Buddhist missionaries, who were active after the third Council, there was an Indo-Greek monk called Dhammarakkhita who was sent to Aparāntaka—the peninsular part of Gujarat where western traders have been active for centuries. Another Buddhist missionary by the name of Mahārakkhita was dispatched to the ‘country of the Greeks’ (probably Kandahar), and Majjhantika was sent to Gandhāra, which was largely a Hellenized area at the time.⁸⁸ *The Great Chronicle* records that Buddhist preachers were dispatched to nine different countries at the Mauryan borders; they included Majjhima who was sent to the Himalayas (Himavanta), Mahinda to Sri Lanka (Tambapaṇṇi) and Soṇa and Uttara to Myanmar (Suvāṇṇabhumi).⁸⁹ In the same history we read that the Elder Mahādhammarakkhita departed with thirty thousand monks from the city of the Yonas, Alasanda (one of the Alexandrias of Western Central Asia), to attend the inauguration of the great *stūpa* at Anurādhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka.⁹⁰

The Great Chronicle informs us that the Buddhist missionary Mahārakkhita Thera delivered the *Kālakārāma-sūta* in the country of the Greeks. The discourse, as recorded in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, does not provide us with the context of how it was inspired, but only states that it was delivered by the Buddha when he was staying at the Kālaka monastery in Sāketa—a region besieged by the Greeks, according to the Indian grammarian Patanjali, during (or before) the reign of the Indo-Greek King Menander.⁹¹ It appears to have been an extraordinary event that led thirty-seven thousand people to attain the reward of the Buddhist path, while ten thousand received the *pabbajjā* (entering the Buddha’s order).⁹²

⁸⁷ For a discussion see Wilhelm Geiger, “The Trustworthiness of the Mahāvamsa,” *The Indian Historical Quarterly* VI, no. 2 (1930): 205–227.

⁸⁸ The Greeks referred to in these texts occupied settlements within the Mauryan Empire that included Arachosia, Aparāntaka, Mahiṣa, Mahārāṣṭra and Vanavāsa; see Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 256.

⁸⁹ Hazra, *Buddhism in India*, 40. The identification of Suvāṇṇabhumi with Myanmar is debated and it may be referring to the region of Southeast Asia in general.

⁹⁰ Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Haynes Bode, *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (London: Pali Text Society; Oxford University Press, 1912), XXIX, 39.

⁹¹ See *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, 54.

⁹² Geiger, *Mahāvamsa*, XII, 39–40. Vassiliades, “Greeks and Buddhism,” 145–146, relates the conversion of the Greeks to Buddhism as preserved in the memory of the Ceylonese Theravāda tradition, who even today recite in their daily prayers the following stanza: “I bow my head to the footprints of the silent saint (Buddha) which are spread on the sandy bank of the Narmada River, on the Mountain Saccabhadda, on the Mountain Sumana, and in the city of the Yonakas [Greeks].”

While the cited number of Indo-Greek converts to Buddhism and monasticism is exaggerated, the terse reasoning style of the *Kālakārāma* and its employment of the *tetralemma* would have perfectly suited a philosophically mature Greek audience. Not unlike the insights proffered by Pyrrho, who also utilized the *tetralemma* in his reasoning, in the *Kālakārāma* a Tathāgata does not conceive form apart from sight or sound apart from hearing or a thing to be sensed apart from sensation or an object of cognition apart from cognition.

If I were to say: 'Monks, whatsoever is seen . . . by the mind—all that I do not know'—it would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say: 'I both know it and know it not'—that too would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say: 'I neither know it nor am ignorant of it'—it would be a fault in me. Thus, monks, a Tathāgata does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight; he does not conceive of an unseen; he does not conceive of a 'thing-worth-seeing'; he does not conceive about a seer . . . Whatever is seen, heard, sensed or clung to, is esteemed as truth by other folk, midst those who are entrenched in their own views being 'Such' I hold none as true or false.⁹³

Many centuries later, the Tibetan historian Tāranātha preserves in his *History of Buddhism in India* a story of the conversion of the pagan Greeks to Buddhism by a certain Arhat named Dhītika.⁹⁴

Once upon a time there lived in the country called Thogar [Tokharistan] a king named Mi-nar [Menander]. In this country everyone worshipped the sky-god [Zeus?]. Besides this, they knew no distinction between virtue and vice [possible reference to Dionysiac cults]. During their festivals, they worshipped the sky-god with great smoke by burning grains, clothes, jewels and fragrant woods. . . . Along with his five hundred arhat followers Aiya Dhītika once flew through the sky, appeared at the place of their worship and took his seat at the altar there. They took him as the sky-god, bowed down at his feet and worshipped him elaborately. When, however, he preached the Doctrine, about a thousand people—including their king [Menander]—were led to the realization of the Truth.⁹⁵

While we must be cautious since Tāranātha was writing in the beginning of the seventeenth century, he is generally a reliable and critical historian who had access to older sources currently lost to us. The rendition of

⁹³ From the *Kālakārāma Sutta*, translated by Bhikkhu Nananda, *The Magic of the Mind: an Exposition of the Kālakārāma Sutta* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1974), 9–11.

⁹⁴ This is no other than the Buddhist monk Nāgasena substituted by the Sarvāstivādins with Dhītika, a master of their own school; see Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 315.

⁹⁵ The brackets are mine. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 46.

Taxila in Tibetan as *dojog* (Tb. *rdo-'jog*), a city built by stone masons, is an accurate portrayal of the Greeks who were proficient in the techniques of stone construction. In any case, the Greeks were not totally unknown to the Tibetans. Physicians with Greek and Iranian names had been active at the Tibetan imperial court, while the discovery of Greek artefacts now on display at the Ashmolean museum in Oxford suggests possible contacts prior to the seventh century.⁹⁶

Buddhist texts may not always be relied upon as accurate historical records, but together with other texts, inscriptions, coins, and archaeological finds, they draw a convincing picture of systematic Buddhist proselytism in the western territories and Central Asian borders of the Mauryas. Inscriptions from the end of the Indo-Greek occupation of Gandhāra (or not long thereafter) substantiate the claim that a number of prominent Greeks converted to Buddhism through ordination, or as lay followers. An inscription on a reliquary urn containing the Buddha's relics in Swat valley records that it was installed by a local Greek governor, the *meridarch* (Grk. Μεριδάρχης) Theodorus. Another inscription from Shahpur near Taxila commemorates the establishment of a *stūpa* by a *meridarch* whose name is illegible.⁹⁷ This evidence in relation to other factors mentioned before calls for a re-examination of sobering claims concerning the intense interactions between Greeks and Buddhists, their sharing of

⁹⁶ See Christopher Beckwith, "The Introduction of Greek Medicine into Tibet in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99.2 (1979): 297–313; Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim "On urine analysis and Tibetan medicine's connections with the West," in Sienna Craig, et al., eds. *Studies of Medical Pluralism in Tibetan History and Society* (Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2010), 195–211; and Dan Martin, "Greek and Islamic Medicines' Historical Contact with Tibet: A Reassessment in View of Recently Available but Early Sources on Tibetan Medical Eclecticism," in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, eds. Anna Akasoy et al. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 117–135; and Philip Denwood, "A Greek Bowl from Tibet." *Iran* 11 (1975): 121–127.

⁹⁷ Seldeslachts, *Final Frontier*, 140. Hazra, *Buddhism in India*, 48–49, notes several inscriptions that mention the names of people who are identified as Ionians (Yona/Yavana) and who contributed to the propagation of Buddhism in their regions. He cites inscription No. 364 discovered at Sāñchi *stūpa* by the Yona from Satapatha; inscription No. 10 describes a '(gift) of Dhamma, a Yavana from Dhenukākātā;' inscription No. 7 found at Karle describes, "(This) pillar (is) the gift of the Yavana Sihadhaya from Dhenukākātā;" another inscription discovered at Karle records '(This) pillar (is) the gift of the Yavana Yasaradhana from Dhenukākātā;' inscription No. 5 found at Junnar in the Poona (Pune) district records that a Yavana wished to give two cisterns at his expense at Junnar to the monks; inscription No. 8 of Junnar tells of the construction of a dining hall at Junnar by a Yavana for the Buddhist Saṃgha; and inscription No. 16 also found at Junnar describes the erection of a hall-front at Junnar by a Yavana for the use of the Buddhist Saṃgha.

customs and faiths, which, *inter alia*, led to the adoption of the Greek calendar by some Buddhists.⁹⁸

4. CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND THE CONFLUENCE OF HORIZONS: EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH IN MATERIAL CULTURE

Following Aśoka's death and the decline of the Mauryas, the Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek rulers extended their political sway in Afghanistan and Pakistan and presided over a flourishing economy as attested by the wide distribution of their coinage and the monetary exchange they established with other currencies.⁹⁹ With the collapse of Greco-Bactrian hegemony in 125 B.C.E., the mobilization of Bactrian Greeks over the Hindu Kush furthered contacts with established Buddhist communities and introduced new trading patterns of interdependency between Greek and non-Greek populations. Their eventual loss of power did not herald the eclipse of Hellenistic culture that continued to exert its influence in Asia for several centuries. The construction of statues modelled in unfired clay or stucco supported by wooden frames (the hands supported on wooden armatures), was a major innovation of Greco-Bactrian artists that left a long-lasting imprint in Buddhist art.¹⁰⁰ Hellenistic traditions continued to flourish long after the reign of the Indo-Greeks for a variety of reasons, not least because of the latter's accumulated wealth and technical know-how in warcraft, irrigation, administration, medicine, architecture and astronomy. To these reasons we may add their familiarity with the international land trade, which was regenerated by maritime trade in luxury goods that

⁹⁸ Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhāra," in *The Spread of Buddhism*, eds. Ann Heirman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 59. See also Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: des origines à l'ère Śaka* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires [et] Institut Orientaliste, 1958), 469–487, where other forms of Greek influence on Buddhism are discussed. There are similarities between the Greek and Buddhist divisions of time, in that they both utilize three periods for day and night, they use the same terminology and the same order. Iranian influence can be ruled out, for in the Persian calendar the day was divided into five parts and the night into four.

⁹⁹ Narain, "Greeks of Bactria and India," 417.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard, "Aī Khanum and Hellenism," 101. Greco-Bactrian innovations, however, are not limited to sculpture making and architecture. The iconography of some of their coin issues, compared to their Seleucid contemporaries, is characterized by exceptional creativity. The commemorative coins, also known as "pedigree" coins issued by Agathocles and Antimachus I were among these novelties; see Osmund Bopearachchi, "Contributions of Greeks to the Art and Culture of Bactria and India: New Archeological Evidence," *Indian Historical Review* 32 (2005): 103–125.

brought Greek and Roman merchants from the Mediterranean basin to India, as attested by archaeological findings in the south of India, but also in Taxila, Tillya Tepe, and Begram.¹⁰¹

Begram, or Alexandria of the Caucasus, was situated at the confluence of the western Silk Routes and served as the capital of the last Greco-Bactrian kings and later of the Kuṣāṇa rulers. This ancient capital of the Kāpiśa region, mentioned in the travelogues of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, was the summer residence of the Kuṣāṇa Emperor Kaniška. The successor of Vima Kadphises, Kaniška was the third of the Kuṣāṇa emperors to extend his influence in Afghanistan and Northwest India. His reign is a landmark in the history of Indian Buddhism. He was not Indian but came from the stock of Central Asian people who invaded Bactria called Yuezhi by the Chinese and Tocharians by the Greeks. In Buddhist traditions he is represented as a great patron of the Buddha's teachings, and he is frequently associated with many Buddhist masters who were responsible for shaping Mahāyāna Buddhism in later times, like the philosopher and poet Aśvaghōṣa who resided at his court. While there are only few coins that bear an image of the emperor with the standing Buddha on the reverse side,¹⁰² there are many inscriptions dating to his

¹⁰¹ One Greek work dating to the early first century C.E., the *Parthian Stations* of Isidorus of Charax, is an account and testimony of the overland trade route between the Levant and India that continued during the times of the Parthian empire; see Wilfred Schoff, *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax: An Account of the Overland Trade Route between the Levant and India in the first century BC. The Greek Text with a Translation and Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1914). In the late fourth century and during the Hellenistic period the circulation of sailing guides (*periploi*) describing coastal features and particular towns were not uncommon. In the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (*Περίπλους τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς Θαλάσσης*) the anonymous author of this manual composed in Greek refers to Greek settlements in India and details the trading routes and goods exchanged in the first century C.E. across the Red Sea, the east coast of Africa and the Indian sea ports; see Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Archeological discoveries of Roman pottery and coins in the South of India confirm the prevalence of trade between the Roman Empire and the Indian subcontinent, adding credence to reports of Indian embassies meeting the Roman Emperor Augustus, and one from Taprobane (Sri Lanka) sent to the Emperor Tiberius Claudius. Knowledge of the Indian Ocean monsoon patterns is attributed to Eudoxus of Cyzicus in the late second century B.C.E., making it predictable to sail to India and back. This resulted in an increase of trade in the spices and other exotica that entered Greece via Alexandria; see Reger, "Hellenistic Greece," 480.

¹⁰² This coin bears a representation of the standing Buddha on the reverse accompanied by the Greek legend ΒΟΔΔΟ (Buddha); see Errington et al., *Transformation of Image*, 199–200. The gilded bronze reliquary recovered from the ruined Buddhist monument is Kaniška's casket has been for a long time in dispute. A recent reassessment of the evidence from Shāh-jī-kī-Dherī resolves two contested issues, namely: that it cannot be dated to the first year of Kaniška nor can it be a gift from Kaniška. Rather the casket would appear

time, as well as that of his successors, which clearly suggest that it was a period of great religious activity. Buddhist monks from India carried Buddhism to Central Asian and China, and the Greco-Buddhist school of art of Gandhāra, which had originated earlier, saw its greatest development. During this time we discern a Buddhist iconographic appropriation of the martial cult of Heracles, the cultic hero and ancestral progenitor (*Ηρακλής πατρώος*) of the Macedonian royal line of the Temenids. Alexander the Great was especially devoted to the son of Zeus Heracles and performed regular sacrifices to him in many places including the Hydaspes, the river Jhelum in India.¹⁰³ Heracles with his attributes (lion skin and club) was associated with masculine achievements and came to be substituted as the guardian of the Buddha with the powerful Buddhist deity Vajrapāṇi, the holder of the ‘thunderbolt-sceptre’ (Skt. *vajra*).¹⁰⁴

There are many similarities between the treasures discovered in Begram and Tillya Tepe and findings from Taxila, the capital of Gandhāra. It appears that these cities had viable commercial and cultural interactions with each other around the beginning of our era, and may have developed a common artistic tradition in earlier times.¹⁰⁵ A good number of glass pieces from Begram, dating to the first century of our millennium, bear Greek inscriptions, while there are many artefacts of Hellenistic style that include rhyta, kantharoi and amphorae for the storage of wine among other things. Refined works of art with Greek themes feature a small mask of Silenus crowned with flowers and bronze statues of winged Eros, Athena with a helmet and chest armour decorated with the head of a Gorgon and serpents, the god Harpocrates, the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis that was adopted by the Macedonians with attributes typical

to have been the gift of the architects (*navakarmiana*) of the fire room during the time of Huviška; see Elizabeth Errington and Harry Falk, “Numismatic Evidence for dating the ‘Kaniška’ reliquary,” *Journal of the Institute of Silk Road Studies* 8 (2002): 101–120.

¹⁰³ Christesen and Murray, “Macedonian Religion,” 430.

¹⁰⁴ F. Flood, “Herakles and the ‘Perpetual Acolyte’ of the Buddha: Some Observations on the Iconography of Vajrapani in Gandharan Art,” *South Asian Studies* 5 (1989): 25, argues that the “syncretic combination of non-Buddhist borrowing in concept and iconography, the protective function of Vajrapani, and the quasi-martial role accorded to him in Early Buddhist thought rendered the character uniquely suited to the adaptation of Heraklean iconography from readily accessible Graeco-Bactrian and Graeco-Roman prototypes.” This combination may very well have been instigated by Greek Buddhists.

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Cambon, “Begram: Alexandria of the Caucasus, Capital of the Kushan Empire,” in *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*, eds. Fredrik Hiebert et al. (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 159.

of Heracles, and plaster medallions depicting Greek mythological pairs, like Eros and Psyche, Ganymede and Zeus, and Endymion and Selene.

Some hundred kilometres to the west of Bactria, the startling discovery of the necropolis at Tillya Tepe ('Hill of Gold') provides the missing link between the end of the Greco-Bactrian era and the rise of the nomadic confederacy of the Kuṣāṇas. Excavated some five hundred meters from the ancient walled city of Emshi Tepe, the necropolis yielded the discovery of over twenty thousand golden items of exquisite workmanship dating from between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. Just like Begram, the artwork at Tillya Tepe is a diverse mixture of Chinese, Indian and Hellenistic traditions.

The wealth, quality and superior craftsmanship of the artefacts are reminiscent of the precious finds in the necropolis of Aegae, the burial ground of the Macedonian kings. The jewellery at Tillya Tepe resembles that worn by Macedonian women who were keen to adopt gold jewellery and jewel-like decoration on their clothing.¹⁰⁶ In this large collection we find gold pendants and rings intended as seals portraying the goddess Athena with a long sharp nose, which are dated to the second quarter of the first century C.E. Many of the items are indebted to Greek style and some rings and medallions represent Dionysian motifs. There are also Parthian coins with Greek inscriptions, appliqués of Aphrodite, and a pair of clasps depicting Dionysus and Ariadne. Some of the larger gold items record their weight according to the Ionic system which utilizes the Greek alphabet in a decimal system.¹⁰⁷

Alfred Foucher of the *Délégation Archéologique Française* argued that two engraved ivory plaques from Begram depict Jātaka tales of the Buddha's previous births,¹⁰⁸ while one inscribed gold coin from Tillya Tepe, dated to the first century B.C.E., depicts a standing man in half profile, who resembles Heracles or Zeus, pushing an eight-spoked wheel with both hands. The Kharoṣṭhī legend above reads: 'He who brings the wheel

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Carney, "Macedonian Women," in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, eds. Joseph Roisman et al. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 412.

¹⁰⁷ Véronique Schiltz, "Tillya Tepe, the Hill of Gold: A Nomad Necropolis," in *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*, eds. Fredrik Hiebert et al. (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 259, 269, 278. The rapid growth and spread of Buddhism in the eastern sector of the Parthian kingdom is attested by Parthian scholars of Buddhism who went to China as missionaries; see G. Koshelenko and V.N. Pilipko "Parthia," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1994), 149–150. This region may have served as another hub for the dissemination of Buddhism among Greek settlements situated at the eastern borders of Parthia.

¹⁰⁸ Cambon, "Begram: Alexandria of the Caucasus," 158.

of the law in motion.’ The obverse side shows a standing lion with its right forepaw raised that resembles the heraldic lions decorating the ceremonial shield of Philip II. In the left field a *nandi-pada* monograph (a trident form above a circle) symbolizes the ‘three jewels.’ The above legend in Kharoṣṭhī reads: ‘The Lion had driven away fear.’ If the interpretation is correct, this gold coin from Tillya Tepe may be the oldest representation of the Buddha ever to be discovered.¹⁰⁹

The decorative tradition of architecture and stone sculpture of the monumental phase of Buddhist art in Kuṣāṇa has Hellenistic roots that can be traced to the Greco-Bactrian period. While the Buddhist iconography is of Indian origin, the technique of modelling through the use of light and shade in Bactrian Buddhist painting was virtually unknown in Indian art of the Kuṣāṇa period.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, Macedonia was most famous for the large-scale paintings that have been uncovered in the magnificent tombs excavated in several locations. Judging from donor inscriptions, Buddhism was supported by the Kuṣāṇa nobility that allocated funds to the building of Buddhist monuments and in support of the Buddhist community. The discovery of a *stūpa* at Bactria containing coins of the philhellenic Kuṣāṇa King has him addressed by the Greek title ‘Great Saviour’ (Σωτήρ Μέγας).¹¹¹

The undeniable links between the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra and the art of Bactria from Surk Khotal to Kara Tepe, and from Kountuz to Dimperlin,¹¹² confirm the continuity of Hellenistic culture across “Greater Gandhāra” and reveal that the real roots of the classical influences evident in Greco-Buddhist art are to be sought “in this easternmost branch of Hellenism, while Rome’s contribution was merely secondary.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Schiltz, “Tillya Tepe,” 276.

¹¹⁰ Tigran Mkrtichev, “Buddhism and Features of the Buddhist Art of Bactria-Tokharistan,” in *After Alexander, Central Asia before Islam*, eds. Joe Cribb et al. (British Academy: Oxford University Press, 2007), 480.

¹¹¹ Paul Bernard, “Oi Ellines sti Bactriani: Apo ta Baktra stin Ai Xanoum,” in *O Ellinistikos Politismos stin Anatoli*, ed. Potitsa Grigorakou (Athens: Politistikos Omilos Palmyra, 2009), 81.

¹¹² Bernard “Ellines stin Baktriani,” 81–82. The chronology of Greco-Buddhist art is difficult to determine with precision, but it appears to have flourished between the end of the first century C.E., during the reign of pro-Buddhist Kuṣāṇa Emperor Kaniška, and the first half of the second century.

¹¹³ Bernard, “Greek kingdoms,” 128. He explains that “since at Tepe Shotor an artist of the fourth century A.D. can portray Vajrapāṇi so similar to the Heracles on the Graeco-Bactrian coins of Euthydemus, and since Indo-Scythian coins provide an intermediate link, there is no need to look for prototypes in some distant country beyond the sea when the local traditions provide them.” In either case, there is no compelling reason to dichotomize

Innovative expressions of Buddhist faith in anthropomorphic representation prospered during the cohabitation of Hellenism and Buddhism in the Indo-Afghan world, “sometimes a little on the clumsy side, but growing stronger every day and developing into the flourishing Gandharan art form with its apex of stucco modelling in the Hadda district.”¹¹⁴

4.1. *The Greco-Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*

It appears that Buddhism emerged out of its Indian cocoon after its encounter with the cosmopolitan culture of the Macedonians, who were culturally Greek and noted for their openness to foreign cults, their preoccupation with death as a passage into the afterlife, their construction of funereal monuments instead of temples, and the deification of their rulers.¹¹⁵ There were many deities that held particular significance for the Macedonians which find their parallel in the cultic pantheon of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is not farfetched to contemplate how Hellenistic cosmopolitanism and polytheistic forms and attitudes of religious worship contributed to the universalization and hybridization of the Buddha in Northern traditions. Gandhāra art featured a pantheon of stylistically-Hellenized buddhas and bodhisattvas who, like their Olympian gods and demigods, have their own legendary lives and possess spiritual markers and physical attributes corresponding to exalted human virtues.

Buddhism was probably known in Gandhāra prior to the reign of Aśoka.¹¹⁶ Gandhāra was strategically situated at the heart of the main trading route that connected Western Central Asia with India, the Mediterranean Sea, and China to the east. Its composite cultural base goes back to the Persian Empire and Alexander III who established Greek rule that lasted nearly a century after his demise in Babylon. Alexander’s legacy finds expression in the extraordinary sculptures of Gandhāra, which from the time of the

the Alexandrian Greek settlers from later Greco-Roman merchants since they chronologically overlap with each other and their communities would have mingled, having much in common in terms of culture and language.

¹¹⁴ Cambon, “Begam: Alexandria of the Caucasus,” 158–159. G. Pugachenkova, et al., “Kushan Art,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1994), 359, cautions: “The problem of the chronology of the stucco sculptures from Hadda needs further elucidation. While it is certain that the majority belongs to the Kusha period, it is clear that some of the material excavated should be assigned to a date before the arrival of the Kushans.”

¹¹⁵ Christesen and Murray, “Macedonian Religion,” 429.

¹¹⁶ Hazra, *Buddhism in India*, 14, reports that it was through King Bimbisāra’s efforts that the king of Gandhāra, Pukkusāti, who was a contemporary of the Buddha, converted to Buddhism and supported the Buddhist monastic community, the *saṅgha*.

Kuṣāṇas are all predominantly Buddhist. The Buddha's Apollo Belvedere type of face, though just "one among the numerous types known, is no doubt the earliest to provide a model for others,"¹¹⁷ while the arresting nudity of Jain sculptures may have been inspired by some Apollonian archetypes.

In the first centuries of the millennium the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra integrated Indian and Hellenistic styles. This is discerned in statues of bodhisattvas adorned with royal jewellery (bracelets and torques) and amulet boxes, the contrapposto stance of the upright, an emphasis on draperies, and a plethora of Dionysian themes. However, we should bear in mind that Greco-Buddhist art did not come all at once or in a single act of creation, but emerged as the by-product of a continuous exchange of material, linguistic and cultural expertise among Indo-Greeks, Indians and Persian populations. While Yona missionaries may have seduced many to Buddhism there would have been among them a good number of Greeks. This would mean that the entire event also involved a Greek-to-Greek conversion to Buddhism where the Indo-Greeks had been active supporters of their new faith. From the earliest times the syncretistic styles at Ay Khanum showed no clear Greek-Oriental dichotomy;¹¹⁸ a state of affairs we encounter in the surviving samples of Greco-Buddhist art. This gives rise to developments which do not necessitate concessions to foreign elements or a radical break with traditional models of representation, but a re-conceptualization of possibilities emerging within a cultural milieu that allowed for a prodigious intermingling in the first place.

Despite discernible similarities no formation provides the model for the other, while the novel delivery and arresting expressions of Greco-Buddhist art would probably not have been possible had there not been a substantial number of Buddhists among Greek donors and Hellenized intellectuals and artists. Elaborate depictions of Hellenistic themes in

¹¹⁷ Pugachenkova et al., "Kushan Art," 364. The authors, 361, explain: "in early Buddhism, introduced here by Aśoka (third century B.C.), the Buddha was never represented in human form. But constant exposure of the Gandhāra Buddhists to the art and pantheistic religion of the Western world created a schism between the purist and the more forward-looking Buddhists."

¹¹⁸ The transmission of ideas and practices across historical periods and semantic fields brings about mutations in the source and target cultures and arguably innovation comes about when the expressions of one tradition are organically restructured according to the inner logic of another. The worship of River Oxus in Ay Khanum is attested in an inscription of the pedestal of a small Greek-style statuette of a satyr-like figure. It reveals that even in cases where a non-Greek name of a god was retained Greek iconography might nevertheless still be introduced.

Buddhist art are not likely to have been the impersonal outcome of hired Greek artisans, who would have been asked by their patrons to stick to more traditional Buddhist themes. A Gandhāra relief, dated sometime in the second century C.E., depicts Cassandra in Indian attire naked to the waist with anklets and necklets ominously framed by the Scaian Gate, while to her left is depicted the procession of the Trojan horse being led into Troy.¹¹⁹ Other reliefs are orgiastically embellished with leitmotifs of Dionysian revelry (music, dance and wine) that do not resonate with the renunciation of early Buddhist 'hearers or disciples' (Skt. śrāvakas). Furthermore, there is nothing regal in the persona of an Arhat, unlike depictions of Bodhisattvas. The portrayal of Buddha Śakyamuni's ectopic birth not from the womb but from his mother's side, a popular theme in Gandhāra art, seems to have been a visual adaptation of Dionysus's birth from the thigh of Zeus.¹²⁰

The synthesis of Dionysian motifs with Yaksha imagery in Mathurā reveals the acquaintance of Indian Buddhists with Bacchanalian rites.¹²¹ The worship of Dionysus was associated with practical knowledge of viticulture and viniculture in Western Central Asia and India. Delphic theology emphasized a fraternal relationship between Apollo and Dionysus, two deities for whom the Macedonians maintained a lasting attachment in their worship.¹²² A passage from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, possibly redacted in Gandhāra during the Kuṣāṇa period, has the Buddha explaining to his disciples how to distil and consume wine, a thriving custom in Macedonian court symposia.

¹¹⁹ See Allan, "A Tabula Iliaca."

¹²⁰ Martina Stoye, "The Deva with the Swaddling Cloth: On the Western origins of Gandhāran Birth Iconography and their Implications for the Textual History of the Buddhist Saviour's Nativity," in *Religion and Art: New Issues in Indian Iconography and Iconology*, ed. C. Bautze-Picron (London: The British Academy, 2008).

¹²¹ For a discussion of Dionysian-Yaksha imagery from Mathura see Martha Carter, "The Bacchantes of Mathura: New Evidence of Dionysiac Yaksha Imagery from Kushan Mathura," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 69, no. 8 (1982): 247–257. In the *Gargi Samhitā* the colonial presence of Greeks in Mathura is alluded to prior to the reign of the Kuṣāṇas. According to this *Purāna*, "the wicked and valiant Greeks" occupied Sakata, Panchāla, and Mathura and advanced as far as Kusāmadhvaja (i.e., Pātaliputra); Dodwell, *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, 55.

¹²² The practice of viticulture in Gandhāra is corroborated by the archeological records; see Pia Brancaccio, and Xinru Liu "Dionysus and drama in the Buddhist art of Gandhara," *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 219–244. During the spring festival of Theoxenia ('hospitality of the gods'), Dionysus was urged to appear along with other deities and partake of food, wine and entertainment, while in the Delphic cult of Dionysus his statue was erected in a chariot drawn by golden lions amid sacrifices and dithyrambic competitions; see Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 138.

When the Buddha was travelling in the north-west along with a retinue of monks, a *yaksha* offered them grapes. The monks did not know such fruits, and thus the Buddha explained to them: “These are fruits from the northern region. They are called grapes. One can eat them after having purified them with fire.” Apparently, after the Buddha and his monks ate some grapes, and there were some left, he added: “The grapes should be pressed to extract the juice, and then the fluid should be heated and removed from the fire before it is completely cooked . . . To store the syrup and serve it to the *samgha* out of the proper time.”¹²³

The extraordinary evolution of Greco-Buddhism was not confined to Buddhist art and Hellenistic forms of entertainment. The region of Gandhāra was also a centre of Buddhist philosophy, the *abhidharma*, which in all likelihood fermented during the Indo-Greek period and not during the later periods of the Śakas or the Kuṣāṇas, to which the earliest Buddhist manuscripts in Karoṣṭhī can be dated. Further studies are needed to evaluate Bronkhorst’s intriguing claim that close contacts between Gāndhārī Buddhists and Indo-Greeks in philosophical debates informed the philosophy of the Sarvāstivāda, as evidenced in the Abhidharma-Piṭaka that is distinct from the one compiled by the Theravada school. In his words, the Buddhists of North West India did not adopt Greek philosophical ideas, but the Greek method of dialectical argumentation.

They [Sarvāstivāda] adopted this method and along with it the willingness (or obligation) to use it in areas that used to be the exclusive territory of tradition and religion, but they adopted nothing else in the domain of philosophy. This method alone, however, was able to affect their ideas profoundly. It forced them to rethink their intellectual and religious heritage, and organize it in a way so as to make it more coherent and more resistant to critical questioning by outsiders.¹²⁴

¹²³ Brancaccio and Xinru, “Dionysus and drama,” 226.

¹²⁴ Johannes Bronkhorst, “Why is there Philosophy in India?” (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences 1999): 22–23. Christopher Beckwith, “The Sarvāstivādin Buddhist Scholastic Method in Medieval Islam and Tibet,” in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, eds. Anna Akasoy et al. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 172, notes that the scholastic method originated “within the encyclopaedic scholastic commentary literature of the Sarvāstivādin school of Buddhism, which flourished mainly in the region of central Asia (especially Gandhāra, Bactria and east Turkistan) and north-western India (especially Kashmir).”

4.2. *Ideological Affinities between Greeks and Buddhists*

We may better appreciate the unique traditions of Buddhism that developed in the Hellenistic East if we take into consideration some ideological affinities between Hellenism and Indian religious thought. The Macedonians and their descendants would have seen in Buddhism a flexible religious-cum-philosophical movement with aspiring egalitarian principles and an ecumenical philosophy that encouraged the individual attainment of spiritual excellence.¹²⁵ Given their preoccupation with the afterlife, they would have been drawn to Buddhist soteriology provided that it did not restrict them in the cultic worship of their gods or deny them essential features of their lifestyle like philosophy, drama, music and wine—elements which are celebrated in Greco-Buddhist art and culture.

The Macedonians inherited from the Greek classical world epic traditions and divine genealogies, but they were not followers of a homogenous religion nor did they have an organized or hereditary priesthood to oppose newcomers. For the most part, the Indo-Greeks were followers of several Hellenistic and foreign cults. They may have contributed to the hero-cult image of the Buddha and in either case they would have embraced it without much difficulty—especially as it enjoyed regional support by wealthy merchants and Indian monarchs. Most importantly, on the daily level of practice Buddhism would not deny lay ritual practices and expressions that were familiar to Hellenic supporters of cults—such as, offering burnt offerings, reciting prayers, propitiating deities, worshipping relics, purifying oneself and places, performing rites and prayers of protection against harm, and so forth.

The Greeks were experts in debate and systematic inquiry and fostered democratic principles in their communities of citizens. These aspects would have been praised by the Buddhists who needed the tools to dismantle an oppressive Indian caste system and phenomenal reality itself, and who arrogated in all persons regardless of their religious or social status the same potential for liberation from the cycle of suffering. Lastly, it is generally agreed that Buddhism localized itself in new areas by

¹²⁵ Hazra, *Buddhism in India*, 403, explains that the rules and regulations of the *sangha* were inspired by democratic principles. It was formed “like a Republic and its members in its regular meetings in the Assembly moved all proceedings and settled them by resolutions. In the eye of its law, every member had equal rights and privileges... By the introduction of the system of votes of the majority, it decided the cases of difference of opinions.”

accommodating regional deities, while its skilled missionaries welcomed converts regardless of language, ethnicity, and social status. That was not necessarily the case with rival religious movements led by Hindus and Jains. The Brahmanical tradition would readily dispute that a Brahmana could learn nothing from foreigners (Skt. *mlecchas*) in matters concerning religious precepts (Skt. *dharma*), while conversing with them was perceived as a source of defilement. Conversion to Brahmanism was not a readily available option for *mlecchas* who could not aspire to initiation (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) into the sacred traditions of the Hindus.¹²⁶ In short, there is no reason to assume that Greek supporters of Buddhism had to renounce their customs and *paideia*, any more than Buddhists had to alter their soteriological aims when adopting Greek methods of argumentation and reasoning and anthropocentric representations of enlightenment.

5. CONCLUSION: ASYMMETRICAL DIFFUSIONS BETWEEN CULTURES AND SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE

In this article I have identified cultural affinities, economic interdependence, and socio-political arrangements as contributing factors in the formulation of Buddhism in the Hellenistic East. Specifically, I have argued for the synchronic and diachronic impact of transnational trade on the transmission, production and expression of religious knowledge. The encounters between Indo-Greeks and Indian Buddhists bear witness to an unenforced and asymmetrical appropriation of knowledge that gave rise to new models of interpretation in discrete historical periods—the Aśokan era, the Indo-Greek, the Indo-Scythian, and the Kuṣāṇa.

With the term “unenforced” we acknowledge that both communities engaged, on different occasions and with varying intensity, in displays of cultural propaganda and forms of resistance by designating the “other” as “barbarian” or “*mleccha*.”¹²⁷ Nevertheless, we find no evidence for religious

¹²⁶ Vassiliades, *Greeks in India*, 61, 96 n. 101, notes that the rigidity of the Brahmanical caste would exclude outsiders from access to the sacred Vedas. While this may not have been exactly the case with the Jains, they nevertheless debased the *mlecchas* just the same as the following quote by Vassiliades illustrates: “As a *mleccha* repeats what an Ārya has said, but does not understand the meaning, merely repeating his words, so the ignorant, though pretending to possess knowledge, do not know the truth, just as uninstructed *mleccha*.”

¹²⁷ For recent discussions concerning Indian perceptions of the Greeks and Greek perceptions of the Indians see Ghosh, “Understanding Transitions,” and Vassiliades, *Greeks in India*, 105–126.

conflict and coercion instigated between Indo-Greeks and Buddhists. Instead we identified *topoi* of cultural conversion by voluntary association and through an internalized assimilation of foreign elements facilitated by trade across multiple zones of contact: trading routes, cities, courts, markets, caravans, public buildings, and so forth.¹²⁸ Given the continuity of evidence surveyed, there is no reason to postulate formative Roman influences on the creation of the Greco-Buddhist art of the Hellenistic East, other than in a sense of renewal and revitalization of pre-existing trends.

And finally, the kinds of exchange that transpired between Hellenes and Buddhists were “asymmetrical” in the sense that neither the cultural conversion initiatives of the respective agents nor the effects of their conscious and unconscious activities are equally or isomorphically distributed in the ideological and material culture that survives. Interactions between cultures do not represent tightly symmetrical processes. Asymmetrical cultural transfers of this degree of complexity and lack of conformity have been addressed in Kroeber’s theory of “stimulus diffusion”, defined as a set of dynamic correspondences between cultures that encountered no visible resistance to their spread. According to Kroeber, “what is really involved in every true example of stimulus diffusion is the birth of a pattern new to the culture in which it develops, though not completely new in human culture. There is historical connection and dependence, but there is also originality. Analogically, ordinary diffusion is like adoption, stimulus diffusion like procreation . . . In essence, stimulus diffusion might be defined as new pattern growth initiated by precedent in a foreign culture.”¹²⁹

His model may be relevant here, for Hellenistic Buddhism is not a forced or hierarchized unity, but the side effect of a re-creation of horizons neither exclusively Indian nor uniquely Greek.¹³⁰ The Indo-Greeks and Indian Buddhists of Central Asia are not tidy and discrete categories,

¹²⁸ Cultural conversion reflects, in its wider context, the diffusion and absorption of knowledge and it is not limited to religious affiliation. The phenomenon of “cultural conversion by voluntary association” has been described by Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Arguably, in pre-modern times commerce and trade provided the most significant introduction of foreign influences by voluntary association, in addition to pressing political and social advantages.

¹²⁹ Alfred Kroeber, “Stimulus Diffusion,” *American Anthropologist* 42, no. 1 (1940): 20.

¹³⁰ We have suggested that the Greek-Buddhist interface reflects a gradual process of an eclectic procreation of expressions of spiritual conduct, moral depictions and art forms produced and reproduced in cross-religious and non-religious contexts; it may be instructive to compare with examples furnished by Kroeber, “Stimulus Diffusion.”

but organic bonds intersecting and overlapping with each other in complex and personal ways over time, in diverse combinations and to differing degrees. The similarities they came to share are neither the straightforward result of external borrowings nor the quantifiable outcome of completely independent processes at work within each culture. They are the expressions of cross-cultural creations of knowledge fostered by conquests and an international trading network of people, commodities and shared currency. In retrospect they reflect the coming together of the civilizations of East and West and the enduring legacy of the Greeks in Asia as the first Europeans ever to be converted to Buddhism.

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