**Distribution Agreement**

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Jonathan Tao March 23, 2020

# Bactria and the Cultural Legacy of Alexander the Great in the East

by

Jonathan Tao

Dr. Cynthia Patterson
Adviser

Department of History

Cynthia Patterson, PhD
Adviser

Tonio Andrade, PhD

Committee Member

William K. Gilders, PhD

Committee Member

2020

# Bactria and the Cultural Legacy of Alexander the Great in the East

By

Jonathan Tao

Cynthia Patterson, PhD

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of History

2020

Abstract

Bactria and the Cultural Legacy of Alexander the Great in the East

By Jonathan Tao

Encompassing modern-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria was an ancient Central Asian region that emerged as an independent kingdom in the aftermath of the wars of Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great and the reigns of his Seleucid successors, Seleucus I and Antiochus I. Located thousands of miles away from the communities along the Mediterranean Sea, blocked by the Pamir Mountains and Taklimakan Desert from China, and fenced off by the Hindu Kush from India, Bactria lay at what was once the northeastern border of Alexander's massive empire. Far from being an isolated, colonial outpost of the Hellenistic world, however, Bactria reinterpreted Alexander's legacy of conquest, mixing Greek influences from its Greek and Macedonian settlers with the culture of the indigenous population, as well as interacting with and influencing the Buddhist tradition of India and the horse culture of China. My examination of Alexander's actions in Central Asia and India aims to reveal that prior scholarship has overlooked the Macedonian conqueror's role in cultivating his unique place in the Central Asian imagination as well as to shed light on the far-reaching repercussions of his cultural memory in the post-Alexander Central Asia.

# Bactria and the Cultural Legacy of Alexander the Great in the East

By

Jonathan Tao

Cynthia Patterson, PhD

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of History

2020

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my immense gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Cynthia Patterson. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Patterson for her unwavering support and encouragement, critical eye, and sage advice ever since my sophomore year at Emory. I am especially grateful for her willingness to read countless drafts of my writing. From when I first studied under her wing as an RPP student, to finding my passion for learning about Alexander the Great in her HIST 301 course, to exploring Bactria in the HIST 585 graduate course, to preparing my first travel grant application to Central Asia, I have been exceptionally fortunate to have had her as my advisor and to have learned under her guidance every step of the way. I hope that one day I too may be able to follow in and live up to her example.

I would like to thank Dr. Tonio Andrade, whose HIST 489RW colloquium sparked my interest in learning about the history of China and its early interactions with the global community. It is through his course and teaching that I found my sense of belonging within the fascinating field of global history. His consistent support has helped me to become a better writer and researcher. I am also deeply appreciative for his valuable assistance through my graduate school application process.

I would like to thank Dr. William Gilders, whose instruction in the ANCMED 101 course laid the foundations for my passion for studying the Hellenistic world and the cultures of ancient Mediterranean societies. In particular, I am grateful for Dr. Gilders' enthusiasm for and knowledge of the religions of the ancient world, which has inspired me to study the history of the worlds' religions and to learn more about the religious experiences of our ancient predecessors.

To the Emory History Department, I would like to extend my greatest appreciation for the opportunity to write this thesis. In addition, I am very thankful for their funding of my travels in Uzbekistan through the George. P. Cuttino Scholarship.

I sincerely appreciate the support of Mr. Rahimjon Abdugafurov, who assisted me on refining my travel grant proposal and nurtured my interest in studying the religious landscape of Central Asia in his HIST 366 course.

I am very grateful for the kindness of Sardor, Sharof and Fatima, who went out of their way to provide a tour of the Afrasiab settlement in Samarkand and the Fortress of Alexander in Nurota. I am also thankful for the hospitality of Ms. Shallo Husanova and Khayotbek Nematjonov for showing me around Andijan and the Ming Tepe settlement.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their continuous support for my research endeavors and passion for history. I would like to thank my mom Esther for her help in finding and checking the Classical Chinese quotations of Chinese primary sources that have been translated into English. I would like to thank my dad Wenchao for accompanying me on my expedition in Uzbekistan. Lastly, I would like to thank our family dog Pooh, who has been a source of joy to our family for over 12 years, who accompanied me in the backyard last summer as I worked on Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, and who passed away on the third of August 2019. If I could, as Alexander was able to for Bucephalus, I would travel to the ends of the earth and name a city after him. May his playful spirit find peace in the beyond and may my memories of him never fade from my heart.

## Table of Contents

## Figures and Maps

### Maps



1. Close up of "Extent of the empire of Alexander the Great." Generic Mapping Tools / CC BY-SA (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MacedonEmpire.jpg

2. "Map of the Greco-Bactrian at its maximum extent, circa 180 BC." World Imaging assumed (based on copyright claims). / CC BY-SA (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greco-BactrianKingdomMap.jpg

3. "Map showing the expansion of the Han dynasty in the 2nd century BC." SY / CC BY-SA (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0) Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han_Expansion.png

### Figures



1.1: "Yonon-Bactriya tangalari." State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Photographed by author on May 19, 2019.

1.2: "Corinthian Capital." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing. Photographed by author on June 2, 2019.

1.3: "Statuette of a Bactrian Goddess." Termez Archaeological Museum, Termez. Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

1.4: "Amfora." Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand. Photographed by author on May 21, 2019.

1.5: "Krater." Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand. Photographed by author on May 21, 2019.

1.6: "Cylindrical Polar Sundial." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing. Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

1.7: "Hemispherical Sundial." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing. Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

1.8: "Female Figurine." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing. Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

1.9: "Inscribed Base for the Stele." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing. Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

1.10: *The Aphrodite of Bactria.* Second quarter of the 1st century AD. Gold. Tomb 6 at Tillya Tepe. 5 x 2.63 x 0.6 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 48-49. Print.

1.11: *Ornament with an Image of Athena.* Second quarter of the 1st century AD. Gold. Tomb 3 at Tillya Tepe. 1.57 x 1.2 x 0.6 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 64. Print.

1.12: *Circular medallion with Ganymede and the eagle of Zeus.* 1st century AD. Plaster. Begram Room 13. Diameter 12.8 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 167. Print.

1.13: *Circular medallion depicting Endymion and Selene*. 1st century AD. Plaster. Begram Room 13. Diameter 16 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 162. Print.

1.14: Fortress of Alexander (5 forts). Nurota, Uzbekistan. Photographed by author on May 22, 2019.

1.15: Kampyr Tepe walls (reconstructed). Termez, Uzbekistan. Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

2.1: "Buddha with monks." 1st – 3rd century AD. Fayaz Tepe, Termez. State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Photographed by author on May 19, 2019.

2.2: "Menander Soter wheel coin" *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum.* By Percy Gardner and Reginald Stuart Poole. (London: British Museum, 1886), PI.XII-7.

2.3: "Miracle of the Buddha walking on a River – East Face – South Pillar – East Gateway – Stupa 1 – Sanchi." Photographed by Biswarup Ganguly / CC BY (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0). 21 February 2013. Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Walking_on_River_-_East_Face_-_South_Pillar_-_East_Gateway_-_Stupa_1_-_Sanchi_Hill_2013-02-21_4433.JPG

2.4: "Kanishka coin with Greek lettering "BOΔΔO" (i.e. Buddha)." Photo courtesy Classical Numismatic Group. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en).
Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coin_of_Kanishka_I.jpg

2.5: “Gandhara Buddha.” 1st – 2nd century CE. Height: 1 m. Tokyo National Museum. Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhara_Buddha_(tnm).jpeg

2.6: “Ayritom frizi.” *Limestone.* 1-2 century AD (copy). Termez Archaeological Museum, Termez. Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

3.1: “Horse Stepping on a Swallow.” Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 AD). Bronze. Tomb at Wuwei, Gansu. 34.5 x 45 cm. Gansu Provincial Museum, Lanzhou. *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art.* By Tamsin Pickeral. (London: Merrell, 2006), 45. Print.

3.2: “Silver Coin of Seleucus I Nicator, Pergamum, 281 BC.” ANS 1967.152.675. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1967.152.675

3.3: “Alexander the Great Mosaic (detail).” Circa 100 BC. Naples National Archaeological Museum. Digital Image. Accessed March 11, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_the_Great_mosaic.jpg

3.4: “Silver 4 drachm (tetradrachm) of Antiochus I/Seleucus I, Sardes, 280 BC – 261 BC.” ANS 1967.152.671. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1967.152.671

3.5: “Silver Coin of Antiochus I Soter, Ai Khanoum/Bactra, 280 BC - 261 BC.” ANS 1995.51.54. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.54

3.6: “Silver tetradrachm of Antimachos, Bactria, 171 BC - 160 BC.” ANS 1995.51.11. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.11

3.7: “Silver tetradrachm of Eucratides I, Bactria, 170 BC - 145 BC.” ANS 1995.51.84. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.84

3.8: “Silver drachm of Hyrkodes, (Soghdia and Bactria, 200 BC - 100 BC.” ANS 1944.100.63802. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.63802

3.9: “Silver Tetradrachm of Philoxenus, Bactria, 100 BC - 95 BC.” ANS 1993.29.91. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1993.29.91

3.10: “Silver Tetradrachm of Hermaeus/Calliope, Bactria, 90 BC - 70 BC.” ANS 1981.44.1. *American Numismatic Society.* Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020. http://numismatics.org/collection/1981.44.1

3.11: Ren Bowen. *Tribute Bearers.* Mid 14th century. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 14 ¼ x 86 ¾ in. *Asian Art Museum.* The Avery Brundage Collection (B60D100). *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art.* By Robert E. Harrist, Jr. (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 95. Print.

3.12: Li Gonglin. *Five Horses.* Late 11th century. Handscroll, ink on paper. Far Eastern Seminar Collections, Princeton University. *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art.* By Robert E. Harrist, Jr. (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 27. Print.

3.13: Zhao Yong. *Noble Steeds.* 1352. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 186 x 106 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Animal: Metaphoric Rebellion in Zhao Yong's Painting of Heavenly Horses," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture,* ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Y. Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 306. Print.

## Introduction

On May 22, 2019, I visited the town of Nurota in Uzbekistan. Shortly after I stepped out of the taxi, the Fortress of Alexander came into view, situated atop a tall hill, watching over the surrounding Bactrian landscape as it had done for over 2300 years. My guide, a local schoolteacher named Fatima, explained that Alexander had created the fortress—a series of seven forts—to protect an underground spring, which still replenishes the town today with a stream of crystal-clear water. The remains of five forts have survived the tests of time, thanks to subsequent military leaders reusing and reinforcing them in the centuries after their construction. Today, the Fortress is a popular playground for Uzbek children during the holidays.

*Here in Central Asia, Alexander's legacy was undoubtedly tangible and real!* I expressed my amazement to Fatima. To my surprise, she replied: "And that's not even considering the palov!" I froze mid-step—unable to comprehend her words. *The palov I had for breakfast? How could Alexander be connected to the delicious rice pilafs? Was I so careless in my search for Alexander's cultural legacy that I let one slip past—and into my stomach?* Upon further inquiry, Fatima explained that the local tradition credits Alexander with inventing the palov. Today the dish is a national favorite, with locals in Tashkent, Samarkand and Andijan proudly claiming their own style of palov to be the best. But how could Alexander the Great—a ruthless, foreign conqueror, responsible for the deaths of thousands in his conquests—become an integral and even celebrated part of the Central Asian collective memory?

To counter the usual way of looking at Alexander as belonging to the "Western" world, my thesis aims to examine Alexander and Bactria from a global perspective, by exploring how the Macedonian conqueror's legacy—in the form of his actions, influences and legends—served as an inspiration in Asia for later generations. Although the ancient sources of Alexander can at

times be ambiguous or contradictory, there is, as A. B. Bosworth puts it, "no single window to the truth."[1] By analyzing the extant literary sources and material evidence through a process of cross-comparison, we can attempt to illuminate authentic, early impressions of the Macedonian conqueror's actions as well as the general state of affairs in Bactria that contributed to Alexander's enduring presence in the Central Asian imagination. In this thesis, the three cases studies that I will discuss shed light on the multifaceted nature of Alexander's cultural legacy in the East, as well as on the underexamined contributions of the inhabitants of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria in the creation of a Central Asian hub of cultural exchange.[2] Indeed, it is through the common thread of Bactria that we can begin to understand the complex and perhaps farthest-reaching repercussions of Alexander's actions and cultural legacy.

In Chapter one, I argue that Alexander's actions in Central Asia influenced the reception of his legacy as a just king of Bactria. Alexander's settling of Greeks and Macedonians in Bactria laid the foundations for a diverse cultural environment that integrated Greek influences as part of the collective Bactrian identity. Alexander's conciliatory approach toward native Bactrian rebel leaders and decision not to insist on Hellenistic cultural unity, cultivated an impression and precedent of a uniquely Central Asian Alexander. Finally, Alexander's marriage to the Bactrian princess Roxana reinforced in Central Asia the perception of Alexander as an honorable conqueror and Bactrian king.

---

[1] A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65.

[2] Although the classical sources refer to the kings of Bactria during the Hellenistic period as "Greeks," the ethnicity of Bactrian kings may be more ambiguous than generally assumed, as suggested by the coins of Antimachus that depict the king with the *kausia*, a traditional Macedonian hat (figure 1.1). To refer to Bactria, from under the reign of Alexander and the Seleucids (undoubtedly Macedonians) to the end of its self-rule under Bactrian "Greek" kings, the all-encompassing term "Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria" will be used. For a different approach, one can consult: Frank Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 64.

In Chapter two, I argue that the multicultural environment of Bactria left by Alexander and his successors played a key role in the transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia. Alexander's interactions with the Indian gymnosophists encouraged in his Greek and Macedonian followers a curiosity about Indian religion and wisdom, while setting the archetype of Alexander in Buddhist literature as a philosophically inclined Bactrian "Greek" king. Finally, the artistic blending of Buddhist religious subjects with Bactrian artistic tastes and sensibilities helped to familiarize Buddhist iconographic and spiritual ideas with the Central Asian cultural context.

In Chapter three, I argue that cultural exchange and innovation between Bactria and China possibly played an overlooked role in the popularization of the horse in Chinese culture. In Bactria, the legacy of Alexander the Great and his famous horse Bucephalus inspired the creative output of Seleucid and Bactrian kings, who affiliated horses with the concept of divine kingship. Inspired by explorer Zhang Qian's discovery of divine horses, emperor Han Wudi popularized in China the heavenly horses of Bactria and Central Asia likely as portents of the Mandate of Heaven. In time, horses from Central Asia and horses in general were elevated to new heights in Chinese culture, established in art and literature as rhetorical representations of the emperor's strength and rule.

## Chapter 1

### He too is Alexander: Creation of the Bactrian King Alexander

Scholarly examination of Alexander III of Macedon tends to view his legacy from a Hellenocentric perspective, and his conquests as an ancient precursor to later European colonial empires. In the introduction to his influential work *The Greeks in Bactria & India,* first published in 1938, William Woodthorpe Tarn proclaims: "The Greek empire of Bactria and India was a Hellenistic state… as a Hellenistic state it must be treated, and I hope that this book may do something towards bringing it back into the sphere to which it belongs."[3] As supporting examples, he refers to two Greek settlements in foreign lands: Cyrene in Africa and Miletus in Asia Minor. According to Herodotus, the women of Cyrene observed local, non-Greek traditions, such as abstaining from eating beef and celebrating fasts and festivals of the Egyptian goddess Isis;[4] the founders of Miletus were all male and intermarried with local Carian wives.[5] Assessing Herodotus' accounts in relation to the perceived *Greekness* of Cyrenians and Milesians in the eyes of other Greek communities, Tarn maintains, in spite of instances of cultural intermingling, that "Greeks, with their dominant civilization and language, could and did absorb a good deal of foreign blood without losing their Greekhood… What happened at Cyrene must have happened to Alexander's settlers, for where the father is of a higher civilization than the mother, the children are apt to follow his language and civilization."[6]

Despite the problematic character of Tarn's language, which likely reflects his social standing as a British gentleman of the early 20th century, both scholars and popular news media

---

[3] William Woodthorpe Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria & India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), xx-xxi.

[4] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. II: Books 3-4*, 4.186-4.187, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 118 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 389-391.

[5] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. I: Books 1-2*, 1.146, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 117 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 187-189.

[6] William Woodthorpe Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria & India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 36.

continue to echo Tarn's assessment. In the 1960s, magazines and newspapers reporting the initial discovery of the Bactrian settlement Ai Khanoum, in Afghanistan, presented the idea that archaeologists had uncovered a definitively Greek city and an outpost of Hellenism.[7] At the turn of the 21st century, H. Sidky wrote, "there can be no doubt that the inhabitants of [Ai Khanoum] were Greeks who retained their full ethnolinguistic identity."[8] Similarly, in 2014, Rachel Mairs argues, "Instead of being an exotic aside to the history of the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Hellenistic Far East demands to be considered as Tarn imagined it in the 1930s: as an integral part of the Hellenistic oikoumene" [inhabited world].[9]

Tarn's assessment of the *Greekness* that was preserved by the Greeks and Macedonians who settled in Asia, however, derives from a biased and colonialist perspective toward Hellenic civilization and the settler population. Scholars such as Frank Holt and Mairs herself have acknowledged evidence of the extensive irrigation systems and prosperous trade that native Bactrians built and maintained, suggesting that they were neither less civilized nor influential than the Hellenic newcomers.[10] The colonialist approach needlessly diminishes the significance of non-Greek influences and obscures the appreciation of the development of a separate cultural identity.

To understand how Alexander entered the Central Asian imagination, I believe it is necessary to reassess what Tarn calls the "sphere to which [Bactria] belongs," by analyzing the meaning of "Hellenistic" in the term Hellenistic world and examining Alexander's conquest and

---

[7] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 22.

[8] H. Sidky, *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria: From Alexander to Eucratides the Great* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 131.

[9] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 188.

[10] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 27-28; Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 37.

legacy beyond the traditional Hellenocentric and colonialist perspective. In this chapter, I will argue that Alexander's actions, following his arrival in Bactria in 329 BC to his death in Babylon in 323 BC, influenced the unique reception of his legacy in Central Asia—not only as a self-absorbed foreign oppressor or a magnanimous agent of Greek civilization (two common views that stem from opposite takes of the colonialist perspective), but also as a just king of Bactria. Alexander's settling of Greeks and Macedonians in Bactria laid the foundations for a diverse cultural environment. Blending Greek with native Bactrian architectural and religious themes, Greek influence in Central Asia became part of the collective Bactrian identity, diminishing the foreign associations of Alexander and his conquest. Alexander's decision not to insist on a single Hellenistic cultural unity in Bactria through the barbarian "other," together with his conciliatory approach toward native Bactrian rebel leaders, cultivated a Bactrian cultural identity independent of the Greek civilization of the Hellenistic world and a unique impression and precedent of Alexander in Central Asia. Finally, Alexander's celebrated marriage to the Bactrian princess Roxana instilled in Central Asia the perception of Alexander as a beneficent conqueror and a genuine Bactrian king, celebrated for generations past and perhaps for generations to come.[11]

## 1. Defining the Hellenistic World

How should we define the Hellenistic world? The term "Hellenistic" was originally coined in the mid-1800s by the German historian Johann-Gustav Droysen. With this term, Droysen sought to portray the character of the dynamic expansion of Greek culture after the conquests of Alexander, an expansion that in his view made possible the rise of Christianity.[12]

[11] On February 10, 2020, I was able to meet the US ambassador to Uzbekistan, Mr. Daniel Rosenblum, who was visiting Emory University. During his Q & A session in Tarbutton Hall, I learned that his experiences in Uzbekistan aligned with many of my own observations (for instance, he too was aware of Alexander's association with the Uzbek *palov*). As he put it: "There's a lot of pride in Александр Македонский in Uzbekistan…"

[12] Andrew Erskine, "Approaching the Hellenistic World," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 2.

Scholars since then have traditionally defined the Hellenistic world by political boundaries and cultural transformation. Politically, it began with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and ended with Rome's annexation of the last major Hellenistic successor state, Ptolemaic Egypt, in 30 BC. Culturally, the Hellenistic world witnessed the unprecedented spread of Greek culture throughout the Mediterranean and much of the Near East. Greek and Macedonian settlers immigrated to foreign lands, populating newly established cities in Egypt and Asia. Greek forms of city-planning, civic life, education and philosophy reached more distant societies than ever before.[13] Numerous non-Greeks adopted Greek language, literary traditions, religion, and other cultural influences in a desire to, as Moses Hadas puts it, "transform themselves into Greeks."[14]

The traditional definition for the Hellenistic world, however, is beset with several significant problems. While the political and cultural framework might be adequate for defining the Hellenistic *period* as a distinct era of political and cultural exchange,[15] the term remains ambiguous—lacking clear geographical references to set the boundaries of a Hellenistic *world*.[16] Politically, after Alexander's death in 323 BC, his empire fragmented into numerous states, including the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt, the Seleucid Empire in the Near and Middle East, the Antigonid dynasty in Macedon, and the Attalid dynasty in Asia Minor. Although defining the

---

[13] Andrew Erskine, "Approaching the Hellenistic World," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 2-3; Gary Reger, "The Economy," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 334; Richard Billows, "Cities," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 196-197.

[14] Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 9.

[15] It is worth noting that the temporal references that define the Hellenistic *period* (Alexander's death in 323 BC and the Roman annexation of Ptolemaic Egypt in 30 BC) are also problematic: cultural connectivity that characterized the Hellenistic world did not suddenly end with the Roman conquest of Egypt. Nevertheless, because I believe that the Hellenistic period is a convenient scholarly classification, while the Hellenistic world is a modern term that describes a real sense of community experienced by its inhabitants, it is the latter which this thesis concerns.

[16] Susan E. Alcock, Jennifer E. Gates and Jane E. Rempel, "Reading the Landscape: Survey Archaeology and the Hellenistic Oikoumene," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 354.

borders of the Hellenistic world as the amalgamation of the lands that Alexander briefly controlled (stretching from Macedon to Northern India) would be a simple fix, recent scholarly works have convincingly argued for the inclusion of lands west of Macedon—lands which Alexander had never visited—into the discussion of the Hellenistic world.[17] Culturally, the regions of Alexander's empire, and beyond, experienced varying degrees of Hellenization. In contrast to the one-directional view of cultural exchange championed by Tarn, a deliberate policy for the Greek and Macedonian elite to Hellenize the native population was rarely if ever implemented.[18] In addition, scholars have noted that the allegedly *Greek* culture that flourished in the Hellenistic world was not identical to that of the preceding Classical period. Enrich Gruen argues that fusion between Greek and native traditions altered the political and cultural environment of much of the West and the Near East. In particular, Gruen argues, "Hellenistic kingship… marked out this era as distinct from its predecessors, constituted its principal organizational feature, and exemplified the tensions generated by grafting the new world onto the old."[19] The classical Greek city (πόλις) had previously associated monarchical rule as the governing style of foreigners. By contrast, Hellenistic Greeks in this new age had to adapt to a changed society and culture, where a king (βασιλεύς) ruled over subjects, whether Greek or non-Greek.

Despite these political and cultural ambiguities, the notion of the "Hellenistic" is nonetheless useful in the discussion of the post-Alexander world. Although the term itself

---

[17] Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn, "Introduction," in *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean,* ed. Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-2.

[18] Anthony W. Bulloch et al., *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5; Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 69.

[19] Anthony W. Bulloch et al., *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 4.

derived from modern scholarly examination, there is evidence that ancient peoples also perceived an enlarged sense of community and connectivity during what we refer to as the Hellenistic period (323 – 30 BC). Koine Greek originated during this period and was popularized as a new *lingua franca*. Richard Billows cites the spread of "inter-city contacts and relations" and "widespread proliferation" of honorific decrees, given by cities to honor foreign individuals or towns, as evidence for the creation of a community of Greek cities throughout the Hellenistic world.[20] Jonathan Prag and Josephine Quinn, citing the movement of populations, the growth in trading relationships, and the rise in cultural interaction, acknowledge an "increased connectivity" and "cross-pollination" experienced across the Hellenistic world.[21]

Therefore, I propose that the Hellenistic world is most meaningfully understood as denoting the community of cultures that not only interacted with and adopted Greek influences of the Hellenistic period, but also, and more importantly, shared a common identity of being part of a new world community. Alexander's conquests and expeditions produced a sense of a larger world for both the Greeks and Macedonians that traveled with him and the natives of Egypt, Persia, Central Asia and India, who would now live in closer proximity to Greeks and Macedonians (as well as their cultures) than ever before.[22] The political activities of Alexander's successors, collectively referred to as the Diadochi, reinforced royal legitimacy and self-identity through the Hellenistic perception of the barbarian (βάρβαρος). Other states, such as Syracuse

[20] Richard Billows, "Cities," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 197.

[21] Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn, "Introduction," in *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean,* ed. Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12-13.

[22] Klaus Geus, "Space and Geography," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 243.

under Hieron II[23] and Numidia under Masinissa,[24] responded to geopolitical changes and the spread of Greek culture with an increase in interactions of their own—actively receiving and creatively manipulating Hellenistic cultural influences and projects to their own advantage. As my thesis seeks to show, however, Bactria ultimately diverged from these developments in the west, reinterpreting Alexander's legacy, while adjusting to a Central Asian landscape and worldview. Though it interacted with Greek influences of the Hellenistic period, Bactria did not share a common identity as part of the new world community that developed in the west, encouraging the creation of a distinctive interpretation of Alexander's legacy specific to the Central Asian cultural context.

## 2. Cultural Integration: Greek and Non-Greek Influences in Bactria

Traces for the "naturalization" of Alexander in Central Asia can be found in surviving Bactrian material culture and epigraphic remains dated to during and after the Hellenistic period. These archaeological findings convey a diverse cultural environment and a flourishing of mixed traditions, reducing the foreign associations of Greek and Macedonian influence and closing the cultural gap between Bactria and Alexander.

While in Bactria from 329 to 327 BC, Alexander III of Macedon founded a number of settlements to secure his rule over what would become the northeastern frontier of his empire. Moving around local populations and settling volunteers, veterans and injured Greek and Macedonian soldiers from his army, the new settlements—many named after himself—served as

[23] R. J. A. Wilson, "Hellenistic Sicily, c. 270-100 BC," in *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean,* ed. Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81-83.

[24] Josephine Crawley Quinn, "Monumental Power: 'Numidian Royal Architecture' in Context," in *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean,* ed. Jonathan R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 194-195.

a visible reminder of Alexander in Central Asia.[25] Alexander's successors in Asia, Seleucus I and Antiochus I of the Seleucid Empire, followed the Macedonian conqueror's example and introduced still more settlers to Central Asia.[26]

The enduring presence of Greek and Macedonian culture in the post-Alexander Central Asia is well attested by archaeological findings. A coin of the Bactrian king Antimachus, exhibited at Tashkent's State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, depicts the Bactrian king with a *kausia* (καυσία)—a traditional Macedonian flat hat (figure 1.1). In fact, the ancient Persians associated the καυσία with Macedonian culture and referred to Macedonians as *yauna takabara:* Ionians with hats that look like shields.[27] (The Persians used the term "Ionians," or *yauna,* to refer to Greeks in general.) Another example comes from the ancient capital of Bactra (modern day Balkh), where a Corinthian capital, adorned with the lush foliage of acanthus leaves, was discovered (figure 1.2). This type of architectural element was increasingly popular during and after the Hellenistic period, gracing Ptolemaic, Seleucid, as well as Roman temples.[28] Its appearance in Bactria expresses a Bactrian interest in western forms of architecture. Furthermore, in Navbog village, southern Uzbekistan, a statuette of a "Bactrian goddess" reveals the influence of Greek art through the naturalistic design of the hands and arms, clutching what appears to be branches of leaves, and the flowing dress, which drapes over and behind the legs (figure 1.3). To the north, at Maracanda (modern day Samarkand), a krater and an amphora,

---

[25] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.83, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 359; Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 7.3.23, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 151; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.22.4-5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 413-415.

[26] Appian, *Roman History Vol. II,* 9.57, translated by Horace White, Loeb Classical Library 3 (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 213-215; Paul Bernard, "The Greek kingdoms of Central Asia," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 105.

[27] Johannes Engels, "Macedonians and Greeks," in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia,* ed. Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 87.

[28] Jerome Jordan Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 247-249.

vessels commonly used in ancient Greek communities, were excavated (figures 1.4 and 1.5). The krater is used to mix water with wine and the amphora to store foodstuffs, such as wine, olive oil, grain, and fish. While it is possible that these vessels were traded goods or, perhaps, brought by the Greek and Macedonian settlers to Bactria, the director of the Afrasiab Museum, Samariddin Mustafokulov, believes that they were made in Central Asia within a decade of Alexander's conquest.[29]

At the ancient Bactrian city referred to today as Ai Khanoum, in modern Afghanistan, archaeologists found abundant traces of Greek influences in literature and science. Greek philosophical and dramatic texts were found in Room 107 of Ai Khanoum's treasury. The original manuscripts did not survive, but the ink from the manuscripts left an imprint on the floors, leaving behind fragments of iambic trimeters and a philosophical dialogue.[30] Outside of the treasury were the remains of a semicircular Greek theatre, with an audience capacity of around six thousand, as well as a Greek gymnasium with the customary dedication to Hermes and Herakles.[31] Greek technology, in the forms of a hemispherical sundial and a cylindrical polar sundial, were also present in the gymnasium (figures 1.6 and 1.7). It seems clear that in Ai Khanoum, there was no shortage of a familiarity with Greek customs and ideas.

Bactria's architectural, naming and religious customs, however, exhibit various non-Greek influences. Ai Khanoum's theatre differed from traditional designs in Greece, displaying what archaeologist Paul Bernard calls "spacious loggias." Bernard declares that these seats of honor are indicative of "Oriental influence."[32] Similarly, the city's palace complex displayed distinct Bactrian qualities. Rachel Mairs points out the widespread usage of "peripheral

---

[29] Samariddin Mustafokulov, Personal Conversation at Afrasiab Museum, May 22, 2019.

[30] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 92.

[31] Paul Bernard, "An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia," *Scientific American* 246, no. 1 (1982): 151-154.

[32] Ibid., 154.

corridors" to compartmentalize the buildings. Unique for their prevalence also in Ai Khanoum's houses, the peripheral corridors were, according to Mairs, a "distinctive feature of local Hellenistic Bactrian architecture."[33] Comparing excavated floor plans, she asserts that the nearby palace at Saksanokhur exhibited the closest likeness in architecture.[34] The visual environment of Ai Khanoum, defined by the unique building design of the peripheral corridors and the mixed nature of the theatre and palace architecture, suggests a regional Bactrian identity in development.

In the treasury rooms at Ai Khanoum, the inscriptions etched on the trade and storage vessels reveal more insights into the cultural identity of Bactrians. These inscriptions were made by officials, apparently signing off and double-checking transactions and storage goods. The fact that both ethno-linguistically Greek (e.g., Philiskos and Nikeratos) and Bactrian-Iranian names (e.g., Oxeboakes and Oxybazos) were present in the inscriptions[35] strongly suggests not only the ethnic diversity in the workplace but also the preservation of traditional names in Bactrian society. By comparison, we know that it was not unusual for native Egyptians in Ptolemaic Egypt[36] as well as Jews[37] and Babylonians[38] in the Seleucid Empire to pick up Greek names and aliases as a way of adapting to the new social environment of the Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, the degree to which native Bactrians refrained from the practice of acquiring Greek

---

[33] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 68.

[34] Ibid., 79.

[35] Ibid., 48-52.

[36] Dorothy J. Thompson, "The Ptolemies and Egypt," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 111; Jane Rowlandson, "Town and Country in Ptolemaic Egypt," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 262.

[37] Erich S. Gruen, "Jews and Greeks," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 267.

[38] Michel Austin, "The Seleukids and Asia," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 131.

names cannot be definitively determined due to the insufficient amount of onomastic evidence from which to draw conclusions for the wider population.

Ai Khanoum's main religious structure, the so-called Temple with Indented Niches, reveals further material evidence of cultural interaction with local traditions. On the outside, the prominent stepped niches protruding from the temple's outer walls resemble the architectural style of Mesopotamian temples.[39] Inside, a Greek columned vestibule led to the room where the cult statue was located. All that remains of the statue is an enormous marble foot wearing a Greek sandal, decorated with a palmette, rosettes, and two winged thunderbolts. Though it is tempting to identify the foot as that of Zeus, Mairs suggests that the native population may have identified the statue as that of the Persian god of light Mithra or possibly a local deity.[40] Also unearthed in the temple was a female figurine, identified as that of a native Bactrian goddess (figure 1.8).[41] In addition, Bernard notes that libation vessels found beneath the temple floor "are evidence that the rites performed here were not Hellenic."[42] These material evidence from the Temple with Indented Niches convey the close contact between Greek and non-Greek religious traditions in Bactria.

Scholars supporting the theory of a preserved Greek cultural identity among the Greek and Macedonian settlers of Bactria often point to the temenos (sanctuary) of Kineas, who is generally thought to have been an important founder of Ai Khanoum. Dated to the late 4th

[39] Rachel Mairs, "The 'Temple with Indented Niches' at Ai Khanoum: Ethnic and Civic Identity," in *Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age,* ed. Richard Alston, Onno M. van Nijf, & Christina G. Williamson (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 97.

[40] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 87.

[41] Paul Bernard, "An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia," *Scientific American* 246, no. 1 (1982): 159.

[42] Ibid., 159.

century BC, the temenos was situated in the center of the city (figure 1.9).[43] Inscribed on the shrine is a Delphic maxim that reads as follows:

παῖς ὢν κόσμιος γίνου,

ἡβῶν ἐγκρατής,

μέσος δίκαιος,

πρεσβύτης εὔβουλος,

τελευτῶν ἄλυπος.[44]

As a child, be well behaved,

as a young man, self-controlled,

in middle age, be just,

as an elder, be of good counsel,

and when you come to the end, be without grief.[45]

To the left of the Delphic maxim is an inscription that speaks of a certain Klearchos, responsible for transmitting this wisdom from Delphi, in Greece, to Ai Khanoum. It reads as follows:

ἀνδρῶν τοι σοφὰ ταῦτα παλαιοτέρων ἀνάκει[τα]ι

ῥήματα ἀριγνώτων Πυθοὶ ἐν ἠγαθέαι·

ἔνθεν ταῦτ[α] Κλέαρχος ἐπιφραδέως ἀναγράψας

εἵσατο τηλαυγῆ Κινέου ἐν τεμένει.[46]

These wise words of men of old are enshrined

---

[43] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 74; Paul Bernard, "An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia," *Scientific American* 246, no. 1 (1982): 157.

[44] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 189.

[45] Translation reorganized by author, adapted from: Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 189.

[46] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 189.

Words of famous men in the most holy Pytho.

There Klearchos engraved them carefully

He went blazing them from afar in the temenos of Kineas.[47]

Jeremy Lerner argues that the inscription was added to the temenos during Ai Khanoum's ceramic period IV, which he dates to 210 – after 170 BC.[48] If Lerner's assessment is accurate, the Delphic maxim, which appears to honor Greek culture and ideas, was inscribed by the descendants of the Greek and Macedonian settlers of Ai Khanoum. Mairs downplays the significance of non-Greek influences in the Temple with Indented Niches, arguing that "Because Greek identity was asserted so strongly in areas such as the gymnasium or at the temenos of Kineas, any ethnic resonance in activities such as dedications at the temple might easily be neutralized."[49] Similarly, Paul Bernard argues that Klearchos' inscription expresses the "determination of the Greek colonists… to remain faithful to their national heritage."[50] According to Mairs and Bernard, these inhabitants of Ai Khanoum, left in an alien land, expressed through the inscription a desire to preserve their sense of belonging to a Greek homeland.

Despite the inscription's clear homage to Greek culture, I believe it would be premature to use the temenos inscription as conclusive evidence for a preserved Greek cultural identity, without analyzing it within the Central Asian context. If, as scholars agree, Kineas was a founder

---

[47] Translation done by author, drawing from the following sources: Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 189; Jeffrey D. Lerner, "Correcting the Early History of Äy Känom," in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan 35-36,* (2003-2004): 391; Frank Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175.

[48] Jeffrey D. Lerner, "Correcting the Early History of Äy Känom," in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan 35-36,* (2003-2004): 395.

[49] Rachel Mairs, "The 'Temple with Indented Niches' at Ai Khanoum: Ethnic and Civic Identity," in *Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age,* ed. Richard Alston, Onno M. van Nijf, & Christina G. Williamson (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 107.

[50] Paul Bernard, "The Greek kingdoms of Central Asia," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 107.

of the city, then the inscription can only be assumed to commemorate the memory of the initial Greek settlers of Ai Khanoum. Even if it had been inscribed by descendants of the settler population, there is not enough evidence for the temenos inscription to represent a cultural attachment to the Hellenistic world, experienced by the generations which came afterward and called Central Asia their home.

Furthermore, I disagree with the argument that a Greek identity expressed through the construction of the gymnasium and the temenos of Kineas could "neutralize" the non-Greek identity expressed through use of the local temple. Such a subjective argument, grounded in reasoning that is reminiscent of Tarn's notions of Greek higher civilization, unduly favors Greek over native Bactrian culture and influence. On the contrary, I believe that the shared usage of a temple with mixed traditions is in fact another trace of the emergence of a new Bactrian cultural identity. That a massive Greek styled cult statue was placed within the non-Greek temple structure, likely worshipped alongside non-Greek rituals, conveys a deliberate notion that such a juxtaposition of varying cultures was acceptable to the inhabitants of Ai Khanoum. Rather than interpreting the gymnasium or the temenos of Kineas as "neutralizing" or conflicting with the native design of the city's main religious institution, the presence of Greek and non-Greek influences very likely reveals the mixed nature and culture of the community.

If Ai Khanoum is indeed representative of Bactrian society, its temple—which is believed to have been shared by all members of the city—suggests that the mixed communities in Bactria, composed of Greek and Macedonian settlers along with the indigenous population, were more tightly knit than mixed communities elsewhere. By contrast, throughout the Hellenistic communities west of Bactria, separation between indigenous and new Greek temples often prevailed. Although Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings bridged cultural gaps by presenting

themselves in the religious idioms of their respective subjects—the former adopting pharaonic Egyptian traditions and the latter emulating pious Babylonian kings—they still relied on an influential and indigenous priestly elite to preserve local traditions and to serve as an intermediary to connect local peoples with the Macedonian ruling class.[51]

Admittedly, the juxtaposition of Greek religious cults in non-Greek buildings was *not* unique to Bactria. We know of at least one other example: the Greeks of the Seleucid Empire expanded an indigenous shrine in Masjid-i Solaiman, in modern Iran, to hold two new temples to the Greek deities: Athena Hippia and Herakles. Like Ai Khanoum's Temple with Indented Niches, the religious structure showcased a Mesopotamian rather than Greek architectural style, while serving as a place of worship for Greek cults.

Despite these similarities, it is the cultural legacy of the Greek tradition that separates the religious scene in Seleucid Iran from that in Bactrian Central Asia. After the Parthians invaded the Seleucid Empire, the temple was sacked and re-dedicated to the Parthian deities Anahita and Verethragna. David Potter, analyzing this event, contends that this apparent faithlessness reveals the local Persians' lack of respect and disaffiliation from the Greek tradition.[52] In other words, the native population of Masjid-i Solaiman, even after numerous decades of Seleucid rule, viewed Greek influence as elements of a foreign culture.

By contrast, Greek religious traditions and imagery became and remained a part of the Bactrian identity long after the fall of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria around 125 BC. While evidence dated to after 125 BC from Ai Khanoum is absent, since the city appears to have

---

[51] Andrew Erskine, "Approaching the Hellenistic World," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 13; Kathryn Stevens, "Empire Begins at Home: Local Elites and Imperial Ideologies in Hellenistic Greece and Babylonia," in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean,* ed. Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler (Oxford: Oxford University Press*,* 2016), 69.

[52] David Potter, "Hellenistic Religion," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 423.

been abandoned around 145 BC and again some years later,[53] tombs at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan dated around the 1st century AD reveal women buried with rings and figurines of Greek deities such as Aphrodite and Athena (figures 1.10 and 1.11). At Alexandria in the Caucasus, near modern Begram, medallions dated to the same period feature Greek mythological scenes, such as Trojan prince Ganymede feeding Zeus' eagle and the moon goddess Selene watching her lover Endymion sleeping (figures 1.12 and 1.13). These artifacts demonstrate the survival of Bactrian Greek artistry and its usage in depicting traditional Greek stories. Moreover, according to archaeological findings dated to the first two centuries AD, the cult of Herakles, associated with local divinities, survived in Bactria into the Kushan Empire (30 – 375 AD), the Central Asian kingdom that ultimately succeeded Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria.[54] Foreign religions, such as Buddhism, were transmitted into Central Asia through the medium of local, Bactrian artistic tastes, which by then exhibited enduring Greek religious and stylistic influences.[55] In other words, in Bactria, elements of Greek influence became viewed not so much as indicators of a foreign culture, upheld only as long as the Greek and Macedonian elite remained in power, but as components to the collective Bactrian identity. Therefore, although the findings at Ai Khanoum are still fragmentary, a close investigation of the surviving remnants of Bactria sheds light on a new cultural identity in development, with Greek influences blended together alongside and sometimes within Persian, Mesopotamian, and Bactrian traditions. To complement this analysis of material culture and epigraphic data, I move now to an examination of rhetorical components of cultural identity in the Hellenistic world and in Bactria.

---

[53] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 172-173.

[54] G.A. Pugachenkova, S. R. Dar, R. C. Sharma, M. A. Joyenda and H. Siddiqi, "Kushan art," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 343.

[55] This will be analyzed in further detail in Chapter 2.

### 3. Hellenistic Cultural Unity: The Barbarian Other in the Hellenistic World

Overturning centuries of Achaemenid Persian rule, Alexander the Great and his Macedonian successors utilized the rhetorical concept of the barbarian "other" to cement cultural unity amongst their multiethnic subjects and to promote their own legitimacy as kings through the creation of a Hellenistic identity and the notion of a common enemy in the new barbarian.

Although the term "barbarian," which has now become broadly used across different cultures and eras, contains nuances in meaning, associations and emphasis depending on the context, many civilizations of the ancient world—from Egypt to China—employed the underlying concept of the "barbarian other" as a means for defining one's own culture and distinguishing it from another's.[56] In the Greek world, the term βάρβαρος (barbarian) originated as a representation of incomprehensible speech. As Edith Hall argues, language was a fundamental factor to identifying ethnicity for the ancient Greeks.[57] During the Persian Wars (490 – 479 BC), the *otherness* implicit in the label of the "barbarian" became more manifest. The multiethnic Persian Empire produced troops from Egypt to as far as Bactria and India to fight against the rebellious Greek city-states.[58] As Persian forces invaded Greece, burning the Athenian acropolis in 480 BC and again in 479 BC, the self-governing and diverse Greek city-states developed a Greek ethnic self-consciousness by promoting a sense of Panhellenic unity in the face of a common enemy—which seemingly included the entire non-Greek world.[59] In the aftermath of the Persian Wars, the ideal of Panhellenic unity continued to be used to legitimize

---

[56] *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, trans. R. B. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33, 46; *Chan-Kuo Ts'e,* trans. J. I. Crump (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996), 290, 293.

[57] Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4-5.

[58] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. III: Books 5-7,* 7.61-81, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 119 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), 375-389.

[59] Emma Dench, "Beyond Greeks and Barbarians: Italy and Sicily in the Hellenistic Age," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 298.

the creation and funding for alliances of Greek city-states, such as the Delian League, to weaken Persian influence in the Mediterranean.[60]

By the mid fourth century BC (just prior to the beginning of the Hellenistic period), this concept of a Greek identity distinct from and at odds with that of the barbarian other had not yet disappeared, but rather had become something of a cultural cliché. According to Plutarch, the Greek philosopher Aristotle allegedly instructed a young Alexander, "to have regard for the Greeks as for friends and kindred, but to conduct himself toward other peoples as though they were plants or animals."[61] Aristotle himself, in a controversial discussion in the *Politics* concerning the theoretical existence of natural slavery, explains that barbarian peoples lack a naturally ruling element and compares barbarian society with communities of slaves.[62] I concur with Peter Garnsey that Aristotle's decision to tie his argument on natural slavery to the notion of the barbarian very likely represents a prevalent conservative strain of Greek thought in his day, in reaction to contemporary discussions questioning the justice and naturalness of chattel slavery.[63] Although Aristotle might not speak for the Greeks as a whole, a cultural barrier between Greeks and non-Greeks continued to persist in the minds of many.

In contrast to such traditional Greek attitudes, Alexander III of Macedon took a bold and unexpected political approach. He adopted Persian dress, appointed instructors to teach the Greek language and Macedonian art of war to 30,000 young Persians, celebrated the Susa Weddings in Persian customs, and prayed at Opis for harmony between Macedonians and

---

[60] Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2.

[61] Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander,* Line 6b, in the Loeb Classical Library, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Fortuna_Alexandri*/1.html (accessed November 24, 2018).

[62] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1.1252b, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 264 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 7.

[63] Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 126.

Persians.[64] While these actions were met with initial indignation by Alexander's Macedonian troops, the Hellenistic era that followed Alexander's conquest and death witnessed his momentous cultural legacy: a loosening in the division between Greeks and those formerly labeled as barbarians.

To be sure, the dichotomy between Greeks and *former barbarians* was not immediately erased. During the Hellenistic period, Greeks and Macedonians who embraced Greek culture quickly occupied all positions of authority, leaving most natives as second-class subjects.[65] The Ptolemies in Egypt, for instance, avoided recruiting troops from the local Egyptian population until over a century into the Hellenistic period, with the introduction of 20,000 native Egyptian hoplites at the Battle of Raphia in 217 BC.[66] Contemporaries, such as the Alexandrian astronomer Hypsikles, referred to the Ptolemaic capital of Alexandria as "Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἡ πρός Αἴγυπτος" ("Alexandria *near* Egypt" as opposed to *in* Egypt), which has sparked scholarly discussion on the name's implications.[67] The Seleucid Empire of the Near and Middle East has similarly been described by scholars as "an empire without a homeland."[68] Although the Seleucids were known to employ indigenous troops since the founding of their empire, Seleucid

---

[64] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 45.2, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 355; Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 47.3, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 359; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica*, 7.4.7, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 213-215; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 7.11.6-9, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 239-241.

[65] Anthony W. Bulloch et al., *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.

[66] Sheila L. Ager, "From the Death of Seleukos to the Battle of Raphia," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 48.

[67] Getzel M. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 356, 409.

[68] Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, "Cosmopolitan Politics: The Assimilation and Subordination of Elite Cultures" in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean,* ed. Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler (Oxford: Oxford University Press*,* 2016), 69.

kings surrounded themselves with a select circle of advisors, governors and military officials—the majority of whom remained Greek and Macedonian.[69]

Through the continuity of trends put forward by Alexander, the cultural barriers that separated Greeks from non-Greeks (specifically those that lived amongst them) gradually did break down. Alexander III and his successors, Ptolemy I, Antigonus I Monophthalmos, and Seleucus I, successfully encouraged unprecedented Greek and Macedonian immigration into Egypt and Asia. Alexandria, Antioch-on-the-Orontes, and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris are among the numerous, densely populated Hellenistic cities inhabited by diverse populations.[70] With ethnic and Hellenized Greek settlers living amongst those formerly labeled as barbarians in larger quantities than ever before, intermarriage between settlers and native peoples became inevitable. To further legitimize and consolidate Macedonian rule, Alexander's successors politically maintained and revived native culture, such as the Egyptian priesthood and Babylonian religion.[71] New enemies, the Galatians for instance, were emphasized as the present barbarian other, and Ptolemaic, Antigonid and Seleucid royal propaganda celebrated the wars waged against them.[72] Romans, according to the prominent stateman Cato the Elder, were also perceived as barbarians (Pliny uses the Latin term *barbaros,* a transliteration of βάρβαρος) in the eyes of the Greeks.[73] Conversely, due to the erosion of cultural barriers in the Hellenistic kingdoms, Roman observers such as general Manlius Vulso pointedly remarked that "The

---

[69] Michel Austin, "The Seleukids and Asia," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 129.

[70] Richard Billows, "Cities," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 197-199; William W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization,* 3rd edition, revised by the author and G. T. Griffith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 100.

[71] Dorothy J. Thompson, "The Ptolemies and Egypt," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 107; William W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization,* 3rd edition, revised by the author and G. T. Griffith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 128-129.

[72] Stephen Mitchell, "The Galatians: Representation and Reality," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 283.

[73] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History Vol. VIII: Books 28-32,* 29.7, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 191-193.

Macedonians who inhabit Alexandria in Egypt, or Seleucia and Babylonia, and other colonies scattered throughout the world, have degenerated into Syrians, Parthians and Egyptians."[74]

In sum, a revised dichotomy emerged between the new Hellenistic (as opposed to Greek) identity and a new type of "βάρβαρος," which 1) diminished the cultural tensions between Greeks and the non-Greeks who now lived amongst them and 2) reused the concept of the barbarian other to focus on new external threats against the perceived Hellenistic world. This new dichotomy contributed to a shared Hellenistic identity, despite instances of internal fighting between the successor states. Stephen Mitchell observes that the artistic output for the Pergamene sanctuary of Athena in Asia Minor celebrated the Hellenistic kingdom of Pergamon's present defense of the Hellenistic world against Galatian tribes rather than emphasizing their battles against Seleucid opponents.[75] For another example, the Peace of Naupactus in 217 BC, concluding the Social War (220 – 217 BC) that pitted an alliance of Greek city-states against Macedon, appealed for Hellenistic unity "in the face of the 'cloud rising in the west,'" referring to the growing powers of either Carthage or Rome.[76] In 207 BC, the concept of a shared identity was conveyed again in a speech given by a Rhodian ambassador, speaking on behalf of Greek islanders and inhabitants of Asia, to dissuade mainland Greeks from further conflict with Macedon:

> You say that you are fighting against Philip [V of Macedon] for the sake of the Greeks… but as a fact, you are fighting for the enslavement and ruin of Greece. This is the story your treaty with the Romans tells… you have made a treaty by which you have given up

[74] Livy, *History of Rome Vol. XI: Books 38-40,* 38.17, ed. and trans. J. C. Yardley, Loeb Classical Library 313 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 57.

[75] Elizabeth Kosmetatou, "The Attalids of Pergamon," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 171; Stephen Mitchell, "The Galatians: Representation and Reality," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World,* ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 285-286.

[76] William W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization,* 3rd edition, revised by the author and G. T. Griffith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 22.

> to the barbarians all the rest of the Greeks to be exposed to atrocious outrage and violence…[77]

Emphasizing the need for unity against the growing threat of the Romans in the west, the ambassador's speech expresses the common identity of Hellenistic Greeks, Macedonians and their allies as fundamental members that shared a Hellenistic world. The barbarians, referring to the Romans in this case, were *outsiders* that would bring the "ruin of Greece." Therefore, although politically divided and culturally diverse, the Hellenistic world shared a cultural identity that was made apparent by distinguishing itself from the barbarian other.

### 4. Rejecting Hellenistic Cultural Unity: The Barbarian Other in Bactria

While the notion of the barbarian other served as a rhetorical expression for cultural unity in the Hellenistic world, Alexander did not succeed in establishing the new Hellenistic – barbarian dichotomy in Central Asia, due to a prolonged resistance against the Macedonian conqueror by the indigenous population and its efforts to preserve traditional Bactrian – Scythian relations. The material record, discussed earlier, has already revealed evidence for a closely-knit society between the Greeks and Macedonians with the native Bactrians, as well as regional architectural innovations and a shared religious environment that mixed Greek elements with local traditions. Ancient literary sources, which will now be examined, reveal that not only did cultural barriers between the Greek settlers and the local population subside more quickly in Bactria than elsewhere, but so did the separation and distinction between the Bactrians and the barbarian other that dwelled in the north—the Scythians. Far from serving as an agent of cultural unity with the Hellenistic world, Alexander set a unique precedent for his successors in Bactria

[77] Polybius, *The Histories Vol. IV,* 11.4.3 – 11.5.8, trans. W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library 159 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 267-269.

in his willingness to relinquish grand personal visions of control and to permit border fluidity with the nomadic tribes.

Historical sources, such as Herodotus and Arrian, convey that the indigenous Bactrians had maintained a mutually beneficial interaction with neighboring Scythian nomadic tribes for generations. More than two centuries before Alexander's arrival, the founder of the Achaemenid Persian dynasty, Cyrus the Great, had tried to enforce the border of his empire and prevent collusion between Bactrians and Scythians. His attempt led to fatal disaster.[78] According to Herodotus, Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae Scythians defeated Cyrus and dishonored his corpse, because he had refused to allow her people to live in peace north of the Araxes (Jaxartes) River.[79] Henceforth, as Pierre Briant and Frank Holt both note, the Persian Empire facilitated active relations with the Scythians and kept loose control over Bactria's northern frontier, which, in Holt's words: "clearly reverted to its open, fluid state." Bactrians and Scythians were, as Holt puts it, "peoples of kindred stock," despite the former being settled and the latter nomadic.[80] During the Persian Wars, according to Herodotus, Bactrians served jointly with nomadic Scythian troops in Persian king Xerxes' army.[81] Arrian similarly reports that over a century later Scythians joined the Bactrians to serve in the Persian army against Alexander the Great. Arrian further points out that the Scythians were not subjects of Persia but were instead allies.[82] The

---

[78] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 38-39; Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire,* trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 39-40.

[79] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. I: Books 1-2*, 1.206-214, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 117 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1920), 259-269.

[80] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 56; Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire,* trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 746-747.

[81] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. III: Books 5-7*, 7.64, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 119 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), 379.

[82] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.8.3, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 247.

close-knit relationship between the two peoples apparently transcended both political boundaries and generations.

After arriving in the then Persian satrapy (province) of Bactria-Sogdiana in 329 BC, Alexander reinforced the border by publicly prohibiting the Scythians from crossing the Tanais (Jaxartes) River without his knowledge.[83] In doing so, Alexander attempted to establish the new dichotomy between the Hellenistic world and the barbarian other. Settled Bactrians and Sogdians were to be included in his empire, their lands to be populated by Greek and Macedonian newcomers, while the nomadic Scythians were to be kept out and at bay, viewed as the new barbarians. To Alexander's dismay, the settlement of Alexandria Eschate, built to consolidate his authority at the borders of the Jaxartes River, ignited a full-scale rebellion that involved Scythians as well as Bactrians and Sogdians under local rebel leader Spitamenes. Holt, Sidky, and Mairs all agree that native Bactrians and Sogdians viewed the military presence as an unwanted disruption to the natural socioeconomic pattern of their land.[84] Just as it was for Cyrus, Alexander's separation between those he considered to be more civilized from those that were less civilized was impossible in Bactria, due to the ingrained culture of fluidity and trade connections of its native population.

Unlike Cyrus, who died before he could compromise with the nomadic Scythians, Alexander ultimately gave in and resorted to a conciliatory approach. To pacify hostile rebel holdouts, he treated remaining rebels with clemency—sparing the lives of Spitamenes' family, including his daughter Apama, and reinstating several rebel leaders, such as Chorienes, to their

---

[83] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 7.6.13, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 181.

[84] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 53; Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 34; H. Sidky, *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria: From Alexander to Eucratides the Great* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 61.

former leadership positions.[85] Most importantly, Alexander himself married the Bactrian princess Roxana—a significant political act with repercussions that I will discuss later in relation to the topic of his diplomatic conquest. In the summer of 327 BC, Alexander led his army out of Bactria and onward to his much-anticipated Indian campaign.

Although Arrian and the other Alexander sources do not record what remained of Alexandria Eschate, Sidky surmises (without offering any sources) that the military outposts established by Alexander continued to "maintain a controlled frontier between Sogdiana and Scythia."[86] Holt, in his 1999 book *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria*, also backtracks from his earlier conclusions by stating definitively that "Their assigned task and natural temperament were to impose a severe, age-old antithesis between Greeks and barbarians, civilization and savagery, urbanization and tribalism, farming and nomadism."[87] Indeed, findings of earthen fortifications, such as the Fortress of Alexander overlooking the town of Nurota and the walled city of Kampyr Tepe near modern Termez, suggest the continued presence of military garrisons (figures 1.14 and 1.15).

The return of a militarized border, however, is dubious, considering the lack of supporting evidence. Scholars have accepted the notion of a militarized border as a primary cause for the revolt against Alexander's conquest in the first place. Alexander's conciliatory approach toward rebellious Bactrians and Sogdians before leaving for India suggests that, as Holt notes, Alexander must have permitted the return of the traditional socioeconomic pattern of the

---

[85] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.21.6-9, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 411.

[86] H. Sidky, *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria: From Alexander to Eucratides the Great* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 82.

[87] Frank Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 24.

land.[88] In addition, the relationship between Alexander and the Scythian nomads appears to have improved. According to Arrian, between 329 – 328 BC and near the end of Spitamenes' rebellion, the king of Scythia sent envoys to Alexander, proposing a marriage alliance.[89] Although Alexander declined the offer, he evidently incorporated Scythian cavalry into his army, since, according to Arrian, they were present during Alexander's campaign in India.[90] Finally, Aramaic documents found in Bactra, dating to the seventh year of Alexander (324 BC), convey what Mairs describes as "the continuing regulation of the province's economic life according to existing practices, within existing administrative hierarchies, and written down in the same language according to the same templates."[91] In other words, Bactria appears to have returned to being locally governed in the same manner as before Alexander's arrival, likely reestablishing its close ties with nomadic Scythian tribes. Thus, it is unlikely that the fortifications at Nurota, Kampyr Tepe, Alexandria Eschate, and elsewhere served any further purpose than to protect the inhabitants and to maintain order. Instead of functioning as an encroachment on the local environment, these fortifications were likely built to serve the local population and the troops that Alexander settled amongst them.

Alexander's decision not to enforce the Hellenistic – barbarian dichotomy influenced and served as a precedent for subsequent rulers, inhabitants, and travelers of Bactria. During the transitional period between Alexander's departure in 327 BC and the beginning of Seleucid rule (308 – 307 BC), Bactria likely maintained its fluid border with the Scythians. We hear of at most two rebellions, one before and the other immediately after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Both

---

[88] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 57.

[89] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.15.2, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 387.

[90] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 5.12.2, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 37.

[91] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 43.

rebellions were carried out not by the indigenous population but rather by the homesick Greek troops, who no longer wished to live amongst those they still considered barbarians.[92] Many of these rebels would be killed by troops under Pithon, one of Alexander's ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful successors.[93] In 321 BC, in the Partition of Triparadisus, Alexander's successors (the Diodochi) allowed a certain Stasanor to retain his position as satrap of Bactria. According to Diodorus Siculus, "[Antigonus] permitted Tlepolemus to retain Carmania, and likewise Stasanor to retain Bactriane, for it was not easy to remove them by sending a message since they had conducted themselves well toward the inhabitants and had many supporters."[94] Although Diodorus does not specify whether the supporters were the Greek and Macedonian settlers or the native Bactrian population, his explanation provides clues to the ongoing events in Central Asia. Stasanor had managed to establish himself as a worthy leader to the inhabitants of Bactria. He and his supporters evidently displayed no intention of leaving Bactria, unlike the rebels, as the Diodochi concluded that he could not be removed without significant effort. Considering the diminished numbers of Greek and Macedonian troops after the rebellions, Stasanor very likely followed the precedent set by Alexander, seeking (at least to some extent) the support of the native Bactrians, who formed the majority of the region's population, and steering clear from engaging in unnecessary conflict with the Scythian nomads.

The Seleucids, annexing Bactria around 308 – 307 BC, seem to have also followed Alexander's precedent and respected the relations between Bactrians and the Scythian tribes.

---

[92] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.99, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 405; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. IX,* 18.7, trans. Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 29-31.

[93] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. IX: Books 18-19.65,* 18.7.9, trans. Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 33.

[94] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. IX: Books 18-19.65,* 19.48.1, trans. Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 359.

Appian notes that Seleucus I built the town of Alexandria Eschate "among the Scythians."[95] It is unclear whether Seleucus rebuilt the settlement by the same name that was founded by Alexander, or that he had organized the construction of a new settlement altogether (Seleucus, perhaps learning from his old friend Alexander, was not beyond giving similar names to multiple cities: he named sixteen cities Antioch after his father and five cities Laodicea after his mother). The way that Appian describes the Bactrian town's location as "ἐν δὲ Σκύθαις Ἀλεξανδρέσχατα" (among the Scythians, Alexandria Eschate) may shed some light on the harmonious and non-segregated relationship between Bactria and the Scythians. Meanwhile, according to Pliny the Elder, the Seleucid general Demodamus of Miletus crossed (*transcendit*) the Jaxartes River into Scythian territories and collected ethnographic information about the Scythians.[96] Citing Demodamus' expedition, scholars often take for granted that it was a military campaign,[97] but there is nothing in Pliny's report, the only known source on the event, that expresses a renewal of hostilities. Instead, Pliny's didactic report only references Demodamus' consecration of an altar to Apollo of Didyma as well as the general's observations of the life and habits of the Scythians.

Under Diodotus I, Bactria declared independence from the Seleucid Empire in 246 – 245 BC, leaving a gap in surviving literary sources regarding Bactrian affairs. The narrative picks up again when the Seleucid king Antiochus III marched eastward in 209 BC to reclaim the lost Bactrian territory. According to Polybius, Bactria was at this time ruled by King Euthydemus, who had overthrown the descendants of Diodotus I. At war with Antiochus III, Euthydemus

---

[95] Appian, *Roman History Vol. II,* 9.57, translated by Horace White, Loeb Classical Library 3 (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 213-215.

[96] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History Vol. II: Books 3-7*, 6.18 (49), trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 352 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 375.

[97] A. H. Dani and P. Bernard, "Alexander and his successors in Central Asia," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 90-91; Frank Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27; Marek Jan Olbrycht, "Iranians in the Diadochi Period," in *After Alexander: The Time of the Diadochi (323 – 281 BC),* ed. Victor Alonso Troncoso and Edward M. Anson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 171-172.

managed to hold out against a prolonged siege in the city of Bactra. Desperate for peace, the Bactrian king pleaded for his right to rule by emphasizing his crucial position as a barrier for the Hellenistic world against the new barbarians on the frontier. According to Polybius, Euthydemus expressed that "neither of them would be safe; for considerable hordes of Nomads were approaching, and this was not only a grave danger to both of them, but if they consented to admit them, the country would certainly relapse into barbarism."[98] Satisfied with Euthydemus' arguments, Antiochus III ceased hostilities.

Sidky, accepting Euthydemus' statement at face value, argues that it reveals Bactria's acceptance of the Hellenistic – barbarian dichotomy.[99] This assessment, however, neglects to analyze other passages of Polybius' work. I believe that Euthydemus' plea was only a pretext to pacify Antiochus III. The protracted siege had worn out both sides. Desiring to end hostilities through a calculated move, Euthydemus used the rhetoric of the barbarian other to his advantage, as a means of legitimizing his kingship in a language that Antiochus would understand. Polybius reports shortly after in the same chapter that Euthydemus provided Antiochus with rations and war elephants. With peace agreed to, Antiochus subsequently took his massive army southward to India.[100] Interpreting Euthydemus' message as a pretext and not as an accurate portrayal of the social climate in Bactria would explain why the Bactrian king chose to give up the valuable rations and war elephants rather than to keep them for his own weakened army to defend against the "considerable hordes of Nomads." It would also explain why Antiochus III directed his march toward India, rather than toward the Bactrian frontier and aid his new ally in the

---

[98] Polybius, *The Histories Vol. IV*, 11.34.1-10, trans. W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library 159, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 335-337.

[99] H. Sidky, *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria: From Alexander to Eucratides the Great* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 171-172.

[100] Polybius, *The Histories Vol. IV*, 11.34.1-16, trans. W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library 159, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 335-339.

supposedly urgent defense against barbarism. By exaggerating (and potentially inventing altogether) the threat of nomadic invasion, Euthydemus discreetly realized Bactria's freedom from the Hellenistic world, represented by the Seleucid Empire.

Frank Holt offers an alternative yet compatible interpretation. He suggests that Euthydemus might have been threatening to enlist the nomads "as allies against the Seleucids."[101] Indeed, Holt's view is further supported by a recently discovered Bactrian administrative document referencing Bactrian payments to Scythian mercenaries not long after the Seleucid siege of Bactra.[102] Whether he was threatening to enlist the Scythians or claiming to be a barrier against them, Euthydemus was likely exaggerating the threat of nomadic invasion and the ethnic divide between the Hellenistic and the barbarian other in Bactria.

Evidence for a fluid border between Bactria and the Scythian nomadic tribes is conveyed one last time before the dissolution of Bactrian autonomy, in an eyewitness account by the Chinese explorer Zhang Qian around 128 BC. According to his report of Dayuan, which is believed to be the northeastern part of a fragmented Bactrian state, "有城郭屋室。 其屬邑大小七十餘城，眾可數十萬。其兵弓矛騎射。"[103] ("The people live in houses in fortified cities, there being some seventy or more cities of various sizes in the region. The population numbers several hundred thousand. The people fight with bows and spears and can shoot from horseback.")[104] Zhang Qian's observation of the fighting ability of the Dayuan people, such as the proficiency with horseback archery, conveys the incorporation of Scythian tactics in the

---

[101] Frank Holt, "Re: Hellenistic Bactria Research," Message to Cynthia Patterson and Jonathan Tao. 30 March 2019. E-mail.

[102] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 150.

[103] Sima Qian, *Shiji,* Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/shiji/da-wan-lie-zhuan/zh#n9026 (accessed March 23, 2020).

[104] Sima Qian, *Records of The Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 233.

Bactrian military. Findings at Kampyr Tepe of part of a bronze corselet—potentially belonging to a Greek cuirass (*thorax*)—and terracotta plaques from Kampyr Tepe and Chingiz Tepe of figures wearing Greek muscle cuirasses in conjunction with large protective metal belts, often associated with Scythian warriors, similarly express a blending in military traditions.[105] The combined arms of bows and spears, reminiscent of Alexander's own recruitment and use of Scythian forces (known to be skilled horse archers) alongside Macedonian phalangites (equipped with the long *sarissa*), as well as archaeological findings of mixed cultural elements in Bactrian military equipment, suggests that the tradition of Bactrian and nomadic Scythian military collaboration was preserved.

Therefore, although conflicts between Scythians and Bactrians may certainly have occurred from time to time, Bactrian leaders, conforming to Alexander's conciliatory approach toward longstanding local traditions of border fluidity, appear to have refrained from implementing a militarized border against the nomadic tribes of the north. While in the Hellenistic world, the concept of the barbarian other, reinforced by imposing a Hellenistic – barbarian dichotomy, served as a rhetorical expression of cultural unity (among fellow Hellenistic civilizations) and distinction (from new external threats), it failed to gain the same resonance in Bactria, where close associations with the barbarian other across the Jaxartes River prevailed as it had for generations past.

**5. Alexander and Roxana: Diplomatic Conquest of Bactria**

Alexander's concessions to the native Bactrians did not end with reinstating rebel leaders and refraining from militarizing the border against the Scythian nomadic tribes; instead it culminated in his marriage to the Bactrian princess Roxana in 327 BC. Breaking from his

[105] Valeri P. Nikonorov and Serge A. Savchuk, "New Data on Ancient Bactrian Body-Armour (In the Light of Finds from Kampyr Tepe)" *Iran* 30, no. 1 (1992): 49-54.

previous resistance to female romantic interests, Alexander took a wife, openly expressing his feelings for Roxana and his wish to be properly married to her. Alexander's conciliatory approach to pacifying the native Bactrian resistance—contrasting with previous strategies of enforcing authority through military conquest—established the Macedonian conqueror in Bactria as a leader that could be humbled with failure. At the same time, Alexander's marriage to Roxana, likely encouraged by both political opportunism and possibly genuine love, cultivated the impression of Alexander as a benevolent and just king, willing to appeal to native Bactrian sensitivities and to win Bactria over through diplomatic "conquest."

When first threatened by widespread revolt under the leadership of the Bactrian rebel Spitamenes in 329 BC, Alexander was faced with two options: either to coerce the rebels into submission through violent conquest, as he had done to stamp out the Greek rebellion against Macedonian rule at Thebes in 335 BC, or to come to terms with the rebels. Characteristically unwilling to compromise, Alexander initially elected to follow the first option, quickly taking over multiple Bactrian cities, massacring and enslaving the inhabitants.[106] Despite these early successes, however, he achieved no decisive victory to quell the revolt. Instead, his army suffered one particularly crushing defeat at the hands of Spitamenes and his Scythian allies, who destroyed Alexander's relief force under the command of Pharnuches of Lycia[107] or Menedemus.[108] Although Alexander himself was not present at the battle, news of the major defeat, as Quintus Curtius Rufus puts it, "marred his record of unbroken success…"[109] The seemingly invincible army of Alexander, which had managed to defeat adversaries many times

[106] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.2.4 – 4.3.1, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 341.

[107] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 4.5.7-4.6.2, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 353-357.

[108] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Vol. II: Books 6-10*, 7.7.30-39, trans. J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 195-197.

[109] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Vol. II: Books 6-10*, 7.7.30, trans. J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 195.

larger than itself, proved vulnerable against the stubborn and swift Bactrian and Scythian rebel forces. Alexander's hold on his newly acquired empire suddenly become uncertain.

With the rebellion dragging on for around two years and no end in sight, Alexander at last turned to diplomacy. In 327 BC, Alexander asked for the hand of Roxana, daughter of the Bactrian rebel leader Oxyartes. The marriage to Roxana is made additionally significant by two factors. Firstly, Alexander chose to marry Roxana *against* the wishes of his Greek and Macedonian troops, who abhorred the prospect of having fought countless battles only to eventually serve a child of mixed barbarian heritage.[110] While the marriage was politically advantageous for gaining the support of the native Bactrian population, as I will discuss shortly, it also risked, as Alexander was likely well aware, upsetting and demoralizing his own troops. Secondly, Alexander had previously refrained from marrying into the Persian royal family, even though he could have done so at any point, having captured the daughters of Persian king Darius III after the Battle of Issus in 333 BC.[111] The marriage between Alexander and Roxana thus marked a significant change in the Macedonian conqueror's strategy toward conquest.

The political advantages of Alexander's marriage to Roxana were many. Firstly, the marriage could serve as means for ingratiating himself with the local population. The possibility for a son of Bactrian descent to inherit Alexander's massive empire was likely an enticing prospect for the native Bactrians.[112] Secondly, the marital proposal created a new ally in Oxyartes, who promptly abandoned the rebel cause.[113] Allied to Alexander, Oxyartes

---

[110] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.4.30, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 273.

[111] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 4.19.5-4.20, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 405-407.

[112] A successor of both Macedonian and Bactrian heritage *did* eventually inherit many of Alexander's provinces in Asia, though it would be Antiochus I, son of Alexander's general Seleucus I and Spitamenes' daughter Apama.

[113] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 4.20.4 trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 407.

subsequently served as an effective intermediary, convincing other rebel Bactrian leaders, such as Chorienes, to give up their fortified positions and to accept Alexander's rule, saving both sides much bloodshed.[114] Deeming him to be trustworthy and useful for maintaining the support of the native population, Alexander eventually relied on Oxyartes to govern the satrapy of Paropamisadae (south of Bactria) on his behalf in 325 BC.[115] Thirdly, and most importantly, both Plutarch (who approves of Alexander's decision to wed Roxana) and Quintus Curtius Rufus (who is critical of the marriage) recognized the marriage as indicative of Alexander's developing ideas of cultural harmony to consolidate his empire. Plutarch argues that the marriage was in keeping with Alexander's personal views "that by a mixture and community of practice which produced good will, rather than by force, [Alexander's] authority would be kept secure while he was far away."[116] Likewise, Quintus Curtius Rufus reports that Alexander, in defending his decision to marry Roxana, "said that it was important for establishing his empire that Persians [and Bactrians] and Macedonians be joined in wedlock; that only in that way could shame be taken from the conquered and haughtiness from the victors."[117] The fact that both sources, differing in their evaluation of Alexander's decision, arrive at the same conclusion—namely that Alexander harbored a belief in cultural harmony by marriage—conveys a prevailing impression (regardless of whether genuine or not) of the Macedonian conqueror's desire to be viewed by his subjects as a benevolent mediator of cultures and disparate peoples. His marriage to Roxana was thus one of the first steps in the realization of these plans, which would ultimately come to fruition at the Susa Weddings of 324 BC, in which he wedded his Greek and Macedonian

---

[114] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.21.6-9, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 411.

[115] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 6.15.3, trans. P. A. Brunt. Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 145.

[116] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 47, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 359.

[117] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander, Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.4.25, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 271.

generals to Persian brides. Unlike the Susa Weddings, however, which mostly resulted in short-lived marriages, Alexander's Bactrian marriage remained intact, with Alexander remaining with Roxana until his death.

Although the marriage was politically motivated, the ancient sources suggest that Alexander was also sincere in his feelings toward Roxana. Arrian reports that "those who served with Alexander said that she was the loveliest woman they had seen in Asia next to Darius' wife, and that when Alexander saw her he fell in love with her…"[118] Quintus Curtius Rufus grudgingly concedes: "Roxane by name, a maiden of remarkable beauty of person, and of a dignity of bearing uncommon among barbarians… [Alexander] was then so transported with love for this little maiden…"[119] In addition, the Alexander sources attest that Roxana's father Oxyartes was delighted at Alexander's offer and had little issue with marrying his daughter to him.[120] Moreover, Plutarch adds that the native Bactrians appreciated Alexander's deferential behavior toward his bride.[121] Thus, while Roxana's opinions of Alexander are not recorded—leaving the question unanswered of whether the marriage was consensual or not, the literary sources agree that the marriage was agreeable to and perhaps even popular among the native Bactrians. Alexander's apparent sincerity in the affair allowed him to further endear himself to the indigenous population. The public wedding ceremony, celebrated with the sacred

---

[118] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 4.19.5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 405.

[119] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.4.23-25, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 271.

[120] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 4.20.4 trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 407; Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.4.27, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 273.

[121] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 47, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 359-361.

Macedonian custom of breaking bread, finalized Alexander's diplomatic conquest of Bactria, putting an end to the native Bactrian rebellion against his rule.[122]

The cultural implications of Alexander's marriage to Roxana further ingrained a unique impression of the Macedonian conqueror in Central Asia. While he had previously left Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia, and later Northern India in the wake of military victory, Alexander won Bactria through numerous diplomatic overtures and concessions. By appealing to local Bactrian sensitivities through his marriage to Roxana and through the impression of his belief in cultural harmony as a means for consolidating his empire, Alexander presented himself as a conqueror, not only by way of the spear, but also—and no less importantly—by his willingness to compromise to obtain the support of the native Bactrian population. He was a Bactrian king as well as a Macedonian one, and his memory as a ruthless conqueror would become intertwined with that of Alexander as a just king of Bactria.

## 6. Conclusion

Alexander III of Macedon left a unique cultural legacy in Bactria that would have a considerable impact on the reception of his memory in Central Asia. His actions in Bactria and his unexpected death in 323 BC, coupled with the deeds of his successors, led to the emergence of a Bactrian cultural identity distinct from that of the Hellenistic world and encouraged the creation of a unique interpretation of Alexander specific to the Central Asian cultural context. As evident in the material and epigraphic record, Alexander's conquests and settling of Greeks and Macedonians in Bactria paved the way for the enduring integration of Greek influences into local traditions, architectural innovations, shared religious environments and sympathies, and more closely-knit communities between the Greek and Macedonian settlers and the indigenous

[122] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.4.27, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 273.

population than in contemporary societies of the Hellenistic world. Literary sources shed light on deviating cultural perceptions of the βάρβαρος (barbarian) and of cultural unity in the Hellenistic world and in Bactria, as a consequence of contrasting experiences of Alexander's kingship. In the Hellenistic world, following Alexander's acquisition and founding of cities in traditionally barbarian lands as well as his adoption of foreign customs, a new dichotomy emerged in which the traditional cultural barriers between Greeks and the *former barbarians* diminished, while the concept of the barbarian other was reused as a rhetorical expression of Hellenistic unity against new external threats. In Bactria, following Alexander's failure to enforce a militarized border against the Scythian nomadic tribes, his acceptance of border fluidity, and the homebound rebellions of his Greek and Macedonian troops, the Hellenistic – barbarian dichotomy was likely rejected in favor of longstanding socioeconomic relations between the native Bactrian population and the Scythians. Finally, Alexander's conciliatory approach toward native rebel leaders and particularly his celebrated marriage to Roxana highlighted the Macedonian conqueror's willingness to appeal to local sensitivities and emphasized the impression of Alexander as a mediator between the conquerors and the conquered. Adjusting to humbling experiences of military defeat and compelled by both political expediency and possibly genuine romantic passions, Alexander deviated from his conduct elsewhere in his expedition and laid the foundations for his unique legacy in Central Asia as a just king of Bactria.

## Chapter 2

### Nirvana for the Yonaka: The Transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia

The fortified Bactrian settlement of Kampyr Tepe, located about a half-hour drive from the city of Termez, is situated on a cliffside along the right bank of the Amu Darya River. Behind the city walls lay the remains of residential quarters and homes made from mudbrick. Archaeological findings indicate that the site was alive from around the third century BC to the second century AD.[123] Although the busy commotion of urban life no longer echoes through Kampyr Tepe, traces of a once vibrant multicultural environment can be perceived through artifacts found at the site. Terracotta figures of Heracles and a satyr from Kampyr Tepe showcase a melding of artistic techniques, connecting detailed Greek styled heads with local Bactrian schematically modelled bodies.[124] Conversely, a sculpture of a couple—possibly Eros and Psyche, from Greek myth—juxtapose graceful, naturalistic bodies with overtly simplified heads and hands.[125] The contrast in design suggests subsequent renovation and treatment of the terracotta figures by craftsmen, who preserved the symbolism, "character and functional particularities" of the figures, despite changing the outward form.[126] The artistic blending of these sculptures attests to the tradition of integrating foreign culture and ideas in Bactria through the medium of art.

Not far off from the settlement is the Buddhist monastery Fayaz Tepe. Inhabited by monks during the Kushan period (30 – 375 AD), well after the fall of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria around 125 BC, Fayaz Tepe retained elements of its surrounding environment and culture. A Buddhist sculpture, once venerated by the monks at Fayaz Tepe and now displayed in

---

[123] Rachel Mairs, *The Archaeology of the Hellenistic Far East: A Survey* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 31.
[124] Kazim Abdullaev, "Reutilization of Old Images for New Iconographic Generations: The Question of the Destiny of Greek Images in the Post-Hellenistic Period," *East and West* 52, no. ¼ (December 2002): 56.
[125] Ibid., 59-60.
[126] Ibid., 56.

the Tashkent State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, depicts the Buddha sitting beside two standing attendants (figure 2.1). The naturalistic appearance of the Buddha's face and clothing convey Bactrian Greek artistic influence. Moreover, the sculptural scene is flanked by a pair of Corinthian capitals. Topped with acanthus leaves, these column types originated from Greece and were popular in Bactria, with surviving examples discovered in the Bactrian settlement of Ai Khanoum. Though the Buddhist subject of the sculpture would have been foreign to the Bactrians, its artistic portrayal reflected a familiar environment.

As conveyed through the Bactrian Greek references in the Buddhist sculpture at Fayaz Tepe, the transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia included a process of integration into the Bactrian cultural context. While scholars examining the spread of Buddhism often portray a top-down approach, focusing on the impact of the pro-Buddhist policies of Mauryan Indian and Kushan kings, I seek to shed light in this chapter on how the Bactrian cultural context—and particularly, the cultural legacy of Alexander the Great among the inhabitants of Bactria—played a key role in Buddhism's spread to Central Asia. Alexander's exploits and adventures in Central Asia and India, followed by the deeds of his successors, created a multicultural environment in Bactria receptive to new ideas as well as inclined toward religious syncretism. Alexander's interactions with the Indian gymnosophists instilled in his Greek and Macedonian followers a curiosity with Indian religion and wisdom, while serving as an archetype in Buddhist literature as a philosophically inclined Bactrian "Greek" king. Finally, the artistic blending of Buddhist religious subjects with Bactrian artistic tastes, as exemplified by the findings at Fayaz Tepe, helped to make Buddhist iconographic and spiritual ideas from India more accessible to the Central Asian cultural context.

### 1. Royal Patronage and Religious Toleration

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, lived sometime during the 5th century BC in what is now modern Nepal and Northern India. Although the Buddha is said to have gained a great following during his lifetime, it would be several centuries before Buddhism flourished in Central Asia. Scholars recognize the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia among the achievements of the Mauryan Empire of India (322 – 187 BC) and the Kushan Empire of Central Asia (30 – 375 AD), the former contemporary with and the latter succeeding Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria. Richard Foltz, for example, asserts that "Though marginal at first, Buddhist activity received a boost under Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty."[127] A victorious conqueror in his youth, Ashoka (reigning from 268 – 232 BC) was said to have abruptly ended the belligerent nature of his rule around 263 BC. Distressed by his experiences of war, the Mauryan king embraced the Buddhist faith and erected rock edicts across his empire, promoting Buddhist moral concepts and pacifistic ideals.[128] In addition, according to Buddhist tradition, Ashoka divided the cremated remains of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, into 84,000 portions, enshrining each portion across his empire in a burial mound called a stupa.[129] The proliferation of stupas allowed a wider Buddhist community to honor and spiritually "encounter" the long deceased Siddhartha Gautama, even after his death and attainment of *parinirvana* (liberation from the cyclical existence of *samsara*).[130] Multiplying the places for Buddhist veneration, the stupas and the relics stored within strengthened the faith of laypeople by attracting devotees to make pilgrimage from distant lands.

---

[127] Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37.

[128] Paul Bernard, "The Greek Kingdoms of Central Asia," in *History of Civilization of Central Asia: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 106.

[129] John S. Strong, *Buddhisms: An Introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 97.

[130] Ibid., 87.

While Ashoka is often credited with propagating the faith from India, Kanishka I (reigning around 120 – 144 AD) is cited for bringing Buddhism to Central Asia. Luce Boulnois calls attention to the Kushan king, who supported the faith and encouraged the proliferation of its followers throughout his empire.[131] In Buddhist tradition, Kanishka I was celebrated as a "second Ashoka" and a royal patron.[132]

Despite their pro-Buddhist sympathies, both Ashoka and Kanishka I not only encouraged Buddhist ideas but also—and just as importantly—promoted a climate of religious toleration and exchange. For instance, Ashoka's *12th Major Rock Edict*, originally written in Brahmi script, pronounces the virtues of toleration:

> The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, honours all sects and both ascetics and laymen, with gifts and various forms of recognition. But the Beloved of the Gods does not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the advancement of the essential doctrine of all sects. This progress of the essential doctrine takes many forms, but its basis is the control of one's speech, so as not to extoll one's own sect or disparage another's on unsuitable occasions, or at least to do so only mildly on certain occasions. Therefore, concord is to be commended, so that men may hear one another's principles and obey them. This is the desire of the Beloved of the Gods, that all sects should be well-informed, and should teach that which is good…[133]

Lest he contradict his own rock edict's advice "not to extoll one's own sect or disparage another's," Ashoka likely supported the coexistence of various faiths. Although he embraced Buddhist moral concepts and helped to advance the Buddhist community through the

---

[131] Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 164.

[132] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhara," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 57.

[133] Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delphi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 255.

construction of thousands of stupas, the Mauryan king evidently also encouraged discussion between devotees of different beliefs. Similarly, Kanishka I dedicated temples to other gods as well.[134] Although Buddhist doctrine did not reject the existence of other gods (for even gods or *devas* were subordinate to the Buddha and in need of enlightenment), Kanishka's patronage sheds light on the king's other pursuits, not highlighted by the Buddhist tradition. Thus, viewing Ashoka and Kanishka I simply as champions of Buddhism would be to inaccurately assess both kings' motivations as well as to misinterpret the cultural and social intricacies at work during this crucial stage of Buddhism's northward spread from India.

In sum, it is important to recognize that Ashoka and Kanishka I were not only supporters of Buddhism but also advocates of religious toleration. Neglecting the contributions of the culture and society in which Buddhism flourished would overlook key elements to how the religion developed and advanced far afield from its Indian roots. In order to examine the implications of religious toleration and interfaith discussion, advanced by the likes of Ashoka and Kanishka, I turn now to the peoples of Bactria, whose culture, religious inclinations and interactions likely influenced how readily and in what ways Buddhism would become accepted and practiced in Central Asia.

### 2. Alexander and the Multicultural Environment of Bactria

As discussed in Chapter 1, Bactrian culture during the Hellenistic period was remarkably diverse, integrating Greek influences into the local Bactrian context—and particularly in the shared religious environment. Following the conquests of Alexander III of Macedon, Bactria became home to several new settlements, populated by native Bactrians as well as Greek and Macedonian settlers. A reliance on Persian administrators as well as the admission of a fluid

[134] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhara," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 57.

border with the Scythian nomadic tribes added still more disparate and influential peoples to the region. Alexander's role in the creation of this multicultural environment, interposing Greek and Macedonian newcomers into the native Bactrian population, deserves attention, as it is this cosmopolitan Central Asian society that would become a flourishing center for cultural exchange and ultimately the recipient of Buddhist advances from India.

Prior to Alexander's arrival in 329 BC, Bactria had long been inhabited by indigenous populations. Archaeological surveys of excavation sites have been able to discern development in urbanization since the Bronze Age.[135] In Islamic and local tradition, the ancient city of Bactra in modern Afghanistan is referred to as the "Mother of Cities,"[136] a title that carries connotations of both the city's dense population and its founding since time immemorial. Traces of extensive irrigation convey that native Bactrian society was capable of substantial organized labor and accustomed to an agricultural lifestyle.[137] Under Persian rule, the Central Asians proved to be a valuable asset to the Persian Empire. According to the foundation charter of Persian king Darius I's palace at Susa, native Bactrians contributed in the construction of the palace by providing gold. The neighboring Sogdians, living to the north of Bactria, supplied lapis lazuli and carnelian.[138] The contributions attributed to these Central Asian peoples reveal that precious metals and stones were a key source of export in the region. In sum, prior to Alexander's arrival in 329 BC, Bactria was a prosperous and agricultural land with long-established urban centers and trade routes.

---

[135] Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 27.

[136] Ibid., 29.

[137] Rachel Mairs, *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 37-38; Frank Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 28.

[138] Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 492.

Greek and Macedonian eyewitness accounts paint a more critical picture on native Bactrian culture and society. Faced with native revolt led by Spitamenes and set against multiple fortified rebel holdouts, Alexander III of Macedon urgently needed to consolidate his control over Bactria. His previous satrap of Bactria, the loyal but aging Persian general Artabazus II, requested his retirement on account of his advanced age. Honoring Artabazus' wishes, Alexander appointed Macedonian officer Clitus the Black as the new satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana. Far from appreciative of his new position, however, Clitus allegedly proclaimed, "You assign to me the province of Sogdiana, so often rebellious, and not only untamed but not even capable of being subdued. I am sent to wild beasts, to which Nature has given incorrigible recklessness."[139] Clitus decries the appointment as an insufferable burden, emphasizing both his distrust of the native people and their cruel dispositions. Although his comparison of the Central Asians to "wild animals with bloodthirsty natures" is certainly a xenophobic remark, it conveys an observation, however crude, of the indigenous population's way of life—one that was wholly incompatible with those of the Greeks and Macedonians. Strabo of Amasia reports a similarly grim picture of native Bactrian society from the Greek soldier Onesicritus:

> Onesicritus does not report their best traits, saying, for instance, that those who have become helpless because of old age or sickness are thrown out alive as prey to dogs kept expressly for this purpose, which in their native tongue are called "undertakers," and that while the land outside the walls of the metropolis of the Bactrians looks clean, yet most of the land inside the walls is full of human bones; but that Alexander broke up the custom.[140]

---

[139] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.1.35, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 243.

[140] Strabo, *Geography Vol. V: Books 10-12,* 11.11.3, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library 211 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 283.

Despite serving as a soldier in Alexander's army, Onesicritus was a notoriously untrustworthy source. Arrian and Plutarch bring attention to separate incidents in which the soldier deliberately fabricated stories from the expedition.[141] Nevertheless, Strabo does not offer any alternative perspectives on Bactrian society. From both Clitus the Black and Onesicritus' descriptions, it seems apparent that the native Bactrians practiced traditions that were considered primitive and unacceptable to most Greek and Macedonian observers.

Regardless of Clitus and Onesicritus' contempt for the native Bactrians, Alexander founded a number of settlements in Bactria to consolidate his control and maintain order, by co-opting both his Greek and Macedonian soldiers as well as the native Bactrians and Persians to his building projects. Fortunately, the ancient Alexander sources discuss in detail the constructions of two important settlements: Alexandria in the Caucasus and Alexandria Eschate. Their accounts provide important clues about the settlements' initial ethnic diversity.

At the Hindu Kush mountains, Alexander founded Alexandria in the Caucasus, near modern Begram in Afghanistan. Arrian writes that the region, part of the satrapy of Paropamisadae, "was inhabited by a large number of people and many flocks and herds grazed there…"[142] His account conveys that the indigenous population in the area relied on a pastoral lifestyle. According to Diodorus Siculus: "Alexander founded other cities also at the distance of a day's march from Alexandria. Here he settled seven thousand natives, three thousand of the camp followers, and volunteers from among the mercenaries."[143] On the other hand, Quintus Curtius Rufus does not mention the nearby cities, expressing only that "A site for founding a city

---

[141] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 6.2.3, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 105; Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 46, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 357.

[142] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 3.28.6, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 323.

[143] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.83, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 359.

was chosen at the foot of the mountain and seven thousand from the subdued nations were permitted to settle in the new city, as well as those soldiers whose services the king had ceased to make use of. This city also its inhabitants called Alexandria."[144] Although his account differs from Diodorus,' Quintus Curtius Rufus confirms that around 7,000 people from the indigenous population were settled in the city. Arrian adds that the king appointed Proexes, a Persian, as satrap (governor).[145] Two years later, on his expedition from Bactria to India in 327 BC, Alexander replaced Proexes with Tyriespis—another Persian, on account of the former's incompetence in administration. Alexander also "settled in Alexandria more people from the neighbourhood together with all the soldiers unfit for fighting…"[146] Two years later, in 325 BC, the Macedonian king made one final adjustment upon hearing of Tyriespis' maladministration. Dismissing Tyriespis, Alexander granted the position of satrap of Paropamisadae to Oxyartes, a native Bactrian and the father of Alexander's wife Roxana.[147] In sum, roughly 7,000 indigenous peoples and 3,000 Greeks and Macedonians, under Persian and Bactrian administrators, were settled in the vicinity of Alexandria in the Caucasus.

Further north, Alexander founded Alexandria Eschate at the Jaxartes River in 329 BC. Quintus Curtius Rufus describes the Bactrian frontier as follows: "this is a place bordering on Scythia, and it is occupied by many populous villages, since the fertility of the soil not only holds the natives but also attracts new-comers."[148] Compared to Alexandria in the Caucasus, the surrounding landscape of Alexandria Eschate was better suited for agriculture. During

---

[144] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 7.3.23, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 151.

[145] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 3.28.4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 321.

[146] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.22.4-5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 413-415.

[147] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 6.15.3, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 145.

[148] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.2.14, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 251.

Spitamenes' Bactrian rebellion against Alexander, seven local cities broke out in revolt. In the ensuing conflict, according to Arrian, all the men were killed, while the women and children of Gaza and of an unnamed second city were enslaved.[149] Whether or not any inhabitants from the other five cities escaped slaughter by Alexander's troops is less clear. In Cyropolis, a city founded by the Persian king Cyrus, Arrian reports that several thousand surviving inhabitants surrendered after the city was breached.[150] Regarding an unnamed seventh city, Arrian reveals the confusion present even among his own sources:

> Ptolemy says that they surrendered, Aristobulus that Alexander captured this city too by force, and killed all he found within; Ptolemy also says that he distributed the men among his army and ordered them to be kept bound and under guard till he left their country, so that none of those responsible for the revolt should be left behind.[151]

While it is unclear what became of the residents of the seventh city, it is possible that many of these captured rebels were among those settled in Alexandria in the Caucasus in the south (mentioned in the above paragraph). Not all of the native Bactrians, however, were removed from their homeland. For Alexandria Eschate, Arrian reports that Alexander "settl[ed] there some Greek mercenaries, any of the neighbouring barbarians who shared in the settlement as volunteers, and also some Macedonians from the army who were no longer fit for active service."[152] Marcus Junianus Justinus records that Alexander "transplant[ed] into it the inhabitants of three cities that had been built by Cyrus."[153] Judging from Justinus' reference to "cities that had been built by Cyrus," it is likely that the population of Cyropolis was among

---

[149] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.2.4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 341.

[150] Ibid., *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.3.1-4, 341-345.

[151] Ibid., *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.3.5, 345.

[152] Ibid., *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.4.1, 347.

[153] Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus,* 12.5, trans. John Selby Watson (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Convent Garden, 1853), accessed through *corpus scriptorium latinorum* at http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/justin/english/trans12.html

those transferred into Alexandria Eschate. As he had done at Alexandria in the Caucasus, Alexander also appointed a trusted Persian official—Artabazus II—to oversee local administration. According to Arrian, "To govern the rest of the Bactrians, who readily adhered to him, [Alexander] appointed Artabazus the Persian as satrap."[154] Later, the Macedonian conqueror demonstrated even more reliance on Artabazus by entrusting him with conducting friendly diplomatic relations with the Chorasmians (located to the northwest of Bactria).[155] In 328 BC, Artabazus retired on account of old age, as mentioned earlier, and was replaced by Clitus the Black and then by Amyntas, who was most likely a Macedonian.[156] In sum, Alexandria Eschate was populated by an unspecified number of Greek mercenaries, Macedonian troops, and native Bactrians, under the administration of Persian and Macedonian leaders.

The settlements that Alexander left behind in Bactria solidified their multicultural foundations through a pair of rebellions and the addition of new settlers. Around 326 BC, while Alexander was still campaigning in India, some of the initial settlers in Central Asia became disillusioned with their situation. Quintus Curtius Rufus attributes their dissatisfaction with a longing for a return to their homeland.[157] Diodorus Siculus offers another rationale for why the Greek settlers rebelled, after hearing rumors that Alexander had died in India: "οἱ κατὰ τὴν Βακτριανὴν καὶ Σογδιανὴν κατοικισθέντες Ἕλληνες ἐκ πολλοῦ μὲν τὸν ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις κατοικισμὸν χαλεπῶς ἔφερον, τότε δὲ φήμης προσπεσούσης αὐτοῖς ὅτι τρωθεὶς ὁ βασιλεὺς τετελεύτηκεν ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ 6τῶν Μακεδόνων." ("…the Greeks who had been settled in

---

[154] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 3.29.1, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 325.

[155] Ibid., *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.15.5, 389.

[156] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.2.14, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 251; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4*, 4.15.5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 389.

[157] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 9.7.3, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 425.

Bactria and Sogdiana, who had long borne unhappily their sojourn among peoples of another race and now received word that the king had died of his wounds, revolted against the Macedonians.")[158] Diodorus expresses that the Greek settlers' displeasure derived from having to bear living "εν τοῖς βαρβάροις" (literally: among the barbarians). Evidently, these rebellious settlers were unprepared and unwilling to live the rest of their lives among peoples of strange cultures. Quintus Curtius Rufus explains that a certain Athenodorus championed the cause to return the homesick settlers to the Mediterranean.[159] Although Athenodorus himself would not make it, according to Quintus Curtius Rufus, the remaining disaffected Greek settlers managed to eventually return to their homeland.[160] Diodorus Siculus states, on the other hand, that these renegades, 3000 in number, were eventually intercepted and put to death by Macedonians loyal to Alexander's successors.[161]

A second rebellion, reported solely by Diodorus Siculus, began after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Longing for "τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ δίαιταν…" ("Greek customs and manner of life)," the Greek veteran-turned-settlers of Central Asia rallied an army.[162] Once more, the successors of Alexander dealt the rebels a decisive defeat, additionally massacring a great number of rebels in the aftermath of the battle.[163]

The result of these two rebellions was an unintentional filtering of the settler population in Central Asia. The majority of settlers who longed to return home or could not bear living amongst the native Bactrians and accepting non-Greek customs had either abandoned their

---

[158] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.99.5, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 404-405.

[159] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 9.7.3, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 425.

[160] Ibid., *History of Alexander* 9.7.11, 427.

[161] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.99.6, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 405.

[162] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. IX: Books 18-19.65*, 18.7.1, trans. Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 30-31.

[163] Ibid., *Library of History* 18.7.9, 33.

settlements, as in the case of Athenodorus' homesick Greek settlers according to Quintus Curtius Rufus, or had been killed in a pair of rebellions, as Diodorus Siculus reports. Those that remained were thus the most determined to carry out their duty of inhabiting the new cities and coexisting with unfamiliar cultures, whether driven by loyalty to Alexander or by fear of punishment from his successors.

Alexander's successors in Asia, Seleucus I and Antiochus I, resumed the Macedonian conqueror's settlement projects by sending additional waves of settlers to Bactria. Paul Bernard contends that many of the families came from the Greek cities of Asia Minor "and particularly from the Meander valley, like King Euthydemus, who had migrated from the town of Magnesia ad Meandrum."[164] Analyzing the surviving names of Bactrian settlers, Bernard also determines Northern Greece (Kineas, Molossus, Triballus) and Macedon (Lysanias) as potential sources of settlers.[165] According to Omar Coloru's analysis of Seleucid settlement patterns and procedure during the reign of Antiochus I, "the king dispatches an embassy to the city which was asked to send the colonists, then the matter is put to a vote and approved by the local assembly in the form of a decree, and afterwards the city proceeds to the selection of the individuals to be sent to the colony…"[166] Whether the city could actually refuse the king's request is unknown, as is the willingness of the individuals chosen to settle elsewhere. Even so, it can reasonably be assumed that these settlers were likely more prepared than Alexander's wounded veteran-turned-settlers to live far from their native land and amongst peoples of varying cultures.

---

[164] Paul Bernard, "The Greek kingdoms of Central Asia," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 105.

[165] Ibid., 105.

[166] Omar Coloru, "Seleukid Settlements: Between Ethnic Identity and Mobility," in *Electrum: Studia z historii starozytnej* 20, (2013): 39.

In Alexandria in the Caucasus, Alexandria Eschate, and likely many other new cities, a settler population made up largely by Greeks, Macedonians, Persians and native Bactrians laid the foundations for a culturally diverse community. With disaffected elements of the settler population filtered out by rebellion, and an influx of new settlers, Alexander and his successors' extensive settlement projects resulted in the foundations of a multicultural community in Central Asia receptive to foreign cultures and new ideas.

### 3. Alexander and the Gymnosophists

Departing from Central Asia and traveling through the northwestern regions of India in 324 BC, Alexander encountered a group of naked philosophers, henceforth known to the Greeks as the "gymnosophists." These philosophers, apparently living an ascetic lifestyle in search of knowledge and peace, were probably members of the *Sramana* movement, which the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama was himself a part of. Alexander's dealings with these Indian philosophers—which touched upon topics integral to Buddhist doctrine—would instill a curiosity with Indian culture and wisdom in his and subsequent Greek and Macedonian settlers of Central Asia and India.

Among the Alexander sources, Plutarch records Alexander's encounter with the gymnosophists in great detail:

> [Alexander] captured ten of the Gymnosophists who had done most to get Sabbas to revolt, and had made the most trouble for the Macedonians. These philosophers were reputed to be clever and concise in answering questions, and Alexander therefore put difficult questions to them, declaring that he would put to death him who first made an incorrect answer, and then the rest, in an order determined in like manner…[167]

[167] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 64, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 405-407.

The ten captured gymnosophists were his enemies, having encouraged the Indian rebel Sabbas against Alexander and "made the most trouble for the Macedonians." However, their supposed wit and wisdom piqued the Macedonian king's interests. Rather than executing them outright, he sought to test their ability first:

> The first one, accordingly, being asked which, in his opinion, were more numerous, the living or the dead, said that the living were, since the dead no longer existed. The second, being asked whether the earth or the sea produced larger animals, said the earth did, since the sea was but a part of the earth. The third, being asked what animal was most cunning, said: "That which up to this time man has not discovered." The fourth, when asked why he had induced Sabbas to revolt, replied: "Because I wished him either to live nobly or to die nobly." The fifth, being asked which, in his opinion, was older, day or night, replied: "Day, by one day"; and he added, upon the king expressing amazement, that hard questions must have hard answers. Passing on, then, to the sixth, Alexander asked how a man could be most loved; "If," said the philosopher, "he is most powerful, and yet does not inspire fear." Of the three remaining, he who was asked how one might become a god instead of man, replied: "By doing something which a man cannot do"; the one who was asked which was the stronger, life or death, answered: "Life, since it supports so many ills." And the last, asked how long it were well for a man to live, answered: "Until he does not regard death as better than life."[168]

This dialogue between Alexander and the gymnosophists, recorded by Plutarch, possibly preserves clues to both the gymnosophists' philosophies as well as Alexander's intentions. The first gymnosophist's explanation for why the living outnumber the dead, "since the dead no

[168] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 64, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 407.

longer existed," appears to deviate from the concept of *samsara* (rebirth and cyclical existence), shared by ancient Indian religions including Buddhism. Such a stance, professing the annihilation of the individual upon death, most aligns to that of the *materialists*, a school of thought that the early Buddhists distanced themselves from.[169] By contrast, the ninth gymnosophist's assessment of life as stronger than death, because life "supports so many ills," conveys a similar strain of thought as that which was fundamental to Buddhism. In particular, his answer conveys a disillusionment with life as filled with stress, pain and futile attachment to the impermanent, compiled in Buddhist doctrine under the term *dukkha*.[170] From the interrogator's point of view, Alexander's sixth and seventh questions regarding how a man can be loved and how a man can become a god, likely shed light on the Macedonian conqueror's personal reflections on his kingship. Having conquered the Persian Empire and traversed farther than any Greek or Macedonian, he was still interested in how he would be remembered by his subjects, either beloved or worshipped. The gymnosophists' responses—by not inspiring fear and by exceeding the limits of man—brought to his attention, if it hadn't been there already, that his present actions could influence his memory among those that came after him. Alexander's next actions thus warrant close scrutiny.

Plutarch records that Alexander was so impressed by their responses that he let them go with gifts.[171] When Alexander learned of another Indian sage, Dandamis, the Macedonian conqueror sent his subordinate Onesicritus, who had received training as a philosopher, to meet him. Onesicritus discussed the teachings of Socrates, Pythagoras and Diogenes to the Indian sage. According to Plutarch, "[Dandamis] remarked that the men appeared to him to have been

---

[169] John S. Strong, *Buddhisms: An Introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 120.
[170] Ibid., 137.
[171] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 65, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 409.

of good natural parts but to have passed their lives in too much awe of the laws."[172] Dandamis' remark possibly reflects the *Sramana* movement's renunciation of social duties and societal norms. Apparently drawing from a separate account, Arrian reports that the Indian sage not only turned down Alexander's invitation to join his expedition—preferring life in India to what he perceived Alexander's expedition to be: a pointless and endless wandering around the world—but also attempted to prevent his disciples from departing as well. In addition, Dandamis allegedly expressed that "So long as he lived, the land of India was all he needed, producing fruits in season; and when he died, he would merely be released from an uncomfortable companion, his body." [173] Dandamis' actions and explanations convey that he was likely not a Buddhist sage but perhaps guarding against growing Buddhist influences in India. Dandamis' refutation of the itinerant lifestyle may be interpreted as a critique of the early Buddhist monks, who initially stood out among other renunciants for wandering the land all year long, prior to the advent of monastic life.[174] Moreover, the topic of the afterlife was an important point of contention and philosophical discussion between Indian philosophers and even among Buddhist sects. Dandamis' belief in being released from his material body upon death appears to presuppose the existence of an unchanging and uncorrupted Self or *Atman*, an eternalist notion often associated with the Indian Upanisadic tradition.[175] Such a notion is rejected in Buddhist philosophy through the breakdown of the person into five changing *skandhas* (body, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness) and the concept of *anatman* (meaning non-self).[176] Therefore, Alexander's discussion with Dandamis through Onesicritus might shed light on

[172] Ibid, *Lives* 65, 409.
[173] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 7.2.3-4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 207.
[174] John S. Strong, *Buddhisms: An Introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 171.
[175] Ibid., 125-126.
[176] Ibid., 129.

contemporary religious and philosophical responses to the early (pre-Ashoka) spread of Buddhist ideas.

Although Dandamis refused Alexander's offer and attempted to prevent his disciples from going physically and perhaps spiritually astray, another Indian guru, Calanus, joined the expedition.[177] By actively and publicly facilitating cultural discussion, whether by testing the rebellious gymnosophists, by sending one of the philosophers in his army to speak with a respected Indian sage, or by requesting the sage to join his expedition, Alexander left a positive impression of learning about foreign cultures and customs on his followers, many of whom he would settle in Central Asia and Northern India.

After Alexander's death, fascination with Indian religion and culture endured. Alexander's empire was split, and Bactria came under Seleucid rule. Megasthenes, a Seleucid ambassador who lived in Arachosia, was sent to the Mauryan Empire of India and published a popular ethnographic work studying the culture of the Indian people.[178] Although his work is now lost, Arrian makes many references to it in his *Indica*. Megasthenes supposedly reports, "As for a Heracles reaching India, as the prevalent story goes, the Indians themselves call him 'Indigenous.'"[179] It is likely that Megasthenes syncretically aligned Herakles with an Indian deity, a phenomenon of cultural diffusion found elsewhere during the Hellenistic period, when more and more Greek immigrants were living among Asian and Egyptian communities. János Harmatta argues, "In eastern Iran, as everywhere, the Greeks attempted to understand local

[177] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 65, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 409; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 7.2.4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 207.

[178] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 5.6.2, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 19.

[179] Ibid., *Anabasis of Alexander* 8.8.4, 235.

religious ideas and to identify local divinities with Greek ones."[180] Megasthenes' account thus serves as another example of the developing interest in drawing syncretic comparisons between Greek and non-Greek religions. In this way, even on a spiritual level, there existed an environment of close cross-cultural interaction.

Megasthenes' ethnographic study might also provide one of the earliest attested encounters with Indian Buddhists. Alain Christol argues that one category of Indian philosophers, referred to as the "garmanai" by Megasthenes in the Greek geographer Strabo's work, may be "a corruption of sarmanes, σαρμᾶνες, representing the Sanskrit śramaṇa, Buddhist ascetics…"[181] I concur with Erik Seldeslachts, however, that such an association is premature, given the fact that the Buddhists were one among many sects of the *Sramana* movement.[182] Nevertheless, it is still possible that early Buddhists were among the Indian philosophers that interested Megasthenes.

Alexander's discussions with the gymnosophists captured the imagination of the ancient world, with the tale reappearing in numerous fanciful accounts, such as the *Alexander Romance*.[183] Likewise, Megasthenes' work enjoyed widespread popularity, cited by Western scholars such as Arrian and Strabo, living thousands of miles away from the Indian subcontinent,

---

[180] János Harmatta, "Religions in the Kushan Empire," in *History of Civilization of Central Asia: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 314.

[181] Stefano Beggiora, "Indian Ethnography in Alexandrian Sources: A Missed Opportunity?" in *With Alexander in India & Central Asia: Moving East & Back to West,* ed. Claudia Antonetti and Paolo Biagi (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 242.

[182] Erik Seldeslachts, "Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 135-136.

[183] Erik Seldeslachts, "Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 241; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Greek Alexander Romance,* trans. Richard Stoneman (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 131-132; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Romance of Alexander the Great*, trans. Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 121-122.

and used as "an indispensable work of reference on India for the entire ancient world."[184] Alexander and Megasthenes, as well as others that might have traveled to India, nurtured a newfound fascination with Indian culture and religion. Meanwhile in India, the ancient city of Taxila, situated in the vicinity of where Alexander first discussed with the Indian gymnosophists, became a symbolic meeting point between two separate worlds. As Stefano Beggiora puts it, Taxila and the meeting of Alexander with the gymnosophists would be "considered in the later Indian literature a kind of archetype of mutual recognition between two civilizations, that will lay the roots of the scientific and artistic Hellenistic syncretism."[185] Indeed, one such work of literature, the *Milinda Panha*, would tie the archetype of Alexander with a king from Bactria, illustrating a seemingly Alexander-esque type of contact between early Buddhism and the Bactrians of Central Asia.

### 4. Bactrian King Menander and Buddhist Monk Nagasena

The Pali text *Milinda Panha* (Questions of Menander) is a famous work of early Buddhist literature. The same tale was known to Chinese Buddhists under the title *Nagasena Bhiksu Sutra* (The Discourse of the Monk Nagasena).[186] The *Milinda Panha* retells a series of conversations between King Menander and a Buddhist monk named Nagasena. Details of the dialogue are likely fanciful, as evident in some clearly anachronistic features, such as Menander's interactions at the beginning of the story with long-deceased philosophers that were contemporary with the

[184] A. H. Dani and Paul Bernard, "Alexander and his Successors in Central Asia," in *History of Civilization of Central Asia: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 97.

[185] Stefano Beggiora, "Indian Ethnography in Alexandrian Sources: A Missed Opportunity?" in *With Alexander in India & Central Asia: Moving East & Back to West,* ed. Claudia Antonetti and Paolo Biagi (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 243.

[186] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhara," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 56.

Buddha.[187] Nevertheless, the Buddhist dialogue speaks of a real Bactrian king and expresses important yet subtle thematic parallels with Alexander and his discussion with the gymnosophists, preparing Buddhism in India for its subsequent transmission into Bactria.

Who was Menander? The *Milinda Panha* refers to the king and his 500 companions as the *Yonaka* in Pali. The term is likely related to the Sanskrit word *Yavana,* used to describe the Greeks. The suffix "-ka" signifies "little," so the term *Yonaka* might best be translated as "little Greek" or "Greekling."[188] I agree with I. B. Horner's assessment that the term was used to describe the mixed peoples descended from the Greek [and Macedonian] settlers of Bactria.[189] According to the *Milinda Panha,* Menander was born in "the village called Kalasi" in "a land between two rivers called Alasanda…"[190] Scholars generally agree that this "Alasanda" refers to the Bactrian city of Alexandria in the Caucasus, mentioned earlier.[191] Greek sources also make mention of a certain Bactrian king Menander. Plutarch makes the following reference in his *Moralia*: "Μενάνδρου δέ τινος ἐν Βάκτροις ἐπιεικῶς βασιλεύσαντος…"[192] (Menander who had been ruling the Bactrians well…). Strabo records that a certain Menander played a role in Bactrian military incursions into Northern India around 180 BC:

> The Greeks who caused Bactria to revolt grew so powerful on account of the fertility of the country that they became masters, not only of Ariana, but also of India, as Apollodorus of Artemita says: and more tribes were subdued by them than by Alexander—by Menander in particular (at least if he actually crossed the Hypanis

---

[187] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhara," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 55.

[188] David H. Sick, "When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17.3, no. 3 (July, 2007): 272.

[189] *Milinda's Questions Vol. I,* trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac & Company, 1969), 2.

[190] Ibid., 114.

[191] William Woodthorpe Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria & India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 420; A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), 74.

[192] Plutarch, *Moralia Vol. X,* Precepts of Statecraft 28, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 321 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 278.

towards the east and advanced as far as the Imaüs), for some were subdued by him personally and others by Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus the king of the Bactrians…[193]

Departing from his Bactrian homeland, Menander soon came to govern his own Indo-Greek kingdom from India, reigning sometime around 160 – 130 BC, independent of the Bactrian government in Central Asia.[194] Findings of his coins suggest that "[Menander] ruled from the Kabul valley in the west to the Ravi in the east, and from the Swat valley in the north to northern Arachosia in the south."[195] In other words, his kingdom centered around modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ruling an expanse of territory that linked southern portions of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria with the northwestern regions of India once controlled by Alexander the Great, Menander attracted the attention of Western scholars who, like Strabo and apparently Apollodorus of Artemita, made comparisons between the successful Bactrian king and the Macedonian conqueror.

In the Buddhist tradition, Alexander's relevance to Menander was likely highlighted more so in both kings' approaches to Indian religion and wisdom rather than in military success. The *Milinda Panha* begins with Menander already reigning as king. Although his impressive army is attested, the Bactrian king is first and extensively described as wise and well-versed in Indian traditions, mentioned as being "acclaimed chief of the leaders of the numerous schools of thought," and referred to as "fond of discussion and eager for conversation with natural philosophers, sophists and others of the sort…"[196] It is Menander's spiritual and philosophical interests rather than his militaristic aspirations that are the focus of the *Milinda Panha.* Testing the wit of six reputed Indian philosophers (considered heretics in the Buddhist tradition),

---

[193] Strabo, *Geography Vol. V: Books 10-12,* 11.11.1, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library 211 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 279-281.

[194] *Milinda's Questions Vol. I,* trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac & Company, 1969), xxii.

[195] A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), 97.

[196] *Milinda's Questions Vol. I,* trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac & Company, 1969), 5-6.

Menander makes a pastime of humiliating and reducing them to silence by giving them questions that they are unable to answer. His questionings of ascetics and brahmans parallel Alexander's testing of Indian gymnosophists and search for Indian sages over a century earlier. Differing from Alexander's case, the Indian philosophers are unable to answer Menander's riddles. Despite the opposite result, the aggressiveness with which Menander pursues answers is reminiscent of Alexander. The *Milinda Panha* records: "Then it occurred to King Milinda: 'India is indeed empty, India is void indeed. There is no ascetic or brahman able to converse with me to dispel my doubts.'"[197] The tone that Menander seems to exhibit is, as David Sick points out, noticeably agonistic.[198] This dialogue is not a discussion between equals. Just as Alexander threatened to kill the first gymnosophist who responded with an unsatisfactory answer, Menander expresses a similar sense of superiority over his defeated Indian opponents.

Only when the Buddhist monk Nagasena arrives onto the scene does the Bactrian king not only find his match but is also visibly shaken with fear, colorfully described in over a dozen analogies of animals being trapped by their natural enemies or predators (e.g. "like an elephant surrounded by rhinoceroses, like a cobra surrounded by eagles…")[199] During their discussion, Nagasena proposes that Menander speak in the language of the learned rather than the language of kings. The learned converse through discussion and refutation without fear of consequence. By comparison, Nagasena explains, "When kings are conversing, sire, they approve of some matter and order a punishment for whoever disagrees with that matter, saying, 'Inflict a punishment on him'—it is thus, sire, that kings converse."[200] Taking it under consideration, Menander agrees to the proposal. The language of kings that Nagesena describes is reminiscent

---

[197] Ibid., 8.

[198] David H. Sick, "When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17.3, no. 3 (July, 2007): 271.

[199] *Milinda's Questions Vol. I,* trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac & Company, 1969), 31.

[200] Ibid., 39.

of Alexander's when interrogating the gymnosophists with the threat of execution for poor answers. By agreeing to converse in the language of the learned, Menander, as David Sick puts it, "exceeds Alexander as a philosopher, in that he agrees to continue the conversation under the rules prescribed by Nagasena…"[201] Alternatively, considering the reversal of Alexander's threat and his rewarding of the gymnosophists upon hearing their answers, Alexander too can be viewed as understanding and ultimately respecting the language of the learned. The two kings' shared curiosity with Indian wisdom and abandonment of their initial approach and method of dialectic emphasizes their thematic similarities. By potentially evoking Alexander's encounter with and treatment of the gymnosophists, the *Milinda Panha* presents Menander in the archetype set by Alexander of a *Yonaka,* or Bactrian "Greek," king.

According to the *Milinda Panha*, Menander ultimately converted to Buddhism, as a result of his experiences with Nagasena. A more moderate stance has been taken by most scholars: that the real Bactrian king was at least favorably disposed to the Buddhist community and ideas.[202] Nevertheless, findings potentially indicating Menander's conversion to Buddhism have been discovered. A coin of Menander displays what appears to be a *dharmachakra* (eight-spoked wheel)—an important Buddhist symbol that represented the Buddha's teachings as well as the cycle of reincarnation (figure 2.2).[203] Plutarch's reference in his *Moralia* to Menander's funeral may also contain traces of Buddhist influence: "…the cities celebrated his funeral as usual in other respects, but in respect to his remains they put forth rival claims and only with difficulty came to terms, agreeing that they should divide the ashes equally and go away and should erect

---

[201] David H. Sick, "When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17.3, no. 3 (July, 2007): 276.

[202] Erik Seldeslachts, "Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 142.

[203] Percy Gardner and Reginald Stuart Poole, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum* Vol. 3. (London: Order of the Trustees, 1886), 50; PI. XII. 7; Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 47.

monuments to him in all their cities."[204] Plutarch points out that Menander's remains, after being cremated, were split among his followers across the kingdom. This practice of cremation and dividing of the ashes matches the treatment of the Buddha's remains, which were likewise divided by his disciples and by Ashoka, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, it is possible that the monuments that Plutarch refers to are in fact stupas, which housed relics of the Buddha and other Buddhist saints. These material and literary evidence provide clues to a potentially real connection between the Bactrian king and the Buddhist devotees of his realm.

In the *Milinda Panha*, the Bactrian king was not alone in his conversion. Menander's own army of 500 Bactrian Greeks applaud and cheer Nagasena as the Buddhist monk manages to answer their king's question.[205] More definitively, Anantakaya, who David Sick proposes is a transliteration of Antiochus, also declared himself as a Buddhist layperson after listening to Nagasena.[206] As Buddhism was transmitted to Central Asia, attracting curious people from all levels of society, it acquired new Greek and native Bactrian influences, which shall presently be discussed.

### 5. Greek and Native Bactrian Influences on Buddhism

The cultural transition between the fall of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria around 125 BC and the rise of the Kushan Empire in Central Asia, though obscured by a shortage of literary evidence, undoubtedly created a new environment—one in which Bactrians lost their autonomy and ultimately lived under Kushan rule. Nevertheless, the transmission of Buddhism into the Central Asian milieu shows signs of extensive Bactrian involvement on a local, artistic

---

[204] Plutarch, *Moralia Vol. X,* Precepts of Statecraft 28, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 321 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 279.

[205] Ibid., 37.

[206] David H. Sick, "When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17.3, no. 3 (July, 2007): 272; *Milinda's Questions Vol. I,* trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac & Company, 1969), 41.

level. Although politically stripped of power, the multicultural societies of Greeks, Macedonians and native Bactrians, remnants of the former kingdom of Bactria, played a fundamental role in the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia.

According to ancient Buddhist legends, the first anthropomorphic depiction of the Buddha was made as early as the Buddha's lifetime. While the Buddha was preaching to his deceased mother in *Trayastrimsa* Heaven, King Udayana of Vatsa allegedly instructed a team of artists to craft a sandalwood statue of the Buddha. When the Buddha returned from heaven, the statue came to life and bowed. The Buddha then predicted that the statue would play an important role in the spread of Buddhism after his death.[207] This legend, reproduced and echoed in other Buddhist tales, expresses that anthropomorphic portrayals of the Buddha existed and were approved since the founding of the religion.

Nevertheless, such an embrace of realistic depictions is contradicted by the earliest surviving Buddhist art, which appears to display a deliberate refrain from giving the Buddha a physical depiction. While gods and other humans are depicted in human form, when depicting the Buddha, "one sees instead an empty throne, a set of footprints, a Bodhi tree, a wheel of the Dharma, or some other symbol."[208] This aniconic tradition is most evident in the ancient Sanchi Stupa in India, which exhibits numerous sculptural reliefs that cover the miraculous events of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama's life. Instead of giving Gautama a human form, however, he is consistently represented by symbolism. For instance, at the eastern gateway, the panel "Miracle of the Buddha walking on the River Nairanjana" illustrates the Buddha walking on water by depicting a horizontal stone slab, representative of the Buddha's presence, drifting above the waves (figure 2.3). Menander too, as mentioned earlier, depicted the symbol of the

[207] John S. Strong, *Buddhisms: An Introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 100.
[208] Ibid., 100.

*dharmachakra* on his coinage rather than a portrait of the Buddha. By the time of the Kushans, however, the tradition of Buddhist art would be forever changed.

After the Kushan Empire annexed Bactria and other portions of Northwestern India, the ruling Kushans made use of Greek influences as a medium through which to convey Buddhism to their subjects. For example, the reverse of a coin of Kanishka I spells out Siddhartha Gautama's title in Greek letters: BOΔΔO (Buddha) (figure 2.4). During the Kushan period, anthropomorphic images of the Buddha first appeared in Northwestern India in the early first and second centuries AD. Scholars are divided whether they first manifested in Gandhara under Greek artistic influence or Mathura under local Indian styles.[209] Regardless of where the human representations of the Buddha first appeared, it was the Gandharan school of art, mixing Greek naturalistic designs with Buddhist subjects, that would be popularized in Central Asia.[210] Greek influences in Gandharan art include the portrayal of Herakles as the Buddha's *Vajrapani* (protector).[211] Holding his iconic club, sporting his characteristically large beard, and wearing barely any clothing, he is depicted standing protectively at the Buddha's side. Another example of Gandharan art, the famous "Standing Buddha from Gandhara," depicts Siddhartha Gautama in naturalistic Hellenistic form, wearing a monastic robe that is reminiscent of the Greek *himation* (ἱμάτιον) (figure 2.5). Siglinde Dietz adds that the Buddha's hair is designed in a distinctive Greek style.[212]

Bactrian Greek art portraying Buddhist subjects, inspired by the artistic output of Gandhara, left an indelible mark in Buddhism's transmission to Central Asia. The design of the

---

[209] Ibid., 99.

[210] Erik Seldeslachts, "Greece, the Final Frontier? The Westward Spread of Buddhism," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 142.

[211] Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44.

[212] Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhara," in *The Spread of Buddhism,* ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 58.

robes that the Buddha is depicted wearing on Kanishka's coin conveys what Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner calls "a Western Classical touch."[213] At Ayrtam, near Fayaz Tepe in modern Uzbekistan, the "Ayrtam Frieze" depicts musicians playing drums and stringed instruments, with acanthus palmettos—reminiscent of those in Corinthian capitals—gracing the background (figure 2.6). Scholars have interpreted these musicians as *gandharvas,* the celestial musicians in Buddhist cosmology.[214] More specifically, S. F. Oldenburg identified the musicians on the Ayrtam Frieze as a "portion of a group of five of the so-called Panca Mahasabda, 'The Five Great Sounds,' of the Buddhist art canon."[215] As evident in these artifacts, Buddhist figures and theology were complemented by local Bactrian Greek artistic forms and motifs.

Native Bactrian influence on Buddhism also impacted its transmission to Central Asia. Although David Alan Scott uses the general term "Iranians" to describe the peoples living from Iran to Central Asia, I will stick with the term "native Bactrians" as that is more specific to the indigenous population of Bactria and accounts for the less prominent (and thus different) reception of Buddhism in Iran proper.[216] As Buddhism spread into Central Asia during the Kushan period, Buddhist literature accommodated the Zoroastrian traditions practiced in Bactria and in neighboring Sogdiana. For example, Scott argues that the Indian term for god, *deva,* was dropped because of the demonic connotations of the similar-sounding Zoroastrian term *daevas. Deva* was thus replaced with *baga "*he who distributes (good things)" and *yazata* "beings worthy of worship."[217] Another motif, fire, was a recurring symbol in Zoroastrian ritual and worship due

---

[213] Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner, "Central Asia: A Melting Pot of Persian, Greek, Indian and Chinese Cultural Traditions," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51.4 (2016): 638.

[214] G.A. Pugachenkova, S. R. Dar, R. C. Sharma, M. A. Joyenda and H. Siddiqi, "Kushan art," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250,* ed. János Harmatta (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 345.

[215] Henry Field and Eugene Prostov, "Archaeology in the Soviet Union," in *American Anthropologist* 39, no. 3 (1937): 475.

[216] David Alan Scott, "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," *East and West* 40, no. ¼ (1990): 43.

[217] Ibid., 45, 49.

to its association with the chief Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda. Fire cults were likely important to the native Bactrians in particular, since Central Asia is believed to be one of the origins for this type of worship.[218] As a result, the motif of fire was incorporated in Buddhist imagery as well. At the Buddhist monastery of Kara Tepe, located near Fayaz Tepe in Bactria, a painting depicts the meditating Buddha surrounded by a halo of flames.[219] Another figure, proposed by Scott to be a depiction of Ahura Mazda himself, is also surrounded by flames but in attendance of the Buddha.[220] Therefore, this Bactrian painting might not only depict a syncretic fusion of the Buddha with the flaming attributes of Ahura Mazda, but also Ahura Mazda paying homage to the Buddha. The connection was evidently not lost upon the locals, as a graffiti inscription made during the third to fourth century AD records the words "*buddha-mazda"* in Kushan script.[221]

In sum, Buddhism was able to flourish in Kushan Central Asia thanks in no small part to the creative output and influence of the cosmopolitan communities already put in place by the Bactrians of the preceding Hellenistic period. The adoption of Bactrian Greek artistic tastes to depict Buddhist imagery popularized the novel anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha, as well as the incorporation of Greek subjects, such as Herakles and Corinthian capitals, into the Buddhist tradition. The interaction between Buddhist ideas with native Bactrian traditions and sensitivities, including the Zoroastrian and Central Asian connotations of *daevas* and of fire, accounted for changes to Buddhist terminology and the inclusion of additional symbolic motifs. By drawing upon the diverse cultures and peoples of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria, Buddhism was able to spread into Central Asia during the Kushan period through a process of artistic localization and symbolic accommodation.

---

[218] Boris J. Stavisky, "'Buddha-Mazda' from kara-tepe in Old Termez (Uzbekistan): A Preliminary Communication," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (1980): 91.

[219] Ibid., 90.

[220] David Alan Scott, "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," *East and West* 40, no. ¼ (1990): 60.

[221] Ibid., 60-61.

## 6. Conclusion

Buddhism spread from India to Central Asia by integrating into the Central Asian cultural context. While scholars have often cited Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire as well as Kanishka I of the Kushan Empire as the primary figures in the transfer of this Indian religion, I have highlighted their equally important policies of religious toleration and communication, emphasizing the importance of the cosmopolitan environment of Central Asia in the northward spread of Buddhism. Alexander the Great's settlements in Bactria, followed by the subsequent filtering of homesick and allegedly xenophobic settlers, and aided by the addition of new and better prepared waves of settlers by Alexander's successors, laid the foundations for a multicultural society in Bactria, receptive to foreign culture and ideas. Alexander's famous discussions with the Indian gymnosophists, followed by accounts of India by travelers and ambassadors such as Megasthenes, popularized and further cultivated an awareness of Indian culture and religions. In the Buddhist literary tradition, the archetype set by Alexander of an inquisitive Bactrian "Greek" king was preserved through the character of the Bactrian king Menander, who appears to have supported the Indian Buddhist community and whose dialogue with Nagasena is said to have inspired the conversions of his fellow Bactrians. Even after the Bactrians lost their autonomy under Kushan rule, key artistic and symbolic changes to Buddhist imagery sheds light on extensive interaction with the diverse culture of the Greek, Macedonian, and native Bactrian population. Greek and Macedonian influence popularized in Central Asia the drastic change in Buddhist sculptural works from traditional aniconic representations to anthropomorphic representations, while adding Greek symbolism into Buddhist imagery. Similarly, native Bactrian influence nurtured an adjustment in Buddhist terminology and artistic motifs to become compatible with local Zoroastrian customs and sensibilities. While the Kushan

period witnessed a flourishing of Buddhism in Central Asia, these advances in Buddhist creative output—influential in the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia—were made possible through the multicultural environment introduced by Alexander's Central Asian settlements and maintained by the inhabitants and descendants of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria.

## Chapter 3

### Heavenly Horses: Arrival of Han Wudi's Divine Horse in Chinese Culture

Created during the Han dynasty and dated to the first two centuries AD, the *Flying Horse of Gansu* (alternatively: *Horse Stepping on a Swallow*) is a bronze sculpture that depicts a horse galloping gracefully in the air, balanced by one hoof resting on a bird in flight (figure 3.1).[222] Prominently displayed in the Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou, China, it is also a common presence around the city. Large replicas of the same flying horse can be found galloping aloft, for instance, at the Lanzhou Zhongchuan International airport and the Lanzhou railway station.

Horses in general have long been a significant part of Chinese culture. The horse is one of the 12 animals celebrated in the Chinese zodiac, a product of ancient Chinese astronomy that continues to be popular in many Asian countries today. The hotel chain *Han Ting* (汉庭) has a logo of a galloping white horse, and a statue of the animal in each of its locations. Horses were and continue to be a popular subject in traditional Chinese paintings. Famous idioms, such as "*yi ma dang xian*" ("一馬當先": "one horse running at the front," meaning to "take the lead") and "*ma dao cheng gong*" ("馬到成功": "success once arriving on horseback," which expresses an "immediate success"), as well as proverbs, such as "*lu yao zhi ma li, ri jiu jian ren xin*" ("路遙知馬力, 日久見人心": "A long road tests a horse's strength; time reveals a person's heart") frequently reference the horse and attest to its cultural significance.

Despite, however, its well-established presence in Chinese culture, the horse was not always regarded as a subject of pride in Chinese society. Much scholarship, as I will discuss in detail below, has pointed to the natural weaknesses of the horses that were native to China. Horse riding was initially a foreign art, and one that the Chinese were late to pick up. Throughout most

[222] Tamsin Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art* (London: Merrell, 2006), 45.

of its history, China found itself in opposition to nomadic peoples that were renowned for their horsemanship. Ancient observers and modern scholars both attest to the difficulty for Chinese horses and horsemen to compete with their nomadic counterparts. How then did the horse become such a celebrated and significant animal in Chinese culture?

I believe that the famous heavenly horses *tian ma* (天馬) of Central Asia, which might have been the inspiration behind the *Flying Horse of Gansu*, can provide insight into the development of the Chinese horse culture.[223] In this chapter, I will argue that cultural exchange and innovation between Han dynasty China and the Central Asian kingdom of Bactria possibly played an overlooked role in the popularization of the horse in Chinese culture. In Bactria, the legacy of Alexander the Great and his famous horse Bucephalus inspired the creative output of Seleucid and Bactrian kings, who affiliated horses with the concept of divine kingship. Acting upon explorer Zhang Qian's discovery of heavenly horses, emperor Han Wudi popularized in China the divine horses of Bactria and Central Asia as portents of the Mandate of Heaven, attributing supernatural abilities to real horses and associating them with mythological Chinese creatures. In time, horses from Central Asia and horses in general were elevated to new heights, established in art and literature as symbols of divine power and as rhetorical representations of the emperor's strength and rule over the Middle Kingdom.

## 1. The Horse as a Foreign Influence

Prior to—and even to some extent after—the arrival of Han Wudi's *tian ma*, the horse in China was often associated with the notion of the foreign. Due to the rarity of findings of horse remains in early Chinese archaeological sites, there is little evidence for horses in association

[223] Stanley J. Olsen, "The Horse in Ancient China and its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 179.

with the Neolithic cultures of Northern and Southern China.[224] Furthermore, environmental factors hindered the growth of the Chinese horse population. Luce Boulnois argues that as China developed into a land of agriculturalists, the widespread planting of cereal crops resulted in poor pasturelands—limiting the ability to raise horses in most parts of the country.[225] Austin Coates and Susan Whitfield both ascribe the difficulty of breeding horses in China to a calcium deficiency in the land and water.[226] On top of unfavorable conditions for horse breeding, ancient Chinese horses were also physically disadvantageous for use in warfare. Related to the small-statured Przewalski's horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*), they had large, heavy heads as well as short bodies and legs.[227] Averaging around 13 hands (52 inches) in height, the diminutive size meant that these horses were not exceptionally strong and were generally unfit for combat.[228] Additionally, in an age when effective iron horseshoes had not yet been invented,[229] early Chinese horses suffered from hooves that wore out quickly.[230] Efforts to make up for the horses' physical shortcomings, such as procuring extra remounts and additional allotted time for the horses to recover, made long-distance military campaigns extremely costly and inefficient.

---

[224] Ibid., 163.

[225] Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 76.

[226] Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: 2000 Years in the Heart of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 54; Susan Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2015), 85.

[227] Chow Ben-Shun, "The Domestic Horse of the Pre-Ch'in Period in China," in *The Walking Larder: Patterns of Domestication, Pastoralism, and Predation,* ed. Juliet Clutton-Brock (London: Routledge, 1989): 106; Bill Cooke, "The Horse in Chinese History," in *Imperial China: The Art of the Horse in Chinese History,* ed. Bill Cooke (Lexington: Kentucky Horse Park & International Museum of the Horse, 2000), 30.

[228] H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 649; It is worth acknowledging that not all small horses were undesirable. The Venetic horse, standing 13 to 13.3 hands, was a prized animal in the Greek world. Even so, it was the larger breeds: such as the Thessalian horses (14.2 to 15 hands) used by Alexander's army and the Nisaean horses (up to 15 hands) prized by the Persian Empire that were often famed for their strength and ability as warhorses: Thomas Donaghy, *Horse Breeds and Breeding in the Greco-Persian World* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014): 105, 113-114, 188.

[229] Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 190-191, 241.

[230] Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 76.

In relation to horsemanship, the Chinese appear to have been relatively late to master horse riding as a military discipline. Early Chinese military works, including Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, dated to the 5th century BC, make no mention of cavalry (mounted warriors).[231] The first reference to horse riding as a military art in China appears to have occurred around 320 BC (for reference: 3 years after Alexander III of Macedon died), when King Wuling of the state of Zhou broke from tradition and formed a unit of horse archers in imitation of the Hu nomads.[232] Requiring his relatives and infantry soldiers to set aside their robes and wear *barbarian* style pants—appropriate attire for riding horses, Wuling anticipated and indeed faced considerable opposition from his advisors. According to the *Zhan Guo Ce (Strategies of the Warring States)*, Wuling's uncle Kung-tzu Ch'eng responded to the reforms as follows:

> I have heard the Middle Kingdoms described as the home of all wisdom and learning, the place where all things needful to life are found, where saints and sages taught, where humanity and justice prevail… a land looked up to from afar, and a model of behavior for the barbarian. But now the king would discard all this and wear the habit of foreign regions. Let him think carefully, for he is changing the teachings of our ancients, turning from the ways of former times, going counter to the desires of his people, offending scholars, and ceasing to be part of the Middle Kingdoms.[233]

Wuling's minister, Chao Tsao, likewise objected to wearing nomadic clothing, even declaring: "I wish to see loyal opposition carried to its fullest measure though it may mean my death." When permitted to speak, Chao Tsao continues, "Barbarian clothing is not thought well of in the world… If the garment be outlandish, intentions become disordered; when custom is flouted, the

---

[231] H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 649-650.

[232] Ibid., 650.

[233] *Chan-Kuo Ts'e,* trans. J. I. Crump (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996), 290.

people become rebellious."[234] Both Kung-tzu Ch'eng and Chao Tsao's complaints emphasize the vast and serious opposition against Wuling's reforms, which ran contrary to "the teachings of our ancients" and undermined the very belief in the Chinese states as the "Middle Kingdoms" of the world—beacons of civilization and knowledge. Moreover, the immediate backlash reveals two insights. Firstly, as most scholars agree, cavalry warfare was probably not an art native to China.[235] Secondly, the cultural stigma of accepting barbarian dress and customs might have delayed the earlier adoption of cavalry into Chinese armies. In the centuries that followed, horses continued to be a valuable *foreign* resource. In artistic depictions, as H. G. Creel notes, horse grooms and handlers are often represented by non-Chinese individuals.[236] Horses dominated Chinese foreign relations and remained a key *import* to China in exchange for silk and then tea.[237] In spite of the growing emphasis of mounted warriors in the Chinese army, China continuously suffered from the inability to breed sufficient native horses.

It was instead the nomadic peoples who frequently threatened China—the Xiongnu during the Qin and Han dynasties, the Mongols during the Song dynasty, and the Jurchen people during the Ming dynasty—who were closely associated with horses and renowned for their horsemanship. The Mongols, for instance, are known to have drunk fermented mare's milk (*kumiss*), a practice that may have strengthened the essential bond between rider and steed.[238] The so-called *Secret History of the Mongols*, written in the mid-1200s by an anonymous

---

[234] Ibid., 293.

[235] Bill Cooke, "The Horse in Chinese History," in *Imperial China: The Art of the Horse in Chinese History,* ed. Bill Cooke (Lexington: Kentucky Horse Park & International Museum of the Horse, 2000), 36; H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 652.

[236] H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 670.

[237] H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 648; Sally K. Church, "The Eurasian Silk Road: Its historical roots and the Chinese imagination," in *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2 (2018): 10.

[238] Stanley J. Olsen, "The Horse in Ancient China and its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 172.

Mongolian author, sheds light on the various daily as well as ceremonial uses of horses in Mongolian culture.[239] The observations of Song Chinese writer Hsu Ting appear to support the equine presence among the nomadic peoples: "When I travelled in the steppes, I never saw anyone walking. As for the army heads, each man rides one horse and has five or six, or three or four, horses following him as a rule, to be ready for an emergency. Even the poor have to have one or two." In addition, Hsu Ting indicates that the Mongols employed horse-raising techniques that were far superior to Chinese techniques, the latter of which had led to a prevailing "sickness" among Chinese horses.[240] Similarly, the Jurchens, renamed as the *Manchu* before conquering China and establishing the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911), sought to preserve their nomadic heritage as skilled horse archers by participating in the imperial autumn hunts.[241] In addition to adopting Chinese court protocol, Manchu emperors, officers and soldiers kept their ancestral traditions alive by regularly hunting game astride horses at the grounds of Mulan. Horses and equestrian activities, though long ingrained in Chinese culture by then, remained a medium of non-Chinese cultural expression for the nomadic rulers of China.

**2. Horse Culture of Bactria: Before Alexander and Bucephalus**

To better understand how the horse came to also be viewed as an integral part of Chinese culture, I turn now to the horse culture of Bactria and Central Asia, where the concept of the heavenly horses *tian ma* (天馬) first arose.

Like the nomadic tribes north of China, the ancient peoples of Central Asia had a long history with horses. Evidence for ancient livestock fences and large concentrations of horse manure has led archaeologists to conclude that the Botai people, living in what is now

---

[239] S. Jagchid and C. R. Bawden, "Some Notes on the Horse-Policy of the Yuan Dynasty," in *Central Asiatic Journal* 10, no. 3/4 (1965): 246-248.

[240] Ibid., 249-250.

[241] Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 186.

Kazakhstan, were among the first humans to domesticate horses around 3500 BC.[242] Chemical residue of the hydrogen isotope deuterium—indicative of mare's milk—on Botai potsherds conveys that these horses were likely kept as a source of food.[243] DNA mitochondrial sampling of modern horses, which has revealed evidence for considerable genetic diversity, suggests that the domestication of horses then spread from Central Asia and the Eurasian steppes, partly through the continuous introduction of wild horses to established, domesticated herds.[244] Further south, ancient findings from what archaeologists have referred to as the *Oxus civilization*, which underwent extensive urbanization around 2400 – 1900 BC, include ceremonial copper axes that were decorated with bronze heads of horses. Evidence for horse burials has also been found, with horses ritually and lavishly buried alongside their owners.[245] These findings convey a close as well as early interaction between horse and man in Central Asia.

By the time literary sources regarding Bactria appear, the peoples of Central Asia had already mastered horse riding and mounted combat. Herodotus reports that, during the Persian Wars (490 – 479 BC), Bactria was one of the nations that supplied cavalry, equipped with their native bows and short spears, to Persian king Xerxes' army.[246] Although he does not provide other details on Bactrian horse culture, Herodotus fortunately offers more information about the lifestyles of the neighboring Scythian nomadic tribes of Central Asia. He explains that the Massagetae Scythians could fight on both horseback and on foot. They were known to adorn their horses with bronze breastplates and golden bridles, bits and cheek-pieces. The Massagetae

---

[242] Debbie Busby and Catrin Rutland, *The Horse: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 115-116; Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35-36.

[243] Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36.

[244] Debbie Busby and Catrin Rutland, *The Horse: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 116.

[245] Massimo Vidale, *Treasures from the Oxus: The Art and Civilization of Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), 32.

[246] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. III: Books 5-7,* 7.64, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 119 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), 379.

also worshipped a sun deity, to whom they sacrificed only horses. Milk was a key element of their diet.[247] The adorning of horses with valuable ornaments conveys a tradition likely practiced by the wealthier Scythian elites. On the other hand, the noted capability of the Scythians to adapt to warfare on horseback and on foot as well as the ceremonial use of horses in religious sacrifices express the prevailing influence of the horse asserted throughout Scythian society. In a separate excerpt, Herodotus describes the Scythian milk in finer detail:

> …this is the way of their getting [the milk whereof they drink]: taking pipes of bone very like flutes, they thrust these into the secret parts of the mares and blow into them, some blowing and others milking. By what they say, their reason for so doing is that the blowing makes the mare's veins to swell and her udder to be let down. [248]

Evidently, the Scythians were known to milk their horses and drink horse milk. The important role of the horse in Bactrian armies as well as in Scythian religions and even in diet are a testament to the profound significance of the horse in Central Asian societies.

Herodotus also alludes to early traces of associating horses with kingship in Scythian culture. On the subject of royal burials, he reports that the Scythians "bury, after strangling, one of the king's concubines, his cupbearer, his cook, his groom, his squire, and his messenger, besides horses, and first-fruits of all else, and golden cups…"[249] At the end of the year, another sacrifice was customarily made, involving the ritual slaughter of more slaves along with fifty of the king's finest horses.[250] These elaborate posthumous displays convey the importance of horses as symbols of wealth, power and authority for Scythian kings. Although it is possible that similar

---

[247] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. I: Book 1-2,* 1.215-216, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 117 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 269-271.

[248] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. II: Books 3-4,* 4.2, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 118 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 199-201.

[249] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. II: Books 3-4,* 4.71, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 118 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 271.

[250] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars Vol. II: Books 3-4,* 4.72, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 118 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 271.

associations of the horse with kingship developed in the neighboring Bactrian societies of Central Asia, such notions have not been substantiated by Herodotus' account or by the Alexander sources that describe the Macedonian king's expeditions through Bactria.

Regardless of whether or not native Bactrians associated horses with kingship, horsemanship proved just as important to the Bactrians as to the Scythians, on the battlefield. During the critical Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC, the final encounter between Alexander III of Macedon and the Persian king Darius III, Bactrian and Scythian cavalry played a significant role in the Persian king's army. They were hurriedly mobilized as early as two years ahead of time (333 BC), when Alexander was still traversing through Asia Minor.[251] As the battle commenced, it was a joint force of Scythians and Bactrians that was the first to engage in what Arrian describes as an "ἱππομαχίαν" or "cavalry engagement" against Alexander's forward troops. According to Arrian, because of the numeric superiority of the Bactrian squadrons and the more protective armor worn by the Scythian horses, the Bactrians and Scythians initially gained the advantage and overwhelmed Alexander's mercenary and light cavalry contingents.[252] Although they were eventually defeated as more Macedonian troops entered the fray, the Bactrians and the Scythian horsemen proved to be formidable adversaries. As reported by the Macedonian officer Aristobulus, who according to Arrian derived his data from captured Persian battle plans after the Battle of Gaugamela, Bactrian cavalry was carefully positioned immediately to the left of the Persian king.[253] This position would prove crucial, as the Bactrian cavalry, arranged beside him,

---

[251] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-5,* 3.2.9, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 368 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 75.

[252] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.13.3-4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 265.

[253] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.11.3, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 257.

escorted and protected Darius as he made his escape when the battle turned south.[254] Serving as both the vanguard to the Persian army and the bodyguards to the king, the mounted warriors of Bactria and Scythia were given great responsibility in the Persian battle strategy at Gaugamela.

### 3. Horse Culture of Bactria: Alexander and Bucephalus

As the memory and legacy of Alexander the Great took root in Central Asian culture, the subject of the horse became associated with the new Bactrian king Alexander. The result was a natural and enduring integration of the myths of the Macedonian king, his famous horse Bucephalus, and the horses of Central Asia.

When Alexander III of Macedon arrived in the Persian satrapy of Bactria-Sogdiana, he made use of the horses that were raised in Central Asia. Arrian records the following: "Alexander brought his cavalry to full strength with horses from the vicinity, for a good many horses had been lost in the crossing of Mount Caucasus and on the marches both to and from the Oxus…"[255] It is noteworthy that the requisition of local horses to his army was among the Macedonian king's first actions in Bactria. Alexander had previously been riding in pursuit of Persian king Darius III, who was seeking refuge in Central Asia after his defeat at Gaugamela. By that point, Alexander's army had lost over a thousand horses to wounds and exhaustion.[256] Nevertheless, upon hearing of Darius' arrest by the traitorous satrap Bessus, Alexander pressed onward, increasing his efforts to reach Darius and to take Bessus by surprise. Leading a retinue of forces ahead of the main army, he pushed his own horses to the limit, riding for 400 *stades* (45 miles) in a single night at one point, until finally catching up with Darius, who had by then been

---

[254] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.16.1, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 275.

[255] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.30.6, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 331.

[256] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.15.6, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 273.

killed and abandoned in a covered wagon.[257] The pursuit of Bessus continued for some time after, until he too was betrayed and surrendered to Alexander by his compatriots.[258] With his adversaries defeated, the Macedonian king finally resupplied his army with local Central Asian horses. Nowhere else, in Arrian's account of Alexander's expedition thus far, does Alexander order the requisition of local horses.[259] Although the exact number is not recorded, thousands must have been conscripted to rescue Alexander's exhausted army. In this way, a close association between Alexander and the Central Asian horses was established, with the latter as the saviors to the king. Ordered out of necessity, it was the local horses that restored Alexander's depleted cavalry, at a time when the Macedonian conqueror was triumphant yet vulnerable and still new to the Bactrian environment.

Following his marriage to the Bactrian princess Roxana, Alexander led his army into Northern India, where his memory would become intertwined with that of his horse Bucephalus. At the climactic Battle of the Hydaspes (326 BC), between Alexander and the Indian king Porus, Bucephalus died or rather passed away into legend. Quintus Curtius Rufus expresses that the horse died of its battle wounds.[260] Arrian provides a different account:

> [Bucephalus was] not wounded by anyone, but worn out by heat and age; he was about thirty years old; up to then he had shared Alexander's numerous exertions and dangers

---

[257] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.21.9-10, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 299-301.

[258] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-4,* 3.30.3, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 329.

[259] The closest mention earlier of conscripting local horses was while the Macedonian king was traversing through Uxian country (in modern Iran). Having defeated the Uxians, Alexander ordered them to pay him annual tribute in horses.

[260] Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 8.14.34, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 355.

> and had never been mounted by anyone but Alexander himself, since he would brook no other rider; his size was large and his spirit noble.[261]

Plutarch refrains from making a judgement and offers a comprehensive outlook on the sources at his disposal: "Bucephalas died,—not at once, but some time afterwards,—as most writers say, from wounds for which he was under treatment, but according to Onesicritus, from old age, having become quite worn out; for he was thirty years old when he died. His death grieved Alexander mightily, who felt that he had lost nothing less than a comrade and friend."[262] Despite these discrepancies on the manner of the horse's death, it is clear from these accounts that Bucephalus' demise left a deep impression not only on Alexander but also on contemporary and subsequent observers.

The Alexander sources agree that after the battle was won, Alexander honored Bucephalus by founding the settlement of Alexandria Bucephala at the site where his horse died.[263] Bucephalus' service to Alexander was undeniably remarkable, having traveled alongside the king throughout the length of his military expedition, from Macedon to India. The horse's reputation for only allowing Alexander to be his rider might have given way to the famous story, recorded solely by Plutarch among the Alexander sources, of how the Macedonian conqueror in his youth was able to tame the wild horse when no one else could. Discovering that Bucephalus was afraid of his own shadow, the young Alexander directed it toward the sun and brought the animal under his control to the surprise of all the onlookers. Philip II's seemingly prophetic

---

[261] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 5.19.4-5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 61.

[262] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 61, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 399.

[263] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 5.19.4, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 61; Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10,* 9.3.23, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 369 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 395; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17,* 17.95.5, trans. C. Bradford Welles, Loeb Classical Library 422 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 395; Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 61, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 399.

response to Alexander after accomplishing the feat: "Son, you had better try to find a kingdom you fit: Macedonia is too small for you," is almost certainly an anachronistic addition made by Plutarch and his sources to embellish what had become the legend of Alexander.[264] Similarly, the *Alexander Romance*, a popular and at times mythical rendition of the conqueror's life originating in the early Hellenistic period, further enhances Alexander's association with his horse Bucephalus.[265] In the Greek and Armenian versions of the *Romance,* Bucephalus is described as a man-eating horse, making Alexander's ability to tame him all the more miraculous.[266] Surviving the Indian campaign, the Bucephalus in the Greek version of the *Alexander Romance* is present as Alexander lays dying from poison in Babylon. In a final act of loyalty toward his master, Bucephalus catches and ruthlessly tramples to death the slave responsible for poisoning Alexander, before breathing his last.[267] Clearly in Western and Near Eastern traditions, Alexander and Bucephalus became the iconic pairing between a king and his horse, inspiring even the Romans to fit their leaders, such as Julius Caesar, into the mold of a famed conqueror paired with a noble steed.[268] By the same token, the significance of the horse to the king was no less important in the East; Bucephalus had met his end in Northern India, and was thereafter immortalized by the settlement founded in his honor. The town of Jalalpur in Northern India came to be known to Chinese Buddhist pilgrims as the "Town of the Famous Horse," possibly a reference to Alexandria Bucephala and its namesake. Michael Wood himself reports of horse-

---

[264] Plutarch, *Lives Vol. VII,* 6, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 239.

[265] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Greek Alexander Romance,* trans. Richard Stoneman (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 17.

[266] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Greek Alexander Romance,* trans. Richard Stoneman (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 45; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Romance of Alexander the Great*, trans. Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 34.

[267] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Greek Alexander Romance,* trans. Richard Stoneman (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 157.

[268] Andrew Runni Anderson, "Bucephalas and His Legend," *The American Journal of Philology* 51, no. 1 (1930): 20-21.

shaped burial stones at nearby Garjak and a local legend that tells of a magical horse that was buried in the vicinity.[269] These reminisces of an eminent horse likely testify to the enduring presence of Bucephalus and the story's reiterations in local traditions.

### 4. Horse Culture of Bactria: After Alexander and Bucephalus

In Central Asia, the association of the horse with kingship and divine influence was popularized by posthumous cultural references to Bucephalus and Alexander. Founder of the Seleucid Empire, which spanned from the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia, and a former general and friend of Alexander, Seleucus I (reigning from 305 – 281 BC) minted numerous coin types that visually convey his strategy for consolidating his spear-won land and his own image as a rightful successor to the late Macedonian king. On the obverse of the silver tetradrachm, he depicted the likeness of a horse with two ox horns sprouting from above its ears (figure 3.2). I suspect that this unnamed horned horse is most likely a representation of Bucephalus, whose name Βουκεφάλας literally translates as "ox-head" (βοῦς and κεφαλή). Various interpretations for Bucephalus' name had arisen, even by Arrian's day. According to Arrian, some claimed that Bucephalus hailed from a famous breed of Thessalian horses that were branded with the mark of an ox's head on the thigh or shoulder. Others reported that Bucephalus had a white mark on its forehead that bore an uncanny resemblance to an ox's head.[270] The famous Alexander Mosaic in Pompeii depicts Bucephalus by coloring the inside of the horse's ear white, resembling an ox's horn (figure 3.3).[271] Regardless of what the original mark and origin of the name might have been, such a small distinction would not only have been more difficult to see on a little coin, but

---

[269] Michael Wood, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great: A Journey from Greece to Asia,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 190.

[270] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. II: Books 5-7 Indica,* 5.19.5, trans. P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 269 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 61.

[271] Andrew Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 137.

also harder to recognize, given the multitude of interpretations for Bucephalus' exact appearance and features. Instead, Seleucus' silver tetradrachms focus in on the head of the horse, adding two protruding and clearly visible ox horns to mythologize the memory of Bucephalus the "ox-head," and to make the reference to that legendary horse unmistakable. That Seleucus I would depict the famous horse on his coins conveys a desire to pay homage to and to make a clear association with the horse's master Alexander. Though in life, Bucephalus may not have wished for another rider, Seleucus tried to convey to his subjects that in death the noble horse had accepted him, for Seleucus was the next Alexander.

In other public portraitures, Seleucus I appears to have further capitalized on the association of Bucephalus with Alexander, by adding the ox's horns to his own image. Appian of Alexandria recalls one particular story regarding Seleucus: "…once when a wild bull was brought for sacrifice to Alexander and broke loose from his ropes, Seleucus held him alone, with nothing but his hands, for which reason his statues are ornamented with horns."[272] The story of Seleucus restraining the sacrificial bull—for Alexander, no less—is reminiscent of the tale of how Alexander single-handedly tamed the wild Bucephalus. Like Alexander, Seleucus was able to surmount seemingly impossible odds—represented in both cases by a wild animal—through a demonstration of his inherent capability. In the Seleucid tale, Bucephalus the "ox-head" was replaced with an actual bull. Appian's report reveals that the ox's horns were a recurring feature on Seleucus' statues. It seems likely that Seleucus sought to highlight stories such as this through his sculptures, not simply because they boasted of his physical strength, but because they would have reminded his followers of Alexander and Bucephalus, helping to strengthen Seleucus' claim to kingship by presenting him on par or at least in the footsteps of the late Macedonian

[272] Appian, *Roman History Vol. II,* 57, trans. Horace White, Loeb Classical Library 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), 213.

conqueror. Although Appian, living in Roman Egypt in the 2nd century AD, does not make the crucial connection, the presence of ox's horns on Seleucus' head would likely have expressed a visual association between Seleucus I and that famous ox-head Bucephalus, to contemporary observers.

Succeeding his father Seleucus I, Antiochus I (reigning from 281 – 261 BC) continued to reference Bucephalus on coinage. He commemorated his father, by depicting him with a pair of ox's horns on the obverse of the silver tetradrachm (figure 3.4). The memory of Seleucus had become mixed with Bucephalus, as apparent in the prominent horns sprouting from beneath his diadem. Portraits of Bucephalus alone continued to be made as well. Antiochus I minted numerous coins that, on the reverse, visibly presented the horned horse Bucephalus (figure 3.5). A great number of these coins were discovered in the Bactrian settlement of Ai Khanoum. They are believed to have been created in a local mint, either in Ai Khanoum or in Bactra. The local production of Antiochus I's coins depicting the horned horse is a clear indication of Central Asia's awareness of the Seleucid kings' creative representation of Bucephalus and its close association with kingship.

Bactrian kings, who ruled Central Asia after declaring independence from the Seleucid Empire around 246 – 245 BC, preserved the tradition of depicting or referring to horses on their coinage, while additionally associating horses with the divine. For example, Antimachus I (reigning from 185 – 170 BC) minted coins that depicted the trident-bearing Greek god Poseidon on the reverse (figure 3.6). Although some scholars have suggested that the portrayal of the sea god was chosen to commemorate a Bactrian naval victory, perhaps in the Caspian Sea or the Oxus River, I concur with Frank Holt that the decision to represent Poseidon is much more likely in reference to the god's reputation as a tamer of horses (or even as the father of the winged

horse Pegasus), considering the landlocked geography of the region and the horse culture of the native people of Central Asia.[273] Another Bactrian king, Eucratides I (who ruled c. 170 – 145 BC), prominently portrayed two horse-riders on the reverse of his silver tetradrachms and bronze coins (figure 3.7). These coins illustrate riders wielding long spears (potentially the Macedonian *sarissa*) in one hand and palm leaves in the other. Most scholars, following Joseph Pellerin in the mid 18th century, have identified the two riders by their iconic starred caps as the mythological Dioscuri: the divine twins Castor and Pollux.[274] The association between the Dioscuri and horsemanship is expressed as early as Homer's *Iliad,* in which Helen refers to one of the twins—Castor—with the epithet "ἱππόδαμον" (tamer of horses).[275] By representing the mounted Dioscuri on his coins, Eucratides I conveyed the divine and equestrian nature of his rule, while associating the horses with divine influence. Moreover, the popularity in Central Asia of Castor and Pollux as divine horsemen was not limited to Eucratides, as they also appear on the reverse of the coins of Diomedes (ruling a Bactrian rump state around 95 – 90 BC) as well as a wall painting in a Bactrian shrine in Dilberjin (if the disputed identification by archaeologist Irina Kruglikova is trusted).[276] Numerous other lesser-known Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings, such as Hyrkodes, Philoxenus and Hermaeus, depicted a prancing horse sometimes ridden by a king on the reverse of their coins (figures 3.8, 3.9, 3.10). The enduring equine presence in Bactrian coinage and art demonstrates the frequent representation of the horse as a symbol of kingship and divinity in Bactrian society.

---

[273] Frank Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 32.

[274] Ibid., 23.

[275] Homer, *Iliad Vol. I: Books 1-12,* 3.235, trans. A. T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library 170 (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1924), 146-147.

[276] Ladislav Stanco, *Greek Gods in the East: Hellenistic Iconographic Schemes in Central Asia* (Prague: Charles University in Prague, Karolinum Press, 2012), 110.

Although the Bactrian kings did not imitate their Seleucid predecessors by minting coins that depicted the horned horse, the memory of Bucephalus and his master remained strong in the Central Asian imagination. Many centuries after, in the early 1270s, the Venetian merchant Marco Polo encountered some of the lasting traces of Alexander and Bucephalus in the royal ideology and horse culture of Central Asia, while traveling through the province of Balashan (Badakhshan in modern Afghanistan):

> The kingship is hereditary, and the royal line descends from King Alexander and the daughter of Darius, the great Lord of Persia… Once there were in this country horses descended from the breed of Alexander's horse, Bucephalus; they were all born with a horn on their head, like their ancestor, Bucephalus. The only one to possess the breed was an uncle of the King's who refused to let the King have one, so that the latter had him killed. The widow then, in despite, destroyed the whole breed, so that now it is extinct.[277]

The Balashan kings' claim of descent from Alexander is most likely untrue. Nevertheless, the alleged claim demonstrates that Alexander remained a positive cultural reference for Central Asian kings to identify themselves with. In addition, though the horses themselves were no longer present by the time Marco Polo arrived, the memory of a particular breed of royal Central Asian horses continued to evoke the legendary Bucephalus. In this way, both horse and master lived on in Central Asian traditions as the noble ancestors of local horses and kings.

Bucephalus was immortalized by his relationship with Alexander, mythologized with the manifestation of protruding horns in Seleucid coins, and associated with kingship through common depictions of the horned Seleucus I. Aware of and influenced by the Seleucid use of Bucephalus' image, Bactrian kings embraced the role of the horse as a symbol of divine

---

[277] Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (London: Routledge 2014), 56-58.

kingship, as evident in the recurring representations of the Dioscuri, Poseidon and prancing horses on their coinage. Although imitations of the horned Bucephalus were not reproduced, the memory and influence of Bucephalus had become part of the time-honored horse culture of Central Asia.

### 5. Zhang Qian: First Report to China of the Bactrian Heavenly Horses

By the time China made contact with Bactria, the association of the horse with divine kingship had become a familiar concept in Central Asia. The expeditions of the explorer Zhang Qian initiated cultural exchange between Bactria and China, resulting in reports of heavenly horses in Central Asia and an unprecedented Chinese interest in obtaining them.

Scholars investigating the so-called "heavenly horses" *tian ma* (天馬) of Central Asia, introduced to China during the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), often associate the horses' honorific title with the famous emperor Han Wudi, who reigned from 141 – 87 BC.[278] After all, according to Sima Qian, it was Han Wudi who, impressed by the hardiness and large size of the horses from Dayuan, bestowed on them the title of "heavenly horses" (天馬).[279] His obsession with obtaining more of these horses culminated in the unprecedented and far-reaching westward ambitions of the Han dynasty. A close examination of Zhang Qian's travels, however, reveals that the association of these horses with the divine was not the emperor's invention but instead a claim made in Central Asia and first recorded by Zhang Qian. It was in response to Zhang Qian's findings, as I will discuss later, that Han Wudi popularized these foreign horses as divine animals.

---

[278] Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4; Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 54.

[279] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 240.

According to the contemporary court historian Sima Qian and later historian Ban Gu, the palace attendant Zhang Qian answered Han Wudi's call for an envoy to travel westward in 138 BC. The mission was to forge an alliance between Han China and the Yuezhi, a nomadic people who had been recently defeated and forcibly driven out of their homeland in modern Xinjiang by the powerful Xiongnu tribe.[280] To reach the Yuezhi, Zhang Qian journeyed through Xiongnu-occupied lands. Unsurprisingly, he was promptly captured by the Xiongnu. After being detained for over ten years, the envoy managed to escape, resuming his decade-old westward assignment.[281] He reached the Yuezhi, however, only to find out that the king of the Yuezhi had no interest in establishing the alliance with Han China. Regarding the king of the Yuezhi, Sima Qian reports, "The region he ruled was rich and fertile and seldom troubled by invaders… He considered the Han too far away to bother with and had no intention of… attacking the Xiongnu."[282] Agreeing to a formal alliance with the Chinese could reignite conflict with the Xiongnu. Having grown accustomed to his new domain in Central Asia and abandoning any intention to reclaim the old Yuezhi homeland in Xinjiang, the king of Yuezhi turned down Zhang Qian's offer.

Unwilling to return to China with only news of failure, Zhang Qian continued his travels in Central Asia, accumulating a wealth of new knowledge regarding various unknown kingdoms and an awareness of the cultural importance of the superior horses raised in the region. The first

---

[280] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 231; Ban Gu, *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage: 125 BC - AD 23; An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty,* trans. Michael Loewe and A.F.P. Hulsewe (Sinica Leidensia Edidit Institutum Sinologicum Lugduno Batavum Vol. 14, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 207.

[281] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 232; Ban Gu, *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage: 125 BC - AD 23; An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty,* trans. Michael Loewe and A.F.P. Hulsewe (Sinica Leidensia Edidit Institutum Sinologicum Lugduno Batavum Vol. 14, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 208.

[282] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 232.

Central Asian kingdom that Zhang Qian visited was Dayuan (大宛), which is believed to be Ferghana, the northeastern portion of by then a fragmented Bactrian state. The character for Yuan (宛) appears to be a transliteration of the term Ἴωνες (Ionian), just like the Sanskrit word *Yavana* or the Pali word *Yonaka*, which was used in ancient Buddhist texts (the *Milinda Panha*) to describe the Greeks, or more accurately: the peoples of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria. Taken together, Dayuan would thus translate to "Great Ionians." Zhang Qian's report of Dayuan is of particular interest:

> Dayuan lies southwest of the territory of the Xiongnu, some 10,000 li directly west of China. The people are settled on the land, plowing the fields and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes. The region has many fine horses, which sweat blood; their forebears are supposed to have been foaled from heavenly horses.[283]

Zhang Qian's observations of Dayuan include the first record of the blood-sweating horses that would later awe Han Wudi. The appearance of blood-stained sweat was likely due to the parasite *Parafiliaria multipapillosa*, which caused the horses to bleed when engaged in physical activity in hot climate.[284] Most importantly, however, Zhang Qian notes that these particular horses were "supposed to have been foaled from heavenly horses." This important statement, preserved by Sima Qian, reveals that Zhang Qian had learned of these horses' divine origins by speaking with the locals in Dayuan. Drawing upon the horse culture of Central Asia, which by then was accustomed to the Bactrian tradition of associating the horse with the divine, the people of Dayuan related the divine genealogy of the local breed of horses. Upon returning to China in 126

[283] Ibid., 233.

[284] Stanley J. Olsen, "The Horse in Ancient China and its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 174.

BC, Zhang Qian reported his findings to Han Wudi, including the mythical stories that surrounded the horses of the west.

After his first expedition, Zhang Qian actively encouraged Han Wudi to maintain contact with the Central Asian kingdoms, by stoking the emperor's interest in foreign horses and culture. Through conversations with the explorer, Sima Qian reports, "the emperor learned of Dayuan, Daxia, Anxi, and the others, all great states rich in unusual products whose people cultivated the land and made their living in much the same way as the Chinese. All these states, he was told, were militarily weak and prized Han goods and wealth."[285] Zhang Qian evidently stressed to the emperor the inability of the Central Asian kingdoms to resist both military force and Chinese gifts, making it an excellent opportunity to exert Chinese influence into the untapped western regions. No less important is Sima Qian's comment that the "people cultivated the land, and made their living in much the same way as the Chinese." The presence of such a statement in this passage suggests that Zhang Qian also emphasized the *sedentary* lifestyles of Dayuan as well as Daxia and Anxi, believed by scholars to be [southern] Bactria and Parthia respectively.[286] In contrast to the backlash that King Wuling of Zhou faced when he first adopted the riding clothes of the Hu nomads, Zhang Qian perhaps sought to reassure Han Wudi that there was no shame in learning from the settled peoples of Central Asia.

Persuaded of the merit of such ventures and intent on spreading his own influence into the west, Han Wudi sent Zhang Qian on a second expedition to search for a direct route to Daxia. Although this project failed due to the unwillingness of intermediate nomadic tribes to provide passage through their lands, a new opportunity to reach Central Asia presented itself after the

---

[285] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 236.

[286] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 234-235; Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 65, 68.

Chinese, under general Huo Qubing, successfully campaigned against the Xiongnu in 121 BC.[287] As a result, the Xiongnu were driven out of the Hexi Corridor in the modern Gansu province of China, opening a new path to the western regions. Despite being stripped of his titles for his unsatisfactory generalship in the same military campaign, Zhang Qian continued to have audience with emperor Han Wudi, who afterwards appointed the explorer as the envoy to the Wusun, a nomadic people that lived to the northeast of Dayuan. From the Wusun, Zhang Qian dispatched assistant envoys of his own to Dayuan, Daxia, and numerous other Central Asian states.[288] In 115 BC, he returned from Wusun with 20 – 30 horses and foreign diplomats. According to Sima Qian, "On his return, Zhang Qian was honored with the post of grand messenger, ranking him among the nine highest ministers of the government."[289] Pleased with Zhang Qian's discoveries—and particularly, the horses of divine origin, Han Wudi henceforth reinforced the association of the Central Asian horses with divine influence by proclaiming them to be "heavenly horses." Persistently advising the emperor, even and perhaps especially in times of failure, Zhang Qian was largely responsible for the emperor's fascination with the acquisition of western horses and interaction with Central Asian culture.

### 6. Han Wudi: Popularizing the Heavenly Horses of Central Asia

Emperor Han Wudi capitalized on the discovery of heavenly horses as an auspicious sign that he had received the divinely ordained right to rule, generally referred to by the ancient Chinese and by modern scholars as the "Mandate of Heaven." Sima Qian writes that, prior to Zhang Qian's final return from Wusun in 115 BC, the emperor prophesied the arrival of divine horses:

---

[287] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 171.

[288] Ibid., 238-239.

[289] Ibid., 240.

> Sometime earlier the emperor had divined by the *Book of Changes* and been told that 'divine horses are due to appear from the northwest.' When the Wusun came with their horses, which were of an excellent breed, he named them 'heavenly horses.' Later, however, he obtained the blood-sweating horses from Dayuan, which were even hardier. He therefore changed the name of the Wusun horses, calling them 'horses from the western extremity,' and used the name 'heavenly horses' for the horses of Dayuan.[290]

Although Luce Boulnois, while analyzing this passage, accepts that Han Wudi had actually made the prediction,[291] I suspect that this passage instead sheds light on the propaganda that the Han government employed to justify its westward ambitions and to enhance Han Wudi's reputation. In 126 BC, returning from his first expedition, Zhang Qian had reported to the emperor about horses of supposedly divine origin. The concept of divine horses that thrived in Central Asia would thus have already been known to the emperor for some time. By claiming that he had prophesized for the coming of divine horses, Han Wudi diminished the importance of the middleman (Zhang Qian) while elevating his own role as the harbinger of heavenly horses to the Middle Kingdom. The propagandist nature of this pronouncement is further suggested by the need, expressed by the emperor, to correct his mistake in distinguishing the true "heavenly horses." Having finally come face-to-face with a breed of Central Asian horses, albeit from Wusun rather than Dayuan, Han Wudi was apparently overly eager to declare the animals' heavenly descent. Only afterwards, when Chinese envoys managed to bring back the same blood-sweating breed from Dayuan that were said to have been foaled from heavenly horses—did Han Wudi fix his mistake. The fact that Sima Qian would record the emperor's mistake,

---

[290] Ibid., 240.

[291] Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 77.

rather than omit his initial honoring of the Wusun horses, suggests that these were both public statements, the first intended for posterity and the second to set the record straight.

If Zhang Qian had reported years earlier that it was the blood-sweating breed from Dayuan that was supposedly descended from divine horses, why would Han Wudi publicly and knowingly mistake the Wusun horses as divine? I believe that Han Wudi sought to publicize the manifestation of heavenly horses as proof of his upholding the Mandate of Heaven: the ultimate form of legitimacy for Chinese emperors to rule. Uncertain if he would eventually receive the horses from Dayuan, or perhaps doubtful of his explorer's claims of an animal with such spectacular traits, the emperor immediately honored the Wusun horses as divine.

There was, in fact, precedent for using horse-like creatures as evidence for the Mandate of Heaven. In the 7th century BC, the Chinese philosopher Guan Zhong rebuked Duke Huan of Qi's claim to rule by noting the absence of the portents of the mandate:

> To those of former times who received the mandate, the dragon and tortoise appeared, the [Yellow] River sent forth diagrams and the Luo River its books, and the earth sent forth Cheng Huang. Although there are those today who, not having seen these three good omens, …still claim to have received the mandate of Heaven, have they not all missed it?[292]

The Cheng Huang, translated literally as "the yellow mount," was a horse-like mythological creature with camel-like features, such as a double humped back.[293] Although, as Guan Zhong concedes, the absence of omens did not stop ambitious individuals of his day from claiming the mandate, their claims to authority remained spurious and understandably questionable.

---

[292] Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Animal: Metaphoric Rebellion in Zhao Yong's Painting of Heavenly Horses," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture,* ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Y. Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 297.

[293] Ibid., 297, 329.

Conversely, the appearance of such omens as the Cheng Huang would serve as an irrefutable indication that the contemporary emperor had rightfully attained the will of heaven to rule. By hailing the Wusun horses and then correctly the blood-sweating horses of Dayuan as "heavenly horses," Han Wudi sought to *prove* to his contemporaries that his reign was justified by the Mandate of Heaven. At the same time, in doing so, the emperor shifted the paradigm for heavenly portents from mythological creatures of odd forms, such as the Cheng Huang, to real horses.

The acquisition of Central Asian horses became a major policy of the Han dynasty under Han Wudi. After receiving the horses of Dayuan, the emperor "sent a constant stream of envoys to that region to acquire them." When the Wusun tribe proposed a marriage alliance with Han China, the Chinese requested for a betrothal gift of 1000 horses.[294] Finally, when the king of Dayuan was discovered hiding his country's best horses in the capital city of Ershi (which most scholars believe is the Ming-Tepa settlement in modern Uzbekistan[295]), Emperor Wudi dispatched a caravan of envoys to bargain for a trade.[296] The king refused and ordered the envoys to be executed. In retaliation, in 104 BC, the emperor sent general Li Guangli to besiege Ershi. Failure was unacceptable to Wudi and, when Li Guangli's first attempt ended in failure, the emperor ordered him not to return. Instead, in 102 BC, the emperor sent a larger army to Li Guangli's position to ensure that the general succeed the second time. In addition, Han Wudi sent "two men who were skilled in judging horses… so that, when the conquest of Dayuan had

[294] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 240-243.

[295] Abdukakhor Saidov, Abdulkhamid Anarbaev and Valentina Goriyacheva, "The Ferghana Valley: The Pre-Colonial Legacy," in *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia,* ed. S. Frederick Starr (London: Routledge, 2015), 7.

[296] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 245-246.

been accomplished, they would be on hand to select the finest horses to take back to China."[297] After a lengthy siege, in 101 BC, the inhabitants of Dayuan assassinated their king and made an offer: a trade of 3,000 of their finest horses for peace. If those terms were not accepted, they threatened to kill their best horses.[298] Considering the present situation and the prospect of enemy reinforcements, the 30,000-strong Chinese army accepted the offer, picked their desired horses, and promptly returned home.

To be sure, the cultural usefulness of the *tian ma* was not the only incentive for acquiring these Central Asian horses. Armin Selbitschka discerns a *Realpolitik* bent in early Chinese diplomacy and convincingly criticizes the theory of the "tributary system" and its overemphasis on ideological motives—such as a heavenly sign of legitimacy—as unsuitable explanations for the Han dynasty's foreign policies.[299] Instead, as Selbitschka points out, a wide array of practical and diplomatic *modi operandi*, such as hostage exchange and marriage alliances, continued to be utilized by the Han dynasty to deal with contemporary political necessities.[300] Concerning the practical (as opposed to ideological) advantages of the *tian ma*, the Central Asian horses probably exhibited great military potential. The horses of Dayuan were said to be about 16 hands in height (63.66 inches), which would have towered over the native Chinese horses and been far more capable of carrying heavy loads (such as heavily armored soldiers).[301] In addition to sweating blood, horses of Dayuan were said to cover "a thousand li" (about 300 miles) in a day. Chinese poetry adds that they even had "a double spinal column" for additional comfort when

---

[297] Ibid., 248.
[298] Ibid., 249.
[299] Armin Selbitschka, "Early Chinese Diplomacy: 'Realpolitik' versus the So-Called Tributary System," in *Asia Major* 28, no. 1 (2015): 69.
[300] Ibid., 104.
[301] H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 661.

seated on or riding such a steed.[302] These factors made long-distance campaigns more bearable—a crucial advantage for the Han dynasty, which now occupied a far larger empire than its predecessors. As Frances Wood points out, while armies of the preceding Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BC) employed some degree of mounted horsemen, the reliance on and use of cavalry during the Han dynasty reached unprecedented heights.[303] Evidently, Central Asian horses were not only used by the Han military, but their significance appears to have also influenced the very composition of Chinese armies.

Despite these practical advantages for acquiring Central Asian horses, their cultural significance as heavenly horses should not be neglected. The relevance of ideological motives in acquiring the heavenly horses during Han Wudi's reign were likely an exception among early Chinese views toward foreign tributes—a point that Selbitschka himself reluctantly allows.[304] Furthermore, the political necessity for obtaining Central Asian horses might not have been as urgent as previously thought. Although initially harassed by the Xiongnu, the Han dynasty under Han Wudi had already soundly dealt with the nomadic threat even before the arrival of foreign horses. Recall that prior to Zhang Qian's return to China with horses from Wusun, the Chinese army under Huo Qubing had driven the Xiongnu out of the Hexi Corridor in 121 BC. Victories against the Xiongnu were so successful that, according to Sima Qian, "…the Xiongnu completely disappeared from the region from Jincheng and Hexi west along the Southern Mountains to the Salt Swamp. Occasionally Xiongnu scouts would appear, but even they were

[302] Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16; Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants,* trans. Helen Loveday (Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 77.

[303] Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: 2000 Years in the Heart of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 54.

[304] Armin Selbitschka, "Early Chinese Diplomacy: 'Realpolitik' versus the So-Called Tributary System," in *Asia Major* 28, no. 1 (2015): 89.

rare."[305] Later military campaigns by generals Wei Qing and Huo Qubing in 119 BC followed up on past victories by pushing the Xiongnu deep into the north.[306] Far from being oppressed by the Xiongnu, the Chinese were no longer on the defensive but instead on the attack.

The cultural significance of acquiring the Central Asian horses is perhaps most clearly conveyed in a hymn, allegedly composed by Han Wudi himself in 101 BC, after the surrender of Ershi and the conquest of Dayuan. Sima Qian records a short version of the hymn:

> 天馬來兮從西極，經萬里兮歸有德。承靈威兮降外國，涉流沙兮四夷服。[307]
>
> Heavenly Horses are coming from the Far West, traveling across 10,000 li to the virtuous one. By the Gods' will the foreign countries [are] conquered, they crossed the Flowing Sands [as] the barbarians are conquered.

Although Ban Gu preserves in his *Han shu* a lengthier (and therefore, a probably edited) version of the hymn, Ban Gu's lengthened hymn furthers associates the heavenly horses with divine characteristics and makes clear references to their role as portents of heaven's will:

> 天馬徠，從西極，涉流沙，九夷服。天馬徠，出泉水，虎脊兩，化若鬼。天馬徠，歷無草，徑千里，循東道。天馬徠，執徐時，將搖舉，誰與期？天馬徠，開遠門，竦予身，逝昆侖。天馬徠，龍之媒，游閶闔，觀玉臺。[308]
>
> The Heavenly Horses are coming,
>
> Coming from the Far West,
>
> They crossed the Flowing Sands,

---

[305] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 237.

[306] Ibid., 174.

[307] Sima Qian, *Shiji*, Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=5195 (accessed April 10, 2020).

[308] Ban Gu, *Han Shu,* Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=63224 (accessed February 24, 2020).

For the barbarians are conquered.

The Heavenly Horses are coming,

Emerging from the spring water,

Having a double tiger-like spinal column,

They can transform themselves like spirits.

The Heavenly Horses are coming,

Across the pastureless wilds,

A thousand li at a stretch,

Following the eastern road.

The Heavenly Horses are coming,

Jupiter is in the Dragon [101 BCE],

Soaring to the far and above,

Who could keep pace [with us]?

The Heavenly horses are coming,

Opening the gates to the faraway lands,

Carrying me high and above,

To the Holy Mountain of Kunlun.

The Heavenly Horses have come,

And the Dragon will follow in their wake,

I shall reach the Gates of Heaven,

I shall see the Palace of God.[309]

[309] Translation done by author, drawing from: Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Animal: Metaphoric Rebellion in Zhao Yong's Painting of Heavenly Horses," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture,* ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Y. Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 298-299.

On the surface, the hymn conjures the image of the emperor eagerly awaiting the arrival of the heavenly horses from the "Far West." The latter designation, though vague, is almost certainly an allusion to Dayuan, considering the emperor's known penchant for obtaining and honoring the horses from that state, as well as his recent victory at the siege of Dayuan's capital, Ershi. Upon closer examination, the hymn reveals the occasion for the horses' arrival into the Middle Kingdom and the intent of the emperor. In the third and fourth stanza, the hymn proclaims: "They crossed the Flowing Sands, For the barbarians are conquered." Han Wudi does not specify whether the barbarians he is referring to are the inhabitants of Dayuan, living in the "Far West," or the Xiongnu, who had been blocking safe travel across "the Flowing Sands" (or desert) between China and Central Asia. Regardless, the heavenly horses are arriving *after* the barbarians had been defeated. Instead of being presented as a military asset to save the Chinese from the Xiongnu threat, the heavenly horses are presented as triumphant prizes and auspicious symbols from the heavens to congratulate prior success. Near the middle of the hymn, the supernatural qualities of the horses are described. Deviating from the down-to-earth description in the report by Zhang Qian and Sima Qian's short version of the hymn, Ban Gu elaborates that the western horses can emerge from water, transform like spirits, and even fly. These are characteristics often attributed to the dragon in Chinese mythology. Finally, the hymn literally refers to the Dragon, as well as the "Holy Mountain of Kunlun," the "Gates of Heaven," and the "Palace of God" to further emphasize the spiritual and cultural nature of the enterprise. Ban Gu's Han Wudi boasts of being lifted to the heavens, thanks to these special steeds. Having proved his merit to the world through the defeat of the Xiongnu and Dayuan, Han Wudi had the honor of not only overseeing the introduction of heavenly horses to China but also riding them to the heavens, thereby claiming the Mandate of Heaven.

Whether in the form of tributes, trade, gifts or spoils of war, horses played a critical role in early Chinese interactions with Central Asia. Influenced by Zhang Qian's expedition to the western regions and the horse culture of the sedentary peoples of Central Asia, which had long associated the horse with divine influence and kingship, Han Wudi actively participated in the acquisition of foreign horses to bolster his own imperial legitimacy. Specifically honoring the horses deemed divine by the people of Dayuan and commemorating them in manners that recall mythological creatures such as the Cheng Huang and the Dragon, the emperor wove between Central Asian and Chinese traditions. Sending diplomatic envoys, waging costly wars, and being glorified in the poetic tradition preserved by Ban Gu, the historical and romanticized Han Wudi used the divine *tian ma* of Central Asia as portents of the Mandate of Heaven, legitimizing his right to rule as ordained by heaven.

**7. Legacy of the Horse in Chinese Culture after the Han Dynasty**

Long after the reign of Han Wudi (141 – 87 BC), the cultural significance of the horse in China endured. During and following the Han dynasty, ceramic figures of horses became popular funerary objects in burials.[310] In the tombs in Jiayuguan, dated between 220 – 316 AD, numerous rural scenes, including images of horses being herded, were depicted on fresco bricks.[311] In both literary traditions and artistic representations, the horse gained new prominence as a Chinese symbol of divine power and the state of the empire.

In literature, the memory of the heavenly horses of Han Wudi remained a prevailing image. Written by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th century, the popular *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義) romanticizes the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 AD and the tumultuous

[310] Robert E. Harrist, Jr. *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 19.

[311] Stanley J. Olsen, "The Horse in Ancient China and its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 179-180.

Three Kingdoms period that followed, in which China disintegrated into rival states vying for power. Most importantly, for this present study, the *Romance* features a horse named Red Hare (赤兔馬). Changing ownership among some of the most famous historical figures in the Three Kingdoms period, including the tyrant Dong Zhuo, the skilled warrior Lu Bu and the powerful warlord Cao Cao, Red Hare eventually came to be the trusted mount of the celebrated general Guan Yu, one of the leaders of the Shu Han kingdom, and posthumously deified as a god of war. In the *Romance*, Red Hare is described as thus:

> 「…有良馬一匹，日行千里，…名曰『赤兔』…」果然那馬渾身上下，火炭般赤，無半根雜毛；從頭至尾，長一丈；從蹄至項，高八尺；嘶喊咆哮，有騰空入海之狀。[312]
>
> There is a good horse, capable of travelling 1,000 li in a day… named "Red Hare"… Indeed, that horse is from top to bottom, as red as burning coal, without a hair of another shade; from head to tail, one *zhang* long; from hoof to withers, eight *chi* tall; it hisses, calls, roars and whines, as if soaring into the sky or diving into the sea.

The description of Red Hare recalls numerous traits associated with Han Wudi's "heavenly horses." Its red pigment echoes the visual appearance of the blood-sweating horses of Dayuan. Its ability to travel "1,000 li in a day" matches the reputed strength of the Central Asian horses celebrated by Ban Gu's version of Han Wudi's hymn. Finally, the references to "soaring into the sky or diving into the sea" parallel the supernatural dragon-like qualities that Ban Gu's Han Wudi connected with the heavenly horses, such as being able to fly and to emerge from water. These similarities suggest that Luo Guanzhong was not only well aware of Han Wudi's

[312] Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* Ch. 3, Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=97217 (accessed March 9, 2020).

popularization of the heavenly horses and Ban Gu's version of the emperor's hymn, but also sought to evoke the sheer power and divine nature of Red Hare by describing it with the elements most associated with the Central Asian horses.

The far-reaching Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD), which outdid even the Han dynasty in asserting Chinese influence and control in Central Asia, witnessed the flourishing of horses in artistic expressions. Emperor Taizong, reigning from 626 – 649 AD, resumed the acquisition of Central Asian horses to China. Desiring to commemorate his six personal horses, Taizong commissioned a stone relief entitled *Six Chargers of Emperor Taizong.* Each of the equine depictions was a carefully constructed portrait, accompanied with a few words expressing the horse's name and features as well as the battles in which the emperor rode them. Robert E. Harrist Jr. argues that "Taizong's project of recording the likenesses of his horses not only established a new tradition of horse portraiture at the Tang court but also reinforced a symbolic equivalence between rulers and their horses."[313] Although Taizong himself is not depicted in the relief, his imperial presence is conveyed through the majestic procession of the well-built horses. Similarly, paintings of foreigners bringing horses, popular during the Tang and Song periods, expanded beyond mere art pieces for viewers to admire, and could serve as a means for artists to reinforce or even question the emperor's claim to the Mandate of Heaven. In the painting *Tribute Bearers,* for example, Ren Bowen presented to viewers the dynastic strength of the former Tang dynasty through colorful depictions of the foreigners, their exotic clothing, and their horses (figure 3.11). The ceremonial nature of the painting boasts of the dynasty's power and influence. By contrast, in the painting *Five Horses,* Li Gonglin's rejection of what Harrist calls the "Tang manner of painting" and use of an austere portrayal of tribute bearers with "quiet, unheroic

[313] Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 19.

horses" indicated to observers the waning strength of the contemporary Song dynasty (figure 3.12).[314]

Subtle messages concerning the political state of the Middle Kingdom and expressed through horse paintings continued into the Yuan dynasty. In the painting *Noble Steeds*, painted by Zhao Yong in 1352, five carefree horses are depicted roaming about, with their handler, a non-Chinese individual, peacefully resting at the base of a tree (figure 3.13). If read politically, the serene painting may perhaps convey praise for a lenient relationship between the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty, represented by the foreign horse handler, and the Chinese state, represented by the relaxed horses. Indeed, the presence of a political message is further suggested by the painting's three inscriptions. The first is one by the painter Zhao Yong, who simply recorded his name and the date of completion. The second is by the poet Wang Guoqi, brother-in-law to the painter. He dedicates a poem to Yuanqing, whom Jerome Silbergeld identifies as Buyan Qutag, a Mongol military official of the Yuan dynasty.[315] The third inscription is by Liu Yong, a little-known Yuan official. Of these three inscriptions, Wang Guoqi's poem is probably the most revealing of the painting's intentions:

1. In the lofty grove, in darkened shadows green as if woven,

2. The groom dozes, sitting there with knees clasped.

3. First washed in the Pool of Heaven, these blood-sweating colts

4. Suddenly come charioteering through the tall catalpas like winged meteors…

12. Exhilarated, painting in color you copy their divine traces.

13. With the wind in their mane and mist in their hair, they soar like a herd of dragons,

---

[314] Ibid., 26.

[315] Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Animal: Metaphoric Rebellion in Zhao Yong's Painting of Heavenly Horses," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture,* ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Y. Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 325.

14. Variegated with the five patterns, puffing green vapors.

15. In the world today there are spirit-horses just like these,

16. To be taken for flashes of lightning in their wrangling and prancing…

21. Just now, as the dust flies up in the Huai Valley,

22. How did you create this real Cheng Huang?...

27. On the imperial birthday [amid shouts of] long-life and songs of peace,

28. The rivers flow clear, the ocean is calm, and armor is put away.[316]

Wang Guoqi makes numerous references to the heavenly horses of Han Wudi. The comparison of the playful horses painted by Zhao Yong to "blood-sweating colts" evokes the famous steeds that Zhang Qian encountered in Dayuan. The mention of horses "First washed in the Pool Heaven" is likely a nod to Han Wudi's hymn in the *Han shu* and its reference to how the divine horses magically emerged from water. Even the manifestation of Cheng Huang, the mythical horse-like creature that the ancient philosopher Guan Zhong listed as an omen for the Mandate of Heaven, is referred to in stanza 22. This poem, however, contains more than simply a recollection of the heavenly horses. The allusion to the Huai Valley was, according to Silbergeld, meant to convey to contemporaries the crisis that had recently erupted there. During the flooding of the Yellow River from the Huai Valley, Chinese peasants sent to control the flood turned on their Mongol leaders, sparking the Red Turban Rebellion in 1351—just one year before the painting's completion! Moreover, the dedicatee of Wang Guoqi's poem, the Mongol official Yuanqing (if Silbergeld's identification is correct), participated in the suppression of the Red Turban rebels. According to a posthumous account of Yuanqing's career, "For every one bandit hiding in the grass, he would hunt down seven, and all would be exterminated and

[316] Ibid., 319-320, 327.

disemboweled."[317] As evident in the severity with which he dispensed with the rebels, the recipient of the painting and poem was certainly no ally of the ongoing rebellion. The final lines of Wang Guoqi's poem, "The rivers flow clear, the ocean is calm, and armor is put away" suggests that, for the time being, the rebellion had been successfully suppressed. Therefore, the poem's reference to the manifestations of Cheng Huang and the blood-sweating horses seem to celebrate the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty's success in maintaining the heavenly mandate. Although this would ultimately prove to be incorrect, with the eventual victory of the Red Turban Rebellion in 1368 and the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, Zhao Yong's painting and Wang Guoqi's poem illustrate the potency of the horse in literature and in art to convey the nature of claims to the Mandate of Heaven.

## 8. Conclusion

Today the horse continues to be a popular animal in Chinese culture, celebrated in artistic, literary, and idiomatic expressions, evoking virtues such as strength, power and courage. Long gone are the days when horses were viewed as a weakness of China and horsemanship as a dangerous foreign influence, unacceptable for inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom. As I have argued, interaction and exchange of horses and ideas between Bactria and China, catalyzed by the visual representation of the horse with divine kingship in the former and the association of these divine horses with the Mandate of Heaven in the latter, might have played a role in the popularization of the horse in Chinese culture. Following the Battle of the Hydaspes in Northern India, Alexander the Great immortalized the memory of his loyal steed Bucephalus in the public imagination, founding a settlement named in its honor. Following the death of Alexander in 323 BC and the profound influence he had left on the peoples of Central Asia, Seleucus I actively employed imagery of the late conqueror's famous horse to promote his own legitimacy as

[317] Ibid., 326.

Alexander's successor. The creative representations of Bucephalus by Seleucus I and Antiochus I, in stories, sculptures and particularly coinage, introduced (or at least reinforced) a tradition of associating horses with kingship in Bactria. Adopting the tradition for their own advantage, Bactrian kings emphasized the equestrian and divine nature of their rule by affiliating horses with the divine through representations of the horseback Dioscuri, the tamer of horses Poseidon, and the prancing horses on the reverse of their coins. Interacting with the locals of Dayuan, Zhang Qian likely learned of and brought back to China the Bactrian association of the horse with divine kingship. Deeply influenced by his explorer's findings and capitalizing on the opportunity to claim the Mandate of Heaven, the historical and the romanticized Han Wudi of Sima Qian and Ban Gu's accounts popularized the heavenly horses (天馬) of Central Asia by comparing the earthly horses with mythological precedents and commemorating them as portents of the mandate. Following the Han dynasty, Chinese emperors, artists and poets continued to promote the use of the horse as a symbol of imperial and divine power. Whether through reference to Han Wudi's Central Asian horses in literature, through government sponsored projects such as the *Six Chargers of Emperor Taizong*, or through the development of horse paintings that could reflect the emperor's hold on the Mandate of Heaven, horses had become an integral part of Chinese culture.

## Final Thoughts and Conclusion

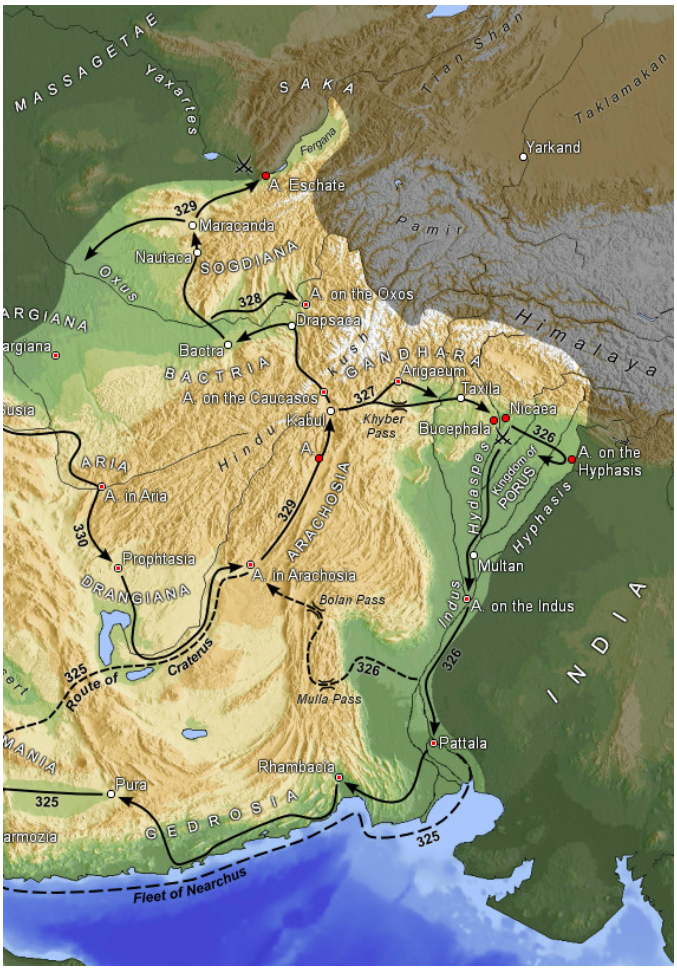
Alexander III of Macedon left a unique cultural legacy in Bactria that would have a considerable impact on the reception of his memory in Central Asia. His actions in Bactria and his unexpected death in 323 BC, coupled with the deeds of his successors, led to the emergence of a Bactrian cultural identity distinct from that of the Hellenistic world and encouraged the creation of a unique interpretation of Alexander specific to the Central Asian cultural context. Adjusting to humbling experiences of military defeat to Bactrian rebel Spitamenes and compelled by both political expediency and seemingly genuine romantic passions for the Bactrian princess Roxana, Alexander deviated from his conduct elsewhere in his expedition, refraining from instilling Hellenistic cultural unity in Bactria by permitting a fluid border with the nomadic Scythian tribes, and laying the foundations for his unique legacy in Central Asia as a just king of Bactria.

Buddhism flourished in Central Asia through a process of integration into the Bactrian cultural context. Alexander's settlements in Bactria, followed by the subsequent filtering of unwilling settlers and the addition of more prepared Greek and Macedonian immigrants, laid the foundations for a multicultural society in Bactria, receptive to foreign culture and ideas. Alexander's famous discussions with the Indian gymnosophists cultivated an awareness of Indian culture and religions, while likely inspiring the Buddhist literary tradition to fit the Bactrian king Menander into the mold of Alexander as the archetype of an inquisitive Bactrian "Greek" king. Eventually, under the Kushan Empire, Greek and native Bactrian influences, preserved by the inhabitants and descendants of the former kingdom of Bactria, aided the introduction of Buddhist ideas into the Central Asian milieu.

Cultural exchange and innovation between Bactria and China potentially contributed to the significance of the horse in Chinese culture. Alexander's relationship with Bucephalus left a deep impression on Seleucid and Bactrian kings, who actively associated themselves with imagery of the mythologized Bucephalus and then other divine horses. Likely learning of the Bactrian association of horses with divine kingship through the accounts of his emissary Zhang Qian, Han Wudi popularized the "heavenly horses" (天馬) of Central Asia as portents of the Mandate of Heaven. Chinese emperors, artists and poets after the Han dynasty continued to reinvent the Central Asian horses and horses in general as symbols of imperial and divine power.

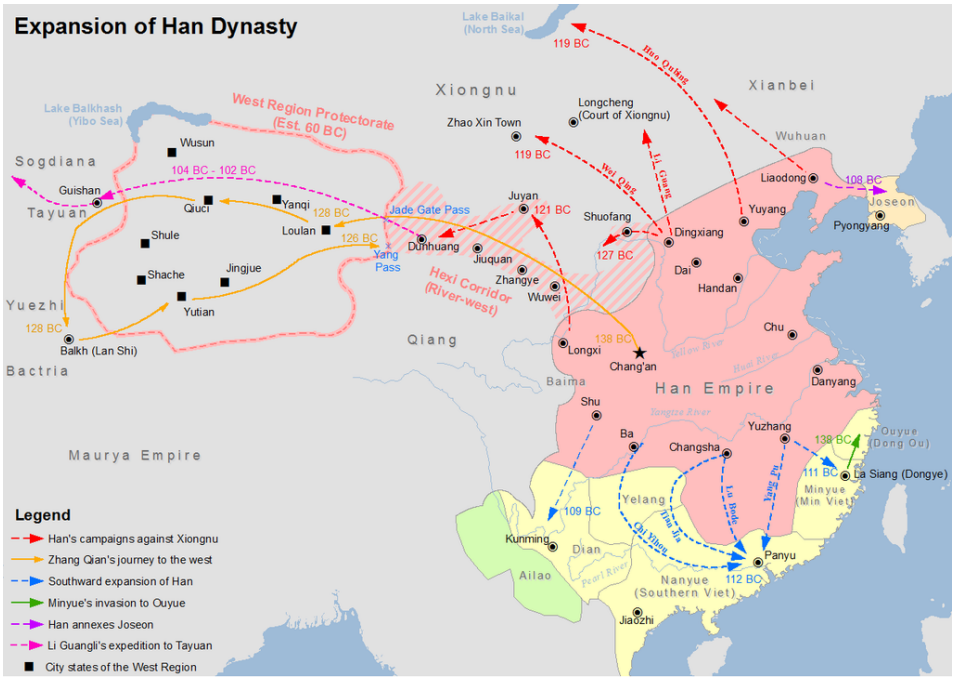
These three case studies shed light on just a few of the manifold ways in which Alexander's cultural legacy impacted the East. While he hailed from faraway Macedon, and died in distant Babylon, his presence remained strong in the Central Asian imagination. At the same time, these case studies highlight the role of Bactria as an important Central Asian hub of cultural exchange. Residing at the crossroads of three points of cultural contact, the inhabitants of Greek and Macedonian-ruled Bactria preserved the impression of Alexander as a just king of Bactria, an inquisitive ruler of the *Yonaka,* and a master of the divine horse, producing far-reaching repercussions in the Bactrian environment and cultural identity, Buddhist literary and artistic tradition, and Chinese horse culture and royal ideology.

## Figures and Maps




Map 1: Close-up of Alexander's Expedition in Bactria and India
Close up of "Extent of the empire of Alexander the Great."
Generic Mapping Tools / CC BY-SA (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)
Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MacedonEmpire.jpg


Map 2: Macedonian-ruled Bactria: Ai Khanoum, Alexandria Eschate, and Alexandria in the Caucasus
"Map of the Greco-Bactrian at its maximum extent, circa 180 BC."
Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greco-BactrianKingdomMap.jpg




Map 3: Expedition of explorer Zhang Qian in Orange and of general Li Guangli in Pink
"Map showing the expansion of the Han dynasty in the 2nd century BC."
SY / CC BY-SA (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)
Digital Image. Accessed March 24, 2020.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han_Expansion.png

Figure 1.1: Coin of Antimachus wearing a kausia
"Yonon-Bactriya tangalari." State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent.
Photographed by author on May 19, 2019.

Figure 1.2: Corinthian Capital from Bactra
"Corinthian Capital." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing.
Photographed by author on June 2, 2019.


Figure 1.3: Bactrian Goddess
"Statuette of a Bactrian Goddess." Termez Archaeological Museum, Termez.
Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

Figure 1.4: Amphora at Maracanda
"Amfora." Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand.
Photographed by author on May 21, 2019.

Figure 1.5: Krater at Maracanda
"Krater." Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand.
Photographed by author on May 21, 2019.

Figure 1.6: Sundial from Ai Khanoum
"Cylindrical Polar Sundial." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing.
Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

Figure 1.7: Sundial from Ai Khanoum (2)
"Hemispherical Sundial." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing.
Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

Figure 1.8: Native Goddess Sculpture from Ai Khanoum
"Female Figurine." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing.
Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

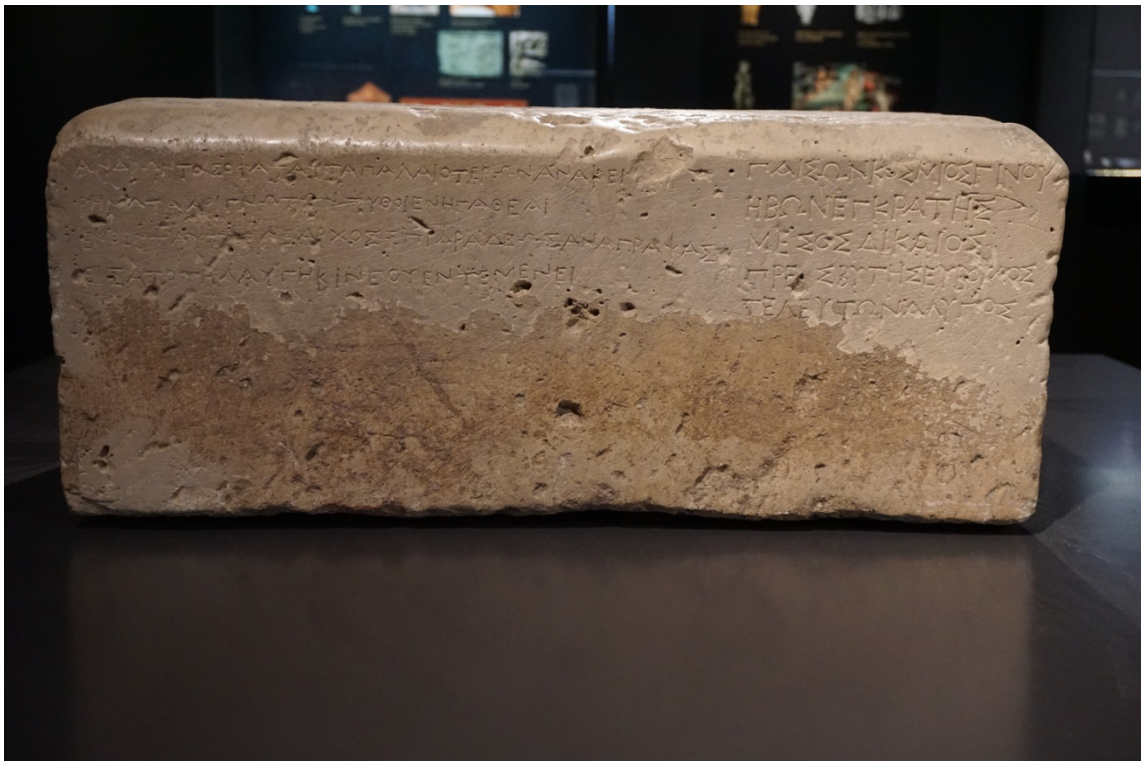


Figure 1.9: Delphic Maxim on Tomb of Kineas in Ai Khanoum
"Inscribed Base for the Stele." *Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Tsinghua University, Beijing.
Photographed by author on June 1, 2019.

Figure 1.10: Bactrian Aphrodite
*The Aphrodite of Bactria.* Second quarter of the 1st century AD. Gold. Tomb 6 at Tillya Tepe. 5 x 2.63 x 0.6 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 48-49. Print.

Figure 1.11: Bactrian Athena
*Ornament with an Image of Athena.* Second quarter of the 1st century AD. Gold. Tomb 3 at Tillya Tepe. 1.57 x 1.2 x 0.6 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 64. Print.

Figure 1.12: Bactrian Ganymede and Eagle
*Circular medallion with Ganymede and the eagle of Zeus.* 1st century AD. Plaster. Begram Room 13. Diameter 12.8 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 167. Print.

Figure 1.13: Bactrian Endymion and Selene
*Circular medallion depicting Endymion and Selene*. 1st century AD. Plaster. Begram Room 13. Diameter 16 cm. Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Compiled by Dunhuang Academy (Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017), 162. Print.


Figure 1.14: Fortress of Alexander (5 forts)
Nurota, Uzbekistan.
Photographed by author on May 22, 2019.

Figure 1.15: Kampyr Tepe walls (reconstructed)
Termez, Uzbekistan.
Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

Figure 2.1: Buddha flanked by Attendants and Corinthian Capitals
"Buddha with monks." 1st – 3rd century AD. Fayaz Tepe, Termez. State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent.
Photographed by author on May 19, 2019.

Figure 2.2: Menander's Coin with Possible Dharmachakra
"Menander Soter wheel coin." *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum.* By Percy Gardner and Reginald Stuart Poole. (London: British Museum, 1886), PI.XII-7.

Figure 2.3: Aniconic Representation of the Buddha at Sanchi
"Miracle of the Buddha walking on a River – East Face – South Pillar – East Gateway – Stupa 1 – Sanchi." Photographed by Biswarup Ganguly / CC BY (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0). 21 February 2013. Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Walking_on_River_-_East_Face_-_South_Pillar_-_East_Gateway_-_Stupa_1_-_Sanchi_Hill_2013-02-21_4433.JPG

Figure 2.4: Coin of Kanishka I with Buddha on Reverse
"Kanishka coin with Greek lettering "BOΔΔO" (i.e. Buddha)." Photo courtesy Classical Numismatic Group. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en). Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coin_of_Kanishka_I.jpg

Figure 2.5: Standing Buddha from Gandhara
"Gandhara Buddha." 1st – 2nd century CE. Height: 1 m. Tokyo National Museum. Digital Image. Accessed March 23, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhara_Buddha_(tnm).jpeg

Figure 2.6: Ayrtam Frieze with Acanthus Leaves
"Ayritom frizi." *Limestone.* 1-2 century AD (copy). Termez Archaeological Museum, Termez. Photographed by author on May 23, 2019.

Figure 3.1: Flying Horse of Gansu
"Horse Stepping on a Swallow." Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 AD). Bronze. Tomb at Wuwei, Gansu. 34.5 x 45 cm. Gansu Provincial Museum, Lanzhou. *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art.* By Tamsin Pickeral. (London: Merrell, 2006), 45. Print.


Figure 3.2: Silver Tetradrachm of Seleucus I depicting Horned Horse
"Silver Coin of Seleucus I Nicator, Pergamum, 281 BC." ANS 1967.152.675. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1967.152.675

Figure 3.3: Close-up of Alexander and Bucephalus in Alexander Mosaic
"Alexander the Great Mosaic (detail)." Circa 100 BC. Naples National Archaeological Museum.
Digital Image. Accessed March 11, 2020.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_the_Great_mosaic.jpg

Figure 3.4: Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus I depicting Seleucus I with Ox Horns
"Silver 4 drachm (tetradrachm) of Antiochus I/Seleucus I, Sardes, 280 BC – 261 BC." ANS
1967.152.671. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1967.152.671

Figure 3.5: Silver Drachma of Antiochus I depicting Horned Horse on reverse
"Silver Coin of Antiochus I Soter, Ai Khanoum/Bactra, 280 BC - 261 BC." ANS 1995.51.54.
*American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.54

Figure 3.6: Silver tetradrachm of Antimachus depicting Poseidon on reverse
"Silver tetradrachm of Antimachos, Bactria, 171 BC - 160 BC." ANS 1995.51.11. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.11


Figure 3.7: Silver Tetradrachm of Eucratides I depicting the Dioscuri on reverse
"Silver tetradrachm of Eucratides I, Bactria, 170 BC - 145 BC." ANS 1995.51.84. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.84

Figure 3.8: Silver Drachm of Hyrkodes depicting Horse on reverse
"Silver drachm of Hyrkodes, (Soghdia and Bactria, 200 BC - 100 BC." ANS 1944.100.63802. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.63802

Figure 3.9: Silver Tetradrachm of Philoxenus depicting a king riding a horse on reverse
"Silver Tetradrachm of Philoxenus, Bactria, 100 BC - 95 BC." ANS 1993.29.91. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1993.29.91

Figure 3.10: Silver Tetradrachm of Hermaeus depicting a prancing horse on reverse
"Silver Tetradrachm of Hermaeus/Calliope, Bactria, 90 BC - 70 BC." ANS 1981.44.1. *American Numismatic Society.*
Digital Image. Accessed February 18, 2020.
http://numismatics.org/collection/1981.44.1

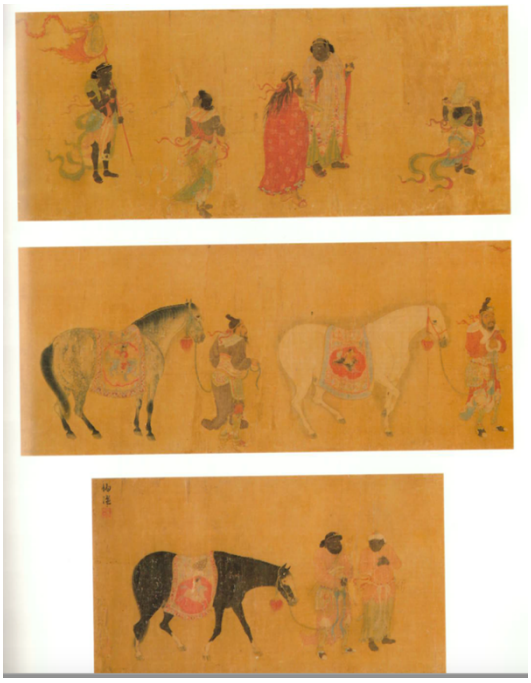


Figure 3.11: Ren Bowen's *Tribute Bearers*
Ren Bowen. *Tribute Bearers.* Mid 14th century. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 14 ¼ x 86 ¾ in. *Asian Art Museum.* The Avery Brundage Collection (B60D100). *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art.* By Robert E. Harrist, Jr. (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 95. Print.

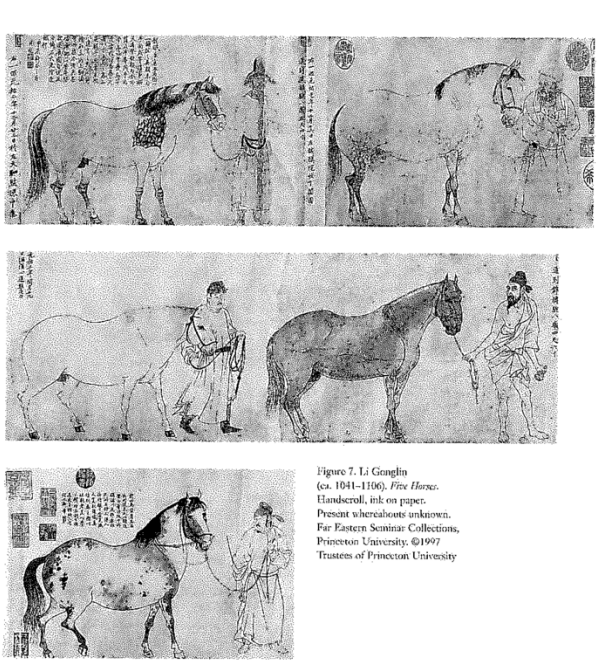


Figure 7. Li Gonglin
(ca. 1041–1106). *Five Horses.*
Handscroll, ink on paper.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Far Eastern Seminar Collections,
Princeton University. ©1997
Trustees of Princeton University

Figure 3.12: Li Gonglin's *Five Horses*
Li Gonglin. *Five Horses.* Late 11th century. Handscroll, ink on paper. Far Eastern Seminar Collections, Princeton University. *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art.* By Robert E. Harrist, Jr. (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 27. Print.


Figure 3.13: Zhao Yong's *Noble Steeds*
Zhao Yong. *Noble Steeds.* 1352. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 186 x 106 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Animal: Metaphoric Rebellion in Zhao Yong's Painting of Heavenly Horses," in *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture,* ed. Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Y. Wang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 306. Print.

# Work Cited

## Chapter 1

### Ancient / Primary Sources


Aristotle. *Politics.* Translated by H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library 264. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.

Appian. *Roman History Vol. II.* Translated by Horace White. Loeb Classical Library 3. London: William Heinemann, 1912.

Arrian. *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I-II*. Translated by P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 and 269. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976 and 1983.

*Chan-Kuo Ts'e.* Translated by J. I. Crump. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17.* Translated by C. Bradford Welles. Loeb Classical Library 422. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History Vol. IX: Books 18-19.65,* Translated by Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.

Herodotus. *The Persian Wars Vol. I-III*. Translated by A. D. Godley. Loeb Classical Library 117-119. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920-1922.

Livy. *History of Rome Vol. XI: Books 38-40.* Edited and Translated by J. C. Yardley. Loeb Classical Library 313. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Polybius. *The Histories Vol. IV*. Translated by W. R. Paton. Loeb Classical Library 159. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Pliny the Elder. *Natural History Vol. II: Books 3-7*. Translated by H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library 352. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942.

Pliny the Elder. *Natural History Vol. VIII: Books 28-32.* Translated by W. H. S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library 418. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Plutarch. *Lives Vol. VII.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919.

Plutarch. *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander.* in the Loeb Classical Library. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Fortuna_Alexandri*/1.html

Quintus Curtius. *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 369. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Sima Qian. *Shiji, Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/shiji*

Sima Qian. *Records of The Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

*The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*. Translated by R. B. Parkinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

**Secondary Sources**

Alston, Richard, Onno M. van Nijf, and Christina G. Williamson, eds., *Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age.* Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

Bernard, Paul. "An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia," *Scientific American* 246, no. 1 (1982): 148-159.

Bosworth, A. B. *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire.* Translated by Peter T. Daniels. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

Bulloch, Anthony W., Erich S. Gruen, Anthony Arthur Long, and Andrew Stewart. *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Cohen, Getzel M. *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Erskine, Andrew, ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005.

Garnsey, Peter. *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Hadas, Moses. *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Harmatta, János, ed. *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250.* Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994.

Holt, Frank. *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia.* Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988.

Holt, Frank. *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Lavan, Myles, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, eds., *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Lerner, Jeffrey D. "Correcting the Early History of Äy Känom," in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan 35-36,* (2003-2004): 373-410.

Mairs, Rachel. *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.

Nikonorov, Valeri P. and Serge A. Savchuk. "New Data on Ancient Bactrian Body-Armour (In the Light of Finds from Kampyr Tepe)" *Iran* 30, no. 1 (1992): 49-54.

Pollitt, Jerome Jordan. *Art in the Hellenistic Age.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Prag, Jonathan R. W., and Josephine Crawley Quinn, eds., *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Roisman, Joseph, and Ian Worthington, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia.* Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Sidky, H. *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria: From Alexander to Eucratides the Great.* Lanham: University Press of America, 2000.

Tarn, William Woodthorpe. *The Greeks in Bactria & India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.

Tarn. William W. *Hellenistic Civilization.* 3rd edition. revised by the author and G. T. Griffith London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971.

Troncoso, Victor Alonso and Edward M. Anson, eds., *After Alexander: The Time of the Diadochi (323 – 281 BC)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013.

---

**Chapter 2**

**Ancient / Primary Sources**

Arrian. *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I-II*. Translated by P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 and 269. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976 and 1983.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17.* Translated by C. Bradford Welles. Loeb Classical Library 422. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History Vol. IX: Books 18-19.65*. Translated by Russel M. Geer, Loeb Classical Library 377. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.

Marcus Junianus Justinus. *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. Translated by John Selby Watson. London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Convent Garden, 1853, accessed through *corpus scriptorium latinorum* at http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/justin/english/trans12.html

*Milinda's Questions Vol. I.* Translated by I. B. Horner. London: Luzac & Company, 1969.

Strabo. *Geography Vol. V: Books 10-12.* Translated by Horace Leonard Jones. Loeb Classical Library 211. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.

Plutarch. *Lives Vol. VII.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919.

Plutarch. *Moralia Vol. X.* Translated by Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 321. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936.

Quintus Curtius. *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10.* Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 369. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

**Secondary Sources**

Abdullaev, Kazim. "Reutilization of Old Images for New Iconographic Generations: The Question of the Destiny of Greek Images in the Post-Hellenistic Period," *East and West* 52, no. ¼ (December 2002): 53-69.

Antonetti, Claudia and Paolo Biagi, eds., *With Alexander in India & Central Asia: Moving East & Back to West*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017.

Bhattacharya-Haesner, Chhaya. "Central Asia: A Melting Pot of Persian, Greek, Indian and Chinese Cultural Traditions," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51.4 (2016): 630-643.

Boulnois, Luce. *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants.* Translated by Helen Loveday. Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005.

Coloru, Omar. "Seleukid Settlements: Between Ethnic Identity and Mobility," in *Electrum: Studia z historii starozytnej* 20, (2013): 37-56.

Field, Henry and Eugene Prostov, "Archaeology in the Soviet Union," in *American Anthropologist* 39, no. 3 (1937): 474-479.

Foltz, Richard. *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Gardner, Peter and Reginald Stuart Poole. *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum.* Vol. 3. London: Order of the Trustees, 1886.

Harmatta, János, ed. *History of Civilization of Central Asia: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250.* Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994.

Heirman, Ann and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, eds., *The Spread of Buddhism.* Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Holt, Frank. *Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of a Greek Frontier in Central Asia.* Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum; Vol. 104, Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988.

Kuhrt, Amélie. *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period.* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Mairs, Rachel. *The Archaeology of the Hellenistic Far East: A Survey.* Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011.

Mairs, Rachel. *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.

McArthur, Meher. *Reading Buddhist Art.* London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

Narain, A. K. *The Indo-Greeks.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957.

Scott, David Alan. "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," *East and West* 40, no. ¼ (1990): 43-77.

Sick, David H. "When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17.3, no. 3 (July, 2007): 253-278.

Stavisky, Boris J. "'Buddha-Mazda' from kara-tepe in Old Termez (Uzbekistan): A Preliminary Communication," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (1980): 89-94.

Strong, John S. *Buddhisms: An Introduction.* London: Oneworld Publications, 2015.

Tarn, William Woodthorpe. *The Greeks in Bactria & India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.

Thapar, Romila. *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. Delphi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

---

**Chapter 3**

**Ancient / Primary Sources**

Appian. *Roman History Vol. II.* Translated by Horace White. Loeb Classical Library 3. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912.

Arrian. *Anabasis of Alexander Vol. I-II*. Translated by P. A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library 236 and 269. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976 and 1983.

Ban Gu. *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage: 125 BC - AD 23; An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty,* Translated by Michael Loewe and A.F.P. Hulsewe (Sinica Leidensia Edidit Institutum Sinologicum Lugduno Batavum Vol. 14, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979.

Ban Gu. *Han Shu,* Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/han-shu

*Chan-Kuo Ts'e.* Translated by J. I. Crump. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History Vol. VIII: Books 16.66-17.* Translated by C. Bradford Welles. Loeb Classical Library 422. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Homer. *Iliad Vol. I: Books 1-12*. Translated by A. T. Murray. Loeb Classical Library 170. Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1924.

Herodotus. *The Persian Wars Vol. I-III.* Translated by A. D. Godley. Loeb Classical Library 117-119. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920-1922.

Luo Guanzhong. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/sanguo-yanyi

Plutarch. *Lives Vol. VII.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library 99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919.

Polo, Marco. *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Translated by Luigi Foscolo Benedetto. London: Routledge 2014.

Pseudo-Callisthenes. *The Romance of Alexander the Great*. Translated by Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Pseudo-Callisthenes. *The Greek Alexander Romance.* Translated by Richard Stoneman. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Quintus Curtius. *History of Alexander Vol. I: Books 1-5*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 368. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Quintus Curtius. *History of Alexander Vol. II: Books 6-10.* Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 369. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Sima Qian. *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II.* Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Sima Qian. *Shiji, Chinese Text Project. https://ctext.org/shiji*

**Secondary Sources**

Anderson, Andrew Runni. "Bucephalas and His Legend." *The American Journal of Philology* 51, no. 1 (1930): 1-21.

Boulnois, Luce. *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants.* Translated by Helen Loveday. Editions Olizane: Geneva, Switzerland, 2005.

Busby, Debbie and Catrin Rutland. *The Horse: A Natural History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Church, Sally. "The Eurasian Silk Road: Its historical roots and the Chinese imagination." *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2, (2018): 1-13.

Clutton-Brock, Juliet, ed. *The Walking Larder: Patterns of Domestication, Pastoralism, and Predation.* London: Routledge, 1989.

Cooke, Bill, ed. *Imperial China: The Art of the Horse in Chinese History.* Lexington: Kentucky Horse Park & International Museum of the Horse, 2000.

Creel, H. G. "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 647-672.

Donaghy, Thomas. *Horse Breeds and Breeding in the Greco-Persian World.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

Dunhuang Academy, compiled. *Legendary Treasures of the Silk Road: Precious Collections from the National Museum of Afghanistan.* Culture and Art Publishing House, 2017.

Elliott, Mark C. *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Harrist, Jr., Robert E. *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art.* New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997.

Hansen, Valerie. *The Silk Road: A New History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Holt, Frank. *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Jagchid, S. and C. R. Bawden. "Some Notes on the Horse-Policy of the Yuan Dynasty," in *Central Asiatic Journal* 10, no. 3/4 (1965): 246-268.

Kelekna, Pita. *The Horse in Human History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Olsen, Stanley J. "The Horse in Ancient China and its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 151-189.

Pickeral, Tamsin. *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art.* London: Merrell, 2006.

Selbitschka, Armin. "Early Chinese Diplomacy: 'Realpolitik' versus the So-Called Tributary System," in *Asia Major* 28, no. 1 (2015): 61-114.

Silbergeld, Jerome, and Eugene Y. Wang, eds., *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

Stanco, Ladislav. *Greek Gods in the East: Hellenistic Iconographic Schemes in Central Asia.* Prague: Charles University in Prague, Karolinum Press, 2012.

Starr, S. Frederick, ed. *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia.* London: Routledge, 2015.

Stewart, Andrew. *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Vidale, Massimo. *Treasures from the Oxus: The Art and Civilization of Central Asia.* London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017.

Whitfield, Susan. *Life Along the Silk Road*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2015.

Wood, Frances. *The Silk Road: 2000 Years in the Heart of Asia.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Wood, Michael. *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great: A Journey from Greece to Asia.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.