

THE GREEK KINGDOMS OF CENTRAL ASIA*

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Contents

Political history	97
The Indian campaigns	99
The last phase	100
Graeco-Bactrian sites	101
The Greek settlements	102
Greek and the local language: epigraphic documents	103
Towns and urbanization	105
Architecture: the palace at Ay Khanum	107
The originality of Graeco-Bactrian architecture	109
Domestic architecture	111
Religions and religious monuments	112
Local cults and Buddhist influence	114
The figurative arts	115
Everyday implements	118
Trade and trade routes	121
Coinage	123
The Greek heritage in Central Asia	124

* See Map 3.

Political history

Written sources for the history of Greek rule in Central Asia are scarce and fragmentary. The works of classical antiquity that dealt with the subject have been lost; all that remain are some fragments: Polybius' account of the expedition of Antiochus III which survives in mutilated form, X.27–31, 49 and XI.39, some indirect references (the *History of Parthia* by Apollodorus of Artemita, on which Strabo drew for his *Geography*) and a synopsis (Justin's synopsis of the *Historiae Philippicae*, Book XLI, by Pompeius Trogus). Bactria does not appear in the Chinese chronicles, the *Shih-chi* the *Han-shu* and the *Hou Han-shu*, until after the collapse of Greek rule in the Oxus valley. The Indian texts that refer to the *Yavana* (i.e. Greeks or westerners) are not truly historical in nature, and cannot easily be interpreted. The archaeological record also has gaps. Excavations were not undertaken in this field until relatively recently and, except for Begram and Taxila, date from after the Second World War. Very few have deliberately focused on this historical period (Ay Khanum, Charsadda and Shaikhan Dheri).¹ Although the data they have provided are neither as abundant nor varied as we would wish, these excavations have nevertheless enabled us to form an idea of the civilization created by the Greeks of Central Asia. Our knowledge of the political history of the states they founded continues to be based almost entirely on the study of the coins they issued. From these, numismatists and historians have been able to reconstruct – not without uncertainties – the sequence of various reigns and their approximate duration, as well as the location and boundaries of different kingdoms.

As we have already noted in Chapter 3 it was towards the middle of the third century B.C., with the death of Antiochus II (246 B.C.), that the final break came between the Seleucid Empire and its Central Asian possessions. The satrap of Bactria, Diodotus, took the initiative in transforming these territories into an independent kingdom. Bactria was its vital centre, around which gravitated Sogdiana in the north, Margiana in the north-west and Aria in the west. In the east, the Greek presence reached its farthest limit on the Syr Darya, where the site of Alexandria Eschate (subsequently refounded as Antioch of Scythia) has been identified beneath the medieval layers of the Khojand citadel. It is doubtful whether the Greek armies ever entered the Tarim basin; the 'Seres' and 'Phryni' referred to in a passage of Apollodorus of Artemita (Strabo XI.11.1) must be regarded as 'neighbours' of the Greeks in the broad sense of the word, because they lived outside their sphere of influence. For half a century, under the first three Graeco-Bactrian kings, Diodotus I, his son Diodotus

¹ For such reconstructions of the history of the Greek kingdoms of Central Asia, the basic works that cover the whole period are Tarn (1951), Narain (1957) and now Bopearachchi (1991). The contributions of Rapson (1922) and, above all, Macdonald (1922) should not be overlooked either.

II, and Euthydemus I, the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom was confined to the north of the Hindu Kush. During this period, however, the kingdom consolidated its position and gained power as a result of the wealth of its land, particularly in Bactria. According to Apollodorus of Artemita (Strabo XI.11.1), the fertility of Bactria's soil created for the Graeco-Bactrians the power that led them to undertake the conquest of India. Recent studies on the development of irrigation during the period of Greek rule confirm that agricultural production was the basic factor in its economic expansion.² The country's prosperity under Euthydemus I is directly reflected in the abundance of his coins. His issues of silver and bronze coins were by far the commonest found at Ay Khanum, after those of the Seleucid period.³ It was no doubt this economic affluence, with a wise administration, that ensured the allegiance of the Greek colonists and local nobles. Without this, Euthydemus would not have been able to hold out for two years against the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, when he launched his campaign to reconquer the lost eastern provinces, defeated Euthydemus' cavalry on the banks of the Arius (Hari-rud) and besieged him at Bactra. Euthydemus' stubborn resistance, and the threat posed by nomads seeking to turn the conflict to their own advantage, forced Antiochus III to abandon the siege and to acknowledge Euthydemus' independence. After this abortive attempt to win back the Greek provinces, Central Asia disappeared for ever from the political horizon of the Seleucid kings. Antiochus III took the southern route back to the west, stopping on the way to renew the treaty of friendship concluded a century earlier by his ancestor Seleucus I with Candragupta, which recognized Mauryan sovereignty over the lands lying between the Indus and Helmand rivers.

It was during the period just mentioned that there took place the first of a long series of power struggles between ambitious rivals which were to punctuate the history of the Greeks of Central Asia and which, by dividing their forces, contributed to their downfall. It was by assassinating the legitimate sovereign, Diodotus II, son of the founder of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, that Euthydemus had ascended the throne.

Under Euthydemus I's son, Demetrius I, a movement of expansion began towards the territories south of the Hindu Kush and ancient north-west India. The founding of a Demetrius in Arachosia indicates that this highly Hellenized province (see Chapter 3), and probably Drangiana as well, had by that time become part of the Graeco-Bactrian Empire. The kings who followed pushed the conquest towards India; but the history of its various stages has given rise to many different theories. The most famous of these kings was Eucratides (c. 171–145 B.C.), whose brilliant career as a military leader led him to be compared to Mithradates the Great, his contemporary. After a fierce power struggle, he wrested power

² Gentelle, 1978; Gardin and Lyonnet, 1978/79.

³ Petitot-Biehler, 1975; Holt, 1981; Bernard, 1985.

from Demetrius and went campaigning in India. The exceptional personality of Eucratides is suggested by the originality of his coinage, which is full of iconographic innovations, by the creation of his own specific era revealed by an inscription at Ay Khanum⁴ and by his grandiose schemes to embellish the palace there. His outstanding career met with a tragic end. He was assassinated by his own son who desecrated his father's body.

The Indian campaigns

It was during the reign of Menander (150–135 B.C.), one of the few Indo-Greek sovereigns to be remembered in the classical tradition, that Greek rule spread to its farthest limit and included the greater part of the Panjab as far as the banks of the Ravi. If the Indian texts are to be believed, the Greek armies penetrated deep into the Ganges valley as far as Madhyadeśa and Magadha. The grammarian Patañjali, when illustrating a particular rule, used two phrases that referred to the towns of Śaketa and Madhyamika being besieged by the *Yavana* (i.e. the Greeks). Kālidāsa's drama *Mālavikāgnimitra* preserved the memory of a victory won during the reign of Puṣyamitra (184–148 B.C.), founder of the Śunga dynasty, by the Indian armies over the Greeks on the banks of the Sindhu (probably a tributary of the Chambal before the latter flows into the Jamuna). Lastly there is the *Yuga Purāna* of the *Gargīsamhitā*, which relates that the Greeks raided and destroyed Pāṭaliputra, the capital of Magadha. Claims have recently been made that traces of this expedition, led by Menander, are to be found in the destruction levels at various sites in the Ganges valley from Hastinapura to Pāṭaliputra itself.⁵ It is unlikely, however, that the Greeks made any permanent settlements in the Ganges valley. The various hoards of Greek coins that have been found there are probably no more than an indication of the fact that Greek money was highly prized in the regions that traded with the Greek-ruled Panjab. It is difficult to know whether the Greeks exercised any direct control over Sind towards the south and the coastline between the Indus delta and the Gulf of Cambay (see Strabo XI.1.1). In all likelihood, it was not until the discovery of the monsoon at the end of the second century B.C. and the institution of fully fledged international maritime trade between Egypt and India⁶ that these regions began to be of interest to the Greeks, who until then had probably been content with nominal rule over them. According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*⁷ drachms of Menander and Apollodotus were still in circulation at the close of the

⁴ Bernard, 1980, pp.22–7.

⁵ Sharma, 1980. The chronology of the destruction levels on different sites that the author associated with Menander's campaigns are insufficiently substantiated to authorize such conclusions.

⁶ The basic study is by Dihle, 1978.

⁷ For arguments against later dates for *The periplus of the Erythraean sea* see Dihle, 1965.

first century A.D. in the Broach-Barygaza region. The presence of these coins there may be explained by the local needs of trade with the West which was developing at that time.

The last phase

Excessive territorial expansion, which spread the Greek population too thinly for adequate control, forced the Indo-Greek sovereigns to delegate too much authority to viceroys, who were tempted to play their own games. This inevitably led to the disintegration of the Greek power in India into a number of independent principalities. This explains why during the two and a half centuries between Diodotus I and the last Indo-Greek king Strato II (A.D. 10) the names of more than thirty kings have been recorded. Some of them bore the same name (much to the consternation of numismatists). Apart from those already cited, the most notable kings were: Apollodotus II (as opposed to Apollodotus I), whose coins were still in circulation in the first century A.D. in the coastal region of Broach-Barygaza; Antialcidas, whose name appears on an Indian monument – the votive column at Besnagar – set up by one of his ambassadors to the court of a Śunga king; and Strato I, whose reign lasted for several decades at the end of the second century B.C. Most of these kings reigned exclusively south of the Hindu Kush, for the territories north of the mountains had slipped out of Greek hands by the third quarter of the second century B.C.

The northern border of the empire had been weakened by the expansion into India, the multiplication of centres of power, and the struggles between rival factions. It was the first to receive the shock waves of nomadic peoples migrating from the north-western regions of China, one following on the heels of another. The abandonment of Ay Khanum around 145 B.C., a date that apparently coincides with the death of Eucratides, was most likely caused by the arrival of one of the tribes, called the Yüeh-chih, in eastern Bactria. Heliocles, Eucratides' successor, was apparently the last Greek king to reign in Bactria (c. 145–130 B.C.).⁸ By then Bactria had also lost the two provinces on its western flank, which had been invaded by the Parthians. When the Chinese ambassador, Chang Ch'ien, visited the Oxus valley in 129–128 B.C., he found the Yüeh-chih settled on the northern bank of the river, and in control of the southern bank, though they had not yet occupied it. Chang Ch'ien's description of southern Bactria as 'a region bereft of central power, with numerous local chieftains and little armies of poor military value' seems to apply to a country in which the political structures created by Greek colonization had already disappeared. The Yüeh-chih occupation of the southern bank was completed around 100 B.C., as related by the Chinese

⁸ On the question of Greek enclaves, thought to have existed in Bactria later than the reign of Heliocles, see below.

chronicles, the *Han-shu* and the *Hou Han-shu*. West of Bactra, the former Greek territories were seized by another nomadic tribe, possibly the Sacaraucae. The Greek principalities south of the Hindu Kush enjoyed 100 years' respite before they too gave way to the new influx of nomadic tribes. Having been expelled from the high valley of Ili, the Sakas crossed Chinese Turkestan and the Pamirs and descended through the Gilgit and Swat valleys into Gandhāra where, around 85 B.C., under the leadership of a chieftain named Maues, they occupied Taxila. The remaining Greek possessions in Gandhāra were divided into two parts, which eventually disappeared. In the principality of Kāpiśa-Begram, the last Greek ruler was Hermaeus, who succumbed around 70 B.C. to the attacks of other nomadic tribes who had taken the western route around Bactria and conquered, successively, Sistan and Arachosia. Further to the east, between the Chenab and Sutlej rivers, the Greek power survived, with Strato II, until A.D. 5–10.

Graeco-Bactrian sites

There is no shortage of sites where finds of coins, pottery or other artefacts indicate the presence of settlements dating from the Hellenistic period: at Gyaur-kala (Alexandria in Margiana);⁹ at Afrasiab (Maracanda in Sogdiana);¹⁰ at Khojand (Antioch in Scythia);¹¹ in Bactria at Termez;¹² at Kobadian;¹³ at Takht-i Sangin;¹⁴ at Tepe-i Dinistan;¹⁵ at Emshitepe;¹⁶ at Tepe Nimlik;¹⁷ at Dilberjin;¹⁸ and at Bactra itself.¹⁹

Again to the south of the Hindu Kush range: at Begram,²⁰ at Kandahar²¹ and at Taxila (Sirkap).²² There are also sites where a town plan is still visible at ground level, which shows the characteristics of this period: at Herat,²³ Taxila (Sirkap),²⁴ Charsadda and Shaikhan Dheri.²⁵ There is even a place where an survived through the centuries as a

⁹ Filanovich, 1974.

¹⁰ Filanovich, 1973; Shishkina, 1969, 1975, 1985.

¹¹ Negmotov and Belyaeva, 1977, p. 569; Belyaeva, 1979, 1980.

¹² Kozlovskiy and Nekrasova, 1976.

¹³ D'yakonov, 1953.

¹⁴ Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1979, pp. 89–109, 1981a, 1981b; Pichikyan, 1980.

¹⁵ Denisov, 1975.

¹⁶ Kruglikova and Sarianidi, 1971, pp. 163–7.

¹⁷ Schlumberger, 1947, pp. 241–3.

¹⁸ Kruglikova, 1974, 1976, 1979; Kruglikova and Pugachenkova, 1977.

¹⁹ Dagens et al., 1964; Gardin, 1957.

²⁰ Ghirshman, 1946.

²¹ AS, 1978, pp. 9–66, 1979, pp. 1–8.

²² Marshall, 1951; Ghosh, 1947/48.

²³ Lezine, 1963/64.

²⁴ Marshall, 1951; Ghosh, 1947/48.

²⁵ Wheeler, 1962; Dani, 1965/66.

testimony of a Greek presence down to the Timurid period: a crossing on the Oxus was called ‘Pardagwi’ from its Greek name *pandocheion* (hostelry).²⁶ However, the thickness and number of layers dating from later periods present an obstacle to the extensive excavation of deep layers, so that in most cases the vestiges of the Greek period in Central Asia consist of just a few sections of walls. Ay Khanum in northern Afghanistan represents a fortunate exception.²⁷ The remains of a Greek town are still visible there at ground level, as the site was never reoccupied after it had been abandoned by the Greeks.²⁸ It has therefore become the site of extensive excavations, which for the first time provided an overall view of an urban layout of this period.

The Greek settlements

The presence of colonists of Greek extraction is clearly established at Ay Khanum by some fifteen proper names.²⁹ Some like Hermaeus, Hippias, Callisthenes, Cosmas, Niceratus, Philoxenus, Philiscus, Sosipatrus, Strato, Theophrastes, Timodemus, Zeno and Isidora are common to the entire Greek world. Among these families, many must have come from Greek Asia Minor and particularly from the Meander valley, like King Euthydemus, who had migrated from the town of Magnesia ad Meandrum. The Meander valley connection is further suggested by a statuette discovered at Takht-i Sangin which represents the River Oxus as Marsyas playing the double flute, the iconographic form in which Greek art depicted the Meander’s main source. Northern Greece was the other main source for Greek colonists as indicated by a group of names characteristic of that region (Kineas, Molossus, Triballus) and Macedonia in particular (Lysanias). Most of the persons whose names have come down to us were palace officials. But as in the rest of Hellenized Asia, many of the colonists would have been landowners who lived off the tracts of land (*kleroi*) allotted to them when they first settled there. At Kandahar, the name has been preserved of a certain Aristonax,³⁰ who belonged to one of the Greek families of Alexandria in Arachosia to whom the imperial edicts of the Indian king Aśoka were addressed.

²⁶ Minorsky, 1967. E. V. Rtveladze (1977, pp. 182–8) has identified the site with Surob-kurgan-Kampyrtepe, some 30Km west of Termez.

²⁷ Bernard et al., 1973; annual reports in *CRAI*, 1965–72, 1974–76, 1978, 1980; Bernard et al., 1976, 1980. Complete bibliography up to 1981 in *BCH*, No. 1, 1982, p. 23.

²⁸ Immediately after the Greek rule the site of Ay Khanum was briefly reoccupied by local populations but this reoccupation did not result in substantial modification of the Greek buildings, except for the partial destruction of the palace.

²⁹ Rapin, 1983, pp. 315–72; Grenet, 1983, pp. 373–81.

³⁰ Fraser, 1979, p. 10.

It is known from the classical authors that Greek colonists were not the only inhabitants of the cities of that time, either new or ancient, but that in some towns at least they lived alongside the indigenous population. This was particularly true of Alexandria ad Caucasum (Arrian IV.22.5; Diodorus XVII.83.2) and Alexandria Eschate (Arrian IV.4.1; Quintus Curtius VII.6.27). This information was confirmed by the excavations at Ay Khanum, where the names from inscriptions and graffiti also reveal the presence of Bactrians bearing Iranian names (Oumanes, Xatranos, Arixares) who must have lived within the city itself. Some of them were even officials at the palace treasury (Oxybazos, Oxeboakes, Aryandes), a further indication that the Greek colonists had managed to achieve a certain symbiosis with the local population. There is, however, no doubt that the government of the cities lay in the hands of the Greek communities. It is significant in this respect that at Ay Khanum, officials of local extraction do not appear to have occupied the highest posts in the hierarchy. The great bulk of Greek colonists arrived during the Seleucid rule, as must also have been the case for the Near East generally,³¹ and the deeper Hellenization of the Oxus valley occurred with this second wave of settlers.

Greek and the local language: epigraphic documents

The colonists had preserved intact the vehicle for their cultural identity, namely their ancestral language and script. The evidence yielded by the Ay Khanum excavations ranges from simple names inscribed on vases to elaborate inscriptions cut in stone. There are now four examples of the latter at Ay Khanum, not to mention two papyri and some thirty brief financial records inscribed on vases. Two further inscriptions are known from other sites in Bactria (Takht-i Sangin and Jiga-tepe) and three others in Arachosia.

After extensive excavations, carried out in different areas of the site, it is indeed surprising that, except for the economic graffiti, so few inscriptions have been found at Ay Khanum compared with the wealth of texts one would expect to find on the site of a Hellenistic city in the Mediterranean area. While this may possibly be explained by the element of chance encountered in all excavations or by the pillage of the ruins, the real reason can more likely be traced back to the nature of the town itself. Ay Khanum was essentially a royal city whose administration, centred around a palace, was probably not very conducive to the type of honorific epigraphy that flourished in the relatively autonomous cities of the Mediterranean kingdoms and normally furnished the bulk of inscriptions. The inscriptions that have come down to us are nevertheless sufficient to show that the Greek language

³¹ An example under Antiochus I is the founding of Antioch in Persia by colonists from Magnesia ad Meandrum, *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* (1903–05), 233, 1. 15.21.

used by the colonists of Central Asia does not contain the slightest hint of barbarization. This is seen as well in the simple stereotyped administrative formulae,³² dedications,³³ funeral epitaphs,³⁴ some versified according to the rules of Greek traditional prosody, or even philosophical texts such as the Aśokan rock edicts discovered at Kandahar. Here the translator demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the Greek philosophical language into which, thanks to a keen sense of proper equivalent, he was able to transpose into Greek the concepts of Indian Buddhism. The lettering itself follows the same evolution as that of characters in current use in the Mediterranean area. This applies to both the cursive capital used for economic inscriptions on vases in the palace treasury at Ay Khanum and to the various types of lettering cut in stone. In some cases these remain close to the cursive capital lettering but in others are more ornate. The language of the colonists was by no means a withered bough but rather a flourishing branch constantly irrigated by the sap of close contacts with the mother tongue. These contacts were fostered not only by the political ties that existed while the provinces of Central Asia still belonged to the Seleucid Empire, but also by the constant circulation of men of all professions, and by the penetration of ideas and literary texts. These included a philosophical treatise of the third century B.C. and the fragment of a poem, one written on a papyrus, the other on a parchment, which had disintegrated but had left the letters in ink printed in the soil in the debris of the palace at Ay Khanum.³⁵ Even when around 250 B.C. the Parthian Empire grew up between the Greek cities of Central Asia and those of the Mediterranean, the circulation of people and ideas was probably not completely interrupted. The Parthian sovereigns were well disposed towards the Greek communities in their own territory, as is demonstrated by the title 'Philhellenic' which figures on the coins struck by Mithradates I (171–138 B.C.) and his successors. Moreover, the military expedition of Antiochus III in the late third century B.C. provided an opportunity for Graeco-Bactrian Hellenism to reinforce direct contact with the source of its national traditions. Antiochus III was obliged to stay in Bactria for two years with his army and, very probably, with all the artists and men of letters who used to make up the retinue of a Hellenistic king.

³² Vase inscriptions recording sums of money received and the storage of various goods at the treasury of Ay Khanum (Rapin, 1983, 1992; Grenet, 1983).

³³ The votive inscription to Hermes and Heracles at the gymnasium of Ay Khanum (Robert, 1973, pp. 207–11); the votive inscription of Clearchus on the same site (see note 36 below); also the dedication to the god Oxus at Takht-i Sangin (Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 202–4); and the dedication at Kandahar (Fraser, 1979, pp. 9–21).

³⁴ Examples of funerary epitaphs are two unpublished inscriptions at Ay Khanum, one in verse, and a funerary epigram at Jiga-tepe. (On the latter, see Pugachenkova, 1979, pp. 74–5; Kruglikova, 1977, p. 245, Fig. 16.)

³⁵ CRAI, 1978, pp. 456–8; Rapin, 1992, pp. 115–23.

Apart from the two inscriptions at Kandahar, in which Aśoka addressed his Greek subjects in their own language, the most revealing text concerning the Hellenism of the Greek colonists is undoubtedly the inscription discovered at Ay Khanum in the heart of the city inside a funerary monument.³⁶ The philosopher Clearchus of Soli, a well-known figure in the history of the Aristotelian school, on a visit from Greece around 275 B.C., had set up in this monument a copy of the famous Delphic maxims to serve as a code of good conduct. The maxims were a collection of some 150 aphorisms kept on display at the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi embodying the ideals of Greek life. The stone stele on which they had been inscribed at Ay Khanum has disappeared, but the base on which it stood has survived. It preserves not only Clearchus' own dedication, but the final maxims of the series, inscribed on the base for lack of room on the stele itself. These read as follows: 'In childhood, learn good manners; in youth, control thy passions; in middle age, practise justice; in old age, be of good counsel; in death, have no regrets.' The fact that the municipal authorities allowed this moral and civil code – the quintessence, as it were, of Greek wisdom – to be displayed publicly in the centre of town provides a striking example of the determination of the Greek colonists to place their city under the protection of the traditional patron deity of the Greek colonization and to remain faithful national heritage.

The site at Ay Khanum has also yielded two non-Greek epigraphic documents. The first is an ostrakon written in Aramaic script noting various payments. The rudimentary form of the text, devoid of inflections and syntactic markings, makes it difficult to decide whether the language is Aramaic, that is, a continuation of the official language of the Achaemenid government, or some local Iranian dialect. Even more enigmatic is the inscription engraved on a silver ingot discovered in an archaeological context dating from a brief post-Greek reoccupation of the site.³⁷ Both its language and its script, which suggests Runic letters, are unknown. This tantalizing text might possibly represent the language of the nomadic invaders.

Towns and urbanization

Under Greek rule Central Asia experienced such unprecedented urban growth that its fame as 'the land of a thousand cities' spread to the West (Strabo XV.1.3; Justin XLI.1 and 4). The cities were necessary instruments in the process of colonization, fulfilling many different roles. They served as: military bases; administrative centres (multiplied by dismembering the Achaemenid satrapies); economic centres of the various regional units;

³⁶ Robert, 1973, pp. 211–37.

³⁷ Bernard et al, 1980, pp. 27–9; Rapin, 1992, pp. 139–42.

communication centres and trading posts along the international and local trading routes; and, not least, cultural centres diffusing Greek traditions. Some of the new towns were built entirely from scratch on virgin soil such as Ay Khanum³⁸ and Alexandria ad Caucasum,³⁹ often in the vicinity of a previous local settlement which could be abandoned once the new town was settled. The Indo-Greek city of Taxila (Sirkap) replaced the Bhir Mound, which dated from the Achaemenid and Mauryan period,⁴⁰ and Puṣkalāvātī-Peucelaotis was moved under Mcnandcr from Bala Hissar (Charsadda) to Shaikhan Dheri.⁴¹ Other new towns were built around a pre-existing fortified site (Antioch in Margiana around Erk-kala,⁴² and Bactra around a previous citadel⁴³). Others were built on the site of the former town itself with Greek ramparts superimposed on those dating from earlier periods such as Alexandria in Arachosia (Kandahar)⁴⁴ and Maracanda (Afrasiab).⁴⁵ In the latter case of existing cities reoccupied by Greek colonists, the archaeological evidence is too scanty to give us an accurate idea of the impact of the Greek settlements, but at least we know from the excavation at Ay Khanum how an entirely new Greek city, built on virgin soil, appeared.

As in the case of Peucelaotis (Shaikhan Dheri), the founders of Ay Khanum⁴⁶ took advantage of the natural defences provided by the confluence of two rivers, the Oxus and one of its southern tributaries, the Kokcha. A natural hill, some 60 m high, closed off the third side of a vast triangular area measuring 1.8 x 1.5 km. The site, with its acropolis formed by the flat top of the hill and its lower town laid out between the hill and the two rivers, was perfectly suited to the needs of the Greek town-planners. The natural defences were strengthened by a solid rampart of unbaked brick, which ran around the entire perimeter of the town, skirting the banks of the rivers and following the outer edge of the acropolis. Special care was taken to ensure that the northern tip of the lower town was particularly well fortified, for it was there that the town lacked natural defences. At this vulnerable point, the wall was built 7 m thick with rectangular towers (19 x 11 m).⁴⁷ This type of massive rampart built solid throughout, where defensive action took place exclusively on the top of its towers and curtains, and whose effectiveness resided mainly in

³⁸ For the town plan and architecture of Ay Khanum, see the studies cited in note 27 above.

³⁹ Ghirshman, 1946.

⁴⁰ Marshall, 1951; Ghosh, 1947/48.

⁴¹ Wheeler, 1962; Dani, 1965/66.

⁴² Filanovich, 1974.

⁴³ . Dagens et al., 1964; Gardin, 1957.

⁴⁴ AS, 1978, pp. 9–66, 1979, pp. 1–8.

⁴⁵ Filanovich, 1973, pp. 85–94; Shishkina, 1969, 1975, 1985.

⁴⁶ For the town plan and architecture of Ay Khanum, in addition to the studies cited in note 27 above, see also Bernard, 1976, pp. 245–75, 1981, pp. 107–20.

⁴⁷ Leriche, 1986.

the height and mass of its masonry capable of withstanding the assaults of siege machinery, was characteristic of the Greek period in Central Asia.⁴⁸ The same kind of rampart is found at Gyaur-kala, Begram and also at Sirkap, where the Indo-Scythian wall probably imitates a Greek rampart not yet discovered. On the contrary the ramparts of Maracanda with their hollow curtains represent the continuation of a local tradition of fortification. Within the city walls a citadel, generally built up against the rampart, provided the town with a last refuge in case of an assault. The citadel at Ay Khanum was built in this manner in the south-east corner of the acropolis.

At Ay Khanum most of the buildings were concentrated in the lower town, which was less windswept than the acropolis and could be supplied with water by a branch of one of the canals on the plain (see Chapter 3, Fig. 3). The plan of this lower town does not conform to the traditional Hellenistic grid pattern such as may be seen, in a simplified form, at Taxila (Sirkap) and at Peucclaotis (Shaikhani Dheri), where the layout of the town is divided by parallel streets at right angles to a main thoroughfare. The particular features of the urban layout at Ay Khanum result from the character of the city itself, which was the seat of a royal palace. To make room for the palace and avoid too close a proximity with other buildings, the main street extending across the lower town was diverted along the foot of the acropolis on a raised strip of ground that separated it from the lower town. The palace (see Chapter 3, Fig. 4) was thus able to spread out across the entire width of the lower town in its southern half, so that it covered an area of 350 × 250 m. The only section where parallel streets are to be observed is in the area of residential mansions at the south-west corner of the town where the rivers meet. The overall plan of the city was therefore dictated by the special role it was meant to play.

Architecture: the palace at Ay Khanum

As the Greek architects had no prototype of their own to imitate for the design of the palace at Ay Khanum, they drew their inspiration largely from the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid models they had seen when they first entered the region with the Greek armies. Like the Achaemenid palace of Susa, the palace at Ay Khanum consists of a massive conglomeration of courtyards (see Fig. 1) and buildings for official, residential and economic use. The main courtyard, through which the palace was entered from the north, struck visitors by its imposing size (137 × 108 m) and by the rows of stone columns, crowned with Corinthian capitals, which formed the façades of its four porticos. Behind the southern portico, a vestibule with eighteen Corinthian columns three rows deep,

⁴⁸ Francfort, 1979, pp. 23–30.



FIG. 1. Courtyard in the north of the palace at Ay Khanum. Remains of the south colonnade.

reminiscent of the spirit of some Achaemenid architectural compositions, provided a monumental entrance to the palace itself. At the western end of the palace was a second courtyard less imposing and of a more private character with its four porticos lined with sixty Doric columns. Among the buildings for official use in the south-east corner, one in particular is remarkable for its size and plan. It is a huge square 50 m each side, divided by two corridors at right angles into two pairs of similar units. In each pair the eastern unit features an audience hall decorated with pilasters topped by painted capitals, while the western unit is composed of office rooms. The south-west corner of the palace is occupied by three sets of private apartments recognizable as such by the presence of forecourts, kitchens and bathrooms. West of the great northern courtyard lies the treasury, composed of a series of store-rooms grouped around a central courtyard. The purpose of the building is clear from its layout and the artefacts found there. These include storage vessels, debris of precious stones (agate, onyx, carnelian, rubies, garnets, lapis lazuli, turquoise, beryl and pearls), both worked and unworked, and inscribed vases which once contained the cash reserve of the palace. Judging by the Indian coins and remains of precious objects from India that have been found there, it is possible to suggest that the palace, in its final and most monumental stage, described above, may have belonged to King Eucratides, who is known to have made conquests in India; and Ay Khanum may well have been Eucratidia, the city that was named after him.

The originality of Graeco-Bactrian architecture

The palace at Ay Khanum typifies the character and originality of Graeco-Bactrian architecture; its walls were built of unbaked brick, sometimes on a baked-brick base. The roofs were flat and made of earth, as in all Oriental architecture, but on the main buildings one or two rows of Greek-style tiles were added to the roof as a border. The use of stone was reserved for doorways and architectural supports. The base and drums of the column were cut on a kind of lathe which ensured rapid and standardized results. While the layout of the buildings was largely inspired by Iranian and Central Asian architecture, the decor remained faithful to Greek taste, making use of the three classical orders of column (Doric, Ionic and, particularly, Corinthian), as well as of decorative terracotta antefixes, generally with the Greek palmette to line the edge of the roofs. The buildings exhibit a sense of the grandiose sometimes overdone, an effective use of repetition, a taste for symmetry that verges on the mechanical, tirelessly playing with parallel and orthogonal axes. They show a practical imagination capable of designing the simplest and most functional solutions but lacking a sense of beauty and delicacy. All of this goes to make the architectural style of the palace typically imperial - powerful, proud and cold.

The public buildings of Ay Khanum, the gymnasium (Fig. 2) and the theatre, answered the needs of a population leading a typically Greek life. The gymnasium, which was dedicated to both the intellectual and physical aspects of Greek education, and thus constituted the most effective instrument for the diffusion of Hellenism, was composed of courtyards and buildings that stretched along 350 m of the bank of the Oxus. Its northern building, probably reserved for teaching, covered a square of 100 m by 100 m. While the basic concept of its plan adheres to a typical Greek gymnasium (a courtyard surrounded by various buildings and porticos), it is remarkable for several distinctive features: its considerable size, the dogged symmetry of its architectural composition, each side of the courtyard being occupied by a colonnaded porch flanked by two long rooms, and the apparent lack of differentiation of the rooms.

The theatre, built against the inner slope of the acropolis, spread the fan of its unbaked-brick tiers over slightly more than a semi-circle, with a radius of 42 m and a height of 17 m. Its seating capacity of about 5,000 is somewhat greater than that of the only other Hellenistic theatre so far excavated in Hellenized Asia at Babylon, and slightly smaller than the famous theatre at Epidaurus in Greece. The presence of royal boxes set half-way up the tiers, a feature unknown in Greek theatres, indicates a society in which differences in social status were more clearly marked and where the democratic ideal so cherished, even by Greek cities under royal rule, was already seriously weakened. There can be no doubt,



FIG. 2 General view of the gymnasium of Ay Khanum.

however, that the repertoire of Greek plays was performed there. Indirect but indisputable evidence of this is provided by one of the carved spouts of the Oxus fountain, which represents the traditional comic mask of the slave cook.⁴⁹ It is, therefore, quite probable that the colonists of Ay Khanum, like their Mediterranean cousins, were familiar with the Greek new comedy, and in particular with the plays of the most famous Greek comic writer, Menander. A passage in Plutarch (*De Alexandri fortuna aut virtute*, 328 D.), referring to the fact that in the parts of Asia conquered by Alexander, the children of Persia, Susa and Gedrosia were learning to recite the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, confirms, in spite of rhetorical exaggeration, the spread to Asia of that typically Greek literary genre and social phenomenon: the theatre.

Another kind of construction at Ay Khanum that is equally characteristic of the Greek urban landscape is a stone fountain, decorated with carved spouts and fed by underground streams situated at the foot of the ramparts along the bank of the Oxus.⁵⁰ Ay Khanum possessed an arsenal, set like the theatre on the edge of the main street, at the foot of the acropolis. It was a vast edifice measuring 140 × 110 m, with store-rooms grouped around a central courtyard. Its presence and size emphasize the role of Ay Khanum as a military base on the eastern marches of Bactria.

⁴⁹ CRAI, 1976, pp. 310–13, Fig. 18.

⁵⁰ Leriche and Thoraval, 1979, pp. 171–205.

At Ay Khanum, as in other Greek towns, the dead were buried outside the city walls and the families had their mausoleums made up of several vaulted chambers arranged on either side of a central passage. These massive rectangular structures of unbaked brick, half submerged in the earth, represent a kind of funerary architecture unknown in the Greek world and that appeared here for the first time in Central Asia. In accordance with Greek custom, honorary burials were allowed within the city walls. This privilege was granted to benefactors of the community so that their memory would be for ever present among the living. Two such mausoleums in the shape of small Greek temples were discovered near the entrance to the palace. The more monumental of the two contained an underground stone vault and was probably surrounded by a row of columns. The more modest, which was also the more venerable because it contained the mortal remains of Kineas, one of the city's founding fathers, had a simple façade with two wooden columns.

Domestic architecture

It was, paradoxically, in domestic and religious architecture – the two types most directly involved in the personal life of the citizens and which ought, therefore, to have been the most conservative – that we encounter the most far-reaching innovations. The traditional Greek house had a central courtyard around which the living room and service quarters were arranged. This was replaced by a house with a courtyard in front of the body of the building and with the building itself firmly centred around the main living-room. A peripheral corridor set off the living-room from the other rooms that formed a horseshoe around it. This living room opened out into the front courtyard through a two-columned porch. This layout subordinated all other rooms to the main living-room, which became the focal point of the architectural composition, while the courtyard acted as a kind of private annexe. In this plan we may have evidence of a hardening of the hierarchical relationship between the master of the house and his subordinates. Although the houses were radically different from those of the Mediterranean, they retained a typically Greek feature – the bathroom – and an even more important place was reserved for it than in their Mediterranean counterparts. Constructed with particular care, the bathroom consisted of two or, more often than not, three complementary rooms, which led in a row from one to the other. The floors were of flagstones or mosaics and the walls plastered with red stucco. There were usually a dressing room, a bathing room, where one could take a shower, and a water supply with cauldrons, from which one drew the hot and cold water. This type of domestic architecture was particular to the patrician mansions in the southern quarter of the town and its northern suburbs, and to Bactria in general. It probably incorporates elements borrowed from local

domestic architecture, and is unknown south of the Hindu Kush, where the few Indo-Greek houses uncovered at Taxila (Sirkap) reflect the principles of the traditional Greek plan with a central courtyard that is found in the Mediterranean and throughout Western Asia.

Religions and religious monuments

In the absence of texts, coins in general and the religious monuments discovered at Ay Khanum are practically the only sources known about the religion practised by the Greeks of Central Asia. With very few exceptions, the official state pantheon was entirely Greek, as illustrated by the images on the coins which depict its various gods in association with the reigning monarch.⁵¹ Among the relatively small range of deities most frequently represented, we find Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Heracles, the Dioscuri, Artemis and Athena (the latter portrayed mostly in her typically Macedonian form as Athena Alkidemos), as well as Nike and Tyche, personifications of victory and good fortune. Examples of cross-influences with local divinities are rare, for example: the crown of radiating spikes that surrounds the head of Artemis, perhaps suggesting the halo of light worn by the Iranian goddess Anahita; the Persian cap worn by Zeus-Mithra, also surrounded by rays of light, on the coins of Amyntas and Hermaeus; and lastly, the wheel, the Indian symbol of universal kingship, found on one lone copper coin of Menander. The significance of the use of the bull and the elephant on the coins remains ambiguous. Both these animals are as common to Greek symbolism (they are featured on Seleucid coins) as they are to Indian (where they are the animals sacred to Śiva and Indra). Agathocles, one of the first kings to penetrate into the Panjab, is unique in that, on the coinage minted in his Indian dominions, an important place was given to local Hindu deities: the brothers Kṛṣṇa (Krishna), holding a wheel, and Balarāma holding a plough, as well as an Indian goddess holding a flower.⁵²

On the basis of the coinage, one would have expected to find Greek-style temples in Bactria. It therefore came as a great surprise that the architecture of the temples discovered at Ay Khanum owed nothing to Greek tradition. One of the most important, if not the principal, sanctuary of the city, both in terms of size (60 × 60 m) and location – on the main street, not far from the palace – contained a massive temple 20 m by 20 m raised up on a high, three-stepped base with its outer walls decorated with indented niches. Inside the temple, a large vestibule led into a smaller chapel flanked by two sacristies. Opposite the entrance stood the cult image. Outside the city walls, not far from the main gate, stood another temple with a closely related plan, also standing on a similar high podium, with

⁵¹ For coin types, see Lahiri, 1965; Mitchiner, 1975.

⁵² Bernard and Audouin, 1974, pp. 7–41. Pantaleon, whose coinage was similar to that of Agathocles but less rich, also issued bronze coins depicting a goddess holding a flower.

its outside walls similarly decorated with indented niches, but containing three chapels opening into an open-air vestibule. There was also another sanctuary at the south-west corner of the acropolis, built around a monumental stepped platform in the open which was clearly used as an altar. This last place of worship recalls directly Iranian religious sites, where, according to the descriptions of classical authors, the Iranians worshipped the forces of nature in high open places, without erecting any statues to personify them. Even if we were ready to admit that this sanctuary was specially built for the local population, particularly for the troops stationed on the acropolis, and that the temple outside the city walls was also erected for a local cult, this supposition would not apply to the main temple with the indented niches which was obviously used by the Greek colonists themselves. The only significant fragment of its cult image that has survived – a foot clad in a Greek sandal decorated with winged thunderbolts, carved in an impeccably Greek style – seems to indicate that the divinity in question, whose identity remains unknown, was portrayed in Greek form (perhaps a Zeus). However, the burial of votive vases at the foot of the edifice indicates a ritual unparalleled in Hellenistic religion. The painted images of the Dioscuri at the entrance to the shrine of the temple at Dilberjin in the ancient oasis of Bactra⁵³ confirm that divinities of Greek origin were worshipped in temples built in a purely Oriental style. It is not impossible, however, that these Greek gods may have been identified with local divinities.

Since such a combination of Greek deities with Oriental temples has been observed at only two sites, neither of which have been fully excavated, it should not be set up as a general rule. The undeniably Greek inspiration of the monumental temple of Jandial at Taxila,⁵⁴ both in terms of its plan and its décor of Ionic columns, in spite of its peculiar features and its probable post-Greek date, indicates that religious buildings in the Greek style did indeed exist in the Indo-Greek area. This possibility should not be ruled out for Bactria either, which was the true cradle of Central Asian Hellenism, and where the public mausoleums of Ay Khanum faithfully preserved the memory of this traditional religious architecture.

⁵³ For the oldest level, possibly dating back to the end of the Graeco-Bactrian period, see Kruglikova, 1977, pp. 407–10. For the painting of the Dioscuri, see Kruglikova, 1976, pp. 87–93; Burfy, 1976, pp. 110–13. The layout of the sanctuary of the god Oxus at Takht-i Sangin is also non-Greek. See Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 197–200 (the Kushan level); Pichikyan, 1991.

⁵⁴ Marshall, 1951, pp. 222–9.

Local cults and Buddhist influence

We have little information regarding the indigenous cults during this period, at least as far as the lands north of the Hindu Kush are concerned. The Oxus river, master of fertilizing waters, certainly occupied an important place in local religious thought. This is suggested by the use of its name in the composition of personal names, and by the discovery of a statuette at Takht-i Sangin which represents the Oxus in the form of the satyr Marsyas playing the double flute.⁵⁵ This very unusual manner of depicting a river-god suggests a direct link with the way Greeks used to represent the source of the Meander, the great river in Anatolia. This in turn leads to speculation that the valley of the Meander may have provided Bactria with contingents of colonists during the period of Seleucid rule. At Ay Khanum two naked women figurines carved in bone with exaggeratedly feminine features, and standing in hieratic frontality, undoubtedly represent a local fertility goddess⁵⁶ rather than the purely Greek Aphrodite. At Takht-i Sangin indirect evidence for the cult of fire, which plays such an important part in Iranian religions, is found in a personal name, Atrosokes, which means ‘fire-brand’.⁵⁷ The monumental altar on the acropolis at Ay Khanum is evidence of a non-Greek cult, but its precise nature remains obscure. The documents concerning Greek territories south of the Hindu Kush offer information on the relationship between the Greek colonists and Indian religions. Their impact on the new masters of the territories was felt even in the most exalted circles of society. Heliodorus of Taxila, ambassador of the Indo-Greek king Antialcidas, who served at the court of the king of the Vidiśā region, was a follower of the cult of Vishnu, as can be seen from the confession of faith that he inscribed on a votive column dedicated to Vāsudeva at the site of Besnagar.⁵⁸ Above all it was Buddhism that penetrated Greek society, and the reasons for its success can be looked for in the fact that its concepts contained many points in common with that of the philosophy of Epicurus⁵⁹ and that it had profited from the active protection of the Mauryan emperors. The conversion of Menander, the most famous of the Indo-Greek sovereigns, to the ‘Good Law’ as described in the Indian work entitled *Milindapañha*⁶⁰ may or may not be a historical fact, but it does bear witness, at least, to Menander’s personal sympathy for that doctrine and more generally to the strength of the message that had been passed on by the the Emperor Aśoka to the Greeks in his

⁵⁵ Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 202–4.

⁵⁶ CRAI, 1974, pp. 302–3; Francfort, 1984, pp. 15–17.

⁵⁷ Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, p. 202; Pichikyan, 1991, pp. 170–2.

⁵⁸ . Raychaudhuri, 1920, pp. 58–61.

⁵⁹ Schlumberger, 1972, pp. 188–99.

⁶⁰ Foucher, 1951, pp. 289–95.

north-western provinces more than 100 years earlier. Towards the end of the Greek occupation of Gandhāra or shortly thereafter, a local governor, the Meridarch Theodorus, *dedicated a Buddhist reliquary in Swat*.⁶¹ The extraordinary flowering of what is called Graeco Buddhist art in the first centuries A.D. would probably never have occurred had there not been a large number of Buddhists already in the Greek community of the southern provinces and among its artists.

The figurative arts

In contrast to the many examples of creative originality in architecture, the figurative arts were, generally, much more dependent on Western models of a latter day classicism. The early date (towards the middle of the second century B.C.) at which the Greek Empire went into decline left little time for the figurative arts to be revitalized by the upsurge of inspiration that characterized the mainstream of Hellenistic art in the second and first centuries B.C. In many respects, it is even possible to speak of Central Asian Greek art as traditionalistic, as in the case of the mosaics discovered at Ay Khanum. Instead of being composed of small stone cubes, which could be laid down in tight patterns to create skilful effects of depth and colour, the mosaics were made by the old technique of setting pebbles in a bed of cement.⁶² The loose spacing of the pebbles and the limitation of colours, white for the background and brown red with a few isolated touches of black for the designs, reduced the decorative motifs to simple outlines, while the repertoire itself remained conventional. The same conservative spirit may be seen in the stone statuary, which was mainly used in small-size works, such as a woman leaning on a short column,⁶³ a male nude wearing a crown of leaves,⁶⁴ which is a fine anatomical study in the best Greek tradition (Fig. 3), the bust of an old man set on top of a pillar,⁶⁵ the funerary relief of a naked youth, with his cloak thrown over his back⁶⁶ and a gargoyle representing a comic mask.⁶⁷ The general standard of craftsmanship is high. There is, however, one important innovation that we owe to the Graeco-Bactrian artists. In the execution of large-scale statues and reliefs for decorating the walls of certain buildings, these artists systematically used and perfected the technique of modelling raw clay or stucco on a framework of wood and thin lead wires used only

⁶¹ *CII*, 1929, 2, 1, 1.

⁶² Bernard et al., 1976, pp. 16–24.

⁶³ *CRAI*, 1972, pp. 628–9, Fig. 15.

⁶⁴ *CRAI*, 1969, pp. 341–4, Figs. 17–18.

⁶⁵ Bernard, 1967, pp. 90–1, Plates XIX–XX; Veuve, 1987, pp. 91–3.

⁶⁶ *CRAI*, 1972, pp. 623–5, Fig. 13. For a foot from the cult image in the temple with indented niches, see also page 115 above and *CRAI*, 1969, pp. 338–41, Figs. 15–16.

⁶⁷ *CRAI*, 1976, pp. 310–13, Fig. 18; Leriche and Thoraval, 1979, pp. 196 et seq., Figs. 16–18.

to a limited extent in the Mediterranean area. With this technique the sculptors were able to develop a more personal style, particularly in the art of portraiture (heads found at Ay Khanum and Takht-i Sangin (Figs. 5 and 6)).⁶⁸ Other superb examples of this development of skilled portraiture are seen in the work of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coin engravers and in the bust of a veiled woman from a terracotta mould (Fig. 4) found at Ay Khanum.

The abundance, diversity and quality of the products of the so-called minor arts are characteristic features of Greek civilization in Central Asia. The sites of Ay Khanum and Takht-i Sangin have yielded a mass of objects of every kind – utilitarian, decorative and votive – made from a wide range of materials. The decorative bowls made of dark schist, carved with simple designs and encrusted with coloured stones, which were discovered at Ay Khanum,⁶⁹ are typical of these local crafts. Owing to the proximity of Bactria to India, the working of ivory in that province was particularly well developed and produced a wide range of fittings from furniture to arm-fittings. The Greek tradition was forcefully expressed in this field as can be seen in parts of thrones and beds,⁷⁰ sword hilts⁷¹ and figurative carvings for sword handles and scabbard endings such as a head of Heracles wearing his lion scalp head-dress,⁷² an image of the same Heracles trampling on an adversary⁷³ and a fantastic feminine water deity, half centaur, half triton, holding an oar. Two bronze statuettes, one of Heracles crowning himself,⁷⁴ the other of the god Oxus portrayed as Marsyas playing the double flute,⁷⁵ exemplify the reworking of Western themes in a provincial style not without a certain rustic flavour (particularly in the case of the Silenus). It was indeed in this field of the minor arts that local artists were most likely to play a role, opening the way to Oriental conceptions. For example, we have at Ay Khanum terracotta figurines of a local goddess dressed with heavy robes and weighed down with jewellery, as well as bone statuettes in which a naked and plump goddess is represented in a hieratic nudity.⁷⁶ The most important work in this Graeco-Oriental style is a gilded silver plaque, also discovered at Ay Khanum, which depicts the Greek goddess of nature, Cybele, riding over a rocky terrain in her chariot drawn by lions and driven by a winged Victory.⁷⁷ Two priests dressed in the traditional robes of the servants of Cybele take part in the scene, one walking behind

⁶⁸ CRAI, 1969 p. 344, Figs. 19–20; Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 204–6, Figs. 9–10.

⁶⁹ Francfort, 1976, pp. 91–8, 1984, pp. 21–6.

⁷⁰ Bernard, 1970, pp. 327–43.

⁷¹ Pichikyan, 1980, pp. 202–12.

⁷² Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 212–15, Fig. 17.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 207, Fig. 12.

⁷⁴ CRAI, 1974 p. 302, Fig. 13.

⁷⁵ Litvinsky and Pichikyan, 1981a, pp. 202–4, Figs. 6–7.

⁷⁶ CRAI, 1974, pp. 302–5, Fig. 15; Francfort, 1984 p. 15; Guillaume and Rougeulle, 1987, pp. 60–3.

⁷⁷ CRAI, 1970, pp. 339–47, Fig. 31; Francfort, 1984, pp. 93–104.



FIG. 3. Limestone statuette of a naked man wearing a crown of leaves, Ay Khanum.

the chariot and holding a parasol to provide shade, the other burning incense on the top of a high stepped altar of an Oriental type. The sun, the moon and a star shine in the sky. The allegorical representation of Victory, the personification of the sun as the bust of Helios and the robes worn by Cybele and the Victory are all inspired by the Greek aesthetic tradition, but the conventions of Oriental art are deeply felt in the absence of perspective, in the



FIG. 4. Bust of a veiled woman, from a terracotta mould, Ay Khanum.

flatness of composition, and in the rejection of three-quarter views in favour of absolute frontality or strict profile. This work nevertheless remains an exception, and it has to be admitted that the figurative arts lack the originality and homogeneity of style that we find in the architecture of the period, and the Graeco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra of later times.

Everyday implements

For everyday needs, the colonists relied heavily on implements created by Greek technology. Apart from the common grinders to be found in any civilization, heavy grain millstones have been discovered in the colonists' houses. These millstones, whose area of distribution coincides with that of the Greek colonization, are of a sophisticated design. The upper grinding stone, cut out to act as a hopper, was moved back and forth by means of a horizontal lever allowing the grain to flow automatically from the hopper to the lower



FIG. 5 Head of a Seleucid King : Seleucos I(?), Takht-i Sangin. Clay and alabaster. (Photo: © Vladimir Terebenin.)

stone where it was crushed. The wine presses and ink-wells⁷⁸ were copied from Western models, and Greek-style sundials with a hemispherical section were used to tell the

⁷⁸ CRAI, 1978, pp. 462–3, Fig. 21, Guillaume and Rougeulle, 1987, pp. 47–8.



FIG. 6. Head in clay and alabaster with Bactrian-style head-dress, Takht-i Sangin.(Photo:©Vladimir Terebenin.)

time.⁷⁹ An equatorial sundial was found in the gymnasium at Ay Khanum whose form, though quite distinct from any previous known model, was nevertheless obviously inspired

⁷⁹ Veuve, 1982, pp. 23–36, 1987, pp. 86–8.

by the Greek theory of solar clocks.⁸⁰ A large part of the ceramic vessels imitated specifically local shapes (for example, the tulip bowl in the Panjab and Gandhāra area and the cylindro-conical drinking-cups in the Oxus valley), but new types inspired by Greek models were constantly introduced, such as high-footed craters, fish platters, hemispherical bowls, carinated bowls, bowls with moulded designs (the so-called Megarian bowls) or applied designs (the so-called Pergamene vessels), amphorae, pitchers, etc. Even the greyish black slip of certain series is a deliberate substitute for the black-glaze monochrome pottery of the Mediterranean area.⁸¹

Trade and trade routes

The distribution of silver coins is a good indication both of their use as international currency beyond the borders of the countries in which they were issued, and of the geographical range of that country's commercial activities. The area in which Graeco-Bactrian tetradrachms are found (mainly of Euthydemus I and II, Eucratides I and II, and Helioctes) reached as far as Syria-Mesopotamia with finds at Baarin,⁸² Susa⁸³ and the Kabala hoard in Caucasia.⁸⁴ Indo-Greek coins circulated as far as the heart of the Ganges valley at Panchkora.⁸⁵ In contrast, the Western silver coins that reached Bactria were mainly Seleucid (up to Antiochus III) or posthumous issues struck in the name of Alexander from mints in Asia Minor, Syria and Phoenicia.⁸⁶ A large hoard of Indian coins, each stamped with several punch marks, and Indo-Greek drachms of Agathocles was discovered at Ay Khanum⁸⁷ but it probably tells us little about the trade between Bactria and the Greek provinces of north-west India, because the hoard was found in the palace treasury, and seems to represent taxes and duties levied in those regions. The same is no doubt true of a mother-of-pearl plaque whose decoration made of incrustated coloured glass is typically Indian in style,⁸⁸ and of fragments of agate and onyx used for furniture decoration, which were discovered in the same place, and whose Indian origin is equally indisputable. The existence of close trade links with the Indian subcontinent is clearly seen in the widespread

⁸⁰ Veuve, 1982, pp. 36–51, 1987, pp. 88–91.

⁸¹ Gardin, 1973, pp. 121–88; Bernard et al., 1976, pp. 45–51.

⁸² Seyrig, 1973. (Hoard 28, No 3.) a coin of Eucratides has even been found in a hoard discovered in Italy, and another has been found on the northern coast of the Black Sea.

⁸³ Mørkholm, 1965, pp. 127–56; Houghton and Le Rider, 1966, pp. 111–17; Strauss, 1971, pp. 109–40; Le Rider, 1965 p. 198.

⁸⁴ Dadasheva, 1976, pp. 106–9.

⁸⁵ Sharma, 1980, pp. 80–3.

⁸⁶ Curiel and Fussman, 1965; Petitot-Biehler, 1975, pp. 40–51; Holt, 1981, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁷ Bernard and Audouin, 1973, pp. 238–89, 1974, pp. 7–41.

⁸⁸ Bernard et al, 1980, pp. 29–36; Rapin, 1987, pp. 185–232.

use of ivory in local workshops for the production of a range of artefacts. Western imports were extremely rare, for local craftsmen were successful in responding to every kind of demand, and produced items that were thoroughly Greek in style. Among the finds from the Mediterranean area which were made at Ay Khanum we might mention scraps of literary papyri,⁸⁹ the stamped handle of an amphora, unique among hundreds and thousands of sherds,⁹⁰ some fragments of black glazed pottery and plaster casts taken from metallic vessels of probable Western origin. For obvious reasons, it is even more difficult to detect Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek exports. It is quite likely that part of the ivory destined for the workshops of Hellenized Asia came from India and was transmitted through Bactria. The possibility that the famous carved rhytons of Nisa in Parthia were produced by Graeco-Bactrian craftsmen cannot be ruled out.⁹¹ But the first real trade links between Central Asia and China were established much later than the mission of Chang Ch'ien and lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

In the third and second centuries B.C., the trade we have just mentioned was carried out exclusively by overland routes, for the sea route linking the north-western coast of India to the Persian Gulf and Egypt had not yet opened. The great east–west caravan route was controlled by the Greek kingdoms. Starting at Pāṭaliputra, it made its way up the Ganges valley to cross the Panjab, through Taxila and Puṣkalāvati. Once it had reached Alexandria ad Caucasum (Begram), it crossed the Hindu Kush to descend into Bactria, and from there, it veered westward towards Hecatompylos, Ecbatana, Seleucia on the Tigris, or Antioch or even Asia Minor. At Alexandria ad Caucasum a secondary branch of this old route forked off south of the Hindu Kush to cross Arachosia and join the main route again in Aria. The *Parthian Stations*, a handbook for travellers by Isidore of Charax written around the beginning of the Christian era, describes this itinerary from the crossing of the Euphrates to Arachosia. Caravans travelling along these roads halted not only at the great urban and trading centres, like those mentioned above, but at simple staging posts, which were the forerunners of the Islamic caravanserais. One such staging post located on the right bank of the Oxus near Termez has been identified thanks to the Iranian form of its name ‘Pardagwi’ which has preserved the Greek word *pandocheion*, ‘hostelry’.⁹² The river- and sea-trade route that was said to allow the shipping of goods along the Oxus to the Black Sea, via the Caspian and the Caucasian isthmus, was never anything more than a grandiose theoretical scheme submitted to Seleucus I by one of his generals, Patroclus, and based on

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 24, n. 35; see also above, p. 107.

⁹⁰ Bernard, 1965, pp. 636–9.

⁹¹ Masson and Pugachenkova, 1959.

⁹² Minorsky, 1967, pp. 45–53.

the mistaken idea that the Oxus flowed into the Caspian Sea.⁹³ All the merchandise leaving the Oxus valley and bound for Western Asia, even when it was destined to go to the Black Sea, ancient Albania or Iberia (Georgia and Azerbaijan), took the land route through Ecbatana.⁹⁴

Coinage

Numismatics plays a crucial role in our knowledge of the Greek kingdoms of Central Asia. Indeed, it is through the study of coins that it has been possible to reconstruct the broad outlines of the history of these kingdoms, and the abundance of their coinage bears witness to the political and economic power they once held.⁹⁵ The Greek coinage of Central Asia, like that of the Seleucids from which it originated, was based on the silver standard. Gold was only struck in exceptional circumstances.⁹⁶ The coinage of this period was exclusively royal, that is to say, it was issued by sovereigns in their own name, even down to the issues of bronze coins intended for minor purchases. It may be divided into two main series that were geographically distinct. North of the Hindu Kush lay the area of what is known as Graeco-Bactrian coinage, which represents the direct continuation of the Seleucid series that it succeeded in this region and whose Attic standard it preserves (with a theoretical drachm weight of 4.4 g and tetradrachm weight of 17.5 g) as well as the exclusive use of Greek for the king's name. South of the Hindu Kush lay the area of Indo-Greek coinage, which had a weight standard considerably lighter than that of the Attic coinage (with a theoretical drachm weight of 2.4 g and tetradrachm weight of 9.8 g) and much closer to that of the Indian punch-marked coins that were common in those territories. The Indo-Greek coins bear bilingual inscriptions, one Greek and the other a translation of it into Prakrit, the Indian language of ancient north-western India, written in Kharoṣṭhī script. The most commonly used denomination in this coinage was the drachm, which was sometimes minted in the square shape of ancient Indian punch-marked coins, a form that was also used for bronze coins. The Indo-Greek coinage, which was minted in the territories of northwestern India after they had been conquered by the Graeco-Bactrian kings, did not begin until around 180 B.C., long after the first Graeco-Bactrian issues, but continued to

⁹³ Tarn, 1951, pp. 486–90.

⁹⁴ Manandian, 1965, pp. 47–52.

⁹⁵ For catalogues of the coins, see note 51 above. For the historical interpretation of the coinages, see the works cited in note 1.

⁹⁶ The magnificent 20-stater piece (167 g) of Eucratides I, now in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris, is the most remarkable of these rare gold coins: see Seltman, 1955, Plate LV, No. 5; Bopearachchi, 1991, p. 69, Plates 16 and 25.

circulate until the time of the last Indo-Greek king, Strato II (c. 55 B.C.), long after the Graeco-Bactrian issues had come to a halt.

The recent discoveries, notably in the famous Qunduz hoard of Graeco-Bactrian tetradrachms and decadrachms issued by the late Indo-Greek kings of whom only bilingual coins were previously known (Amyntas, Antialcidas, Archebius, Diomedes, Hermaeus, Lysias, Menander, Philoxenus, Theophilus), do not necessarily prove that these kings retained enclaves within a Bactria overrun by nomads.⁹⁷ They only imply that these late Graeco-Bactrian coins were struck by these sovereigns for commercial use with the northern territories, already lost to them, where the former Graeco-Bactrian issues continued to circulate, or to pay tribute to the nomadic conquerors.⁹⁸ Except in the case of Pantaleon and Agathocles, who had admitted into their coinage certain Indian divinities, the gods represented on the Indo-Greek issues remain Greek. The wheel depicted on a unique copper coin of Menander is virtually the sole concession to Indian symbolism. Despite the progress of Indianization of the colonists, official public life remained Greek until the very end. The superb royal portraits adorning these coins, whether bareheaded, helmeted or wearing the *kausia* (a Macedonian felt cap), are some of the most striking manifestations of Central Asian Hellenistic art to survive.

The Greek heritage in Central Asia

The influence of Greek tradition on the empire of the Kushans, successors to the Greeks in Central Asia, should neither be over- nor underestimated. This influence was profound, as one would expect, even though in certain fields it met with an anti-Hellenistic reaction. These former nomads, having subjected an empire of sedentary peoples, adopted some of the ways of urban life and civilization in an environment that had been shaped by two or three centuries of Greek domination. Greek ceased to be the official language, and was replaced by local Iranian and Indian languages; but to write Bactrian, which until then had been only a spoken language, the Kushans made use of the Greek alphabet with minor modifications. Gold replaced silver as the monetary standard, but the highly developed monetary system of Kushan Central Asia, based on bimetallism (gold and bronze) and using coins depicting the king on the obverse and various deities on the reverse, was a Greek invention and in no way a product of the Iranian or Indian East.

⁹⁷ Curiel and Fussman, 1965, pp. 61–4; Bopearachchi, 1991, pp. 75–6.

⁹⁸ The late date of these kings renders untenable the theory that they would have kept territories in Afghan Bactria, especially since the region of Badakhshan or eastern Bactria, in which these last outposts of the Greek presence north of the Hindu Kush are supposed to have been located, had already fallen into nomadic hands by 145 B.C., as the excavations at Ay Khanum have shown.

In religion there can be no doubt that local cults quickly gained the upper hand over the pantheon of the colonists. This change must have been made all the easier by the fact that the Greeks themselves had probably never, except in their own official state religion, put up any barriers between their own gods and those of their subjects, and so had paved the way to their progressive assimilation. The Kushan coinage is indeed dominated by an Indo-Iranian pantheon within which only a few gods are occasionally designated by their Greek name, but most of the deities are portrayed in a style that, if not overtly Greek, is at least Hellenized. The goddesses are shown draped in a chiton and a cloak, occasionally holding a cornucopia. One of them (Riṣto) even retained the martial costume and attributes of an Athena. The gods are generally dressed in a knee-length tunic with a short cloak thrown over the shoulder, or in a long robe with a full-length cloak. The same trend can also be detected in both the sculptures and paintings of the period. An image of Athena modelled in clay dating from the first century B.C., was found at Khalchayan in Bactria. Several centuries later Dalverzin in north Bactria also yielded a figure of a goddess retaining the features of a helmeted Athena; and from Tepe Shotor on the Hadda plain comes a statue of a seated Vajrapāṇi, one of the Buddha's attendant deities, which faithfully reproduces a prototype of Heracles as he is represented on the coinage of the Graeco-Bactrian king Euthydemus.

It is in the architecture and figurative arts that the Greek heritage is to be most clearly seen. Certain Graeco-Bactrian building styles were incorporated into Kushan architecture. At Dalverzin in northern Bactria this was the case both for the great mansions with their front courtyards and central living-rooms, and for a mausoleum containing many vaulted chambers set on either side of a central corridor. However, it is primarily in architectural decoration that the persistence of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek tradition reveals itself. It is apparent in the columns set on Attic-Asiatic bases (sometimes arranged to form a true peristyle), in the pilasters used to decorate walls, in the ubiquity of the Corinthian order with its acanthus leaves, in the rows of antefixes along the roof edges and in the decorative use of relief and sculpture modelled in clay or stucco. Even the technique of cutting the bases of columns with a turning machine survived into the Kushan period.

In the figurative arts the Greek conquest brought about an equally profound change. It introduced a certain naturalism in the representation of the human body and its drapery, an attempt to produce volume and perspective, the use of three-quarter views and asymmetrical attitudes. Even when Central Asian art had largely outgrown these outside influences, their underlying presence could still be felt. For a long time, it has been thought that the art style called Graeco-Buddhist, which developed in Gandhāra and the Oxus valley in the first centuries of our era, derived its markedly Western features from influences passing

from the Roman Empire along the trade routes. The discovery over the past twenty years of a vigorous and authentically Greek civilization that had flourished under the rule of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms seems to indicate that the real roots of the classical influences evident in Graeco-Buddhist art are to be sought in this easternmost branch of Hellenism, while Rome's contribution was merely secondary. Since at Tepe Shotor an artist of the fourth century A.D. can portray a Vajrapāṇi so similar to the Heracles on the Graeco-Bactrian coins of Euthydemus, and since Indo-Scythian coins provide an intermediate link,⁹⁹ there is no need to look for prototypes in some distant country beyond the sea when local traditions provide them. The fabulous royal tombs discovered at Tillya-tepe in southern Bactria have brought to light another descendant of the Greek art in Central Asia, an art of the steppes enriched with Hellenistic iconography and traditions in the form of gold jewellery, richly set with semi-precious stones, particularly turquoise.

The fact that we now have proof of the existence of Greek theatres in Central Asia, where Greek plays were actually performed, should lead to a re-examination of the origins of Indian theatre, whose first creations were roughly contemporary with the end of the Greek kingdom, and of possible Greek influence on it. In the same manner, the lively interest that Greek colonists of Central Asia took in astronomy – as shown by the discovery at Ay Khanum of sundials, one of a highly sophisticated type – raises other questions of a similar nature. We are indeed entitled to ask ourselves if the Babylonian astronomical conceptions that are manifest in Indian astronomy may have reached India earlier than has been supposed, that is to say, in the Hellenistic period via the Greek kingdoms of Central Asia.

⁹⁹ Tarzi, 1976, pp. 394–7, Figs. 10–11.