

Wine Cultures
Gandhāra and Beyond

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Wine in Gandhāra

Notes on a Mythical and Economical Geography

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Abstract The contribution focuses on the geography of places associated by the Greeks in the retinue of Alexander with wine and the myth of Dionysus and Herakles in Gandhāra, specifically the city of Nysa in the Kunar/Chitral valley. The study then analyses the economic spaces of wine production in the region until late antiquity. The existence of an actual 'Wine Belt' has been hypothesised in the past on the basis of archaeological data. This encompasses both Swat and the Kunar/Chitral area and roughly corresponds to the cultural region today called Greater Kafiristan or Peristan.

Keywords Wine. Gandhāra. Gandhāran art. Alexander the Great. Hellenistic age. Archaeology. Ancient Pakistan. Ancient Afghanistan. Dionysus. Herakles. Greek historiography. Fashion Ware.

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1 Introduction*

All this the poets sang of Dionysus; and I leave
interpretation to learned Greeks or barbarians.
(Arrian, *Indikà*, 1.7-8)

The journey to India that Greek mythology attributes to Dionysus has been the subject of many studies. According to late Classical sources, both textual and visual, the god is said to have conquered the country by taking on the features of a civilising hero who, among other things, taught the Indians the cultivation of vines and the production of wine. The story is not as old as one might think, and it was known only from the times of Alexander onwards.¹ It was intentionally created in this period perhaps even for political purposes. Since then, it became so popular that it entered Mediterranean traditions as if it had always existed. In fact, the Indian narrative of the events around the god Dionysus is part of that gradual and artificial extension of the geographical horizon of the Greeks from the eastern Mediterranean to India. This extension of mythical geography in the Hellenistic age involved Dionysus, Herakles (here certainly for political purposes), and even Prometheus.² As we shall see, only Dionysus conquered a definitive space in the Western traditions, while Herakles remained lively only in Central Asia and India. As for Prometheus' Indian connection, no trace will remain except for a mention in Strabo (in the Augustan period),³ and later in Arrian (age of the Antonines).⁴ In the following pages, we will focus on the origins of this ideological and cultural process to understand its genesis and the reasons that allowed the extraordinary persistence of Dionysian motifs and wine production in Gandhāra [fig. 1] well beyond the actual Greek presence in the region.

* Sections 1-4 of the present study, including the footnotes, on-site research, illustrations and map, are the result of a joint research done by Omar Coloru and Luca Maria Olivieri. These, by mutual agreement, each acknowledge a contribution of half of the section. Elisa Iori is the author of section 5-7, while the conclusions were collectively prepared by Omar Coloru, Elisa Iori, and Luca Maria Olivieri.

1 Karttunen 1997, 89-90.

2 See Goukowsky 1981; Bosworth 1995, 213-17.

3 Strabo 15.8.

4 Arr. *Anab.* 5.3.2-3.



Figure 1 Step-riser from Swat, Bacchus, c. second century AD (photo L.M. Olivieri; courtesy Miangul Archive)

2 In the Land of Dionysus. Alexander's Itinerary Through the Kunar, Bajaur, and Swat Valleys

Since the story of Dionysus restarts with Alexander's military expedition, it is essential to retrace briefly the stages of his itinerary in Gandhāra to identify the local elements appropriated by the conquering ruler and his retinue that served to establish a connection with Dionysus. In this regard, we must make the obvious assumption that Alexander and his people had come to the region with their own set of ideas about Dionysus: a god linked to viticulture and conqueror of an East, who by Alexander's time was already settled in Bactria.⁵ The loss of Hellenistic historiography in the manuscript tradition prevents us from having a precise description of the stages of the Macedonian's itinerary so we have to rely on fragments of the alexandroglyphers and the bematists that survived in later works.⁶

⁵ Eur. *Bacch.* 14-15.

⁶ The present reconstruction of this section of the Alexander's itinerary in India is built upon Bosworth 1995, 141-219; Olivieri 1996, 45-78; Rapin, Grenet 2018, 141-81; cf. Rapin 2017, 88-95, 102-3, although it differs in several points.

In the late spring of 327 BC, Alexander leaves Bactra (Balkh), crosses the Hindu Kush in ten days, and arrives in Alexandria of the Caucasus (Begram). There, he spends an unspecified amount of time overseeing the settling of the colony and assigning administrative duties.⁷ Alexander arrives in Nicaea (Kabul-Bala Hissar) from where he sends heralds to the various Indian rulers/chiefs on the right bank of the Indus.⁸ Curtius Rufus adds an interesting logistical detail: Alexander intends to use these local leaders as guides in his advance into Indian territory.⁹ On the Cophen, Alexander sends Hephaestion and Perdikkas to subdue the territory of Peucelaotis (Pushkalavati). At the same time, he moves toward the territory of the Aspasiens, the Guraeans, and the Assaceniens.¹⁰

Alexander marches down the Choes (Kunar) River on a difficult mountain road and crosses it with difficulty. He orders the infantry to follow him at a walking pace, while he rushes with the cavalry at a great speed against the local population, who takes refuge in the fortified settlements on the neighbouring hills. The Macedonian army arrives in front of a city whose name, Silex (to be hypothetically located near Chigai Sarai in Kunar),¹¹ is transmitted only by the *Epitome of Metz* (35). The city has two defensive circuits.¹² Alexander lays siege in front of the weakest point of the walls and the next day, at dawn,

7 Nicanor is made governor of Alexandria, and Tyriespis satrap of Paropamisadae and the territories up to the Cophen River (Arr. *Anab.* 4.22.3).

8 Arr. *Anab.* 4.22.6.

9 Curt. 8.10.1-2. Alexander moves with great ability and knowledge in the complex topography of this mountainous regions (we say this from personal experience). He is undoubtedly guided by Sisicottos or his men. Sisicottos, a member of the Assaceniens aristocracy who had passed from Darius' service in Bactria to that of Alexander, must be the man who prepared the terrain, arranged the rapid surrenders, informed Alexander of structural weaknesses, suggested the passes to be crossed, and guaranteed Alexander the surprise effect.

10 Arr. *Anab.* 4.23.

11 Chigai Sarai is a site well known to archaeologists who have dealt with the lower Kunar for the ruins of Shahi temples and forts (refs in Olivieri 2022a); the site is also mentioned in the *Bāburnāma* as “Chagān-sarāi” as the starting place of Babur's military expedition in Bajaur in early 1519 (fol. 216b). In the Laghman (Lampakā) area, before entering the Lower Kunar valley where Silex should be located, Aśokan inscriptions (edicts) were found (Henning 1949; Rosenthal 1978) in a visible spot along a crucial junction of the northern caravan route (*uttarāpatha*) linking Kabul with the Indus and the Punjab. Likewise at Kandahar the Aśokan edict was located at the entrance to the ancient city, at Shahbaz-garhi the edicts are near the junction of the *uttarāpatha* and the Ambela route (connecting the first with Swat), while at Manshera they are at the junction of the routes that linked Kashmir with the road to Taxila.

12 Construction details (think of the masonry technique of the urbic walls of Massa-ga) are always included, especially in Curtius Rufus which are often confirmed by archaeology. These are quotations or fragments that Alexander's historians must have taken without citing their sources, possibly the great experts in poliorcetics and engineering who followed Alexander, such as Aristobulus.

he orders the assault. Alexander, Ptolemy, and Leonnatus are wounded during the fighting, but eventually, the town is taken and razed to the ground. Alexander orders the massacre of its inhabitants, but most of them have managed to run away to the nearby hills.¹³ After crossing the one of the passes connecting Kunar to Bajaur,¹⁴ Alexander enters this latter region [fig. 6].¹⁵ The next stop is Andaca (which in our reconstruction could be located near Nawagai), another walled settlement. He obtains its submission but leaves a garrison there and takes hostages.¹⁶ Alexander sets off again, leaving behind Craterus,

13 Arr. *Anab.* 4.23.5; Curt. 8.10.4-6.

14 Alexander may have crossed the mountain ridge that divides Lower Kunar from Bajaur in one of the many passes that cross the mountains at that point, that is, from the southwest: Nawa-kandao, Ghakhai-kandao, Mukha-kandao, Kaga-kandao. The role of the Nawa-kandao (Nawa Pass) was first indirectly suggested by Colonel Holdich: "From the Kunar valley this road, even to the time of Baber's invasion of India (early in the sixteenth century), crossed the comparatively low intervening range into Bajour; thence to the valley of the Panj-Kora and Swat, and out into India by the same passes with which we have now [...] found it convenient to enter the same district" (Holdich 1896, 43, cit. also in McCrindle 1896, XXX). In fact, the Nawa-kandao lies too far south of the theatre of operations. Most likely Alexander entered Bajaur after crossing a pass slightly north of the latter namely the Ghakhai-kandao. In this way he would have easily reached the first town in the region, Andaca (which we locate near or at Nawagai), and from there, following the Bajaur River valley (Euas), he would have arrived at the nameless capital city of the region, which we locate in Khar (see below).

15 The Bajaur region is extremely rich for its fertile and irrigated soils, forest and mineral resources; it is also important archaeologically, with a tradition of occupation dating back to the ancient Holocene (see Ihsan et al. 2002). Favorable climatic conditions make it an optimal area for double-crop agricultural production and surplus export, as does Swat, although to a lesser extent. In fact, the *Bāburnāma* cites both Swat and Bajaur as the areas from which Babur was able to impose the highest agricultural taxes without affecting the reserves of the two regions (*Bāburnāma* fol. 131; 220; 236b [Thackston 2002]). The distinctive orography makes Bajaur an archaeological basin of great importance. The region must have played an important role in the spread of Buddhism in Aśokan times and inscriptions mention the existence of ancient stupas possibly established in the Maurya period (Falk 2005). In the last three centuries BC Bajaur was ruled by the local dynasty of the Apracarāja or Avacarāja, in whom we may recognise the descendants of the Āśvakayana/Āśvayana, the Assaceniens and the Aspasioi of whom the Alexandrographers tell us (Tucci 1963a; 1977). Important epigraphic documents (such as the so-called Shinkot casket, see Falk 2005 and Baums 2012) and textual documents (the "Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhi manuscripts", see Strauch 2008) come from the Bajaur region. More information on the archaeology of Bajaur can be obtained for instance from Saeed ur-Rehman 1996, to which Ihsan et al. 2002 (on prehistory) and Ashraf Khan et al. 1999-2000 (rock art) should be added. At the threshold of the Late Antiquity, Bajaur continued to have a central position in the archaeological geography of these regions, as evidenced by the extraordinary presence of painted ceramics which, although widespread also in Swat (Olivieri 2018), find in Bajaur their highest formal expression (Brancaccio 2010). In pre-modern and modern times Bajaur oscillated in terms of political and cultural affinity between the Afghan and Indian areas (i.e. after 1895 the British Raj). The last known incident is that of a supposed attempt to annex Bajaur by the Kingdom of Afghanistan in September 1960 (and May 1961), the so-called 'Bajaur incident' (Anonymus 1961).

16 *Ep. Metz* 35.

whom he orders to organise the territory and destroy the settlements that are unwilling to submit. Alexander advances toward the river Euas near which is the city where the Aspasian chief resides.¹⁷ Alexander arrives on the second day after leaving Andaca,¹⁸ but the city has already been set on fire and deserted. This city can be identified with the modern-day Khar. Thus, he pursues the fugitives into the hills and massacres them, but some of them make it to the steeper heights. Ptolemy chases the Aspasian leader first on horseback and then on foot because of the steepness of the hill. We witness a ‘duel’ between Ptolemy and the Aspasian chief, who dies. The Aspasians at this point descend to the valley to attack Alexander, but are pushed back with difficulty toward the mountains. In the accounts of Curtius Rufus and Arrian, the next – and for us significant – stage of Alexander’s itinerary is Nysa. Curtius Rufus proves much more useful in terms of topographical and military details: it is through his sources that we know that a wooded area stands between the Macedonian camp and the settlement. The accidental fire in the forest causes the destruction of cedar funerary monuments placed outside the walls. This detail is interesting because the practice of wooden funerary sculptures is well documented later and in the same areas among the Kafirs. The Nysaeans attempt a sortie but are pushed back into their town. At this point, the Nysaeans are uncertain about what to do, and Alexander orders his officers to maintain the siege. Eventually, the Nysaeans surrender and send Alexander a delegation led by Akouphis, an individual that the sources describe as a prominent figure in his community. Helmut Humbach has convincingly shown that Akouphis is not a personal name but rather a Persian administrative title *Akofiz ‘mountain dweller’ that contains the term *kau-fa/kof* ‘mountain’.¹⁹

17 In later times the nameless capital ‘near the river Euas’ remained the main centre of the region under the name of Khar. A.S. Beveridge in a note to his translation of the *Bāburnāma* (Beveridge 1922, 267 fn. 4) reports that, according to H.G. Raverty, Khar (and its fort) was known simply as Khahr or Shahr. We were unable to trace this information in Raverty 1880. However, if so, Khar might be one of the few instances of the use of the term *šahr*, *xār*, *yār* ‘city’, which is rather rare in the toponymy of these north-eastern Pashto-speaking areas (M. De Chiara, pers. comm.). To seize Bajaur, Babur in 1519 needed to reach Khar first. For this purpose Babur entered Bajaur – we know this for a fact by crossing a northerly pass, which is located at the top of the Bābā-qāra (today: Babukara) valley, where there was a fort at the time controlled by the Bajauri (fol. 216b). This pass corresponds to present-day Mukha-kandao. That Mukha-kandao had become the key to an important trail can be cited in several later archaeological records, including the Brahmi-Śarada inscription of Zarai (c. tenth century; Saeed-ur-Rahman 1996, 161, fig. 62).

18 Arr. *Anab.* 4.24.1.

19 Humbach 2007, 137. To the best of our knowledge, no one has ever attempted to associate this name with an ethnonym known from Xerxes’ inscription XPH 3.27 (Kent 1953, 150-1). Callieri (2023, 859) noted that “The Old Persian term Akaufačiya is a

According to tradition, the Nysaeen delegation would ask Alexander to spare their town because it was a foundation of the god Dionysus. As proof of this, they show the king that ivy and vines grow there.²⁰ In addition, they show the mountain sacred to the god, Meros, whose name was related to the extraordinary birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus. Alexander and part of his retinue ascend the mountain and spend some time there engaged in Bacchic rituals.²¹ Curtius Rufus (8.10.17) is the only one to report that this stay lasted 10 days. In our reconstruction, the events took place in late summer, which also corresponds with the descriptions of the natural environment. Mount Meros could be identified with one of the mountains of Bajaur, i.e. from the Koh-e Mor (today popularly spelled as Koh-e Moor)²² to the Dre Sarai-sar.²³ In fact, any mountain in that area less than 3,000 m above sea level covered with oaks, laurel and ivy

designation for a population group of the Persian Empire that appears only once in an inscription of Xerxes from Persepolis. They are mentioned between the Thracians and the Libyans and thus not in a position that would suggest their location. However, the name has been interpreted as the source of the Middle Persian ethnonym Kōfēč (> New Persian Kūfēč > modern Qofs), which designates a population group living in the Bašakerd area of southeastern Iran. On this basis, the Old Persian term has also been attributed to a population settled in that region, and this is why we include Akaufačiya people in this chapter [dealing with the 'Southeastern Regions of the Persian Empire']'. Of course, this does not imply that the region known as Akaufačiya, contrary to Callieri's claims may correspond to the Kunar/Bajaur area. If the two terms were linguistically associated, Akouphis/*Akofiz might be also interpreted rather than as an ethnonym, ('an Akaufaka'), as a general denomination ('a mountain-dweller'), exactly as proposed by Humbach (2007).

20 Cleitarchus reports that the local name for ivy is *skindapsos*, on which cf. *BNJ* 137 F 17.

21 In the *Bāburnāma* (fol. 219) we find another interesting comparison between Alexander and Babur's experiences in Bajaur. On January 12, 1519, to celebrate the conquest of the Bajaur fort in Khar, Babur took part in a wine festival, the first of at least three he organised or participated in during the first two months of that year. "There was a wine-party in Khwāja Kalān's house, several goat-skins of wine having been brought down by Kāfirs neighbouring on Bajaur. All wine and fruit had in Bajaur [which means here specifically the city of Khar] comes from adjacent part of Kāfiristān" (transl. by Beveridge 1922, 371-2).

22 Probably locally moulded on the more famous name 'Koh-i-Noor' (M. De Chiara, pers. comm.).

23 The Koh-e Mor, for its toponym, altitude, location, and the presence of three peaks, has been always the most suitable mountain (*contra*, see the negative, but not elaborate, opinion expressed in Tucci 1977, 40 fn. 46 with references) (Map: Mt Meros 1). The identification was perhaps first proposed by Holdich: "On the right bank of the Panj-Kora River (the ancient Ghoura), nearly opposite to its junction with the river of Swat (Suastos), is a very conspicuous mountain, whose three-headed outline can be distinctly seen from the Peshawar cantonment, known as the Koh-i-Mor or Mountain of Mor. On the southern slopes of this mountain, near the foot of it, is a large scattered village called Nuzar or Nasar. The sides of the mountain spurs are clothed with the same forest and jungle that is common to the mountains of Kafiristan, and to the hills intervening between Kafiristan and the Koh-i-Mor. Amid this jungle are to be found the wild vine and ivy" (Holdich 1896, 43-4, *cft.* also in McCrindle 1896, XXXI).

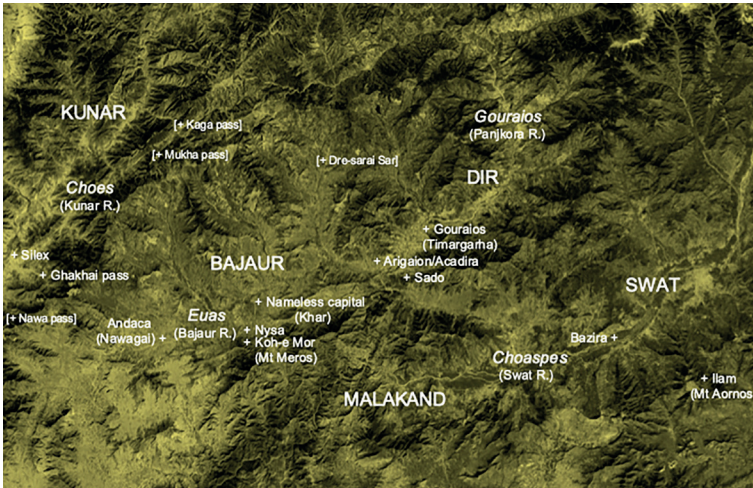


Figure 2 Places of Alexander's itinerary in Kunar, Bajaur, and Swat (map by L.M. Olivieri)

could be Mount Meros. However, only Koh-e Mor and Dre Sarai-sar match the “three-peaked mountain” described by Polyaeus.²⁴ But only Mt Koh-e Mor has these three characteristics: (a) having three peaks, (b) having its flanks covered with holm oaks and ivy, and (c) being along the path of the Euas/Bajaur Valley [figs 3-5].²⁵ Field observation has factually confirmed these elements, just as there is no doubt, again from field observation, that Mount Dre Sarai-sar is located too far to the NW, which would have implied a long diversion, which does not accord with the synopsis of events narrated by the sources. All in all, it can undoubtedly be considered that Andaca has to be located near or at Nawagai, that the Euas is the Bajaur River, that Mt Meros is the Koh-e Mor, and that Khar was the ancient unnamed capital of the region.²⁶

²⁴ *Strat.* 1.1.2.

²⁵ Additional information gathered in the field 1) the summit of Mount Koh-e Mor is visible both from Peshawar and from the mountain passes of lower Kunar; 2) the Kunar valley is visible from the summit; 3) the mountain is only 7 km as the crow flies from Khar; 4) a shrine to a *pīr* (local saint) is located below the summit; 5) the mountain is frequently visited by local herbalists and *hakīm* (healers) to collect rare medicinal plants; 6) the sides of the mountain are quite wild, there are areas covered by dense *jaṅgal* (forest) made thicker by the presence of wild creepers and ivy, and it is populated by *piṣṭoprāṅg* (a local Paṣṭo explicative compound used to label wild cats and lynxes).

²⁶ Tramaṇospa/Tamanosa/Trama/Tramaṇa, which in the Avacarāja inscriptions seems to have been their capital or the administrative centre (*adhiṣṭhāna/athitaṇa*)? See Salomon 2007, 273-6.



Figure 3 The NNW side of Mt Koh-e Mor (Meros) and the Bajaur (Euas) River seen from NNE. Courtesy by @ak and Hanifullah of Shir-pana, Khar

When describing the campaign of Dionysus in India, Polyaeus says that the god occupied a mountain whose peaks were called Korasibie, Kondasbe, and Meros (in memory of his birth). Next, the Macedonian army passes over a hill, enters the Daedala region,²⁷ and descends to the city of Arigaion (or Acadira in Curtius Rufus, 8.10.19-21, modern Timargarha), which we locate beyond the junction between the Bajaur-Jandul and Panjkora rivers. However, the town was destroyed and abandoned by its inhabitants. Here Craterus rejoins Alexander and receives the order of fortifying Arigaion and settling the disabled veterans and local ‘volunteer’ population. Then, the king advances to the hill where he is told that most of the local population has taken refuge and camps at the foot of the hill. The Macedonian army splits into three parts and successfully confronts the barbarians. Quoting the lost *Memoirs* of Ptolemy, Arrian²⁸ reports the figure of over 40,000 prisoners and over 230,000 oxen taken by the Macedonians. The latter would have been selected by Alexander in order

²⁷ The Latin toponym ‘Daedala’ refers to the Dards living in that area, see Tucci 1977, 10, 18, 43, 50. For the names of the three peaks as reported by Polyaeus we can consider the possible association of the second one (Kondasbe) to *khunḍa* (with infix *ṅ* → *khunṭa/khunṭa* = to indicate a vertical object, or a corner, i.e. a peak. See Pašto *ḡonday, ghwanḡai*, which indicates a round, semi-spherical object (→Skt.: *kuḍa/kuṭa*). The first term (*Korasibie*) recalls *khōra*, which is associable, as a synonym, also to *khunḍa* (see Turner 1969-85 in <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/soas/>). We thank F. Squarcini and M. De Chiara for the suggestions.

²⁸ Arr. *Anab.* 4.25.4.



Figure 4a-c Above: the Ewas valley seen from the Mt Koh-e Mor top NNW side.
Center: the valley of Bajaur seen from the top. Below: the three peaks of Mt Koh-e Mor (NNW side).
Photo Ikram Qayyum; credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan



Figure 5a-b Vegetation on the NNW flanks of Mt Koh-e Mor: holm oaks and ivy.
Photo Ikram Qayyum; credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

to be sent to Macedonia. Following this, Alexander crosses the territory of the Guraeans where the Macedonian army struggles to cross the Guraios River (Panjkora) because of its depth, its strong current, and slippery pebbles.²⁹ Apparently, the Guraeans do not attack Alexander, but take refuge in their cities, strengthening their defences. At this point, the Macedonian army enters the land of the Assacenians and crosses the Choaspes River (Swat) where it will be engaged in the sieges of Massaga, Bazira, and the assault on the Indian Aornos.

At this point, Alexander's itinerary in this area can be summarised as follows [fig. 2]:

Late spring 327 Bactra → 10 days → Alexandria to Caucasus → x days → Nicaea (Kabul - Bala Hissar) → x days early summer? → Cophen (Kabul River) → march along the Choes (Kunar) → x days → attack of the first city (Silex - Chigai Sarai?) → dawn of the next day → destruction of the city (Silex) → x days → subjugation of Andaca (Nawagai) → 2 days → the nameless capital (Khar) → Nysa, clashes and siege, peace negotiations (x days) → celebrations on the Meros (Koh-e Mor) → 10 days, then x days to the Euas River (Bajaur River) → x days → Arigaion/Acadira (Timargarha) → x days → crossing of the Guraios River (Panjkora) → x days. End of summer 327 BC → crossing of the Choaspes (Swat) and sieges of Bei-rā/Bazira (Barikot) and Massaga.³⁰

If we relate these narratives with each other, a few temporal inconsistencies emerge which tie in with the ten days that Alexander allegedly spent celebrating Dionysus on Mount Meros according to Curtius Rufus.³¹ We cannot of course draw firm conclusions but we would like to point out that it is possible to elaborate an alternative itinerary. If

29 Arr. *Anab.* 4.25.7. The river is called Garroia in Arr. *Ind.* 4.12. A suitable place for fording would be found a bit to the south of the junction between the Bajaur and Panjkora. The place near the modern Zulam Bridge in the locality of Sado (sometimes referred to as Saddo) in Lower Dir. Here today, thanks to the aforementioned bridge, passes one of the most convenient roads to Bajaur. Culverts and bridges were also established in the past, including the one used by the British on April 13 1895 to move forward against Umra Khan's army (see for instance *The Illustrated London News*, 25 May 1895 [fig. 6] in this essay). The presence of an ancient ford is confirmed by Buddhist inscriptions in Kharoshthi and numerous symbolic and figurative carvings on the boulders on the left bank of the Panjkora (see Nasim Khan 2024, 187-95 with previous references). The *Bāburnama* (fol. 219b) says: "[On the 21st January 1519] we marched for Sawād [Swat], with the intention of attacking the Yūsuf-zāi Afghāns, and dismantled in between the water of Panji-kora and the united waters of Chandāwal [Jandul] and Bajaur" (transl. by Beveridge 1922). The site of Sado has been surveyed in September 2023 by one of the author of this essay, Elisa Iori, along with Stefan Baums and Amanullah Afridi of the Dir Museum.

30 Mingora, see Iori 2023b.

31 Curt. 8.10.7-17.



Figure 6 “Entrance into the Bajaur, Valley of Panjkora River, contested by Umra Khan’s men on April 13, 1895”. From *The Illustrated London News*, 25 May 1895

we follow the stages of Alexander’s march as transmitted by Arrian and Curtius Rufus, it seems that the events at Nysa are to be placed after the subjugation of Andaca. However, Arrian³² states that Alexander arrived at the Euas River and the city of the Aspasian chieftain two days after leaving Andaca. Consequently, there is a time discrepancy, because if we place Nysa after Andaca and if we count 2/3 days of siege and fighting in Nysa and another 10 days on Mount Meros, it becomes difficult to explain how Alexander managed to reach the river Euas two days after the events in Andaca. Perhaps Nysa should be placed further east? Plutarch³³ is the only source to preserve the information that a deep river flowed in front of the citadel of Nysa and that Alexander struggled to cross it. This detail presents several affinities with the description of the town of the Guraeans located close to the Guraiois river whose stream depth and riverbed proved to be a challenge for the Macedonian army. In addition, Arrian³⁴ says that the Guraiois River and the city located nearby share the same name. Thus, both the towns of the Guraeans and Nysa have in common the presence of a river with a difficult crossing. Indeed, in the

32 Arr. *Anab.* 4.24.1.

33 Plut. *Alex.* 58.

34 Arr. *Anab.* 4.25.7.

long and complex process of the manuscript tradition concerning the itinerary of Alexander, the merging of events and place names is always possible.³⁵ However, if we assume that Nysa was in the Guraean territory, then we should imagine that the settlement was located in the modern Dir region. The *Metz Epitome* (36), reports that Nysa was at 230 stadia (c. 40 km) from the earlier town touched by Alexander's expedition. In that case, could the distance of c. 40 km from the other city refer to Arigaion? On the other hand, Strabo³⁶ provides the following sequence of peoples living between Bajaur and Swat: Astaceni, Masians, Nysaei, and Hypasii. It seems that these ethnonyms are listed in reverse order from what we find in other descriptions of Alexander's itinerary, that is to say, they follow an east-west direction. While the form of these names is corrupt, it is quite easy to recognise among them the names of the Assaceni, the inhabitants of Massaga and Nysa, and the Aspasi.³⁷ If the sequence is correct, in the itinerary of Alexander the Nysaeans would be located immediately before the events in Massaga. In addition, Claudius Ptolemy³⁸ places Nagara/Dionysopolis (=Nysa) in Goryaia, a region south of the Lambaga (modern Laghman)³⁹ and the Suastene (Swat). It should also be added that in the summary of Book 17 of Diodorus' *Library of History* the facts of Nysa are placed before the Macedonian attack on Massaga. In fact, the topics are reported in the following order: invasion of India and total destruction of their first nation in order to intimidate the rest of the population; benefits granted to Nysa by virtue of its founding by Dionysus; assault to the fortress of Massaga.

These elements do not substantially change the reconstruction of events but have significant implications as for their geographical setting. The important element to be noted here is that according to Plutarch and the *Epitome of Metz* one can readjust the internal sequence of the itinerary as follows [fig. 2]:

35 See for example *It. Alex.* 106, which merges the narrative of the siege of Massaga with the events in the region of the Guraeans.

36 Strabo 15.1.27.

37 See Rapin, Grenet 2018, 167.

38 Ptol. *Geog.* 7.1.43.

39 Atkinson 1884, 386; see also Rapin, Grenet 2018, 169-70. If Nagara/Dionysopolis was located on the left bank of the Panjikora River (a piece of information we find very problematic), the best location would have been the low flat hills between Khongi and Timargarha. In any case, the Timargarha area itself, on the banks of the Gouraios (Panjikora) would have been the best location for the city of Gouraios mentioned by Arrian. In Timargarha, archaeological evidence dates back to the fifth-fourth centuries BC (Dani 1967, 1-55). The best picture of local geography is always that provided by Arrian and Curtius on the basis of Macedonian reports. Both *Epitome of Metz* and Ptolemy's information is either too compressed (in the former case), or too vague (in the latter).

Late spring 327 Bactra → 10 days → Alexandria in the Caucasus → x days → Nicaea (Kabul - Bala Hissar) → x days early summer? → Cophen → march along the Choës (Kunar) → x days → attack of the first city (Silex? Chigai Sarai in Kunar) → dawn of the next day → destruction of the city (Silex) → x days → in central Bajaur, subjugation of Andaca (Nawafigai) → 2 days march to the Euas River (Bajaur River) → x days → Arigaion/Acadira (Timargarha) → 40 km → [2 days → the unnamed capital] 1 or 2 days → Nysa, clashes and siege, peace talks (x days) → celebrations on Meros (Koh-e Mor) → 10-day stop, then x days, crossing of the Guraios (Panjkora) → x days. Late summer of 327 → crossing of the Choaspes (Swat), sieges of Beira/Bazira and Massaga, assault on the Indian Aornos.

3 Dionysus from the Mediterranean to India

The events of Nysa served as the initial impetus for Alexander and his retinue to reshape the Greek myth about Dionysus as an ideological tool to enhance the image of the Macedonian king. It is all too obvious that the people of Nysa knew nothing about this Greek god before their encounter with Alexander. The story arose during the meeting between the Nysaeian delegation and the Macedonian ruler when both the interlocutors were in search of that middle ground essential to diplomatic communications. We must imagine the presence of one or more interpreters, as would happen later during Onesicritus' conversation with the Indian gymnosophists near Taxila: on that occasion, the interpreters involved in the conversation were three.⁴⁰ The translation from one language to another or even more languages must have generated simplifications or misunderstandings in the communication between Alexander and the Nysaeians. Both the interlocutors adapted and exchanged information to their mutual benefit: the Nysaeians gained their own relative autonomy and Alexander an ideological tool to show himself as a worthy emulator of a popular god. Which were the basic elements that allowed the creation of the middle ground? 1) The presence of ivy and wild vines in the area of Nysa; 2) the existence of a cult for a local deity who exerted some protection over the local community and was linked to the formation of that same community; 3) one of the features of this deity seems to be associated with the consumption of an intoxicating drink and with the presence of a shrine on a nearby mountain. The name of the mountain reported by the Graeco-Roman sources is Meros, which is the hellenised form of the Indian toponym Meru. In Indian cosmography, there is indeed a mythical mountain Meru

⁴⁰ Onesicritus *FGrHist* 124 F 17 (= Strab. 15.1.63-5).

that holds an important position similar to that of an *axis mundi*. The same toponym also identifies other sacred mountains in northwestern India.⁴¹ The fact that this toponym may recall the Greek name for ‘thigh’ must have generated an association with the miraculous birth of Dionysus in the Greek audience.⁴² The Nysaeans, in their conversations with Alexander, must have insisted on their religious tradition and on the fact that the settlement was under divine protection. For this reason, already in the sources used by Arrian⁴³ it is said that the Nysaeans proudly displayed ὑπομνήματα – literally ‘memories’, ‘recollections’ – of Dionysus. This should be understood perhaps as ‘material’ memories because Arrian’s sentence “Alexander was taken by the desire to see the place where the Nysaeans boasted certain memories of Dionysus” suggests a reference to some sort of monuments/buildings rather than written records. Actually, the Nysaeans pointed out to Alexander the presence of a local shrine on Mount Meros in order to strengthen their argument that both themselves and the king worshipped the same god.⁴⁴ When describing Mount Meros, the Classical authors often indulge in literary stereotypes but the presence of ivy and vines is recurrent, and these plants are effectively present among the flora of that area.⁴⁵ In Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the description of the shrine of Dionysus on Mount Meros presents the same features but also provides the reader with interesting data that cannot always be reduced to mere literary inventions.⁴⁶ The shrine is peculiar for it consists of a circle of laurel that provides cover for the god’s statue housed inside.⁴⁷ This vegetal architecture is also surrounded by ivy and vines. Fanciful as it may be, the description of this place reminds us of an interesting parallel attested in more recent times in the same regions, especially in what is now called Nuristan (and Kafirstan until 1895). This is the Indra-kun, a garden sacred to Indra near the village of Wama in Kafirstan, set on a terrace at an altitude of 1700 m where among other things

41 Karttunen 1997, 28.

42 Contrary to what is related by Curt. 8.10.12 the story of the birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus was not made up during Alexander’s stay in Nysa but it dates back to the late sixth or early fifth century BC, see Leitao 2012, 58.

43 Arr. *Anab.* 5.2.5.

44 In addition to Arrian, see Strabo 15.8; Curt. 8.10.13-18; Philostr. *VA* 2.8-9; *Ep. Metz* 38-9.

45 See Edelberg 1965, 180.

46 For a reevaluation of some information transmitted by Philostratus on Central Asia and India see Goukowsky 1981, 27; Coloru 2022a, 247-58.

47 In Nuristan we found laurel belonging to the species *Daphne Augustifolia*, see Edelberg 1965, 180.

there were pressing vats and tanks for fermenting wine.⁴⁸ Vines were so important that those who were proclaimed guilty of plucking the grapes before harvest were sentenced to be thrown from a cliff overlooking the Aka valley.

The points outlined above were sufficient for Alexander to establish that the deity of the Nysaeans was Dionysus and that the eastern limits of the god conquests should therefore be set in India. Alexander followed in Dionysus' footsteps and gave the city of Nysa 'freedom and autonomy' as he had done with other local communities during his march. We have already mentioned that Ptolemy's *Geography*⁴⁹ reports the existence of a city known under a local name, Nagara (which is the Indian generic term for 'town'), and a Greek one, Dionysopolis. Ptolemy⁵⁰ locates the settlement in the Goryaia region, thus in the Panjkora valley. According to Rapin, Grenet,⁵¹ Ptolemy may have merged two different settlements: Nagara, close to Jalalabad, and Dionysopolis/Nysa along the Koas river, the Choes of Alexander's itinerary. Perhaps, the identification of the Koas and Choes with the modern Alingar river is not conclusive as they both seem to be variants of the hydronym Choaspes. As Francesca Grasso points out in a recent study, in the works of the alexandrogographers the hydronym Choaspes had a broad use as it designated several rivers in the area that formed the western border of India, at least the Panjkora and the Swat.⁵² In any case, it seems plausible to think that Nysa was renamed Dionysopolis by Alexander himself and/or his historians. However, none of them ever used that name, and in addition, the bestowing of 'freedom and autonomy' – whether it occurred – does not imply that Alexander refounded Nysa, which on the contrary seems to have been left free to administrate itself as it did before in exchange for its allegiance to the Macedonian king. More hypothetically, we could not exclude the possibility that the renaming of Dionysopolis betrays a refoundation of the town in a later period under the Indo-Greeks rulers: refoundation and renaming of settlements was a typical Hellenistic practice to assert power in a given geographical space. The reigns of Pantaleon and Agathocles in the first half of the second century BC would be the ideal candidates both because they correspond to a phase of Greek territorial

48 On the Indrakun garden see Edelberg 1965, 161-6; Goukowsky 1981, 27-8. The existence of pressing vats, silver cups for drinking wine and related ceremonies are attested among the other Kafir tribes. On the production and consumption of wine in Kafiristan see Klimburg 2014, 53-70; 331-9; 2016, 271-302.

49 Ptol. *Geog.* 7.1.43.

50 Ptol. *Geog.* 7.1.42-3.

51 Rapin, Grenet 2018, 169-70.

52 Grasso 2020, 133-6.

expansion in north-west India and because of the Dionysian imagery of their coins, a feature that among all the Indo-Greek rulers belongs only to them as we shall see. That would mean that the memory of the discovery of the Indian Dionysus by Alexander was still alive in the area and the Indo-Greeks used it to connect themselves to their illustrious model.

The historian Chares of Mytilene, who accompanied Alexander to Asia in his capacity of *eisangeleus*, i.e. 'chamberlain', provides us with a fundamental detail about the Nysaeon Dionysus.⁵³ A fragment of his lost history of Alexander reports that the Indians worship a god called *Soroadeios* whose Greek translation is *oinopoios*, literally 'the winemaker'.⁵⁴ Although the context of this passage is lost, it is very likely that this information refers to the place where Alexander 'discovered' the material traces of Dionysus' passage in India, namely Nysa. In that case, we have a vivid testimony of the meeting between Alexander and the Nysaeans. In fact, Chares' functions at court were those of a functionary very close to the king who also managed his correspondence.⁵⁵ Chares' fragment has crystallised a moment of the creation process of that middle ground obtained through the translations of the interpreters which gave birth to a new version of the Dionysus myth: a king who makes wine could only be identified by the Greek audience as Dionysus. It is important to note that one of the distinguishing features of Chares' narrative was his attention to the languages and culture of the local populations to the point that an anonymous author criticised him for his excessive interest in non-Greek people (*xenikoteron*).⁵⁶ Based on these considerations it is possible to assume that even when Curtius Rufus⁵⁷ reports the detail that the inhabitants of the site of Barikot in Swat call it Beira in the local language, we are dealing with a fragment taken from Chares' work.

There have been several etymologies of the name *Soroadeios*: the second part of the name is undoubtedly *deva*, 'god', while the first element has been interpreted as the name of the god *Sūrya* and more recently *Śarva* (which became the demon *Saurva* in the Avestic tradition).⁵⁸ Since the second element stands for the term 'god', the Greek translation *oinopoios* will necessarily refer to the first element of the name *Soroadeios*. McHugh has proposed an interpretation that seems to us more convincing.⁵⁹ In the first element of the

53 Ath. *Deipn.* 1.48.64.

54 Chares of Mytilene *FGrHist* 125 F 17 (= Ath. *Deipn.* 3.97 124c).

55 Monti 2023, 13-20.

56 *P. Oxy.* LXXI 4808, l. 4. See Monti 2023, 19-20.

57 Curt. 8.10.22.

58 Humbach 2007, 135-42, but see Falk 2009, 65.

59 McHugh 2021, 333-4.

name Soroadeios we should recognise Sanskrit *surā*, a term that, depending on the context and the period, refers to intoxicating beverages obtained from different products and different production techniques. In the Indo-Aryan border area where these events took place, *surā* could refer to a beverage obtained from a wine making process. Modern historians have tried to identify the god of Nysa with deities of the Indian classical pantheon such as Indra and Śiva,⁶⁰ but it is more probable that we are just dealing with a local deity whose personal name was lost in the translation process of the speech of the Nysaeans. Thus, Alexander and his retinue took an epithet related to wine production for the actual name of the god of the Nysaeans. In this regard, it is worth noting that Diodorus of Sicily⁶¹ reports that the Indians called ‘their’ Dionysus by the epithet *Lenaios* because he taught them how to make wine by using wine-vats (Gr. *lenoi*). *Lenaios* (Gr. ‘belonging to the wine-press’) is a typical epithet of Dionysus related to the process of winemaking and it closely recalls Chares’ *oinopoios*. We may assume that the source of that information is again the historian of Mytilene or another author who re-elaborated the same distinctive feature of the god of the Nysaeans.⁶² Again, we should not look for exact correspondences between the god of Nysa and Indian deities whose features were formalised only at a much later historical stage.⁶³ It is more probable that we are dealing with a local deity presenting mixed features such as the unknown god with Dionysian elements represented on a small stele found in Barikot (c. third century AD) [fig. 7] and that could be identified with the same deity attested in Nysa five/six centuries earlier.⁶⁴ Another fragment of Chares shows us Alexander somehow emulating Dionysus in the spread of wine culture in the same geographical area:

In his *Histories of Alexander*, Chares of Mytilene has told how to keep the snow, when he describes the siege of the Indian town of Petra. He says that Alexander dug thirty pits which he filled with snow and covered with branches of oak.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Goukowsky 1981, 21-33 inclines towards Śiva-Rudra; Karttunen 1989, 214-19 [where he shares Tucci’s opinion = Tucci 1963b; but *contra* Karttunen 2009, 132] thinks that the Nysaeon Dionysus should be identified with Śiva; for a similar view see Lévêque 1995, 128-36. On the other hand, Dahlquist 1977, 177-289 assumes that the Indian Dionysus described by Megasthenes is related to the religion of the Mundas in Eastern India.

⁶¹ Diod. Sic. 3.63.4.

⁶² The fragment is attributed to Megasthenes by Stoneman 2022, 40-1.

⁶³ See Tucci 1963b, 160-1; Karttunen 1989, 213-19. See also Parker 2017, 185.

⁶⁴ Olivieri 2013.

⁶⁵ Chares of Mytilene *FGrHist* 125 F 16 = Ath. *Deipn.* 3.97 124c. For an updated comment by Luisa Prandi on this fragment see Chares of Mytilene *BNJ* 125 F 16.



Figure 7 Unknown deity from Barikot with Dionysian features. Photo C. Moscatelli; credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

Here the historical context is clear; it refers to the assault on the fortress (Gr. *Petra*) on the Indian Aornos (Mount Ilam),⁶⁶ so we are in the final phase of Alexander's campaign in Bajaur, Kunar, and Swat. The practice described by Chares is related to the conservation of wine by using snow as a refrigerant. Considering the season and the place, the Macedonian must have brought the snow from somewhere else, however this episode was quite soon used in the construction of the image of Alexander as a new Dionysus, conqueror of India.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ On the identification of the Indian Aornos with Mount Ilam see Coloru, Olivieri 2019, 93-106.

⁶⁷ See Müller 2014, 47-52.

4 **Dionysus Strikes Back: At the Origins of Dionysian Scenes in Gandhāran Art**

The elements highlighted so far strongly suggest that the association of Dionysus and wine culture with the conquest of India took place while Alexander was in Gandhāra or immediately after. If a few years after Alexander's death Megasthenes, the Seleucid envoy to Chandragupta, already knew and related the traditions about the Indian Dionysus, it means that the Indian adventures of Dionysus had already become part of the Greek mythological and ideological as-set. The fact that the first Ptolemies used Dionysian themes related to India and Alexander as a tool for their self-representation does not mean that they were the first inventors of the concept of Alexander as the *avatar* of Dionysus as a conqueror of India. The Ptolemies offer us the earliest available evidence for the use of that iconography. However, it seems more probable that they drew on a preexisting ideological and mythological set of traditions deliberately created by Alexander and his court.⁶⁸

In Gandhāra, the popularity of representations harking back to the Dionysian sphere is not due to - or at any rate not exclusively due to - the introduction of artistic models from Graeco-Roman Egypt into the region. There are deeper motivations connected with the ideology of power. Alexander continued to be a model for the Graeco-Bactrian rulers at the time of their conquest of northwestern India. Demetrius I of Bactria (c. 200-180) would have himself portrayed exclusively wearing the elephant spoils in clear imitation of the idealised portraits of Alexander that were also promoted by Ptolemy I when he was still satrap of Egypt in the last years of the fourth century BC [fig. 8]. Once the Indian territories were conquered, the Graeco-Bactrian rulers were no longer just emulating their model but they surpassed it.⁶⁹ The rulers Agathocles and Pantaleon displayed explicit references to Dionysus as the conqueror of India in their numismatic tradition. In their coins we see the portrait of the god with ivy leaves and a panther with a bell (to suggest its domestication and thus allude to the subjugation of the region) flanked by a vine shoot [fig. 9]. Although references to Dionysus in the official iconography of later Indo-Greek kings are no longer used, Dionysian motifs in Gandhāra remained popular also because wine consumption was a practice associated with the ruling elite, as we can see from the pottery found in the Indo-Greek strata

⁶⁸ The ideological connections between Dionysus and Alexander in India have been considered an invention following the death of Alexander, see Bosworth 1996, 140-66; Müller 2009, 161-4.

⁶⁹ See Coloru 2018, 65-80.



Figure 8 Left, Head of Alexander wearing elephant spoils (credits: The Trustees of the British Museum); Right, Bust of Demetrius I wearing elephant spoils (credits: Wikimedia commons)

in Barikot and other sites.⁷⁰ The close association between kingship and wine/Dionysian imagery as perceived by the Indian population is exemplified by one of the reliefs from the Bharhut stupa dated between the second and first centuries BC. It depicts a figure holding a vine branch, which seems clearly inspired by the official portraits of the Indo-Greek rulers, particularly the head encircled by a diadem [fig. 10].⁷¹ However, a significant detail that has escaped scholarly attention so far, is that the image of this foreign royalty (in the eyes of the Bharhut artists) seems deeply associated with the culture of wine and vines. We should add that craftsmen from the North-West worked on the construction of the Great Stupa of Bharhut and exported some elements related to the Hellenistic royal iconography.⁷² After the end of Indo-Greek power, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian elites continued to commission Dionysian scenes to Gandhāran artists, even in contrast to the Buddhist interdiction of consumption of intoxicating

70 See Olivieri, Iori 2021 with references. The fortune of the ‘Dionysian’ language was not only due to its association with dominant groups, but should also be sought in its immediate ability to represent a cultural dimension in which the consumption of wine - whatever values were attached to it - had an identity, communal and therefore social significance. Cf. Carter 1968, 121-46; Falk 2010, 101.

71 On the identification of the vine branch see Carter 1968, 137-9. Even if we were to identify the plant with a stylised ivy as Boardman 1994, 112 fn. 90 argues (quite unconvincingly), this would still not detract from an association of kingship with the Dionysian element since ivy is also associated with the god. On the representation of ‘westerners’ in ancient Indian art and, more specifically, on the figure from Bharhut see Brancaccio 2005, 401-6.

72 The Kharoshthi mason-marks of the Gandhāran craftsmen were used on the railing of the Great stupa at Bharhut (Eastgate) see Olivieri 2022b, 58, 63 fn. 16 with refs.



Figure 9 Coin of Agathocles. O/ Bust of Dionysus with ivy wreath and thyrsus, R/ panther standing and vine (credits: www.cngcoins.com and Wikimedia Commons)

beverages, because this imagery had by now become deeply associated with power and the habits of the ruling elite.⁷³

A similar argument can be made for Herakles. In Alexander's time, the adventures of Herakles had never been particularly associated with the East. Again, it is Alexander and his court who 'found' traces of his passage and added an Indian setting to the adventures of the hero. In this case, Alexander was particularly eager to find proof of Herakles' presence in India since he was the divine ancestor of his dynasty. As in the case of Dionysus, a few basic elements were good enough to establish a connection between India, Herakles' deeds, and the campaign of Alexander. For example, the seizure of 230,000 oxen after subduing the territory of the Aspasiens and the following selection of the best head of cattle to be brought to Macedonia⁷⁴ may have been perceived as the tenth labour of Herakles in which the hero killed the three-headed (or three-bodied) giant Geryon and seized his cattle which was renowned for its extraordinary beauty. The conquest of the Indian Aornos – similar to what was done with the myth of Dionysus – was intended to show how Alexander had surpassed his mythical progenitor. The toponym Bazira (*Vajra*) refers to a local deity who had his seat on the Indian Aornos. The flight of the Bazirenes and other Swat communities to the rock led Alexander to discover from local informants the existence of legends about a supernatural

⁷³ See Falk 2009, 65-78; Galli 2011, 279-329; Filigenzi 2019, 53-84; cf. Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 227-34.

⁷⁴ Arr. *Anab.* 4.25.4.



Figure 10 Relief of a royal figure from Bharhut. First century BC. Calcutta Museum. (credits: Wikimedia commons, with slight modifications)

entity who allegedly attempted to climb the mountain.⁷⁵ As it happened with the Nysaeian Dionysus, the basic elements of the stories circulating in Bazira were enough for Alexander to associate Herakles to a local tradition echoing the fight of Indra against the half-serpent Vṛtra.⁷⁶ The conquest of the Aornos allowed the Macedonian king to surpass his mythical ancestor.⁷⁷ In official Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek iconography, Herakles will be a much more popular deity than Dionysus, because he was the tutelary god of the Euthydemid dynasty credited for beginning the Greek expansion into India. The Indo-Greek rulers often adopted this iconography to connect themselves to an illustrious model of dynastic legitimacy. If we think that this local deity, in whom Alexander recognised Herakles, was worshipped in the region and we add that Indo-Greek rulers starting with Menander I were the protectors of Buddhism in Gandhāra, then we may explain why in Gandhāran art Vajrapāṇi was depicted as a Greek Herakles.⁷⁸ In fact, in Gandhāra Herakles had been the tutelary deity of monarchical power (Alexander, Bactrian Greeks, and Indo-Greeks) and the Indo-Greeks rulers became patrons of Buddhism to which they also offered military protection.⁷⁹ Accordingly, the Gandhāran artists chose to give Heraklean features to Vajrapāṇi in his capacity as protector of Buddha.

⁷⁵ Arr. *Anab.* 4.28.1-4; Curt. 8.11.2.

⁷⁶ Dahlquist 1977, 128-9. According to Dahlquist, the toponym Aornos could be a Greek adaptation/simplification of *Aurṇavābha*, the epithet of the same Vṛtra in the *Rgveda*. For the existence of a tradition about a half-serpent *nāga/yakṣa* in Swat, see Carter 1992, 70.

⁷⁷ It is likely that the decision to name his son Herakles, who was born around this period or shortly after, was part of the program of reinvention of the tradition conceived to celebrate Alexander's exploits, see Coloru 2022b.

⁷⁸ On the representation of Vajrapāṇi as Herakles and related bibliography see Tanabe 2005, 363-81, Filigenzi 2006.

⁷⁹ Flood 1989, 24-5. Some decisive elements should be added in this regard. The first is Vajrapāṇi's spiritual hierarchical rank in the Buddhist framework. Although at a later stage this figure is associated by the Mahāyāna sutras and Vajrayāna texts with the rank of a *bodhisattva*, he is originally a non-human being or spirit-god belonging to the category of Yakṣa. In particular it is defined as a "Great Yakhsa" according to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* (quoted in DeCaroli 2004, 182). This text is significantly preserved in a manuscript that comes from Gandhāra and allegedly from Bajaur; the manuscript is particularly old, as it can be dated to at least the middle of the first century AD (Falk, Karashima 2012). In Prajñāpāramitā literature Vajrapāṇi is defined as the protector not only of the Buddha, but of every "irreversible bodhisattva" (DeCaroli 2004, 182). In any case we find Vajrapāṇi as the protector of the Buddha in all events related to the geography of the northwest, Gandhāra (182). At a later stage Buddhaghōṣa picks up the tradition that Vajrapāṇi is "identical to Sakka (Indra)" (182): in this respect clearly the identifier of vajra played its role well. It should be remembered that Indra is identified as inhabiting god of Mt. Ilam/Aornos, of which the acropolis of Barikot (Vajrasthāna), is the geographical projection, as keenly observed by E. Iori (2023a, 206 fn. 32). From these elements, we can conclude that the Vajrapāṇi figure, who is *ex post facto* identified as Herakles, is the *yakṣa* of the northwest, certainly of Gandhāra, if not even Swat.

5 Archaeology of Wine Making and Consumption in Swat

So far, field archaeology has little to say on the Nysa of Dir, the shrine of 'Dionysus' on Mount Meros, or any 'material memories' of 'Dionysus'. This silence, however, does not necessarily speak for the fallacy of the information reported by Alexander's historians. It is rather the paucity of archaeological research in Dir and Kunar/Chitral that hinders any direct archaeological approach to the issue. Despite this impasse, in order to envision the cultural and religious context that inspired the construction of the myth of Dionysus in India, it is a promising endeavour to address those elements of the material culture that point to the significant social and ritual value that wine had in an area that is geographically and culturally contiguous to Dir and Kunar/Chitral - the two settings proposed for Nysa - that is the Swat Valley, where archaeological research was more systematic.

There are at least four different elements of the material culture that should be addressed here: (1) the presence of wine making devices, (2) local production and use of ceramic vessels for serving and drinking 'special' beverages, (3) archaeobotanical data, and (4) the rich figurative repertoire of Gandhāran art on wine production and consumption. Whereas the latter has been the focus of dedicated studies over the years,⁸⁰ on the following pages we rather intend to present the material remains of practices possibly connected to wine culture in Gandhāra. Undoubtedly, almost none of the evidence mentioned below is relevant if considered in isolation. Yet, when taken together, they form a constellation of data that, we believe, allows us to take a stand on the question of wine culture in the area.

We set out from the simple and objective fact that grapes have grown in Swat and the surrounding mountain areas since at least the mid-second millennium BC, as attested by the presence of grains of grapevine (*vitis vinifera*) in the settlement of Loebanr III.⁸¹ Archaeobotanical research carried out at the urban centre of Barikot⁸² (c. 1200 BC-AD 350) has revealed the presence of 25 *vitis vinifera* (grape) pips, mostly in association with phases marking the rise of the city (c. 600-350 BC, Macrophase 2),⁸³ in trench BKG 11 K-105. In addition, 42 other grape pips were found during the most recent excavations

⁸⁰ E.g., Filigenzi 2019, Tanabe 2020, see also Filigenzi, Moscatelli in this issue.

⁸¹ Costantini 1987, 160. A single grape pip comes from Qasim Bagh (Spate et al. 2017) while *vitis* pips were also found from sites across the Indus valley dating back to the early Harappan period (Bates 2019). See Spengler et al. 2017 on the spread of *vitis* in Central Asia.

⁸² Collecting archaeobotanical samples at Barikot started in 2017 and since then collaboration with the Max-Planck-Institute of Jena has continued in relation to sample collected in BKG 11 K-105, BKG 16 SE/TTC.

⁸³ Spengler et al. 2021, Tab. 1.

at the urban Buddhist shrine of Barikot in contexts dated between c. 350 BC-AD 300 (BKG 16),⁸⁴ where grape seems to represent the most common fruit recorded in the sector.⁸⁵ Although grapes were certainly consumed in urban contexts since early periods, the step between the cultivation or harvesting of grapes⁸⁶ and winemaking is not obvious. Yet, a set of archaeological evidence can act as a link.

6 Archaeology of Wine Production

The best assemblage to begin with when looking at the archaeology of wine production are certainly the about 22 wine production sites, consisting of clusters of up to 15 winepresses, documented over an area of c. 250 ha in Swat. The surveyed area includes the valleys of Kotah, Kandak, Saidu and Jambil.⁸⁷ The artefacts here recorded include two broad categories of wine making devices: rock-cut wine presses, clustered in the Kandak and Kotah valleys, and the so-called 'palettes' distributed across all four valleys [fig. 11].⁸⁸ Wine presses consist of either rectangular tanks with an overflow hole [fig. 12a-c] or sub-circular cavities connected to basins placed at a lower level [fig. 13]. At the sites of Banj-ghwandai 1 and Bang-khas 1 in the Kotah valley, the original walls of the tanks, lost in most of the sites, were found in situ.⁸⁹ In contrast, palettes are rectangular grooves, which may or may not be connected to an overflow canal, that are used as working surfaces for wooden wine making devices [fig. 14]. As highlighted by Olivieri and Vidale,⁹⁰ a solid support for interpreting these artefacts as winepresses, despite the lack of residual analysis, is the ethnographic comparison with the Kafir environment [fig. 15].

Due to the inherent difficulties in dating rock-cut facilities, it cannot be established with any certainty whether the formal differences between these two categories of wine production devices indicate a different chronology or not. So far, the time span proposed for these

84 Olivieri et al. 2022.

85 For preliminary results see Spengler et al. 2021; Spengler, Dal Martello in Olivieri et al. 2022.

86 The geometric morphometrics generally used to distinguish between cultivated and wild grapevines are problematic and scholars must rely on contextual evidence and quantitative analysis to clarify the issue (Fuller forth.). However, the distinction between cultivated and wild grape is somehow superfluous to the behavioural speculations proposed here.

87 Olivieri, Vidale 2006.

88 Olivieri, Vidale 2006, 142.

89 Olivieri, Vidale 2006, 92-3.

90 Olivieri, Vidale 2006, 142-4, fig. 84.

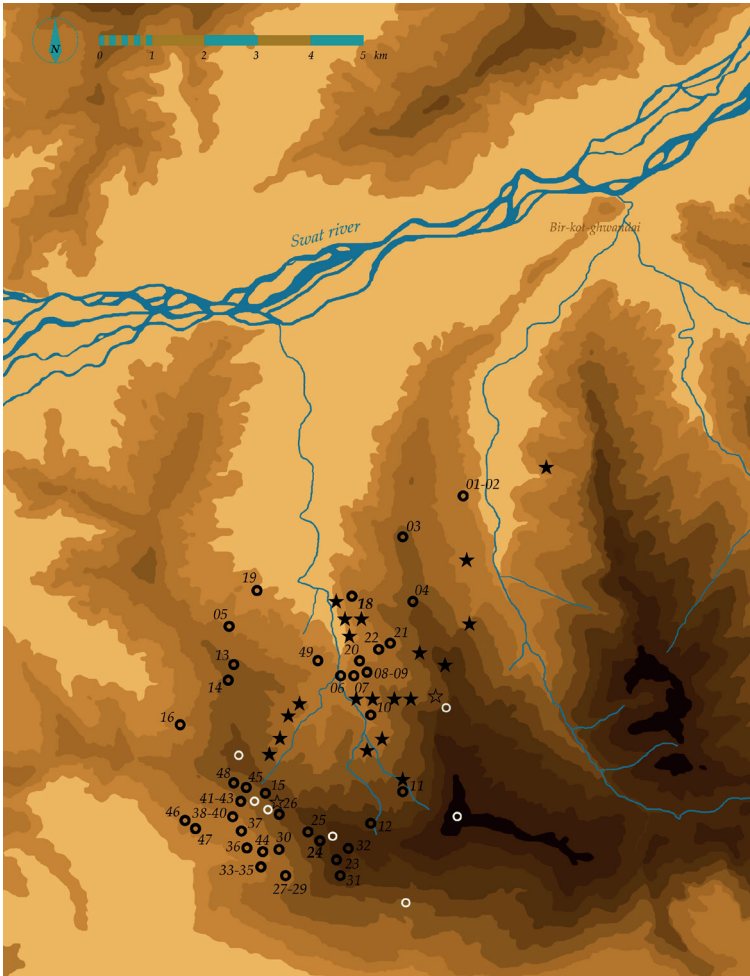


Figure 11 Painted shelters (numbers) and other evidence from Kandak and Kotah valleys. (Key: ★: wine-presses; ☆: vats; white.: main high-mountain Buddhist sites). Map by E. Morigi and L.M. Olivieri (credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)

artefacts, indirectly dated through iconographic analysis of nearby paintings and carvings or through surface pottery, is broad, going from the Bronze Age to the end of the first millennium AD.

In light of the above, an estimate of the scale of wine production is problematic, too. Assuming that (a) grapes were the object of seasonal harvesting rather than the result of crop cultivation, and (b) that all the wine presses were used at the same time, an annual yield of



Figure 12a-c Winepresses of the tank type with overflow hole from Banj-ghwandai 2 (AMSV 375), Kotah Valley. Photos by L.M. Olivieri; credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan



Figure 13 Interconnected tank and sub-circular cavities from Jambil Valley. Photos by L.M. Olivieri.
(credits: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)

6-8000 hl has been estimated.⁹¹ Despite the hypothetical nature of this calculation and the high probability that the winepresses were not used concurrently, the wine production of middle Swat Valley,

91 Olivieri, Vidale 2006, 145.



Figure 14a-b Winepresses of the palette type. Left: Banj-ghwandai 2 (AMSV 375), Kotah Valley. Right: Sanchar, Kotah valley. Photos by L.M. Olivieri (credits: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)

even if the number of presses operating simultaneously were to be halved, seems to have been significant and yielded a surplus.

In addition to the scale of wine production, the clustering of the sites is interesting as well. The upper valley of Kotah has a remarkable concentration of wine production sites arranged almost sequentially at an average altitude of 1000-1500 m asl. Just considering that part of the Kotah valley that leads to one of the mountain passes to Mardan, seven sites for wine production were found within a distance of about 2.5 km: the site of Tapa (AMSV 360) consisting of three wine-presses with flow holes, a 'palette' (1.75x1.00 m), several cup marks and ruins; the site of Sanchar (AMSV 361), a cluster of eight winepresses of both 'tanks' and 'palettes' type, with two axe-sharpener; the site of Mena (AMSV 363) with rock carvings, cup-marks, and two circular tanks with a lateral cavity for the wooden shaft; the site of Sandok (AMSV 364) consisting of about fifteen wine presses; then, the site of Bang-khas 1 (AMSV 359a) where a



Figure 15 Rock-cut winepresses at Sher Qila, Gilgit. Photos by K. Jettmar 1975; courtesy archives of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan: folder “Jettmar/Hauptmann minor documents”

large winepress (2.20x1.60 m) still preserving part of the original wall in stone slabs is connected through an overflow hole to a lower circular basin. This complex, also marked by the presence of several cup marks, had a boundary wall of which remains only the rock-cut foundation made of a continuous groove running along the edge of the boulder (c. 10x5 m). Not far from this complex are four other winepresses (Bang-khas 3, AMSV 378a), and then finally the site of Gwarejo-patai (AMSV 379a) where a wine press of the palette type was found inside a painted rock shelter.

These sites of Swat seem to have been places where the entire chain of operations linked to the production of wine was performed, like in the Kafir environment mentioned above, and indeed like represented in Gandhāran reliefs. In his article on the connections between wine making and the monastic environment, Falk⁹² rightly pointed out that cavities, like those found in Swat, are not depicted on Gandhāran friezes which instead represent trading grapes facilities as rectangular construction sometimes covered with a canopy. However, we must keep in mind that what we see today is only what is left of more articulated structures that did not survive the passage of time. As suggested by ethnographic comparison⁹³ and

⁹² Falk 2009, 66.

⁹³ Robertson 1900, 556.

confirmed by the remains at the sites of Banj-ghwandai 1 and Bangkhas 1, the rock-cut palettes and tanks only constitute the working floor and foundation of higher structures made of stone slabs, wood or clay that must have looked very similar to the structures depicted in the Gandhāran reliefs.

Besides the facilities connected to the extraction of expressed juice, the quantity of cup-marks found on the same boulders where winepresses are cut is also remarkable. Even if in most cases the number of cup marks is so high that is difficult to hypothesise any ratio in their disposition, in a few cases they are clearly placed at regular distance, thus suggesting that they might have had a functional role. An illustrative case is the site of Amluk-dara where four almost equidistant cup marks are located between a rectangular tank and a circular basin on the top of a boulder [fig. 16]. It might be hypothesised that the four cup marks might have been used as postholes for mobile wooden structures, like those with hanging skin bag used in the wine filtering activity represented on Gandhāran reliefs next to treading facilities and discussed by Falk.⁹⁴

All in all, the possibility that Gandhāran reliefs depicting wine making did indirectly recall to the observer the local socio-cultural environment of people engaging in wine production in northern Gandhāra may be possible. On the reliefs, these activities always take place in a rural environment. Figures involved in the act of treading grapes or in carrying wine in leather bags or vases, usually wear an exomis tunic with a wavy hem or an eyelet indicative of leather fabric.⁹⁵ Some figures are also depicted semi-naked. As for the figures appearing in drinking scenes on step risers, Galli has noted that some of them have ears with a bestial look, typical of the satyrs depicted in classical art.⁹⁶ It is likely that that was indeed the figurative imagery used by Gandhāran craftsmen in the context of drinking scenes on step risers where Hellenistic imagery echoing a distinctive element of local culture was staged as symbolic capital.⁹⁷ Yet, for the figures engaged in winemaking the association with the 'Dionysian imagery' is untenable⁹⁸ and the reference was to a much more familiar environment. In Gandhāran art, the type of exomid tunic worn by

⁹⁴ Falk 2009, 66, with references. The presence of some rectangular and circular tanks without overflow channels suggests the performance of other activities connected to the production of wine like for instance the transformation of semi-solid residue remains into dried grape cakes through presses, a practice attested at Kamdesh (Nuristan) in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Robertson 1900, 559-60).

⁹⁵ Falk 2009, fig. 7; Buner series.

⁹⁶ Galli 2011, 310-14.

⁹⁷ Olivieri, Iori 2021, 221-33.

⁹⁸ See also Tanabe 2020, 94-5.



Figure 16 Cup-marks between tank and basins at Amluk-dara (after Olivieri, Vidale 2006, fig. 6); boulder with cup marks and winepresses of the sub-circular type, Jambil valley. Photo by L.M. Olivieri (credits: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)

male figures making or offering wine is used to represent non-urban characters such as ascetes, *yakṣas* and Vajrapāṇi as *yakṣa*. Hence, they are recognised as people belonging to the extra-urban world. The use of this clothing for winemakers or wine bearers might then be a marker pointing to the rural reality of the actual engineers of the transformation from grape to wine, namely the Dardic communities of the countryside.⁹⁹

These local people most likely were not only those who knew how to make wine but were also the first to socialise it. Winemaking and consumption are considered to being central to religious festivities of the so-called 'Kafir'-Dardic community which are assumed to have constituted the original ethnic substratum of a part of ancient Swat, Dir, and Chitral¹⁰⁰ whose local ecology allowed for hunting, gathering, pastoralism, and subsistence farming. The fact that wine presses are often located in proximity of what are considered the media of local rituality, such as rock carvings, painted shelters,¹⁰¹ zoomorphic and anthropomorphic boulders, suggests that, in specific situations, these assemblages of artefacts were operating on the same religious/ritual level.

If evidence of the production of grape juice is attested in the countryside, clear evidence of distillation, at least from the last two centuries BC, comes from cities.

In the city of Barikot, devices such as condensers and pipes, convincingly linked to the process of distilling and conserving alcohol by Allchin,¹⁰² appear from the Saka (possibly Indo-Greek) period onwards. Condensers are subglobular or ovoidal vessels in coarse ware, usually with a gritty bottom, featuring an oblique lateral mouth with a thick round rim. The frequency of this type of vessel when compared to the other coeval forms is quite low, confirming that it had a specialised function. They were used to collect the condensed vapour and to contain the liquid after being sealed.¹⁰³ Interestingly, most of the well-preserved examples found in Barikot are connected to Buddhist complexes: the court of late-Kushan urban Buddhist temples (B and H) dated to the third century AD and the room annexed to the small stupa of unit I, from where also comes one miniaturistic

99 It is worth mentioning that a passage of the Buddhist monastic code of the *Mūlasārvāstivāda* tells the story of the Buddha receiving bunches of grapes from a *yakṣa* of the northern region (see Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 226 with references).

100 Filigenzi 2019; Olivieri, Vidale 2006, 133-4. On the possible connection to 'Kafir' Dardic environment see Olivieri 2011, 137-41 and related fn. for further bibliography. On the importance of wine for Dardic communities see Klimburg 2014.

101 In one case a 'palette' was found even within a painted shelter (see above).

102 Allchin 1977; 1979; fig. 14, a, c-e.

103 Allchin 1977, 759-65.

condenser in red ware [fig. 17b]. At any rate, the presence of distillation devices in cities is not a peculiarity of Swat. In fact, according to Allchin field notes, 108 receivers (often bearing *tamṅas*) in combination with several water pots with soot and pipes were found in the city of Shaikhan-dheri in layers dated from the late Indo-Greek to the late Kushan periods.¹⁰⁴ For the late Kushan period, he even suggested the presence of a distillery associated with a Buddhist urban temple similar to those from Barikot.¹⁰⁵ By that time, the consumption of alcoholic drinks must have become an authorised medium of religious communication in an urban and monastic context. Moreover, the fact that condensers were often marked by royal *tamṅas* means that the beverage had reached a certain economic and religious value and thus was put under state control.¹⁰⁶ This evidence, together with the scale of annual yield of wine in Swat, allows us to advance the hypothesis that Swat (and nearby valleys) not only had a long tradition of wine culture, but that at a certain point the wine surplus, like the agricultural surplus,¹⁰⁷ was exported in areas unsuitable for cultivation, like the lower plain of Gandhāra with its main urban centres like Charsadda, Purushapura and Taxila.

7 Wine Consumption Through Ceramics

Evidence for drinking practice in Swat is widespread from protohistory to the Islamic era, so as to make it a distinctive element of local culture. Indeed, ceramic vessels used for consumption of inebriating beverage in either convivial or ritual contexts, are a sort of *leitmotiv* in the ceramic assemblages of Swat from c. 1200 BC-AD 400. Whether this substance was actually wine will only be proven when residual analyses are conducted. However, ignoring the bulk of evidence that points to consistent wine production in the countryside and to the centrality of wine in rituals of local elites and community, especially through Gandhāran art, would be a conceit. The production of expressed grape juice certainly took place in the countryside in proximity of the areas of gathering, presumably since the Bronze age. How and in which context people socialised wine, however, changed over time. In Swat, the history of wine-drinking vessels starts with the so-called Swat Grave Complex (c.1300/1200-800 BC). As indicated by its naming, the most distinctive feature of this

¹⁰⁴ Husain 1980.

¹⁰⁵ Moscatelli 2022, 13-17. Condensers were also found at Sirkap stratum III and II (Marshall 1951, 127-9).

¹⁰⁶ Allchin 1977; Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 226-7.

¹⁰⁷ Spengler et al. 2021.

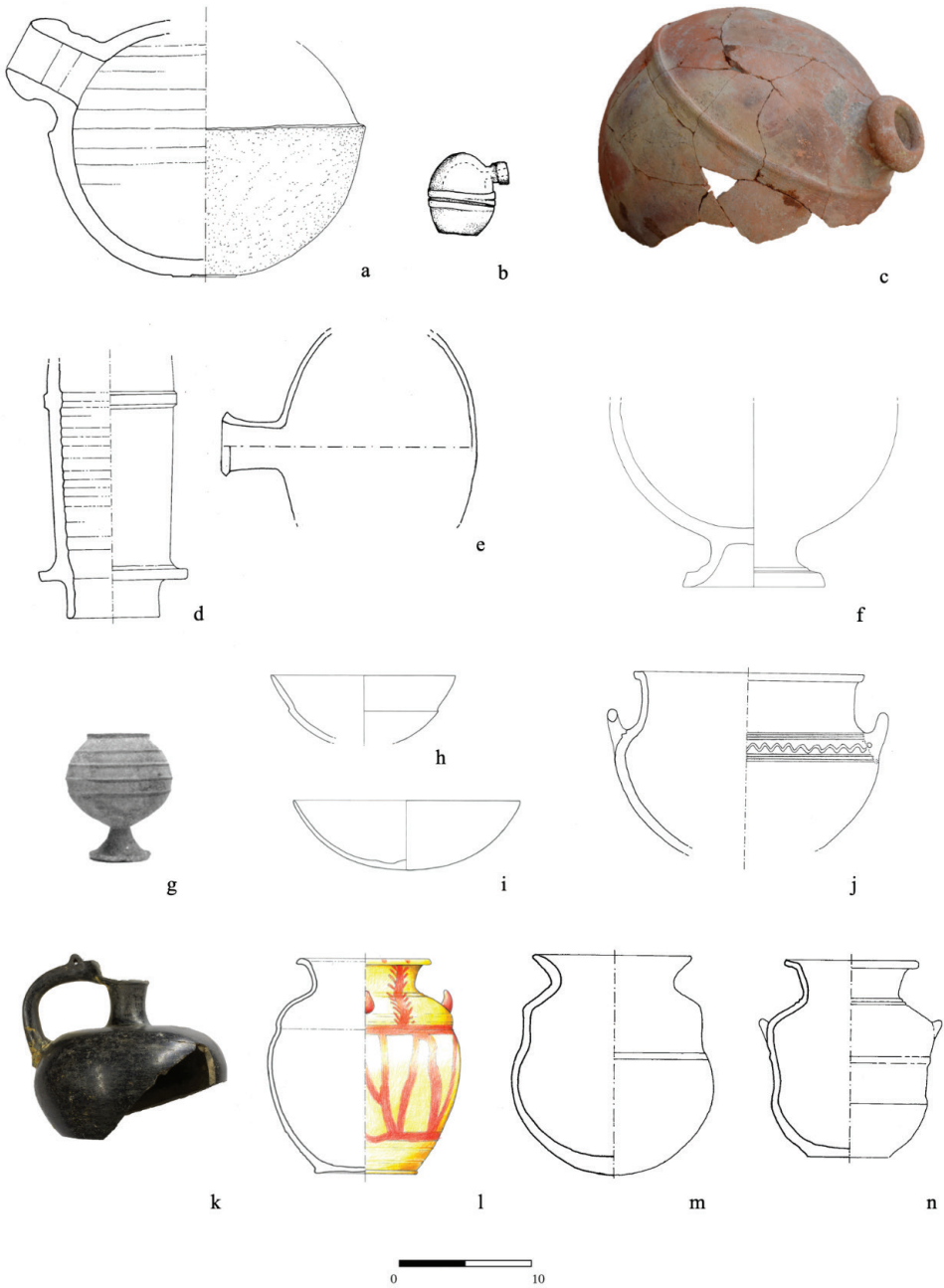


Figure 17 Vessel forms from Swat connected to wine making, conservation and consumption. Drawings and photos by various authors; credits Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

cultural phase were the extensive graveyards associated with the protohistoric settlements that visually dominated the ancient landscapes of the valleys. They consisted of megalithic chambers, marked by low mounds of earth, wooden fences and posts¹⁰⁸ in which a complex rituality involving the manipulation and displacement of the skeletal parts went hand in hand with the offering and/or drinking of inebriating liquids, we presume wine, in standardised stemmed cups and beakers, known as ‘brandy-bowls’.¹⁰⁹ In the graveyards associated with these proto-urban settlements, drinking or offering wine seems to be strongly connected to rituals of the dead.

While in the early historical period this type of graveyard complexes and drinking cups disappeared, drinking as a practice did not. The Achaemenid acculturation phase (fifth-fourth centuries AD) witnessed the introduction in Swat of an Iranian vessel form imitating a metal version, the tulip bowl, used in ritual banqueting and feasting for drinking, in all likelihood, wine [fig. 17h]. The introduction of this distinctive drinking cup, also attested for the main centres of northern Pakistan (Akra, Charsadda, and Taxila) at that time under the authority of the Achaemenids, has been linked to local elites gradually emulating Persian drinking practices.¹¹⁰ Under these new political and social conditions, the city became the new socio-spatial realm where wine was consumed and staged. That this vessel form is particularly frequent and standardised in the city of Barikot, far from the regional centres of power, may suggest not only that the city had a certain importance such to be involved in imperial and social dynamics, but also that the local cultural environment was particularly receptive of this specific aspect of the newcomers and quickly assimilated.

Another page in the material history of wine drinking comes in the mid/late-third century BC, with the large-scale local production of Hellenistic vessel forms. Among the new vessel shapes appearing in this period are forms traditionally used for mixing wine with water, the crater. The most representative example is the fragment of a crater coming from the urban context of Barikot [BKG L] [fig 17f] currently displayed in the Swat Museum of Saidu Sharif.¹¹¹ This is the lower part of a mould-made crater (d. max 23 cm) in gray ware with a black slip. The best parallels, as suggested by Gardin¹¹² for

108 Vidale et al. 2016, 204.

109 Vidale et al. 2016, 206; fig. 14, g.

110 Petrie, Magee 2020.

111 Formal parallels can be made with Taxila (Marshall 1951, pl. 122.90) and Ai Khanoum (Lyonnet 2013, fig. 100.9-10; see also fig. 96).

112 Gardin 1973, 146-7.

Ai-Khanoum - where however specimens are all wheel-turned and in red ware - probably come from Asia Minor.

The so-called urns/craters found in residential contexts at Barikot from the mid/late third century BC until the first century AD had likely a similar function [fig. 17j]. These are medium-sized deep vessels in red ware, with an S-shaped profile and a flared or projecting rim, sometimes bearing horizontal loop-handles and (most probably) a low moulded stand. The decorative patterns range from the simple incised wavy line to a black-on-red painting of a traditional pattern, triangles filled with parallel wavy lines. These vessels are rare at Barikot so, just as the condensers, they had a specialised function as suggested by their peculiar form. The representation of a similar vessel, without handle, appears in the drinking scene of a stair riser from the so-called 'Buner series' (CMA 1930.328.2) where the vessel is carried with two hands by a figure in exomis followed by another one carrying a leather bag on the shoulders, wearing the same type of cloth.¹¹³ Vessels of this shape seem to be quite characteristic of Swat since no comparisons are available from other Gandhāran sites. Representations of craters of Hellenistic type, more similar to the one found in BKG L, appear for instance in a toilet-tray from Sirkap.¹¹⁴

Another interesting form that appears in the early Hellenistic period is a rare luxury hemispheric bowl with a very thin section and pointed rim attested by only one specimen [fig. 17i]. This bowl features decorative omphalos on the inner bottom to which no recess in the external face corresponds. This was probably an imitation of a metal prototype. The application on the interior surface of a talc-based golden slip which provided the shiny effect proper of the metal also speaks for this.¹¹⁵

From a slightly later phase (Oḍirāja phase, c. 50 BC-AD 50), comes a pouring subglobular squat pitcher with a narrow neck, simple everted rim and loop handle decorated with protruding perforated upper knob. The specimen is in Black Glossy Ware, a rare luxury ware appearing from the Indo-Greek period (mid/late second century BC) probably imitating the Attic black glaze pottery.¹¹⁶ Despite the rather short neck, the vessel echoes the Hellenistic *lagynos* used in banquets

113 See also the reference to a female terracotta figurine holding a similar vessel in Callieri, Olivieri 2020, 123 fn. 38.

114 Marshall 1951, pl. 144.65.

115 The only available comparison in Gandhāra comes from Charsadda layer (24) (Wheeler 1962, fig.23.146, layer 25), although here the omphalos is not preserved.

116 Maritan et al. 2020.

to decanter and pour wine [fig. 17k]. The object was found in a kiln reserved as a damped pit, close to a Buddhist shrine.¹¹⁷

As the partial abandonment of the city approached, urban Buddhist complexes built during the third century AD seem to develop a particular connection with drinking practices. Besides the condenser mentioned above, luxury drinking vessels,¹¹⁸ were found in the court and back room of temples B and K of Barikot. In temple K these drinking vessels were found together with luxury storage jars and other serving vessels in one of the back rooms connected to the platform, while 'structured deposits' of broken luxury vessels in fashion ware and shell bangles created by repetitive and formalised actions were found on the benches and associated floor levels of temple B1. Almost all these sherds are in Fashion ware (a ware also found in the monastery of Saidu Sharif) and Red-on-Golden slip, two types of ware characteristic of the third century and always found in connection to religious context. One of the most distinctive luxury forms of this assemblage is a rare carinated or bi-carinated jar with everted simple rim sometimes provided with two lugs/knobs on the shoulders, often with geometric or vegetal decoration in red-on-golden slip [fig. 17l-17n]. Similar examples come from Jaulian and Dharmarajika at Taxila, such to confirm the connection with the religious context.¹¹⁹ It is significant that a very similar type of jar is represented at the bottom of the well-known stele of Hārītī and Pañcika from Takht-i Bahi now in the British Museum (BM 1950.0726.2). Here at the bottom of the enthroned tutelary deities, there are two figures pouring what is usually interpreted as "the treasure pouring out as water"¹²⁰ from two pots. The pots in question are relevant because they are bi-carinated jars with flared rim. Since water jars (usually larger) are never carinated or bi-carinated, the interpretation of the pouring liquid as water is quite weak. Indeed, one should keep in mind that the presence of carination in pots has usually a functional (rather than an aesthetic) value and that liquids usually contained in carinated vessels are either milk or wine. Milk could certainly make sense in the context of this stele. However, one cannot ignore neither that Hārītī is quite explicitly associated with wine in Gandhāra – for instance, in the stele of Shaikhan dheri and Barikot she is depicted while holding a bunch of grapes –¹²¹ nor that Pañcika

¹¹⁷ Olivieri et al. 2022. The connection between this area and the activities performed at the sanctuary cannot be excluded and the study of the entire ceramic assemblage could be revealing in this regard.

¹¹⁸ See Olivieri 2016, pl. 4.

¹¹⁹ Callieri, Olivieri 2020, 201-2.

¹²⁰ Zwalf 1996.

¹²¹ Moscatelli, Olivieri, Niaz 2016.

in this same stele is holding a *kantharos*-like vessel. That the pouring liquid in question here was wine, and not water or milk, might be indeed reasonable.

To close this excursus on the evidence of wine consumption in cities through pottery we cannot but mention the representation of vine scrolls on the 'water'-bottle (stratum III)¹²² and bowl (stratum V)¹²³ in embossed ware from Bhir mound.

As far as Gandhāran art is concerned, besides the well-known scenes of wine production and consumption and the small stele of deities holding grapes or cups, depictions of vine plants recurrently depicted at the entrances of religious buildings, in particular on stairs and gates,¹²⁴ are interesting evidence. At the Buddhist sanctuary of Butkara, fragments of jambs and architrave of tapered doors, probably belonging to the entrances of the 'Great Vihāra', dated to the Oḍirāja period, were decorated by three parallel scrolls of pipal, vine with leaves, tendrils and grapes and full-blown lotus scrolls (Inv. No. BKG 7190), by lotus and vine scrolls with tendrils and grapes (Inv. No. BKG 2289) or by only vine scrolls with leaves, tendrils and grapes (Inv. No. BKG 4476). Another architrave with vine scrolls comes from a religious building in the Kandak valley, probably from Dur-bandai or Gumbat,¹²⁵ another architrave with vine scroll comes from Dharmarajika,¹²⁶ while another beautiful piece of the jamb of a door decorated with peopled vine scroll containing scenes of harvesting and treading of grapes was published by Tanabe.¹²⁷ Given the religious meaning of pipal and lotus in Buddhism, the presence of vine scrolls in association with them as well as the location at the threshold of the religious building, indicate that the vine scroll had acquired a religiously charged value in Buddhist context.¹²⁸ The 'vegetal architecture' of the rural shrines described in the classical sources (see above), here crystallises into stone.

122 Marshall 1951, pl.128.234.

123 Marshall 1951, pl.128.239.

124 Brancaccio, Liu 2009; Olivieri, Iori 2021.

125 Olivieri, Iori 2021, 219 fig. 19.

126 Marshall 1951, pl. 215.53; see also 215.51.

127 Tanabe 2020, fig. 5. Bunches of grapes also appear as pendant of arches in most of the false-niches/false-doors.

128 For the presence of drinking scenes on stair risers and stair side-elements, not treated here, see Brancaccio, Liu 2009; Galli 2011.

8 Conclusions

When Alexander arrived in the northern sectors of Gandhāra – Chitral, Dir, Bajaur, and Swat – he found Dardic peoples who were involved in the production and consumption of wine. One of the local deities they worshipped had a role in wine production as a key element in the cultic sphere. The study of the documentary and archaeological evidence seems to indicate that Alexander and his court used these elements for ideological purposes to associate the Macedonian ruler with the Greek wine-producing god par excellence, Dionysus. The association between Alexander, the Indian god, and Dionysus was intended to find ideological justification for the Macedonian conquest of India. To this end, Alexander's entourage reworked the classical myth about Dionysus, by making him a civilising hero and especially a conqueror of India, a place where classical myth had never placed the adventures of that deity. The local culture of wine on which Alexander and his indirect successors built their myths and ideologies of power is well-attested by the numerous wine production facilities, dating back to the Bronze Age, spread in the countryside of Swat. Moreover, ceramic evidence suggests not only that wine consumption had a certain centrality also in funerary or ancestor rituals in the proto-urban phase (1200-800 BC), but also that wine consumption had been progressively urbanised, released from rural and funerary contexts and brought into cities, since the Achaemenid period. In this urban context, the consumption of wine was charged with additional social values, becoming an objectified mark of social distinction within the frame of emulation processes and power dynamics fostered by an urban society that was, since the very beginning complex, sophisticated, and globally connected.

It is upon this complexity of values and habits that the wine imageries of Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Saka-Parthian and Oḍi kings dwell. Over time the diversification of meanings (see above also the connection between wine and kings) and popularisation of wine consumption, must have resulted in increasing demand and intensified production – and exporting – of wine and wine-related iconography, from the regions surrounding Nysa towards southern Gandhāra and beyond.

Abbreviations

BNJ = *Brill's New Jacoby*, <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/bnjo/>.
FGrHist = Jacoby, F., *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 1923-58.

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