

# Wine Cultures

## Gandhāra and Beyond

edited by  
Claudia Antonetti, Bryan De Notariis,  
Marco Enrico



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Wine Cultures

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Wine Cultures. Gandhāra and Beyond  
Claudia Antonetti, Bryan De Notariis, Marco Enrico

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## **Wine Cultures**

### **Gandhāra and Beyond**

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## **Abstract**

The volume *Wine Cultures. Gandhāra and Beyond* represents the primary outcome of the MALIWI project (SPIN Ca' Foscari 2021) directed by Claudia Antonetti. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this work seeks to explore the production techniques, social functions, and cultural significance of intoxicating drinks with particular reference to wine – an extraordinary beverage that has been intertwined with human history for millennia. This volume gathers contributions by scholars interested in studying wine and drinking culture in Gandhāra and neighbouring regions, including Ancient Assyria, Arachosia, and present-day India. The topic is explored from three fundamental perspectives, employing a diverse range of sources, including literary and historical texts, as well as linguistic, iconographic, archaeological, and anthropological evidence.

**Keywords** Gandhāra. Drinking culture. Wine. Indo-Greeks. Alcohol.





## **Wine Cultures**

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**Wine Cultures**  
Gandhāra and Beyond



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# Introduction

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This volume represents the main outcome of the MALIWI project,<sup>1</sup> a research project lasting 24 months (2021-2023), funded by Ca' Foscari University of Venice through a SPIN (Supporting Principal Investigators) Grant.

The MALIWI project aimed to analyse the cultural exchanges in the Gandhāran area through the lens of wine culture. A long-term study (from Achaemenid to Kushan ages, ca. VI BC-III AD), in an interdisciplinary perspective, was an urgent *desideratum*. Hence, the project has collected evidence on winemaking and consumption, starting from an interdisciplinary approach in order to trace the production techniques and the social and convivial uses of wine as well as changing, overlapping and *métissage* of cultures in the Gandhāran area.

A novelty of the project was to bring together two scientific fields that are academically separated in Italy: Classical and Indological studies. Therefore, the project pursued research in both fields, putting them in constant dialogue with each other.

The attempt of combining eastern and western sources has been demonstrated to be worthwhile. Especially sources of the eastern

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<sup>1</sup> Making Libation of Wine from Golden Cups: Social, ritual, and ceremonial use of wine in the Gandhāran area, from the Achaemenids to the Kushans: SPIN 2021, P.I. Claudia Antonetti.

frontier of Greco-Roman influence on the social, ritual, and ceremonial use of wine lacked an exhaustive analysis. The study of alcoholic drinks (in general) and wine (in particular) in Indian sources was almost a virgin land. A notable exception to this gap in the academic literature is James McHugh's recent monograph *An Unholy Brew: Alcohol in Indian History and Religion*, the most important work in the history of these studies dedicated to the Indian subcontinent.<sup>2</sup> Our research has therefore been deeply inspired by the work of McHugh, whom we invited to introduce the volume: he kindly accepted, and we are grateful to him.

As for the Indological research, one primary investigation focused on tracing evidence for grapes and wine in the most ancient Buddhist literary sources, exploring a potential spread of grapes in the Indian sub-continent initially prompted by medical reasons.<sup>3</sup> Later, the research extended to social aspects related to conviviality and collegial drinking of alcoholic beverages through an investigation of popular festivals with the involvement of royal elites, in addition to private parties with sympotic elements. Particular attention was paid to the following Indian and Chinese sources: *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Aṭṭhakathās*, *Milindapañha*, *Arthaśāstra*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Medical *Samhitās*, *Manusmṛti*, Aśoka's edicts; *Nàxiān bīqiū jīng* 那先比丘經 (= *Milindapañha* in Chinese), *Dà zhìdù lùn* 大智度論 (= *\*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*), *Gēnběn shuōyīqiè yǎobù pínàiyé* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 (= *Vinaya* of the *Mūlasārvāstivādins*), *Dà Táng Xīyù jì* 大唐西域記 (= Xuánzàng's travel reports).

Research on Classical sources lied first in examining Strabo's *Geography*, as it is considered a valuable source of the geographic and ethnographic data on Ancient India and Central Asia transmitted by Alexander the Great's historians. The research has revealed an intriguing aspect about the interpreters accompanying Alexander the Great's expedition and their role in the historians' retrieval of information. The hypothesis that has been tested is that certain inaccuracies in the geographical, ethnographic, and botanical information provided by Alexander's historians may have arisen from misinterpretations and translation mistakes made by their interpreters.<sup>4</sup> Particular attention was paid to the following Greek and Latin sources: Arrian (*Indica* and *Anabasis*), Athenaeus of Naucratis, Ctesia of

<sup>2</sup> McHugh 2021.

<sup>3</sup> This research resulted in the paper "Where is Grape Wine? On Grapes and Wine in Pāli Buddhist Literature and Beyond" (De Notariis 2023a).

<sup>4</sup> This research resulted in the publication "Traduzioni e interpretazioni ai confini tra Grecia e India. Una rilettura di Strabone 15.1.20 alla luce delle fonti indiane e buddhiste" (De Notariis, Enrico forthcoming).



Cnidus (*Persica* and *Indica*), Diodorus Siculus, Historians of Alexander the Great, Curtius Rufus, Plinius the Elder.

Not only did the primary sources play a fundamental role in the research, but also the secondary sources used were quite heterogeneous, as they derive from two fields of study. Therefore, the bibliography of the project is itself an output of the research: we wanted it to be public, reusable, and expandable at the end of the project. Hence, the choice to collaborate with the Service Management Office of the BAUM (Biblioteca di Area Umanistica at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice) and with Dr. Mauro Mazzocut, who oversaw the realisation of the online bibliography in Zotero.<sup>5</sup> The bibliography has been exported in RIS file format and uploaded on Zenodo,<sup>6</sup> where it received a proper DOI.<sup>7</sup>

The research team was active in dissemination activities.<sup>8</sup> To further spread knowledge about the project, a website<sup>9</sup> has been designed by Eloisa Paganoni.

On May 5th and 6th, 2023, we organised the international conference *Wine Culture: Gandharan Crossroads* at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Speakers interested in the study of wine and drinking culture came to Venice from Canada, Pakistan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Naples, Bari, Florence, Udine, Bologna and Genoa. The conference was an opportunity to delve into the drinking cultures in ancient Gandhāra and neighbouring areas such as Ancient Assiria and Arachosia, and today India. Many contributions presented at that time have been revised for the volume we are presenting, which addresses the overarching theme of the research project from three fundamental perspectives. The first part (*Indological Sources: Literature and Anthropology*) is devoted to Indological sources with a particular reference to literature and anthropology, the second one (*Archaeology of Wine: Comparisons and*

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**5** [https://www.zotero.org/groups/4744246/wine\\_in\\_gandhara/library](https://www.zotero.org/groups/4744246/wine_in_gandhara/library).

**6** <https://zenodo.org/records/10245260>.

**7** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10245260>.

**8** Some other publications related to the project are: “The Buddhist Text Known in Pāli as *Milindapañha* and in Chinese as *Nàxiān bīqiū jīng* 那先比丘經. Some Philological Remarks and the Problem of the Archetype” (De Notariis 2022); “Revisiting Levman’s View on the *Milindapañha*” (De Notariis 2023b); “Μηροτραφής: un nuovo frammento di Sofocle?” (Enrico forthcoming). Eventually, it is worth mentioning that Claudia Antonetti, Bryan De Notariis and Marco Enrico presented joint papers at the following conferences: “Il vino nell’India antica, una frontiera culturale fra geografia e politica” paper presented at the workshop *XII seminario di Geographia Antiqua*, Università degli Studi di Perugia, Italy (14-15 March 2024); and “Strabone e l’India: immagine (e simologie) della regalità indiana”, paper presented at the international conference “Da Sardi all’Indo: gli Orienti di Strabone fra popoli e culture”, Università di Genova, Italy (28-29 September 2023).

**9** <https://mizar.unive.it/venicepigraphy/maliwi/public/>.

*Diachronies*) to the archaeology of wine through diachronic comparisons, the third one (*Gandhāra and Classical Sources: Imagery, Iconography, Epigraphy and Texts*) to Gandhāran and Classical sources delving into imageries, iconographies, epigraphs, and texts.

In particular, the introductory chapter has been written by James McHugh, who provides a fresh overview on some relevant approaches to the study of wine and intoxicating drinks in India and Gandhāra.

Bryan De Notariis initially discusses how Gandhāra could have been the ideal place to accommodate the Greek *symposion*. Later, he delves into the Buddhist literature, analysing how sympotic-like elements (alcohol, sex, and intellectual pursuits) were represented in a legislative account and examines some sympotic deities occurring in cosmological accounts.

Andrea Drocco presents an innovative analysis of texts written in Prakrit and Ardha-Māgadhī with a particular reference to the *desī* 'regional' words used to indicate 'intoxicating drinks'. In so doing, he explores a bunch of sources which have hitherto received little attention.

Stefano Beggiora presents a comparative study in an anthropological perspective. He proposes a comparison of the Vedic Soma and wine production in Gandhāra with the production of alcoholic, fermented products and traditional fermentation starters (and their related ritual uses) among the indigenous *ādivāsī* communities of India.

Elena Rova focuses on the Southern Caucasus, a key area where viticulture and wine production first develops in the Neolithic period. Her investigation adopts a multidisciplinary approach, employing bioarchaeology and archaeological sciences to explore recent results obtained on the field of "Archaeology of Wine".

Francesca Simi, Costanza Coppini, and Daniele Morandi Bonacossi present the discovery of the first wine production area ever identified in the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia, situated in close proximity to Tell Khinis (Assyrian Khanusa). Their work highlights the enduring and extensive exploitation of this agricultural landscape over an extended period.

Prabhjeet K. Johal investigates the beginning of viticulture in the Achaemenid satrapy of Arachosia, proposing that the region swiftly embraced viniculture under the empire's standardised administrative and cultural norms, evident through changes in material culture, architectural advancements, and mentions of local wine in administrative documents.

Omar Coloru, Elisa Iori, and Luca Maria Olivieri delve into the geographical sites associated by the Greeks accompanying Alexander the Great with wine production and the myths of Dionysus and Herakles in Gandhāra. They place a specific emphasis on Nysa in the Kunar/Chitral valley. Additionally, the research explores the economic dynamics of wine production in this region until the late antiquity period.

Cristiano Moscatelli and Anna Filigenzi offer some observations on the values underlying Gandhāran wine symbolism and associated figurative themes, aligning with a recent enquiry on the interactions between Buddhism and the local cultural substratum in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in ancient times.

Claudia Antonetti explores the plausibility of the ritual practices described by Curtius Rufus in Greater Gandhāra and in the broader “Indo-Iranian frontier”, focusing on their significance for elite prestige. She highlights how the use of gold libation cups functioned as a powerful symbol of kingship, connecting Indian and Greek cultural traditions.

Stefan Baums investigates the drinking culture of ancient Gandhāra through the analysis of manuscripts and epigraphs, collecting the available material and considering the information that can be extracted from it. In so doing, he provides an original perspective on the Gandhāran wine culture.

Marco Enrico focuses on the description of Central Asia and India offered by Strabo of Amasea and aims to critically examine Strabo’s evidence on vine cultivation and wine production in India, focusing on Musikanos’ kingdom and the utopian setting where wine-related information is presented.

As the reader can see, we opted for grouping the contributions based on the sources, methodologies and academic disciplines used. Clearly, it is often difficult to draw a sharp line between fields of study and methodologies, especially when an author adopts more than one. However, we editors believe that the heterogeneity of disciplines and approaches is a richness and a strength of this work. Therefore, the drinking culture of Gandhāra was analysed from different perspectives, also investigating the alcoholic traditions of neighbouring countries, based on a multiplicity of sources, from textual to material ones, passing through anthropological glimpses. In so doing, we had to recognise the existence of a plurality of ‘cultures’, hence the title: “Wine cultures”. When we use the word ‘wine’ in English, we chiefly mean the fermented juice of grapes, but it can also indicate, more generically, any fermented juice from a fruit or a plant. Therefore, starting from the ‘wine’ *par excellence* drunk and produced in Gandhāra, which is the grape wine, we had plenty of intoxicants flowing into this book, involving a plurality of countries or cultural areas, whence we opted for the subtitle “Gandhāra and Beyond”.

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# Intoxicating Nectars of Plenty

## Reflections on Wine and Other Drinks in Ancient South Asia

James McHugh

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**Abstract** This introductory chapter frames the collection of essays. It is time that we moved beyond merely noting the presence of 'imported' Hellenistic wine imagery in Gandhāra, and the view of visual imagery as mere documentary evidence for wine culture in the region: surviving representations of wine culture from Gandhāra are just as layered and historically complex as Renaissance Venetian depictions of *The Wedding at Cana*. The essays in this book add exactly that sort of nuance to our understanding of wine in Gandhāra. After a brief summary of what we know about early alcohol production and consumption in South Asia as a whole, the chapter considers what was distinctive about a vinocentric alcohol culture in Gandhāra. How did external trade in wine from Gandhāra affect wine culture in South Asia as a whole? As a somewhat exceptional drink in the South Asian context, how might wine culture have been considered in Buddhist contexts?

**Keywords** Wine. Gandhāra. India. Alcohol. Intoxicants. Buddhism.

In this chapter, originally delivered as a keynote address, I wish to set the scene for all the other chapters in the volume; pieces that are based on the talks delivered at the international conference *Wine Culture: Gandharan Crossroads* (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 5th-6th May 2023). Thus I present here some general reflections on drink in South Asia, along with some comments on wine, wine in general and wine in South Asia. Many of my remarks and questions in this chapter are rather speculative in nature, intended above all to stimulate discussion, merely to preface the rest of the essays resulting from the colloquium.

Inspired by the location of this colloquium in Venice, at Ca' Foscari, I shall begin my comments, not in Gandhāra, but within the very building at the heart of Ca' Foscari University; a building whose facade is world-famous, with the spectacular central large balcony and windows so typical of Venetian *palazzi*. Yet I always wondered what inner structure corresponded to these distinctive facades, copied all over the world, from Victorian Manchester to Las Vegas casinos. Yet, unlike in Nevada, in the original *palazzi*, these windows were positioned at the end of a very large room called a *sala* or *portego*; a long hallway of sorts, with doors leading off to separate rooms; a grand reception room with an impressive display of Venetian glass windows at one or both ends. In such rooms, as art historian Monika Schmitter has written, wealthy merchant families would host a variety of events, in a space decorated with weapons, with large credenzas of impressive silver and glass, and above all collections of paintings.<sup>1</sup> And it is these paintings, the *quadri da portego* that I wish to consider briefly. For as Schmitter explains, scenes of feasting and entertaining, often religious in nature, such as the supper at Emmaus or the Wedding at Cana, were common themes for art commissioned for such spaces – pictures eminently suited to a space designed for affluent feasting, and displays of cosmopolitan, mercantile success. Yet, when these paintings contained religious subject matter, as they often did, these images emphasized virtues such as charity and hospitality. As such, certain Venetian paintings commissioned for the *salas*, paintings in which we see biblical feasts, can fruitfully be understood in the context of particular social concerns and economic conditions, in rooms used for actual feasts, which no doubt influenced the choice of subject matter, the manner of representation, and also the contemporaneous reception of the images.

I wanted to think a little about the contexts of Venetian art, because so much of our detailed evidence for alcohol use in early South Asia likewise consists of ‘representations’ of drinks and drinking, which were produced and received in very particular contexts: religious, social and economic, including the reliefs of wine making from Gandhāra. Take one more example, not from Venice however: a well-known painting by Poussin in the Louvre, in the center of which two men carry an oversized bunch of grapes on a stick.<sup>2</sup> What is going on in that image? Is this a bad, disproportionate painting of grapes? Of course not; this image is part of a set that depicts the seasons, and

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I wish to thank the organizers of this conference, Professor Claudia Antonetti, Dr. Bryan De Notariis, and Dr. Marco Enrico for inviting me to deliver this talk, as well as all the support from everyone else at Ca' Foscari.

1 Schmitter 2011.

2 *L'Automne*, by Nicolas Poussin.

the grapes evoke autumn and the time of the grape harvest, with two men heroically bringing the grapes home slung on a stick, like hunters triumphantly carrying a dead deer. This is less an image of a fruit than of a time, and an artistic expression of human victory over economic resources at a certain time of year.

Such are the perspectives I would like to try to bring to our reflections on wine culture and its representations in the complex, cosmopolitan region of greater Gandhāra. We need to move beyond the concept of ‘imported’ Dionysiac imagery or the search for ‘documentary depictions’ of vinification processes. The chapters in this volume exemplify precisely that sort of complexity and nuance.

Now, wine is a ‘particularly’ good topic with which to think about Gandhāra or Greater Gandhāra – a region at the fringes of, and at times infused with elements of the complex Persian and Hellenized worlds, both areas with their own well developed wine cultures. Yet Gandhāra is also part of the greater Indic world and an important center for early Buddhism. Gandhāra is also a region on trade routes to Inner Asia and China. And, last but not least, it is an area with a climate extremely well suited for certain types of agriculture, in particular viticulture, which would appear to have been long established here. Many factors intersect here. But of course, for the average Gandhāran, their land and their ways of wine, be these the drinks, words, or visual images, most likely did not seem hybrid or syncretic, but rather the norm. It is highly likely that for the Gandhārans, as for the Venetians, the extremely cosmopolitan nature of their history and culture – so strikingly cosmopolitan to outsiders and modern scholars – did not take away from the fact that their ways were a distinctive whole, more than the sum of these various parts. Gandhāra may seem at times like a fascinating ancient cocktail to us, but it was more a glass of distinctive local wine to the Gandhārans.

Before I turn to wine and Gandhāra, I wish briefly to review what we know about alcohol cultures in South Asia as a whole, for by doing so we might better appreciate what is distinctive about Gandhāra. The thing that surprised me most when I wrote a large survey of alcohol in South Asia is that, despite the limitations of mostly using Sanskrit sources to study this topic, there was so much variety within the alcohol cultures in the region over the long term.<sup>3</sup> We have drinks made from various grains, made using two main methods. The method seen in Europe and Mesopotamia where you change the starches to sugars with the enzymes of malted grains, as well as the method associated with East Asia today, where people use molds. As such, the grain based drinks of this region resemble those to the

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<sup>3</sup> For details on the various drinks discussed in this paragraph, see McHugh 2021b, chs. 2, 3.

west and to the east. Not only that, but South Asia is remarkable for having drinks made from sugarcane at a very early period, certainly several centuries BC. Again, sugarcane drinks were not just one thing, but many: some were made from fresh juice; some from processed sugars. And this must have made a difference in other realms, economic, regional, and cultural: drinks made from fresh juice are far easier to make where you actually grow sugarcane, whereas you can make drinks from jaggery anywhere you trade it. Then we have drinks made from fruits: jackfruit, *jambu*, grape wine, and so on, not to mention all the various forms of palm toddy. Most alcoholic drinks also contained a herbal additive, a mixture of various botanicals, which was called *saṃbhāra*, which was often seen as quite essential to making these drinks, just as one sees with hops and most modern beers. I will return to the *saṃbhāra* additive mixture below in my discussion of wine.

These many drinks also most likely corresponded to different patterns of consumption: common refreshments for farm workers, as we see with toddy today; or grain *surās* brewed en masse for festivals and weddings. Some drinks were more complicated, probably more costly, and as we know from the *Arthaśāstra*, wine was imported in some places, and such drinks were likely associated with more elite consumption – at least in places where the drinks were rare and expensive. And, as with the feasts we see in the *quadri da portego* of the Renaissance Venetian *palazzo*, these patterns of consumption crept their way into representations of drinking, textual and visual, even in religious contexts.<sup>4</sup> Representations of making and producing drinks could also be used to characterize regions, such as the Persian wine bower in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*, or Abhinavagupta's beloved local Kashmiri wine.<sup>5</sup>

There is no space in this short chapter to explore the morals of drink in South Asia, but I should make two small observations before continuing. First, laws and moral attitudes concerning drink were very nuanced and complicated. Also, the erotic and sensuous delights of a drinking session as depicted in poetry might well be admired by people who were supposed to be absolutely teetotal. Second, we must remember that in the premodern world there was no concept of alcohol as a substance common to different drinks. Rather, when deciding which intoxicating drinks were permitted or not some other criteria were needed. Vasubandhu, for example, notes in his autocommentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, that although arecanuts and

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<sup>4</sup> On imported wine as connoting elite drinking, see, for example McHugh 2021b, 131-2.

<sup>5</sup> On toddy as characterizing certain regions, see, McHugh 2021b, 58. On grape wine and regionality, see McHugh 2021a, 10-12.



kodo millet ‘can’ intoxicate they are ‘not’ forbidden by the Buddhist precept on *surā* and *maireya* as they are not technically forms of *surā* or *maireya*, whatever those are for him.<sup>6</sup> So in thinking about what may or may not have been allowed in certain Buddhist contexts as in Gandhāra, we might consider how a given liquid might have been classified. For example, if someone made a drink that resembled Italian *vino cotto* in Gandhāra, only lightly fermented but very sweet and quite suited to storage and transportation, would this be counted as covered by *surā* and *maireya* of the precept and *Vinaya* rule, or might it just be another type of honey, a grape honey or sorts, eminently suited to a monastic afternoon sugary drink? I will return to this question below.

Let us now turn to wine. First let us think about geography and environment. Not everywhere in the world is well suited for growing grapes, and then some places where you grow grapes are a bit too hot for optimal vinification. Traditionally the optimal northern hemisphere zone for growing vines is said to be between 32 and 51 degrees North – though of course with factors of continentality, altitude, rainfall, and soil, there are plenty of places within this band that are not great for grapes, and conversely, as with the wines of Nashik in modern India, there are places that work outside this range.<sup>7</sup> Now, although tropical viticulture ‘is’ possible, it does not always come naturally and requires a lot of extra work. Similarly, there are, for example, solid environmental reasons why my ancestors are potato people, not tomato people. And Gandhāra, at about 34.5 degrees North, as with connected areas in Central Asia and parts of Persia, is evidently well suited to the production of grapes, and apparently long has been, given our archaeological evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Yet even in an area suited to viticulture people need to know about grapes, know about making wine, and they also need to think wine is a good thing to make. France, for example, is a good place to make wine. Yet this was apparently not always the case. Michael Dietler has written of the process whereby the French, or perhaps more accurately, some Iron age people living in the Rhone Valley, encountered and adopted wine and also Mediterranean material culture associated with wine, these people previously being more exclusively beer drinkers.<sup>9</sup> Wine was an addition here, and was taken undiluted, to the great disapproval of classical authors.<sup>10</sup> Despite this novel and ‘barbarian’ style of consumption, wine in ancient France was

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6 For Vasubandhu on drinks and other substances, see McHugh 2021b, 221-4.

7 Robinson, Harding 2006, s.v. “Latitude”.

8 On grapes and other crops at Barikot, for example, see Spengler et al. 2021.

9 Dietler 1990, 382-3.

10 Dietler 1990, 385.

associated with imported drinking paraphernalia, Etruscan or Greek, or with local paraphernalia that sometimes emulated imported models – aligning with other wine cultures in at least that respect.

Given that it seems that grapes were long established in Gandhāra, perhaps wine was also long known, so perhaps what we are dealing with in the archaeological record here is the adoption of new forms – maybe new forms of production, and certainly new forms of vessels and imagery – be these Achaemenid or Hellenistic.<sup>11</sup> The Gāndhārī word for wine, *masu*, is Indic, but as I have discussed elsewhere, it seems possible that the prominence of that particular form in Indic languages maybe owes something to the reconstructed Iranian *\*madu* – and significantly we see no *oinos* words for wine here. Although pure speculation, one wonders what other aspects of wine culture in greater Gandhāra adapted selected foreign forms: Persian feasts, the *symposium* or something like it, or Indic forms of drinking perhaps, such as the rowdy outdoor drinking bouts and *surā* festivals we read of in the epics and some Buddhist sources?

What of the trade in wine, which we certainly see in the Niya texts.<sup>12</sup> But what about in greater Gandhāra itself – if Kāpiśāyana was so famed, might we look for evidence or processing and packaging for trade as opposed to for local consumption? I have written before about those vessels, some marked with Kushana *tamgas*, that Marshall and Allchin suggested might have been used for distillation.<sup>13</sup> I am far from convinced by the distillation theory, but might these vessels perhaps have been used for trading wine or other liquid grape products? After all wine from Kāpiśa is mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* and other sources. One of the few state monopolies mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* is the trade in alcoholic drinks, and there are references to royal seals for goods there too. It would seem to fit rather well if we were to discover that those vessels held wine – and I am hopeful that someone might do a residue analysis of some of those jars at some point – maybe people here today could help with that. And for those who are more keen on the theory that there ‘was’ distillation of wine in ancient Gandhāra, some very important questions then need to be addressed: how did this radical change from other wine cultures, such as the Greek ones, arise, and why? Moreover how did the production and consumption, *not* of wine, in Gandhāra, but of a drink that would be more like Peruvian *pisco* change the nature and economics of drinking culture here?

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**11** On the appearance of the region of tulip bowls and *rhyta*, see Petrie, Magee, Nasim Khan 2008.

**12** See the many examples under the lemma *masu* in Baums, Glass 2002-.

**13** McHugh 2020.

Now, some wine regions make wine largely for internal consumption, with very little exported, and typically such wines are not very well known today. It is not uncommon, for example, to read of certain varieties of Italian wine that ‘it rarely reaches the export market’. On the other hand some wine regions are deeply shaped by the demands of the export market. Bordeaux, for example, although well suited in terms of soil and climate for producing good wine, developed into an especially important global wine center largely because of the trade with the English and also the Dutch.<sup>14</sup> And not just because these people traded and consumed wine, for it was the Dutch, so skilled at draining wetlands, who drained the prestigious Médoc region in the mid seventeenth century. Or think of the British involvement in Marsala wine, or Port. The city of Shiraz, likewise, thrived as a center for wine in the Early Modern period due to factors of external trade and geography, good conditions for viticulture and relative proximity to trade routes.<sup>15</sup> And this is arguably exactly what we see with Gandhāra, sited on major trade routes, suited to viticulture, experiencing centuries of contact with other cultures and economies that valued and had developed wine production, trade, and consumption. The Hellenized aspects of Gandhāran wine cultures are superficially evident, but we might also speculate whether traders and consumers from ‘within’ peninsular India have shaped the manufacture, the style, or the material culture of wine here, like the Dutch, the British, and also, in fact, the Irish did in Bordeaux.

I do apologize if I have offended any Italian sensibilities with my digressions about French wine. Personally I am extremely fond of a well-made Valpolicella. But this only goes to show that regional pride in wine can matter too. In like manner we might also consider: were people in the Gandhāran cultural sphere conscious that they were fortunate to have a desirable wealth of grapes and wine? We know that Kashmiris at a later date ‘were’ self-conscious of this, and proud of their grapes, celebrated in poetry.<sup>16</sup> If this was the case for Gandhāra, how did the people there view parts of South Asia that did ‘not’ make so much wine? Although there is some controversy about the matter, I am convinced by Max Nelson’s work, where he writes that the Greeks in the classical period, rich and poor, drank wine as their main alcoholic drink, and not beer, which was perceived as an unusual, foreign drink.<sup>17</sup> If wine was the main, or even the ‘only’ alcoholic drink in Gandhāra did some people there perhaps also adopt that scorn for the uncivilized and alien beer drinker we see in

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**14** Robinson, Harding 2006, s.v. Bordeaux; History.

**15** On this trade and geography, see de Planhol 1972.

**16** For example, McHugh 2021b, 256.

**17** Nelson 2014.

classical Greece? Or perhaps they were possessed of a quite different sensibility regarding their place relative to the greater Indic context, where such a vast number of drinks were available, not just beer, and where drinks like *surā* and *sīdhu* were mentioned in literary and religious texts? We may well never know anything about this, but still, having such ideas in the back of our minds might well be useful in thinking about our evidence.

But is wine the only alcoholic drink people made in Gandhāra? In the Swat Valley, barley was plentiful, as was wheat and rice, and probably also types of millet.<sup>18</sup> Did people brew grain-based *surā* in Gandhāra? Also, what of drinks made from sugar products here? We know from one document found at Loulan that what must have been exotic spices in that region, such as black pepper, long pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon were available.<sup>19</sup> Some of these are quite typical ingredients in many recipes for drinks ‘other’ than wine in South Asia, in those *sambhāra* additives no less, and in that very same list containing the spices we also find a reference to sugar. Whatever the status of other drinks here, Gandhāra is unquestionably a ‘horizon’ between a more wine-centric world and a region with an unusually large number of drinks. Further, we might also speculate whether ‘within’ Gandhāra wine was perceived as quite variable, as it is in any wine making country, different colors, styles and so forth?

Also, let us reflect: if Gandhāra was largely a wine making region, from the point of view of someone from, say, Mathura visiting Gandhāra, this grape-centric culture of drink would have been striking. We perhaps see a hint of this awareness of regional differentiation in a somewhat imprecise but intriguing passage Dr De Notariis has translated from the Chinese version of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, where it is stated that in Northern states even the poor drink grape intoxicants, whereas in other areas even rich people cannot obtain it.<sup>20</sup> This is sort of like a description of a land where caviar is as abundant as cabbage. And perhaps, then, in that case in Gandhāra we might find the sorts of patterns of consumption for wine, elsewhere so precious, that we might associate with the commonest drinks, such as millet *surās*, in other parts of South Asia?

While we think about access to this drink it seems entirely possible that wine was not perceived as prohibited to anyone in Gandhāra, lay or monastics. First, one might argue that people, monastics included, may have not taken the precept or rule on drink too seriously. Or, perhaps *masu*, the processed, stabilized ‘nectar’ juice of grapes, was not typically deemed to be covered by the rules on *surā* and *maireya*,

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18 See Spengler et al. 2021.

19 Baums, Glass 2002-, s.v. *śakara* (and referring to document CKD 702).

20 See De Notariis 2023, 97 fn. 48.

more a kind of honey or sweet juice. Yet, even within a far more technical, even pedantic, legal framework wine might have been permitted to monks here. Now, we possess a version of the drinking precept in Gāndhārī that mentions “*surā* and *maireya*” (*suramerea*-).<sup>21</sup> As with Pāli sources, quite possibly a Gāndhārī *Vinaya* likewise mentioned both drinks in defining the monastic ‘offence’ of drinking. And one might read the Pāli version and – perhaps audaciously – even this hypothetical Gāndhārī version of the rule as permitting wine to monastics. How might that be the case? One thing that is striking about wine in the South Asian context is that it only has one ‘ingredient’: grapes. This is implicit, perhaps, in the definition of wine in the *Arthasāstra*, and explicit in the description of wine in the much later twelfth century *Mānasollāsa* and also in Jayaratha’s comments on Abhinavagupta.<sup>22</sup> If we look closely at the Pāli *Vinaya* rule on drinking, there is an offence in drinking *surā* and *maireya*.

*surāmerayapāne pācittiyā ti.*  
*surā nāma piṭṭhasurā pūvasurā odanasurā kiṇṇapakkhītā*  
*sambhārasaṃyuttā.*  
*merayo nāma pupphāsavo phalāsavo madhvāsavo guḷāsavo*  
*sambhārasaṃyutto.*<sup>23</sup>

There is an expiation offence for drinking *surā* and *meraya*.

(*Starch-based drinks*)

*Surā* means: crushed grain-*surā*, cake/bread *surā*, cooked rice *surā* – with *kiṇva* (starter) put in, mixed with *sambhāra* (herbal additive mixture).

(*Sugar-based drinks*)

*Meraya* (= Sanskrit: *maireya*) means: flower *āsava* (= sugar-based alcoholic drink), fruit *āsava*, honey *āsava*, jaggery *āsava* – mixed with *sambhāra* (herbal additive mixture).

Of course, for this rule to be functional we need a good definition of those words. *Surā* is defined as various starchy things with the addition of *kiṇva* and *sambhāra*, the herbal additive mixture I mentioned earlier; and *maireya* is made from sugar sources: flowers, fruits, honey, sugar, also with the addition of *sambhāra* additive. Yet it appears that grape wine has no *sambhāra*. And if you accept that fact, then a

<sup>21</sup> Strauch 2014, 29. I am grateful to Bryan de Notariis for making me aware of this reference.

<sup>22</sup> See McHugh 2021b, 255-6.

<sup>23</sup> Vin IV 110.

canny, legally minded monk could quite easily argue it is not covered by the rule. Indeed we see this very argument being produced in a serious controversy about the permissibility of palm toddy that took place in sixteenth century Burma, which all revolved around the nature, presence or absence, of the *saṃbhāra* addition to that drink.<sup>24</sup> To conclude this digression: wine has a quite different name to the drinks in the Pali rule and is made in a quite different way, so maybe it was not forbidden.

What of wine and time, vinification as an event? Above, I mentioned visual images from Europe where grapes symbolize a season or a month. Grapes need to be dealt with fast when compared to some agricultural products. If you find yourself with a huge amount of grapes they can rapidly decay or ferment. We tend to see wine as a delicious intoxicant, a Dionysiac nectar, but arguably wine, as also the raisin, and even as with ham and cheese, is a product of the need to stabilize and store a perishable substance. You can dry grapes; you can dry them and then press them, as we see with the great raisin wines, *recioto* and *amarone*, of the Veneto. And you can make wine with fresh grapes. All these products are easier to store and to transport in trade. Undeniably from our images, archaeology, and the fame of Kāpiśāyana wine, people in Gandhāra did make what we would call wine, but did they make other grape-based products, and what was the wine like that they did make? On that note, what do we possibly make of a Gāndhārī word attested Niya: *śukhiga*, perhaps cognate with *śuṣkaka*, so perhaps implying 'dry', perhaps implying a wine made from dried grapes; an advantage in processing time in some contexts, allowing for a delay in production, as well as producing an exceptionally tasty, sweet wine, a sort of *vino recioto di Caḍota*?<sup>25</sup>

As scholars of Gandhāra all know, Buddhists were by no means averse to the grape, nor to grape products, which may have been classified in various ways in various different contexts.<sup>26</sup> Also, Olivieri and Vidale have written of the probable involvement of Buddhist institutions with agriculture in the Swat Valley.<sup>27</sup> Professor Olivieri also observes that the grapes for wine in the Swat Valley may have been gathered from vines growing wild.<sup>28</sup> And he has also described the multiple stone structures for crushing and pressing wine in parts of the Swat Valley, which could have produced quite a significant volume of wine, mobilizing quite a lot of labor too. Given what a major annual event the grape harvest and wine making must have been,

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<sup>24</sup> On this controversy see McHugh 2021b, 218.

<sup>25</sup> Baums, Glass 2002-, s.v. *śukhiga* (and consulting references given for that entry).

<sup>26</sup> De Notariis 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Olivieri et al. 2006, 131-5.

<sup>28</sup> Olivieri et al. 2006, 142-6.

and given its economic importance, the presence of such imagery in the Buddhist monasteries is not at all surprising, especially if the drink was not seen as immoral or prohibited.

Harry Falk proposed that Gandhāran wine was fermented quickly, as one sees with some Kalash wine making, and that this young wine was quickly consumed at a festival of sorts.<sup>29</sup> Now I do not think the evidence from Gandhāra allows us to assume that exact scenario, and I 'am' interested in the idea that some wine might have been made somewhat more carefully with an eye on storage and trade. Nevertheless, in Greater Gandhāra, an economy with a significant involvement in grapes and wine, there was surely an annual moment of abundant sweet fruit, frenzied activity, and the prospect of voluminous storable products, above all wine, that could be enjoyed locally and traded for economic gain. Perhaps there was a festival of sorts to celebrate the new wine, and certainly these images of wine making, from a wine making region, must have evoked a moment that was both sensuous and economically reassuring for everyone, drinkers or not. A moment that was well worth celebrating in art, experiencing through luxurious material culture, and evidently thoroughly supported by monastic institutions.

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<sup>29</sup> Falk 2009, 75-6.

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Vin = *Vinaya* (Pali Text Society edition)

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**Indological Sources**  
Literature and Anthropology



# The Gandhāric Roots of the Indian *Symposion* and Sympotic-like Elements in Buddhist Literature

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**Abstract** Starting with a recent work by Kenneth G. Zysk “From Symposion to Goṣṭhī: The Adaptation of a Greek Social Custom in Ancient India”, this contribution aims to analyse evidence about the three sympotic elements (alcohol, sex, and intellectual pursuits) in the Gandhāra region. Gandhāra is, indeed, the ideal area in which a *métissage* of cultures could occur, and an ideal place in which the Greek symposion could at first be accommodated and then later spread. Then, Buddhist literary sources (with a special reference to those in Pāli) will be considered in order to analyse some relevant sympotic-like elements. Most notably, a feast occurring in the Pāli Vinaya, the regulative monastic code of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, will be examined, highlighting its sympotic characteristics. Furthermore, three groups of deities known as *karotapāṇi* ‘Those with cups in hands’, *mālādhara* ‘Garland-bearers’, and *sadāmatta/sadāmada* ‘Always euphoric/drunk’ will be discussed. These deities are represented in iconography, well attested in Buddhist literary sources in Sanskrit and Chinese, and even mentioned in Pāli literature. Their sympotic function in Buddhist cosmology as hypostatizations of the three sympotic elements of the symposion will be advanced.

**Keywords** Gandhāra. Buddhism. Pāli. Symposium. Vinaya. Buddhist Cosmology.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Gandhāra as a Perfect Grey Area. – 3 An Account from the Pāli Vinaya: Acknowledging Sympotic Ways of Partying in a Regulative Monastic Code. – 4 Sympotic Divinities in Buddhist Cosmology: Assimilating Festive Elements. – 5 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction\*

The archaeological and inscriptional evidences illuminate the extent of Greek customs, practices, and knowledge that were transmitted from Gandhāra into the central parts of the Indian subcontinent during the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>1</sup>

With these words Kenneth G. Zysk highlights how the abundant material evidence we have points to a transference from the region of Gandhāra to the southern Indian subcontinent of a set of practices and customs of Greek origin. In particular, he analysed evidence for the well-known Greek social institution called *symposion* and characterised, *in nuce*, by three main elements: alcohol, sex and intellectual pursuits.<sup>2</sup> The very name *sym-posion* indicates the act of ‘drinking together’,<sup>3</sup> which in Greece involved the alcoholic substance known as ‘wine’, accompanied by foods of various kinds. As wine is a very good ‘social lubricant’, sexual aspects are not totally unexpected. Differently, the intellectual element is not at all obvious and indicates a refined way of enjoyment that overcomes the basic acts of eating, drinking and having sensual pleasures. Indeed, at least for some activities, it presupposes a certain appreciation for intellectualism, most likely present in the higher and well educated classes of a society. In particular, if we consider the cosmopolitan society of the ancient Gandhāra, a melting pot of people in which Indians and Greeks coexisted,<sup>4</sup> an interesting association between Buddhism and the symptotic elements can be recovered. Material culture related with wine production and consumption, in addition to iconographies related to symptotic scenes, were found in Buddhist sites. So much so was the Buddhist involvement in such worldly activities that Harry Falk, in the conclusion of his seminal article on the Buddhist wine production in Gandhāra, writes that “[t]he age-old and non-Buddhist wine-cum-merry-making festival was so attractive that its organisation was hijacked by the Buddhist monasteries”.<sup>5</sup> Falk was referring to

\* I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed feedback. All the translations from Pāli, Sanskrit, and Chinese are my own unless otherwise noted.

1 Zysk 2021a, 105.

2 Other of Zysk’s works are concerned with exchanges between the Indian and Western worlds. See, for instance, his contributions on physiognomics (2018; 2019a; 2019b) and medicine (2021b).

3 As reported by Zysk (2021a, 84), there is, notably, the cognate Sanskrit form *sam-āpānaka* ‘drinking together’.

4 Baums 2018.

5 Falk 2009, 75.

a communal and popular festivity. However, we might assume, Buddhism in that region got in touch with an even more elitarian way to party, that is to say with the *symposion*. As it has been suggested elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> juices (especially that from grapes), without neglecting their primary medicinal function, might have also had a social facet in situations in which monks and laypeople had to eat together. Indeed, it might be possible to infer from the Chinese pilgrim Xuánzàng 玄奘 that grape juice was the alcohol-free counterpart of the intoxicating grape wine, a typical beverage of the caste of the *kṣatryas* (Sanskrit term for ‘warriors’ = Pāli: *khattiya*). It would seem that the *śramaṇas* (a Sanskrit general term for ‘ascetics’ which also includes Buddhists) and *brāhmaṇas* in Xuánzàng’s account drank as good as the highest caste, positing themselves on the same social level without violating religious norms.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddhists’ self-representation that can be inferred from Pāli literature (but not restricted to it) is that of a religious group particularly eager to be compared with the higher classes of the Indian society. Buddhists define themselves as *ariya* ‘noble’,<sup>8</sup> an adjective used to also describe many of their practices. They also redefined the meaning of the word *brāhmaṇa* claiming that it is a state that is not achieved by birth but by merit,<sup>9</sup> thus conceptually allowing Buddhists not to be excluded from being considered *brāhmaṇas* due to congenital limitations. Furthermore, the Buddha himself was a *khattiya/kṣatrya*, a member of the caste of the warriors and ruling class.<sup>10</sup> Not by chance, he is described with a war metaphor through the epithet *jina* ‘Victorious one’, and was also a universal king (Sanskrit: *cakravartin*; Pāli: *cakkavattin*; lit.: ‘Wheel-turning’ king) in previous lives. Another meaningful epithet of the Buddha is ‘caravan leader’ (Sanskrit: *sārvabhauṃsa*; Pāli: *sattavāha*), which connects the Buddha with the wealthy caste of merchants (Sanskrit: *vaiśya*; Pāli: *vessa*).<sup>11</sup> In light of the Buddhist interaction with the élites, we might wonder about the necessary adaptations which occurred on both sides to interact with each other, in a game of negotiation of uses, customs and values. It would seem, sometimes, that Buddhists followed the

6 De Notariis 2023a, 96-7.

7 “Thus, there are intoxicants of many different tastes, distinctive liquid substances [for each group]. Grape and sugar cane [intoxicants] are for the *kṣatryas* to drink [...] *Śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* drink grape (葡萄) and sugar cane (甘蔗) juices (漿), [these] are not considered intoxicants” (若其酒體之差滋味流別。\*葡萄甘蔗剌帝利飲也 [...] 沙門婆羅門飲葡萄甘蔗漿, 非酒體之謂也; T2087.51.0878b03-06).

8 In the sense of a ‘worthy person’, with a connotation of superiority; cf. Benedetti 2023, 131-2.

9 Sn 142; see also Norman 1992, 196, fn. 17.

10 Ellis 2019, 59-60.

11 Neelis 2011, 24-39.

motto “When in Rome do as Romans do”, showing remarkable societal adapting skills. Furthermore, reevaluations of moral tenets certainly occurred. An example could be the negative Buddhist attitude towards dance and dance performances, as emerges from the Pāli texts, whereas the puritan attitude is not preserved in the Vajrayāna Buddhism, which is conversely well integrated with such practices.<sup>12</sup> Potentially, a Buddhist interaction with the Greek *symposion* would have challenged the Buddhist attitude to the world and might have prompted a negotiation of values. In principle, if we give serious consideration to the widely known ‘five precepts’ (*pañca-sīla*),<sup>13</sup> also known in early canonical texts as *pañca-dhammas*,<sup>14</sup> the main elements of the Greek *symposion* may seem to contradict the religious tenets adopted even by laymen. Indeed, the ‘five precepts’ are moral and behavioural rules adopted by laymen, which include *inter alia*: the rule of training (*sikkhāpada*) of abstention (*veramaṇī*) from a misconduct regarding sensual/sexual pleasures (*kāmesu micchācārā*) and from states of intoxication (*pamāda-tṭhāna*), derived from *surā*, *meraya* (two macro-categories for alcoholic drinks) and intoxicating substances (*majja*).<sup>15</sup> In light of this, the case of wine production in Gandhāra highlighted by Falk is a good example of how real practices might differ from precepts.<sup>16</sup> Even contemporary empirical evidence would show us that, concerning the abstention from alcoholic substances, there is a good deal of flexibility in modern states in which Buddhism is the dominant religion.<sup>17</sup> A similar ancient flexibility is likely the reason why we can find an attempt to legitimise such praxis in some exegetical Buddhist literature from northern sources.<sup>18</sup> Concerning the misconduct regarding sensual/sexual pleasures, we should be conscious not to superimpose either our modern worldview on the matter or some modern Buddhist approaches derived from the Victorian sexual mores, a legacy of British colonialism.<sup>19</sup> Sexual intercourses were forbidden to ascetics, monks and nuns since they all have to live a chaste life, whereas

<sup>12</sup> On the dance in Pāli texts, see Comba 2019, whereas a discussion on dance in Vajrayāna Buddhism is provided by Shaw 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Given the prominence of Pāli sources in the present work, I will mainly use Pāli terms when mentioning Buddhist concepts, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. A III 203.

<sup>15</sup> The ‘five precepts’ are also attested in Gandhāra thanks to a Gāndhārī version preserved in a manuscript. In this regard, see Strauch 2014, 29, quoted also in the contribution of Stefan Baums in the present volume.

<sup>16</sup> Falk 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Crosby 2014, 116-17.

<sup>18</sup> Kano, Kramer 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Gombrich, Obeyesekere 1988, 255-6; Crosby 2014, 244.

laypeople could have a vivacious sexual life, without breaking any Buddhist rules. For example, Pāli texts widely attested polygyny,<sup>20</sup> and courtesans and prostitutes were well integrated members of society – their presence in a city could even enhance its prestige.<sup>21</sup> Although their work is often described in negative terms,<sup>22</sup> it would seem that neither the prostitution would fall into the category of a wrong sexual conduct, nor the patrons, as long as they have paid for their own prostitute and did not go with a prostitute already paid for (*alias* engaged) by another person (otherwise the act would be equated with the notion of theft, as in the case of adultery).<sup>23</sup> This state of affairs would be, as rightly stated by Jonathan Silk,<sup>24</sup> still in line with the Indian legal literature.<sup>25</sup> In light of this, the presence of the courtesans and brothels in the art of Gandhāra – as those detected, for instance, by Tadashi Tanabe –<sup>26</sup> is certainly less striking and scandalous than images related to drinking scenes. However, as highlighted by Collins,<sup>27</sup> polygyny, adultery and prostitution, although often accepted or justified, are certainly not encouraged and, indeed, we have textual examples that promote moderation in Pāli literature.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the Buddhist attitude that mostly emerges from the Pāli texts is certainly strait-laced when compared with the more worldly attitude we find in the archaeological and material culture. Kenneth Zysk believed that this ‘moderated attitude’ modified and mitigated the Indian social male gatherings influenced by the Greek *symposion*:

The evidence thus far presented indicates that central symptotic elements of drinking and sex existed in the regions of Bactria

<sup>20</sup> Collins 2007, 263, fn. 2.

<sup>21</sup> This happened in the case of the courtesan Ambapālikā, “through her, [the city of] Vesālī has been abundantly beautified” (*tāya ca Vesālī bhīyyosomattāya upasobhanti*; Vin I 268).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. a prostitute (*gaṇikā*) is ‘one who lives on defiled form of actions’ (*kiliṭṭhakamma-upajīvin*; Pv-a 75; cf. Vv-a 75 and Ja III 436) or one who has an ‘inferior work’ (*nīca-kamma*; Ja III 60), cf. Collins 2007, 278, fn. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Collins 2007, 280-2; Silk 2008; Langenberg 2018, 584.

<sup>24</sup> Silk 2007, 376.

<sup>25</sup> As discussed, for instance, by Sternbach (1951).

<sup>26</sup> Tanabe 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Collins 2007.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Ja II 125-7 suggests us that adultery, despite being a wrong action, can be nonetheless forgivable (cf. Collins 2007, 271), whereas in the *Parābhavasutta* (Sn 91-115) going with a prostitute for a married man is a cause of ruining (Sn 108), but the reason, according to the commentary (Pj II 172), is not the sexual act but the fact that a man would waste money (cf. Collins 2007, 272). If the polygyny was accepted and prostitutes were also regarded as ‘temporary wives’ (*muhuttikā*; cf. Collins 2007, 265), it would seem an interaction somehow legalised.

and Gandhāra shortly after Alexander conquered them and set up satraps to govern. The third symptotic element, involving mental activity, has come to us via Sanskrit literature. These three symptotic practices were subsumed into the Indian courtly and urban life during the Kuṣāṇa period and were adapted, imitated, and interwoven in the aristocratic, social, and courtly fabric of the Indians under the Sanskrit names of *sabhā* and *goṣṭhī*. It was probably during this time that Brahmanic and perhaps also Buddhist religious ideology and practice influenced the activities of the men's social gatherings, so that the emphasis moved away from drinking and women to emphasise intellectual and literary activities.<sup>29</sup>

In the present contribution, I initially want to delve deeper into the centrality of Gandhāra with regard to a possible diffusion of the Greek *symposion* in India. Then, I will adopt a complementary perspective to the conclusion made by Zysk, that is to say, I will analyse the influence that men's social gatherings and *symposion*-like parties had on Buddhism. In particular, how symptotic elements and related activities could be represented in the conservative Theravāda tradition will be explored. As such, it would become a study of how real life practices – so far mostly attested by the material culture – flowed into the Pāli texts, providing us with some new nuances on Buddhist culture and paving the way to new interpretative hypotheses concerning potential foreign influences on Buddhist literature. The elements analysed are widely and significantly attested in Gandhāra even in Buddhist contexts, making a case of a potential influence. If the influence of Gandhāra on the diffusion of Buddhism out of India through to China has been thus far well recognised, the fact that Gandhāra could have also affected the more native Indian versions of Buddhism may, nonetheless, be an intriguing line for future inquires.

<sup>29</sup> Zysk 2021a, 107.



## 2 Gandhāra as a Perfect Grey Area

In the gradual passage from black to white, there should be something in between which is neither one nor the other, but a mixture of the two. This is grey. Its usefulness consists in avoiding a blunt passage from one to the other, allowing a harmonious transition [fig. 1].



Figure 1 Gradient from black to white

Of course, there is not only one grey, but many shades connected together from the most blackish ones up to those most white. Black and white are the two extremes and, perhaps, they do not even exist in their purity, and as such they could only be academic constructs. The reader, at this point, might have already understood that I am speaking metaphorically since I am here referring to the dichotomy between West and East or, in our case, between Greek and Indian cultures. Can we say there is a pure Greek or Indian culture uncontaminated from foreign influxes? I doubt we can, as would also be the case for any unisolated culture. Cultures are dynamic and even the most conservative ones somehow react to new things, either in opening or closing to them. The mere contact between cultures triggers a motion, allowing potential for change or a process of mediation. Thus, when we consider an area such as that of Gandhāra, we should consider and value the melting pot of cultures which existed and their necessity to coexist. As also argued by Stefan Baums,<sup>30</sup> the cosmopolitan society of Gandhāra produced a unique piece of literature able to appeal to both Greeks and Indians who lived side by side in that area. The text is extant in its Indian rendition as *Milinda-pañha* and in two Chinese versions as *Nàxiān bǐqiū jīng* 那先比丘經.<sup>31</sup> In such a text, a Buddhist monk called Nāgasena/*Nàxiān* 那先 held several dialogues with the Indo-Greek king Milinda/*Mílán* 彌蘭 (the latter probably corresponds to Menander)<sup>32</sup> in a fabulous encounter in which Buddhism talks to Greece, at least allegorically. Not by change, the text was composed in Gandhāra, in such a grey area in which a *métissage* of cultures occurred.

*Mutatis mutandis*, Gandhāra might have been crucial in the Indian reception of the Greek *symposion*. Its characteristic of being

<sup>30</sup> Baums 2018, 42.

<sup>31</sup> T 1670 versions A and B.

<sup>32</sup> I have recently discussed some not entirely convincing attempts to revisit the identity of Milinda, see De Notariis 2023b, 306-7.

a grey area, arguably, made Gandhāra able to receive foreign customs and readapt them for another culture. In Gandhāra, Indians could be receptive and cosmopolitan enough to receive a new custom, but could also still preserve Indian cultural traits which then may prompt an adaptation of the new custom to suit Indians' sensitivity, if needed. The mitigated foreign custom can, then, reach the subcontinent in an Indianised form. In this regard, for instance, we may note how references to homosexuality in Indian texts, which refer to symptotic scenes, lack explicitness,<sup>33</sup> a fact arguably due to an underlying aversion and proof of an Indian adaptation, at least from a narrative point of view.

Thus, to bolster the assumption that Gandhāra was the epicentre for the diffusion of the Greek custom of the *symposion*, we shall note how the three symptotic elements discussed by Zysk are all well documented in Gandhāra. Since long ago, archaeological research presented us material culture related to wine/alcohol production and consumption in Gandhāra, customs which were corroborated by anthropological data and literary sources and prompted early suggestions concerning a certain Buddhist involvement with such activities.<sup>34</sup> Sexual aspects were also often found in material culture related to Buddhist places, a fact that struck scholars and called for explanations.<sup>35</sup> Even in literary sources, such as in the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya* (a regulative monastic code), there is evidence of an articulated sexual life in north-west India, an area that roughly corresponds to Gandhāra.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, we might note how Gandhāra is the birthplace of some outputs which can be well sprung from the symptotic intellectual activities. The most representative example is most likely the Buddhist poet and playwright, Aśvaghōṣa. Born in the North city of Sāketa (Ayodhyā), Aśvaghōṣa has been associated with Gandhāra as a result of his association with the Kushan king Kaniṣka who ruled over the northwest.<sup>37</sup> He was, notably, the author of the oldest *mahākāvya*s (great poems) we have.<sup>38</sup> As we know, poets (*kavi*)

<sup>33</sup> As noted by Zysk 2021a, 91.

<sup>34</sup> "Buddhism also seems to have been compelled to allow, in those countries, some exceptions to its prescriptions concerning the prohibition of drinking alcoholic beverages (as was the case also in Tibet, Nepal and China)" (Tucci 1977, 33). Overviews on the main sources can be found in Falk 2009, 65; Klimburg 2016; Filigenzi 2019a, 60-3.

<sup>35</sup> Carter 1968; Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 369-74; Filigenzi 2019a; 2019b.

<sup>36</sup> "The one visible female domain outside the home is that of the courtesans or prostitutes, who also densely populate the narratives of the *MSV* [= Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya*]" (Finnegan 2009, 163; square brackets mine) and also "prostitutes or courtesans are simply part of the social landscape in the *MSV* [= Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya*], and appear as figures in each of its 13 volumes" (Finnegan 2009, 341; square brackets mine).

<sup>37</sup> Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 243; Deeg 2022, 234.

<sup>38</sup> Lienhard 1984, 164.

used to frequent the Indian male social gathering known as *goṣṭhī*,<sup>39</sup> which is the object of Zysk's study, being one of the main candidates to represent an Indian version of the Greek *symposion*. A further example is the forementioned text known in Pāli as *Milindapañha* and in Chinese as *Nàxiān bǐqiū jīng*, a text that consists of the philosophical dialogues which occurred between a Buddhist monk and a Indo-Greek king. The text is believed to have been composed in Gandhāra and in Gāndhārī language.<sup>40</sup> Notably, philosophical dialogues can also form part of the intellectual pursuits of the Greek *symposion*, as Plato's *Symposium* itself well exemplifies. All the elements mentioned were in connection with Buddhism, and Buddhists were actually involved in worldly activities in the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya*, a north-western literary source. This was highlighted by Gregory Schopen in stating that:

the Buddhist monk in Early North India, and in this monastic code [viz. in the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya*], did not look like the caricature found in modern scholarly sources [...]. The monk that we will see in this code is a construction foreman, an art promoter, a banker, an entrepreneur, sometimes a shyster, and sometimes a saint - he should at least prove to be of some interest.<sup>41</sup>

Monks in the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya*, compared with “the caricature found in modern scholarly sources” (Schopen most likely refers here to the picture derived from the Pāli *Vinaya*), can be described as gentrified monks.<sup>42</sup> Thus, we have both archaeological and literary evidence which tells us that Buddhism in Gandhāra departed from some of its ascetic tenets to become involved in more worldly activities. Thus, it would seem we are entitled to wonder to what degree these gentrified monks were also directly involved with, or at least supported, activities related to our sympotic elements, if not even the *symposion* itself. Perhaps in these sources the process of gentrification is more evident than in the Pāli sources, although I would argue that Pāli Buddhism similarly testifies to have come into contact with these - or at least similar autochthonous - social activities, but reacted, at least in theory, in a more conservative way. In my view, while reading the Pāli sources we should consider two potential attitudes regarding sympotic elements, namely: acknowledging and assimilation. ‘Acknowledging’ is used in the sense of acknowledging the

<sup>39</sup> Lienhard 1984, 16-19.

<sup>40</sup> De Notariis 2022, 118, fn. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Schopen [2000] 2004, 20; square brackets mine.

<sup>42</sup> With ‘gentrified monks’ I mean monks who moved away from the rural world and, at the same time, look like they are in search of material well-being, in a *viveur* spirit.

existence of such practices, and by ‘assimilation’ I mean that those practices found their own way to be integrated in the Pāli Buddhist world, at least in the imaginary. The evidence I will discuss below originates from regulative literature, since a legislator forbids what is really or potentially practised, and from mythological accounts involving cosmology, as what is forbidden – or at least discouraged – on earth can be a reward in heavens.

### 3 An Account from the Pāli *Vinaya*: Acknowledging Symptotic Ways of Partying in a Regulative Monastic Code

In considering the Gandhāric Buddhist attitude towards intoxicants, we should regard it as a later development when compared with a hypothetical early Buddhism. In the same manner, we should consider any openness towards sexuality. Buddhism did not come out of the blue, but was part of the ascetic tradition of ancient India, which testifies quite early on a certain general (albeit perhaps not exclusive) negative attitude towards these activities.<sup>43</sup> On this point, we also have evidence from the Greek historian Strabo, who wrote in book XV of his *Geography*<sup>44</sup> that Indian ascetics do not drink intoxicants and avoid sexual intercourses (Strabo’s account is based on the Historiography of Alexander the Great, and so refers to an early period). In the Pāli canon we find roughly the same statement in the *Upakkilesasutta*,<sup>45</sup> in which intoxicants and sexual intercourse are among the obstructions (*upakkilesa*) for both *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, that is to say, for all the religious actors of ancient India from the Buddhist perspective. Buddhism posits itself on the side of those ascetics who avoid drinking and sexual intercourse, at least in the earliest times. However, the text, indirectly also tells us that there were some who used to do such activities: “There are, monks, some *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who drink *surā* and *meraya* and do not abstain from *surā* and *meraya* drinks”.<sup>46</sup> The same statement is repeated with reference to the act of indulging in sexual intercourses (*methunaṃ dhammaṃ*

<sup>43</sup> In this regard, see Bodewitz (2007), McHugh (2021, 213-15). *Chāndogyopaniṣad*, for instance, clearly forbids drinking *surā* and some specific kinds of sexual intercourses (CU 5.10.9).

<sup>44</sup> Strab. 15.1.60.

<sup>45</sup> A II 53-4.

<sup>46</sup> *santi bhikkhave eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā suraṃ pivanti merayaṃ pivanti surāmerayaṃ pānā apāvīratā* (A II 53).

*paṭisevanti*).<sup>47</sup> In the Pāli *Vinaya*, on an occasion such kinds of actions were actually performed by some Buddhist monks. The account aims to condemn this behaviour, but nonetheless testifies to the existence of a type of private elitist way of partying which has all the sympotic elements previously described, in addition to other elements which, commonly, characterise the Greek *symposion*:

*tena kho pana samayena Assajipunabbasukā nāma Kiṭāgirismiṃ āvāsikā honti alajjino pāpabhikkhū. te evarūpaṃ anācāraṃ ācaranti: mālāvacchaṃ ropenti pi ropāpenti pi siñcanti pi siñcāpenti pi ocinanti pi ocināpenti pi ganthenti pi ganthāpenti pi ekatovaṅṅikamālaṃ karonti pi kārāpenti pi [...] te kulitthīnaṃ kuladhītānaṃ kulakumārīnaṃ kulasuṇhānaṃ kuladāsīnaṃ ekatovaṅṅikamālaṃ haranti pi harāpenti pi [...] te kulitthīhi kuladhītāhi kulakumārīhi kulasuṇhāhi kuladāsīhi saddhiṃ ekabhājane pi bhuñjanti ekathālake pi pivanti ekāsane pi nisīdanti ekamañce pi tuvaṭṭenti [...] vikāle pi bhuñjanti majjamaṃ pi pivanti mālāgandhavilepanamaṃ pi dhārenti naccanti pi gāyanti pi vādenti pi lāsenti pi [...] atṭhapade pi kīlanti [...] raṅgamajjamaṃ pi saṅghātiṃ pattharivā naccakīṃ evamaṃ vadanti idha bhagīni naccassū ti; nalāṭikamaṃ pi denti vividhamaṃ pi anācāraṃ ācaranti.*

At that time, shameless and sinful monks who were followers of Assaji and Punabbasu were residing at Kiṭāgiri. They indulged in such a kind of misbehaviours: they cultivate and cause to cultivate [flowering] plants for garlands, they water and cause to water them, they pick and cause to pick them up, they tie and cause to tie them up, they produce and cause to produce a garland with the stalk on one side [...] These [monks] offer or cause to bring the garland with the stalk on one side to women from a good family, to daughters from a good family, to maidens from a good family, to daughters-in-law from a good family, to female slaves from a good family [...] These [monks] eat together in the same bowl with women of a good family [...] they drink from the same beaker, they sit on the same seat, they were coupled in the same bed [...] they eat at the wrong time, they drink intoxicants (*majja*), they make use of garlands, perfumes, and cosmetic, they dance, sing, play musical instruments, and amuse [...] They play on a chessboard (*atṭhapade*

**47** A II 53. We should wait till the emergence of Tantrism to see these practices fully and clearly legitimated by religious traditions. The passage can, in principle, testify to early harbingers of practices that will be labelled as ‘Tantric’ in later times or, perhaps more likely, complain of the existence of blameable religious actors who do not follow common behavioural standards. Brahmins and Jains agreed with Buddhists in their approach to intoxicants and sexual intercourses, allowing us to assume that this was the dominant attitude.

*pi kīlanti*)... [there is a long list of games at which the monks play (*kīlanti*)]. Having spread the robe as it was a stage, they say to a dancer: “Sister, dance here!”, they mark their forehead,<sup>48</sup> and they indulged in various misbehaviours.<sup>49</sup>

This account begins with monks that cultivate plants suitable to produce garlands. Later, they actually go on to make garlands and send them to a variety of elitist women. As also highlighted by Jonathan Silk, giving a garland can indicate in India a sexual invitation.<sup>50</sup> The monks and these women eat and drink together, and intoxicants conveyed through the generic term *majja* are also involved. They consume food and drinks in a festive environment, sharing the same space (being it a seat, a bed, etc.), and playing (*kīlanti*) many kinds of games.<sup>51</sup> The ludic activities can be identified with our ‘intellectual pursuits’. Daud Ali highlights that these activities match the activities in the *Kāmasūtra*.<sup>52</sup> Of course, we cannot exclude the autochthonous nature of such elements even if, we may argue, there was a time interval (albeit short) in which foreign elements could potentially flow into the *Vinaya* literature in Pāli.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, there are some remarka-

<sup>48</sup> Horner translates *nalāṭikam pi denti* as “they applauded” ([1952] 2001, 15), although it is not clear to me whence she derived such translation (even the recent DOP s.v. “nalāṭika” does not provide anything similar to that interpretation). Since *nalāṭika*, as reported in PED (cf. s.v. “nalāṭika”), has a parallel in the Sanskrit *lalāṭikā*, I based my translation on the SED (s.v. “lalāṭikā”): “A mark made with sandal or ashes on the forehead”.

<sup>49</sup> Vin II 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> Silk 2007.

<sup>51</sup> We might wonder whether the various practices described in this *Vinaya* passage refer to a single ‘it’, a party, as it were, rather than to various behaviours not necessarily taking place on a particular occasion or at a particular gathering. To my mind, the passage depicts the many activities occurring during an elitarian party. Many activities involved are not wrong *per se*, but only if framed within the general picture. Not all the activities listed have to happen at the same time, some are clearly alternatives.

<sup>52</sup> Ali 1998, 177. The *Vinaya* passage is discussed also by McHugh (2021, 215-16), who also refers to the article of Daud Ali.

<sup>53</sup> The presence of Alexander the Great in India is dated in the second half of the fourth century BC, while a convenient cut-off point for an early redactional closing date for the Pāli *Vinaya* is the first century BC (Kieffer-Pülz 2020-21, 156), when Pāli texts were first committed to writing according to tradition. However, this convenient closing date includes the canonical *Abhidhamma*, a much later composition than many other texts. Therefore, an earlier date for at least the core of the Pāli *Vinaya* sounds reasonable, and this can be the third century BC, the period in which Buddhism arrived in Sri Lanka during the reign of King Aśoka (von Hinüber 1996, 21). In the same period, viz. the third century BC, we have evidence that Buddhism reached Gandhāra (Olivieri et al. 2022, 72; Iori 2023, 198; Olivieri 2024). Taking these dates into account, we can note that there is a short time interval between the arrival of Alexander and the composition of the *Vinaya* core in which Greek customs could flow into Indian culture. Furthermore, a couple of centuries exist between the redactional closing date of the *Vinaya* and the Buddhist presence in Gandhāra, where Greek culture spread. It is worth noting that our *Vinaya*’s account is not

ble details which are worth noticing. The party is basically elitist, as it is enjoyed by monks (who are *ariyas* ‘nobles’)<sup>54</sup> and women from a “good family” (*kula*);<sup>55</sup> it is private and not open (as it can be with a public festival). If we were in Greece, we could probably call it *symposion*, as its core elements are involved. Sexual aspects are not explicit, but are most likely implied by garlands and the intimate situation of consuming food and drinks closely. At least, we can certainly infer a certain degree of intimacy,<sup>56</sup> since the prescribed monastic behaviour was much stricter. Indeed, it is reported that the Buddha declared that it is better to embrace, sit or lie down with a mass of fire rather than with high-class maidens.<sup>57</sup>

representative of the earliest phase of Buddhism, as it presents us a wealthy and well-developed monastic community living in a lavish monastery and not itinerant and wandering ascetics. Eventually, in discussing some knowledge about Greeks in the *Assalāyanasutta* (M 93), Anālayo (2012, 245-6) makes a point, suggesting there is no need to await the invasion of Alexander to expect references to the Greeks. In sum, even if a Greek influence on Buddhism is certainly more likely in a later period (especially, during the Kushan period), we cannot exclude some early harbingers of mutual influences.

**54** The monks of Kiṭṭāgiri, followers of Assaji and Punabbasu, are according to the text ‘shameless and sinful’, but are described as ‘noble’ (*ayya*; variant of *ariya*) by the people of Kiṭṭāgiri (*ayyā Assajipunabbasukā*; Vin II 11).

**55** In another version of this story (Vin III 184-5), there occurs a gloss on the term *kula*, explaining that it refers to warriors (*khattiya*), *brāhmaṇas*, merchants (*vessa*), and slaves (*sudda*). As Zysk highlights, in the classical Greek *symposion*, “[a]ristocratic women were strictly forbidden, but slave women and special courtesans, serving as female companions (*hetaira*), were commonly present for the enjoyment of the men” (2021a, 87). However, we should bear in mind that, according to Zysk (2021a, 91-2), some sympotic elements in Indian texts could occur either with Indian nuances or as Indian adaptations.

**56** It might be considered significant that in the passage it is not suggested that the monks have infringed the first *pārājika* offence which, according to Theravāda tradition, entails expulsion from the monastic order for monks and nuns who have sex (a less strict penalty is admitted by other Buddhist traditions, in this regard see Clarke 2009 with further notes on the topic in Anālayo 2016). However, we might wonder, in a speculative legal sense, whether there could be a possibility that, even if the monks had sex, this was not considered an infringement of the first *pārājika*. Indeed, as Collins (2014, 211) highlights, a penalty is not applied to a person who is mad (*ummattaka*) in the *Vinaya* (Vin III 33) and the condition of madness can be caused by drinking intoxicants (and these monks were actually drinking intoxicants), a fact attested in the canon (A IV 248; Kv 619) and supported by the existence of the term *surummattaka* (maddened by *surā*) (Ja III 243). Naturally, the latter case can be considered only in a speculative sense as the commentary (Sp I 269) would interpret the term *ummattaka* as *pitummattaka* ‘maddened by bile’, and later mentions *yakkhumattaka* ‘maddened by demi-gods’. In any case, we can assume the presence of sexual-related activities to such a degree that do not violate the *pārājika*. The *Vinaya*, indeed, describes a huge range of sexual behaviours not necessarily entailing expulsion from the monastic order (Langenberg 2018, 574-8). Finally, it might be worth noting that, as highlighted by Schopen (2006, 497), *Vinaya*’s accounts in which monks had sexual interactions with women involved the latter in the act of visiting the monastery.

**57** A IV 128; cf. Vism 55. It is worth noting that when the Buddha asked the monks if they would prefer to embrace, sit or lie down with the mass of fire or the maidens, the monks chose the latter.

We can hardly state whether or not the account tells us of a historical event since the literary genre of the *Vinaya* commonly makes use of stories as an etiological expedient to explain the reasons why the Buddha established a certain rule.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, we can infer some information: this kind of way to party was known and monks were believed to have the resources to organise it. Even if the story is not true, it sounds at least plausible. There should be the possibility, even if remote, that this could happen, since there is no reason to forbid an action totally outside the horizon of thought. Therefore, it might seem that the Pāli account acknowledges the existence of a social practice and reacts by condemning it. In so doing, it provides us a description of the condemned practice, thus serving as an evidence for its existence. The behaviour of these monks would constitute an evident violation of many ascetic norms. In the same way, as would the behaviour of six nuns in another *Vinaya*'s account:

*tena kho pana samayena chabbaggiyā bhikkhuniyo avaṅgaṃ karonti visesakaṃ karonti olokanakena olokeṇti sāloke tiṭṭhanti sanaccamaṃ kārāpentī vesim vuttāpentī pānāgāraṃ ṭhapenti [...]*

At that time, the group of six nuns painted the corner of the eyes, painted the cheeks, they look down/out from a window, they stand in a visible [position], they arrange dance[-parties?], they promote courtesans, they establish a drinking house [...]<sup>59</sup>

These nuns, just like the aforementioned monks, behaved in a manner considered wrong by the orthodoxy. Nonetheless, the account provides us a glance into some remarkable working activities women could undertake when not relegated to the mere role of 'housewife'. The establishment of a drinking house (*pānāgāra*) is quite telling as also the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya* would provide evidence for nuns' expertise in brewing intoxicants,<sup>60</sup> allowing us a brief insight into some historical truth behind the account. Furthermore, the account interestingly reports that "People get annoyed, bothered, upset [saying]: 'They [viz. the nuns] enjoy sensual pleasures (*kāma*) just like female-householders'".<sup>61</sup> This and similar statements are used very frequently in the *Vinaya* and reveal a certain Buddhists' attention to laypeople's judgement and the need to distinguish themselves

<sup>58</sup> Clarke 2009, 35-6.

<sup>59</sup> Vin II 267.

<sup>60</sup> McHugh 2021, 91-2.

<sup>61</sup> *manussā ujjhāyanti khīyanti vipācentī: seyyathāpi gihikāmahoginiyo 'ti* (Vin II 267).



from the latter.<sup>62</sup> However, later textual and material sources, mostly datable around the middle of the first millennium AD (with fluctuations of a few centuries), would testify to the existence of ascetics and Buddhist monks who lived like householders,<sup>63</sup> pointing to a potential breaking of boundaries and merging of roles.

Assuming, for the sake of the argument, a historic interpretation for the symptotic-like party of the aforementioned monks of Kiṭāgiri, the account can be regarded as an early evidence of monks behaving like householders (in this case elitist householders), taking advantage of the societal and economic sources they have.<sup>64</sup> But in case we do not want to endorse a historic reading, we can nonetheless read into the account a fear of breaking boundaries expressed by the orthodox tradition, perhaps in a period in which the progressive enrichment of the monastic community, combined with an increase in relations with the laity, began to constitute a danger for the sober lifestyle derived from the Buddhist ascetic background.

Turning to the interpretation of the passage about nuns, we might wonder what is wrong with nuns looking out from a window. Probably, the answer lies in the next sentence in which it is stated that the nuns “stand in a visible [position]”. Following the commentary: “‘They stand in a visible [position]’ means that having opened the door, they stand showing half body”.<sup>65</sup> As highlighted by Schopen, standing at the door is the classical behaviour of a prostitute, and so it is within reason that we should likewise understand the act of looking down/out from a window, an act that presupposes the existence of a building.<sup>66</sup> Following Tanabe, some Gandhāric reliefs would represent buildings that were interpreted as brothels, and their representation aimed

to remind vividly lay Buddhist devotees and a certain kind of monks of the pleasures to be obtained in the Realm of Desire (*kāmadhātu*), in particular, in the paradise of the *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Notably, monastic celibacy seems it actually was a key element to differentiate monks and nuns from laypeople (Langenberg 2018, 568-9).

<sup>63</sup> von Hinüber 2006, 24-6; 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Similar cases are actually attested in sources external to Buddhism, as in the case of a Kashmiri satirical play which is ironic about the luxurious life of Buddhist monks (McHugh 2021, 237).

<sup>65</sup> *sāloke tiṭṭhanti ti dvāraṃ vivarivā upaḍḍhakāyaṃ dassentiyo tiṭṭhanti* (Sp VI 1293).

<sup>66</sup> Schopen 2008, 237-8, fn. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Tanabe 2019, 35.

If Tanabe is right in his interpretative hypothesis, such lascivious activities were assimilated in the Buddhist imaginary, namely in their representation of heavens, which are notably one of the main soteriological goals of laypeople.<sup>68</sup> It is apparent that Pāli texts contain descriptions of various kinds of amusement, just as the dancing and drunkenness scenes in the description of the city of Kusāvati,<sup>69</sup> but we can arguably attribute a particular meaning to pleasure occurring in celestial realms. As epitomes of human pleasures, the pleasures of the heavens dignify worldly activities, and if such activities were prohibited or discouraged on earth, they find their legitimacy in heaven. This is not a mere representation of the culture in which the Buddhist texts were composed, but is a deliberate act to reintegrate earthly entertainments (repressed by the ascetic tenets) into the imaginary. In the same perspective, we can read the presence of what we can call ‘sympotic divinities’ in the Buddhist cosmology, a further sign that worldly and lay customs have flowed into the Buddhist worldview, perhaps mitigating the original ascetic attitude over time.

#### 4 **Sympotic Divinities in Buddhist Cosmology: Assimilating Festive Elements**

Assimilating an element in the cosmology means to allow something to enter the constructed imaginary in a hierarchical localised place. Heavens or paradises (*sagga*)<sup>70</sup> are rewards for having had a meritorious life. Things located there are not only deserved, but somehow coveted. Heavens, as the name suggests, are often above us in higher planes. Attaining heaven is quite an early element and is the only soteriological goal we find in the Buddhist-inspired Aśoka’s edicts of the third century BC. We can deduce from the Pāli literature that the Buddhist view of cosmology consists of roughly thirty-one realms of existence [tab. 1].<sup>71</sup>

The table shows us a panoramic and macroscopic view of the Buddhist world-system called in Pāli *lokadhātu* or *cakkavāḷa* (=

<sup>68</sup> However, as Stephen Jenkins has highlighted (2022), attainment of heavens does not only concern laypeople, but can similarly be a goal for monks, since even from heavens *nibbāna* can be achieved.

<sup>69</sup> D II 170.

<sup>70</sup> Steven Collins (1998, 293) has well highlighted how the definition of the word ‘paradise’ only partially fits the Buddhist ‘heaven’, a literal translation for the Pāli term *sagga* (= Sanskrit: *svarga*), although it is certainly somehow evocative of some luxurious settings that might be found in Buddhist heavens.

<sup>71</sup> The realm of the Anti-gods/Demons (*asura*) is sometimes omitted, see Collins 1998, 300, fn. 4.

**Table 1** Buddhist cosmology, according to Pāli sources and based on the reconstructions made by Gethin (1997, 195; 1998, 117-18), Collins (1998, 298-9), and De Notariis (2019, 66-7)

<b>Cosmology</b>		
<b>WORLD-SYSTEM</b> <i>(dhātu)</i>	<b>REALM</b> ( <i>bhūmi</i> )	
Formless World-System <i>(arūpadhātu)</i>	<i>nevasaññānāsaññāyatana</i> (Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception) <i>akiñcaññāyatana</i> (Sphere of Nothingness) <i>viññāṇañcāyatana</i> (Sphere of Infinite Consciousness) <i>ākāsānañcāyatana</i> (Sphere of Infinite Space)	Formless Brahmā's Worlds <i>(arūpa-brahmaloka)</i>
World-System of Pure Form <i>(rūpadhātu)</i>	<i>akaniṭṭha</i> (Highest Gods) <i>sudassin</i> (Beautiful Ones) <i>sudassa</i> (Good-Looking Ones) <i>atappa</i> (The Serene) <i>aviha</i> (The Durable) <i>asañña-satta</i> (Unconscious Beings) <i>vehapphala</i> (Great Fruit) <i>subha-kiṇha</i> (Full Splendour) <i>appamāṇa-subha</i> (Measureless Splendour) <i>paritta-subha</i> (Limited Splendour) <i>ābhassara</i> (Radiant Ones) <i>appamāṇābha</i> (Measureless Luminosity) <i>parittābha</i> (Limited Luminosity) <i>mahābrahmā</i> (The Great Brahmā) <i>brahma-purohita</i> (Brahmā's Ministers) <i>brahma-pārisajja</i> (Brahmā's Retinue)	Brahmā's Worlds of Form <i>(rūpa-brahmaloka)</i>
World-System of the Five Senses <i>(kāmadhātu)</i>	<i>paranimmita-vasavattin</i> (Those who have authority on others' creation) <i>nimmāṇa-ratin</i> (Those who delight in creation) <i>tusita</i> (Contented Ones) <i>yāma</i> (Yama Gods) <i>tāvatiṃsa</i> (Thirty-Three Gods) <i>cātummahārājika</i> (Realm of the Four Great Kings) <b>Human Being (<i>manussa</i>)</b>	Good Destinations <i>(sugati)</i>
	<i>asura</i> (Anti-Gods/Demons) <i>petti-visaya</i> (Departed Ones/Hungry Ghosts) <i>tiracchānāyoni</i> (Animals) <i>niraya</i> (Hells)	Bad Destinations <i>(duggati)</i>

**Table 2** A focus on the borders between Human realm and the first divine realm

<b>A closer look at the Buddhist cosmology</b>	
The first heavenly realm of the gods	<b>Cātummahārājika 'Four Great Kings'</b> <i>karoṭapāṇi</i> 'Those with cups in hands' <i>mālādhara</i> 'Garland-bearers' <i>sadāmatta/sadāmada</i> 'Always drunk'
Human realm	<b>Upper-class (<i>khattiyas</i> and <i>brāhmaṇas</i>)</b> Medium/lower classes (merchants, slaves, outcastes)

Sanskrit: *cakravāla*).<sup>72</sup> The general features of this scheme are shared by both Sanskrit and Pāli sources, although there might be differences in details.<sup>73</sup> From the human condition, an individual can achieve either higher destinations, which are increasingly better, or lower destinations, which represent a degeneration from the human condition. A closer look at this cosmological map would show some details which might, at first and panoramic sight, be bypassed. In doing so, especially thanks to the testimony that has come to us through Sanskrit and Chinese sources (which we will discuss below), we move closer to the border between humans and gods' worlds, where the boundaries seem to conflate [tab. 2].

In looking closer at the Buddhist cosmology we can see some significant details. As already stated, the upper class in Buddhism is that of the 'warriors' (Pāli: *khattiya*; Sanskrit: *kṣatrya*) which is also the ruling class.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is of some significance that the first heavenly realm is that of the *Cātummahārājika* 'Four Great Kings'. Among them, a king called Kubera rules over the north and is associated with a class of divinities or genii called in Pāli *yakkha* (= Sanskrit: *yakṣa*). The *yakkhas* constitute the retinue of that king.<sup>75</sup> Often described as *yakṣas* in Sanskrit sources, we find three groups of special relevance for our discussion. These are: *karotapāṇi* 'Those with cups in hands', *mālādhara* 'Garland-bearers' and *sadāmatṭa/sadāmada* 'Always euphoric/drunk'. These deities are represented in iconography,<sup>76</sup> well attested in Buddhist literary sources in Sanskrit and Chinese, and even mentioned in Pāli literature in such a way that would allow us to suspect either that something went wrong in the Theravāda reception of such deities or that the Theravāda preserved a non-levelled early version.<sup>77</sup> The core of the story that can be gleaned from many Bud-

<sup>72</sup> As noted by Gethin (1997, 195-6, fn. 36), the term *cakkavāla* does not occur in the four principal *Nikāyas*, which constitute quite an early stratum of Buddhism.

<sup>73</sup> Randolph Kloetzli writes that "[t]he basic outlines of the single world system of the '*cakravāla*-cosmology' are generally agreed upon throughout a broad spectrum of Buddhism and are a prominent feature of the Pāli texts as well as the Buddhist Sanskrit literature" ([1983] 2007, 23). Later, he writes that "[w]hile the basic structure of the *cakravāla* is the same in both traditions, certain discrepancies in detail do occur" (24). For reconstructions of the Buddhist cosmology based on the *Abhidharmakośa*, see Kloetzli [1983] 2007, 33-9; while for a comparison between Pāli canonical accounts and literary sources from other Buddhist traditions on cosmology, see Kirfel 1920, 190-5.

<sup>74</sup> Although, as noted above, Buddhism was well connected with the caste of merchants, on an ideological level, the two castes that compete for being considered the most important caste are *khattiya/kṣatrya* and *brāhmaṇa*.

<sup>75</sup> Zin 2015, 128.

<sup>76</sup> Zin 2015, 129-31.

<sup>77</sup> Accounts in Sanskrit sources can be found at *Abhidh-k* III 64 (and in its commentary *Abhidh-k-bh*); *Mvu* I 30-1, *Divy* 218-19. A similar account in Pāli can be found at *Ja* I 204 (= *Spk* I 339). Furthermore, there is a mention to the *sadāmatṭa* at *D* II 260.

dhist sources concerns the fact that Mount Meru, from base to top, is defended by various groups of deities. Comparing the Pāli version of this account with Sanskrit and Chinese sources, we can see both similarities and differences, but can certainly identify an underlying consistency in the progressive enumeration of these groups of deities [tab. 3].

From Table 3, we can infer the existence of a common kernel, albeit there are some differences in the details. The Pāli account notes aquatic snakes as the first group of deities, just like the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Āpīdámó dà pípóshā lùn* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論. Furthermore, the deities are all called *devas* in the *Divyāvadāna* and in the *Āpīdámó dà pípóshā lùn* (*tiān* 天 = *deva*), whereas they are all *yakṣas* in the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Mahāvastu*. The Pāli *Jātaka* designates only the fourth group as *yakkha*, namely the *madanayuta* ‘Intoxicated ones’,<sup>78</sup> glossed by the commentary with the compounds *visamacārīn* ‘Those who behave immorally’ and *yuddhasoṇḍa* ‘Those who are intoxicated to war’. This group corresponds, in principle, to the *sadāmatta/sadāmada* ‘Always euphoric/drunk’ of the other Buddhist sources. In the *Jātaka* we also find the *karoti*, perhaps an abbreviation of *karotapāṇi*. Notably, the translator(s) of the Chinese version misunderstood the meaning of the original Indian compound, reporting *jiān shǒu tiān* 堅手天 ‘Strong-handed gods’, apparently taking something along *\*koṭa* in place of *karotā*.<sup>79</sup> The only element in the *Jātaka* account that ostensibly differs from the other sources is *payassa hārin* ‘Those who bear water’, whereas the parallel Buddhist accounts almost unanimously have *mālādhara* ‘garland-bearers’. There is at least one element in common as both *hārin* and *-dhara* indicate the action of ‘bearing, holding’. The formulation of the Pāli passage is certainly odd, as *karoti*, *payassa hārin* and *madanayuta* are all *hapax legomena* in Pāli literature<sup>80</sup> since they only occur in Ja I 204 and in texts that quote this passage. The wording of the groups of deities in Pāli differs from that of the other sources, but virtually the only missing element is the *mālādhara* group, which seems to be replaced by the *payassa hārin*. In order to explain the singularity of the Pāli evidence we can advance two interpretative hypotheses:

The Chinese Buddhist texts also greatly testify to the existence of these groups of deities. A complete analysis of the Chinese texts would exceed the limits of this contribution, but it would certainly be a worthwhile task. For the present contribution, I will only adopt the Chinese translation of the *\*Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Āpīdámó dà pípóshā lùn* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論; T 1545) made by Xuánzàng.

<sup>78</sup> As already noted by Coomaraswamy (1931, 24-5), *yakṣas* were subjected to offerings of food and intoxicants.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Morris 1893, 23.

<sup>80</sup> *Karoti* as a term to refer to a ‘cup’ or a ‘skull’ also occurs in other contexts, but as far as I know, there is nowhere else where it occurs to refer to a group of deities.

**Table 3** Comparison of Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese sources

group	group	group	group	group	group	group			
I	<i>uruga</i> ( <i>tattha urugasaddena</i> <i>nāgā gahitā, te udake</i> <i>balavantā hoti</i> )	I	<i>karotapāṇi</i> (Abhidh-k III 64): <i>karotapāṇayo nāma</i> <i>yakṣāḥ</i>	[I]	<i>karotapāṇayo nāma</i> <i>yakṣāḥ</i>	I	<i>udakaniśrītā nāgāḥ</i>	group	<b>Āpādamō dā pīpāsā lūn</b> 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 (T1545-27,0019a20-22) The text mentions 6 groups by numbering them
II	<i>karoti</i> ( <i>karotisaddena supannā</i> <i>gahitā</i> )	II	<i>mālādharma</i>	[II]	<i>mālādharā nāma</i> <i>yakṣāḥ</i>	II	<i>karotapāṇayo devāḥ</i>	II	堅手天 (= 'kotapāṇi'-deva, lit. 'strong-handed', a misunderstanding of <i>karotapāṇi</i> , cf. a similar case in Morris 1893, 23)
III	<i>payassa ca hārī</i> ( <i>payassa hārisaddena</i> <i>kumbhāṇḍā gahitā</i> )	III	<i>sadāmadā</i>	[III]	<i>sadāmattā nāma</i> <i>yakṣāḥ</i>	III	<i>mālādharā devāḥ</i>	III	持曇天 (= <i>mālādharma-deva</i> )
IV	<i>madanayūta</i> ( <i>madanayutasaddena</i> <i>yakkhā gahitā</i> )	IV	<i>caturo mahāntā</i>	[IV]	<i>caturmahārājika</i> (omitted in the account of the battle but mentioned later and implied by its cosmology)	IV	<i>sadāmattā devāḥ</i>	IV	恒憍天 (= <i>sadāmatta-deva</i> )
V	<i>Tāvāmsa</i> (implied by its cosmology and by the story)	V	<i>Trayastrimśā</i> (implied by its cosmology, these gods reside at the top of Mount Meru; Abhidh-k III 65)	[V]	<i>Trayastrimśā</i>	[V]	<i>Trayastrimśā</i> (mentioned in the account, but not part of the five defences)	V	四大王衆天 (= <i>caturmahārājika-</i> <i>deva</i> )
[VI]		[VI]		[VI]		[VI]		VI	三十三天 (= <i>Trayastrimśā-deva</i> )

1. A later interpolation. In light of the diffusion of the story in North Indian Buddhist sources (all of which include the three groups of deities as an inner core), we may consider the Pāli version as an adapted reverberation occurring in literature which mentions some deities that might have had a fairly significant iconographic function.
2. A non-levelled early version. As the evidence of the three groups of deities occurs in the *Jātaka* verses, this means it is part of the Pāli canon,<sup>81</sup> and so it can be a quite early reference to which we could apply the philological principle of the *lectio difficilior potior*, according to which the oddest reading could likely be the original one as the tradition tends to level out the oddities.

In both cases, the Pāli evidence plays a special role as either a late addition (which was either misunderstood or intentionally adapted) or an early crystallised reading. What is interesting to note is that, regardless of the correct interpretative hypothesis, if we exclude the Pāli testimony (which, if taken alone, has a less clear sympotic connection), the remaining North Indian evidence cannot be regarded as evidence earlier than the iconographic records. According to Martha Carter, these groups of deities were used by Buddhists to rationalise and assimilate local festivities in Gandhāra by depicting them as heavenly delights.<sup>82</sup> However, although *yakṣas* are certainly pre-Buddhist, a more sympotic characterisation can be connected with a bulk of North Indian Buddhist sources which are closer in time (if not even later) than the so called ‘Gandhāran Art’, which flourished during the Kushan period (first to third century AD).<sup>83</sup> All this leaves open the possibility that Buddhist literature reflects elements developed in the iconographic context. Taking this one step further, from the meaning of their names and their representation in iconography, we can further suggest that these groups of deities epitomise our three sympotic elements. The *karotapāṇis* ‘Those with cups in hands’ represent the action of drinking (and perhaps even

<sup>81</sup> While *Jātaka*’s prose sections took the final form in the fifth-sixth century AD, during the Pāli commentarial literature’s final redaction. See von Hinüber 1996, 55, 131; Appleton 2010, 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Carter 1992, 57.

<sup>83</sup> The compositional date of the *Mahāvastu* covers a wide range of time between the first BC to sixth century AD (Tournier 2017, X), the *Divyāvadāna* can be dated from the early centuries of the common era onwards (Rotman 2008, 6, n. 14 [385-6]), the *Abhidharmakośa* is a work of Vasubandhu who lived between the fourth and the fifth century AD (Kritzer 2019), while, generally speaking, the earliest Chinese translations of Buddhist texts are those of Ān shigāo 安世高 from the middle of the second century AD (Zacchetti 2019).

eating).<sup>84</sup> The *mālādharas* ‘Garland-bearers’ potentially refers to the sexual aspects if we consider the symbolic meaning of garlands as ‘sexual invitation’ in addition to some representations depicting erotic scenes in which *mālādharas* seem to be involved.<sup>85</sup> Lastly, I argue, the *sadāmattas/sadāmadās* ‘Always euphoric/drunk’ indicate amusement in a state of intoxication. Indeed, it would seem from the medical text known as *Carakasamhitā* that entertainments, along with the company of women, were an expedient to mitigate and to keep under control the effects of the alcohol:

*vanāni ramaṇīyāni sapadmāḥ salilāsayaḥ | viśadānyannapānāni  
sahāyās ca prahaṣaṇāḥ || mālyāni gandhayogās ca vāsāmsi  
vimalāni ca | gāndharvaśabdāḥ kāntās ca goṣṭhyaś ca hṛdayapriyāḥ  
|| saṅkathāhāsyagitānām viśadās caiva yojanāḥ | priyāścānugatā  
nāryo nāśayanti madātyayam*

Delightful forest parks, ponds with lotus flowers, outstanding foods and drinks, and enrapturing [male-]companions (*sahāya*),<sup>86</sup> perfumed garlands, clean clothes, musical sounds, mistresses (*kāntā*), pleasant *goṣṭhīs*, and also splendid arrangements of conversations, laughs and songs, the lovely women in tow remove the effects of intoxication (*madātyaya*).<sup>87</sup>

The rationale behind such kinds of recommended activities seems to be the necessity of cheering up the body and mind both of which were affected by the state of intoxication:

*nākṣobhya hi mano madyam śarīramavihatya ca | kuryānmadātyayam  
tasmādeṣṭavyā haṣaṇī kriyā*

Without upsetting the mind and afflicting the body, the intoxicant

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**84** According to the *Jātaka*’s commentary, it would seem that the cups or bowls of these demigods can contain both drinks and food (*tesaṃ kira karoti nāma pānabhojanaṃ*; Ja I 204 = Spk I 339).

**85** I am especially referring to a depiction found in Ajanta and discussed by Zin (2015, 130, fig. 3). Furthermore, we should consider the presence of males with female companions described in Sastri’s study on dwarf motif in iconography when dwarfs are associated with Garland-bearers: “The sculptures at Sāncī, have these meandering creepers with leaves and emerging from the mouth or naval of a dwarf *yaśa*. The lintels of the *torāṇa* design with jewels issued from the flowers. Slowly, well proportioned men were also introduced in the loops along with dwarfs and animals. Generally males, sometimes associated with female companions were in the loops [...]” (1959, 35). Furthermore, we can also consider the presence of *amorini* in the representations of Garland-bearers discussed by Swāti ([1997] 2008).

**86** This might be a reference to homosexuality; cf. Zysk 2021a, 91.

**87** CS 24.191-3.



would not produce intoxication, hence exhilarating treatment should be applied.<sup>88</sup>

From the medical literature we can infer that activities existed which were enjoyed in a state of drunkenness and were believed to help the inebriate to recover. If not involved in amorous activities, drunks were supposed to be involved in playful activities, just as we found above in the symptotic *Vinaya* account.<sup>89</sup> Thus, it might be argued that these three groups of deities can actually epitomise the three symptotic elements. They are symptotic deities associated with the *Cātumahārājika* (Four Great Kings), and, according to the traditions that describe them as *yakṣas*, more precisely with Kubera, king of north direction (N.B. Gandhāra is located in north-west from an Indian point of view). Therefore, it would seem that at the borders of the human and divine worlds, there is a fusion of customs. From a cosmological geography perspective, the world of the *Cātumahārājikas* is co-present to the world of Humans, but on an invisible level.<sup>90</sup> This fact can be of some significance when we consider that gods' festive modes are the same as those of noble/royal men in our world. These gods live a life which resembles that of the humans. Their life is not that of an average human being, but rather it is the life of a high class human being, having fun accordingly. If ordinary humans have obligations and duties during their life, "having fun etc., is the aim in the [existential] condition of the gods" (*devānaṃ nāma dhātu-attho kīlādi*).<sup>91</sup> *Vice versa*, it might be argued that the high class individuals behave like gods, in a sort of mutual mirroring, in a ludic place where borders merge. Thus, we face a paradoxical situation. Activities on earth which are forbidden for monks and nuns and whose participation is discouraged for laypeople are a reward in the heavens. However, the heavens nearest to the Human realm are a deified reflection of high Human society, thus possibly betraying an underlying aspiration for social climbing.

<sup>88</sup> CS 24.194.

<sup>89</sup> Vin II 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> "It should be noted that the *Cātumahārājika* heaven is actually on the same level as the human world. It may be regarded as a sub-world which is invisible to human eyes. The reason for its invisibility is that it belongs to a different realm of existence" (Na-Rangsi [1976] 2006, 18). We should similarly note that some inferior spheres of existence can also be co-present to the Human world, such as the animal kingdom (*tiracchānayoṇi*).

<sup>91</sup> Bv-a 25.

## 5 Conclusion

The three symptotic elements discussed by Kenneth G. Zysk have been found in regulative monastic literature and in mythological accounts involving cosmology. As such, the present contribution would add a piece to the puzzle of the study on the potential influence of the Greek *symposion* on Indian festive modes already started by Zysk. Thus, it would seem that the existence of symptotic-like ways of having fun was acknowledged by the Buddhist Pāli legislation and assimilated into the Buddhist imaginary through representations in iconography, attestations in Sanskrit and Chinese sources and faint echoes in Pāli. The *symposion*-like party in the *Vinaya* account has some striking features which can be of some comparative interest for future studies if confronted with the Greek *symposion*. This can be a valuable task as, *a fortiori*, the chronology of the *Vinaya* does not rule out the possibility that foreign influences flowed into the text. Further, three groups of deities occurring in cosmological accounts were discussed and it has been argued they may epitomise the three symptotic elements. Their symptotic characteristics clearly emerge only in North Buddhist sources in Sanskrit and Chinese, which are mostly chronologically contemporary – if not even later than – the iconographic evidence in which they were represented. Thus, we can make a point in considering the artistic importance that the Gandhāra holds in the Buddhist ecumene. Gandhāra, it has been argued, was the perfect grey area in which early Buddhist ascetic values had to face more worldly attitudes, a fact that prompted adaptations if we consider the Gandhāran Buddhist involvement in the wine production system of the region and the erotic scenes represented in iconographies connected to Buddhist sites. This negotiation of values can be, at least in part, explained in the attempt to make Buddhism more attractive to laypeople (those who have the attainment of heavens as a goal)<sup>92</sup> and compared with a similar attempt made by Aśoka in the middle of the third century

<sup>92</sup> Concerning erotic scenes, Anna Filigenzi writes: “Figures of *yakṣas*, *yakṣīs* and tutelary and human couples occupy a prominent place in the iconographic programmes of Buddhist monuments. This is not, in my opinion, a mere concession to the secular world in order to please the lay community, but rather the expression of a quite common approach to the subject matter in Indian thought” (2019b, 171). This opinion can be compared with that of Richard Gombrich, who suggested that “the idea of beauty in the Buddha’s cultural environment was inextricably associated with feminine beauty, and thus with sexual attraction” (2014, 86). However, following Gombrich (84-6), the Buddhist attitude to visual art in the earliest texts (Gombrich discusses those in Pāli) is largely negative. This is not surprising if we consider the ascetic origins of Buddhism. Therefore, in my view, although the choice of the subjects of the iconographic representations may be dictated by a general Indian tendency, the very fact of choosing to promote and produce pieces of visual art is certainly more worldly than ascetic as an attitude, which winks at those who live there in the world, such as laypeople.

BC to universalise a Buddhist-inspired Doctrine (*dhamma*), coming to terms with lay and worldly needs. The emperor Aśoka, indeed, legitimates a morally questionable festivity called *samāja*:

(C) *na cha samājo katavyo* (D) *bahukaṃ hi dosaṃ samājamhi pasati* *Devānāmpriyo Priyadasi rājā* (E) *asti pi tu ekachā samājā sādhumatā Devānāmpriyasa Priyadasino rāño*.<sup>93</sup>

(C) And no festival meeting [*samājo*] must be held. (D) For king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin sees much evil in festival meetings. (E) But there are also some festival meetings which are considered meritorious by king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin.<sup>94</sup>

The term *samāja*, used in the Aśoka's edicts to indicate a festival or a fair, has a counterpart Pāli term: *samajja*. The initial aversion shown by Aśoka towards the *samājas* is consistent with the Buddhist disposition towards these festivals. In the Pāli canon, we find that monks were forbidden to participate in mountain fair (*giraggasamajja*) because of the presence of music, dancing and singing,<sup>95</sup> whereas for the laymen, it is stated that there are many disadvantages (*ādīnava*) in visiting fairs (*samajjābhicaraṇa*).<sup>96</sup> Thus, in stating that some *samājas* would be considered meritorious, Aśoka would show a certain degree of openness regarding some forms of amusement, a fact that certainly meets the laypeople's worldly needs. In a similar way, as discussed by James McHugh, among the moral precepts advocated by Aśoka, sexual misconducts and abstention from intoxicating drinks are missing.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, we can assume that there were lay Buddhist practices that at a certain point in history departed from the rigid early ascetic tenets to meet more worldly needs. This negotiation of values and the perennial tension between tradition and innovation can be found as reflections and echoes in Buddhist literature, the latter being a product of monastic orthodoxy. The Pāli *Vinaya* account,<sup>98</sup> with its behavioural condemnation, implicitly acknowledges the existence of symptotic-like ways of partying. Although the practices described in the narrative could be potentially autochthonous, we cannot exclude a foreign influence. While an attempt to assimilate symptotic elements took place within cosmology, revealing what appears to be an actual tension between desire and prohibition. The three groups

<sup>93</sup> Hultsch 1925, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Hultsch 1925, 2; square brackets mine.

<sup>95</sup> Vin II 107-8.

<sup>96</sup> D III 183.

<sup>97</sup> McHugh 2021, 241-2.

<sup>98</sup> Vin II 9-10.

of deities which, it has been argued, can epitomise the three symptotic elements, call for further discussion and contextualisation in the future. If Gandhāra was a grey area that mediated the passage of cultural customs from Greece to India, the *Cātummahārājika* realm was, similarly, a grey area of the Buddhist imaginary, in which a negotiation of values occurred. This Heaven is, at the very least, ambivalent. Even though it is to be considered a superior and desirable rebirth, it can nonetheless act as a springboard for involution within the Buddhist cosmos.<sup>99</sup> It was a place for revelries and carousals to the point that the anti-gods known as *asuras*, which constitute a bad condition of rebirth, in an exegetical Pāli source,<sup>100</sup> derive their name from the lack (*a-*) of the intoxicant known as *surā*, a fact that betrays a certain appreciation for intoxicating drinks, at least in the imaginary. However, we do also know that in the ascent of the Buddhist cosmos to higher and higher realms, beings change their nutritional habits and so there are beings made of mind (*manomaya*) who are just feeding on joy (*pīti-bhakkha*).<sup>101</sup> The Buddhist path of liberation is, indeed, framed in a Buddhist view of a progressive liberation from the bounds of the physical matter and a mastery over it. This process also concerns a change in the nutritional needs.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, it would seem that symptotic activities are as forbidden on earth as they are desirable as celestial attainments in the post-mortem, but only to be abandoned again in the evolutionary progression of the cosmos since the heavens – *Cātummahārājika*, *Tāvatiṃsa*, and so on – should be progressively left behind in a sort of climb to higher worlds, just to find that even the Brahmā's world is impermanent.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, we can conclude that the literary sources of Pāli Buddhism deliver us an awareness of symptotic-like ways of partying through the acknowledgement during the practical act of legislating and provide us with some new nuances on the assimilation processes in Buddhist imaginary occurred over time and, perhaps, influenced by iconographic representations. However, it is nonetheless of some significance that, on the one hand, sexual misconduct and drinking intoxicants can be conducive to bad destinies (viz. rebirth in hells, as an animal or among the ghosts)<sup>104</sup> and, on the other hand,

<sup>99</sup> Mvu I 31.

<sup>100</sup> Spk I 337.

<sup>101</sup> D I 17.

<sup>102</sup> As it has been argued (De Notariis 2019, 53-6), the development of a body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*) in the Buddhist path of liberation is a turning point in the gradual process of liberation from the bonds of matter. Notably, the body made of mind is a higher embodiment than those embodiments that require solid food (61-8).

<sup>103</sup> S V 410.

<sup>104</sup> A IV 247-8.

we can find in heavens drunks and libertines, without any cause for contradiction. Thus, it would appear that the abstentions from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and drinking intoxicants of the ‘five precepts’ (*pañca-sīla*) were unevenly deemed, and some, let us say, sins were almost a divine temptation.

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### Primary Sources and Abbreviations

All Pāli citations are from Pali Text Society (PTS) editions, unless otherwise noted.

A	<i>Aṅuttaranikāya</i> (PTS)
Abhidh-k-(bh)	<i>Abhidharmakośa-(bhāṣya)</i> (see Pradhan 1967)
Bv-a	<i>Madhuratthavilāsini</i> ( <i>Buddhavaṃsa-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)
CS	<i>Carakasamhitā</i> (see Sharma 1998)
CU	<i>Chāndogyopaniṣad</i> (see Olivelle 1998)
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i> (PTS)
Divy	<i>Divyāvadāna</i> (see Cowell, Neil 1886)
DOP	Dictionary of Pāli (see Cone 2010)
Ja	<i>Jātaka</i> (PTS)
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i> (PTS)
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i> (PTS)
Mvu	<i>Mahāvastu</i> (see Senart 1882-97)
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (see Rhys Davids, Stede [1921-25] 2015)
Pj II	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i> II ( <i>Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)
Pv-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> ( <i>Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)
S	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> (PTS)
SED	Sanskrit-English Dictionary (see Monier-Williams 1899)
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i> (PTS)
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i> ( <i>Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> ( <i>Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> (大正新修大藏經). Digital edition: <a href="https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php?lang=en">https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php?lang=en</a>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i> (PTS)
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> (PTS)
Vv-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> ( <i>Vimānavatthu-aṭṭhakathā</i> ) (PTS)

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# In Search of Regional/Local (*deśī*) Words for ‘Intoxicant’ in First-Millennium India

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**Abstract** While, as a consequence of recent studies, we can now have a good image of ‘intoxicant’ in Sanskrit literature, the same is not true for Middle Indo-Aryan literature, except perhaps for Pāli. In this paper two texts written in Prakrit and Ardha-Māgadhī respectively will be taken into examination, focusing especially on those words not linked to Sanskrit tradition, and normally known as *deśī*, ‘regional’, words. In particular, the second text analysed, which is part of the Jain Śvetāmbara Canon, will give me the opportunity to look at the use of *deśī* words meaning ‘intoxicant’ and/or concerning ‘drinking culture’ in the *Deśīnāmamālā*, Hemacandra’s lexicon of Prakrit *deśī* words. The result of the analysis reveals that local, regional ‘drinking traditions’, in some cases part of non-Indo-Aryan ethnolinguistic groups, can be found beside the pan-indian, cosmopolitan Sanskrit culture.

**Keywords** Prakrit. Drinking culture. Wine. Kuvalayamālā. Deśī.

**Summary** 1 Sanskrit and Prakrit in First-Millennium India. – 2 The Tripartite Classification of Prakrit Words in ‘*tatsama*, *tadbhava*, and *deśī*’. – 3 Prakrit Words Meaning ‘Intoxicant’ in Uddyotana-sūri’s *Kuvalayamālā*. – 4 Prakrit Words Meaning ‘Intoxicant’ in the Eleventh *āṅga* of the Jain Canon Known as *Vivāgasuyam*. – 5 *Deśī* Words Meaning ‘Intoxicant’ in Hemacandra’s *Deśīnāmamālā*. – 6 Conclusions.

Indian classical literature, encompassing a huge body of works that spans thousands of years, is principally represented by two languages belonging to the Old Indo-Aryan (hereafter OIA) group of the Indo-European language family. The first one is the Vedic language, normally known with this name because it is the language of the Vedic corpus, that is to say the language of the four Vedas (*Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*) with their four subdivisions (*Samhitās*,

*Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*) as well as also those other works forming part of Vedic textual traditions (*Śrautasūtras*, *Gṛhyasūtras*, *Śulbasūtras*, *Prātiśākhya*).<sup>1</sup> The second one is Sanskrit, the language described by Pāṇini in his grammar *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and by Kātyāyana and Patañjali in the commentaries of this grammar and then used for the two major Hindū epics (i.e. the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*), for *Purāṇa* literature, by Indian court poets approximately from the third up to the thirteenth century AD, also by a part of Buddhists, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Even though, as said, Indian classical literature is normally known thanks to Vedic and Sanskrit works, it is also written in languages other than these two. This is the case of the various texts written in various literary vehicles belonging to the second period of evolution of Indo-Aryan languages, the Middle Indo-Aryan (hereafter MIA) period. The extent of MIA literature is comparable to that of Vedic and Sanskrit, but the scholars dealing with this literature are very few, in comparison to those specialised in Vedic and/or Sanskrit.<sup>3</sup>

As far as the topic of the present book is concerned, if now thanks to McHugh's recent works<sup>4</sup> we can have a good image of 'intoxicant' in Sanskrit literature, as for the same image in MIA literature the information we have are very scanty.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the present paper is therefore to examine words with meanings related to 'intoxicant' in works written in some MIA literary languages, focusing the attention especially on the words reported in those texts not linked to the Sanskrit tradition. As I will have the opportunity to illustrate, these words are the so-called Prakrit *deśī* ('regional', 'local') words.

The paper is organised as follows. In the first section, I offer an overview of the literary multilingualism in first-millennium India. Subsequently, in section 2, an explanation of Prakrit words not linked to Sanskrit tradition and used in Prakrit literature, as said the so-called *deśī* words, is provided. Then, after a brief introduction to the first Prakrit text here analysed, I focus my attention to the words related to 'intoxicant' mentioned in this text (§ 3). In section 4, a canonical Jain text written in Ardha-Māgadhī, the latter a MIA religious literary variety, is taken into consideration. The reasons behind this choice are that some *deśī* words are mentioned in this specific MIA text. In this way, I have the opportunity to focus my attention on these *deśī* words meaning 'intoxicant', or related to 'drinking culture', reported in the most important traditional dictionary of this specific class of Prakrit words, that is to say Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* (§ 5).

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1 Cf. Cardona 2003.

2 Cf. Cardona 2003.

3 Pollock 2006; Ollett 2017; 2018.

4 For example, his opus magnum of 2021 (2021a).

5 Cf. McHugh 2021a; 2021b.

## 1 Sanskrit and Prakrit in First-Millennium India

It is a well-known fact that starting from the beginning of the first millennium AD up to the thirteenth century at least two 'languages' were used in India as the appropriate linguistic medium for artistic, religious and scientific literature:

1. Sanskrit (in its various forms: classical, epic, epigraphical, etc.);
2. varieties of what can be considered a MIA literary koine.<sup>6</sup>

From the fifth-sixth century AD another language entered the scene of literary production, Apabhraṃśa.

From the point of view of linguistic diachronic evolution:

- Sanskrit corresponds to the end of the OIA period (approximately the beginning of the second half of the first millennium BC);
- the various varieties of literary MIA correspond to the early and middle MIA period, that is to say the last centuries of the first millennium BC and the first centuries of the first millennium AD;
- Apabhraṃśa corresponds lastly to the end of the MIA period, because used, for literary purposes, from the fifth-sixth century AD, and for this reason considered a late MIA literary language.

The varieties of literary MIA, the topic of the present paper, have been chosen:

- as administrative languages of the court by some of the most important Indian kingdoms in the period just before and immediately after the beginning of the Common era;<sup>7</sup>
- as elaborate literary varieties in all works that are part of classical Indian *kāvya* tradition.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly true for Māhārāṣṭrī<sup>9</sup> which, according to the grammarians, was 'the Prakrit'.<sup>10</sup> The prestige of Māhārāṣṭrī is perhaps connected

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bubenik 1998; Pollock 2006. According to Bubenik, it is important to emphasise that talking on these literary languages "It is important to realise that we are not dealing with three different languages in the usual sense of the word; rather we are dealing with 'triglossia' definable as the simultaneous use of three functional varieties of the same language for literary purposes" (1998, 16).

<sup>7</sup> Lienhard 1984, 82-3; Deshpande 1993, 15, 92; Hultzsich 1924; Mehendale 1948; Salomon 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Katre 1964; Lienhard 1984; Warder [1974] (1990).

<sup>9</sup> Māhārāṣṭrī was based on the living tongue of the Northwestern part of the Deccan (along the river Godavari) and became a 'lingua franca' of Southern India in post-Christian centuries.

<sup>10</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, when I use the term 'Prakrit' in the present paper I mean this specific MIA literary variety.

with the fact that this specific variety of literary MIA, which with respect to its linguistic relationship to OIA is the most advanced MIA literary variety (apart, obviously, Apabhraṃśa, see below), was used as literary and administrative language in the dominions of the powerful dynasty of Śātavāhanas (the Andhra dynasty);<sup>11</sup>

- as religious/sacred literary languages for canonical and extra-canonical Buddhist and Jain texts.<sup>12</sup> To be more precise, the language normally known as 'Pāli' is the sacred literary language used to draw up the Theravāda Buddhist Canon, known as *Tiṭṭaka* (Sanskrit *Tripitaka*). Similarly, Ardha-Māgadhī was cultivated by the Jains of the Śvetāmbara sect who used it as a sacred language for their religious works.<sup>13</sup> Both these religious traditions used these MIA literary varieties in order to reject Sanskrit because linked with Hindū scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Jain authors, especially, composed their poetic works in a different late MIA linguistic variety used as a literary vehicle called by the authors themselves and by the contemporary grammarians as the aforementioned Apabhraṃśa (virtually no prose works in Apabhraṃśa have come down to us). From its beginnings Apabhraṃśa was located in Gujarat, Rajputana and Malwa (contemporary Gujarat, Rajasthan and western Madhya-Pradesh) and thence it spread through the whole of North India becoming the most important North India's literary koine of this period and another literary language of the first-millennium India in addition to Sanskrit and Prakrit.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to point out that, as regards the use made of them in *kāvya* tradition in the period here taken into consideration, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa were used synchronically.<sup>16</sup> This means that each of these languages did not have an exclusive position compared to the others. For example, Sanskrit was never used at the expense of Prakrit (someone says Sanskrit by Prakrit) and, in the same

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**11** About 230 BC the Śātavāhana dynasty replaced Maurya power in Deccan. This dynasty ruled over Maharashtra, Kathiawar, Central India, Berar and Malwa from the second century BC to the second AD.

**12** Pischel 1965, 11-25; Ghatage 1996-, 1: \*1-\*25, I-XXXIII.

**13** Jain exegetical texts were written in a form of Māhārāṣṭrī, normally called Jain Māhārāṣṭrī by modern scholars, but almost identical with 'standard' Māhārāṣṭrī as described in the various Prakrit grammars. As for the Digambara sect, their Canon was written in a literary language variety very similar to the variety of Prakrit normally called 'Śaurasenī' by Prakrit grammarians. For this reason, the language of the Digambara Canon has been termed Jain Śaurasenī by modern scholars (cf. Bubenik 1998).

**14** Deshpande 1993; Bronkhorst 1993.

**15** Bubenik 1998; Ollett 2024.

**16** Cf. Bubenik 1998, 18.

manner, Apabhramśa was never used at the expense of Sanskrit and/or Prakrit. As a result, in this period of time one may find:

- the same subject matter treated in Sanskrit and Prakrit by different authors;
- the same subject treated in Sanskrit and Prakrit by the same author in two different works, respectively;
- different subjects treated in Sanskrit and Prakrit by the same author in different works;
- and, especially at the end of the period under consideration, authors making use of all these available literary vehicles in a single work.

Therefore, following Bubenik,<sup>17</sup> an older language (i.e. Sanskrit/Prakrit) moved up vertically into the position of the 'high'/'prestigious'/'dignified' variety to be imitated by the 'low' one. Even though it is not the topic of the article, it is worth mentioning that the process of elevation of Sanskrit must be understood as the result of the fact that in ancient India Sanskrit grammarians believed, taught and grew up in an ideological framework where Vedic scriptures and Vedic/Sanskrit language are eternal entities.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence of and within this framework Prakrit has no independent standing and its existence and use is closely linked to the Sanskrit language.<sup>19</sup> Actually, thanks to the above said process of elevation, during the first millennium Sanskrit became increasingly a language spoken and read not only by the upper strata Hindū, but also by Jain and Buddhist communities who could afford formal education.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 The Tripartite Classification of Prakrit Words in '*tatsama, tadbhava, and deśī*'

The symbiotic relationship between Sanskrit and Prakrit in *kāvya* literature can be easily understood by considering the tripartite terminology in '*tatsama, tadbhava, deśī*' that, as Pollock says, "emerge as a cornerstone of Indian philological thought".<sup>21</sup> The aim of these three technical terms, part of Indian grammatical tradition, was to describe words mentioned in literary works written in

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<sup>17</sup> Bubenik 1998; 2001. Cf. also Kulikov 2013 and Pollock 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Deshpande 1993; Aklujkar 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Deshpande 1993, 73-4.

<sup>20</sup> Bubenik 1998; Pollock 2006; Bronkhorst 2010; Eltschinger 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Pollock 2006, 93.

Prakrit by a comparison with words attested in Sanskrit works.<sup>22</sup> Namely, according to the majority of Indian authors, a Prakrit word could be:<sup>23</sup>

- *saṃskṛtasama* 'the same as Sanskrit', commonly referred to as *tatsama* 'the same as that', but also as *tattulya* 'equal to that' and *samānaśabda* 'the same word (as that)';
- *saṃskṛtabhava* 'of the nature of Sanskrit', commonly referred to as *tadbhava* 'of the nature of that', but also as *saṃskṛtayoni* 'the origin is (in) *saṃskṛta*', *tajja* 'born out of that' and *vibhraṣṭa* 'fallen, deteriorated', but also 'detached';
- *deśya*, *deśī* or *deśaja* 'country-born', i.e. 'local, regional', but also referred to as *deśīprasiddha* 'famous in the country' and *deśimata* 'known in the country'.

It is not the aim of the present paper to focus on the cultural significance of the Prakrit words classification in '*tatsama*, *tadbhava* and *deśī*' in the context of Indian grammatical tradition.<sup>24</sup> Suffice is to say that the 'link' mentioned above between a Prakrit and a Sanskrit word is a 'link' depending on grammarians' description of Prakrit who, according to the 'transforming phonological rules' provided in their grammars, understand a Prakrit word as 'linked' (i.e. a *tatsama* or a *tadbhava* word) or 'not linked' (i.e. a *deśī* word) with a corresponding Sanskrit word with the same meaning.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence, the class of words used in Prakrit literature and called *deśī* by Prakrit grammarians and Prakrit/Sanskrit authors is, in a nutshell, an heterogeneous class of words consisting of:<sup>26</sup>

- words of ancient IA or even Indo-European origin which, although not used in the OIA literary works (i.e. Vedic and/or Sanskrit) - because regarded, for example, as too vulgar - were later inherited or borrowed by some MIA literary language varieties, and thus perhaps also by Prakrit;
- genuine loanwords from Indian non-IA languages;
- loanwords from non-Indian languages;
- all those words that can be classified as Prakrit neologisms which, though corresponding to Sanskrit forms in their constituent parts, nevertheless do not have a corresponding complex Sanskrit form;

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Drocco 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Beames 1872-79; Pischel 1965, 6-7; Chatterji 1926; 1960; 1983, 98-100; Bhayani 1998b, 48. For an analysis of these terms see Drocco 2006; 2012.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed overview on this topic see Pollock 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Kahrs 1992; Drocco 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Pischel 1965.



- words that are phonologically linked to a corresponding Sanskrit form according to the 'transformation phonological rules' (see above) explained by Hemacandra in his *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, but whose Prakrit meaning is not attested in Sanskrit.<sup>27</sup>

As for our concern, it is important to point out that a good part of Jain literature is composed in a linguistic variety strongly characterised by a frequent use of non-standard vocabulary and/or by a clear tendency to absorb words, forms and uses from the numerous spoken dialects.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, it is easier to find *deśī* words in a text written by a Jain author, than in any text written by a non-Jain author.

In what follows, I will have the opportunity to explain the exact meaning of the tripartite classification of Prakrit words in '*tastama*, *tadbhava*, and *deśī*', in particular of *deśī* words, discussing those pertaining to 'intoxicant' reported in the two works written by Jain authors here analysed.

### 3      **Prakrit Words Meaning 'Intoxicant' in Uddyotana-sūri's *Kuvalayamālā***

In order to look at Prakrit *deśī* words with reference to 'intoxicant', I decided to take firstly into exam one Prakrit text written by a Jain author, the *Kuvalayamālā* ('Garland of Blue Water Lilies'). The reason of this choice is that in this text a lot of *deśī* words are attested. As a consequence, I am looking if it can offer, by means of the attestation of these *deśī* words, an image of 'intoxicant' different from the image we have in Sanskrit literature.

The *Kuvalayamālā* is a Prakrit-language novel written in the second half of the eighth century AD by the Jain monk Uddyotana-sūri in Jabalipura, a city of the great Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom (present-day Jalore, India). This text is written in the *campū* form, that is to say in a mixed verse and prose form, and the multilingualism that it demonstrates is worthy of particular interest. As a matter of fact, dialogues in several languages are reported in this work, including, apart Prakrit, Sanskrit and Apabhramśa, the mysterious Paisācī

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<sup>27</sup> For this classification see Drocco 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Alsdorf 1936; 1937; Balbir 1989; Bhayani 1988a; 1988b; 1998a. Cf. also Salomon 1989, 285 and Sandesara, Thaker 1962.

language, another MIA literary variety.<sup>29</sup> It also includes some sentences in the famous 18 *deśabhāṣās* 'regional languages'.<sup>30</sup>

Even if in the *Kuvalayamālā* several *deśabhāṣās* and regional (*deśī*) words are attested,<sup>31</sup> as far as 'intoxicant' terms are concerned, this text shows roughly part of the same terms normally found in Sanskrit texts. Indeed, the author refers to 'intoxicant' by means of *tatsama* words, therefore words used in Prakrit literature and found in Sanskrit texts with absolutely identical form and meaning (see above). This kind of words used in the *Kuvalayamālā* are:

- *āsava* (20.28; 50.16);
- *surā* (20.28; 52.16);
- *madirā* (83.5; 83.8);
- *madhu* (84.29; 85.8; 113.16).

Uddyotana does not provide much information so as to understand how these drinks are made and this is exactly due, perhaps, to his use of *tatsama* words (see below). For similar reasons, Uddyotana doesn't help the reader to understand if the same word can mean different kinds of alcoholic drink, depending, for example, on the paragraph. We can refer to a Prakrit dictionary, but it is a fact that Prakrit lexicography is not yet as developed as that of Sanskrit.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, in order to give meaning to these words, we have to start from the broad use of the corresponding forms of these words in Sanskrit literature. Moreover, thanks to McHugh's recent works<sup>33</sup> we can have a better idea of their broader or more precise meaning in this literature and/or in the context of a specific work. In this regard, it is important to remember that perhaps the reason explaining the wide use of words linked to Sanskrit tradition (i.e. *tatsama* and *tadbhava* words) by Prakrit authors in first-millennium India,<sup>34</sup> as in the case of Uddyotana for words related to 'intoxicant' – as we have just seen –, is to give them the possibility to leave unexplained many Prakrit words, because known by the authors/readers thanks to the previous knowledge of their Sanskrit corresponding forms. This

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**29** Upadhye 1939-40; Master 1943a; 1943b; 1948.

**30** Master 1950; 1951. The mixed novel of prose and verse, the *campū*, is especially widespread in Buddhist, Jain and obviously *smartā* environments, as demonstrated by the production of the genre. The *Kuvalayamālā* certainly belongs to the *campū* proper, a *mahākāvya* that defines itself as 'complete history' (*sakalakathā*), 'history of doctrine' (*dharmakathā*), or 'mixed history' (*saṃkīrṇakathā*). Preserved in two reviews, the work narrates the previous lives of Prince Kuvalayacanda and other characters, who at the end of the story all convert to Jainism.

**31** Drocco, forthcoming.

**32** See, for example, Vogel 1979.

**33** McHugh 2021a; 2021b; 2021c.

**34** Cf. Drocco 2006; 2012.

seems to be also true for a modern scholar as Christine Chojnacki, who in 2008 published the French translation of the *Kuvalayamālā*. As matter of fact, in her translation she gives the following meanings of the above-said terms, almost certainly starting from their Sanskrit meanings:

- *āsava* 'fermented drink/beverage';<sup>35</sup>
- *surā* 'spirit', 'eau de vie';<sup>36</sup>
- *madirā* 'liquor';<sup>37</sup>
- *madhu* 'alcohol', 'alcoholic drink'.<sup>38</sup>

As we can see, the *Kuvalayamālā*, composed by an author who can be considered a member of the Indian 'educated elite' and who was able to use various literary varieties at their command, is a good example of the fact that in the second half of the first millennium AD,<sup>39</sup> the works drawn up in Prakrit have a mutual relationship with Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition and they have been influenced strongly by the latter.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that the majority of words adopted in a good part of Prakrit works of this tradition are MIA in their phonological shape, but with a clear Sanskrit counterpart – traceable to the latter through the specific phonological rules mentioned in Prakrit grammars (see above) –, therefore easily understandable by a well-educated Indian author in the first millennium. Actually, the words mentioned in these Prakrit texts can be also identical with their Sanskrit corresponding form, as we have seen for the aforementioned words meaning 'intoxicant' and reported in the *Kuvalayamālā*.

In spite of the fact that the *Kuvalayamālā* can give us a good picture of the use of intoxicant in eight-century central-western India during the Gurjara-Pratihāra Kingdom, even if with a strong influence of Sanskrit literary tradition,<sup>41</sup> if we want to look for some true

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Monier-Williams 1899, 160; original French meaning 'boisson fermentée', Chojnacki 2008, 1: 345-6.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Monier-Williams 1899, 1235; original French meaning 'boisson spiritueuse', Chojnacki 2008, 1: 346, 363.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Monier-Williams 1899, 778-9; original French meaning 'liqueur', Chojnacki 2008, 1: 355.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Monier-Williams 1899, 779; original French meaning 'alcool', Chojnacki 2008, 1: 343, 345.

<sup>39</sup> It is important to point out that between Sanskrit and the regional dialects (emerging New Indo-Aryan vernacular languages) we find a fluid continuum of various literary varieties of Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa. The proof that Apabhraṃśa was in an intermediate position in this linguistic continuum is given by the fact that in Apabhraṃśa works it is possible to find influences from 'above' and 'below', that is to say from Sanskrit and Prakrit literary models and from the spoken language.

<sup>40</sup> See, among many others, Bhayani 1998d; 1998c; 1998e; Bubenik 1996; 1998.

<sup>41</sup> It is worthy of note that, even Prakrit texts showing a strong connection with Sanskrit as the *Kuvalayamālā*, which as many other Prakrit texts shares with Sanskrit a

local Prakrit words meaning 'intoxicant', true because not connected with the Sanskrit tradition (i.e. *deśī* words), we have to check other MIA literary texts. This is possible by virtue of the huge MIA literary production, and by virtue of the possible greater proximity to spoken languages of part of this production, I mean a part of literary production more inclined to be influenced by spoken languages. For this reason, some MIA literary texts are probably better candidates to investigate part of Indian culture not testified by Sanskrit.

#### 4 **Prakrit Words Meaning 'Intoxicant' in the Eleventh *aṅga* of the Jain Canon Known as *Vivāgasuyaṃ***

As we have said, we could have a good image of the importance of 'intoxicant' in the first millennium AD by means of various words used in those texts less connected to the Sanskrit tradition. This minor link is probably due to the fact that they are composed in an epoch and/or by authors and/or in areas less subjected to the influence of Sanskrit or, in any case, less connected to standard Prakrit which, for its nature, is more linked to Sanskrit, especially in first-millennium India. For example, the large amount of Jain MIA works is normally seen as an interesting source for the study of linguistic features that show, for example, anomalous diachronic changes, with respect to their derivation, because understood as not derived from Sanskrit forms, thus derived from OIA words not attested in Sanskrit.<sup>42</sup>

In this regard, let me show an interesting excerpt from Jain Canonical literature, to be more precise from the *Vivāgasuyaṃ*,<sup>43</sup> the eleventh *aṅga* of the Jain Canon:

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good part of its vocabulary, can add information about drinking culture in India. For example, let me mention the following interesting excerpt where *āsava*, *surā* are reported, giving us the possibility to suggest that they actually mean two different beverages: "[20.28] *samuṭṭhio rāyā kaya-majjaṇo uvaviṭṭho āvānaya-bhūmī. sajjiyā se viviha-kusuma-vaṇṇa-virayaṇā āvānaya-bhūmī, sajjiyāiṃ ca ahiṇava-kaṃdoṭṭa-reṇu-raṃjjiyāiṃ, diṇṇāiṃ ca kappūra-reṇu-parisappaṃta-dhavalāiṃ āsavavisesāiṃ, piṇṇāiṃ ahiṇava-jāi-kusuma-surahi-parimalāyaḍiyāli-ruyārāva-ruṇaruṇeṃtāo nibbhara-ramukaṃṭhiyāo surāo tti.*" ("The king got up and after having washed himself, settled down in the bar area. This space had been arranged for him and adorned with the colours of various flowers. We also prepared sweet specialties coloured by the pollen of new blue lotuses. They brought in specialty **fermented drinks** made white by the clouds of camphor powder. **Spirits** were given to drink, their heady perfume making them desirable and which buzzed with the buzzing of bees attracted by the fragrant scents of the new jasmine flowers", emphasis added). Moreover, this excerpt is also interesting because is mentioned the compound *āvānaya-bhūmī*, translated in French by 'space-bar' and thus with the English meaning used above, 'bar-area'.

<sup>42</sup> Bhayani 1988a, 155; 1988f, 219-22; Balbir 1989; Bhayani 1998a, 13, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Chokshi, Modi 1935.

*tae ṇaṃ sa uppalā kuḍaggāhiṇī annayā kayāi āvannasatta jāyā yāvi hotthā. Tae ṇaṃ tise uppalāe kuḍaggāhiṇīe tiṇhaṃ māsāṇaṃ bahupaḍipuṇṇaṇaṃ ayamevarūve dohale pāubbhūe. “dhannāo ṇaṃ tāo ammayāo suladdhe jammajīviyaphale, jāo ṇaṃ nagaragorūvāṇaṃ saṇāhāṇa ya basabhāṇa ya ūhehi ya thaṇehi ya vasaṇehi ya cheppāhi ya kakuhehi ya vahehiṃ ya kaṇṇohi ya acchīhi ya nāsāhi ya jibbhāhi ya oṭṭhehi ya kambalehi ya sollehi ya taliehi ya bhajjīehi ya parisukkehi ya lāvaṇehi ya **suram** ca **mahum** ca **meragam** ca **jāi** ca **sīhum** ca **pasannaṃ** āsāemāṇīo visāemāṇīo paribhuñjemāṇīo paribhāemāṇī odohalaṃ viṇenti [...]”<sup>44</sup>*

Once upon a time that Uppalā, the wife of the cattle-entrapper, became pregnant. Then when full three months were over the following desire in pregnancy arose in the mind of that Uppalā, the wife of the cattle-entrapper: “Blessed, indeed, are those mothers and only they have obtained the real fruit of life and birth who satisfy their pregnancy-desire by tasting, enjoying, eating and distributing to others **wine, wine prepared from honey, wine prepared from palm-fruit, a kind of white wine, wine prepared from raw sugar and flowers of dhataki, and wine prepared from grapes**, together with [...] pieces of meat roasted on an iron pipe [...]”<sup>45</sup>

This excerpt is interesting under different point of views. First of all, various kind of ‘intoxicant’ are mentioned, more specifically: *surā*, *mahu*, *meraga*, *jāi*, *sīhu* and *pasanna*.

With the purpose to distinguish these alcoholic beverages, the translators of this excerpt give clear meanings of the words mentioned, maybe thanks to their explanation in Sanskrit texts. Indeed, the first word mentioned, *surā*, is translated simply as ‘wine’ and in fact in Prakrit is a genuine *tatsama* word, that is to say a word used in Prakrit literature with the same Sanskrit form and meaning (see above).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Vivāgasuyam* § 10, Chokshi, Modi 1935 (emphasis added). Following McHugh (2021b) this can be considered an old-fashioned translation which should be overcome with a more careful translation in the choice of individual and more specific words in the target language. I think it is important to mention here the exact author’s words on that matter: “We must no longer casually translate words for alcoholic drinks in early Indic texts somewhat at random. Rather, just as we would expect from a scholar of medieval Italy, we should always try to differentiate between various drinks and their economic, legal, literary and social significance, sparse as our evidence may sometimes be” (McHugh 2021b, 114). I would like to thank Bryan De Notariis for this suggestion (*personal communication*).

<sup>45</sup> *Vivāgasuyam* § 10, translation by Chokshi, Modi 1935, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed overview of what was meant by *surā* in Vedic literature see McHugh 2021d.

Apart from *jāī* (on which see below), the other Prakrit words aforementioned are genuine *tadbhava* words, that is to say words used in Prakrit literature with a clear Sanskrit counterpart with the same meaning, but showing a difference in phonological shape, a difference explained by means of specific rules mentioned in the most renowned Prakrit grammars.<sup>47</sup> To be more specific, the word *mahu* is translated with 'wine prepared from honey', because connected with the Sanskrit word *madhu* with the same meaning (see above). This is also true for *meraga*, but the translators' rendering of this term as 'wine prepared from palm fruit' is not correct, because not in line with the Sanskrit meaning of the corresponding Sanskrit word *maireyaka*, whose meaning is 'a kind of intoxicating drink'<sup>48</sup> following what had been reported by McHugh in his in-depth analysis of the Sanskrit words *mairaya*, *mairayaka*.<sup>49</sup>

From the phonological point of view, the correspondences *dh* (Sanskrit) = *h* (Prakrit), regarding the words *madhu* (Sanskrit)/*mahu* (Prakrit),<sup>50</sup> and *k* (Sanskrit) = *g* (Prakrit), in this case related to the words *meraka* (Sanskrit)/*maireyaka* (Prakrit), are described by Indian grammarians as typical of Prakrit and Prakrit/Apabhramśa respectively.<sup>51</sup> The same kind of correspondence is true for the Prakrit word *sīhu* translated as 'wine prepared from raw sugar' and connected to the Sanskrit word *sīdhu*,<sup>52</sup> again with the same meaning.<sup>53</sup> Probably, the unique translators' misunderstanding concerns the Prakrit word *pasannā*, normally found in Prakrit and other MIA texts as *pasannā*.<sup>54</sup> The original Sanskrit form is *prasanna*,<sup>55</sup> commonly attested in Sanskrit as an adjective with the meaning of 'clear', 'bright', 'pure'.<sup>56</sup> However, in the *Carakasamhitā* this word is also mentioned as a derived feminine noun *prasannā* with the meaning of 'spirituous liquor made of rice',<sup>57</sup> which is the corresponding form of the Prakrit word *pasannā/pasannā*. In the case of the latter, it is not clear how the translators give the meaning of 'wine prepared from grapes'.

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<sup>47</sup> Kahrs 1992; Drocco 2006; 2012.

<sup>48</sup> See Monier-Williams 1899, 834.

<sup>49</sup> McHugh 2021c.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Pischel 1965, § 188, 141-2.

<sup>51</sup> Pischel 1965, § 192, 143-4.

<sup>52</sup> Turner 1962-85, 775, entry no. 13433.

<sup>53</sup> Monier-Williams 1899, 1218.

<sup>54</sup> Setha 1923-28, 579; Turner 1962-85, 496, entry no. 8823.

<sup>55</sup> See Turner 1962-85, 496, entry no. 8823.

<sup>56</sup> See Monier-Williams 1899, 686.

<sup>57</sup> See Monier-Williams 1899, 696. See also McHugh 2021a, 33-5, 38-9.

It must be acknowledged that while this paragraph is not clear about the use and attestation of words meaning ‘grape wine’, in the same text a word for which the meaning ‘grape’ is quite sure is used; this word is *muddiyā* and it is attested in the following excerpt:

*tae ṇaṃ se sirīe mahāṇasie [...] karei [...] āmalarasiyāṇi ya muddiyārasiyāṇi ya kaviṭṭharasiyāṇi [...]*<sup>58</sup>

Then that cook Siria used to prepare [...] pieces of flesh seasoned with the juice of ‘amalaka’, pieces of flesh seasoned with the juice of grape fruits ‘muddiyā’, pieces of flesh seasoned with the juice of ‘kaviṭṭha’ fruits, [...]

It is interesting to point out that in the *Vivāgasuyam* the word *mudḍiya* is mentioned as *muddiyā rasiyā*, thus in composition with *rasiyā*; the meaning of *muddiyā rasiyā* is ‘grape juice’.<sup>60</sup> The Prakrit word *muddiyā* is related to the Pāli word *muddikā* and both can be compared to the Sanskrit word *mṛdvikā*. It is quite interesting that the Sanskrit word *mṛdvikā* is attested in *Carakasamhitā* and *Suśrutasaṃhitā*,<sup>61</sup> the two most important medical treatises written in Sanskrit. According to Charpentier’s proposal (AO vii 191) the Sanskrit word *mṛdvikā* is a hyper-sanskritism of an original word \**madvikā*- derived from the Iranic form \**maδvī*, the latter reconstructed from the Balochi word *mavīč* ‘raisins’.<sup>62</sup>

Among the various terms meaning ‘intoxicant’ mentioned in the *Vivāgasuyam* (*surā*, *mahu*, *meragā*, *sīhu*, *pasanna*), the word *jāi* reported in the first excerpt is quite interesting, because it gives me the opportunity to focus my attention to the group of Prakrit words about ‘intoxicant’ not connected with Sanskrit tradition and, as said above, called by Sanskrit and Prakrit authors *deśī* words. The word *jāi* is indeed reported in Setha’s Prakrit dictionary (1923-28), but, contrary to the other terms already seen, where the Sanskrit form linked to the Prakrit one is given, for this term there is not a corresponding Sanskrit form, at least known. As a consequence, this word is marked as ‘*de.*’, the abbreviation for ‘*deśī*’.

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<sup>58</sup> *Vivāgasuyam* § 29, 59(3), Chokshi, Modi 1935.

<sup>59</sup> *Vivāgasuyam* § 29, translation by Chokshi, Modi 1935, 93.

<sup>60</sup> The word *rasa* linked to grapes is attested also in Pāli and probably also in the Chinese *pútáo zhī* 葡萄汁; in this respect see De Notariis 2023, 88.

<sup>61</sup> But see McHugh 2021b, 118.

<sup>62</sup> But see Turner 1962-85, 594, entry no. 10296. For a comprehensive overview of the possible etymology of the Sanskrit word *mṛdvikā* I refer the reader to McHugh 2021b.

## 5 ***Deśī* Words Meaning 'Intoxicant' in Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā***

For the study of *deśī* words in Prakrit, one of the most important sources is a work composed by the Jain monk and polymath Hemacandra (c. 1087 to c. 1173 AD). The text is normally known as *Deśīnāmamālā*. As a matter of fact, for the study of the issues related to the *deśī* element in Prakrit, the *Deśīnāmamālā* represents certainly an essential source; that is to say the most important lexicon of *deśī* words now available.<sup>63</sup> Unsurprisingly, the only Prakrit dictionary published so far, I mean the aforementioned Setha's dictionary (1923-28), refers to the *Deśīnāmamālā* as the primary and unique source to give a meaning to the majority of *deśī* words attested in Prakrit literature. Therefore, as pointed out by Bhayani in most of his studies (see above), because of the uniqueness of the *Deśīnāmamālā*, a critical examination of the headwords recorded in this text might suggest several lines of investigation. This is particularly true for *deśī* words meaning 'intoxicant' and often translated simply as 'wine', because in this lexicon many of these words are reported. Namely:<sup>64</sup>

- *avakkarasa* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *sīhu* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* I 46) and of the Sanskrit word *saraka* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* I 46) 'muddy liquor'; the word *avakkarasa* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *pañkasurā* and *kaluṣa madirā*;<sup>65</sup>
- *kavisa* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *majja* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* II 2) and of the Sanskrit word *madya* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* II 2) 'wine, liquor';<sup>66</sup> the word *kavisa* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *dārū*, *madya* and *surā*;<sup>67</sup>
- *kallā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *majja* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* II 2)

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<sup>63</sup> Ramanujaswamy 1938, 6; Pischel 1965, 48-50; Shriyan 1969, 25-32; Upadhye 1978, 182; Bhayani 1988a, 162; Tieken 1992, 221; Ghatage 1996-, vol. 1, \* 2- \* 3.

<sup>64</sup> The words are arranged according to their use in the text, therefore according to the order of the *devanāgarī* script.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Here and below I maintain the word 'wine' as a substitute of 'intoxicant', because 'wine' is the translation used in the sources referred to. However, for the unsuitability of this term for any kind of intoxicant see above note 44.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 233.



and of the Sanskrit word *madya* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* II 2) 'wine, liquor'; the word *kallā* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *madya* and *dārū*;<sup>68</sup>

- *jāī* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *surā* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* III 45) and of the Sanskrit word *surā* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* III 45) 'muddy liquor'; the word *jāī* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary as *jāī* with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *madirā*, *surā* and *dārū*;<sup>69</sup>
- *dayarī/daarī* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit/Sanskrit word *surā* (in the text and in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* V 35) 'liquor'; the word *dayarī/daarī* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *surā*, *madirā* and *dārū*;<sup>70</sup>
- *pacchucchuhaṇī* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *paḍhamasurā* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 35) and of the Sanskrit word *navasurā* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 35) 'fresh liquor'; the word *pacchucchuhaṇī* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *nūtana surā* and *tāzā dārū*;<sup>71</sup>
- *piṭṭhakhaurā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *paṅkasura* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* I 46) and of the Sanskrit word *kaluṣā surā* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 50) 'muddy liquor'; the word *piṭṭhakhaurā* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *paṅka-surā* and *kaluṣa madirā*;<sup>72</sup>
- *peṃḍhā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit word *paṅkasura* (in the text of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 50) and of the Sanskrit word *kaluṣā surā* (in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 50) 'muddy liquor'; the word *peṃḍhā* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *kaluṣa surā* and *paṅkavālī madirā*;<sup>73</sup>

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68 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 232.

69 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 353.

70 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 451.

71 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 509.

72 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 598.

73 Cf. Setha 1923-28, 613.

- *maimohaṇī* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Sanskrit word *surā* (in the text and in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 113) 'liquor'; the word *maimohaṇī* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *surā*, *madirā* and *dārū*;<sup>74</sup>
- *maī* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit/Sanskrit word *surā* (in the text and in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 113) 'liquor'; the word *maī* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained through the words *dārū* and *madirā*;<sup>75</sup>
- *veṃḍhasurā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra by means of the Prakrit/Sanskrit word *kaluṣā surā* (in the text and in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VII 78) 'muddy liquor'; the word *veṃḍhasurā* is not reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary.

It is worth mentioning that apart *deśī* words used in Prakrit to mean 'intoxicant', Hemacandra mentions also terms related to the production and/or consumption of this product. For example:

- *bhukkaṇa* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 110, by means of the Sanskrit word *madyādīmānam* 'a measuring cup for wine'; the word *bhukkaṇa* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained with the following Hindi translation *madya ādi kā mān* 'measure for wine, etc.';<sup>76</sup>
- *pāla* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 75, by means of the Sanskrit word *śauṇḍika* 'a seller of liquor'; the word *pāla* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained with the following Hindi translation *kalvār, śarāb becnevālā* 'a seller of spirits';<sup>77</sup>
- *pāraṃkaṃ* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśīnāmamālā* VI 41, by means of the Sanskrit word *surāmānabhāṇḍa* 'a measuring cup or vessel for liquor'; the word *pāla* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśīnāmamālā* and is explained with the

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 660.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 661.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 655.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 591.

following Hindi translation *madirā nāpne kā pātr* 'a proper recipient to measure wine, alcohol';<sup>78</sup>

- *ṭokkaṇa* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśināmamālā* IV 4, by means of the Sanskrit word *madyaparimāṇabhāṇḍa* 'a pot to measure liquor'; the word *pāla* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśināmamālā* and is explained with the following Hindi translation *dārū nāpne kā bartan* 'a pot to measure wine, liquor';<sup>79</sup>
- *kariā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśināmamālā* II 14, by means of the Sanskrit word *madyapariveṣaṇabhāṇḍa* 'a pot for serving wine'; the word *kariā* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśināmamālā* and is explained with the following Hindi translation *madirā parosne kā pātr* 'a proper recipient for serving wine, liquor';<sup>80</sup>
- *kottalaṃkā* - this word is explained by Hemacandra, in the commentary of the *Deśināmamālā* II 14, by means of the Sanskrit word *madyapariveṣaṇabhāṇḍa* 'a pot for serving wine'; the word *kottalaṃkā* is reported in Setha's Prakrit dictionary with the unique reference to the *Deśināmamālā* and is explained with the following Hindi translation *dārū parosne kā bhāṇḍ* 'a pot for serving wine, liquor'.<sup>81</sup>

Actually, it is not easy to find the origin and to trace the history of all these terms. But, at least two of them are quite interesting because they give me the possibility to offer good examples of the typology of *deśī* words in Prakrit:

1. *kallā* 'muddy liquor';
2. *veṃḍhasurā* 'muddy liquor'.

The Prakrit word *kallā* has *kalya* as Sanskrit corresponding word.<sup>82</sup> However, *kalya* is reported only in late Sanskrit lexicons and not in any other Sanskrit work.<sup>83</sup> This can be a good example of genuine Prakrit words included in Sanskrit - actually only in one lexicon - through sanskritisation. As for its origin, the Prakrit word *kallā* 'intoxicant' is one of the many types of *deśī* words used in Prakrit, more specifically a true loanword from Indian non-IA languages, in

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 590.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 369.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 228.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Setha 1923-28, 264.

<sup>82</sup> Turner 1962-85, 150, entry no. 2950.

<sup>83</sup> Turner 1962-85, 150, entry no. 2950; Monier-Williams 1899, 263.

this case from Dravidian languages.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, following Burrow and Emeneau's suggestion, the Prakrit *deśī* word *kallā* 'intoxicant' can be compared with the following Dravidian words with their respective meaning:<sup>85</sup>

- Tamil *kaḷ* 'toddy', 'honey', *kaḷippu* 'intoxication', 'delight', 'pride'; *kaḷiyaṅ* 'drunkard';
- Malayalam *kaḷ*, *kaḷḷu* 'toddy';
- Kolami *kaḷ* 'toddy';
- Kannada *kaḷ*, *kaḷḷu*, *kallu* 'toddy';
- Kodagu *kaḷḷi* 'alcoholic liquor';
- Tulu *kali*, (B-K. also) *kari*, *kaḷi* 'toddy', 'liquor';
- Telugu *kallu* 'toddy', 'palm wine';
- Kolami *kaḷ* 'liquor';
- Naiki *kaḷ* 'liquor';
- Gondi *kaḷ* (*obl. kadd-*) 'fermented liquor, especially of *mahuas*' (*mahua* = *Madhuca longifolia*); *kallu/kaḷḷu* 'liquor';
- Koṅḍa *kaṛu/kalu* 'country liquor';
- Pengo *kaliṅ* 'liquor';
- Maṅḍa. *kaliṅ* 'liquor';
- Kui *kalu* 'spirituous or fermented liquor', 'toddy', 'beer', 'grog', 'wine';
- Kuwi *kārū* 'country spirit'; *maṛa kārū* 'toddy'; *kāḍu* 'toddy'; *māra kāḍu* 'sago toddy'; *kāru* 'liquor'.

It is important to point out that the Prakrit *deśī* word *kallā* has some derivatives that gave origin to New Indo-Aryan words; for example, the Hindi words *kaḷ(w)ār*, *kaḷāl* and the Marathi words *kaḷāl* 'distiller' derive from the Prakrit word *kallāla-* 'liquor-dealer'.<sup>86</sup>

As for the Prakrit word *veṃḍhasurā*, we have already seen that Hemacandra explains it through the Sanskrit word *kaḷuṣā surā* 'muddy liquor' (*Deśīnāmamālā* VII 78). In this case, we are facing to another kind of *deśī* word. In fact, *veṃḍhasurā* is classified as *deśī* by Hemacandra, because can be included under the category of 'new Prakrit compounds',<sup>87</sup> as a consequence of the fact that this term is a compound where *surā* is from Sanskrit (see above), whereas *veṃḍha* is again a borrowing from Dravidian languages comparable with the following words:<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Burrow, Emeneau 1984, 128, entry no. 1374.

<sup>85</sup> See Burrow, Emeneau 1984, 128, entry no. 1374.

<sup>86</sup> See Turner 1962-85, 150, entry no. 2950.

<sup>87</sup> See Drocco 2006.

<sup>88</sup> See Burrow, Emeneau 1984, 473, entry no. 5237.

- Tamil *vaṅṭal* 'dregs, lees, sediment, silt, mud, mire, slush, earth washed ashore by a river, lake, etc., alluvial soil'; *vaṅṭalam* 'slush'; *vaṅṭi* 'sediment, dregs, lees'.
- Malayalam *vaṅṭaru* 'dirt', 'filth'; *vaṅṭikkāran* 'cleaner of vessels in a temple'.
- Kannada *vaṅḍu*, *oṅḍu*, *baṅḍalu* 'sediment, deposit, lees, dregs', 'muddy deposit of a flood, river, or tank', 'muddiness, turbidness'.
- Telugu *vaṅḍa*, *vaṅḍali*, *vaṅḍu* 'muddy deposit of a river, tank or the like, alluvium, alluvial soil'.

## 6 Conclusions

The aim of the present paper was to look at those Prakrit regional words (called *deśī* in the Indian grammatical tradition) not linked to the Sanskrit tradition and attested with the meaning 'intoxicant' and/or concerning 'drinking culture'. The texts chosen for our study were part of Jain literary tradition, because, as said above, this tradition was more prone to borrow words from the local and folk culture. While, thanks to the translation of these works, was quite simple to detect the words analysed above, as a conclusion of our analysis, it must be noted that the great part of Jain literary production, on the contrary, still requires further investigation. This is necessary to ascertain and authenticate the form and meaning of the *deśī* words reported. Nevertheless, this is a difficult task, since most of the Prakrit works published so far do not present any word index. For this reason, the class of Prakrit words knowns as *deśī* is a complicated and partly unexplored area of study. Indeed, despite their importance, these words, after the acute and to some extent pioneering observations of Bühler (1874), Pischel (1877-80, 1880), Beames (1872-79), Höernle (1880), Bhandarkar (1914), to name the best known, have been scarcely studied.<sup>89</sup> Notwithstanding this limitation, it is quite clear that the *Deśīnāmamālā* gives us a unique chance to understand the importance of the cultural contact, and thus to the mutual linguistic influence between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages. This is certainly true also for drinking culture in first-millennium India, a culture that currently has been studied only with respect to Sanskrit tradition.

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<sup>89</sup> Bhayani 1998e, 143. Bhayani's studies (1988a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1998f) represent an important exception in this sense.

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# Wine in India and Other Substances

## An Anthropology of ‘Entheogens’

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**Abstract** The history of studies on psychotropic and psychoactive substances in general and on hallucinogens concerning the religious experience and altered states of consciousness is undoubtedly wide and intriguing. Today, it clearly emerges that the scientific perspective has too often been shaped, or even spoiled, by socio-economic trends, political backgrounds, fashions and pop culture of the times. From Prohibition to the psychedelic revolution, reported academic positioning shifts dramatically regarding these substances, which eventually were defined as entheogens in the 1970's. This contribution traces the history of these studies with a particular focus on South Asia, from the still largely unsolved mystery of Soma/Amṛta to the first archaeological evidence of wine production in Gandhāra. Via a comparative perspective, an ethnographic study is proposed on the production of alcoholic, fermented products and traditional fermentation starters (and their related ritual uses) among the indigenous *ādivāsī* communities of India.

**Keywords** Shamanism. Palm wine. Alcohol. Altered states. Psychoactive drugs.

**Summary** 1 The Drink of the Gods in South Asia. – 2 A Modern (Watered Down) Wine Debate. – 3 Towards an Anthropology of the Substances. – 4 The Palm Wine Variation: A Case Study. – 5 Conclusion: Winy Ontologies.

Man's tendency to use psychoactive substances to transcend the phenomenal world and come into contact with the divine, the subtle world and the non-human has its roots in the mists of time. The bond is so close that the first reconstructed testimonies regarding altered states of consciousness are all to be traced back to religious or spiritual contexts.<sup>1</sup> Yet this is a slippery subject, about which,

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<sup>1</sup> Robertson 2004.

proceeding with methodological accuracy, there are many fewer things that can be affirmed than those that can be described with certainty. The lesson on the problematic nature of religions in the protohistoric period is long, and passes through the work of scholars who have emphasised as in the absence of reading codes, therefore the researcher remains fettered in the context of the possibility and the hypothesis rather than in the thesis.<sup>2</sup> The perfection of many cases documented in prehistoric art, its very high formal level, the profound ability to abstract symbols and signs linked to the animal world, hunting, etc. testify to the existence of archaic civilisations of admirable culture, whose religious thought remains a mystery with jagged and still ephemeral outlines. By analogy it is interesting to note that even the history of the use of substances, in particular those with psychotropic principles, is equally problematic for similar reasons.<sup>3</sup> Today it is almost taken for granted that the use of drugs or entheogens (as they are defined today) is *ab origine* intrinsically linked to much of the human religious experience, by virtue above all of countless historical testimonies and literature, in particular starting from the Dionysian cults of the western classic world onwards.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it is notorious that the wine, fully consumable among the sacred and psychoactive substances, has very ancient origins. The oldest archaeological remains place the appearance of the first cultivated vine around 6000 BC, in the Caucasus, close to the contemporary borders of Turkey, Georgia and Armenia.<sup>5</sup> The cultivation of the grape, as ancient as that of the cereals, coincides with the very first settlement of the man, when the hunters-gatherers become farmers-herders. But it is also true that the fermentation process is a phenomenon of great interest for historians of food and, more generally, scholars within cultural studies. A naturally occurring metabolic process responsible for the conversion of sugars to alcohol, fermentation has been employed for the storage and processing of food, to increase the nutritional value of various edibles and, in some cases, for the development of drugs and medicinal concoctions. Therefore, by releasing alcoholic production from the vine plant proper, it is possible to infer that the discovery and production of fermented products from any type of food is very ancient and almost lost in the oblivion of human history.

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<sup>2</sup> Leroi-Gourhan 1964; Dickson 1992.

<sup>3</sup> McKenna 1993.

<sup>4</sup> McGovern, Stuart, Katz 2003.

<sup>5</sup> McGovern 2019, 41.

## 1 The Drink of the Gods in South Asia

The literary approach, where materials are available on this matter, is no less problematic due to a recurrent and similar lack of interpretative codes in an exegetical context. India in this context is an excellent example, for the richness of its sacred tradition and as the cradle of one of the oldest civilisations it is an intriguing scenario for this research. The enigma on the relationship between the nectar of immortality and a salvific path of light has almost become, in the history of Indian studies, the paradigm of an archetypal quest, also often in relation to the more or less contemporary Mesopotamian civilisation. Practically since the beginning of Indology and Iranology, scholars have been trying to identify the plant that plays a central role in Vedic and Avestan hymns and that is called Soma in the *Veda* and Haoma in the *Avesta*.<sup>6</sup> What is the plant mentioned in the *Rgveda*, 8.48.3?

We just drank the Soma, we have become immortal, we have come to the light, we have found the gods. What can enmity do to us now, and what the mischief of a mortal, o immortal one?<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, in *Atharvaveda Samhitā* 11.6.15:

The five kingdoms of plants, having Soma as their chief, we address; the *darbhá*, *hemp*, *barley*, *sáha* - let them free us from distress.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of the concept of Soma as the key to achieving immortality is undeniable. Nevertheless, it is equally well-known that this very ancient text, which is the basis of the Indian literary tradition, dating back to around four thousand years ago (but which the Indians tend to backdate) is essentially cryptic. The drink of the gods, Soma (from a Sanskrit root which indicates squeezing, distilling, sprinkle, obtaining a liquid or juice) is also called Amṛta (coming from the root *√mṛ*, meaning 'to die', with the inclusion of the negative a-prefix) it has been compared to Greek ambrosia, or a nectar of immortality. The most famous myth in the Hindu tradition about the discovery of the sacred drink is called *samudramanthana* or 'the churning of the ocean of milk'. As is known, in the cosmic struggle between gods (*devas*) and antigods (*asuras*), since one cannot prevail over the other, both decide for a truce. They collaborate to churn

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<sup>6</sup> Houben 2003; Albrile 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Griffith 1896-97, 198.

<sup>8</sup> Whitney 1905, 642.

the oceanic diluvian expanse, a sort of sea of milk (*kṣīrasāgara*), using the cosmic serpent Vāsuki wrapped around the sacred mountain Mandara (a sort of *axis mundi*) as a gigantic churn. The process of symbolic thickening of the ocean of milk into butter allows the emergence on its surface of precious treasures and magical weapons, but also extremely dangerous poisons. From a psychological and introspective perspective, such churning seems like an exploration of a metaphysical unconscious, giving rise to virtues and vices. Also in a cosmogonic perspective this poietic process concretises the multifaceted multiplicity of the manifest world from an unfathomable and indefinite primordial ocean. In both cases, the emergence of the ampoule containing Soma/Amṛta, depending on its declinations, stands out as a drink of immortality or rather the enlightened emancipation (*mokṣa*) from the conditioning of space and time.

The attempt to understand, outside of the metaphor, the nature of this drink and its possible ingredients or formulas was figuratively a sort of search for the Grail of Indology, in an empirical ritual dimension even before a spiritual perspective. The act of drinking the substance immediately linked it to something alcoholic, primarily wine or similar fermented products. There has been a strong tendency by scholars over the years to maintain that *bhaṅga*, a closely related substance, was based on the processing of *Cannabis indica*. This theory is at once both intriguing and difficult to support due to the lack of exhaustive descriptions and numerous contradictions in the identifying terms that emerged in ancient literature.<sup>9</sup> In contemporary studies the prevalence of Sanskritists leans towards the hypothesis of mycotoxins such as muscimol and ibotenic acid obtained from the processing of mushrooms probably of the amanita type (*Amanitaceae*). Some go so far as to deduce that the drink was even the urine of priests who had previously ingested the substance, preserving it thus filtered through a physio-metabolic process.<sup>10</sup> I believe it is wise to stop the analysis when faced with the exegetical problem of the lack of an interpretative code which in botanical matters is the result of various elements: problems of dating of works and authors, umbrella definitions of botanical species or nouns indicating clusters of similar plants, synonyms often used for preparations and medicines, significant divergences in semantic roots and spelling, and processes of canonisation of sometimes uncertain oral traditions.<sup>11</sup> *Vijayā* (lit. 'victorious'), for example, is the recurring and interchangeable name of deities and mythological characters, but also of a medicinal recipe,

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<sup>9</sup> Southworth 2005, 214-24; Wujastyck 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Kazanas 2015; Polosmak 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Nyberg 1995.

whose actual active ingredients are difficult to identify today.<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, in India, increasingly precise descriptions of plants, with their foliage and inflorescences, as well as investigations into the so-called *materia medica* utilised in the pharmacopoeia took shape in the Common Era, in particular around the Middle Ages and in the Ayurvedic context.

Incidentally it should be noted that in antiquity the most relevant evidence of grape wine consumption in the subcontinent is attested among the Dardic/Kafir cultures of the Hindu Kush/Karakorum, which appears to be part of ancient Paropamisos, homeland of Dionysus according to some traditions; but the theme in this volume is treated by fellow archaeologists, therefore I merely suggest some essential references.<sup>13</sup> However, if it is not possible contextually today to demonstrate that Soma was wine, at least in the modern meaning of the term, in this article I intend to propose a reflection on the depth of the problem, and consider the importance of the connection between the use of psychotropic substances and religious experience in the history of Indian subcontinent.<sup>14</sup> To do this I will proceed with the analysis of some paradoxes in the modern scientific approach to the subject, then including the case study of the production of palm wine and other fermented alcoholic products among the indigenous populations of the Subcontinent. This is a methodological comparison that certainly does not seek to establish a connection between ancient and tribal India, but due to a series of analogies it can at least offer interesting ideas for our investigation.

## 2 A Modern (Watered Down) Wine Debate

The link between religion and vine wine, in particular among all psychoactive substances, is a theme that is not questioned today, though of course there are numerous testimonies in antiquity and in the classical world, with the very first evidence dating back to Egypt.<sup>15</sup> In the Eucharistic transubstantiation of Christianity, this link was confirmed throughout the Middle Ages. In France and Germany, religious centres played a strategic role in the development of the wine trade. French Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries were granted large tracts of land by the nobility and wealthy landowners in the

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**12** Victoria, Victory, Vittoria, Victoire or similar, paradoxically, are recurring names among contemporary products and brands of European wineries famous throughout the world.

**13** Filigenzi 2019; Olmo 1996; Callieri et al. 2006.

**14** McHugh 2021.

**15** Poo 2009.

hope that this would ease their passage to paradise in the afterlife. The soils were often of poor quality but proved excellent for growing vines. But it is in the modern era, therefore after the discovery of America and new trade routes with the Indies and the Pacific, that the West expanded its knowledge and exploration of fermented and psychoactive products from the East. Their use in the religious context does not seem to particularly capture the interests of European commercial companies in the colonial era, who were instead rather attentive to their economic potential. After evaluating and subsequently discarding the possibility of taxation of cannabinoid substances in South Asia, the United Kingdom considered it more fruitful to engage in the so-called Opium Wars (1839-42; 1856-60) against China. And yet there remained a great interest in possible scientific, medical-botanical applications of the oriental pharmacopoeia of fermented, distilled and psychoactive substances in general.<sup>16</sup> Even in France we can say that there was no particular disfavour toward substances and their experimentation. A clear example is hashish, the use of which reached Europe following Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801). Antithetical tendencies contrasted a trenchant judgment on the dangers of mental alienation linked to its use<sup>17</sup> against the exaltation of the artistic-aesthetic experience of the 'cursed poets' of the so-called hashish fashion.<sup>18</sup>

But it is also true that from 1700 onwards, wine, and other alcoholic beverages were questioned by religious movements, starting with the Methodists in the eighteenth century, who considered alcohol harmful to workers.<sup>19</sup> Although the Catholic clergy was generally lenient regarding wine, the Church in France suffered a setback when the revolutionary government nationalised and sold all vineyards and other ecclesiastical land in 1790. This ended the centuries-old connection between the Church and wine production in France. Nineteenth-century temperance movements in the United States and Northern Europe were often led by Protestant women who questioned the health and other benefits often claimed of wine. Methodists and Presbyterians in particular associated alcohol with domestic violence and a growing lack of morality among the poorest of the population. Religious and evangelical organisations, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Salvation Army, adopted abstinence policies and campaigned for the abolition of the use of wine in communion services. Prohibition as such appeared in

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**16** Goodman, Sherratt, Lovejoy [1995] 2014.

**17** Moreau 1845.

**18** Booth 2015, 128.

**19** Phillips 2021.



several Western countries starting in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> In Canada, the prohibition movement began in 1864 with the Temperance Act (also called the Dunkin' Act) adopted by the Parliament of United Canada which authorised counties and municipalities to ban the retail sale of alcohol on their territory but, ironically, not the production of alcohol, permitted for medicinal, sacramental, scientific, industrial and even artistic purposes. In 1878, this law was extended to all provinces of British North America. The prohibitionist movement became radicalised in Canada and the United States, so much so that throughout the first half of the twentieth century alcohol was considered a threat to health and social peace. These hanging sectarian tendencies managed to make inroads into the institutions and ended up influencing and corrupting even contemporary scientific thought.

The Victorian era and the first decades of the nineteenth century were extremely important for archaeological discoveries and the literary and critical study of Eastern cultures. This is the period in which a new and revolutionary science was born with an innovative perspective on human behaviour: anthropology, which was first physical and anthropometric, and then matured into its modern cultural and social forms. Yet all this literature seems, from a very general point of view, to suffer the effects of the trends of the time. There is almost a stigma, an austere reserve, in dealing with the topic of substances, drugs and wine in particular, found throughout past academic literature. In other words, I have the impression that up until the end of the nineteenth century there could have still been a sincere curiosity, at least for medical-pharmaceutical purposes, about the use of substances, even if alcohol addiction, which today is considered a clinical disease, was then labelled as a condition of moral compromise in the medical literature.<sup>21</sup> But it is with the growth of prohibitionism in the twentieth century (especially in North America) that the topic of substances becomes a taboo, particularly if related to a spiritual quest or religious experience.

A clear example of this watering down of the scientific debate is the work *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986),<sup>22</sup> a famous historian of religions who in particular also dealt with shamanism, ecstatic and/or altered consciousness phenomenology. His work was not ethnographic field research, but a hermeneutical synthesis, an attempt to taxonomically canonise the shamanic and trance phenomena. A milestone in the history of studies, today considered obsolete by many, he was able

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<sup>20</sup> Fuller 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Sarkar 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Eliade 1951.

to animate the debate on these issues. Although he does not dedicate specific chapters to substances, whenever there is reference to them the terms are generally disparaging. With regard to shamanic practices, he emphasised the knowledge of ‘mechanical’ techniques to self-induce a state of trance, such as the music of possession cults and the percussion of the drum which is widespread in central Asia, from the Himalayas to the Siberian steppes. The use of psychoactive substances to achieve an altered state of consciousness is defined as a degradation of shamanic knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

The reasons for this are not, in my opinion, sufficiently discussed. The general skepticism of Eliade, who was a child of his time, remains implicit. At the same time, for those who are able to grasp it, there is a certain perennialist influence in the interpretation of the shamanic phenomenon. The techniques of ecstasy are ‘archaic’ not so much (or not only) because they are probably a pre-religious phenomenon in an evolutionary perspective which at the time had not yet been completely undermined. But moreover they are such because they belonged to previous ages of man, such as the golden age in a Hesiod perspective. Eliade certainly does not go as far as saying, like René Guénon (1886-1951),<sup>24</sup> that the shamanic ability to induce oneself into an ecstatic condition is a sort of relic of what man’s knowledge was in previous cosmic eras. It is a treasure that the last indigenous peoples, not completely aware of this, are presumed to still preserve in the most remote corners of the planet. But if that profound mystery of the vision of divinities and parallel worlds through the state of trance, which he compared to ecstasy, had needed psychotropic support, this would be a clear sign to the scholar of the decadence of the times.

### 3 Towards an Anthropology of the Substances

Interestingly, however, Eliade does not criticise the presence of wine and other substances in a ritual context per se, but rather their application in achieving a condition of trance or altered consciousness. Whatever the reasons for this, his criticism meets a factual reality observed to a large extent in Asian countries, from India to Mongolia. Among native peoples there are various psychoactive substances considered sacred for this reason; the diffusion and consumption of fermented alcoholic products in particular is part of the daily life of many communities. Like fermented mare’s milk for the steppe nomads (Turkish/Mongolian: *airag/äärag*; Kazakh: *qymyz*), or palm wine

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<sup>23</sup> Kamiński 2017, 396.

<sup>24</sup> Guénon [1945] 2001, 177-84.

(Hindi: *tāḍi* anglicised 'toddy'; Tamil: *kallu*; Oriya: *salpo*, etc) for indigenous minorities of the Indian Subcontinent, today are increasingly replaced by modern industrial distilled products. However, in general, due to an almost archetypal conception that filters through the different currents of Hinduism and Buddhism (but is also characteristic of shamanism), the ritualist abstains from it for reasons linked to a dynamic of purity in the ritual. In other words, the *pūjārī*, the lama, the monk, but also the shaman, in the period preceding the ritual, avoid contact or proximity with the sick, the deceased, cemeteries, pregnant or menstruating women, in short everything that implies a state of liminality or transformation. They also abstain from anything that could be contaminating, such as the consumption of meat, blood, altering substances, non-vegetarian food. Indeed there is often a practice of absolute fasting for preparatory and purifying purposes. This is generally observed by the shaman who must reach the state of trance and in many possession cults where in fact music has a prominent role. When the shaman is finally possessed by deities or spirits of ancestors, then it is quite possible that he takes in profusion sacred and potentially psychotropic substances as offerings subsumed by the entities right through his own mouth.

It is also intriguing to note that Eliade's position almost seems like a hardening against a world that was now changing. Shortly before the Second World War the era of prohibitionism ended and the 1950s were characterised by the youth movements of the Beat Generation. Seeking a way of emancipation from a patriarchal culture, now perceived as bigoted, that dominated the United States in the previous half century, the collective debate of artists, poets and writers, in a certain sense legitimised the theme of drugs, alcohol and encouraged exploration of Eastern doctrines, as well as interest in ritual practices among the cultures of native peoples. This increasingly prevalent branch of pop culture also influenced - this is beyond question - the academic perspectives on the topic of substances, starting from the United States and then reaching Europe. The Beat Generation was followed by New Age and the psychedelic revolution in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

We will therefore observe that in recent decades the anthropological perspective on altered states of consciousness has also increasingly shifted towards an openness and an experimental dimension. By virtue of the emic point of view and participant observation, several scholars, in particular relating to South and Meso-American studies, began to experiment on themselves for scientific purposes with the psychoactive substances used by indigenous peoples in their rituals. In this period of reorientation of trends, it is interesting to note

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<sup>25</sup> Shepard 2005.

that within Christianity, and in particular since the 1960s, the liberation of wine during Mass is no longer a problem.

The first publication in Paris of Eliade's work on shamanism dates back to 1951, republished in the United States in 1964; the generally intransigent interpretative canons imposed by this work on the topic of substances seem in a certain sense to contrast with the wave of interest that in the same years was mounting on research mainly of an anthropological nature. This trend probably developed one of its first significant expressions in the publication edited by Michael Harner (1929-2018), *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*.<sup>26</sup> Harner was an ethnologist who had done research on the shamanism of communities in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon. Following his doctorate research on the Jívaros of Ecuador he became a pioneer of investigation on substances and altered states of consciousness. Paradoxically, he later abandoned both the academy and his passion for drugs, becoming the famous founder of Core Shamanism, a neoshamanic movement which mixes, in my opinion somewhat arbitrarily, notions of indigenous Mesoamerican religiosity and New Age spirituality, but which spread with some success in the United States and Europe.

However, the debate on substances and the role of the humanities and scientific research in this area reached maturity in the 1970s. So much so that expressions of a certain elegance, appreciated by Eliade and the old school of history of religions, such as 'psychotropic' in the sense of psychoactive and generally indicating hallucinogens and psychedelics, began to be perceived as stigmatising or derogatory. In other words, the need was felt to find a new definition for this type of experience, especially if linked to a sacral context. The turning point was the definition of the neologism 'entheogen' towards the end of the 1970s. If the Greek etymology (ἐνθεος + γινέσθαι) clearly alludes to an internal process in which divinity is related to an ongoing dynamic/a birth/a happening, the theoretical approach works a lot on the relationship between individual, divinity and sacred substance (or plant). Therefore the entheogenic epiphany is commonly described as a state where all distinctions and boundaries between the individual and the metaphysical realm dissolve into a mystical and consubstantial communion with the Divine.<sup>27</sup> Shaman, entheogen, and deity come to share indeed a common identity. With both the human and the god (or gods) acquiring attributes of the same ingested botanical agent that brought them together, all three become consubstantial.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Harner 1973.

<sup>27</sup> Ruck et al. 1979, 145-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ruck, Staples 1995; Hoffman, Ruck 2004.

Linked to a past in which the aforementioned notions could be taken for granted to a certain extent, this revolutionary vision is extraordinary, since in contemporary times it is the basis of modern Alcohol and Substance Studies.<sup>29</sup> Leaving aside the clinical aspect, which is less relevant here, it is necessary to emphasise how these premises interface with neuroscience, with the study of ecology and the so-called 'mother plants', of indigenous pharmacopoeia, of environmental humanities, and even with the posthuman and the perspectives discussed in the so-called psychedelic revolution. But in all of this, it seems useful to note for the purposes of our study that the theme of wine in ancient times played a crucial role. In fact, among the great mass of scholars who animated the debate on substances, such as anthropologists, ethnographers, doctors, religious scholars, the so-called 'entheogenic theory' was essentially the brainchild of Carl A.P. Ruck (1935-) and Blaise Daniel Staples (1948-2005). Although supported by a group of ethnobotanists, they came from classical studies and classical mythology. In this period, the need to start again from studies on Dionysus and wine emerged in search of what had not yet been dared to explore.

On the other hand, Greek thought, facing the otherness of Eastern cultures, had been for the West the most shining example of the vocation to light, to rationality and to the Logos. But for some years already, to be precise since 1951, Eric R. Dodds (1893-1979) had suggested the opportunity to evaluate even that elusive sphere of an irrational, hidden world, buried under the ivy (κισσός), the wild vine to use a metaphor, which was considered the primitive intoxicating antecedent of the cultivated grape. In other words, the civilised ritual drunkenness practised by the Greeks at festivals or symposiums, within the city, which was so celebrated in literature, was contrasted with a darker, rural, orgiastic rite of the maenads considered essential to honour the wild and primitive dimension of the god. If the beverage of Dionysus is a vinous potion, balanced through fermentation and representing in a certain sense the 'cultivated' version of the god, maenadism seems to be an attempt at mediation with its 'wild', primordial, potentially deadly version, because it involves the intake of unprocessed toxics, or even mixing entheogenic plant additives with the sacred drink. On the other hand, much like the spicing of wine with other intoxicants is a common practice even today, Greece perpetuates the ancient tradition with its retsina, or resin-flavoured wine. After Dodds's<sup>30</sup> *The Greeks and the Irrational*, there is growing investigation into the possible existence of ecstatic cults, cases of possession and ritual consumption of psychoactive substances which

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<sup>29</sup> Rush 2013; Wolff et al. 2016; Labate, Cavnar 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Dodd 1951.

would perhaps have also characterised classical everyday life, but which had less space in 'major' literature because they coagulated near or around the great temples or oracular centres that catalysed mostly the attention of ancient writers.

In this hypothetical cone of shadow, persistent in contemporary science, influences and syncretisms with Eastern and Central Asian disciplines may have had great importance. We could define this as a luminous abyss in which, even the shaman, or similar figures, can make his catabasis as a cultural hero. Even if after a few decades of debate, some scholars<sup>31</sup> tend to downplay the hypothesis of a 'shamanism' tout court in ancient Greece, the question on the knowledge and use of entheogens still remains open.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the paragraph it should be remembered that a few years before the definition of the entheogenic theory, Erika E. Bourguignon (1924-2015),<sup>33</sup> famous above all for gender studies in shamanism and cases of possession, published a pioneering investigation in which among approximately five hundred case regarding the use of substances mainly among native populations, 90% were linked to a ritual context. This provided a further basis on which to develop the connection between religious experience and the intake of psychoactive principles.

#### 4 The Palm Wine Variation: A Case Study

Regarding my twenty-year research experience in Asia and in particular among the indigenous peoples of India, or *ādivāsīs*, I have had the opportunity to observe different dynamics of production and use of psychotropic substances.<sup>34</sup> To tell the truth, similar to other rural communities with recreational habits, there is a widespread use of substances which are not actually psychoactive or which are mildly so: such as smoking tobacco, chewing betel nut, but also the intake of cannabinoids and alcohol. Indeed the production of alcohol is undoubtedly prevalent: the custom of drinking fermented products is commonly understood as a characteristic feature of *ādivāsī* culture. As I had the chance to observe among the *ādivāsīs* of Odisha as well as in the sub-Himalayan region and the Northeastern Frontier, alcohol is not used to induce shamans or the ritual specialists and healers into a state of trance, for the above reasons, but is anyway an essential ritual element in most ceremonies. Wine creates sociality,

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<sup>31</sup> Bremmer 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Sumler 2023; Wasson, Hoffmann, Ruck [1978] 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Bourguignon 1973.

<sup>34</sup> Beggiora 2016.

enshrines communal relations among the clans and consecrates rites of passage such as weddings, births and funerals. Furthermore, the consumption of alcohol produced from the plants of the forest, where survival is always a challenge, contributes to reduce the levels of anxiety among community members.<sup>35</sup> Being one of the most archaic techniques used in nutrition and considering that many of these ethnic minorities survive in particularly remote and extreme environments, I had the opportunity to document the obtaining of alcohol from any type of product: rice, wheat, potato, milk and various plants of the forest. Among the Monpas in the high mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, I was struck by the observation that some villages survive almost exclusively by collecting small timber to sell at the market: they were so poor that in some periods there was nothing to eat except a distillate obtained from maceration of wheat. This was distributed to everyone, even children, as the only guaranteed element of a diet unfortunately dangerously lacking in essential nutritional values.

However, it is possible to state that the most produced and consumed alcoholic fermented product among the indigenous Indian populations is palm wine: various qualities of this drink are consumed all over India.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, the fermented palm sap is generally known as 'toddy', or *kallu*. Prepared from the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*) or from the palmyra tuber/toddy palm (*Borassus flabellifer*) the product is the most widespread type of palm wine in the subcontinent. The tribal areas of Odisha are renowned for the production of *salap* or *salpo*, a local palm wine made by infusing the juice of the *salap* tree (*Caryota urens*) from which it takes its name. Generally speaking, palm wine is a popular beverage among lower-income groups and is prepared wherever palm trees are cultivated or grow wild, either on the hillsides or in the jungle tracts. The indigenous Saora community produces the so-called *ālin*, a local handmade variety of palm wine that is very much appreciated also by non-tribal people, venturing onto the hills in search of this cheap and unadulterated liquor. Besides the *Caryota urens*, alternatively known as fishtail palm for the characteristic shape of its leaves, I noted the frequent use of other species of palm trees with similar properties, such as the silver date palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and the palmyra tuber palm (*Borassus flabellifer*). The names of these plants may have regional variations, but they all belong to the same family (*Areaceae*) and the same order (*Arecales*) as *Caryota urens* and concurrently as the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*).

A palm tree requires a long time before reaching maturity, beginning to produce after at least ten years of growth. The techniques

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<sup>35</sup> Dash 2009, 92-8.

<sup>36</sup> Steinkraus 1996, 398.

for the extraction of juice, and its fermentation for the production of wine, are roughly the same. The liquid can be obtained from the fruits or from the latex oozing from an incision made at the top of the trunk or on the branches in proximity to the inflorescence. In some communities, clans claim ownership or patronage of productive trees on the edge of villages. Householders supervise the collection, but often it is the young men or boys of a village who have the task of climbing the trees. Until recently they collected the full pots strategically positioned below the incisions in exchange for a certain amount of product to take home as a reward. Fresh palm sap is generally dirty brown, but it becomes pale and eventually opalescent if the yeast multiplies. The latex produced from *Caryota urens* is generally of a milky whitish colour. Although palm wines are generally sweetish, the *salap* variety can have a sour aftertaste. The consistency is strong, milky and sometimes lumpy. It is, however, a vigorously effervescent alcoholic beverage. Considering that the alcohol content is not very high, and that in the areas I visited in Odisha and the North-eastern border it has a standard content of 4-5% (but often less), the substance produced is more rightly defined as beer rather than wine. Besides its ritual and social use, this wine is traditionally believed to be good for health, particularly for eyesight. It also serves as a sedative, and it is used as a mild laxative relieving constipation. In general, it is prescribed as a tonic for those recovering from various diseases.<sup>37</sup>

In some hill areas, along with palm wine, there exists a variety of liquor produced from the dried corollas of the *mahul* flower (*Madhuca longifolia* var. *latifolia*): the product is well known by various vernacular names, such as *mahua* or *mahuli*, in different states of India. But always it is associated with indigenous production. The plant, belonging to the *Sapotaceae* family (*Ericales* order), requires a more complex preparation, similar to distillation, in order to obtain the final product which is then used for the same social and ritual uses as *salap* by indigenous communities.

Production techniques may vary slightly from district to district. In some areas of the Odisha, I observed that the *salap* is simply left to ferment inside the pots hanging from the trees. The wine is thus prepared naturally. When it is believed to be ready for consumption, it is collected and sold or distributed. However the most common way to prepare *salap* requires the liquid to be preliminarily boiled and then fermented after adding a mixture of spices and roots. The process for the production of *mahua* is different. *Mahul* flowers are collected in March and April in the plains or in some remote forest areas. They are dried and stored in bamboo baskets or in cups made of

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<sup>37</sup> Sekar, Mariappan 2007, 111-20.



*siali* leaves (*Bauhinia vahlii*) to be used throughout the year. Flowers can be sold and bought at the market, especially by those who have difficulty finding them in their area of origin. The liquor is prepared by means of a simple distillation process. The flowers are left soaking in a clay pot for few days. This is then warmed with fire and then covered with a second pot, identical in shape, which serves as a lid and, at the same time, permits internal condensation. Over these two pots, a smaller jar may be placed, which only contains cold water to foster condensation. The distillate trickles out from a side opening in the upper jug to which is attached a piece of cane, guiding the droplets into another suitably placed container.<sup>38</sup>

But the true miracle of indigenous culture that has interested several scholars and which can be very useful for the purposes of our study in general is the knowledge of fermentation starters. In the most remote areas of Indian geography, the *ādivāsīs* pass down traditional fermentation techniques that suggest a profound cognition of the environment and in particular of its flora. This complex of notions, constituting indigenous knowledge of the forest, also includes an awareness and familiarity with a series of microbiological starters, which are not really known to science,<sup>39</sup> nor have they ever been used elsewhere. Collected and compressed into small balls, commonly known as *ranu* tablets (or *bakhar*), these are made up of approximately of one half unboiled rice flour and the other half a mixture of plants with various properties. The mystery is precisely this: the original recipe varies from area to area and each community generally believes that its own is better than the others. In some old publications, this was considered a note of folklore, but it was soon realised that both microbiological fermentation starters and medicinal plants from the indigenous pharmacopoeia were present in different proportions in the mixture.<sup>40</sup> This is why not only are informants gen-

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**38** There are further variations of the traditional alcohol production techniques among the indigenous cultures of Central India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh) including a large number of beers such as *handia*, obtained from the fermentation of rice, *paise*, from the fermentation of *rāgi*, the so called Indian millet (*Eleusine coracana*).

**39** The interdependent application of plant parts and microorganisms in food processing and preservation in the absence of modern technologies associated with the process it is something extraordinary. The level of understanding of the *ādivāsīs* behind this methodology, passed down through generations, is neither clear nor easily investigable.

**40** This method not only keeps intact the nutrition part in the food but also eliminates the use of chemical preservations in order to retain the desired aroma and flavouring of the product. On the other hand, the potential of microbes including several species of Lactic Acid Bacteria (LAB) to produce organic acids (phenyllactic acid, lactic acid, caproic acid and acetic acid), hydrogen peroxide, reuterin, bacteriocins, reutericyclin enables to create an unfavourable environment for the pathogenic microbes to grow within the food matrix (Banerjee et al. 2017). It also abolishes the unwelcome constituents such as mycotoxin and endotoxins to enrich with malto-oligomers, phenolics,

erally reluctant to reveal the contents and exact number of plants included in the *ranu* tablets, but it is practically impossible to obtain the exact proportions.

Among the species most commonly used by the tribal groups of Jharkhand and Odisha are *Asparagus racemosus*, *Cissampelos pareira* var. *hirsuta*, *Clerodendrum serratum*, *Coccinia grandis*, *Holarrhena pubescens*, *Smilax macrophylla*, *Woodfordia fruticosa* and *Rauwolfia serpentina*, etc.<sup>41</sup> Overall the botanical ingredients can be 20 or 25 depending on the season and availability in each particular location. The medicinal uses, based on the active ingredients most frequently available in the literature, are the most varied. From some barks, antihelminthic and antipyretic are obtained to treat dysentery and worms (*Holarrhena pubescens*), or gastric disorders (*Homalium nepalense*). The aforementioned *Asparagus*, known in Sanskrit as *Śatāvārī*, was already used in Ayurvedic and Unani medicine for its tonic and nutritional properties and to treat typical symptoms affecting the female reproductive system. Among the *Sapotaceae*, there are also fruits (*Xantolis tomentosa*) with antiseptic and digestive properties. The root of *Rauwolfia serpentina* is used (also by indigenous South American populations) to treat malaria and snake or scorpion bites. The seeds and leaves of the *mohua* itself are used to produce an oil for use against rheumatism and to combat diabetes. The aforementioned ‘velvetleaf’ *Cissampelos pareira* is applied as an anti-inflammatory for kidney and urinary system problems, but also against coughs and respiratory diseases.<sup>42</sup> In this way, it will be clear how the concept of *ranu* merges the principle of transformation of liquids into alcohol with the idea of a sort of panacea for all ills.<sup>43</sup>

Some studies<sup>44</sup> previously emphasised the importance of alcohol consumption among indigenous people for its social value. It is very common to see groups of men and women among the villages stopping to consume palm wine on their way back from working in the fields. The atmosphere is generally relaxed, constructive, free of taboos regarding substance, it is an occasion in which community problems are discussed. In my first book on the Saoras<sup>45</sup> I documented

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prebiotics, probiotics, antioxidants, antimicrobials and further modifies sensory qualities of the food.

<sup>41</sup> Panda, Bastia, Sahoo 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Mahalik, Singha, Parida 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Although I have not seen it personally, my informants said that cannabinoids and other intoxicants are sometimes added to increase the psychoactive effect of the product. This is attested in the ethnic recipes of the Himalayan starters, so-called *keem* and *dhelhi*, for the preparation of the alcoholic drink known as *sur/sura* (Rawat et al. 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Mahapatra 2011, 78-80.

<sup>45</sup> Beggiora 2003.

how the entire axis of negotiation and courtship between the young groom and the future wife's family was based on gifts of a vinous nature. Moreover, on market days, the sale of the product is a festive occasion. The owners of the trees position themselves at the side of the road with the palm wine in large aluminum jugs, waiting for customers. Generally the price of a glass of *salap* or *mohua* is very low, as drinking becomes an opportunity for sharing, but there are also those who buy entire jugs. This type of activity has an economic impact, so much so that it is possible to say that the simple production of wine is a supplementary subsistence activity. Certainly, the possession of one or more trees of *Caryota urens* is an asset for the family. Yet all these aspects, so incisive in everyday life, are nothing compared to the potential of the study of starters and *ranus*, which reveal intriguing implications in the medical, religious or ontological fields regarding wine production. The alchemical complexity of the ingredients coming from the jungle essentially evokes the kaleidoscopic structure of the forest itself, which in *ādivāsī* cultures is a macrocosm. The process of fermentation and transformation of wine is clearly a cosmogonic process, it evokes a sort of palingenesis and for this reason it has a sacred value.

The shaman consecrates the starters and the individual ingredients, just as he consecrates the wine before consumption. There are obvious differences in the worship and ritual gestures of each individual group, but they all reflect a certain depth and respect towards the substance and the place where it comes from. In the Himalayas, before drinking, drops of liquid are generally thrown in the direction of the forest, mountains and sacred places. Similarly in Odisha I have seen shamans sprinkling the first sip from their mouths towards the four cardinal points in honour of the spirits, or directly spitting the wine onto the fireplace as a form of ancestor worship. Conversely, alcoholism (however widespread among indigenous populations) or abusive drunkenness are necessarily seen as a failure to respect the sacredness of the substance, a careless and infamous prevalence over the inviolable sense of a certain mystery, which exposes the unfortunate to a situation of danger and imbalance. In fact, in many healing rituals the shaman identifies the accidental infringement of taboos, occurring in a state of excessive drunkenness or outside of a ritualised context, as the primary supernatural cause of accidents or illnesses.

## 5 Conclusion: Winy Ontologies

The famous cult of *gaumātā* (the holy mother cow) in Hindu India is clearly linked to the milk produced by cattle which is a universal food for humans and non-humans. In general it is a fundamental food for all beings that are born, so much so that it recalls the cosmic principle in the myth of the primordial ocean of milk that I mentioned in incipit. At the same time, in the botanical and *ādivāsī* world, the palm - as in our case study the *Caryota urens* - is equally a mother-tree. First of all, it exudes a latex that is sought after by all creatures. Spirits of the deceased, demons and divinities yearn for this inebriating liquid capable of becoming wine. To be born or reborn into this world, through the ritual act of the shaman, they are called to this libation or are excluded from it. Second, the tree itself is an *axis mundi*: the representation in the indigenous wall paintings of this element, supporting the cosmos, the structure of the villages, surmounted by animal forms (bees, peacocks, monkeys) linked to liminality or acting as a vehicle for subtle beings, is clear.

It is particularly intriguing to note that among the Saoras and the Konds of Odisha there exists the concept that each species of plant has a gendered connotation. Plants mature (germination and flowering) and have sexual relationships (pollination). They also enjoy social life, family and community connections. Such bonds are developed in parallel to those of human and nonhuman animals, and are consecrated by means of the various beverages, oozing from symbolically charged trees.<sup>46</sup> So when it is said that a tree is considered a mother plant, it truly is, just as the multiplicity of botanical species in the forest is considered to have its own agency, a sort of personhood transforming them into a people with whom relational bonds are practicable. Among the Desias of Khandamal there exists in fact the custom of adopting palm trees as members of the community, as if to emphasise the versatility of an empathetic relationship between different degrees of existence (human/non-human). So emerges a sense of collective responsibility for plant life, as trees can become part of the clan.

During the last century in India some scholars analysed the indigenous world and the related subsistence techniques, as if this were a paradigmatic observatory for understanding aspects of our prehistory. Today this approach is no longer viable because it is obviously generalising and substantially biasing towards an outdated evolutionary perspective. Nonetheless, many archaeologists today suggest how the *Sapiens*, despite belonging to different geographical locations and eras, tends to react sensitively and respond to technical

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46 Beggiora 2016, 37-54.

and existential problems in very similar ways. Even though I am not an archaeologist or a Vedic Sanskritist, I was honoured to have participated in the *Wine Culture: Gandharan Crossroads* event and to be on the board of the MALIWI<sup>47</sup> Project. I hope that my gaze between Indology and anthropology may have brought a useful reflection on the multiplicity of contemporary methodological approaches, including entheogenic theory, and on indigenous ontologies linked to the world of wine.

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<sup>47</sup> *Making Libations of Wine from Golden Cups. Social, ritual, and ceremonial use of wine in the Gandharan area, from the Achaemenids to the Kushans*, SPIN 2021, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Humanities.

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**Archaeology of Wine**  
Comparisons and Diachronies



# The Archaeology of Wine in the Southern Caucasus

## New Methods for an Old Tradition

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**Abstract** The Southern Caucasus belongs to the core area where viticulture and wine production first developed in the Neolithic period (sixth millennium BC). Since then wine occupied, and still continues to occupy, a central role in the local cultures, as part of the subsistence economy, a focus of ritualised consumption and a source of visual symbols. Archaeology provides ample material evidence of this tradition and of its continuity/development, in particular from the territory of Georgia: wine production installations, areas for storage, consumption and deposition, specialised tools and vessels, wine-related iconography, etc. The article presents a selection of the different categories of evidence and focuses on the new results obtained on the 'Archaeology of Wine' in the region through a multidisciplinary approach and with the help of bioarchaeology and 'archaeological science'.

**Keywords** Georgia. Southern Caucasus. Viticulture. Bioarchaeology. Wine culture.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Origins of Wine and Viticulture. – 3 Wine Culture in the Southern Caucasus from the Chalcolithic to the Late Second Millennium BC. – 4 From the First Millennium BC to the Late Antiquity: Wine Culture at the Crossroads Between East and West. – 5 Epilogue: A Still Living Tradition.

## 1 Introduction

The Southern Caucasus belongs to the ‘core’ area where viticulture and wine production first developed during the late Neolithic period (sixth millennium BC). It is not surprising, therefore, that the ‘Archaeology of Wine’ has recently become a popular topic of investigation in this region. In Georgia, in particular, in the course of the last 10 years, wide-scale international interdisciplinary research on the subject has been promoted, among others, by the National Wine Agency of Georgia and the Georgian National Museum under the general framework of “Research and Popularization of Georgian Grape and Wine Culture”.<sup>1</sup> This effort resulted not only in a large number of scientific publications, but also in international exhibitions, such as “Georgia. The Cradle of Viticulture” at *La cité du Vin* in Bordeaux in 2017,<sup>2</sup> and “Gold und Wein. Georgiens älteste Schätze” in Frankfurt in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

This essay offers a quick overview of this recent research by presenting a series of different case studies. Its aims are on the one side to sketch a history of wine and viticulture in the region and, on the other one, to highlight the multidisciplinary nature of the ‘Archaeology of wine’. Following the pioneering work of Patrick E. McGovern,<sup>4</sup> this has indeed developed into a complex research field which involves different sources, data and methods, and therefore requires a close collaboration between scholars belonging to very different fields: archaeologists, bioarchaeologists, historians, art historians, cultural anthropologists, experts of ‘archaeological sciences’, but also geologists, climatologists, enologists, DNA experts and specialists of other disciplines.

## 2 The Origins of Wine and Viticulture

A first, important topic of research has been the origin of viticulture and wine. In the first figure, one can appreciate a map of the Ancient Near East showing the distribution of modern wild grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* subsp. *silvestris*) [fig. 1]. Presently, the oldest evidence of winemaking in the region dates back to the pottery Neolithic period and derives from two different areas: the Southern Caucasus

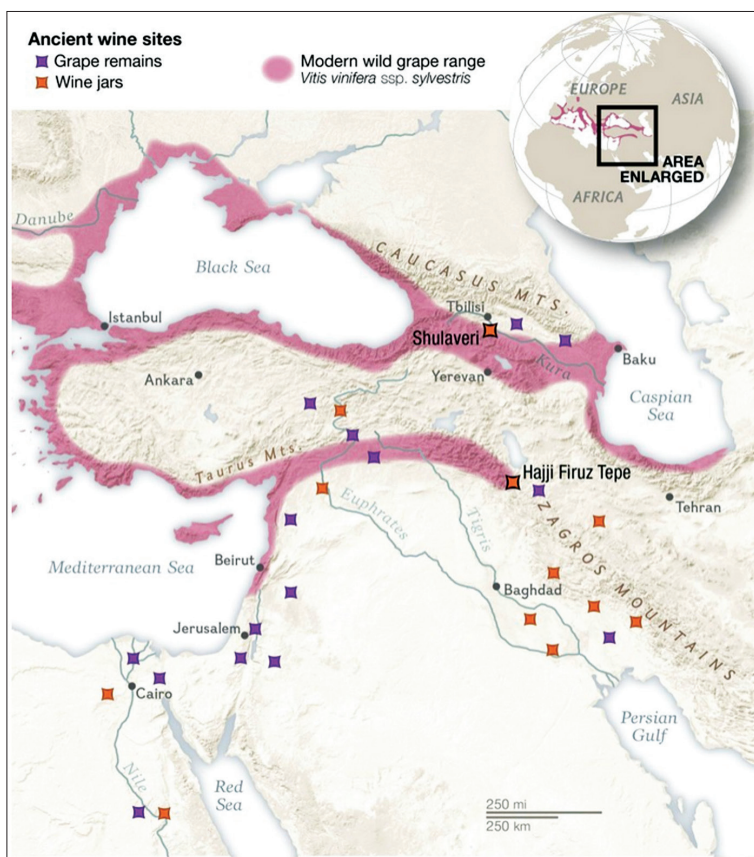
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1 Maghradze et al. 2016; 2019; McGovern et al. 2017. Part of this wider effort is, for instance, the GRAPE project, a Georgian-Canadian cooperative effort by the University of Toronto and the Georgian National Museum focusing on Neolithic sites in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia (Batiuk et al. 2017; 2019).

2 Lordkipanidze 2017.

3 Giensch, Hansen 2018.

4 McGovern 2003; 2009; McGovern, Fleming, Katz 1995.



**Figure 1** Map of the Ancient Near East showing the distribution of modern wild grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* subsp. *silvestris*) with location of sites with evidence for ancient wine and viticulture. From Salopek 2015. NG Maps, Andrew Umentum. Source: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

(different sites of the so-called Shulaveri-Shomu culture) and the Zagros Mountains of northwestern Iran (Haji Firuz Tepe).<sup>5</sup> To date, the earliest absolute dates (first half of the sixth millennium, c. 6000-5800 cal. BC) come from Georgia,<sup>6</sup> but the infusion of new data may well change the picture in the future, as it seems probable that by this time wine was already known over a relatively wide area.

Sites like Shulaveris Gora, Gadakhrili Gora and Khramis Didi Gora in Georgia yielded multiple relevant data, which will be presented in decreasing order of certainty. Conclusive evidence is provided by

<sup>5</sup> McGovern et al. 1997.

<sup>6</sup> McGovern et al. 2017.

chemical analyses of ancient organic compounds absorbed into the fabric of pottery vessels (biomolecular archaeological evidence). In fact, several sherds from these sites proved positive for tartaric acid, a clear mark for the original presence of wine by a combination of chemical techniques, including Fourier-transform infrared spectrometry (FTIR), gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS), and especially liquid chromatography linear ion trap/orbitrap mass spectrometry (LC-MS-MS).<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the presence of pollen of *Vitis vinifera* L. and of accompanying weeds was detected on samples taken from both pottery vessels and from contemporary sediments. In the case of samples from pots, a use as wine containers is suggested not only by the mere presence of grape pollen, but also by the fact that pollen grains are perfectly preserved, because alcohol inhibits the multiplication of microbes and fungi, which consequently cannot alter and destroy the pollen grains. Vine starch, microscopic cells of vine cane and hairs of fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*), which is attracted by sugar and alcohol, were also found in the same samples. Pollen grains of *Vitis* were also found on the floors of dwellings, and in all pits and storage areas, suggesting that vineyards were present in the close neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup>

Clear paleobotanical evidence for the domestic variety of wine, on the contrary, is still missing. In fact, for instance, some fossilised pips allegedly collected from domestic contexts at Dangreuli Gora, another Georgian site of the Shulaveri Shomu culture in Georgia, which based on their morphological and ampelographical properties had been attributed to the cultivated variety of grapevine (*Vitis vinifera sativa* Linnei),<sup>9</sup> after being submitted to radiometric dating turned out to be of modern date and therefore intrusive, whereas the morphology of single pips from contemporary settlements in Azerbaijan is still uncertain.<sup>10</sup> This opens up the possibility that in this period wine was made from wild grapes, a practice which was still relatively widespread in recent times.<sup>11</sup>

Another promising line of research, which is still in its beginning and whose results are still very preliminary, is DNA analysis of ancient grape seeds and plant remains from Georgia and the Southern Caucasus, to evaluate them against modern wild and domesticated European

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<sup>7</sup> McGovern et al. 2017, E10311-E10315.

<sup>8</sup> Kvavadze, Jalabadze, Shakulashvili 2010; McGovern et al. 2017, E10315.

<sup>9</sup> Rusishvili 2010, 12-15.

<sup>10</sup> McGovern et al. 2017, E10315; Bouby et al. 2020. Indeed, much caution is needed when analysing isolated seeds from archaeological contexts, as these can easily be transported by rodents and other animals and therefore move from one layer to other.

<sup>11</sup> Chkhartishvili, Maghradze 2012; Maghradze et al. 2019; Maghradze et al. 2021; Bouby et al. 2020.



**Figure 2** Vessel from Khramis Didi Gora with decoration possibly depicting grape clusters.  
From McGovern et al. 2017, fig. 2A

varieties and establish their taxonomic relationships, in order to reconstruct more precisely the process of grape domestication and the subsequent spreading of its cultivation around the Mediterranean basin.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, it was also possible to mobilise additional data which, in spite of providing less certain evidence, can help integrating the general picture of the origins of wine. It may be observed, for instance, that the vessels which residue and palynological analysis proved to have contained wine are closed vessels, usually of hole-mouth shape. It may then be supposed that other vessels of the same shape were also used for the same purpose (morphotypological evidence). It has also been supposed that some decorations, like the one on a famous vessel from Khramis Didi Gora [fig. 2], featuring groups of dots in relief, which are common on Shulaveri Shomu closed vessels, represent

<sup>12</sup> Maghradze et al. 2016, 3-4, 6-7; Maghradze et al. 2019, 3, 6-7; Bouby et al. 2020.

stylised grape bunches<sup>13</sup> and that this and other contemporary iconography may show that grapes and wine were already imbued, like in all following periods, with a deep symbolic meaning.<sup>14</sup>

### **3 Wine Culture in the Southern Caucasus from the Chalcolithic to the Late Second Millennium BC**

Once created, the tradition of wine-making firmly established itself in the region during the following periods, probably helped by the particularly favourable climatic conditions created by the mild climate of the so-called 'Holocene climatic optimum' when, for instance, the total surface, in Georgia, of land where viticulture can be successfully practised reached a maximum, allowing cultivation at higher altitudes than in present days.<sup>15</sup>

During the following Chalcolithic period (c. 5000-3500 BC) direct evidence from Georgia is scanty, but it is compensated by an exceptional discovery from the neighbouring country, Armenia, more precisely from Areni-1, one of a complex of caves in the province of Vayots Dzor.<sup>16</sup> Here, the lower Chalcolithic level, which is <sup>14</sup>C dated between 4223 and 3790 cal BC, yielded an installation consisting of a shallow clay basin with raised edges, the centre of which was occupied by the mouth of a large jar, surrounded by large storage jars [fig. 3]. This has been interpreted as a grape crushing basin, where grapes would have been pressed on the plastered surface of the basin with the juice flowing into the mouth of the jar in the centre of the installation, where it was left to ferment, while secondary fermentation may have taken place in the neighbouring jars. Desiccated grapes, grape seeds (apparently of an intermediary form between wild and domestic) and skins still attached to pedicels, and grape rachises (stems) were also found in close proximity. Chemical evidence by LC-MS-MS proved the presence of tartaric acid/tartrate and of the red pigment malvidin, also typical, although not exclusively, of red wine, as it is for instance found also in pomegranate juice.<sup>17</sup> Wine production at the site may have been associated with ritual activities, as shown by the presence, in the same excavation trench, of three burials of human heads, clearly severed after death from the body, each in spherical receptacles made of unbaked clay.<sup>18</sup>

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**13** McGovern et al. 2017, E10312.

**14** See, for instance, Lordkipanidze 2017, 30.

**15** Maghradze et al. 2016, 7-8, figs 4-7.

**16** Areshian et al. 2011; Areshian et al. 2012; Wilkinson et al. 2012.

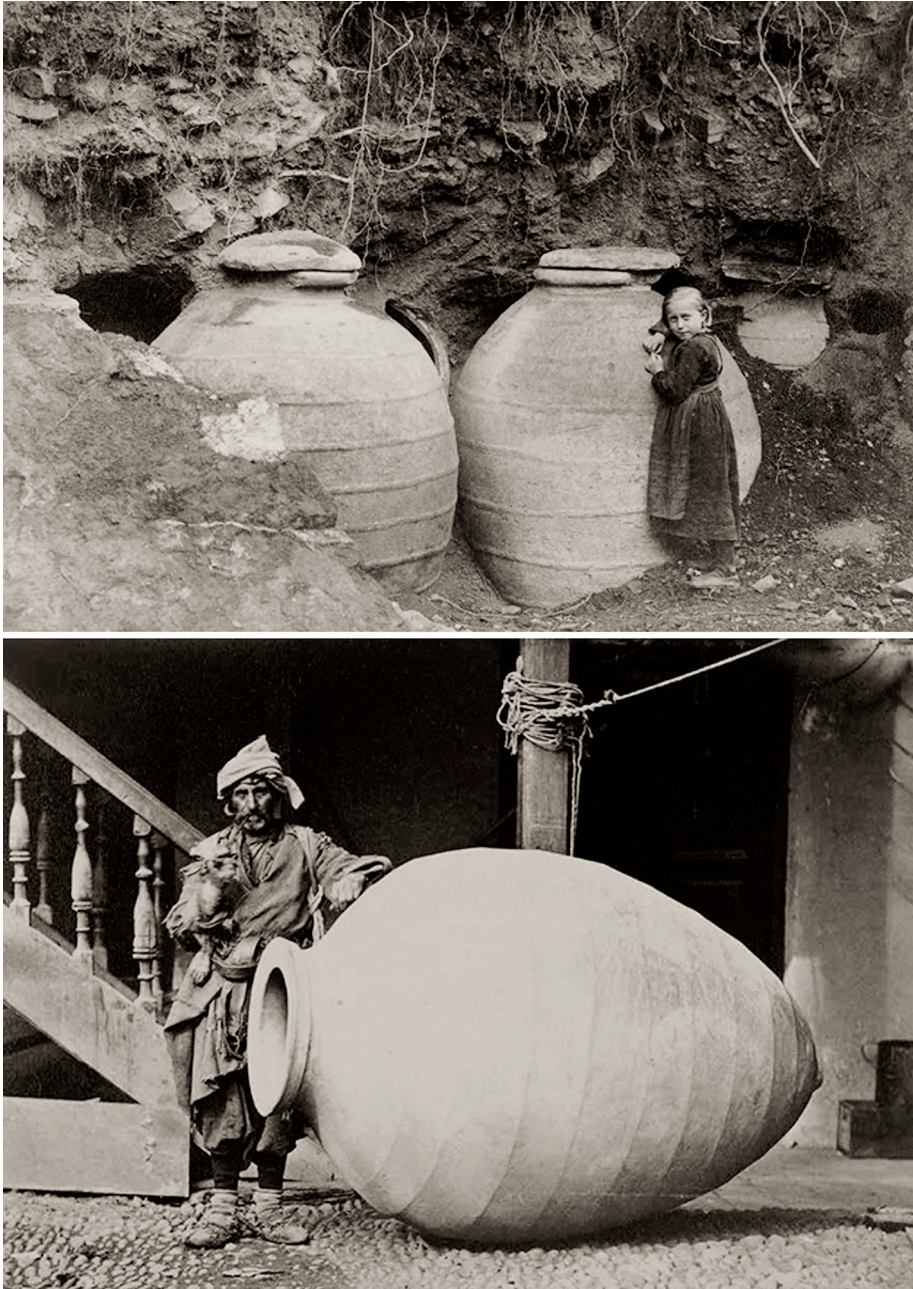
**17** Barnard et al. 2011.

**18** Areshian et al. 2012; Wilkinson et al. 2012.





**Figure 3** View (above) and plan (below) of the Chalcolithic grape-pressing installation and associated burials in Trench A at Areni-1 (Armenia). From Areshian et al. 2012, fig. 7; Wilkinson et al. 2012, fig. 3B



**Figure 4** Nineteenth century AD photos by Dimitri Ermankov (1846 – 1916) of Georgian *qvevris*.  
From Lordkipanidze 2017, 12; 76

Wine fermentation in large underground jars, of which we may have here one of the first examples, was a common practice, by the first millennium BC, all over the Near East and throughout the Mediterranean. Since then, it has continued in Georgia, where this process of wine making in so-called *qvevris* has been preserved in its original form up to the present day and has accordingly been listed in the UNESCO's representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [fig. 4]. Wine-making in *qvevris* was connected with religious beliefs through cult and ritual practices: until recently, for instance, there was a special *qvevri* (the so-called 'qvevri for communion wine') in the wine cellar of every wine-making villager in Georgia, which was used for keeping the wine to be consumed during the festival of the patron saint of the village (or region). If the family moved from the village, it had to leave this *qvevri* at the local sanctuary. Even today in Kakheti such *qvevris* are found in many old village churches.<sup>19</sup>

Even in the absence of unequivocal evidence of residues of wine on pottery vessels,<sup>20</sup> much data suggests that the practice of viticulture was widespread in the Southern Caucasus by the Early Bronze Age (late fourth/third millennium BC). For instance, pollen of *Vitis vinifera* and plants associated with vineyards are commonly found in palynological samples from archaeological contexts of this period.<sup>21</sup> It has even been suggested by Stephen Batiuk<sup>22</sup> that wine culture was an important element in the identity of the bearers of the Kura-Araxes culture, a cultural complex of south-Caucasian origin which by the beginning of the third millennium BC occupied vast areas at the northern periphery of Syro-Mesopotamia, as would be shown, among others, by the fact that the limits of the distribution of the culture roughly follow those of the habitat of wild grape vine.

Be that as it may, the ritual use of wine by the Kura-Araxes population has been confirmed by a recent discovery of the GISKAP project of Ca' Foscari University of Venice in collaboration with the Georgian National Museum at Aradeti Orgora in the Shida Kartli region of Eastern Georgia.<sup>23</sup> A step trench on the eastern side of the mound brought to the light a densely packed 4m-high sequence of Kura-Araxes layers with 6 different phases, <sup>14</sup>C-dated to the thirty-first-twenty-ninth centuries BC. The fourth of these levels yielded part of a

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**19** Barisashvili 2011.

**20** This absence is clearly a consequence of the fact that residue analysis has been applied, until now, almost exclusively to Neolithic vessels.

**21** Kvavadze, Martkoplshvili, Chichinadze 2020.

**22** Batiuk 2005; 2013.

**23** Kvavadze et al. 2019; see also Gagoshidze, Rova 2018.



**Figure 5** Zoomorphic vessels from Aradeti Orgora (Kura-Araxes period): context of recovery (above); photos (centre left); pollen grains of *Vitis vinifera* (centre right); pollen diagram of the vessels' content (nos 1-3) and of modern wine vessels (below). From Kvavadze et al. 2019, figs 4, 3a, 3c, 7, 6

probable Kura-Araxes shrine, on the burnt floor of which were found the remains of three different vessels: a large jar and two zoomorphic pots in the shape of water-birds, still bearing traces of painted decoration [fig. 5].

The latter were clearly not everyday vessels, but special containers used in ritual ceremonies, such as libations or convivial drinking. Palynological analysis of samples taken from the sediments preserved inside the zoomorphic vessels highlighted the presence, in both of them,<sup>24</sup> not only of numerous pollen grains of common grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*), but also of pollen from vineyard weeds and plants - e.g. walnut and hazelnut - which are usually grown close to the vineyards. Among non-pollen palynomorphs, the samples contained large amounts of vine starch, *Vitis* epidermis and hairs of the tiny *Drosophila* flies, which typically fly around grapes and wine during the first stage of its production, and easily fall into the large vessels where wine is usually placed. The same combination was also found on samples from modern home-made wine, as well as from archaeological vessels of different periods (e.g. of Medieval date) which had contained wine. It can therefore be concluded that both vessels must have originally contained wine.

Finally, pollen of grapevines were found not only in the two zoomorphic vessels, but also in all other sediment samples of the Kura-Araxes period collected within the settlement of Aradetis Orgora and the contemporary cemetery of Doghlauri. This indicates that viticulture was widespread in this period in the Shida Kartli region of Georgia, and that it played a significant cultural role for the Kura-Araxes people.<sup>25</sup>

Following a different line of reasoning, the two vessels from Aradetis Orgora, which are presently unparalleled in the Kura-Araxes culture, may represent the prototypes of a tradition of zoomorphic vessels for alcoholic beverages (mainly but not only wine), which in the course of the third millennium BC spread through Northern Anatolia - along what we called 'the Northern Corridor' - to the Aegean coast, where it probably merged with different indigenous traditions, giving rise there to the first *rhyta*.<sup>26</sup> The local tradition of zoomorphic vessels continued in the Anatolian region in the second millennium BC with the so-called *BIBRU* vessels of the Hittite period.<sup>27</sup>

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**24** The jar, on the contrary, mainly contained pollen of cereals and other non pollen palynomorphs suggesting that it originally contained grains, although pollen grains of *Vitis vinifera* were also present (Kvavadze et al. 2019, 508).

**25** For further contemporary palynological evidence from other Georgian sites, see also Kvavadze, Martkoplshvili, Chichinadze 2020.

**26** Dall'Armellina, Rova 2019. The vessels from Aradetis are not true *rhyta*, as they have in fact only one opening.

**27** Dall'Armellina, Rova 2019, 145-6.



**Figure 6**  
Wine canes wrapped in silver foil from Bedeni Kurgan no. 12  
(second half of the 3rd millennium BC).  
From Lordkipanidze 2017, 61

By the third millennium BC wine was known and appreciated all over the whole Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean. In the Syro-Mesopotamian area, however, it remained for a long time an exotic product reserved for elite consumption, while beer maintained its pre-eminence as traditional local alcoholic beverage. On the opposite, in the northern regions of the Near East, wine production and the ritual importance of wine continued to represent distinctive local features.<sup>28</sup>

For the Southern Caucasus in particular, this is now confirmed by multiple types of archaeological data. Funerary evidence is especially conspicuous: thus, in the burial goods of the monumental barrow graves (kurgans) of the later third and earlier second millennium BC (Bedeni and Trialeti cultures) we find not only sets of elaborate drinking vessels in ceramics and precious metals, but also heavily symbolic items, such as the vine canes wrapped in silver foil found in a Bedeni kurgan [fig. 6], probably meant as a symbol of rebirth and eternal life.<sup>29</sup> The symbolic value of communal drinking is also emphasised by the elaborate decoration of a famous goblet from one of the Trialeti kurgans and by its analogous form from Karashamb in Armenia, both of which re-adapt old Mesopotamian banqueting scenes.<sup>30</sup>

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**28** For Anatolia in particular, see Corti 2017; 2018.

**29** As already remarked above (fn. 20), the absence of results from residue analyses is a consequence of the fact that methods of biomolecular archaeology have up till now rarely been applied to samples of these periods. On the other hand, palynological analyses are now available for several sites attributed to the Early Kurgan cultures (Martqopi and Bedeni, second half of the third millennium BC) (Kvavadze 2016; Kvavadze, Martkoplshvili, Chichinadze 2020, 141-63).

**30** Boehmer, Kossack 2000.



**Figure 7** Statuette of *tamada*, seventh-sixth cent. BC (left) and detail of silver belt showing banqueting scene, second half of fourth century BC (right), from Vani, Georgia. From Lordkipanidze 2017, 42

#### 4 From the First Millennium BC to the Late Antiquity: Wine Culture at the Crossroads Between East and West

Over time evidence for the production, use and symbolic value of wine in the country becomes more and more abundant, especially from the Late Bronze Age onwards, and it culminates in the first millennium BC, when it really becomes ubiquitous.<sup>31</sup> By this period, morphologically domestic vine pips are attested by paleobotanical analysis.<sup>32</sup> However, the wild type is still frequent, although there is no doubt that vine was cultivated since millennia in the country. DNA analysis of the pips shows a wide diversity of varieties, whose precise meaning is still under investigation, but well corresponds to the diversity of species attested in present-day Georgia.<sup>33</sup>

The production of specialised vessels for wine consumption continues and in fact intensifies in the first millennium BC. In Eastern Georgia, during the first half of the millennium, for instance, one may mention some animal-shaped vessels from Treli Gorebi with clear analogies with items from the Talysh area of Azerbaijan and north-western Iran, which may suggest contacts along the eastern side of the above mentioned 'Northern Corridor'.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Lordkipanidze 2017.

<sup>32</sup> McGovern et al. 2017; Maghradze et al. 2016; 2019; Bouby et al. 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Maghradze et al. 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Dall'Armellina, Rova 2019, 146.

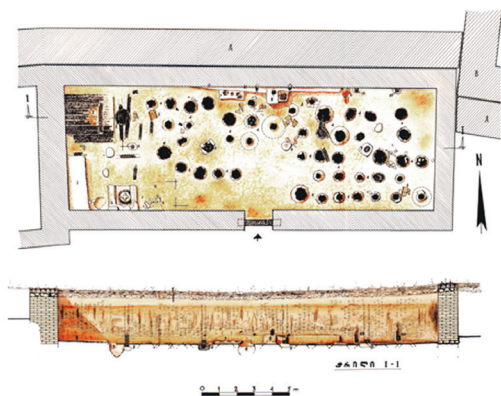


**Figure 8** Examples of ceramic and metal vessels for pouring and drinking wine: ceramic vessels in local and Achaemenid style from Takhtidziri, fourth-third century BC, kingdom of Caucasian Iberia (above); metal vessel in Achaemenid style from Akhlagori (kingdom of Caucasian Iberia) and silver *rhyton* from Mtsidsiri (Colchis). From Gagoshidze 2020, 254; 208, 202; Knauss 2006, figs 1, 3

In Western Georgia, on the other hand, the famous site of Vani provides ample evidence for drinking vessels of different materials and sets of them and of their evolution in the course of time. Iconographic evidence is also remarkable: the bronze figurine [fig. 7 left] for instance, depicts a man holding a drinking horn of a type still used in traditional Georgian banquets (so-called *supra*) and therefore known as *tamada* (banquet leader).<sup>35</sup> Over time, in this part of Georgia lo-

**35** On the Georgian tradition of *supra*, cf. Harvey, Jordania 2014; Lordkipanidze 2017. Some intriguing representations of traditional Georgian banquets can be found in the work of the famous painter Niko Piroshvili (1862-1918).





**Figure 9** Tsikhiagora (fourth-third century BC): plan and section of the *marani* (left) and reconstruction of painted *qvevri* (right). From Makharadze, Kalandadze, Sakhvadze 2023, pl. 15; Lordkipanidze 2017, 56 (Artistic installation: Lina Lopez, Production: Vakhtang Khoshtaria)

cal traditions coexist with, are influenced by, or finally substituted by western (Greek) influences [fig. 7 right] as well as, especially during the Achaemenid period, by eastern (Iranian) ones.

The same mixture of local and foreign (in this case prevailing eastern) elements characterises Eastern Georgia in the Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid/Hellenistic period. The kingdom of Caucasian Iberia is characterised by a profusion of ceramic vessels of different shapes for pouring and drinking wine [fig. 8 above], and especially of drinking vessels in precious metal in pure ‘achaemenid style’ [fig. 8 below left]. Especially noticeable is also the presence in Georgia during the Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid periods of zoomorphic *rhyta* and drinking horns in precious metals [fig. 8 below right].

Later in the first millennium there is also remarkable evidence for wine-production and storage facilities. One example is the *marani* (sacred wine cellar) attached to a temple complex of the fourth-third century at Tsikhiagora. It contained a large wooden grape press and 48 *qvevris* with red decorations, each with a capacity of about 600 litres [fig. 9]. More than 6 kg of grape pips were also recovered from it, as well as remains of cut vine canes inside a jar.<sup>36</sup>

By the first centuries of the first millennium AD the territory of Georgia is perfectly integrated in a common ‘wine culture’, which stretches from the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia and

<sup>36</sup> Makharadze, Kalandadze, Sakhvadze 2023, 58-61.

expresses itself through an Hellenised visual language. Wine, for instance, appears prominently as a source of visual symbols and as an object of ritualised consumption in the well-known Dionysian banquet depicted in the famous mosaic of Dzalisa [fig. 10].

## 5 Epilogue: A Still Living Tradition

The advent of Christianity did not represent a break in the land's 'culture of wine'. Wine consumption not only continued (as it still continues) to play a prominent role in profane occasions, but also in sacred ceremonies. Grapevine, grapes and wine became imbued with novel symbolic values connected with the new religion. Suffice it to mention the cross of St. Nino (the Cappadocian woman who according to the tradition introduced Christianity in Georgia), which is made of vine canes held together with strands of hair from the Saint herself, or the ubiquitous reference to vine, vine branches and grapes in the decoration of local churches [fig. 11 left]. This tradition continued even in the Soviet period on profane monuments [fig. 11 right] and it is still alive, as it now meets the post-Soviet reorganisation of wine production, dissemination and commercialisation and the promotion of wine tourism in the country.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Harvey, Jordania 2014; Lordkipanidze 2017; Maghradze et al. 2016.



**Figure 10** Detail of the mosaic from Dzalisa (third century AD) with Dionysian banquet. Lordkipanidze 2017, 54-5

**Figure 11** Detail of the decoration of the church of the Ananuri fortress, seventeenth century AD (left); detail of terracotta relief decorating a Soviet public building (the "Green market") in Kutaisi (right). (Photos by the author)

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# **An Assyrian Winery in Khinis, Ancient Khanusa (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)**

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**Abstract** Wine production and consumption played an important role in the imperial Assyrian court, as attested by both written and iconographic sources. However, archaeological data concerning wine production in the empire's heartland were lacking up to now. Since 2021, a project of the University of Udine in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has been investigating a large wine production area in the hinterland of the last two capitals of the Assyrian Empire: Khorsabad and Nineveh. The site, consisting of eighteen wine presses, is located in the immediate vicinity of Tell Khinis (Assyrian Khanusa) and close to the monumental, celebratory Khinis Archaeological Complex. Here a massive irrigation canal was built by King Sennacherib in the early seventh century BC and commemorated through the carving of impressive rock-reliefs and cuneiform inscriptions. The investigation results not only show the intensive agricultural exploitation of the area and the presence of a winery at the site during the Neo-Assyrian period, but also emphasise the *longue durée* exploitation of an agricultural landscape that was possibly also devoted to vine cultivation later, from the Early Islamic period onwards.

**Keywords** Assyria. Wine Presses. Wine Production. Mesopotamia. Islamic period. Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Wine in Assyria. – 3 The *Wine for the Empire* Project. – 4 The Khinis Wine Production Area. – 5 Conclusions.

## 1 Introduction\*

This essay presents the first wine production area ever identified in the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia, modern Iraq. This unique site is located in the hinterland of the last two capitals of the Assyrian Empire (Khorsabad and Nineveh), in the immediate vicinity of the site of Khinis, a large monumental complex that represents one of the most extraordinary landscape sanctuaries and commemorative sites of ancient Assyria.

The Assyrian Empire is considered the first world empire in human history.<sup>1</sup> Assyria originated from the city state of Ashur at the beginning of the second millennium BC and transformed into a large territorial state around the fourteenth century, to eventually become a vast empire in the ninth century BC. At its maximum expansion in the eighth-seventh centuries, the Assyrian Empire ruled over the entire Mesopotamia, parts of Anatolia and modern Iran, and the Levant and even Egypt, to the West [fig. 1]. The empire collapsed in 612 BC with the fall of the capital Nineveh to a military coalition led by the Babylonians and the Medes.

The Khinis Wine Production Area is located in the piedmont landscape that characterises the foothills of the Zagros Mountains at the northern edge of the Navkur Plain. This is considered one of the most fertile plains east of the River Tigris and served as the breadbasket of the Assyrian capitals of Khorsabad and Nineveh.<sup>2</sup>

Until the recent discovery of the Khinis Wine Production Area, there had been a lack of archaeological data regarding wine production in the heartland of the empire. What we know about the role of wine production – and especially consumption – in the Assyrian

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1 Frahm 2023; Düring 2020; Bedford 2009.

2 Morandi Bonacossi 2018.





Figure 1 Map of the Assyrian Empire with the location of Khinis. Map: F. Simi

Empire comes from the textual sources, the Assyrian palace reliefs and the material culture mainly belonging to elite contexts discovered during the excavations carried out in the Assyrian capitals.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Wine in Assyria

In ancient Assyria, wine played an important role in various social, political, and religious events. It was used as a symbol of rank and status,<sup>4</sup> and was closely linked with the expression of royal authority.<sup>5</sup> The consumption, storage, and distribution of wine are well-documented by both written<sup>6</sup> and iconographic<sup>7</sup> sources.

<sup>3</sup> Fales 1994; Powell 2005; Stronach 2005; McGovern 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Ermidoro 2015, 204, 207; Stronach 2005, 183.

<sup>5</sup> Stronach 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Kinnier Wilson 1972; Fales 1994; Powell 2005; Ermidoro 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Collins 2018, fig. 56; Portuese 2020, 59; Stronach 2005; Watanabe 1992.



**Figure 2** Relief showing Ashurnasirpal II enthroned and with a drinking bowl in his right hand. From the North-West Palace at Khalku, Iraq, 865-860 BC. Now at the British Museum. Photo credit: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

From the time of Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 BC), the small carinated (or round) drinking bowl (like that shown in the reliefs) became a symbol of power, prosperity and abundance [fig. 2].<sup>8</sup>

In the palace reliefs, wine seems to be often present when the king takes part in a ritual activity, such as for instance the ceremonial bull hunts. However, wine was also consumed on other occasions, such as festivals and special events like that described, for instance, on the so-called Banquet Stele<sup>9</sup> found in the reception suite of Ashurnasirpal II's royal palace at Kalkhu. In the cuneiform inscription of this stele, Ashurnasirpal describes the incredible amount of wine, beer, and food served to almost 70,000 state guests on the occasion of the inauguration of his new palace at Kalkhu in 864 BC.

<sup>8</sup> Stronach 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Wiseman 1952.

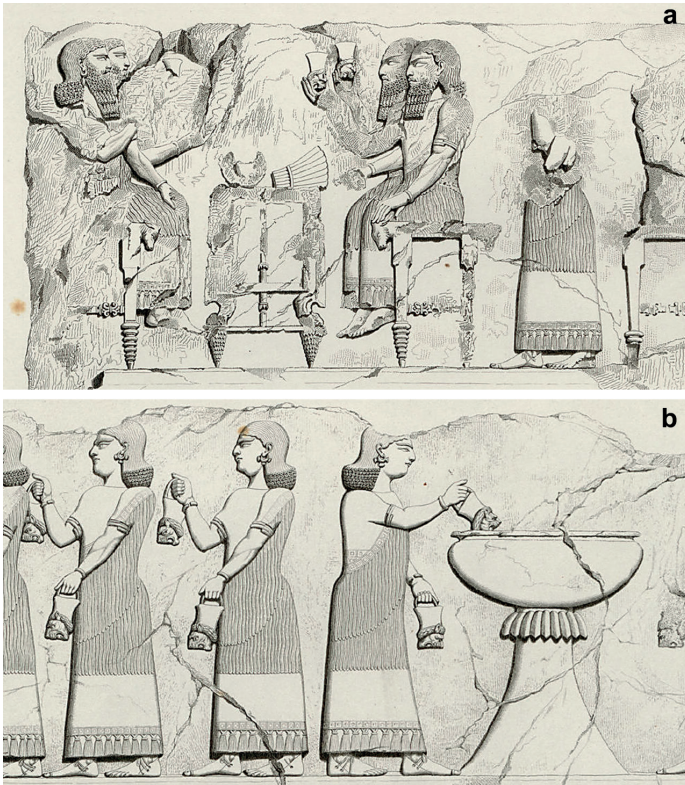


Figure 3 Drawings of palace reliefs from Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad. From Botta 1849 (Public Domain)

In the following centuries wine consumption seems not to have been restricted to the king, but extended also to include the imperial elite, represented by the officials of the Assyrian court.<sup>10</sup> Wall reliefs from the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II (721-705 BC) at Khorsabad depict small groups of officials and their staff drinking wine from lion-headed rhyta and celebrating in convivial fashion [fig. 3a]. The reliefs also show lion-headed situlae being dipped into large wine cauldrons by beardless attendants [fig. 3b]. These drinking vessels and cauldrons are almost identical to finds from the Assyrian capital cities and the Great Tumulus at Gordion<sup>11</sup> dating to the same period (end of the eighth century).

<sup>10</sup> Powell 2005, 121.

<sup>11</sup> McGovern 2000.

As mentioned above, wine was not only drunk, but also (and at the same time) poured to offer libations in various ceremonial and ritual activities, as known from textual sources<sup>12</sup> as well as from palace art, e.g. a relief depicting King Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) pouring wine on the dead bodies of four ceremonially hunted lions [fig. 4]. Wine was also offered to gods in temples on special occasions,<sup>13</sup> as attested by a text from Ashurbanipal's Library in Nineveh that describes how two four-litre jars of wine (from Helbon in Lebanon and Izalla in Turkey) and six eight-litre jars of different types of beer are offered by the queen of Assyria in the temple of Ashur in the city of Ashur at a festival dedicated to Mullissu.<sup>14</sup>

The consumption of wine is also represented in a famous scene of King Ashurbanipal and his queen, Liballi-sharrat, depicted under overarching vines in a lush garden [fig. 5]. The type of drinking bowl held by the queen in her raised hand is well attested in the archaeological record. An almost identical gold carinated bowl with vertical ridges was found together with many other wine consumption vessels in the Queens' Tombs of Nimrud.<sup>15</sup> More in general, the carinated bowls depicted in the Assyrian reliefs (with their highly symbolic value) are in fact known from many archaeological sites throughout the Near East.<sup>16</sup>

In the Nimrud Wine Lists,<sup>17</sup> a group of c. 60 tablets dating to the eighth century BC that document the distribution of wine rations in the capital city, the queen is the most important recipient of wine<sup>18</sup> in all the lists - which record the individuals (from court officials to musicians and the kitchen staff)<sup>19</sup> who were entitled to get wine rations.

Notwithstanding the significant role played by wine production and consumption at the imperial Assyrian court, as attested both by written and iconographic sources, archaeological data concerning wine production in the empire's heartland had not previously been found. The Nimrud Wine Lists are also important because they mentioned two winemaking regions possibly not too far from Assyria's heartland: Yaluna and Zamua.<sup>20</sup> Yaluna<sup>21</sup> in particular is interesting

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12 Powell 2005; Stronach 2005; McGovern 2019.

13 Ermidoro 2015, 124.

14 Fales, Postgate 1992, no. 184.

15 Hussein 2016.

16 Stronach 2005.

17 Kinnier Wilson 1972; Dalley, Postgate 1984, 22-5 and nos. 119-49; Fales 1994.

18 Kinnier Wilson 1972, 44.

19 Stronach 2005, 185.

20 Stronach 2005, 186.

21 According to Bagg (2017, 269-70), located in the Upper Khabur area.



**Figure 4** Relief showing Ashurbanipal pouring wine (?) on the bodies of hunted lions, North Palace Nineveh. Now at the British Museum. Photo credit: Slices of Light ,CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED, via Flickr

because according to some proposals it may also be tentatively located east of Nineveh in the direction of Aqreh (corresponding to our research area).<sup>22</sup>

Regarding grape cultivation, some partial data come also from the ‘Harran Census’ dated to the reign of Sargon II, which records a census of estates and agricultural resources in the region of the upper River Balikh where tens of thousands of vines are listed.<sup>23</sup>

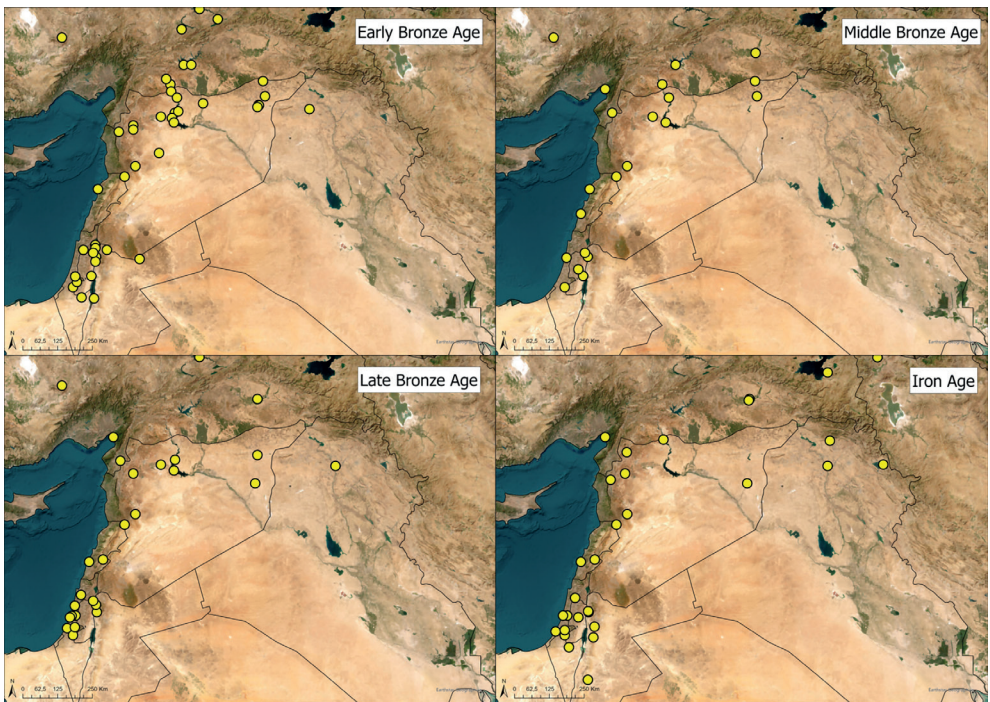
In all ancient Mesopotamia, wine presses (Assyrian or otherwise) had never been recorded before; to date, the scanty archaeobotanical data attesting the presence of *Vitis vinifera* (from proto-historical times to the modern era) include only c. 30 archaeological sites [fig. 6].<sup>24</sup>

For these reasons, the identification and excavation of the Khinis Wine Production Area represent an extremely important step forward in our understanding of wine production in Assyria and – more in general – in ancient Mesopotamia.

<sup>22</sup> Kinnier Wilson 1972, 111, fn. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Johns 1901, 21; Fales 1973.

<sup>24</sup> ADEMNES 2015.



**Figure 5** Relief of the Banquet of Ashurbanipal from Nineveh. Now at the British Museum (photo credit: Allan Gluck, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

**Figure 6** Archaeological sites with archaeobotanical evidence of *Vitis vinifera*, third to first mill. BC. Data retrieved from ADEMNES 2015

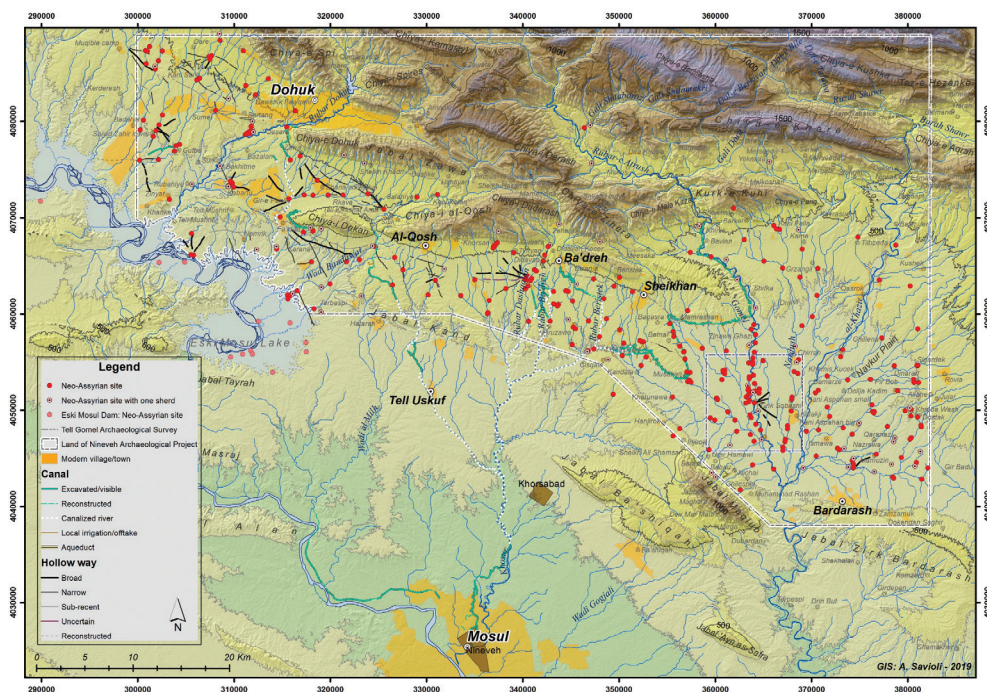


Figure 7 Location of the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project survey area and distribution of the archaeological sites discovered in the 2012-2022 survey campaigns. © LoNAP

### 3 The Wine for the Empire Project

The *Wine for the Empire* project stems from the wider Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (LoNAP) of the University of Udine.<sup>25</sup> LoNAP aims at investigating, using a multidisciplinary approach, the hinterland of the ancient Assyrian capitals of Nineveh and Khorsabad in the modern Governorate of Duhok,<sup>26</sup> Kurdistan Region of Iraq [fig. 7]. Since 2012, the project has been conducting a regional archaeological surface survey in order to investigate the settlement patterns and land use of the aforementioned territory, thus involving also the study of water management and use in this very fertile region of Northern Iraq.<sup>27</sup> The multidisciplinary project has also focused on

<sup>25</sup> Morandi Bonacossi, Iamoni 2015; Morandi Bonacossi 2018a; 2018b; 2018c.

<sup>26</sup> Morandi Bonacossi, Iamoni 2015, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Morandi Bonacossi 2018b, 87.

the monumental irrigation network built by King Sennacherib in the early seventh century BC to irrigate what is considered the breadbasket of Assyria and to bring water to its capital, Nineveh.<sup>28</sup>

The Khinis Archaeological Complex belongs to this large irrigation network, and comprises a series of celebratory rock reliefs and monuments located in a symbolically and ideologically important location, where the 'Khinis Canal' starts, fed by the diversion of water from the River Gomel [fig. 8].

In this fertile and symbolically charged landscape, the LoNAP team brought to light a cluster of eighteen rock-hewn structures, identified as wine presses. They thus constituted a wine production area, which is located less than 500 m west of the monumental complex of Khinis and less than 100 m north of the small archaeological site of Tell Khinis, identified with the ancient Assyrian village of Khanusa [fig. 9].

The *Wine for the Empire* project is based on an archaeological excavation of the wine presses identified by the LoNAP team, a targeted intensive survey of the nearby site of Tell Khinis and a comprehensive reconnaissance of the hillside region surrounding the installations.<sup>29</sup>

The project was initiated with multiple aims, including the interpretation of the structures as wine presses, their chronology, and the identification of grape cultivation evidence in this area of the Zagros foothills. The project was carried out following a multidisciplinary research method combining archaeology (excavation and survey), archaeobotany (analysis of plant remains), geoarchaeology (collection of soil samples and geomorphological survey of the hillside surrounding the Wine Production Area), <sup>14</sup>C date determinations and organic residue analysis of rock samples from the wine presses.

The present contribution presents the preliminary results of this still ongoing research.

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**28** Morandi Bonacossi 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; Morandi Bonacossi, Qasim 2022.

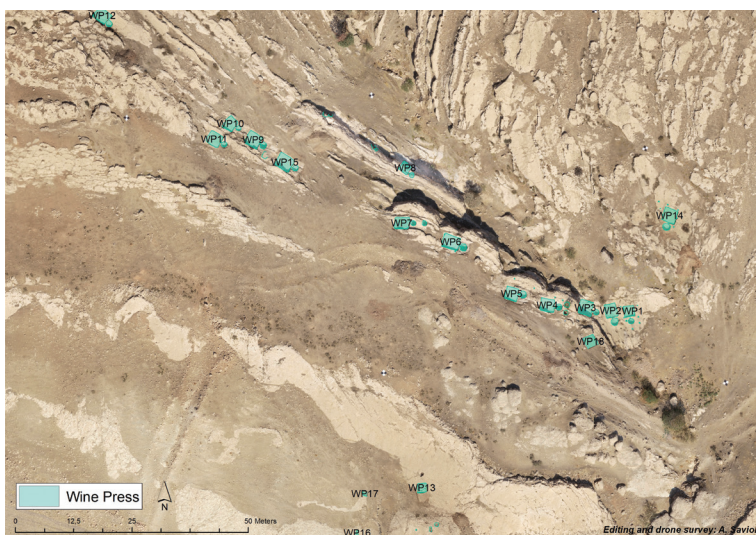
**29** The project benefited from the multidisciplinary collaboration of archaeologists, archaeobotanists and geomorphologists, with the support of local workers from the nearby village of Khinis. For further details, see "Acknowledgements".





**Figure 8** The Khinis Archaeological Complex, Duhok Governorate (Kurdistan Region of Iraq). In the centre, the Khinis cliff with the “Large Panel” and four of the twelve rock-cut niches sculpted with the image of Sennacherib under divine symbols. In the lower right, the “Sculpted Monolith” (which has partly slid into the river) that marked the canal head. Photo: F. Simi. © LoNAP

**Figure 9** Processed satellite image showing the location of the Wine Production Area, Tell Khinis and the Khinis Monumental Complex. Source: Esri



**Figure 10** Drone photo showing the location of the wine presses in the Wine Production Area. Photo: A. Savioli © LoNAP

#### 4 The Khinis Wine Production Area

The Khinis Wine Production Area features a total of eighteen wine presses [fig. 10]. In the 2021 field season, four out of the eighteen installations were excavated and/or cleared of the debris filling them in order to bring the structures back to light. During the last fieldwork campaign of the *Wine for the Empire* project, which took place in September 2022, eleven wine presses were excavated, while three more were detected in the survey and have not yet been investigated.

The wine presses were hewn from the mountain limestone bedrock. Each structure comprises three elements: a rectangular treading basin, a smaller, sunken circular or sub-circular vat, and a connecting channel linking the two structures [fig. 11].

The rectangular treading basin has a short side from 2.10 to 3.50 m long and a long side ranging between 2.05 and 3.70 m. The diameter of the circular vats ranges between 1 and 1.30 m. The preserved depth of both installations varies depending on the erosion of the mountain's surface.

At the present state of research, the Khinis wine presses represent a unique discovery in Mesopotamia. However, their layout resembles that of similar structures that were used elsewhere for the production of wine. This specific press type is known from excavations in

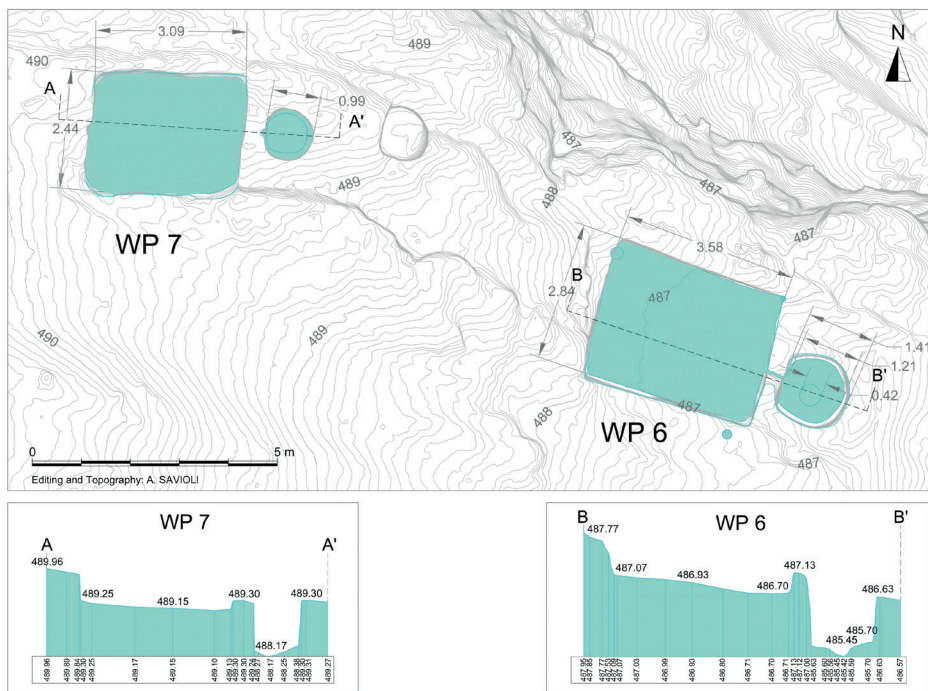


Figure 11 Plan and section of wine presses 6 and 7. © LoNAP

the Levant and also from iconographic sources.<sup>30</sup> Those at sites on the Lebanese coast - such as Tell Burak, in Israel - such as Tell Ta'anek and Neshar-Ramla, in Jordan and in the Syrian Orontes Valley near Apamea show the same layout of the structures, although not all of them are hewn from the bedrock.<sup>31</sup>

Thanks to these comparisons, stages in wine production have been reconstructed based on the aforementioned similarities. In the first stage, grapes were trodden in the rectangular treading basin; in the second stage, the must remaining in the grape skins was pressed out; thanks to the slightly sloping floor of the basin, the liquid could easily flow through the connecting channel into the circular vat. In the third stage, the grape must was left in the circular vat for the first part of the fermentation process.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Avrutis 2015; Guasch-Jané, Fonseca, Ibrahim 2013; Orsingher et al. 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Frankel, Gadot, Bachi 2009; Herzog 1989; Hirschfeld 1983; Lapp 1969; Orsingher et al. 2020; Stager, Master, Schloen 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Frankel, Gadot, Bachi 2009, 77.



**Figure 12** Wine presses located uphill on the mountain and at the bottom of the wadi (in the red frame).  
Photo: M. Cusin. © LoNAP

The wine presses at Khinis are generally quite well-preserved, though their locations on the hill slope have determined their different states of preservation: they have in fact been eroded to different degrees by the water running down from the hill slope and the wadi. Wine presses 1 and 2, located at the bottom of the wadi running from the mountain, are very well preserved, as are also the wine presses hewn in the limestone uphill on the mountain [fig. 12]. Much poorer is the state of preservation of the two wine presses numbers 12 and 8, which are heavily eroded due to their locations on the mountain slope and in the wadi, respectively.

The wine presses' chronology has been defined by combining different sets of data coming from the contexts in which they were hewn, the results of their excavation, and the survey of the area surrounding them. The zone around the wine presses, which was investigated for an area of 5 km<sup>2</sup>, contained few potsherds; however, the few sherds collected from the surrounding area date to the Neo-Assyrian period. This result is also mirrored by the ceramics recovered from the intensive survey of the nearby site of Tell Khinis, where the Neo-Assyrian period is that most represented. Furthermore, the pottery collected from the fills of the wine presses shows that the Neo-Assyrian and Islamic periods are the most represented epochs. In terms of quantity, the Islamic period pottery is more attested than ceramics dating to the Neo-Assyrian period [chart 1]. However, given that the Islamic era covers a very long span of time (seventh to twentieth century), the Neo-Assyrian period appears to be very well represented in the ceramic assemblages from the wine presses.

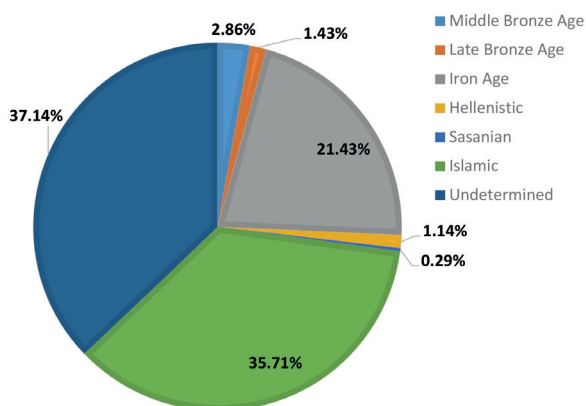


Chart 1 Percentages by period of the pottery found in the wine press fills

Assemblages reflecting the Neo-Assyrian pottery tradition - hammer-head bowls, carinated bowls, banded-rim jars - were found in wine presses 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15 [fig. 13].<sup>33</sup> These types were spread all over the territory of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in particular in its core region and in the northern Iraqi Tigris valley and plains. The archaeological evidence collected indicates that the Khinis winery was first established in the Neo-Assyrian period.

The existence of an Islamic period phase of use of the Khinis Wine Production Area points to the *longue durée* use of these structures, whether in their primary function as wine presses or reused for other subsistence activities. The latter hypothesis is suggested by the evidence provided by archaeobotanical remains. Their analysis shows the presence in the upper deposits of both the rectangular basins and the circular vats of ashy soil and carbonised plant remains, represented by cereals and wild taxa. This evidence, combined with the recovery of Islamic pottery fragments from the fills of the presses, indicates that the structures were possibly reused for other purposes (cereal processing), although the simultaneous continuation of the use of the area for wine production is also possible. A further important result from archaeobotanical analysis is the presence of

<sup>33</sup> The chronology of the Neo-Assyrian ceramic assemblage is confirmed by comparisons with the sites of Ashur (Haller 1954), Nimrud (Lines 1954), Nineveh (Lumsden 1999), Khirbat Hatara (Negro 1997), Khirbet Khatuniyeh (Curtis, Green 1997), Khirbet Qasrij (Curtis 1989).

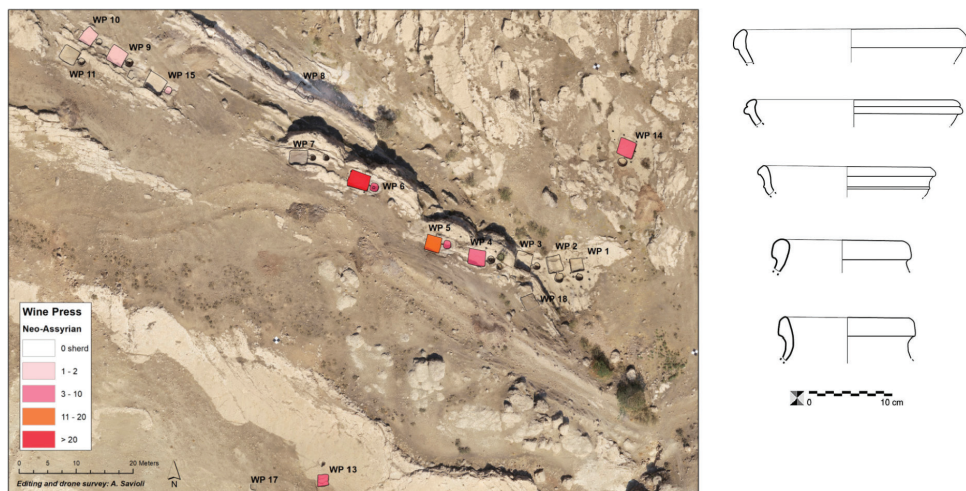


Figure 13 Wine presses in which Neo-Assyrian pottery is attested; on the right, the main Neo-Assyrian ceramic types. © LoNAP

*Vitis vinifera* in the fills of the wine presses: the presence of grapes in the area is demonstrated by the discovery of grape pips and pedicels, and fruit skins from the lower deposits, in both the rectangular treading basins and the circular vats.

To obtain a more complete picture of the Khinis Wine Production Area, based not only on archaeology and archaeobotany, other analyses are still being carried out. The survey of the area surrounding the wine presses and the soil sampling conducted by our geoarchaeology team are aimed at furnishing data about the productivity potential of the terraces adjoining the Khinis Wine Press Area in terms of grape cultivation. To identify possible biomarkers of grapevine products, especially tartaric and malic acids, chemical organic residue analysis will be conducted. To this aim, rock samples were collected at different spots of the treading basins, circular vats and connecting channels of each wine press. They are currently being analysed by means of gas chromatography and mass spectrometry<sup>34</sup> in the laboratory of the Equip de Recerca Arqueològica i Arqueomètrica of the University of Barcelona.

34 Barnard et al. 2011; Olcese, Razza, Surace 2020, 41; Pecci et al. 2013.

## 5 Conclusions

The Khinis Wine Production Area represents a unique and massive concentration of wine presses in a site associated with the Khinis canal intake structures built in the early seventh century BC by Sennacherib - and commemorated by cuneiform inscriptions celebrating the construction of this regional irrigation system and impressive rock reliefs depicting the king in front of the main Assyrian deities. The dating of the wine presses' construction phase to the Neo-Assyrian period has allowed us to identify the first grape processing and wine-making area ever discovered in Assyria and - broadly speaking - in ancient Mesopotamia, and to shed light for the first time on the archaeology of wine production in pre-classical West Asia. The 'industrial' character of the Khinis winery with its 18 wine presses well fits into the wider scenario of grapevine cultivation in the Iron Age Near East.<sup>35</sup> Cuneiform sources and the scanty archaeobotanical evidence available show during the Iron Age a vigorous increase in *Vitis vinifera* cultivation in comparison to the Middle and Late Bronze Age,<sup>36</sup> pointing to a marked expansion of grape cultivation and wine production in first millennium BC Northern Mesopotamia, which was probably stimulated by the growing demand for this royal and elite beverage in the Assyrian court and the peripheral imperial administration.

The archaeological evidence collected from the Khinis Wine Production Area also indicates that the wine presses had been reused during the Islamic period, in particular in the Early and Late Islamic phases. During the centuries of the early Caliphates and the Ottoman Empire the region was inhabited by numerous Christian communities that still populate the region. Clear evidence of their presence is provided by the archaeological record, as well as by Syriac textual sources.<sup>37</sup> The latter give us information on grape cultivation and wine production, which must have been so abundant that wine was integrated into the Mosul region Abbasid taxation system, as reported by the tenth century geographer Ibn Hawqal.<sup>38</sup>

The Khinis Assyrian and Islamic wineries show that the roots of the present-day winemaking by the Christian Assyrian and Chaldean communities living in the region between Southeastern Turkey and Northern Iraq are much deeper than hitherto imagined and go back to the time of the Assyrian Empire and its royal and elite wine production and consumptions.

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<sup>35</sup> Amit, Yezerski 2001; Orsingher et al. 2020; Castellano 2021.

<sup>36</sup> ADEMNES 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Book of the Governors of Thomas of Marga: Wood 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy 2016, 233.

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# **Wine in Achaemenid Arachosia**

## **An Imperial Network of Regional Wines**

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**Abstract** This essay investigates the possible beginnings of viticulture in Arachosia, an Achaemenid satrapy in the southeastern end of the empire. It explores the idea of how in creating a consistent Achaemenid administrative system across the empire, new regional centres had to rapidly adopt practices that soon evolved to become the standard. One such practice was the use of wine for social, economic, and religious reasons as attested by various Achaemenid administrative texts from around the empire. I argue that it is within this context that we should understand the initiation or scaling up of viticulture around the empire including, and especially in, Arachosia. Arguably, the integration of Arachosia into the imperial network transforms the region into a holistic vinicultural landscape as seen through a shift in ceramics, the presence of certain building types, increased investment in irrigation at the site of Old Kandahar and also, most importantly, the mention of Arachosian wine in administrative texts.

**Keywords** Ancient wine. Viticulture. Vitiiculture. Arachosia. Achaemenid. Afghanistan. Iranian Plateau.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Assessing Arachosia’s Land: The Agricultural Potential for Viticulture and Vitiiculture. – 3 For the King’s Table: Viticulture in Achaemenid Networks. – 4 Drinking Cups in Arachosia: The Imperial and the Local. – 5 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

The sixth to fifth century BC reliefs from the eastern stairs of the Apadana at Persepolis, depict a procession of the various peoples of the Achaemenid empire bringing tribute to King Darius I [fig. 1]. Among the tribute bearers are the Arachosians (from today's Kandahar province, Afghanistan) conspicuously holding not one but two types of drinking vessels: two horizontally fluted phialai and two horizontally fluted beakers.<sup>1</sup> Much has been said about the tribute reliefs of Persepolis, and yet the appearance of the Arachosians and, more importantly, what they offer as tribute remains virtually unexplored. Such an investigation forces us to rethink the complex relationship between what is offered and who is doing the offering. The drinking cup is widely regarded in Near Eastern scholarship as a signifier of royal authority and of the consumption of wine.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, in the case of Achaemenid Arachosia, it is therefore reasonable to ask whether there was an association between Arachosia and wine and, for the purposes of this essay, whether that association is reflected in the archaeological and art historical record of the Achaemenid period.

To date, an investigation into wine culture in Arachosia and its surrounding areas (what can be regarded generally as the eastern end of the Iranian Plateau), and more specifically Achaemenid Arachosia, has not been undertaken.<sup>3</sup> As I argue elsewhere, by the time of the Arsacids (third century BC to third century AD), the Iranian Plateau appears to contain two distinct self-sufficient wine producing sub-regional networks.<sup>4</sup> The first was centred in Mesopotamia, including north Syria, and comprised a more long-standing network of viniculture; the second in Central Asia and, by extension, included north-eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Both networks were regionally motivated systems with strong links forged between local sites, thus transcending imperial borders and control, through the shared enterprise of and investment into a wine economy. In the case of the Mesopotamian and north Syrian network, overland and waterway routes persisted from the third-millennium BC onwards where

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1 While identifications of the delegations are uncertain, I believe that we can make reasonable identifications through a visual cross-comparison with the study of similar groups of people in monumental Achaemenid art and inscriptions. A great number of interpretations have been made as to the identities of the delegations and have been tabulated by Gropp 2009, Table 1, 293.

2 Stronach 1996, 183. Previous scholarship has focused largely on how the reliefs may allow a better idea of the origin or production of metal toreutics and vessels. Muscarella has summarised the topic: Muscarella 1988.

3 The present essay is developed from a portion of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, which investigates at a larger scale the ancient wine culture of the Iranian plateau.

4 Johal forthcoming.



**Figure 1** Tribute bearer relief. Lower register of the Apadana stairway, Persepolis, Iran. Arachosian delegation (?). Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago

wine was moved, repackaged, and shipped from the northern areas of the Upper Euphrates, where *vitis vinifera* thrived in the wild, to the southern plains and low-land Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> The presence of ‘torpedo jars’ of Mesopotamian origin of the first to third centuries AD to sites along the Persian Gulf and to as far away as India can be understood as the eventual transformation of the network into one inclusive of long-distance trade of the wine of this region.<sup>6</sup> On the other side of the Zagros mountains, the Central Asian network is more difficult to identify. Chinese sources<sup>7</sup> make it clear that by the time of the Arsacid empire, the wine of many regions (particularly Sogdiana and Parthia) became of interest to Han China, indicating the existence of a production network that not only produced for local consumption but also for markets beyond the Arsacid empire.

**5** For more on where Mesopotamia imported its wine from see McGovern 2003, 160-4.

**6** For ‘torpedo’ or ‘ovoid’ jars see: Tomber 2007; Durand 2021.

**7** Sima Qian *Shiji* 123.

In my effort to tease out the structure of the Central Asian sub-regional wine network, I will demonstrate how the evidence from our most well-excavated site in Arachosia and the most representative of Achaemenid rule, Old Kandahar, indicates the beginnings of this network initiated under the Achaemenids. Old Kandahar was an extensive urban site at the foot of a precipitous ridge with a large citadel mound, urban fortifications, and an extramural necropolis. The site is important for its unparalleled status in Afghanistan in terms of a lengthy history of archaeological activity, yet we must be mindful of its dominating and potentially over-representative position in the archaeological record and of the reality that it may not speak for the region as a whole. As Pierfrancesco Callieri has noted, it is often “difficult to define a material culture that can be said to represent the Persian Empire in the face of the great strength of local Iron Age traditions” and, if we move towards the eastern end of the empire, the “material manifestation of an imperial presence becomes even more difficult to discern”.<sup>8</sup> While such a statement may be correct when considering monumental art, there are aspects where we certainly can trace an overlap between imperial and local interests. Viniculture is one such activity where an intersection can be discerned. It is imperative, then, that we attempt to differentiate and define Arachosia as a site of wine production and consumption. There is a well-established history of scholarship on the topic of Persian eating and drinking practices pieced together through the discussion of ‘Persian luxury’ in the Greek and Roman literary tradition.<sup>9</sup> It must be noted, however, that for an understanding of Achaemenid wine consumption and production, classical documentary sources do not offer the regional specificity left to us in the archaeological record and, on their own, the sources do not afford us a point of view from the Achaemenid world itself. It is therefore important to discuss the material culture in relation to the literary sources, especially since Arachosia did not take up a lot of space in the Greek and Roman literary tradition.<sup>10</sup> And so, I will first assess Arachosia’s palaeoenvironmental conditions and agricultural potential for viticultural endeavour and viticultural productivity. Although the lack of palaeoenvironmental work in Afghanistan poses limitations on any real comparison between ancient and modern climate and landscape,<sup>11</sup> consistent settlement patterns in

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**8** Callieri 2023, 844.

**9** At times the discussion is related to extant Achaemenid metal tableware. See for example: Dahlén 2020; Daryaee 2012; Briant 2002, 286-92; Hobden 2013; Lenfant 2007; Simpson 2005; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995.

**10** There is mention of Arachosian wine in Strab. 11.10. This will be discussed in the last section.

**11** Bowlby, White 2019, 18-23.

the alluvial terraces of the water courses in the otherwise arid area of southern Afghanistan, from the Bronze Age to today, indicate that the area was chosen in ancient times for the same reasons as today, for its agricultural potential through the exploitation of water sources.<sup>12</sup> I will then explore Arachosia's role as an administrative centre within both the Achaemenid imperial network (macro-level) and the regional system of exchange (micro-level) through the use of administrative texts and literary sources as well as ceramic data and the built environment so as to delineate the networks within which the production and use of Arachosian wine arose.

## 2 Assessing Arachosia's Land: The Agricultural Potential for Viniculture and Viticulture

Ancient Arachosia generally coincides with the modern day Kandahar province of Afghanistan and is watered by the Helmand, Arghandab, Tarnak, and Arghastan rivers [fig. 2]. The area is situated within an alluvial cone formed by the confluence of the Arghandab river and its tributary Tarnak, and so the Arghandab valley forms the centre of what we consider ancient Arachosia. As Kandahar province's climate is semi-arid, it is not in an optimal rainfall area for viticulture<sup>13</sup> but its position amid an extensive river system allows for the development of irrigation infrastructure to enable the successful cultivation of grapevines. Located just south of Afghanistan's central mountains, the Kandahar province forms a sort of foothill oasis with the Registan desert just to the south. As the soil of the Arghandab valley has low to medium salinity and low serozem, it makes the area especially favourable for viticulture.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, given both the optimal soil type and the valley's position amid river systems, Kandahar province forms one of the most active viticultural areas in modern Afghanistan. Today, farmlands and vineyards are largely irrigated with underground or surface level canals (*juis* and *kāriz* or *qanat* irrigation systems).<sup>15</sup> While grapes are traditionally grown along the ground in a 'bush' structure (*juj* system), there has also been an introduction of training the vine on T-bars.<sup>16</sup>

It is not only the environmental factors of Kandahar, such as the irrigation potential or soil type, that allude to ancient Arachosia's position as a potential site of grape cultivation and wine production;

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<sup>12</sup> Petrie, Shaffer 2019, 162-3.

<sup>13</sup> Bowlby, White 2019, 18-23 (fig. 1.3).

<sup>14</sup> Arab, Ahamed 2022, 6, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Bowlby, White 2019, 38-43.

<sup>16</sup> Khasrow 2015, 2.



**Figure 2** Map showing Arachosia and its surrounding regions indicating key regions and sites: 1. Kandahar 2. Persepolis 3. Toprak-kala 4. Susa 5. Malyan 6. Shahr-i Sokhta 7. Mehrgarh 8. Manjukly Depe 9. Mundigak 10. Dingildzhe. Google basemap. Paula Gheorghide

wild *vitis vinifera* (ssp. *sylvestris*) and *vitis jacquemontii* are known in parts of Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the current archaeobotanical and palaeobotanical record for the eastern Iranian Plateau indicate early grape exploitation in the general area by the Bronze Age.<sup>18</sup> As it stands, the data includes: grape seeds from the fourth millennium BC site of Malyan (Fars, Iran; ancient Anshan), and from the third millennium BC Shahr-i Sokhta (Sistan and Baluchestan, Iran),<sup>19</sup> as well as third millennium BC charred grapevine wood from Mehrgarh in Pakistan,<sup>20</sup> and even earlier grapevine wood, from the fifth

<sup>17</sup> Abdullaf et al. 2021, 8: 19; Riaz et al. 2020, 4: Table 1; Riaz et al. 2013, 3-4; Table 1. The majority of the UC Davis repository for *vitis vinifera* was collected by Harold P. Olmo during a Central Asian germplasm acquisition trip in 1948 and published in A. Riaz et al. 2020 and Riaz et al. 2013. However, it should be noted that Olmo does not provide exact locations aside from country of origin. Even so, Olmo's collection at UC Davis is invaluable for the study of *vitis* varieties for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran and for allowing a general agreement that wild *vitis vinifera* ssp. *sylvestris* is present in Afghanistan.

<sup>18</sup> As pointed out by Dodd 2022, 445-7: It is difficult to detect the differences between exploitation, cultivation, and domestication of grapevine solely through archaeobotanical and palaeobotanical data. As Dodd states "the use of grape and vine are many, and it is difficult to determine a clear relationship between early cultivation, if it occurred, and winemaking".

<sup>19</sup> Constantini, Costantini-Biasini 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Thiébault 1989.



millennium BC at Monjukly Depe in Turkmenistan.<sup>21</sup> However, as many have argued before, it is likely that foraging, exploitation of the wild grapevine, and fermentation of grape juice occurred prior to their cultivation in these areas and we can imagine a similar case in the eastern Iranian Plateau.

Even though by the third-millennium BC the areas surrounding Arachosia were unmistakably exploiting and consuming grapes, the byproducts of which may or may not have included the production of wine or a fermented grape derived product, there is a lack of archaeobotanical evidence from ancient Arachosia itself. The scarcity of information is due to numerous reasons, at the forefront of which is Afghanistan's political instability and the consequent hindrance of academic and archaeological inquiry.<sup>22</sup> However, given the link between the rise of arboriculture and urban expansion further north in Transoxiana, it is likely that the Bronze Age sites of Arachosia, such as Mundigak, may also yield archaeobotanical evidence in the future.<sup>23</sup> At present, however, the existence and extent of viticulture and viticulture in Arachosia prior to the Achaemenids (sixth to fourth centuries BC) remains unclear. While it is conceivable that viticulture was active or that wine was produced and consumed on a small scale in Bronze Age Arachosia, the evidence illustrates that under the Achaemenids, at the very latest, viticulture is scaled up and integrated into an imperial and regional network.

### 3 For the King's Table: Viticulture in Achaemenid Networks

Taking a fortified rural manor east of the Oxus at the site of Dingildzhe as his example, Michele Minardi demonstrates how the earliest evidence for viticulture in ancient Chorasmia occurs under Achaemenid administration of the area around the fifth century BC.<sup>24</sup> The administrative texts from Toprak-kala, a palatial site of Chorasmia, frequently mention wine likely produced in the surrounding landscape to which the Dingildzhe manor belonged and is verified, in

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<sup>21</sup> Chen et al. 2022, 2 (fig. 1).

<sup>22</sup> There is the irrecoverable impact on academic research in the region due to the loss of a considerable portion of the Kabul museum's collection and records. Archaeological evidence shows wine production around the third millennium BC site of Goldin Tepe in the central Zagros mountains, for more on which see: McGovern 2003, 40-63.

<sup>23</sup> Chen et al. 2022. The evidence from Transoxiana seems to show the tandem development of urban centres and grapevine cultivation. On the link between the development of urban centres and the rise in viti- and viticulture see: Fuller, Stevens 2019, 263-82.

<sup>24</sup> Minardi 2016 (fig. 2).

Minardi's view, by the presence of grape pips found at the manor itself.<sup>25</sup> Archaeobotanical evidence aside, Minardi's argument for the introduction of viticulture in Chorasmia, therefore, rests on the indications of imperial activities including the presence of administrative texts from Toprak-kala and the Achaemenid practice of central canalisation and fortification works, but also the existence of carinated bowls that are often understood as developing through Achaemenid influence.<sup>26</sup> What is left to be understood is whether the co-occurrence of viticulture and Achaemenid administration in an area is, in fact, more intimately related. The driving question is why the Achaemenid administration should be interested in agronomic output that could potentially yield wine and here I offer some potential answers. At the imperial level, the intensification of viticulture in various parts of the empire could be contextualised within the larger framework of Achaemenid empire formation, the role that viticulture played within the imperial networks and in the area's integration into that system, both socio-culturally and economically.

Planting vineyards or initiating viticulture in areas should be considered as an Achaemenid activity integral to empire formation, suggested by Chorasmia and also our best-attested case from Persis (Fars Province, Iran; [fig. 2]).<sup>27</sup> In the establishment and maintenance of the main palatial Achaemenid city of Persepolis in Persis we see a clear example of the co-occurrence of Achaemenid administration, irrigation works, and viticulture. Like Chorasmia, it is under the Achaemenids that there is an intensification of irrigation projects in the Persian heartland, reflected in the pollen samples taken from Lake Maharlou and Lake Parishan which signal vegetal changes likely brought on under the Achaemenids.<sup>28</sup> Over-reliance on palynology should be cautioned against as *vitis* is generally underrepresented in pollen samples<sup>29</sup> but, as Morteza Djamali has argued, the *vitis* detected is considerable enough to indicate viticulture in the

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**25** Livshits 1984, 257, 262; Minardi 2016, 283-4. Minardi 2016, 282: twentieth century surveys of the area around the manor seemingly revealed what the excavators termed 'vineyards' with related canals for irrigation.

**26** Minardi 2016, 283-4. For more on the continuity and strong stylistic parallels of carinated bowls across the empire, but particularly with western Iranian ceramics see: Dussinberre 1999, 76-8.

**27** Not to mention 'Chalybonian wine' which was supposedly a product of the introduction of viticulture in Syria by the Achaemenid Kings and a wine that only the King was allowed to consume: Strab. 15.3.22; Ath. *Deipnosophistae* 1.51; Posidonius FGrHist 68.

**28** Djamali et al. 2009, 131; Djamali, Andam, Poschlos 2021, 128 (plate 11, fig. 2). The two irrigation works in the Persepolis area that have been assigned to the Achaemenid Period include Band-e Dukhtar and Bard Burideh II. See Sumner 1986, 13-17.

**29** Brown, Meadows, Turner 2024, 127-8.

Maharlou and Parishan regions during the Achaemenid period.<sup>30</sup> The pollen data is corroborated by the *Persian Fortification Tablets (PFT; 509-494 BC)*, where the impact of irrigation works and the scaling up of viticulture is clearly outlined in economic, social, and political terms. Because the *PFT* elucidate a complex and organised network of food, at the centre of which lie the districts on the route between Persepolis and Susa, we know for certain that vineyards from around Persepolis were producing wine that, for example, was rationed to the King and his family but also disbursed to other figures such as priests, craftsmen, couriers, or diplomats.<sup>31</sup> The most obvious rationale for the incorporation of viticulture in imperial networks is that it formed an integral component in the key Achaemenid activity of drinking and feasting, which was then replicated by satraps and local elites. However, as the *PFT* indicates, this was likely not the only reason, even if it is the reason which conferred wine its high status. Rather, a unified imperial administration system should also be considered as a primary reason for the position of wine in Achaemenid society. Briant, Henkelman, and Jacobs have all stressed the importance of continuity across the empire and the rapid introduction of administrative practices from the heartland into regional centres, including the organisation of travel along “royal roads”.<sup>32</sup> We can imagine that the upkeep of efficient travel along roads relied on easily transferable and predetermined administrative mechanisms and obligations. This is what is revealed through Nakthor’s travel to Egypt where the document he carried from Aršāma, satrap of Egypt, was valid beyond the jurisdiction of the next province with a secure supply of food for the entirety of his journey (*TADE A6.9*).<sup>33</sup> As Jacobs and Briant have discussed, the document Nakthor carried was probably similar to the numerous sealed documents mentioned in the *PFT* and showcases an empire-wide ‘administration coordination’ through consistent terminology (‘travel provision’ or ‘rations’).<sup>34</sup> Such consistency was vital for allowing mobility within

**30** Djmalali, Ghavi, Poschlos 2021, 129; Henkelman 2021, 140. Brown, Meadows, Turner 2024, 128: it should be noted that a *vitis* pollen count over approximately 0.1 percent would reflect a vineyard close to the sampling site; Djmalali, Ghavi, Poschlos 2021, 301 (plate 11, fig. 2). Pollen samples show an occurrence of <3% *vitis* pollen for the Achaemenid period at Maharlou.

**31** See for example, *PF 1565*; Strab. 15.3.1: Strabo also describes Persepolis as a land with vineyards; For more on Wine in Achaemenid Fars see: Balatti 2021, 169-91.

**32** Briant 2010, 43; Henkelman 2011, 578-9; Jacobs 2021, 847. Briant 2002, 448; Stark 2021, 699.

**33** *TADE A6.9* in Taylor 2020, 34-5. In this case the provisions seemingly are allocated from Aršāma’s own estates but uses the same administrative language seen across the empire.

**34** Jacobs 2021, 842; Briant 2009, 149. Jacobs 2021, 842: “The folding and sealing of the documents, the provision of an address and sometimes a summary of the content,

the empire (for soldiers, craftsmen, messengers, and others) and fostered cohesion and stability.<sup>35</sup> The insight we gain through the available administrative documents is of an effective system consisting of administrative sections that produce unified documents across the empire.<sup>36</sup> We see this document uniformity in the transference of heartland administration to the regional context of Arachosia through the presence of Elamite tablets in Old Kandahar. As Fisher and Stolper as well as Amélie Kuhrt have discussed, the tablets hint at the managing of a regional centre in an Achaemenid manner with similar operations and institutions.<sup>37</sup> With the emphasis on administrative continuity, the Elamite tablets in their similarity to the *PFT* in form and function allow us to imagine that in many ways Persepolis, as an Achaemenid foundation itself, could act as a model of what requirements went into the establishment and functioning of a new Achaemenid administrative centre.

Persepolis's administrative texts (the *PFT*) allow insight into imperial network formation and in particular confirm how accessibility to wine for various operational reasons was a key requirement in the establishment and functioning of an administrative centre. Operational requirements could range from social (consumption by the King's or Satrap's court), economic (disbursement or payment of wine or as ration to travellers or workers) and religious (as offerings to temples).<sup>38</sup> Wine, in service of key imperial functions, is quite clearly an important commodity under the jurisdiction of the satrap.<sup>39</sup> As such, in the Achaemenid world, we should imagine wine as a regional commodity produced, moved, and stored on parts of the 'royal road' that were within a given administrative sector, especially provided that the documents available for the Achaemenid world are mainly concerned with regional commodities drawn from local vineyards and farms. We could suppose, as the reliefs from Persepolis, along with Greek and Roman sources, indicate, that these regional wines

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and even the form of salutation are all similar".

**35** Jacobs 2021, 842.

**36** Folmer 2017.

**37** Fisher, Stolper 2015, 2; Kuhrt 2007, 815. Stolper, Fisher 2015, 2: 9-10 (fig. 5); 21-2: It is undeniable that the recovery of the tablets from Old Kandahar show that "the Elamite language and script were used in administrative recordings across the entire breadth of Achaemenid Iran, from Susa to Arachosia; that they imply that administrative practices and institutions comparable to those documented by the Persepolis archives were also installed in Achaemenid Afghanistan". The Elamite tablets from Old Kandahar are assigned to the category of V ('journals') or W ('accounts') according to Hallock's (1969) typology developed for the *PFT*.

**38** A sampling of examples from the *PFT*: for social: *PF* 728-9, *PF* 732; for economic: *PF* 1137, *PF* 1548-67; for religious: *PFT* 753-4.

**39** Pseudo-Arist. *Oec.* 2.2.38: "[Alexander] ordered the satraps to fill, according to the custom of the country, the storehouses located along the Royal Roads".

made their way to the King's table on the occasion of tribute.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps we should shift our perspective on what the "empire feeding the King's table" could mean. A locally produced wine operating within a regional portion of the royal roads towards social, economic and political ends, under the administration of the satrap would be in service of the stability and efficiency of the macro level network that did indeed feed the King and his empire, metaphorically and literally. Given such an administrative system, where wine was a necessary commodity in key administrative operations across the empire, we should imagine that the search for active or promising viticultural lands would be a royal or satrapal concern.

Xenophon,<sup>41</sup> one of the most informed sources on the Achaemenid Empire, shares similar themes which should give us pause. He writes: "The Persian King has vintners scouring every land to find some drink that will tickle his palate". While undoubtedly a moral comment on taste and therefore inherently about wine for the purposes of drinking and feasting, what Xenophon does is imply that an imperial sanctioned search for viticultural areas was not outside of a King's purview and that such a search could instigate imperial redirection of resources and manpower. Xenophon's choice of words is purposefully topographical. The combined use of 'μαστεύοντες' ('searching') and 'περιέρχονται' ('go all around') makes the reader imagine the type of expansive road network - beyond the 'royal roads' - suggested above. As Jacobs and Henkelman have noted, the movement of resources and people in the areas mentioned in the *PFT* "suggest a dense local road network", with many ancillary roads that connect to the main ones. Xenophon's statement also suggests a concentration of knowledge and decision-making power in the official position of "vintners".<sup>42</sup> That such a position existed speaks to the importance of wine in the Achaemenid world. Xenophon's statement is significant for a number of reasons: It echoes the local archaeology of Persis,

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**40** Ael. *VH* 1.31; Ath. 9.393c: all areas of the empire were expected to send provisions for royal meals; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.6.13; Ath. 1.28d, 2.45a-b, 12.529d, 14.652b-c; Strab. 15.3.22: List of provisions include items from India to Egypt. See also Estates and 'Paradises' established in satrapies towards the maintenance of local and royal courts as seen in the *PFT* and Plin. *NH* 6.143. For more on these topics: Tuplin 1996, 80-131; Jacobs 2010, 377-410; Henkelman 2010, 686: As Henckleman comments, the Persepolis administrators themselves considered the "King's table as an institution".

**41** Xen. *Ages.* 9.3.

**42** Henkelman, Jacobs 2021, 725. Equally important is the high official in charge of the production of wine. See Briant 2002, 425-6: From the *PFT* it is clear that "production was organised into five departments: livestock, grain, wine (and beer), fruit, and fowl". Each area had a similar bureaucracy to the one in Persepolis; The *PFT*, Greek sources, and the Old Testament also provide titles of other positions related to both the banquet and the production and supply of wine as discussed in Balatti 2021, 177-9. See also the discussion of Achaemenid wine connoisseurs in Dahlén 2017, 106.

Chorasmia, and, as we will see shortly, Arachosia; it allows insight into at least the idea that imperial networks could be strengthened or extended for the potential movement of wine, or put in another way, to build access to a landscape that supported grapevine growth suitable for wine production; and, it shows that wine was very much an administrative concern and so its production extended beyond fulfilling requirements of taste. Consequently, while keeping in mind that the primary impetus for irrigation works was perhaps not always for viniculture, we should not underestimate the possibility of imperial investment in a land that ‘may’ be able to produce wine.<sup>43</sup>

At the imperial level or macro level, it is through the maintenance and extension of the Achaemenid network and the integration of new administrative areas that the scaling up of viniculture can be contextualised in Arachosia and, arguably, across the eastern end of the empire. In fact, Callieri, building on the work of Jacobs and Vogelsang,<sup>44</sup> has recently outlined how Arachosia was the main administrative centre of the southeastern part of the empire, which included: Drangiana, Gedrosia, Sattagydia, Gandhāra and Hinduš. That Old Kandahar was one such Achaemenid administrative centre of Arachosia is made clear by certain imperial activities and investments. Similar to elsewhere in the empire, imperial interventions range from fortifications, road building, construction or expansion of irrigation systems and all sorts of buildings, most particularly, storerooms and an archive, remains of which are all present or indicated at Old Kandahar.<sup>45</sup> The previously discussed fragmentary Elamite accounting tablets undoubtedly hint at how administration was conducted in Achaemenid Arachosia in a manner similar to the Persian heartland.

Chorasmis and Persis show that the identification of certain activities enable a more thorough investigation of viniculture in the Achaemenid world, the most telling of which is the imperial investment in irrigation. Not all necessarily led to viticulture, but if the environment allowed for it, then the intensification or initiation of viticulture is arguably one plausible outcome. It is significant that the Argandab river’s output was augmented by the construction of what Helms<sup>46</sup> termed ‘*qanats*’, a sort of underground tunnel that redirects water for irrigation and consumption. According to Helms, the introduction of ‘*qanats*’ loosely date to the Achaemenid period (sixth and

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<sup>43</sup> Especially if we keep in mind that *qanats* and reservoirs were often constructed along royal roads to ensure accessibility to drinking water: Polyb. 10.28.

<sup>44</sup> Callieri 2023, 845-6; Jacobs 1994; Vogelsang 1985; 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Excavation reports and summary: Ball 1982 (New Edition 2019); McNicoll, Ball 1996; Helms 1997; Vogelsang 1992, 255-61; archives indicated by the presence of the Elamite tablets.

<sup>46</sup> Helms 1997, 3.

fifth centuries BC).<sup>47</sup> Without further excavation or survey work in Kandahar we are unable to reassess what sort of irrigation feature Helms has termed ‘*qanat*’, or at what point they were installed.<sup>48</sup> What is implied by the similarities between the previously mentioned cases of Persis and Chorasmia with that of Arachosia is that the Achaemenid satrapal economy necessitated increased agricultural productivity for which an expansion or introduction of irrigation features, such as *qanats*, certainly occurred. Therefore, we can safely assume that a good number of the many inactive *qanats* surrounding Old Kandahar were put in place during the Achaemenid period.<sup>49</sup> Pierre Briant<sup>50</sup> proposed two potential reasons for investment in such a system that highlights how the *qanat* or similar irrigation works can be used as an imperial tool. The first of Briant’s hypotheses centres on the imperial desire to exploit previously unproductive land for agricultural purposes and collect tribute from it. The second hypothesis emphasises the imperial desire to control the main conduits of movement along their royal roads and to ensure a reliable water supply nearby.<sup>51</sup> At Arachosia, these explanations overlap.

Arachosia’s integration into imperial networks, but also elevated position as a regional administrative centre for the southeast,<sup>52</sup> necessitated certain requirements to be fulfilled and the presence of the irrigation works<sup>53</sup> indicate that Arachosia now demanded increased supplies and resources. One such vital commodity along the royal roads was wine (*PFT*) and since Arachosia’s environmental conditions were optimally suited for the cultivation of grapevines it proved as an advantageous imperial investment.<sup>54</sup> Irrigation was likely critical in the scaling up of vinicultural production in a region where rainwater was insufficient.<sup>55</sup> Arguably, then, it is

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**47** Helms’s expresses the accepted position in scholarship which is that the *qanat* was developed in the first half of the first millennium BC and spread in the second half of the of the first millennium BC under the Achaemenids.

**48** Boucharlat 2021, 326: While it is certainly true that irrigation works in the eastern half of Iran and southern Afghanistan were initiated in pre-Achaemenid times around the first half of the first millennium BC, these irrigation techniques, according to Boucharlat, differed from *qanats* in the sense that they were not as deep. For *qanat* terminology, see: R. Boucharlat 2001, 157-9. See also the underground Achaemenid irrigation works in Hyrcania according to Polyb. 10.28.2-4.

**49** For the active and inactive *qanats* in the Kandahar Valley see: Stinson et al. 2016.

**50** Briant 2003, 45.

**51** Briant 2003, 45.

**52** Callieri 2023, 845-6.

**53** Helms 1997, 3.

**54** Arab, Ahamed 2022, 6: 8; Abdullaf et al. 2021, 8: 19; Riaz et al. 2020, 4, Table 1; Riaz et al. 2013, 3-4, Table 1.

**55** Bowlby, White 2019, 18-23 (fig. 1.3).

under the Achaemenids that Arachosia's vinicultural industry grew into widespread production and consumption with the related development of its trade and export (see below). Keeping in mind Briant's hypotheses, the Achaemenid irrigation policies sought not only to demonstrate imperial interest in a region but also to increase agricultural offerings from tributary lands: a way for regional wines to end up on the King's table.<sup>56</sup> If we accept that the satrapal transformation of Arachosia necessarily included an expansion of *qanats*, the irrigation investments could be viewed as an attempt to ensure that wine became a tribute commodity and to foster consistent administrative practices throughout the empire. This brings a different understanding to the relief work from the eastern stairs of the Apadana at Persepolis.

#### 4 Drinking Cups in Arachosia: The Imperial and the Local

If the *PFT* and Greek historiographers make anything clear, it is as St John Simpson has written: "wine was synonymous with the Persian Banquet";<sup>57</sup> and as a result precious metal drinking cups formed a central part of Achaemenid tableware. However, as Simpson has already pointed out, without residue analysis we cannot be certain of what was consumed within these drinking cups.<sup>58</sup> Drawing from the Assyrian repertoire, what we can perhaps agree on is that in the Achaemenid world the image of the drinking cup acted to signify the consumption of wine. David Stronach has discussed how the consumption of wine held a prestigious place in the Assyrian context and in Assyria, within the ninth and seventh century BC wine became a status- and rank-conferring commodity where the possession and disbursement of wine expressed royal authority and, as a result, the drinking bowl became a symbol of such authority.<sup>59</sup> It is

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<sup>56</sup> Briant 2003, 45. We can imagine that court centres likely drew from the regions around them and served regionally specific wines at the King's table. Dahlén 2017, 107-8: As Dahlén has discussed, Polyaeus states that the wine offered in Ecbatana were different than those from Susa and Babylon. In the case of the latter two, the wine was a mixture of grape and palm. See: Polyaeus *Strat.* 4.3.32.

<sup>57</sup> Simpson 2005, 104.

<sup>58</sup> Simpson 2005, 110-11. As Simpson had noted already in 2005, there is a significant gap in organic residue analysis on ceramics in the Iranian Plateau with its application mainly on Bronze Age and earlier material. See for example the career-spanning work by P.E. McGovern or V.R. Badler. Although there has not been much development in this field since Simpson's remark, the use of organic residue analysis at the Achaemenid site of Kani-Zirin in western Iran has yielded traces of grape products: Qanberi-Taheri et al. 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Stronach 1996, 183: "With reference to one of several canonical ways in which the Assyrian King could be represented, such ninth century monarchs as Assurnasirpal



within this continuum that we should contextualise the imagery of drinking bowls in the Achaemenid world and it is not without reason that ten of the twenty-three tribute bearers shown on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis carry drinking vessels.

Elsbeth Dusinberre<sup>60</sup> has argued how the great number of wine vessels featured on the Apadana reliefs outline their importance to the imperial authority and showcase their significance as indicators of imperium. For Dusinberre,<sup>61</sup> the use of standardised vessels by elites across the empire, particularly the Achaemenid bowl (a deep cup with a carinated rim), the *phialai*, round-bottomed bowls, and animal-protome rhyton, indicate elite membership to a culture dictated by the King's court. Out of the four vessel types, the Achaemenid bowl and round-bottomed bowl are the two which feature on the Apadana relief. It is the conformity of these two vessel shapes in their depiction on the reliefs that to Dusinberre (and borrowing from Calymeyer 1993), indicate that "metal drinking vessels look alike no matter where the elite use them", and this statement is supported by the archaeological finds of drinking vessels from Anatolia and their depictions on seals from the Fortification archive.<sup>62</sup> However, I would differ from Dusinberre in one regard: the Persepolis reliefs are imperially patronised artistic representations from the point of view of the King, not a representation of or by local elites. As Jacobs<sup>63</sup> has shown, Achaemenid monumental art was limited to the members of the inner court and was made to express certain values to the successor of the Achaemenid empire. The messaging of the reliefs was not for local elites around the empire, instead it offered regionally specific associations visualised from the centre's view to convey an understanding of the empire from one King to the next. The Apadana reliefs in this way are a representation of the imperial network directed and viewed from one way: centre in. And so, as a metaphorical representation of the constituent parts of the empire and their respective offerings, the Apadana reliefs allow a unique insight into the various associations of each region as held by the King (or the imperial court in the heartland).<sup>64</sup>

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and Shalmaneser III can be seen to have turned with enthusiasm to the potent symbol of a drinking bowl – a recurrent attribute of gods and Kings going back at least the third millennium BC".

<sup>60</sup> Dusinberre 2013, 130.

<sup>61</sup> Dusinberre 2013, 129.

<sup>62</sup> Dusinberre 2013, 130.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobs 2021, 757-8.

<sup>64</sup> That the delegations are differentiated by clothes, appearance, and regionally specific gifts is certainly a long-standing idea, see for example: Gropp 2009, 296; Sancisi-Weedenburg 2001, 326; Dusinberre 1999, 100; Muscarella 1988, 23-8.

While the identity of the individual delegations are not entirely certain, four out of the ten groups that carry drinking vessels are accompanied by the Bactrian camel which lends a regionally specific association to the land in and around that of Arachosia and its neighbours, the natural habitat of the camel. Given the fact that Arachosia functioned as a regional centre for the southeast we can agree that they would, without doubt, be featured as one of the delegations featuring the Bactrian camel. Beyond the regional specificity of the animal, identification of the Arachosians is possible because there are clear and distinct iconographic attributes that we see shared with the throne-bearing Arachosians featured on the tomb of Darius I and the southern tomb at Persepolis who are identified through accompanying inscriptions.<sup>65</sup> The belted tunic and trousers tucked into boots as well as the beard and filleted hairstyle seen across a corpus of throne-bearer reliefs seems to indicate that Delegation 15 on the eastern stairway is the likeliest representation of the Arachosians as has also been proposed by Koch and Gropp [fig. 1].<sup>66</sup> Therefore, already by the point of the relief's production, in the sixth to fifth centuries BC, Arachosia is able to offer wine as a tribute to the King or at the very least, in the King's mind, Arachosia represents an area that produces wine, probably as a result of imperial investment in irrigation works that scaled up viticulture in the area (see above). This point of representing wine tribute as a regionally specific association is made clearer by the fact that the nine other delegations, even with loose identifications, are largely well known wine producing areas such as Armenia, Syria, or Ionia.<sup>67</sup>

That the association of Arachosia with wine in the Achaemenid court was one borne out of a reality can be verified in the distribution of Arachosian wine in the imperial network. Towards the end of the Achaemenid period in Arachosia, a document exists with Arachosia as a great source of wine: a fourth-century BC Aramaic leather document from the vicinity of ancient Bactria.<sup>68</sup> Document C1<sup>69</sup> is a supply list of the last Achaemenid satrap of Bactria. Bessos, the aforementioned satrap, removed items from the store in order to replenish his travel supplies not only for his own consumption but also for

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<sup>65</sup> Callieri 2023, 842: Callieri has recently pointed out there are four other royal tombs that repeat the scene. It is through the combination of these scenes that we can reconstruct the identities of the delegations. Especially since the relief work is better preserved on the other tombs than the tomb of Darius I or the southern tomb at Persepolis.

<sup>66</sup> Koch 1997, 58; Gropp 2009, 294.

<sup>67</sup> To be discussed in my forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>68</sup> Naveh, Shaked 2012, 178-83; *Khalili Collection or Ancient Aramaic Documents from Bactria, AADB*.

<sup>69</sup> Naveh, Shaked 2012, 178-9; *AADB*.

offerings and sacrifices that are listed separately. In the list of items for personal consumption in line 31 we find that he removes 120 *mariš* (approx. 1200 litres) of Arachosian wine, for his own consumption.<sup>70</sup> The substantial amount of Arachosian wine is astounding but so is its presence in a Bactrian storeroom. Not only does this document highlight a relationship between the southeastern and northeastern ends of the Achaemenid empire through the imperial network but it also hints at a regional network of exchange in which Arachosian wine was produced, packaged, and shipped as a desirable commodity for local Bactrian elite consumption. Even within conservative interpretation, we can locate Arachosian wine in Bactria on this occasion in the fourth century BC. The document demonstrates that by the time it was written, Arachosia produced wine that operated within the imperial network as the Persepolis reliefs suggest but also produced wine for local consumption.

By now it is evident that the imperial network transformed Arachosia from a potentially small-scale wine production zone to one with interregional and imperial significance. What the integration of Arachosia into imperial networks and the imperial investments in irrigation and the resultant scaling up of viticulture likely encouraged was a shift in consumption patterns across Arachosian society that also impacted its neighbours, for example Bactria. In fact, it is possible to see this shift in the ceramics at Old Kandahar produced in Iranian styles under the Achaemenid administration. These include similar carinated drinking bowls as those found in Chorasmia and all over the empire.<sup>71</sup> Of interest particularly is Site H, a building in the southwestern portion of Old Kandahar. It is a large Achaemenid building with a series of rooms constructed of rammed earth. Anthony McNicoll concluded that part of Site H was used for storage based on the size of the rooms, the number of thoroughfares and the absence of domestic furnishings but also due to the ceramics.<sup>72</sup> David Fleming, who published an assessment of the ceramics from site H, identified a considerable number of carinated and uncarinated drinking bowls and a large number of storage jar sherds used likely for the storage of liquids or grains.<sup>73</sup>

As Fleming noted, the carinated bowls and the storage jars are both minimally differentiated designs that show that the production of these vessels was broadly standardised. Although two bowls from site H also recall metalwork from western Iran from the early

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**70** AADB C1:31 “hrhwny mry 120”. Translated by Naveh, Shaked 2012, 179: “(wine of) Arachosia, 120 mari”.

**71** Minardi 2015, 77-8.

**72** McNicoll 1996, 234.

**73** Fleming 1996, 367-70.

first millennium and may themselves have been considered prestige items.<sup>74</sup> While of course one can never make definite statements without chemical analyses to detect residual traces of what was once stored within, however, in light of the evidence presented thus far, the occurrence of carinated bowls and storage jars nevertheless suggest the local storage and consumption of wine. The standardisation and quantity of the bowls and jars should point to a broader communal and normalised drinking practice shared by people beyond the local elites. Thus while the Persepolis relief provides insight into an imperial association of Arachosia to wine likely in the form of tribute and in service of the royal roads, the local material culture suggests that during the Achaemenid period investments were made in viticulture encouraging a drinking culture that became more widespread in Arachosia.

## 5 Conclusion

Empire formation and consolidation was carried out in a variety of ways in the Achaemenid world. It is evident, however, that establishing a coherent and transferable administrative system across the empire was of vital importance for the efficient functioning of the imperial network and the integration of new regions.<sup>75</sup> At this macro-level, administrative centres were required to operate in certain standardised ways and to fulfil specific obligations like, for example, the upkeep of royal roads.<sup>76</sup> It is within these administrative functions that we can contextualise the importance of wine in the Achaemenid world and begin to understand the official search for and cultivation of vineyards around the empire towards a perspective that goes beyond but also includes conventional narratives of wine's role in feasting and dining. From the administrative texts (*PFT*; *AADB*) it becomes clear that administrative centres were obligated to produce, store, and offer wine along royal roads in the imperial network. As such, wine's role as a social, economic, and religious commodity justifies the Achaemenid investment in scaling-up or initiating viticulture across the empire. In this system, wine was a regional commodity that operated within the local (micro) network as a means to maintain the imperial (macro) network.

Using the administrative regions of Persis and Chorasmia as foils, Arachosian wine seems to develop largely in part to meet its new administrative obligations and is evidently transformed by its

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<sup>74</sup> Fleming 1996, 368.

<sup>75</sup> Briant 2010, 43; Henkelman 2011, 578-9; Jacobs 2021, 847.

<sup>76</sup> Briant 2002, 448; Stark 2021, 699.

integration into an imperial network, especially in its servicing of the eastern end of the imperial road network. As various forms of *vitis*, including *vinifera*, are wild and native to parts of Afghanistan and the particular soil and climate of the area is favourable for the growing of grapes, Arachosia's environment was already susceptible to viticulture.<sup>77</sup> While pre-Achaemenid wine production in Arachosia remains to be explored archaeologically and palaeobotanically, it is clear that viticulture was scaled-up and integrated into an imperial network under the Achaemenids; alternatively, it may have also begun only at that point. One way in which we can trace Achaemenid investment in Arachosian wine is through irrigation works that are implied through the many inactive *qanats* installed to augment the Arghandab river,<sup>78</sup> the main water source for Old Kandahar. Not only do the irrigation investments indicate an interest in maximising Arachosian agricultural output to meet a higher demand due to its new position as regional centre, but the projects also suggest a scaling up of viticulture in the area and the widespread consumption of wine in Arachosia, which is also reflected in both the administrative texts and the ceramic material found at the site.

That Arachosia was associated with wine in the Achaemenid psyche and heartland by as early as the sixth to fifth centuries BC, dates contemporary to the augmentation of the Arghandab, is demonstrated by the offering of wine vessels by the delegation of the Arachosians in the eastern stairway Apadana reliefs at Persepolis. Drinking vessels in Near Eastern art often signify wine consumption in pictorial terms and so we must not underestimate its presence as a tribute in reliefs made to visualise the imperial network from one King to another.<sup>79</sup> This association is verified by the distribution of Arachosian wine in imperial networks by its mention in the *PFT* as a traveller's ration on their way from Arachosia to Susa, which also dates to the sixth to fifth centuries BC. It is revealed through its presence in a Bactrian storeroom and removal by Bessos, the once satrap of Bactria, that by the fourth century BC Arachosian wine became a desirable and speciality commodity in other regions of the Achaemenid empire (*AADB* C1). In this way, we can begin to see how Achaemenid investments and infrastructure in Arachosia, in combination with evidence from Chorasmia,<sup>80</sup> set up what would later become the Central-Asian sub-regional network of wine under the Arsacids, some few hundred years later.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Abdullaf et al. 2021, 8: 19; Riaz et al. 2020, 4: Table 1; Riaz et al. 2013, 3-4, Table 1.

<sup>78</sup> Helms 1997, 3; Stinson et al. 2016, 451.

<sup>79</sup> Stronach 1996, 183; Jacobs 2021, 757-8.

<sup>80</sup> Minardi 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Johal forthcoming.

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**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.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 In the Land of Dionysus. Alexander's Itinerary Through the Kunar, Bajaur, and Swat Valleys. – 3 Dionysus from the Mediterranean to India. – 4 Dionysus Strikes Back: At the Origins of Dionysian Scenes in Gandhāran Art. – 5 Archaeology of Wine Making and Consumption in Swat. – 6 Archaeology of Wine Production. – 7 Wine Consumption Through Ceramics. – 8 Conclusions.



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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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),<sup>3</sup> and later in Arrian (age of the Antonines).<sup>4</sup> 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.

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\* 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Curtius Rufus adds an interesting logistical detail: Alexander intends to use these local leaders as guides in his advance into Indian territory.<sup>9</sup> On the Cophen, Alexander sends Hephaestion and Perdicas to subdue the territory of Peucelaotis (Pushkalavati). At the same time, he moves toward the territory of the Aspasiens, the Guraeans, and the Assaceniens.<sup>10</sup>

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),<sup>11</sup> is transmitted only by the *Epitome of Metz* (35). The city has two defensive circuits.<sup>12</sup> Alexander lays siege in front of the weakest point of the walls and the next day, at dawn,

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**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 Siscottos or his men. Siscottos, 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.<sup>13</sup> After crossing the one of the passes connecting Kunar to Bajaur,<sup>14</sup> Alexander enters this latter region [fig. 6].<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> Alexander sets off again, leaving behind Craterus,

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**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 pre-history) 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.<sup>17</sup> Alexander arrives on the second day after leaving Andaca,<sup>18</sup> 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’.<sup>19</sup>

**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 Nysaeian 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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)<sup>22</sup> to the Dre Sarai-sar.<sup>23</sup> 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).

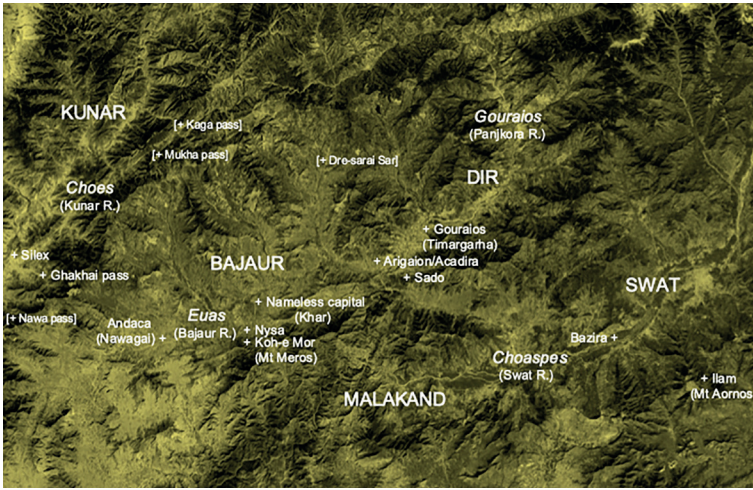


Figure 2 Places of Alexander's itinerary in Kunar, Bajaur, and Swat (map by L.M. Olivieri)

could be Mount Meros. However, only Koh-e Mor and Dre Sarai-sar match the “three-peaked mountain” described by Polyaeus.<sup>24</sup> 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].<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Strat.* 1.1.2.

<sup>25</sup> 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 *piṣṍṍrāṅg* (a local Paṣṍo explicative compound used to label wild cats and lynxes).

<sup>26</sup> 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,<sup>27</sup> 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, Arrian<sup>28</sup> 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

<sup>27</sup> 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, ghwanḍai*, 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 Assaceni 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 Beira/Bazira (Barikot) and Massaga.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> We cannot of course draw firm conclusions but we would like to point out that it is possible to elaborate an alternative itinerary. If

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**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, Arrian<sup>32</sup> 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? Plutarch<sup>33</sup> 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, Arrian<sup>34</sup> 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

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**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.<sup>35</sup> 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, Strabo<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> If the sequence is correct, in the itinerary of Alexander the Nysaeans would be located immediately before the events in Massaga. In addition, Claudius Ptolemy<sup>38</sup> places Nagara/Dionysopolis (=Nysa) in Goryaia, a region south of the Lambaga (modern Laghman)<sup>39</sup> 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]:

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**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 Guraïos (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.<sup>40</sup> 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

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<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 Arrian<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> The shrine is peculiar for it consists of a circle of laurel that provides cover for the god’s statue housed inside.<sup>47</sup> 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

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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.<sup>48</sup> 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*<sup>49</sup> 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. Ptolemy<sup>50</sup> locates the settlement in the Goryaia region, thus in the Panjkora valley. According to Rapin, Grenet,<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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

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**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.<sup>53</sup> 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'.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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*).<sup>56</sup> Based on these considerations it is possible to assume that even when Curtius Rufus<sup>57</sup> 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).<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> In the first element of the

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<sup>53</sup> Ath. *Deipn.* 1.48.64.

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

<sup>55</sup> Monti 2023, 13-20.

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

<sup>57</sup> Curt. 8.10.22.

<sup>58</sup> Humbach 2007, 135-42, but see Falk 2009, 65.

<sup>59</sup> 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,<sup>60</sup> 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 Sicily<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> 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.

<sup>61</sup> Diod. Sic. 3.63.4.

<sup>62</sup> The fragment is attributed to Megasthenes by Stoneman 2022, 40-1.

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

<sup>64</sup> Olivieri 2013.

<sup>65</sup> 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),<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>

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

<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

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.<sup>69</sup> 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

<sup>68</sup> 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.

<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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].<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

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 Macedonia<sup>74</sup> 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

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

<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> The conquest of the Aornos allowed the Macedonian king to surpass his mythical ancestor.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, the Gandhāran artists chose to give Heraklean features to Vajrapāṇi in his capacity as protector of Buddha.

<sup>75</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 4.28.1-4; Curt. 8.11.2.

<sup>76</sup> 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.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

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

<sup>79</sup> 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,<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> Archaeobotanical research carried out at the urban centre of Barikot<sup>82</sup> (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),<sup>83</sup> in trench BKG 11 K-105. In addition, 42 other grape pips were found during the most recent excavations

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<sup>80</sup> E.g., Filigenzi 2019, Tanabe 2020, see also Filigenzi, Moscatelli in this issue.

<sup>81</sup> 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.

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> Spengler et al. 2021, Tab. 1.

at the urban Buddhist shrine of Barikot in contexts dated between c. 350 BC-AD 300 (BKG 16),<sup>84</sup> where grape seems to represent the most common fruit recorded in the sector.<sup>85</sup> Although grapes were certainly consumed in urban contexts since early periods, the step between the cultivation or harvesting of grapes<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> 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].<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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,<sup>90</sup> 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

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**84** Olivieri et al. 2022.

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

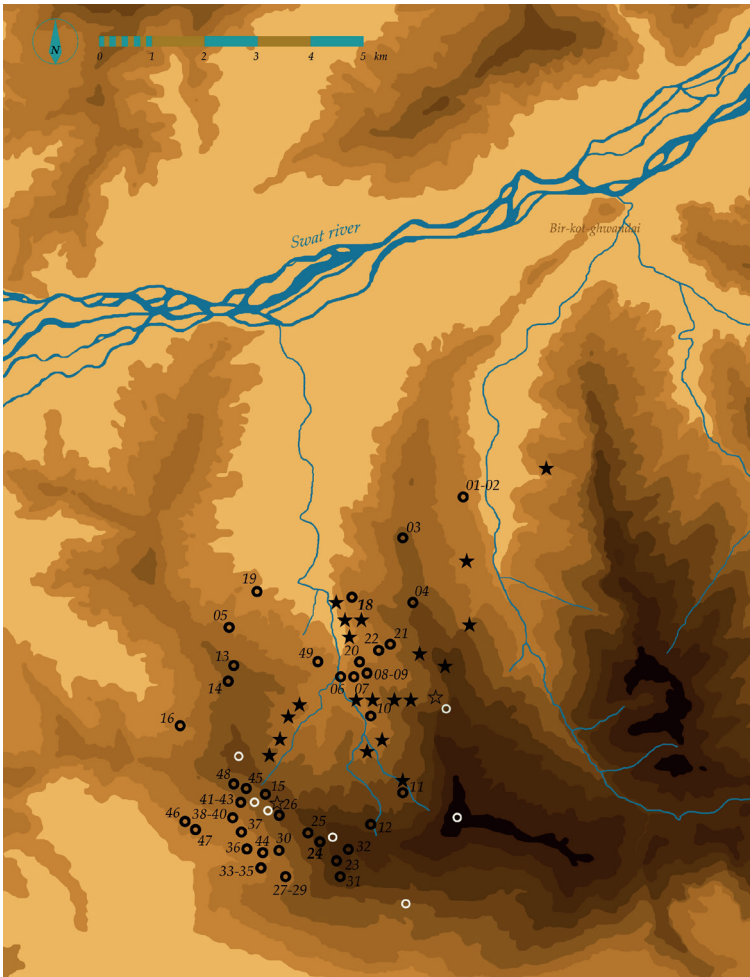
**86** The geometric morphometrics generally used to distinguish between cultivated and wild grapevines are problematic and scholars must rely on contextual evidence and quantitative analysis to clarify the issue (Fuller forth.). However, the distinction between cultivated and wild grape is somehow superfluous 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.<sup>91</sup> 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,

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**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, Falk<sup>92</sup> 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 comparison<sup>93</sup> and

<sup>92</sup> Falk 2009, 66.

<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> Yet, for the figures engaged in winemaking the association with the 'Dionysian imagery' is untenable<sup>98</sup> and the reference was to a much more familiar environment. In Gandhāran art, the type of exomid tunic worn by

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<sup>94</sup> 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).

<sup>95</sup> Falk 2009, fig. 7; Buner series.

<sup>96</sup> Galli 2011, 310-14.

<sup>97</sup> Olivieri, Iori 2021, 221-33.

<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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 Chitral<sup>100</sup> 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,<sup>101</sup> 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,<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> 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

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**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 *tamḡas*) 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.<sup>104</sup> For the late Kushan period, he even suggested the presence of a distillery associated with a Buddhist urban temple similar to those from Barikot.<sup>105</sup> 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 *tamḡas* means that the beverage had reached a certain economic and religious value and thus was put under state control.<sup>106</sup> 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,<sup>107</sup> 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

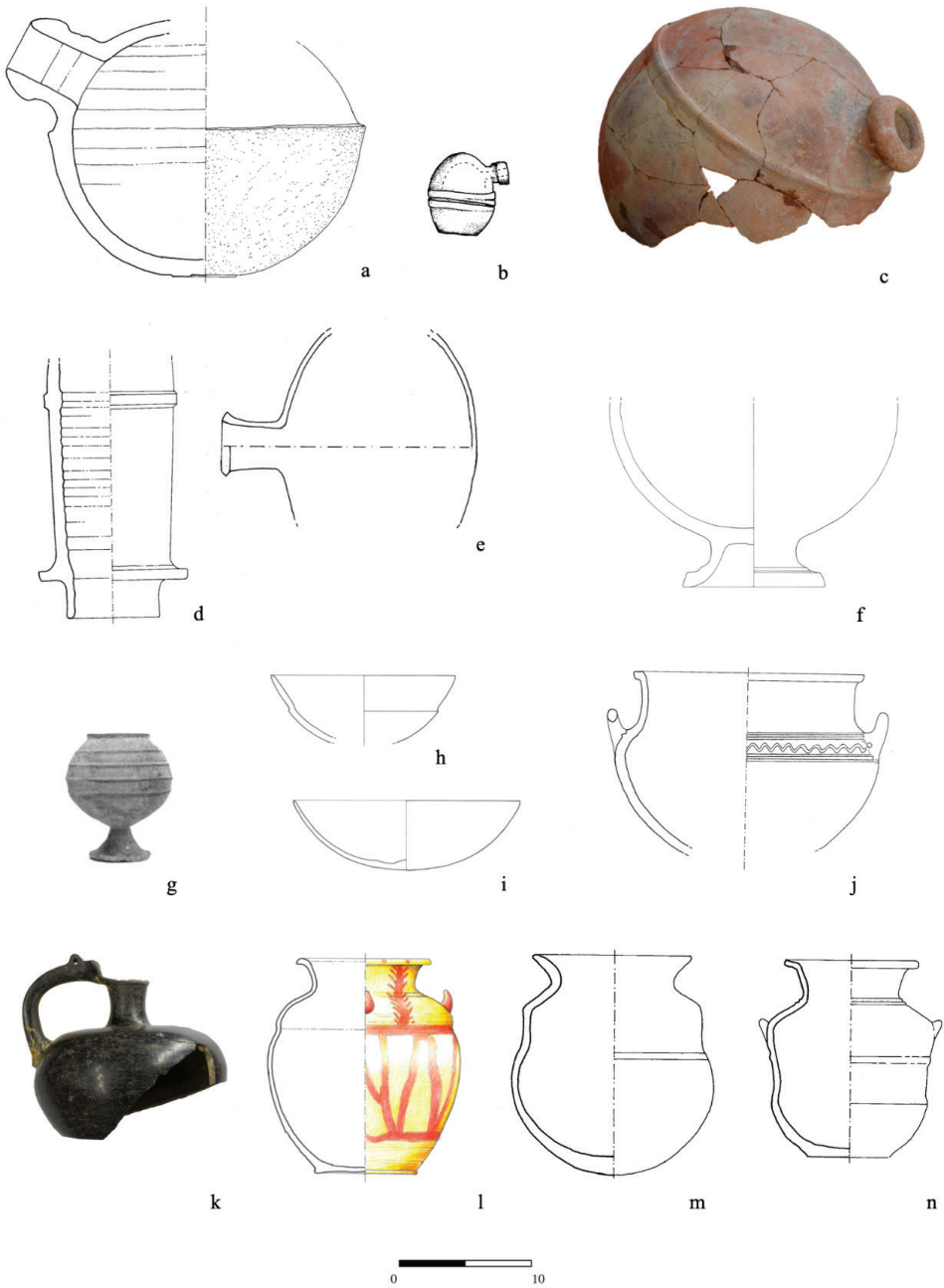
Evidence for drinking practice in Swat is widespread from protohistory to the Islamic era, so as to make it a distinctive element of local culture. Indeed, ceramic vessels used for consumption of inebriating beverage in either convivial or ritual contexts, are a sort of *leitmotiv* in the ceramic assemblages 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

<sup>104</sup> Husain 1980.

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

<sup>106</sup> Allchin 1977; Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 226-7.

<sup>107</sup> 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 posts<sup>108</sup> 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’.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> 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 Gardin<sup>112</sup> for

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**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.<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup>

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.<sup>115</sup>

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.<sup>116</sup> Despite the rather short neck, the vessel echoes the Hellenistic *lagynos* used in banquets

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**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 reused as a damped pit, close to a Buddhist shrine.<sup>117</sup>

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,<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> 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”<sup>120</sup> 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 –<sup>121</sup> nor that Pañcika

<sup>117</sup> 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.

<sup>118</sup> See Olivieri 2016, pl. 4.

<sup>119</sup> Callieri, Olivieri 2020, 201-2.

<sup>120</sup> Zwalf 1996.

<sup>121</sup> 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)<sup>122</sup> and bowl (stratum V)<sup>123</sup> 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,<sup>124</sup> 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,<sup>125</sup> another architrave with vine scroll comes from Dharmarajika,<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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.<sup>128</sup> The 'vegetal architecture' of the rural shrines described in the classical sources (see above), here crystallises into stone.

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**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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## **Gandhāra and Classical Sources**

Imagery, Iconography, Epigraphy and Texts



# **Beyond the Form**

## **Observations on Wine-Symbolism and Related Figurative Themes in Gandhāran Art**

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**Abstract** Wine and related motifs hold a special place in Gandhāran sculptural production as they constitute a common thread among several visual themes, including the so-called 'Dionysiac scenes'. Despite their different nature, these themes bear indirect – yet significant – witness to a coherent pattern of shared semantic values, the core meaning of which can be considered in light of recent discoveries, data reassessment, and contextual interpretative approaches.

**Keywords** Gandhāran revelry scenes. Wine symbolism. Hārītī. Tutelary couples. Erotic couples. New Year festival.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Context. – 3 The Gandhāran Visual Repertoire: A Glimpse into Archetypes and Symbolic Patterns. – 4 The Gandhāran Revelry Scenes: Again on the Saidu Sharif I Reliefs. – 5 Final Remarks.

## 1 Introduction

There are perhaps few iconographic themes in Gandhāran art that have attracted more scholarly attention than the so-called ‘Dionysiac scenes’, showing characters engaged in winemaking and revelling. Such a fascination is easy to understand, for these scenes not only constitute a puzzling occurrence in the figurative programs of Buddhist monuments (*stūpa*) but they also effectively embody a range of issues crucial to Gandhāran studies, including their long-debated Hellenistic features within the broader – and no less discussed – phenomenon of Hellenism in Asia.

This is a domain hard to seize, where our interpretation efforts may be muddled by potential bias arising from preconceived knowledge and lack of proper tools for contextual analysis. The term ‘Dionysiac’ itself, which strongly associates Gandhāran revelry scenes with the Graeco-Roman visual repertoire, exemplifies conceptual approaches that, although increasingly questioned in recent years, still remain influenced by restrictive paradigms. Already Martha L. Carter, in a paper published in 1968, had rightly observed that “a purely Western interpretation of the origin and significance of such [Dionysiac] motives does not seem adequate to justify their basic *raison d’être*”.<sup>1</sup>

Here, however, we do not seek to either revise or expand upon the general question of the Hellenistic influence on Gandhāran art, which has been extensively addressed in several dedicated contributions.<sup>2</sup> Instead, we would like to offer some observations on the values underlying Gandhāran wine symbolism and associated figurative themes, aligning with recent research on the interactions between Buddhism and the local cultural substratum in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in ancient times. It has become apparent that the coexistence of different – and theoretically contrasting – cultural facets calls for re-evaluating the criteria used in current standard practice, as they are proving not to fit the intricacy and nuances of the socio-cultural dynamics at play. While it takes time to establish new paradigms, we can at least start outlining general patterns to define potential, promising lines of research. This essay represents a first modest attempt.

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<sup>1</sup> Carter 1968, 121.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Filigenzi 2012.



**Figure 1** Unknown male deity. From Barikot (Swat Valley, Pakistan), third century AD. Schist, 17.2 × 8.5 × 2.8 cm. Swat Museum, Saïdu Sharif, inv. no. BKG 2304 (SM acc. no. 547). Photo by Cristiano Moscatelli, copyright IAMP-ISMEO

## 2 The Context

Among the research questions that have gained prominence in Gandhāran studies in the last years is the relationship between the distinctive social groups that shaped the cultural landscape of the North-West in the first half of the first millennium AD; that is, the urban centres, Buddhist communities and non-urban groups.<sup>3</sup> The reconstruction of such interactions poses a monumental challenge to our interpretative efforts as it encompasses non-linear aspects of history, including not only religion and art but a much broader social and economic domain. As a matter of fact, our knowledge of ancient Gandhāra is still mainly confined to macroscopic events such as the rise of strong political powers and formalised religious systems. In contrast, the underlying (co)existence of subaltern ideologies, likewise crucial to historical dynamics, largely remains ignored for being cloaked – at least to our eyes – in dominant cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, the data obtained by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (IAMP-ISMEO) over almost seventy years of systematic activities in the Swat Valley has allowed research to move forward on much firmer ground. Especially some of the evidence collected in the last decade hints at a system of beliefs that has been connected to the so-called ‘Dardic’ local substratum, which must have formed a significant sociocultural facet of the region since early times.<sup>4</sup>

Worth mentioning is a third-century small stela [fig. 1] found at the urban centre of Barikot (Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai) in a corridor leading to a courtyard of a residential block, where a Buddhist domestic chapel was also excavated.<sup>5</sup> This piece depicts a local male deity sitting frontally on a throne, his right hand holding a goblet, his left a severed head of a goat and a sacrificial knife. The deity belongs to a group of similar figures – mostly female – already known from specimens obtained from the antique market, who carry the same attributes and are portrayed, in a few cases, with a goat head that emphasises their intimate connection with this animal [fig. 2].<sup>6</sup> While very

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**3** The evidence briefly summarised in this section represents only the tip of the iceberg of a much more intricate picture. Besides the references given in the text, see also Olivieri, Coloru, Iori in this volume.

**4** This ‘Dardic’ cultural substratum was outlined, among others, by Giuseppe Tucci in a seminal work (1977) and connected to the north-western people mentioned in Classical and South Asian textual sources as *Dardae*, *Dadikai*, *Dardas*, etc., as well as the Assakenoi that Alexander the Great fought in *Daedala* during the Indian campaign in 327 BC (Olivieri 1996). It is still not clear whether a true ‘Dardic kingdom’ ever existed or rather we have to think of several political entities somehow connected. Hence, for the sake of simplicity, the term ‘Dardic’ is used here to refer to local substrata of culturally related areas comprising the north-western regions of present-day Pakistan.

**5** Olivieri 2014, 95-6; Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018, 76; Filigenzi 2019b, 77.

**6** Taddei 1987.





**Figure 2** Unknown female goat-headed deity. Possibly from Dir. Collected by Sir H.A. Deane, given by Lit. Col. H.H.R. Deane. Schist, 24.2 × 13 × 5.2 cm. British Museum, inv. no. OA 1939.1-19.19. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved



**Figure 3** Relief showing Buddha's life episodes (lower register) and a ceremonial scene (upper register). From Saidu Sharif I (Swat Valley, Pakistan), first century AD. Schist. Museo delle Civiltà, Rome, inv. no. S 704 (MNAOr acc. no. 4152). Photo by Jaroslav Poncar copyright IAMP-ISMEO

little, if any, can be said about the identity of these local deities,<sup>7</sup> their attributes manifest a religious environment centred around alcohol consumption and goat sacrifice.

Cognate visual evidence was recently detected by one of the Authors in a group of reliefs excavated at the Buddhist area of Saidu Sharif I by IAMP during the first archaeological campaign at the site in the early 1960s. These reliefs, which can be ascribed to the same monument based on technical, iconographic, and stylistic features,<sup>8</sup> show in the upper register a high-rank male figure sitting on a throne in a vineyard-like setting. Several male attendants are bringing him drinking vessels, grapes and - in two cases - a goat, which is led "in a way that suggests a bloody sacrifice without actually representing it" [figs 3-4].<sup>9</sup>

Intoxicating beverages and goat sacrifice were thus the showiest features of a deep-rooted, socially relevant ritualism to the extent that even in a Buddhist context it was codified as a means to stress the cultural affiliation of the lay groups, and the same groups who supported

<sup>7</sup> One may wonder, for instance, whether the female figures represent the same or different deities. For an iconographic reassessment of these stelae, see Moscatelli, Filigenzi 2023, 704-9.

<sup>8</sup> This is probably the little *stūpa* no. 38, dating to the first century AD, in whose proximity one of these reliefs (no. S 418) was excavated (Filigenzi 2019b, 72 fn. 19).

<sup>9</sup> Filigenzi 2019b, 74.



**Figure 4** Relief showing Buddha's life episodes (lower register) and a ceremonial scene (upper register). From Saidu Sharif I (Swat Valley, Pakistan), first century AD. Schist. Museo delle Civiltà, Rome, inv. no. S 418 (MNAOr acc. no. 4107). Photo by Jaroslav Poncar, copyright IAMP-ISMEO

the monastic community (*saṃgha*).<sup>10</sup> As pointed out by ethnologic studies, this ideological system once dominated a much wider geographic area comprising the Hindukush-Himalaya region where autochthonous populations (traditionally and inadequately referred to as Kafirs, Arabic for 'unbeliever') practised forms of Indo-European polytheism. Notwithstanding local differences, these populations were united by a common, all-encompassing 'pastoral ideology' founded upon goat husbandry, the religious value attached to this animal, and wine consumption especially during (but not limited to) seasonal festivals. In north-western Pakistan, vestiges of this system are found in the valleys of southern Chitral, where the Kalasha communities managed to maintain their traditions.<sup>11</sup>

**10** It is reasonable to assume that the monastic communities initially attempted to restrain such practices, only to tolerate them eventually in the face of their rootedness. In this connection, it is interesting to recall Caroline Humprey and James Laidlaw's ethnographic study (2007) on goat sacrifices performed at the Buddhist monastery of Mergen Süm, Inner Mongolia. They observe that "the crucial organs of the carcass are laid out in the inner sanctum of a temple, right beside the Buddhist altar [...] the ceremony (or at least that part of it taking place inside the temple) is carried out by lamas with cheerful goodwill and without a hint of condemnation" (258).

**11** In Eastern Afghanistan, this cultural system began to collapse in the sixteenth century with the gradual spread of Islam in the area, culminating in 1895 with the conversion of the Nuristani people under the rule of the then Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan. The Kalasha communities were not affected by Islamisation as they were located in an area that, a few years earlier, the Durand Line (1893) had placed under the administration of the British

While, according to some scholars, the linguistic conservatism and the absence of any Buddhist or Brahmanical cultural elements seem to indicate that these communities mostly remained isolated from the major historical events that affected the valleys,<sup>12</sup> the archaeological record from Swat suggests there may have actually been a greater contiguity than previously thought.

Besides the Barikot stela, which is the most eloquent piece of evidence in that regard, historical interactions between 'Dardic' and valleys communities have been inferred from a number of painted rock shelters that were documented in the uplands of the Swat-Malakand area by MAIP in the framework of the Archaeological Map of the Swat Valley project (AMSV).<sup>13</sup> These natural rock formations are located along outcrops of gneiss, generally at the same altitude and in some cases near springs, ancient trails and mountain passes. While their purpose remains unclear, the paintings overall display a consistent semantic system conveying the beliefs and world views of transhumant pastoralist groups who retained their cultural traits over generations (Bronze Age to late first millennium AD). The subjects include hunting and fertility-related scenes, anthropomorphic figures with overdrawn body parts, what appears to be the ritual slaughtering of an ibex,<sup>14</sup> and Buddhist monuments. These latter are not necessarily an indication of religious affiliation (buddhas or bodhisattvas are never represented in the paintings), but may rather be regarded as visual evidence of contact with the Buddhist communities - which we may assume occurring already in the third century BC with the gradual spread of monastic groups in the area.<sup>15</sup> Based on the collected data, it appears that especially during the historical period these pastoral communities formed a sort of 'tribal belt' around the urban and monastic settlements, with which they must have had constant social and economic interactions.<sup>16</sup>

Among the activities was no doubt wine-making, as evidenced by several stone tanks and vats for grape pressing (comparable to those used by the Nuristani/Kalasha people)<sup>17</sup> documented next to the rock shelters, and in one case, inside; similar stone vats were also found near Buddhist areas where they might have been used for fermentation.<sup>18</sup> The overall picture suggests a standardised process in wine

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Raj. On the cultural traditions of the Nuristani people, see Sir George Scott Robertson's renowned account (1896); on the Kalashas, see Cacopardo, Cacopardo 2001; Cacopardo 2016a.

**12** Cf. Fussman [1977] 2014.

**13** Olivieri, Vidale 2006; Olivieri 2011.

**14** Olivieri 2012, 45, site no. 4.

**15** Tucci 1977, 57-8.

**16** Olivieri 2011, 180 ff.

**17** Klimburg 2016.

**18** Olivieri 2011, 191.



**Figure 5** Stela depicting Hārītī. From Barikot (Swat Valley, Pakistan), third century AD. Schist with traces of gold leaf, 22.4 × 16.2 × 5.1 cm. Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif, inv. no. BKG 3636 (Reserve Collection). Photo by Cristiano Moscatelli, copyright IAMP-ISMEO

production, with initial stages (grapes harvesting and crushing) taking place in the uplands, followed by pasteurisation in the urban settlements. Here, still devices, probably used for either cooking or distilling alcohol, were found in significant numbers by excavations, particularly in Buddhist cultic places.

The presence of winemaking infrastructures and related devices in both extra- and urban Buddhist areas introduces a further layer of cultural transversity, which adds many telling clues to the intertwining of different social, ideological, and economic identities in the area. Besides the evidence from Sirkap/Taxila, distillers were found at Late Kushan Barikot in the courtyards of Sacred Buildings BN and H. Particularly noteworthy is the former, which yielded an almost complete condenser along with an exquisite stela depicting Hārītī [fig. 5], a demi-goddess (*yakṣiṇī*) associated with childbirth and fecundity and usually shown holding a bunch of grapes, as in this specimen.<sup>19</sup> Worthy of mention is also the contemporary archaeological context of the so-called ‘House of Naradakha’ at the urban centre of Shaikhān-dherī, present-day Charsadda (north-western Pakistan). The building, which shares a similar layout, architectural features, and material evidence with the Barikot structures, was a Buddhist shrine located within a block where wine and/or other fermented drinks were probably manufactured. This is evidenced by several millstones, distillers, and large jars, mostly found still *in situ* in the rooms surrounding the shrine.<sup>20</sup> Although we do not know whether these sorts of urban Buddhist-*cum*-winemaking buildings were run by groups of monks or nuns, the involvement of the *saṃgha* in the process, while not widely accepted, cannot be dismissed.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Iori 2023.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘House’ was excavated by a joint Pakistani-British mission in 1963. According to one of the leading archaeologists, the building was the private dwelling of a first-century AD Buddhist *ācārya*, which was gradually turned into a shrine after the teacher’s death at the time of Kaniṣka I’s reign (Dani 1965-66). For the sake of simplicity, we are not dealing here with the inconsistency of this interpretation, for which we refer the reader to the reassessment of the archaeological record of the site made by one of the Authors (Moscatelli, forthcoming a; Moscatelli, forthcoming b).

<sup>21</sup> *Contra* see, for instance, K. Tanabe 2015. The scholar argues against Harry Falk’s claim that Gandhāran monasteries participated in wine production. Falk’s arguments were based on the analysis of some large stone bowls that, according to the German scholar, were used by the *saṃgha* to ferment and distribute wine during lay festivals (Falk 2009). Although Tanabe raises some compelling points, his critique is mainly confined to textual sources and does not consider the whole corpus of available data. Not to mention that there is at least one reference to nuns taking part in wine production for secular celebrations in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, a monastic code likely redacted in the North-West of the early Common Era (Falk 2010, 101). Regarding the still devices, see Mahdihassan 1972; Allchin 1979; Brancaccio, Liu 2009, 225-7.

### 3 The Gandhāran Visual Repertoire: A Glimpse into Archetypes and Symbolic Patterns

Gandhāra was thus an area rich in wine tradition, encompassing economic and religious spheres. What does the Gandhāran visual repertoire tell us about this ideological system, with its revelry scenes, erotic and tutelary couples, and local deities imbued with wine-related symbolism?<sup>22</sup>

To begin with, there is no doubt that this visual repertoire conveys different layers of meaning. Yet, one cannot help but notice that the visual codes employed in these themes, when taken together, hint at a coherent set of notions rooted in ancestral ideas of both cosmic and social order, with special connotations on fertility and the interplay between different realms of existence. The artistic evidence is self-speaking that Buddhism did not conflict with these conceptual paradigms but fostered instead a cultural integration that stemmed from the recognition of, and interaction with, the social structures, practices, and norms of local communities.

In a 1998 paper, Richard S. Cohen discussed a trend in the contemporary academic discourse that emphasised a conceptual distinction between what was considered ‘official Buddhism’ – namely, the Buddha’s teachings and the *saṃgha* – and ‘popular Buddhism’, the latter encompassing religious beliefs somewhat contingent on Buddhist practice, such as the worship of local spirits. Such an approach persists in current scholarship, where non-Buddhist cultural aspects are usually regarded as mere phenomena of syncretism or appropriation within the broader context of Buddhist practice.<sup>23</sup>

Cohen suggested that such cults in Buddhist contexts should be considered in light of a network of different exchange relationships between the *saṃgha* and local lay communities. In this dynamic, the monastic groups took on concerns surrounding the laity, whose resolution would ensure mutual benefits for all parties involved and, eventually, social (Dharmic) harmony. For instance, the subjugation of a wicked *nāga* (semi-divine beings connected to water) would assure the local society of living in a stable and orderly environment, no longer fearing the violent floods these subterranean creatures were believed to cause. On the other hand, the monastic community would benefit from such a context, for a wealthy society means, above all, material support. Through these mechanisms, Buddhism found therefore its natural field of action and, most importantly, legitimacy in society.

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<sup>22</sup> This section and the following one provide a revision of the contents outlined in a preliminary form by the Authors within the framework of the Roots of Peristan International Conference held in Rome, 5-7 October 2022 (Moscatelli, Filigenzi 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Cohen 1998.



Figure 6 Tutelary couple. From Takht-i Bahi. Schist, 27 × 24.7 × 10.3 cm. British Museum, inv. no. OA1950,0726.2. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved

Cohen based his assumption on the analysis of the archaeological evidence from the fifth-century Caves 2 and 16 at Ajanta - associated with a local king of *nāgas* (*nāgarāja*) and the *yakṣiṇī* Harīti, respectively. While Gandhāra has not yielded similar programmatic contexts, the cultural process discussed by the scholar was no doubt operating also in the North-West as *nāgas* and *yakṣas*, notwithstanding local developments, belong to a strong transregional belief in the religious Indic universe. The northern Buddhist literary tradition records several stories about the Buddha subjugating these creatures during his mythical journey in the region, and the Gandhāran sculptural production itself witnesses a widespread cult.

It will be sufficient to recall the legends of the *nāga* Apalāla,<sup>24</sup> the guardian of the source of the River Swat, or Hārīti, the anthropophagus *yakṣiṇī* who became a protector of the Doctrine in the Buddhist tradition.<sup>25</sup> Also in Gandhāra, these conversion stories contribute to relocate the worship of local supernatural beings within the Buddhist

<sup>24</sup> Zin 2006, 54-68.

<sup>25</sup> Péri 1917; Zin 2006, 35-53.



cultural environment, with the Doctrine standing as the sole authoritative ordering source of the forces that threaten both the natural and civilised world. In this connection, it is not surprising that such mechanisms had, or at least reflected, purely pragmatic outcomes, with the *saṃgha* acting as an intermediary in the management of natural resources and social affairs.<sup>26</sup> At any rate, it is clear that this process did not deconstruct the inherently ambivalent nature of these figures, or the religious practices associated with them. These latter are more or less apparent in the figurative production, showing *nāgas* and their female counterpart (*nāginīs*) in scenes of revelry or Hārītī holding a bunch of grapes, according to popular conceptions in India that ascribed to them a penchant for offers of intoxicating beverages.

From a semantic point of view, the figure of Hārītī can be connected to other Gandhāran subjects that, when considered together, define a rhetoric of sexuality. The symbolic core of this discourse is not, however, the mere sexual act itself, but its deeper purpose – whether motivated by biological, ideological, or even economic reasons; that is, the generation of offspring and the perpetuation of one’s family line, and therefore, by extension, the civil society. The origin of the *yakṣiṇī* is unknown, but it can undoubtedly be traced back to the broader group of pan-Indian female deities embodying fertility and motherhood. The Gandhāran iconography portrays her as a loving mother standing, or sitting on a low throne, surrounded by her infants.<sup>27</sup>

The values associated with Hārītī find a natural semantic convergence in her depictions with the companion Pañcika, the commander-in-chief of the *yakṣa* army [fig. 6]. This couple arises from a concept of polarity articulating the dual unity of opposing yet complementary powers within an ontological system that is, above all, strongly sexualised. The ‘system of tutelary couples’ is well-documented in the

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**26** We refer, for instance, to the large barrage works documented in the Kandak Valley close to Buddhist monasteries, which were most likely engaged in the management of water supply within the economic activities of the area (Olivieri 2008, 297). As for the involvement of the Buddhist monastic communities in social concerns, see e.g. Schopen ([2012] 2014, 131-56), who stresses Hārītī’s role as a model for the practice of giving children at risk to monks in Buddhist texts.

**27** In his travelogue, the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang records that in the surroundings of Puṣkalāvati, there was a *stūpa* dedicated to Hārītī on the spot where, according to local tradition, she was converted by the Buddha. People would sacrifice at the monument to obtain children from her (Beal 1884, 1: 110-11). The site was identified by Alfred Foucher (1901, 342-3) with the Sarē-makhe-ḍherī mound (the remains of a *stūpa*) located in the proximity of the Umarzai village, Charsadda. The scholar recorded that pinches of earth collected from the mound were believed by local Muslims to cure children suffering from ‘red face’ (*sarē makhe*), either smallpox or measles, hence recalling the association of Hārītī with diseases. Moreover, it is interesting to note that in a nearby village, a popular shrine is dedicated to a Muslim female saint (variously spelt as Bibi or ‘Lady’ Sahida/Sayeda/Sayda), believed to cure infertility. (<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/556515-travelling-to-charsadda>).

Iranian-Central Asian and Indian regions, as well as in the border areas such as Gandhāra. Here, excavations have yielded, besides the said Pañcika-Hāritī pair, another couple that is traditionally identified with Pharro and Ardoksho, the Iranian deities of royal glory (*xvarenah*) and wealth, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

The tutelary couple is the powerful expression of archetypes of gender, each invested with symbols inherent to their respective condition that is embedded in the local cultural ideology. At the same time, this condition appears to be political, social, and familial: the male figure carries attributes and motifs related to the sphere of power and authority, such as the military attire or the spear, while the female figure, depicted holding a cornucopia or a child, embodies fertility, generative power, and motherhood.

An explicit body language manifests the union between the two opposing poles. In the female figure extending her arm to the male's genital, or gently touching his thigh, we perceive the interaction between the feminine and masculine energy, both channelled towards creation.<sup>29</sup> One cannot act or exist without the other.

The *mithuna* (Sanskrit 'pair'), or so-called 'erotic couples', underlies similar notions, but here being communicated through a subtle allusion to the sexual union between a male and a female figure and the fruit it will bear. Actually, the term 'erotic' can be critically questioned as it only stresses the sexual arousing and not the whole semantic content embodied by these figures, including notion of birth and generation - i.e., the realm of life. This is alluded to, for instance, by the *mithuna* carved on the door-jamb B 3215 [fig. 7] from Butkara I, a Buddhist site excavated by IAMP in years 1956-62. A *mithuna* is carved in the upper register. The female, standing with crossed legs, pulls down her lower garment with her left hand to reveal the vulva, which is covered by a leaf-shaped band, while uncovering or probably grabbing her companion's phallus. The male kisses her and touches her belly with the right hand, the latter being a universal gesture for pregnancy.

But the Butkara door-jamb provides significant evidence of how such themes were incorporated within a Buddhist context. In the lower register is depicted what, at first glance, appears to be a Buddha standing in *abhaya mudrā* (gesture of reassurance). A closer look shows that his right hand is turned with the palm facing outwards. This gesture, yet to be fully understood, was documented by Maurizio Taddei in some reliefs, where it is usually performed by the Buddha-to-be Maitreya.<sup>30</sup> This may indicate that not a Buddha, but Maitreya as an accomplished buddha is portrayed in the door-jamb.

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28 Bussagli 1984.

29 Filigenzi 2019a, 172.

30 Taddei [1969] 2003.



**Figure 7**  
Door-jamb showing a *mithuna*  
(detail). From Butkara I, second half  
of the first century/third century AD.  
Schist, 50 × 18 × 6.5 cm. Museo delle  
Civiltà, Rome, inv. no. B 3215. Photo  
after Filigenzi 2019a: fig. 10.10

However, the question is extremely complex and cannot be addressed in detail here.<sup>31</sup> Be as it may, it will be sufficient for the time being to stress how the occurrence of iconographic themes produced by different ideologies converges in expressing one and the same conceptual idea: the intertwined bond that ties the renewal of the Buddhist Doctrine with that of humankind, as the human world (*manuṣya-loka*) constitutes, according to Buddhist soteriology, one of the beneficial samsaric condition of existence where self-liberation can be potentially achieved.<sup>32</sup>

**31** Here, we shall limit ourselves to mentioning a possible comparison with the paintings at the entrance of Cave 17 in Ajanta, particularly on the monastery's entrance door (Ghosh [1967] 1996, pl. LXII). The upper frame shows the Seven Buddhas of the Past and the Buddha-to-be-Maitreya, readily discernible by his attire and rich jewellery. The lintel is painted with eight panels of as many *mithunas*. It is worth noting the exact correspondence between the number of Buddhas (including Maitreya) and that of the couples. A detailed discussion on the Butkara I *mithunas* and connected iconographic themes is under preparation by one of the Authors (Moscatelli, forthcoming c).

**32** Filigenzi 2019a, 176. See also Jenkins 2022 for a recent discussion on rebirth in Heavens within Buddhist soteriology. We are grateful to Dr Bryan De Notariis for bringing the study to our attention.

Notwithstanding different nuances, these themes can be assumed overall as semantic variations of the same principle, that is, life perpetuating itself within a cosmic and social order. This notion finds a corollary in wine-related symbolism that seal the intrinsic value of the images – such as the bunch of grapes attributed to Hārīti; the *kantharos*-like vessel held by the male deity in the tutelary couple; the grape hanging from depictions of city doors, or the vine scroll, in which one can recognise not a mere decorative motif but rather, following Carter, the idea of the all-pervading and all-nourishing *arbor vitae*.<sup>33</sup>

Depictions found in other types of reliefs such as cornices, which are often overlooked in Gandhāran studies, offer much food for thought in this regard. Let us briefly consider a specimen from Kālawān showing naked garland-bearers,<sup>34</sup> regrettably broken on the proper right side. Of particular interest are the other figures carved in the field. In the two surviving lower hollows of the garland, a winged female figure (on the right) and a *mithuna* (on the left) are emerging. In the foreground and in correspondence with these figures are, respectively, a pair of children touching (or probably eating) a bunch of grapes hanging from the garland and a pair of birds pecking at another pendent fruit. We do not know what was sculpted in the lost section – probably the same alternating children/birds, judging from the remaining portion of a third child visible near the fracture. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe how a cross-reading of these figures and the centrality of grapes suggest again an interdependence between different levels of existence that is at the foundation of the Gandhāran imagery: everything is firmly connected, and all participate in the great mystery of life – deities, humankind, and natural sphere.

We have seen that in Gandhāra a local religious thought associating alcohol consumption with the bloody sacrifice of goats is documented, and that this finds a much-telling allusion at the Buddhist site of Saidu Sharif (§ 2). While the grape as a symbol of renewing life emerges quite evidently from the artistic evidence, the possibility that the same motif may convey an implicit atavistic reference to blood is less explicit. For instance, as Hārīti retains her potential malevolence, which only the good practice established by the Buddha can restrain, one can wonder whether iconography conveys the same kind of ambiguity through the grape, or better, its juice, evoking the *yakṣiṇī*'s bloodthirst. The allegory of 'wine as the blood of grapes' is, after all, transversal to cultures, time, and space.

In this respect, the female attribute *par excellence*, the cornucopia, offers much food for thought. What is traditionally defined as a 'cornucopia' in Gandhāran art actually appears to be a hybrid of two different

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<sup>33</sup> Carter 1968, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall 1951, 2: 709, no. 72; 3: pl. 216, no. 72.

containers: on the one hand, the body matches the Graeco-Roman horn of plenty overflowing with produce and fruits; on the other, the termination recalls the rhyton, a horn-shaped vessel featuring a hollow element, usually in the shape of an animal or animal's head, used as wine or alcohol purer in libation. The Graeco-Roman cornucopia and the Gandhāran type were both attributed to female deities associated with abundance and fortune in their respective cultural contexts.<sup>35</sup>

As discussed by Niccolò Manassero, the rhyton holds several symbolic meanings, particularly fertility.<sup>36</sup> While the protome in the shape of an animal's head implies sacrifice, the scholar specifies that this notion would be more precisely manifested by the rhyton itself, not by the animal represented. This subtle emblematic distinction, however, does not fit into our context, as there is no conceptual break between the two semantic levels. The protome in the shape of a goat head – whether domestic or wild – always typifies the Gandhāran 'cornucopia'. Not to mention the recurring instances of goat sacrifices found in the available archaeological record from the region. Besides the previously mentioned evidence (§ 2), reference should be made to a bronze rhyton found at Imit (Gilgit), which is in the shape of a centaur holding an ibex in a manner that suggests a sacrificial offering.<sup>37</sup>

We leave philologists to deal with references to goats in literary sources. Let us briefly remark on the symbolic associations between wine and goats. A fact one can easily observe in nature may explain this connection: these animals are particularly voracious for grapes. For instance, goats eating vineyards are a recurrent literary theme in Dionysian etiological myths. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, goats began to be sacrificed to Bacchus as a punishment for biting vines. Similarly, Servius tells us that the king of Calydon, Oeneus ('wine-man'), learned winemaking by squeezing a bunch of grapes he received from a shepherd, who had caught a goat eating them.<sup>38</sup> Depictions of goats eating grapes or vine shoots are already attested in Sumerian art<sup>39</sup> and are also found in Gandhāran production: see, for instance, a relief from Jamālgarhī showing two goats eating the leaves and fruits of a vine in an open-air setting.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Di Castro 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Manassero 2010.

<sup>37</sup> The rhyton is kept in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (acc. no. EA1963.28). For bibliographic references, see the entry of the object on the museum's website: [http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/7/10230/10264/all/per\\_page/25/offset/0/sort\\_by/seqn./object/11133](http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/7/10230/10264/all/per_page/25/offset/0/sort_by/seqn./object/11133).

<sup>38</sup> For these and similar accounts, see Doria, Giuman 2019, 36 ff.

<sup>39</sup> See reference in Burkert 1966, 100-1 fn. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Zwalf 1996, no. 309.

#### 4 The Gandhāran Revelry Scenes: Again on the Saidu Sharif I Reliefs

In light of our observations, we shall now consider the Gandhāran reliefs depicting winemaking and revelry scenes, showing characters engaged in wine consumption, dancing, and playing music, with strong orgiastic connotations. These scenes were usually part of the main figurative apparatus of the *stūpa*, where they follow the unfolding episodes of the Buddha's life in a separate register. That the Gandhāran revelry scenes may represent local religious practices rooted deep in antiquity can be regarded as more than just a mere hypothesis.<sup>41</sup>

Traces of this cultural complex can be recognised in the Alexandrographers' accounts, variously describing Dionysiac-like cults among the Dardic people of the North-West, particularly in relation to the story of Nysa. According to the Classical sources, the city was founded by Dionysus at the foot of a mountain called Meros (cf. Sanskrit Meru), atop which was an open-air temple dedicated to the deity and visited by the locals in a bacchic fashion. In the sacred space were vats and tools for winemaking and a white stone image of the god created by Dionysus himself.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever deity the Greeks knew as Dionysus,<sup>43</sup> it is clear that they encountered a local worship that shared many structural and ritual aspects with the Dionysian Mysteries, such as the open-air celebration and its orgiastic character induced by wine consumption, wild dancing, and music. In other words, what we observe in the Gandhāran revelry scenes.

In this connection, we shall add some remarks on the Saidu Sharif reliefs (§ 2). We have seen that these scenes manifest a strong ceremonial character both by the drinking vessels and the goat, symbolic of an imminent sacrifice. Worthy of mention is also the 'Kushan' dress worn by the figures, which is not necessarily indicative of 'Kushan people' but instead of members of the local (Dardic) elite affiliated with the central power. Moreover, this type of dress strongly contrasts with

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<sup>41</sup> Recently, Tadashi Tanabe argued that these scenes depict the pleasures awaiting Buddhist devotees in paradise (2016; 2020). However, this hypothesis does not consider the whole set of archaeological, literary, and ethnological evidence available today.

<sup>42</sup> Carter 1968, 140 ff.; Filigenzi 2019b, 75, fn. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Several scholars have highlighted some shared characteristics between (Rudra-) Śiva and Dionysus (e.g. Long 1971). Also, we shall not forget that the North-West was a centre of Shaivism. For instance, Tucci (1963, 159) recalls the god's epithet of *Gāndhāra* 'from Gandhāra', which can also be understood as *Gāndhārasvara* (*svara* 'voice', referring to the songs dedicated to him). This latter may be connected to the *Gandarios* of Hesychius' Lexicon (Carter 1995, 150; *contra* Karttunen 2009, 132). For some Gandhāran Shaivite reliefs, see Taddei 1971; 1985. Also, see Mon/Mandi (i.e., Mandeo = Mahādeva = Śiva) of the Nuristani and Kalasha pantheon (Carter 1995, 152).

the use of Indian costumes in the Buddha's life scenes depicted in the lower register.<sup>44</sup>

Based on the ethnological data collected by Max Klimburg,<sup>45</sup> one of the Authors (§ 3) has already stressed elsewhere the strong affinities between the contents underlined in the Saidu Sharif reliefs and the feast held in the Indrak'un or 'Garden of Indr' (cf. Vedic Indra), a small forest of holly oaks and other fruit trees surrounded by wild vines, once a Nuristani cultic place located near Wama in the Pech Valley (southern Nuristan, Afghanistan). The feast would start around the end of September/October, marking the end of harvesting. The village's inhabitants would gather to attend the procession of the god image from the village temple (Indr-amā) to the Indr-tā, where it would be set on a stone base. Here, people of high rank would sit on rows of stones and enjoy dance, hymns and animal sacrifices performed in honour of the god while drinking wine produced in nearby stone vats.

The strict similarities between the Indrak'un, the 'Dardic' ceremonies recorded by the Greeks, and the Saidu scenes can hardly be overlooked. However, here we would like to take a leap forward and wonder whether the grape motif occurring in Gandhāran revelry scenes could be interpreted as a codified symbol to define the period when the depicted feasts were understood to take place by contemporary society. If so, this period would fall between late autumn, at the end of grape harvesting, and winter. While the Nuristani and Kalasha traditions bear different wine seasonal feasts<sup>46</sup> – and notwithstanding local or regional developments depending on environmental factors such as fruit availability and harvesting quantity – one particular festival, and the only one that appears to align with the meanings of the Gandhāran visual repertoire, is still observed by the Kalasha in the said period: namely, the New Year.

As in many other Indo-European traditions, the New Year stands as the most significant festival in the religious calendar of the Kalashas, which culminates with the winter solstice.<sup>47</sup> It celebrates the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one, hence the regeneration of the world and life. During the multifaceted rituals that formed the festival, the community experiences a period of social communion, which is gradually extended to the surrounding environment. Wine consumption, goat sacrifice, dances and songs with sexual undertones are core practices within the morphology of the celebration. According to some traditions, the coming to the valleys of the god Balimain and his attendant Pushaw, both connected to fertility (cf. Indr/Indra and the Vedic

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<sup>44</sup> Filigenzi 2019b, 72-3.

<sup>45</sup> Klimburg 2014; 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Carter 1992, 54-6

<sup>47</sup> Cacopardo 2016b.

Pūṣan),<sup>48</sup> marks the peak of the festival, corresponding to the renewal of the established order.

The possibility to understand the Gandhāra revelry scenes as a distinct picture of a context similar, or even cognate to, the Kalasha New Year festival offers a new perspective within the broad topic of the relations between Buddhism and local cultural substrata in ancient Gandhāra. Although this interpretation is based on fragmentary and patchy materials (no complete decorative programs have ever been preserved), the overall visual codes and themes consistently match the notions and practices underlying the New Year festival.

We may even venture further and recall John Irwin's interpretation of the *stūpa* as a cosmogram, i.e. an architectural rendition of the cosmic order.<sup>49</sup> In this connection, one cannot help but notice a subtle distinction between the temporal course in which the Buddha's narrative cycles and the revelry scenes respectively take place: the former being in a condition that is no longer in the realm of history; the latter existing in a defined time, "in the present and not *in illo tempore*".<sup>50</sup> However, both partake in the experience of cosmic order and life renewing themselves.

## 5 Final Remarks

The Italian university system embraces a principle, widely reflected in the classifications of disciplinary areas and courses, that combines the history of ancient art with archaeology. This does not imply that an art historian must necessarily practise field archaeology or vice versa, but rather implies an inalienable epistemological perspective that recognises the value of visual arts as historical, social, and cultural testimony. This value can only be recovered through context, from which the image draws its semantic, aesthetic, and stylistic codes.

We would never have arrived at the interpretations presented here (for which, of course, we take responsibility for limitations and inaccuracies) without the possibility of placing our reliefs within a secure network of relations that, by concentric circles, expands from the stratigraphy of a site to its own artistic province and specific territory, and only then to external comparisons. Interpretation thus arises not only from a strictly art historical analysis, but from a wide range of data made available to art history by an inclusive archaeological map, in which, over the course of almost seventy years of research, all traces (certainly, all those recognisable or that we were able to recognise)

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<sup>48</sup> Cacopardo 2016a, 255; Di Carlo 2010, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Irwin 1979.

<sup>50</sup> Filigenzi 2019b, 73.



of the interaction between human societies and territory have converged. An idea may arise, as in this case, from an intuition suggested by a transdisciplinary comparison, but the verification of its plausibility treads on firmer ground if it is then entrusted to the corroboration of material evidence. Without the body of archaeological information that excavations and reconnaissance have produced on civil and religious settlements, as well as on valley and mountain economies and their mutual integration, this study would not have been possible.

We would also like to point out how landscape archaeology, recently established and accepted as a specific discipline, assisted by increasingly refined diagnostic techniques, has in fact been practised in the past without a specific label. Since its beginnings, IAMP has included in its projects a constant focus on the landscape and traces of non-monumental cultures or traditions. This is the case with rock sanctuaries and rock sculptures, graffiti, and winemaking stations, which live in symbiosis with the landscape without modifying it, but rather by reading, or exploiting, its natural forms. Notwithstanding the impressive monumental remains of Swat, the concept of a topography that does not necessarily coincide with the built-up space, or that pre-exists it and justifies it, has also always been present in the IAMP's investigations of the region.

The reliefs discussed here seem to belong, precisely, to that elusive world of substratum that creeps like an apparent otherness into the demarcated space of the Buddhist domain. And yet, it would be reductive to consider them extraneous. Rather, they reveal, under the unifying cloak of hegemonic cultural references (in this case, Buddhism), the complexity of the nexuses of social reality.

The work has just begun. We have tried to identify behaviour that we can trace back to a 'cultural mentality'. We will perhaps be able to recognise actions and characters more precisely in the future, when other series of similar reliefs, of archaeological provenance and linkable to each other by spatial and chronological proximity, are more carefully studied and published. This is the case, for instance, with some stair-riser reliefs from Shnaisha depicting standing figures in Kushan dress interacting in various ways with the main character (referred to by the excavators as government/state functionary), namely a central seated figure, often armed with a spear.<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly, this is another window on the world that moves around the Buddhist sacred spaces and interacts with them. The actions depicted in the Shnaisha reliefs differ from those we analysed here and yet they too are strongly marked by references to actuality (the evocation of a space that lies outside the sacred area, the focus on a seated aristocrat, the historical topicality of clothing that contrasts with the philologically 'Indian'

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**51** Rahman 1993, 21, 48-9; pls. 41a, 47a-b, 48a-b.

clothing of the characters depicted in the biographical scenes) and by codified attitudes, gestures and behaviours that are part of one and the same 'realised signifying system'.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, we would like to devote a brief reflection on the use of written sources. If we are concerned with Buddhist art, we cannot ignore its literary and epigraphic production. However, the use we can make of written sources depends on what we expect from them. We will never find in the image the exact transposition of a text. Even in cases of the closest correspondence (think, for instance, of the biographical stories of *jātakas* and *avadānas*), the image is constructed in relation to a syntax and within a defined space that are different in nature from those of the text. Hence, if we look at the meaning of an iconography from a strictly logocentric point of view (it does not exist unless it is written), the relationship between text and image will always have a very narrow margin of encounter. Moreover, although all images are derivative (of intellectual or sensible cognitions), it would be unrealistic to assume that their source of derivation is always a written text. On the contrary, it is not infrequent that images represent our primary source of information on processes of historicisation of individual or collective memories.

Likewise, if we limit ourselves to a descriptive analysis based on the model, scenes of the type analysed here will be nothing more than a peripheral and imitative rivulet of Greek Dionysian culture. It is the context, with its complex network of relations and comparisons, that may suggest a different juxtaposition between image (or rather, the visual syntax to which the image belongs) and text or model. The coherence we must seek is not in correspondence, but rather in consonance. Likewise, we can look at the apparent dissonance not as a fanciful intrusion but as the insertion of a different temporal plane, which makes the metahistorical plot of the mythical tale interact with the present, thus implicitly staging a *modus vivendi* between different realities and identities.

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<sup>52</sup> Williams 1981, 207.

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# Wine, Women and Royalty in Gandhāra

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**Abstract** Curtius Rufus (8.10.34-36) narrates that when Alexander the Great had conquered the city of Massaga, which was the capital of the kingdom of the Assaceniens, queen Cleopis presented herself to the conqueror with a retinue of noblewomen who libated wine from golden cups: in this way she managed to maintain her kingdom. Beyond the fictional episode that is analysed as a 'cultural representation', the paper investigates the plausibility of the ritual act that the text reports, i.e., the libation of wine through peculiar precious vessels (*paterae* or *phialai* – often inscribed), in the historical context of Greater Gandhāra and, more in general, in the 'Indo-Iranian frontier', in connection with royalty and the presence of women of rank. Research shows that the connection between these elements is functional to the ostentation of prestige by elites, and to the recognition of kingship: the possession and use of gold libation cups is a characteristic of sovereignty, a speaking symbol for both Indians and Greeks.

**Keywords** Curtius Rufus. Alexander the Great. Assaceniens. Queen Cleopis. Swat. Greater Gandhāra. Paterae. Phialai. Wine libation. Indo-Greeks. Indo-Scythians. Scythians.

**Summary** 1 The Backdrop of the Story. – 2 Curtius Rufus and Queen Cleopis. – 3 Women and Royalty. – 4 Wine Libation and Precious Vessels. – 5 Golden Cups and Kingship: Ideological Connections.

## 1 The Backdrop of the Story

In the autumn of 327 BC, at the beginning of the Indian campaign, Alexander the Great arrived in the region of the Gureo-Panjhora River and, from there, entered the Swat Valley, at that time inhabited by the Assaceniens, who were preparing to fight him. Thus, he conquered the cities of Bazira (Barikot), Massaga (Mingora), Ora (Udegram) and many other strongholds before taking the fortress of Aornos and heading towards the Indus. The sources are not consistent in presenting the itineraries of this journey and the details,<sup>1</sup> but they are unanimous in attesting the strong local resistance of the inhabitants, thus suggesting the existence of a society politically autonomous from the Achaemenid power.<sup>2</sup> The opulent region constituted the kingdom of the recently deceased king Assacanos, and the surrender negotiations of its capital, Massaga, were conducted by his mother who was recognised as a legitimate queen. Even about her figure, the historiography is not unanimous. According to Arrian, she was taken prisoner together with Assacanos's daughter,<sup>3</sup> while for all the remaining historians (generally considered as forming part of the so-called *Vulgate*)<sup>4</sup> she played a more active role. According to Diodorus, Assacanos's mother, admiring Alexander's magnanimity, sent him very precious gifts and pledged allegiance.<sup>5</sup> According to Curtius Rufus, Justin, and the *Metz Epitome* her name was Cleopis, and she had a relationship with Alexander, a fact described in a

1 Cf. Antonetti 2020, 98-100 (also for primary sources). I am generally following Curtius Rufus' itinerary, on which a general scientific consensus has recently been reached, especially thanks to Olivieri 1996; Rapin, Grenet 2018; Coloru, Olivieri 2019. For Alexander's itinerary before his entry into Swat, see now Coloru and Olivieri in Coloru, Iori, Olivieri, in this volume.

2 On the Achaemenid rule in the area, cf. Callieri 2023, 863-76. On the toponymy of the region, cf. De Chiara 2020, 18 ff. On Mengjieli/Massaga as the capital city of Uḍḍiyāna, see Iori 2023.

3 Arr. *Anab.* 4.27.4: τὴν τε πόλιν αἰρεῖ κατὰ κράτος ἐρημωθεῖσαν τῶν προμαχομένων, καὶ τὴν μητέρα τὴν Ἀσσακάνου καὶ τὴν παῖδα ἔλαβεν (Forcibly conquered the city, which was now without defenders, and took Assacanos' mother and daughter prisoner). Cf. Sisti, Zambrini 2004, 445.

4 Today, *Vulgate* appears a questionable definition: this historiographical tradition is now carefully studied by diversifying its components. See Bosworth 1995, 141-2; Baynham 1995; 1998 and, for the region under study, the case studies of Rapin 2017; Rapin, Grenet 2018; Coloru, Olivieri 2019.

5 Diod. Sic. 17.84.1: ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις γενομένων τῶν ὄρκων ἡ μὲν βασίλισσα τὴν μεγαλοψυχίαν τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου θαυμάσασα δῶρά τε κράτιστα ἐξέπεμψε καὶ πᾶν τὸ προσταττόμενον ποιήσειν ἐπηγγείλατο (A sworn pact was made on these terms: the queen, admiring Alexander's magnanimity, sent him precious gifts and promised to carry out his every command). The *Periocha* suggests that the city was Massaca (= Massaga); Prandi 2013, 141-2.



particularly fictional way by their historical accounts.<sup>6</sup> It would seem, at first glance, that we are facing another version of the famous literary *topos* of Alexander's erotic encounters with mythological figures, such as Candace or the Queen of the Amazons, but we shall see that the episode is rather part of the Macedonian conqueror's series of encounters with queens endowed with real power, like Ada and Sisygambis,<sup>7</sup> and whose authority he carefully defines. Though a legendary aspect is certainly present in the account we are dealing with, nevertheless this episode, as well as the previous ones, is the result of a tradition developed in at least four centuries of historiography and should be considered as a 'cultural representation'. As such, it will be analysed, in an attempt to understand the original contexts in which the representations at stake were 'adapted', rather than merely emphasising the *Quellenforschung*.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Curtius Rufus and Queen Cleophis

I will mainly deal with Curtius Rufus' version on the basis of the following reasons: Curtius has resulted to be the most reliable and informed historian for this part of Alexander's expedition;<sup>9</sup> he is more attentive to the characteristics of Indian royalty than Strabo, who

<sup>6</sup> Just. *Epit.* 12.7.9-11: *Inde montes Daedalos regnaque Cleopheidis reginae petit. Quae cum se dedidisset ei, concubitu redemptum regnum ab Alexandro recepit, inlecebris consecuta, quod armis non poterat; filiumque ab eo genitum Alexandrum nominavit, qui postea regno Indorum potitus est. Cleophis regina propter prostratam pudicitiam scortum regium ab Indis exinde appellata est* (He then reached the Daedala Mountains and the kingdom of queen Cleophis. When she had given herself to the king, redeemed her kingdom by her favours and received it from Alexander, having acquired by caresses what she had not been able to have by arms; and she named Alexander the son whom she conceived of the king, and he was afterwards master of the kingdom of India. For this reason, queen Cleophis was called by the Indians the royal courtesan). *Metz Epit.* 45: *deinde ad oppidum reversionem fecerunt. eis obviam venit Cleophis cum populi principibus ac nepote parvo, prae se velatas verbenas ac fruges supplicii signa portantes. tum Alexandro facies mulieris pulchra visa est. erat enim statu ac dignitate ea, uti nobili loco orta atque imperio digna videretur. deinde Alexander cum paucis in oppidum introiit ibique complures dies commoratus est* (They then returned to the town. Cleophis came to meet them with the leading citizens and her little grandson, carrying before them wands wrapped in wool and fruits as signs of supplication. Alexander saw that the woman had comely looks, and her bearing and dignity betrayed her noble birth, suited to rule. Then Alexander entered the town with a few men and dallied there for several days). This account is the only one that attributes a grandson rather than a son to the queen. On the relationship between the *Metz Epitome* and Curtius, see Baynham 1995.

<sup>7</sup> For the first case, see Baynham 2001; Coppola 2008; for the second one, Howe 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Li Causi in Li Causi, Pomelli 2001-02, 233-40, following the symbolism theory of D. Sperber. On the sources of Curtius, see Baynham 1998, 57-100; Atkinson 2000, XIX-XXV.

<sup>9</sup> See above, fnn. 1; 4. Cf. also Tucci 1977, 48-50.

is, among the classical sources, the reference author,<sup>10</sup> and his story presents an interweaving of elements that are not immediately decipherable and attributable to a specific cultural horizon, as is the case for other versions. The *Metz Epitome*, for instance, represents the episode as a procession of suppliants, which includes the queen and the *principes populi* (the 'leaders of the people'), in a form that recalls a Roman setting.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Diodorus' short version – while historically appreciable – proposes the classic scheme of the submission ceremony, which is typical of the Great Achaemenid King and is attested for Alexander in India, with regard to the *reguli* who reached him as soon as he 'crossed the border of India' and in the case of kings Omphis and Mousicanos.<sup>12</sup>

Curtius narrates that when the inhabitants of Massaga were besieged and without hope, they decided to surrender and sent ambassadors to the Greek king to beg for mercy (*veniam*). When this was granted (*qua impetrata*),

*regina venit cum magno nobilium feminarum grege aureis pateris  
vina libantium. Ipsa genibus regis parvo filio admoto non **veniam**  
modo, sed etiam **pristinæ fortunæ** impetravit decus: quippe ap-  
pellata regina est. Et credidere quidam plus formæ quam misera-  
tioni datum: puero quoque postea ex ea utcumque genito Al-  
exandro fuit nomen.*

The queen came with a great train of noble ladies, making libations of wine from golden cups. She herself, placing her little son at the king's knees, obtained, not only pardon, but also the splendour of her former fortune; indeed, she was addressed as queen. And some believed that this was granted rather to her beauty than because of compassion; also, it is certain that a son who was born to her, whoever his father was, was called Alexander.<sup>13</sup>

Leaving aside the last part of the story that concerns the union between the characters and the improbable birth of Alexander's son (which is a predictable theme and is also found in Justin),<sup>14</sup> it is worth noting the way in which the queen presents herself to the king to

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**10** Compare Curt. 8.9.23-30 and Str. 15.55 (obviously, on the basis of Alexander's historians and Megasthenes). On the topic, Antonetti (forthcoming).

**11** On the ancient supplication, the Greek *hikesia*, cf. Canciani, Pellizer, Faedo 2006; Naiden 2006. For the attributes of the supplicants depicted here, Canciani, Pellizer, Faedo 2006, 205-6.

**12** Curt. 8.10.1, 12.5-11. Arr. *Anab.* 6.15.5. See Briant 2017, 500-2; Coloru 2021, 69-70.

**13** Curt. 8.10.34-6 (emphasis added), transl. by Rolfe 1946.

**14** See Atkinson 2000, 508-9.

wonder what that means. According to the text, there occurs a procession (Curtius' *grex*, to be understood as the Latin *pompa* and the Greek *pompe*) of noblewomen who follow the queen making wine libations. However, whether this libation will be followed by a sacrifice or a banquet, is not specified. Likewise, we do not know whether the precious vessels (*aureae paterae*) will then be donated to the king, an act that would follow into the category of 'submission ceremony with gift offering' which is Diodorus' preferred version. The little son's position at the knees of the king is, instead, very clear: it represents the *hikesia*, the classic attitude of the suppliant, known to the Greeks from Homer onwards; as we have seen, it is the bare version chosen from the *Metz Epitome* to interpret the whole episode.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note how the same narrative elements appear, with different intentions, in the various versions: the fundamental function of the institution of supplication, that of having one's life saved, becomes an accessory element in Curtius' text because the king has already shown his mercy. In his account, the supplication is evidently performed to confirm the power of Cleophis, who does not seem to bow before the king (as the supplication would require) and, in the end, is 'acclaimed queen'.

Curtius' version is composite, somehow hybrid, not only when compared to the other authors but especially in the light of the cultural references he uses, which evoke: the procession, the sacrifice, the banquet (albeit less likely), the supplication, the royal acclamation. Basically, fundamental institutions of the ancient world are invoked. However, considering how they are quickly mentioned and placed side by side in the text, alluded to but not fully described, we cannot outline a reliable historical picture, rather, a 'cultural representation'. Nonetheless, a learned reader of the Roman Empire could find Curtius' story generic but plausible, even in its subtlest, terminological aspects: to Cleophis is destined the *venia* (forgiveness) of the Macedonian king, not the *clementia* (clemency) that is instead reserved for the illustrious mother of the King of Kings, Sisygambis, whose reply to Alexander is "dignified and perceptive. [...] She also knows that Alexander's mercy is politically expedient".<sup>16</sup>

To an upper-class Roman from the late republican or early imperial period, *clementia* and *gratia* (gratitude) are two-edged, implying

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<sup>15</sup> See also Naiden 2006, 55 for the mother/child pair in scenes of supplication, and *passim*. For another example of a supplication whose setting is 'Romanised', see Curt. 6.7.35, 10.14: Philotas begs Alexander, who gives him his right hand, cf. Atkinson 2000, XVII-XVIII. The ample space given by Curtius to Philotas episode demonstrates his interest in politics, certainly aroused by his contemporary one, and the central role played by the king's *clementia* in relation to the monarchical institution (Curt. 8.8.8). Cf. Baynham 1998, 13, 143, 182-3, 197-8.

<sup>16</sup> Baynham 1998, 127 on Curt. 3.12.24-5.

the intrinsic superiority of the individual who exercises the former and the obligation of the latter<sup>17</sup> but *venia* is the request of the guilty and the losers.

Yet Cleophis manages to retain the royal *status* she had before Alexander's conquest, that *fortuna* which for Curtius is the 'structural pendant' of the *regnum*.<sup>18</sup> We can therefore take a step forward and try to shed light on this earlier history, attempting what we can call a 'local' reading of the story: in other words, trying to establish whether Curtius' narration can arouse echoes in the very region in which it was set, i.e. 'Greater Gandhāra' (but also, in a broader sense, in the 'Indo-Iranian frontier'),<sup>19</sup> in the time span from the passage of Alexander to the first century AD, period in which Curtius most likely wrote his work.<sup>20</sup>

The salient element in the Roman historian's account is the affirmation of kingship: to be more specific, the negotiation between a 'vassal' and an 'imperial' kingship, obtained with the deployment of clear indicators of *status*. These are wealth and reciprocity, in conjunction with an active female component. We will therefore analyse these themes which are ideologically interconnected: women's participation in royalty; wine libation through peculiar precious vessels, and the symbolism of royal power conveyed by these elements.

### 3 Women and Royalty

Kingship is well documented everywhere in this area and occupies a central place in the *imaginaire* of ancient India, but what matters in our context is the female presence, and any historical evidence that documents it. We certainly cannot believe the historicity of the figure of Cleophis as exactly described in our account. However, on the basis of the sources, there is little doubt about the existence of an Assacanian kingdom, allied with Indian principalities, and depending on the choices of the ruling family.<sup>21</sup> The presence of a procession accompanying the queen is also attested: from another passage of Curtius, we do know that the Indian king was accompanied by two separate

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<sup>17</sup> Baynham 1998, 134-5. See Naiden 2006, 242-3.

<sup>18</sup> Baynham 1998, 134-6 and above, fn. 15.

<sup>19</sup> For a definition of 'Greater Gandhāra' cf. Stewart 2024, 1-2; for the concept of 'Indo-Iranian frontier' cf. Callieri 2023, 838.

<sup>20</sup> Baynham 1998, "Appendix", in favour of dating the author to the age of Vespasian; Atkinson 2000, XI-XIX, for the Claudian period. Lucarini 2009, VIII: the author was read and possibly followed by Hegesippos and the *Metz Epitome*.

<sup>21</sup> After Tucci's 1977 seminal contribution, see, for Alexander' time, Coloru 2021.

processions of equal splendour, one led by the queen and one consisting of the royal concubines (*paelicum longum ordo sequitur; separatum a reginae ordine agmen est aequatque luxuriam*, 8.9.29). The latter is also widely attested in Indian literature.<sup>22</sup>

In our discourse, particular attention must be paid to some remarkable numismatic sources related to regent queens and wives of rulers. The documentation is scanty, although of great interest, and is concentrated in the final phase of the Indo-Greek kingdoms and the initial phase of the Indo-Scythians.

The first among this group of notable women is Agathocleia (reigning in the third quarter of the second century BC), now considered the wife of Straton I,<sup>23</sup> who managed to keep the eastern part of the paternal kingdom between eastern Gandhāra and Panjab. She appears on a series of tetradrachms together with Straton, also in the Greek numismatic legend of the obverse, probably receiving from him the insignia of power.<sup>24</sup> Alone, she is portrayed on the obverse of drachms – a commemorative coinage – with braided hairs in Indian style and Greek legend:<sup>25</sup> the queen of Taxila is characterised by a rare epithet that alludes to the Divine and which served as a model for other queens in the area, *Theotropos* ('divine in character', or 'turning towards divinity').<sup>26</sup> Hermaios (c. 90-70 BC), who was the last Greek king to rule over Paropamisadae and Arachosia before the invasion of the nomads, had his first two coin series minted also in the name of his wife Calliope, perhaps a signal of a marriage alliance: on the obverse the two busts appear geminated and are accompanied by the names of the two sovereigns in the Greek legend.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the Indo-Scythian conqueror of Gandhāra and Panjab, the king Saka Maues, issues a series of tetradrachms in which, on the obverse, stands his wife Machene (or Nachene), who adopts the Agathocleia's epithet *Theotropos*.<sup>28</sup>

**22** On Indian royal concubines, Sternbach's 1951 essay is fundamental.

**23** She is not the widow of Menander: Dumke, Grigo 2016. Previous *status quaestionis* with historical commentary in Coloru 2009, 246-7; 2015, 178-80.

**24** Dumke, Grigo 2016, 53, 57.

**25** Dumke, Grigo 2016, 57, now the fundamental study for the chronology and monetary iconography of Agathocleia.

**26** Muccioli 2013, 306-8, with a very fine analysis of the possible meanings of the epithet, which only occurs in this area and in this era.

**27** Coloru 2009, 256; 2015, 179.

**28** Coloru 2009, 257-8; 2015, 179-80, 186. Coloru 2015, 185 for another example in the same area: "in the first century BC Tanlis Maidates, possibly a tribal chief belonging to the Sakaraucae, struck a series of coins representing himself and his wife Raggodeme [...]. The veiled portrait of Raggodeme, accompanied by the Greek title KYPIA, i.e., 'the Lady', is represented on the reverse [...] denoting the divine status of the queen".

The custom of representing in coinage queens – and family members – derives from Egypt through the Seleucids (from the beginning of the second century BC) and is widespread in all the kingdoms of the Indo-Iranian and Mesopotamian areas. Nevertheless, Omar Coloru highlighted an early concentration of these attestations in the north-western Indian area, underlining the special political role of the queens portrayed in the obverse of the coins (usually reserved for the ruling kings), and especially “the high status a woman of the royal family could attain among the Indo-Scythians”.<sup>29</sup>

To these considerations, derived from numismatic analysis, are added others of an archaeological and epigraphic nature, which help to paint a coherent picture of the active presence of *status* women in the local society of Assacenic origin, which over the centuries took on Persian, Hellenic, Indian and finally Scythian characteristics.<sup>30</sup>

For the protohistoric phase of the Swat Valley (c. 1200-800 BC), recent excavations of two important groups of graves at Gogdara IV and Udegram, showed, in burial practices, a

careful consideration of a cyclical conception of time and a ‘narrative’ ideological background in which gender, age and kinship roles were actively performed by members of the household.<sup>31</sup>

At Udegram, in some of these megalithic burial chambers, the primary interment of an aged female might

involve a strong link between females and the idea of the household, and perhaps even a matrilinear descent and residential pattern.<sup>32</sup>

Further archaeological research sheds light on the social customs of the region’s lay elites of Indo-Scythian times: an early-historic funerary monument at Butkara IV, the largest multiple burial monument ever discovered in Swat, which was in use at least from c. 151 BC to c. 51 AD, clearly speaks of the

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**29** Coloru 2015, 186.

**30** Tucci 1977 carefully examined the Purānic tradition of ancient local dynasties that retained the names of some queens (46), while expressing scepticism about dating them; he defined the local population as a Dardic people and was inclined to see a connection between the Assacenic and the Massagetae (and generally the Scythians): the bellicosity of the latter’s women was legendary in ancient historiography (51). On the topic, cf. Rollinger, Schnegg 2023. Today, it is believed that local elites had deep roots in the region: Olivieri 2019, 252-3. On the genetic pools of the Swat population, see Narasimhan et al. 2019.

**31** Vidale, Micheli, Olivieri 2016, 209.

**32** Vidale, Micheli, Olivieri 2016, 208.

elitarian role of the family [...] who managed to keep a visible memory of its ancestry not only through the elevation of a monument, but especially through the enduring ritual of the manipulation of the dead, occurred throughout two centuries.<sup>33</sup>

For at least four/five generations a defined burial custom was performed in it, where the known ancestor is represented by the mother, and the main deceased by the son.<sup>34</sup> L.M. Olivieri emphasises the importance of the cemetery, given its position between two major Buddhist sanctuaries (Butkara and Saidu Sharif) at the outskirts of the most important urban centre of Swat, and the concomitance of these funerary uses with the early development phase of Buddhism and urbanism in Swat, going hand in hand.<sup>35</sup>

The local ruling family was that of the Oḍī-rajās: *clientes* of the Saka, they might have been in power in the period from the first century BC to the first century AD, contemporarily to the Apraca royal house in Bajaur.<sup>36</sup> The evergetic activity of female exponents of these royal families who dominated the mountain regions north of the Peshawar Valley towards Buddhist monasteries is widely attested in the Gandhāran epigraphy: royal women played the roles of principal donors, co-donors, and beneficiaries of ritual activity, a female protagonist that decreases with the advent of the Kushans.<sup>37</sup> As A. Lakshminarayanan wrote,

the chief wives of the *rāja* and the *strategos* seem to have been more active as principal donors establishing multiple donations, but secondary wives, sisters, and aunts of royal men also supported the *saṃgha* further strengthening the Apracarāja's role in the Buddhist corpus. We can tentatively advance that a similar blueprint of patronage was likely practiced by the royal women related to the Oḍīrājas, but their donations are yet to be confirmed by the archaeological record.<sup>38</sup>

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**33** Olivieri 2019, 247.

**34** Olivieri 2019, 252.

**35** Olivieri 2019, 248, 253. The (so-called) burial of a young woman associated with the foundation of the Indo-Greek city wall (c. 130-115 BC) of Barikot is interpreted by Iori 2021 as a ritual deposit aiming at legitimising the new idea of city foundation, but, since the female skeleton is in secondary deposition, it does not appear to be significant of a specific female role in the ritual act.

**36** Olivieri 2019, 253.

**37** Salomon 1988; 1997; 2007. Baums 2012, 202-4; 2018b, 58-9.

**38** Lakshminarayanan 2023, 221.

These local elites express a

*smanioso desiderio* ('eager desire' or 'craze') [...] to appropriate and represent themselves materially through the forms of the 'symbolic capital' of Hellenistic Greece and Hellenised Iran, to which ritual innovations (the creation of mobile geographies of pilgrimage) undoubtedly contributed.<sup>39</sup>

We can visually appreciate this trend by contemplating Saidu Sharif's frieze celebrating the figure of Utarasena, the founder of the local dynasty, the progenitor of the Oḍi family reigning in Swat,<sup>40</sup> in the frame of a 'dynastic sanctuary'.

Women at the top of society can, therefore, assume a political role, being it either institutional or belonging to the religious sphere. This picture is increasingly attested, starting from the end of the Indo-Greek kingdoms, and is consistent with the prominent role that contemporary queens, and *status* women held in the Hellenistic, Mediterranean and Eastern worlds, of course also and especially in Rome.

#### 4 Wine Libation and Precious Vessels

The investigation of libations from golden *paterae* is not an easy task: it is difficult to select relevant examples within a rich but heterogeneous archaeological material from a wide area ranging from Afghanistan to northern India, and almost always lacking precise contextual and chronological references.

The first source one would naturally turn to, is the iconographic repertoire of the so-called 'Gandhāran reliefs', but the latter mainly provides us with images of beakers, mugs, pitchers, and *kantharoi*. Evidently, a particular vessel such as the Latin *patera*, clearly identifiable with the Greek *phiale* in form and function,<sup>41</sup> was not so widespread in the local tradition of drinking scenes, unlike the *kantharos* itself and the Graeco-Roman cornucopia, which finds a parallel in the Gandhāran type, a typical attribute of female deities associated with abundance and fortune.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the Kalash tradition of Nuristan and Kafir has kept alive the use of precious metal goblets,

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<sup>39</sup> Olivieri 2022, 175. The application of Bordieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' to the case at hand was made by Galli 2011, 282, 285-7.

<sup>40</sup> Olivieri 2022, 18 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Hölscher, Schörner 2005, 205, 208-9 (on the *patera*).

<sup>42</sup> Moscatelli, Filigenzi in this volume. Cf. also Filigenzi 2019 for an updated definition of the entire visual repertoire of the 'Gandhāran reliefs'. For the archaeological evidence of these different vessels in the Barikot excavations, see Iori in Coloru, Iori, Olivieri, in this volume.



a tradition that has its roots in Central Asia, as illustrated by archaeological and ethnographic research,<sup>43</sup> but, again, their shape is very different from that of the *phiale*.

The second resource to draw on, would then be the literary tradition: a drinking cup defined by the sources as *caṣaka* could be a reference to a context homologous to the one studied. According to J. McHugh, the Sanskrit word *caṣaka*, which is attested from approximately the early-mid first millennium AD in literary scenes of luxurious drinking with cups and vessels made of gemstones, silver, and gold, may be based on an Iranian word:<sup>44</sup> the same happens for other Indian words related to the sphere of wine and drinking, thus revealing the imported origin of these goods of social prestige, as, for instance, the excellent *Kāpiśāyana* wine (*madhu*) which was imported from Kapiśa, near Begram in modern Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup> A Gāndhārī *caṣaga* parallels the Sanskrit *caṣaka*,<sup>46</sup> a fact that might allow one to speculate about the existence of a traditional local cup in that cultural area. But, as we do not know what shape the cup known as *caṣaka* has, we must set aside this interpretative possibility.

As is often the case, it is not easy to associate ancient lexicons with archaeological finds and, furthermore, with modern taxonomy. For this reason, we should turn again to Curtius' account in which the action of making a libation of wine from golden *paterae* is clearly expressed. Since this action has, in the context, its own functional coherence, the latter will have to be better investigated starting with the value attributed to the Greek *phiale* (corresponding to the Latin *patera*).

Within the Greek world, the word *phiale* referenced the vessel designated by this name in modern scholarship, namely the handleless libation bowl with the mound in the middle.<sup>47</sup>

The *phiale* constantly accompanies one of the most frequent ritual acts in Greek religion, that of libation; indeed, it may be said to constitute its technical object *par excellence*. Its mere presence, in an archaeological context, is an indication of a libation, i.e. of the "most

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<sup>43</sup> Francfort 2007-08; Klimburg 2014; 2016. See the *caveat* of McHugh 2021b, 128, fn. 75.

<sup>44</sup> McHugh 2021a, 184; McHugh 2021b, 120-2.

<sup>45</sup> McHugh 2021a, 53, 131-2; McHugh 2021b, 114-15.

<sup>46</sup> McHugh 2021b, 121, fn. 32 with full references: in Gāndhārī *caṣaga* is attested as a measure of volume (s.v. "caṣaga" in Baums, Glass 2002a-).

<sup>47</sup> Gaifman 2018, with the *caveat* that neither current terminology nor ancient language is always consistent. On the *phiale*, after the seminal work of Lushey 1939, see Krauskopf 2005.

refined and purest form of renunciation”,<sup>48</sup> because it entails the total irretrievability of the offering.<sup>49</sup> The *phiale*'s success in antiquity was due to the fact that it “evoked the dedicator’s personal participation in the libation and his involvement in the making of the offering”, as it “embodied the dedicator’s physical commitment to an act of piety”.<sup>50</sup>

its unique design allows the performer of the ritual to manipulate it with ease, smoothly controlling the course and extent of the flow [of the poured liquid].<sup>51</sup>

*Phialai* also indicate the divine or heroic nature of those who manipulate them, so they are frequently seen depicted in the hands of deities involved in rituals:<sup>52</sup>

they constantly await human acts of giving and, if they so choose, they can respond to the bringing of liquids to their vessels with participation in a divine libation.<sup>53</sup>

By substituting the container for the content, one understands how the *phiale* becomes a favourite offering at shrines, an *agalma* that also has an economic value:<sup>54</sup> *chremata* which are recorded in sanctuary inventories very often with their weight.<sup>55</sup> In the Roman imperial era, there is an accentuation of the institutional aspect over the votive one in public representations of sacrificial rites: starting with Augustus, the canonical image of the libating emperor with *patera* is affirmed, aimed at communicating one of the fundamental Roman virtues, *pietas*.<sup>56</sup>

The Gandhāran testimonies of *phialai* are rare. The surviving ones are made of precious metal, especially silver, sometimes fully or partially gilded; unfortunately, we do not know the original archaeological context of most of them, as they usually come from the antiques market, like two famous private collections believed to originate, one

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**48** Burkert 2003, 173.

**49** The beautiful definition is by Parisi 2017, 562.

**50** Gaifman 2018, 457 (for both quotations).

**51** Gaifman 2018, 449.

**52** Lissarague 1995, 132.

**53** Gaifman 2018, 460.

**54** Lissarague 1995, 133.

**55** Parisi 2017, 502; Gaifman 2018, 456-7. According to Kéi 2014, the *phiale* is a multifunctional and versatile object; it serves as a medium for contact and exchange, as well as a symbol of honor between humans and the world of gods and the deceased.

**56** Simon 2004, 247: the most famous – and archetypal – representation is the statue of Augustus of Via Labicana.

from an area located between modern Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the other from the Mohmand Agency north of the Khyber Pass.<sup>57</sup>

The latter contains some specimens of shallow and smooth *phialai*,<sup>58</sup> but some stand out for their elaborate decoration. One of them, finely chiselled, belongs to the Achaemenid tradition and is, perhaps, an Egyptian production: dating from the second or early first century BC, is very famous for its bilingual inscription in Greek and Gāndhārī, which connotes the artefact as an offering by the meridarch Kalliphon (*Kaliphona* in Kharoṣṭhī) to an Indian deity who in Kharoṣṭhī is *Boa*-interpreted by Falk as *Bhava*, “one of the gods melting into Śiva”,<sup>59</sup> and in Greek *Chaos*.<sup>60</sup> The Greek interpretation, not very satisfactory, reveals the evident difficulty in identifying the venerated deity in the complex identity of this border area, which may have witnessed the simultaneous development of layered and parallel forms of worship, still evolving at the time of their ‘fixation’ in the epigraphic document.

The treasure, possibly associated with a Hindu shrine from the late phase of the Indo-Greek period, includes two more offerings (without indication of the recipient deity) by officials whose title is derived from the Seleucid administrative tradition: one, in Gāndhārī, is the offering by a certain Samangaka, described as *epesukupena* (ἐπίσκοπος), of a gilded silver bowl with Eroses;<sup>61</sup> the other, in Greek, is the dedication of the meridarch Phoitokles (or Phantokles) of a silver *mastos* and also bears the weight inscription (in Attic drachmas).<sup>62</sup>

Writing *en pointillé* coexists for both Greek and Kharoṣṭhī on precious vessels with a similar function, and for the first time in the area, weight notation, also of Hellenic origin, appears. The objects constituting the second treasure, found between Pakistan and Afghanistan,

<sup>57</sup> The first one was published by Baratte 2001 and Falk 2001 (see also Salomon 1990); the second one by Falk 2009. For both, see the epigraphical updates in CKI, and Baums’ very detailed contribution in this volume. For copies in terracotta of the silver *phialai* samples, see Falk 2010, 99.

<sup>58</sup> Falk 2009, 25, 37-8. Cf. Baratte 2001, 39-41.

<sup>59</sup> Falk 2009, 40. Cf. CKI 552 and Baums, in this volume.

<sup>60</sup> IGIAC 88bis: Καλλιφῶν μεριδάρχης εὐξάμενος ἀνέθηκεν τῷ ΧΑΟΣΕΙ. *Chaos* would thus be the *interpretatio graeca* of *Bhava*, but G. Rougemont and P. Bernard raise doubts about the alleged Greek dative *Chaosei* from the Greek nominative *Chaos*. G.-J. Pinault, believes that the composer of the Greek text was unable to render the Gāndhārī word *Boa* into Greek and resorted to another name (epithet?) of the god *Bhava/Śiva*. Cf. SEG 62, 1571.

<sup>61</sup> Falk 2009, 29-31. Cf. CKI 553 (without weight indication).

<sup>62</sup> Falk 2009, 34-5 (*Phantokles*). But cf. IGIAC 88ter: Διὰ Φοιτοκλέους (?) τοῦ μεριδάρχου· δρ(αχμαὶ) ν´. SEG 62, 1572. On the Hellenistic administrative titles transposed into Gāndhārī, see P. Bernard in IGIAC, 272; Coloru 2009, 268; Baums 2018a, 39. A comprehensive functional interpretation, very convincing, has been offered by Lakshminarayanan 2023, 215-20.

slightly more recent than the first one (first century BC/first century AD) and containing some extraordinary pieces,<sup>63</sup> confirm these acquisitions that seem to have been systematised: the language is only Gāndhāri, and the epigraphic typology is that of ownership inscription accompanied almost always by weight annotation.<sup>64</sup> Four samples of *phialai* found by J. Marshall at Sirkap (Taxila) confirm this pattern.<sup>65</sup> In this evolutionary trend, the same epigraphic *habitus* is found on inscriptions engraved on precious vessels that do not belong to the Greek tradition, such as Indo-Parthian cups,<sup>66</sup> and, consequently, on Buddhistic reliquaries composed from the latter, like the most famous reliquary of Indravarma and wife.<sup>67</sup> The *pointillé* fashion quickly spreads during the Indo-Parthian period for dedicatory inscriptions on a wide range of utensils.<sup>68</sup> The typology of writing adopted is not a minor detail: the ‘chased script’ is a precise cultural reference evoking the imperial engravings on precious objects circulating among the ruling classes, primarily at the court of the king or satrap and among their associates.<sup>69</sup> The weight annotation refers to the same context: as an expression of the widespread social distinctions at the Achaemenid court, it finds numerous comparisons in the Parthian and Sassanian world.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting to note that most of the metal vessels bearing ownership inscriptions made *en pointillé* are silver *phialai*:<sup>71</sup> the names of the owners are Greek, Iranian, Scythian, and particularly Indian,<sup>72</sup>

**63** Baratte 2001; Falk 2001. See the *phiale* who has an *emblema* with a Dionysian character (Heracles?) holding a lyre while riding a feline which is, according to Baratte 2001, “un objet sorti d’un atelier extérieur aux frontières de l’empire romain (262)”, CKI 722 (only the weight indication is present); or the silver kantharos with Centaurs that perhaps mentions the Scythian king Maues: Baratte 2001, 252-8; Falk 2001, 314-15; CKI 721. About this last text, refer to Baums’ appropriate caution in this volume.

**64** CKI 723 (without weight indication), 724, 727, 728, 729. On weight inscriptions and their metrology, based on the system of the Greek drachma, see Bernard 2000, 1422-5; Falk 2001, 309-11.

**65** Marshall 1951, 612, no. 7, a, b; 612-13, nos. 10, 11. Cf. CKI 88, 89 (88 and 89 bear the same inscription without weight indication), 91 (this *mesomphalos phiale* bears the same ownership and weight inscription as CKI 90, which is, however, engraved on a silver plate), 190. On all of this, see Baums 2018a, 36-8, 40 and the contribution in this volume.

**66** CKI 724, 725, 726 (without weight indication); cf. 173.

**67** CKI 241. Cf. Baums 2012, 233-4; 2018b, 65 and the contribution in this volume.

**68** Salomon 2022, particularly 272.

**69** “Royal inscriptions would have enhanced the symbolic value of the vessel”: Miller 2010, 875.

**70** Canepa 2021, 12-16, fn. 23, with a peculiarity for the Chorasmian region. Cf. Minardi 2016, 283. Aelian reported the following tradition: two silver *phialai* weighing one Babylonian talent were a customary Persian royal gift to foreign ambassadors: *VH* 1.22.

**71** The frequency of *phialai* has also been noted by Baratte 2001, 302.

**72** On the variety of local names, cf. Baums 2018a.

and the weight annotation is almost ubiquitous. It is undeniable that these features were introduced in the Gandhāran region along with the Hellenising habits of the ruling classes, as we have seen for the megarques who made precious offerings to local deities: the Greco-Bactrians are the prime suspects, although we cannot exclude earlier influences, and also later, until the Indo-Scythians, given their receptivity.

If the presence of the *phialai* indicates, as observed, a widespread libation custom, an entirely different question is to establish the ritual context in which this may have taken place in the composite Gandhāran region. For instance, the fragment of ceramic *patera* found in Barikot, inside Building H (a Buddhist cult building from Mauryan era) during the 2021-22 excavation campaign by the Italian Archaeological Mission, is certainly the sign of a ritual act, but only future studies might help to better clarify its context.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, the libation is not uniquely Greek; it has precedents and parallels in the Ancient Near East, in various corners of the ancient Mediterranean. Even in ancient India there are examples of libations of water and wine to the ground which can hardly have been influenced by the Greeks and should have been rather an Indian ritual custom.<sup>74</sup> Most significantly, ritual pouring served different purposes: similar bowls may have been used across cultures and continents for similar rituals, but their significance varied according to context and norms.

In the area under study, there is little evidence that we can relate with certainty to libation contexts. But the studies by A. Filigenzi have shown how some representations of the ‘Gandhāran reliefs’ should be understood as ritual acts in which a libation is presupposed, alluded to, or depicted: for example, those of a ‘ceremonial character’ displaying local aristocracies exercising power, or the arrival of the sacrificer with the goat, or the scenes of libation with the Nāgas.<sup>75</sup> It is therefore necessary to be very cautious in the analysis: libations may have been performed (and therefore represented) even if they are not immediately apparent or the main focus of the scene.

Concerning potential depictions of the ritual act with a *phiale*, the most explicit I know is a ‘toilet tray’ which presents a libation scene performed at a tripod by a heroic character (iconographically very

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**73** A fine grey pottery dish bottom (a kind of *patera*), BKG 7939: see Olivieri et al. 2022, 96, 134-6, 146, Plate XIXg.

**74** The offering to the gods described in *Caraka’s Compendium* and the *Heart of Medicine* is linked by H. Falk 2010, 99-101 to Hellenised drinking practices, possibly depicted in the ‘libation trays’ from the Gandhāran region; cf. Zysk 2021, 90. McHugh 2021a, 152 disputes this position, recalling that “the practice of making offerings to various beings by leaving food on the floor (*baliharāṇa*), which sometimes has to be cleaned first, was also well established in ancient Indian rituals”. According to Strabo, the Indians use wine in sacrifices: 15.1.53.

**75** Filigenzi 2019, 73-4, 78, cf. 69.

similar to Apollo) with a palm branch in one hand and a *paterna* in the other. This evidence is very important because it demonstrates the knowledge of the Greek libation practice *in situ*: the overall picture of the scene is Hellenistic but, as mentioned earlier, this does not mean that the ritual act took place ‘Greek-style’, as is indeed strongly supported by H. Falk.<sup>76</sup> The scholar’s assertion is linked to his interpretation of the object bearing the representation as a ‘libation vessel.’ This is actually a particular class of artefacts from the Gandhāran region, whose classification is highly controversial. Generally known as ‘toilet trays’ or ‘palettes’, they present a remarkable variety of iconographic themes inside a disc of soft stone or schist; they “belong to urban life in Gandhāra proper, and according to their distribution do not show any significant link to religious centres”.<sup>77</sup> H. Falk has argued skilfully regarding their general use in the context of libations, but his proposal remains problematic, albeit fascinating.<sup>78</sup> While those ‘trays’ that feature explicit ritual representations may indeed relate to libation contexts, this does not seem to be the case for all of them. The main problem is that the functional context of these objects is not archaeologically established: until this is known, the issue cannot be resolved.

The clearest indication of libations associated with a sacrifice comes from the northern ‘Indo-Iranian frontier’, from eastern Bactria: it is the famous Greek dedicatory epigram found in Kuliab (Afghanistan) which attests a rite performed for the celebration of the kingship of the *panton megistos basileon* Euthydemus and his son Demetrios *Kallinikos*. The dedication has been made by a certain Heliodotos (κλυταῖς [...] λειβαῖς ἐμπύροις, “with splendid libations and sacrifices”) at the altar of Hestia, inside the grove of Zeus, for the salvation of the kings around the end of the third century (206 BC).<sup>79</sup> Given the historical importance of the inscription expressing the religious celebration of the Greco-Bactrian dynasty that initiated the conquest of India,<sup>80</sup> the clear mention of libations alongside sacrifices allows us to focus on the central point of the demonstration conducted so far, namely the structural connection with kingship.

<sup>76</sup> Falk 2010, 97-9.

<sup>77</sup> Falk 2010, 90.

<sup>78</sup> After Francfort 1979’s fundamental work, see, with different approaches to the issue, Pons 2011; Galli 2011; Francfort 2016; Lo Muzio 2018.

<sup>79</sup> IGIAC 151: Τόνδε σοι βωμόν θυώδη, πρέσβα κυδίστη θεῶν / Ἑστία, Διὸς κ(α)τ’ ἄλλος καλλιένδρον ἔκτισεν / καὶ κλυταῖς ἤσκησε λειβαῖς ἐμπύροις Ἥλιόδοτος, / ὄφρα τὸμ πάντων μέγιστον Εὐθύδημον βασιλέων / τοῦ τε παῖδα καλλίνικον ἐκπρεπῆ Δημήτριον / πρηνεμένης σώιζης ἀκηδεῖς) σὺν Τύχαι θεόφρον[ι]. Cf. SEG 54, 1569; 66, 1883.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Coloru 2009, 181-2, 186-93. On the importance of libation for Chinese sovereignty, see Li 2022.

## 5 Golden Cups and Kingship: Ideological Connections

We can now discern a subtle thread connecting all the topics we have examined. There seems to be a certain coherence between Curtius' account of the recognition and affirmation of local royalty and the ideological values conveyed by the precious metal libation cups found in Gandhāra. The fact that these cups bear weight markings and indicate their owners suggests that they were registered, hoarded, or even offered. However, more significantly, they served as clear indicators of *status*, demonstrating that both the objects and their owners were hierarchically valued. Harbingers of this ideological structure could be found in the gift-giving system of the Achaemenid kingship, where "the king and the imperial elites seem to have particularly favoured metal vessels for dining and drinking",<sup>81</sup> these vessels had a clear hierarchy, from gold to silver, and the periphery of the empire – the satrapies – imitated the central power.<sup>82</sup>

The presence in Hellenistic Gandhāran region of other objects typical of the donatives of the Persian kings demonstrates that the same ideology was maintained, *mutatis mutandis*, after Alexander's conquest in the kingdoms that followed at the eastern end of his conquest. Some favourite ornaments of the Persians were "the animal terminal bracelets which are associated with Achaemenid Persian luxury arts".<sup>83</sup> Called *pselia* by the Greeks, they belong to the sphere of long-distance diplomatic gift-exchange as described by Herodotus (3.20, 22). Two of them, made of gold, were found in the area between modern Pakistan and Afghanistan: one, with a serpent's head, bears a weight inscription (31 drachmas); the other, with the head of a sea monster, the signature of the goldsmith.<sup>84</sup>

The simple fact of owning, using, displaying, or donating a gold or silver cup (or a jewel) is thus associated with the idea of power. But we must not forget the economic aspect of amassing wealth by accumulating precious metals in the form of gold and silver objects. As stated by Strabo (15.3.21) "these metals are considered as the most suitable for gifts and hoarding". Herodotus (3.96) reports that the Persian king hoarded the tributes in precious metal from across the Achaemenid Empire and minted coins "from time to time as he needed".<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Balatti 2021, 174.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Miller 2010, 876; Wiesehöfer 2016; Balatti 2021, 174-80.

<sup>83</sup> Miller 2010, 868.

<sup>84</sup> IGIAC 154, 155. For dating (before 150 BC?) and further commentary, see SEG 52, 1517.

<sup>85</sup> This is the third function that scholars attribute to the widespread circulation of precious vessels within the Achaemenid Empire. Cf. Asheri 2005, commentary ad loc.;

Originally inspired by the Achaemenid model, a universal empire by definition, the pairing of gold with royalty regained vigour and relevance at the end of the Indo-Greek kingdoms, perhaps with a legitimising purpose. This occurred during the rise of nomadic aristocracies, which gradually took control of the Bactrian, Gandhāran, and eventually northern Indian regions.<sup>86</sup> The luxurious lifestyle and symbols associated with royalty were also shared by contemporary Indian principalities in central and southern India, as evidenced by the importation of the same western luxury goods which are recorded in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.<sup>87</sup>

The picture so far outlined seems to me clearly corroborated by the exceptional discovery of the ‘royal’ burials of Tillia Tepe (northern Afghanistan, c. first century AD), whose attribution, in terms of ethnonymy, is far from being clear.<sup>88</sup> The cultural references of the different objects connoting the kingship of the ‘warrior prince’ – the only male buried in the Tomb 4 – are in fact manifold (Saka-Parthian, Yuezhi, Kushan, etc.), with a clear tendency towards symbolic accumulation. One of them takes us back to the context we have just mentioned: the head of the warrior rested on a silk pillow (or headdress)<sup>89</sup> and on a gold *phiale* with 32 grooves: an inscription reports its weight, 41 staters and 4 drachmas.<sup>90</sup> This element speaks in favour of a Scythian tradition, as was already noted,<sup>91</sup> since the golden cup served an essential function for Scythian royalty, as Herodotus extensively testifies. The Scythians associated the golden cup with the myth of the ethnogenesis of their people and with all the constitutive and celebratory phases of their kingship, including the choice of the sovereign and the prescriptions for his burial: *phialai chryseai* were placed in royal burials.<sup>92</sup> At Tillia Tepe the heads of the

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Miller 2010, 877. On the topic of gold and wine in Herodotus’ depiction of the Persians, see Bichler, Ruffing 2023.

**86** For insights into the economic dynamics of the Saka-Parthian period, refer to Coloru, Iori, Olivieri 2022.

**87** *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 39, 49, 56 with the commentary of Casson 1989, 21-3, 41: the courts of the rulers required fine ointments, vintage wine, deluxe clothing, handsome slave girls for the harem and slave boys trained in music; among the most expensive goods were silverware and slaves. Cf. De Romanis 2020, 137.

**88** Francfort 2011. Cf. Cribb 2023.

**89** Shenkar 2017.

**90** Cambon, Schiltz 2010, no. 123.

**91** Olbrycht 2016, 20.

**92** Hdt. 4.5.3; 9-10; 71 with the commentary of Corcella [1994] 2005 (233 for the sacred and honorary value of the *phiale*) and Hartog 1980, 38-46. According to Ivančik 1999, 175 the sacred gold objects from Herodotus’ legend (including the golden cup) represent a form of the Iranian image of royal *hvarnah*.



women in graves 3 and 6, that M. Olbrycht believes must have been the prince's chief wives, rested on silver *phialai*.<sup>93</sup>

Curtius too leaves us such a cultural reference in a passage with a sententious tone.<sup>94</sup> He reports that when Alexander was about to cross the Iaxartes, he received a delegation of Scythian ambassadors, and the oldest of them delivered a philosophical-like speech. Among the many arguments used to discourage the Macedonian king's expedition, there is also the following:

*Dona nobis data sunt, ne Scytharum gentem ignores, iugum boum et aratrum, sagitta, hasta, patera. His utimur et cum amicis et aduersus inimicos. Fruges amicis damus boum labore quaesitas, patera cum isdem uinum dis libamus; inimicos sagitta eminus, hasta comminus petimus.*

So that you do not ignore who the Scythian people are, we have been given as a gift a pair of oxen and a plough, an arrow, a spear, a cup (*patera*). We use them both with friends and against enemies. We give our friends the harvest produced by the work of oxen, and together with them we pour wine from the cup to the gods.<sup>95</sup>

All the elements so far discussed seem to suggest a 'revival' of royal symbology particularly vivid in the Saka-Parthian period. The heterogeneous elements that characterised such a royal symbology were largely understandable by an equally heterogeneous audience: Greek, Roman, Indian, Parthian, Scythian, etc.

The passage we started with, depicting queen Cleopis accompanied by noblewomen pouring wine from golden *paterae*, is not at all in contrast with the prominent role played by some Indo-Greek or Indo-Scythian queens; rather, it is its symbolic celebration. On the other hand, in this same representation, one can also see reflections of high-ranking women in late Republican and early Imperial Rome who are now taking centre stage in the public arena and acting as protagonists. Curtius has crafted a hybrid image, but the individual elements composing it find a precise historical resonance at the 'Indo-Iranian frontier'.

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<sup>93</sup> Olbrycht 2016, 20. Cf. Shenkar 2017, 157, 161.

<sup>94</sup> According to Pearson, the passage appears to be inspired by some sentences of Kleitarchos, FGrHist 137 F 40, 43, 48: see Atkinson 2000, commentary to Curtius' passage.

<sup>95</sup> Curt. 7.8.17-18 (emphasis added), transl. by Rolfe 1946.

## Abbreviations

- CKI = *Corpus of Kharosthi Inscriptions* (in Baums, Glass 2002b-).
- IGIAC = Rougemont, G., with contributions by Bernard, P. (2012). *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum. Part 2, Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia. Vol. 1, Inscriptions in Non-Iranian Languages. Part 1, Inscriptions grecques d'Iran et d'Asie centrale*. Edited by N. Sims-Williams. London.
- SEG = Chaniotis, A. et al. (eds) (1996-). *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden; Boston.
- ThesCRA = Balty, J.C.; Boardman, J. et al. (eds) (2004-06). *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum. Vol. 1, Processions. Sacrifices. Libations. Fumigations. Dedications. Vol. 3, Divination. Prayer. Veneration. Hikesia. Asyilia. Oath. Malediction. Profanation. Magic. Vol. 5, Personnel of Cult. Cult Instruments*. Los Angeles.

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# Wine in the Gandhāran Epigraphic Corpus

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**Abstract** Vessels used in the consumption or ritual use of wine have been recovered from sites in ancient Gandhāra. Some were donated to Buddhist monasteries, and one even repurposed as a reliquary. The inscriptions attached to the vessels provide information about their ownership and uses without indicating any active involvement of Buddhist institutions in the production or use of wine. A recent new reading of the Dasht-e-Nawur inscriptions also points to a non-Buddhist ritual use of wine. Some information about practical aspects of viticulture is preserved in Central Asian Gāndhārī documents, and such documents may yet be found in Gandhāra itself.

**Keywords** Wine. Gandhāra. Inscriptions. Ritual. Buddhism. Viticulture.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Taxila. – 3 A Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot. – 4 Another Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot. – 5 The Dasht-e-Nawur Inscriptions. – 6 Wine and Buddhism in Gandhāra. – 7 The Goblet of Kharayosta and Indravarma. – 8 A Third Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot. – 9 Conclusion and Outlook.

## 1 Introduction

The wine culture of ancient Gandhāra, so richly attested in its art history and reflected in the accounts of outside observers, has left only modest traces in the epigraphic and manuscript record of Gandhāra itself. In this article, I collect the available material and consider the information that can be extracted from it. A number of inscribed drinking vessels preserve information about their owners, while objects from monastic contexts provide only suggestions for

a possible engagement of Buddhist communities with wine-related activities. Recent research on the Bactrian and Gāndhārī inscriptions from Dasht-e-Nawur in Afghanistan has uncovered a likely record of a mountain-top ritual activity involving the consumption of wine. Documents concerning viticulture are entirely missing from Gandhāra itself (but preserved in the Gāndhārī archives from the Central Asian kingdoms of Krorayina and Kucha, casting an indirect light on Gandhāran wine culture).

## 2 Taxila

John Marshall's excavations at Taxila in 1926 and in 1929 brought to light five inscribed vessels that, judging from their shape and parallels in the Hellenistic world, were likely used for pouring wine and for either drinking it or using it in libations. All of these formed part of a hoard of various gold and silver objects, including personal jewellery, hidden beneath the floor of house 2D behind the apsidal temple D in the lower city of Sirkap.<sup>1</sup>

The first of these is a small silver *askos*,<sup>2</sup> 17.8 cm high and 20 cm long, with a handle in the shape of two knotted vines with leaves at their ends providing an unambiguous connection to wine culture. The inscription (CKI 63)<sup>3</sup> runs around its neck and was read by Konow as follows:<sup>4</sup>

*ka 1 100 20 20 20 20 10 1 maharaja[bhra](ta ma)[ṇi](gula)sa putra-  
sa jinoṇikasa cukhsasa kṣatrapasa*

The main part of the inscription consists of a name and associated titles in the genitive singular, indicating the owner of the vessel: the Western Satrap Jihonika.<sup>5</sup> The name of his dominion Cukhsa is also known from the Taxila copper plate of Patika (CKI 46), and the name of his father Manigula is reconstructible from his coin legends,<sup>6</sup> though the identity of the 'great king' to whom his father was close remains unknown.<sup>7</sup> The main part of the inscription is preceded by

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1 Marshall 1951, 155-7.

2 Marshall 1951, 156, no. 17, 611; cf. Scheibler 2000b.

3 Baums, Glass 2002b.

4 Konow 1929, 81-2, no. 1. I follow modern transliteration conventions: [ ] mark uncertain readings, ( ) reconstructions, ( ) editorial insertions, and /// the edge of the writing support.

5 See Boppearachchi 2012.

6 E.g., CKC 219, Baums, Glass 2002b.

7 See Marshall 1951, 156 on the use of 'brother' as an honorific.

the clear number '191', and this in turn by an akṣara *ka* that has given rise to much discussion.

Konow originally suggested that it introduced a date and should be interpreted as an abbreviation for *kale* 'at the time' in place of the usual *saṃvatsare* 'in the year' of dating formulas.<sup>8</sup> In his review of Konow's edition, Thomas thought he could make out an additional akṣara *sa*, and suggested reading *saka* with reference to a hypothetical Saka era.<sup>9</sup> Konow adopted Thomas's suggestion, noting that while the additional letter was invisible on renewed eye inspection of the *askos*, it could be made out in a new plaster cast.<sup>10</sup> The older cast reproduced on Konow's plate XVI does not show any sign of an additional akṣara, and the reading consequently continued to be doubtful.<sup>11</sup>

The debate rested for almost seventy years, until Cribb and Senior independently suggested that rather than providing a date, the number '191' on the silver *askos* could indicate a weight, with the akṣara *ka* (without uncertain *sa*) as an abbreviation for the unit *kārṣāpaṇa*.<sup>12</sup> Salomon considers this possibility, correctly pointing out that a date would be unexpected on what is otherwise a simple ownership (not a dedicatory) inscription, but noting that the units used on other such inscriptions (some examples of which are discussed below) are staters and drachms, and in the end agrees with Konow's original interpretation as a date.<sup>13</sup>

Recently, however, the balance of likelihood has swung more definitely in the direction of a weight indication, with the publication of a birch-bark manuscript of unknown provenance (CKM 297) datable on internal evidence to the time of Vima Kadphises and containing a list of items (including, apparently, one *kuḍi* 'water pot') in combination with numbers preceded by *ka*, which here seems to indicate monetary values and therefore most likely serves as an abbreviation of *kārṣāpaṇa*.<sup>14</sup> Allon also discusses the inscription on the Taxila *askos*,

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**8** Konow 1929, 82.

**9** Thomas 1931, 3-4.

**10** Konow 1931-32, 255.

**11** Konow 1929.

**12** Cribb 1999, 196-7; Senior 2001, 96, 104. Marshall (1951, 609) argued that notations such as this referred to the value rather than the weight (as maintained by John Allan) of the objects in question, on the basis that the latter when compared to the actual weight of the objects resulted in too widely varying values for the units. The discoveries of similarly inscribed gold bars at Dalverzin-tepe in 1972 (Пураченкова 1976), however, made it clear that the units in question must designate weight since otherwise the value of silver and gold would have been almost identical (Salomon 1990, 152). The discrepancies observed by Marshall may at least in part be due to the imperfect state of preservation of many objects. On weight (and thus indirectly value) indications on drinking vessels as social markers, see the article by Antonetti in the present volume.

**13** Salomon 1999, 144-5; 2005, 374-5.

**14** Allon 2019.

and accordingly favours the interpretation of its *ka* in the same way,<sup>15</sup> attributing it (unaware of Cribb, Senior, and Salomon's earlier contributions) to Bracey.<sup>16</sup>

If, in spite of this preponderance of evidence, the number '191' on the *askos* were to be interpreted as a year, then it would have to be assigned to the Greek era that, probably, commenced in 175 BC,<sup>17</sup> which would put the inscription in the year AD 16-17 and thus slightly too early for the accepted dates of Jihonika. On the other hand, when applied to silver in the context of the Western Kṣatrapas, a *kārṣāpaṇa* appears to have been equivalent to approximately 2.6 g,<sup>18</sup> which would put the weight of the silver *askos* at 495 g. This seems plausible given its size, but needs to be verified with an actual weight measurement of the object.

The inscription can then be translated as follows:

191 *kārṣāpaṇa*. Of Jihonika, satrap of Cukhsa, son of Manigula, brother of the Great King.

In the inscriptions discussed below, weight indications follow the name of the owner, and it may therefore be preferable to start the reading of this circular inscription with *maharaja[bhra](ta)* as well. There is a small space in front of this word that would support doing so, but in the available images, taken from the side, an even larger space seems to precede the *ka* of the weight indication. A new image taken from the front of the *askos* would further clarify the layout of the text.

Part of the same hoard as the *askos* were two identical *phialai* measuring 13.3 cm in diameter, and bearing two copies of the same inscription (CKI 88, CKI 89) on their side.<sup>19</sup> Konow read both as

*theutaras[y]a thavaraputras[y]a*<sup>20</sup>

He suggested that they were "apparently meant for keeping grain or flowers", but this is made unlikely by their small size and shallow shape, and in the wider Hellenistic world, the *phiale* type of vessel is firmly associated with the ritual drinking or the libation of wine.<sup>21</sup>

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**15** Allon (2019, 16-17) also attempts to see *ka* for *kārṣāpaṇa* in the inscriptions (CKI 462, CKI 1192) on two Maitreya images in the Indian Museum.

**16** Bracey 2009, 48.

**17** Baums 2018a, 62.

**18** Sircar 1965b, 165.

**19** Marshall 1951, 157, no. 20, 612, no. 7; cf. Luschey 1939; Schütte 1994; Scheibler 2000c.

**20** Konow 1929, 97-8, nos. 1, 2.

**21** See also the essay by Antonetti in the present volume.

Konow interprets the name of the owner as a Kharoṣṭhī spelling of the Greek name Theodoros, now doubt correctly, but does not see the possibility of a Greek name in the spelling of the owner's father, suggesting a connection with Skt. *sthāvara* 'stable' instead. While this word is attested in the Gāndhārī form *thavara* in the Khotan Dharmapada (CKM 77), it is unexpected as a personal name, and I suggested previously that a possible and more likely correspondent is the Greek name Theoros.<sup>22</sup> We may then translate both inscriptions as

Of Theodoros, son of Theoros.

Also part of the same hoard were a *phiale mesomphalos* and a rectangular silver tray belonging, apparently, to the same person. It is not clear what, if any, purpose the tray would have served in connection with wine, but it is included in this treatment because of the connection of owner and inscriptional formula between these two objects.

The *phiale mesomphalos* measures 22.2 cm in diameter, weighs 486 g,<sup>23</sup> and bears on its side an inscription (CKI 91) that Konow read:<sup>24</sup>

*miṃjukritasa sa 20 10 dha 1 1*

The silver tray with three (out of an original four) short legs measures 22.4 × 15.5 cm and weighs, in its current state, 348 g.<sup>25</sup> On its underside, it is inscribed (CKI 90) with:<sup>26</sup>

*muṃjukritas[y]a s[y]a 20 dra 1*

Konow reasonably suggested that both objects belonged to the same owner, and took the variation in spelling as the result of a non-Indian origin of at least the first part of his name, with the same foreign sound represented once as *i* and once as *u*. The second part, Konow tentatively proposed, could be the Greek name element -kritos. A number of such partially Greek hybrid names occur in Gandhāran inscriptions, including Avakhazada (CKI 178),<sup>27</sup> Helaūta (CKI 564), and Theūta (CKI 969),<sup>28</sup> though it is maybe significant that in all the clear cases, the Greek element comes first. Brough took a different

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<sup>22</sup> Baums 2018b, 37, 38; 2023, 115, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall 1951, 157, no. 23, 612-13, no. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Konow 1929, 99, no. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Marshall 1951, 157, no. 25, 613, no. 13.

<sup>26</sup> In the reading of Konow 1929, 98, no. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Baums 2018b, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Baums 2018b, 40.

approach and suggested that the first element of the owner's name was Indian Mañju-, with the vowel of the initial syllable variously assimilated to preceding *m* or following *ñ*, and that the second element could be Indian -kīrti with the common Gāndhārī methathesis of *r*.<sup>29</sup>

It would be wise, however, not to consider the name on these two objects in isolation from several other phonetically similar names that occur in Gāndhārī inscriptions. In Taxila itself, this includes Maṃjumina (CKI 189), left unexplained by Konow, but compatible with Brough's etymology. Fussman similarly explains Muṃji in CKI 328 with explicit reference to Brough.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Konow connected Muṃjavaṃda in the inscription on the Bimaran casket (CKI 50) with the Vedic Mūjavat tribe, and Falk invokes the same tribe in his discussion of a further group of phonetically related names in inscriptions from Kashmir Smats, to which he later added the name Miṃjaka in a seal inscription (CKI 1038) from Taxila.<sup>31</sup> While at least for some of these names a connection with Indian Mañju- can thus not be ruled out, others point to different, non-Indian etymologies, and it remains unclear into which of these categories the owner of the silver objects falls.

Both inscriptions contain, in addition to the name of their owner, an indication of their weight. In contrast to the *askos* inscription with its *kārṣāpaṇa*, here a different and more widespread system of measurement is used. By comparing the combinations of units on different silver and gold objects from Taxila, from Dalverzin-tepe in Uzbekistan, and from unknown findspots (more on these below), and comparing them to the weights of the preserved objects, the following system combining Greek and Indian units could be worked out,<sup>32</sup> with one stater corresponding to between 14.57 g and 18.03 g:

1 stater = 4 drachms  
1 drachm = 6 dhānaka  
1 dhānaka = 4 aṇḍikā

We may then translate the inscription on the *phiale mesomphalos* as:

Of Miṃjukrita. 30 staters, 2 dhānaka.

and that on the tray as:

Of Muṃjukrita. 20 staters, 1 drachm.

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<sup>29</sup> Brough 1962, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Fussman 1985, 39-40.

<sup>31</sup> Konow 1929, 51; Falk 2003, 6-10; ur Rahman, Falk 2011, 182.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall 1951, 609-10; Pugachenkova 1976; Salomon 1990; Falk 2001.

According to Sircar, *dhānaka* could also be used synonymously with *aṇḍikā*, and could correspond to 4 *kārṣāpaṇa*, neither of which is borne out by the Gandhāran evidence.<sup>33</sup> Rather, if, as mentioned above, one *kārṣāpaṇa* weighed approximately 2.6 g, then it would have corresponded to (approximately or precisely) 4 *dhānaka* in the system. This raises the possibility that *kārṣāpaṇa* could serve as an alternative to the stater-based system, and that their use in the inscription on the *askos* does not necessarily indicate a non-local origin of the object.

The final object from Sirkap to be discussed here is a silver *phiale* discovered in the 1929 season in a separate hoard in house 3D', on the other side of the main street from the apsidal temple.<sup>34</sup> It measures 15.5 cm (6.12 in) in diameter, weighs 169 g (2,603.7 grains), and has the following inscription (CKI 190) on its base:

*aśpavarmasa strategasa sa 10 1 dra 2 [dha] 2*

The final unit of the weight specification presents a problem. Marshall first read 'o',<sup>35</sup> and then,<sup>36</sup> rather cryptically, 'ζ=0', taking this sign to stand for the Greek obol. In light of later discoveries, however, Salomon suspects that Marshall here mistook a Kharoṣṭhī *dha* for a similarly-shaped Greek Z, and that the intended unit is the *dhānaka*.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, this still pends verification since no image of the inscription is available. In the owner of this *phiale*, Aśpavarma, another well-known Indo-Scythian ruler joins Jihonika and his *askos*, and we can translate:

Of General Aśpavarma. 11 staters, 2 drachms, 2 *dhānaka*.

Two further inscribed utensils from Taxila, a copper ladle (CKI 66, with a dedication to the Buddhist Kāśyapiya school) and a silver sieve (CKI 92), have no clear connection to wine, but may be mentioned in passing.

### 3 A Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot

The next major discovery of inscribed, wine-related utensils from Gandhāra was the result of looting, allegedly around the year 1980 or earlier in the border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan,<sup>38</sup> and the items were apparently split up and sold separately soon after their discovery.

<sup>33</sup> Sircar 1965a, 90.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall 1951, 188, no. 4, 613, no. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Marshall 1935, 62; 1951, 613.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall 1935, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Salomon 1990, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Baratte 2001, 250.

The first of them was published by Salomon and was, at that time, in an unspecified “private collection”.<sup>39</sup> It is a different type of vessel from those discussed so far: a so-called ‘Parthian’ goblet that may, in turn, go back to the Greek *kantharos* under subtraction of the latter’s handles.<sup>40</sup> The object is 10.8 cm high, 8.3 cm in diameter, and weighs 134.75 g.

Around its rim runs an ownership inscription (CKI 173) containing a proper name read by Salomon as *jivatmevosa* followed by the weight specification *sade 4 4 dra 1 1 1 dha 4 a 1 1*. Salomon derives the name as read by him from Skt. *Jīvātmabodha*, noting the absence of a genitive ending (explained as haplography) as the main problem. Other problems include, however, the preservation of *tm* (which regularly develops to *tv* in Gāndhārī), the *e* in the third syllable,<sup>41</sup> the weakening of *b* to *v* in the beginning of a compound member, and the awkward semantics of the otherwise unattested name itself. The word *jīvātman* ‘living individual soul’ only appears to occur in Brahmanic philosophical contexts,<sup>42</sup> and would be quite out of place in combination with the Buddhist concept of enlightenment.

Instead, I propose to read *jivasre[ṭha]sa*. The third akṣara does look more like a *sre* than a *tme*, with its top identical to the two following *sa* and joining the stem on the left (whereas *ta* would meet *ma* in the middle). In *ṭha*, the middle stroke to the left is usually parallel to the top stroke, but examples with slanted middle stroke do occur, and the engraver of the vessel under discussion was not always accurate (as shown, for instance, by the double line on the immediately following *sa*). The name would then correspond to Skt. *Jīvaśreṭha*, and falls within a pattern of Gāndhārī names ending in *sreṭha*: *Dharmaśreṭha* at Hadda (CKI 1081) and in Central Asia (CKD 204, CKD 605, CKD 609, CKD 614), *Savaseṭha* in Jamalgarhi (CKI 117), and *Sreṭha* on its own at Hadda (CKI 361) and in an unprovenanced Apraca inscription (CKI 265). That *Jiva-* was exchangeable with *Dhamma-* as first element of compound names is further shown by the pairs *Jivanaṃḍa* : *Dhammananḍi* and *Jivasena* : *Dhammasena*.<sup>43</sup>

The entire inscription on the goblet can then be read and translated as follows:

*jivasre[ṭha]sa sade 4 4 dra 1 1 1 dha 4 a 1 1*

Of *Jivasreṭha*. 8 staters, 3 drachms, 4 dhānaka, 2 aṅḍikā.

<sup>39</sup> Salomon 1990, 149.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall 1951, 612; Goldman in Salomon 1990, 155-6.

<sup>41</sup> Brough (1962, 81) does not, as claimed by Salomon, describe palatalisation of *a* outside palatal environments, and such would be highly unusual.

<sup>42</sup> Böhtlingk, Roth 1855-75 s.v.

<sup>43</sup> Baums, Glass 2002a s.vv.



Other items from apparently the same hoard that reached a different (one presumes) private collection were published and studied in a pair of articles by Baratte and Falk, the former focussing on the objects, the latter on the inscriptions on some of them.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, maybe due to a miscommunication in the publication process, the two companion articles use different numbering systems for the objects, so that we can only partly reconstruct which inscriptions were attached to which object, and even the precise number of inscriptions remains uncertain. Baratte provides the following information and measurements for his ten items nos. 1, 2, 8, 21, 22, 23, 35, 36, 37, and 38:

1: "Or la discussion pourrait être relancée par l'inscription en karoshthi qui à été gravée en lettres pointillées au-dessus du premier groupe. Elle donne le poids de la coupe complète, avec ses deux anses, semble-t-il, en drachmes et en statères." Body: 11.5 × 11.8 cm, 435 g; handle: 140 g. Foot 2.3 × 4.5 cm.<sup>45</sup>

2: "Une inscription pointillée en karoshthi court le long du rebord de la coupe, dont elle donne le poids." 4.2 × 19 cm, 381 g.<sup>46</sup>

8: "Sous le rebord court une inscription en karoshthi, qui donne le poids de la coupe et le nom d'un de ses possesseurs." 5.4 × 20 cm, 267 g.<sup>47</sup>

21: "Sous la lèvre une inscription en karoshthi est tracée en lettres pointillées : elle donne le nom du propriétaire et le poids de l'objet." 13.2 × 8.2 cm, 203 g.<sup>48</sup>

22: "Sous la lèvre, une inscription karoshthie est tracée en lettres pointillées." 13.2 cm high.<sup>49</sup>

23: "Sous le rebord, une inscription karoshthie en lettres pointillées." 8.8 × 8 cm.<sup>50</sup>

35-8: "Tous offrent sous le rebord une inscription karoshthie en lettre pointillées, qui donne le poids de l'objet et le nom de leur

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<sup>44</sup> Baratte 2001, 250; Falk 2001, 310.

<sup>45</sup> Baratte 2001, 252, 257-8.

<sup>46</sup> Baratte 2001, 259, 263.

<sup>47</sup> Baratte 2001, 282, 284.

<sup>48</sup> Baratte 2001, 293-4.

<sup>49</sup> Baratte 2001, 294.

<sup>50</sup> Baratte 2001, 294.

propriétaire [...]” 35: 24 cm wide; 36: 5 x 23.5 cm, 417 g; 37: 4 x 19.1 cm, 205 g; 38: 4.5 x 20.6 cm, 272 g.<sup>51</sup>

Falk, on the other hand, provides the following physical information for his nine item nos. 1, 3, 9, 17, 18, 19, 37, 40, and 41:

1: “the magnificent centaur goblet”; “goblet, foot reattached, one handle preserved”; “the weight of the goblet alone (435 g.) [...] the 80 g. of one preserved handle”.<sup>52</sup>

3: “phiale, complete. Its ‘sa 20 1 1 dra 1 1’ correspond to a weight of 381 g.”.<sup>53</sup>

17: “‘sa 10 1 1’, stater 12, goblet, cup 187 g., base 16 g.”.<sup>54</sup>

18: “carinated gold, foot missing”; “weight of 311 g.”.<sup>55</sup>

37: “the 417 g. of the object”.<sup>56</sup>

40: “shallow bowl, repaired and complete. Its 205 g. with a given weight of 13 stater [...]”.<sup>57</sup>

41: “shallow bowl, intact. Its 272 g. [...]”.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, some Kharoṣṭhī signs can be made out in Baratte’s illustrations 22 and 23 (293, 295). Combining this information, we can reconstruct the following certain correspondences.<sup>59</sup>

Baratte no. 1 = Falk no. 1 (*kantharos*, CKI 721)

Baratte no. 2 = Falk no. 3 (*phiale*, CKI 722)

Baratte no. 21 = Falk no. 17 (goblet, CKI 724)

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<sup>51</sup> Baratte 2001, 300.

<sup>52</sup> Falk 2001, 308, 311.

<sup>53</sup> Falk 2001, 311.

<sup>54</sup> Falk 2001, 311.

<sup>55</sup> Falk 2001, 313.

<sup>56</sup> Falk 2001, 313.

<sup>57</sup> Falk 2001, 311.

<sup>58</sup> Falk 2001, 313.

<sup>59</sup> With added information on the object type and item numbers in Baums, *Glass* 2002b.

Baratte no. 22 = Falk no. 18 (goblet, CKI 725)

Baratte no. 36 = Falk no. 37 (*phiale*, CKI 727)

Baratte no. 37 = Falk no. 40 (*phiale*, CKI 728)

Baratte no. 38 = Falk no. 41 (*phiale*, CKI 729)

Less certain are the following two correspondences:

Baratte no. 8 = Falk no. 9 (*phiale*, CKI 723)

Baratte no. 23 = Falk no. 19 (goblet, CKI 726)

The difference in the total number given for the inscribed items (Baratte: ten, Falk: nine) can be reconciled if we assume in light of the above that Baratte's no. 35 (a *phiale*) is not actually inscribed. The correspondences between the objects and their inscriptions reconstructed from the published information as above thus remain partially uncertain, and it is to be hoped that eventually they can be verified on the actual objects, if and when the identity of the private collection housing them is revealed and general access to the objects granted.

The readings and interpretations provided by Falk for the nine inscribed objects are solid, and there are only a few places where I would like to suggest improvements or proceed more cautiously. Of the three goblet inscriptions in this collection, CKI 724<sup>60</sup> follows the same pattern as the goblet inscription allegedly from the same hoard and edited eleven years earlier by Salomon (CKI 173) – the name of the owner in the genitive is followed by the weight:

*aṇaṃtasenaṇaputrāsa dhru[ū]jaseṇasa sa 10 1 1*

Of Dhruaseṇa, son of Aṇaṃtasena. 12 staters.

Falk suggested, no doubt correctly, that the name of the owner corresponds to Skt. Dhruvasena, but read *dhraaseṇasa*.<sup>61</sup> I think the small horizontal projection at the bottom left of the akṣara can be interpreted as a vowel sign *u* and therefore read *dhru[ū]jaseṇasa*. The name of the owner's father is interpreted as Skt. Anantasena by Falk.<sup>62</sup> This is possible, but it seems more likely that it corresponds to Skt.

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<sup>60</sup> Baratte 2001, 293-4, no. 21; Falk 2001, 316, no. 17.

<sup>61</sup> Falk 2001, 309.

<sup>62</sup> Falk 2001, 309.

Ānandasena, which is attested in the form Anamdasena in the Central Asian Gāndhārī documents (CKD 345, CKD 403, CKD 703; cf. also Namdasena in CKD 68, CKD 385, CKD 399, spelled Namtasena in the last), notwithstanding the Amtasena (apparently Skt. Antasena) that is also attested there (CKD 400, CKD 462, CKD 463).

The same owner's name occurs (without that of his father or a weight specification) in the second goblet inscription, CKI 726:<sup>63</sup>

*dhr[u]aseṇasa*

Of Dhruaseṇa.

Here the vowel sign *u* is even more distinct.

The third goblet inscription, CKI 725,<sup>64</sup> follows the same pattern as the first, but combines an Indian owner's name with the non-Indian name of his father:

*ru[b]leaputrasa budhavalasa sa 20 dhanea 1 1*

Of Budhavalā, son of Rubea. 20 staters, 2 dhānaka.

Here Budhavalā corresponds to Skt. Buddhapāla, while Rubea remains etymologically unclear.<sup>65</sup>

The most spectacular of the vessels from this hoard is a silver *kantharos* decorated with a scene from Greek mythology involving centaurs. Two handles that were originally attached to it (maybe secondarily, since no room had been left for them in the mythological scene) have fallen off, though one of them appears to have entered the collection in question together with it. The beginning of the inscription on the *kantharos*, CKI 721, has been damaged.<sup>66</sup> Falk reads and interprets it as follows (question marks mine):

*arṣaṇobhaḍusa Mogasa todirasa dra 20 10 4 ½ tra 1*

Of Moga(?), the brother(?) of the prince(?), the todira(?). 34 ½ drachms(?), 1 drachm.

and attempts to connect *arṣaṇo* to the title *erzuṇa* (maybe corresponding to Khotanese *alysānai*) in CKI 53 from Takht-i-Bahi. Considering not only the physical damage that this word has undergone,

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<sup>63</sup> Baratte 2001, 294, no. 23; Falk 2001, 316, no. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Baratte 2001, 294, no. 22; Falk 2001, 316, no. 19.

<sup>65</sup> It could, as Falk (2001, 308, 316) notes, also be read Rurea.

<sup>66</sup> Baratte 2001, 252-9, no. 1; Falk 2001, 314-15, no. 1.

but also the unexplained difference in sibilant between *ṣ* in the inscription and [z] in Takht-i-Bahi and Khotanese, this can, however, not be considered certain. Similarly, both the reading *bhaḍusa* and its interpretation as the genitive of the word for ‘brother’ (which is well-attested in Gāndhārī, but never with retroflex *ḍ*, however motivated such might be by the *r* of its Skt. correspondent) cannot be considered certain, nor can the name Moga (with the stroke interpreted as *o* pointing in the wrong direction, and a *ga* that could also be read as *ṣa*). While none of these readings can be definitely ruled out, it would be unwise to base any historical conclusions on their aggregate. The word (or partial word) *todirasa* (possibly *todorasa*) is clearly visible, but of unknown significance, and in view of the uncertain beginning of the inscription, it may well represent the name (or part of the name) of the owner of the vessel. In the specification of the weight, it seems to me that *dra*, considered a mistake for *sa* by Falk, can be read as the top of the expected *sa*. The rare sign for ‘½’ is noteworthy, but could conceivably also be ‘2’, which would yield a total weight of 36 staters and 1 drachm for the vessel.

The remaining inscribed vessels from this hoard are five *phialai*. Four of these inscriptions follow the by now familiar patterns. CKI 727<sup>67</sup> has the Indian owner’s name Budhila (Skt. Buddhila; Falk reads Budhala and interprets it as Skt. Buddhala) together with the Greek name Theudama (which also occurs in the seal inscriptions CKI 34 and CKI 978, and probably stands for Theodamas)<sup>68</sup> of his father:

*theudamaputrasa budh[i]lasa sa 20 4 ½ dha 1*

Of Budhila, son of Theodamas. 24 ½ staters, 1 dhānaka.

The symbol for ‘one half’ looks noticeably different here than in CKI 727, casting further doubt on its presence in the latter.

Both the owner and his father in CKI 728 bear Indian names:<sup>69</sup>

*biśpelaputrasa budharakṣidasa sa 10 1 1 1*

Of Budharakṣida, son of Biśpela. 13 staters.

The same is true of CKI 723,<sup>70</sup> though here the owner’s name is clearly Hastiṇamḍa rather than Falk’s Hastidasa:

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<sup>67</sup> Baratte 2001, 300-2, no. 36; Falk 2001, 317, no. 41.

<sup>68</sup> Baums 2018b, 37-8; 2023.

<sup>69</sup> Baratte 2001, 300-2, no. 37; Falk 2001, 317, no. 41.

<sup>70</sup> Baratte 2001, 282-4, no. 8; Falk 2001, 316, no. 9.

*viradasaputrasa hastiṇaṃdasa*

Of Hastiṇaṃda, son of Viradasa.

The owner in inscription CKI 729<sup>71</sup> has the Iranian-Indian hybrid name Tiraghoṣa (compared by Falk with Iranian Tiravharṇa in CKI 179, to which we may add Tiravhara in CKD 582 and CKD 732, as well as uncompounded Tira in CKI 564 and Tiraka in CKI 1060):

*tiraghoṣasa sa 10 4 1 dra 1 1 dha 1 1 1 a 1 1*

Of Tiraghoṣa. 15 staters, 2 drachms, 3 dhānaka, 2 aṇḍikā.

Finally, the *phiale* inscription CKI 722 appears to consist only of a specification of the weight of the vessel.<sup>72</sup> Falk reads the preceding signs as *ma[n]a* meaning ‘measure’, i.e., ‘weight’, but the first sign is not oriented the correct way for *ma*, and the second is missing the characteristic head of *na*, so this is less than certain:

*ma[n]a sa 20 2 dra 2*

The measure is(?) 22 staters, 2 drachms.

#### 4 Another Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot

All of the inscriptions on the drinking or libation vessels discussed so far only specify owners and weights, without providing any information about their intended uses and the larger ritual or ideological complexes that they belonged to. In the case of the two Taxila hoards, contextual information can partly fill this lacuna. When the hoard in house 2D behind the Sirkap apsidal temple was found, Marshall originally surmised that it constituted donations made to the temple and subsequently hidden in the adjacent building. This is, as discussed, not supported by the inscriptions, where one would then have expected some word denoting the act of donation, such as *danamuha* or *deyadhaṇṇma*. After the discovery of the second hoard in house 3D', at a remove from the apsidal temple, Marshall too changed his mind and considered both hoards the result of private wealth hidden away in a time of danger. No contextual information is, of course, available for the looted objects, possibly from the same hoard, published by

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<sup>71</sup> Baratte 2001, 300-2, no. 38; Falk 2001, 317, no. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Baratte 2001, 259-63, no. 2; Falk 2001, 316, no. 3.

Salomon in 1990 and by Baratte and Falk in 2001. Baratte did, however, observe similar marks on several of the vessels that to him indicated that in spite of the multiple owners' names, at least some of them had had at some point been consolidated into a single treasure.

Another set of silver drinking vessels, also unprovenanced, but allegedly from just north of the Khyber Pass in Pakistan, were published in Falk from a private collection in the United Kingdom.<sup>73</sup> Three of these (one *phiale*, one *mastos*, and one bowl) were inscribed, and in this case the inscriptions do shed light on a ritual use of the bowls. Most informative is the *phiale*, which has two inscriptions in Greek and Gāndhārī (CKI 552) running around its edge. The Greek one is clear and was read and interpreted by Falk as follows:

Καλλιφῶν μεριδάρχης εὐξάμενος ἀνέθηκεν τῷ ΧΑΟΣΕΙ

Kalliphon the meridarch made a vow and dedicated (the vessel) to Khaos.

Rougemont was not willing to follow Falk in accepting ΧΑΟΣΕΙ as an irregular dative of the name Khaos, and instead built on Falk's alternative suggestion of a stem \*Khaosis or \*Khaoseus (adding the possibility \*Khaoses), interpreting them as the name of a divinised local river.<sup>74</sup> In any case, the *phiale* was dedicated to a deity in fulfilment of a vow, reflecting an entirely Greek ritual practice. The Gāndhārī inscription, commencing on the left of the Greek one, can therefore be considered a secondary version of the latter and can be interpreted in its light, even though several linguistically difficult points remain (reading by Falk, uncertainty marks added):

*kaliphonena meridarkhena [prati]śunita nirakaṭe [bo]asa*

Kalliphon the meridarch made a vow and repaid(?) it to Boa(?).

The Indian verb *prati-sru-* is semantically a perfect fit for εὐξάμενος, and it is likely that the corresponding Gāndhārī gerund *[prati]śunita* should be read. The spelling of the prefix is peculiar, however (it should, counter to Falk, be either *paḍi-* or *pradi-* and the root would normally be spelled either *ṣu-* or *śru-* (though *śu-* also occurs).<sup>75</sup> The main verb *nirakaṭe* may phonetically well correspond to Skt. *nirākṛta-* but this means (as Falk notes) 'removed', and is thus a rather indirect way at best to render ἀνέθηκεν. Finally, the name of the deity Boa is

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<sup>73</sup> Falk 2009a.

<sup>74</sup> Rougemont 2012, 269-70.

<sup>75</sup> Falk 2009a, 27.

not easily derived from Bhava (proposed by Falk as an *interpretatio Indica* of Khaos). The word *bhava* is well-attested in Gāndhārī, and only once (in the verse-commentary manuscript CKM 11) is it spelled *ba-va* with unmotivated loss of aspiration. Since the vowel mark *o* is not actually very distinct on the *phiale*, one should maybe read [*ba*]vasa to agree at least with this single parallel, if one is willing to follow Falk's identification of Khaos.

The bowl from the same hoard bears the Gāndhārī inscription (CKI 553):<sup>76</sup>

*samagakeṇa epesukupēṇa karavite ye aīmukhe sajate*

Samagaka, the overseer, had it made, who became an adorant(?).

Here the main doubt rests on the word *aīmukhe*, which is not otherwise attested in Gāndhārī and should, if indeed it corresponds to Skt. *abhimukha-*, rather be spelled *avhimukhe*.

A *mastos* from the same hoard has a Greek inscription specifying owner and weight in the familiar way:<sup>77</sup>

διὰ Φοιτο[κ]λέ[ο]υς τοῦ μεριδάρχου· δρ ν´

For Phoitokles, the meridarch. 50 drachms.

The hoard that these three vessels came from thus clearly held a connection to a sanctuary, and the inscriptions hint in the barest of outlines at a ritual act of depositing these valuable objects in gratitude to the local deity, who appears to have fulfilled a wish. What remains unclear, however, is whether the drinking or libation of wine was in any way involved in the ritual.

## 5 The Dasht-e-Nawur Inscriptions

The ritual consumption of wine may, however, be attested in one inscription from the western fringe of the Gandhāran world. A boulder on a high mountain plateau at Dasht-e-Nawur in Afghanistan has recorded on its upper surface five inscriptions, three of which (nos I, III, and IV) appear to carry the main text and be translations of each other. No. I is in the Bactrian language; no. III in what has been called the 'unknown script', writing a language that has only very recently begun to be deciphered; and no. IV is in Gāndhārī.

<sup>76</sup> Falk 2009a, 29-31.

<sup>77</sup> Falk 2009a, 34-5; revised reading by Rougemont 2012, 270-1.



Documentation for all five inscriptions and a first decipherment attempt were published by Fussman, which for the Bactrian inscription no. I was improved upon by Sims-Williams and Cribb:<sup>78</sup> the inscription is dated on day 15 of the month Gorpaios of year 279 of an unspecified era (probably the Greek era of 175 BC, placing the inscriptions in AD 104-105) and names the Kushan emperor Vima Takto with a long list of his titles, but the second part of the inscription remained obscure. Fussman had reported extensive damage to the inscription at the time of his last visit to the site, and no further documentation has been produced since.

Recently, however, a previously unpublished colour image of the Bactrian inscription from the estate of Fussman was made available, prompting two new decipherment attempts, one of the Bactrian as well as the Gāndhārī inscriptions,<sup>79</sup> another of the Bactrian inscription only.<sup>80</sup> While the new reading of the Gāndhārī inscription proposed in the former remains highly speculative and, as admitted by its authors, strongly inspired by their reading of the Bactrian, there are now three phrases in the second half of the Bactrian inscription that both groups of authors agree on, and that do provide intriguing information about the acts carried out in the aforementioned year of Vima Takto, and maybe even in his presence. These phrases are: l. 11 αβο ι βαγανο ‘to the gods’, l. 12 καρανο ‘of the people’, and l. 13 μολο χοαρδο ‘drank wine’. Taken together, they appear to suggest a public ritual involving wine-drinking at this remote mountain-top location, and thus possibly a Kushan-era continuation of the type of indigenous Gandhāran wine ritual reported by the Greek historians.<sup>81</sup>

## 6 Wine and Buddhism in Gandhāra

One of the key questions that remains, however, is the possible involvement of Gandhāran Buddhist institutions in wine-related activities. The depictions of wine-drinking scenes in Gandhāran art are well-known, but usually interpreted as a reference to worldly activities of pleasure that are to be overcome on the Buddhist path, rather than something engaged in or even endorsed by Buddhist monastics.<sup>82</sup> Buddhist prohibitions against the consumption of alcohol were, of course, known in Gandhāra, and are directly attested in one Gāndhārī manuscript fragment of the Dakṣiṇāvibhaṅgasūtra

<sup>78</sup> Fussman 1974; Sims-Williams, Cribb 1995-96, 95-6.

<sup>79</sup> Palunčić, Palunčić, Maharaj 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Halfmann et al. 2024.

<sup>81</sup> Carter 1992, 51-3.

<sup>82</sup> Rosen Stone 2008, 84.

(CKM 264)<sup>83</sup> as part of the five precepts undertaken by the aspiring nun Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī:

*(panadi)[pa](tade pradi)[vira]da adiṃnadanade prativirada  
(kameṣu michacarade prativirada mu)[ṣa]vadade pradivirada  
suramereamajapramati[tha>(\*nade prativirada)*

She has abstained from killing living beings, has abstained from taking what is not given, has abstained from wrong conduct with regard to desires, has abstained from false speech, has abstained from the bases of negligence grain liquor, sugar-and-spice liquor, and (other) intoxicating drinks.

But precept is of course one thing, and practice another, and in view of the evident popularity of wine festivals in Gandhāra from ancient times, up to the present day among the Kalash,<sup>84</sup> accommodations and interactions cannot be ruled out. The question is whether there is any positive evidence for such, and in particular – for purposes of this article – whether such evidence can be found in the epigraphy of Gandhāra. Falk argued that Buddhist monastics, while (at least initially) abstaining from any wine-related vinaya violations themselves, ‘organised’ wine festivals for the local population in order to engage them and, potentially, win them over to Buddhism.<sup>85</sup> Falk sees the physical evidence for this in large stone bowls with lotus-petal decorations on their outside that have been found at monastic sites in Gandhāra and beyond, and that Falk himself originally interpreted differently as representations of the begging bowl of the Buddha that were meant to be worshipped as a type of relic and in which devotees could deposit food donations for the monastery.<sup>86</sup> Falk’s reinterpretation is based partly on the depiction of similarly sized and adorned bowls in wine-production scenes in Gandhāran art, partly on the inscriptions on three of these monumental bowls.

One of these bowls was found in 2000 near Charsadda and has, on the outside of its rim, the following donative inscription (CKI 367):<sup>87</sup>

*saṃ 20 20 10 1 kartaasa masasa divasaṃmi 10 1 1 1 iṣe kṣuṇaṃmi  
saṃghe caūḍisami kridaṅkae puyakaviharami acaryaṇa kaśaviaṇa  
parigrahaṃmi vāiraśa daṅamukhe ṣaveasa uvajayasa arogadakṣiṇe  
sarva(sa)tvaṇa puyae*

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<sup>83</sup> Strauch 2014, 29.

<sup>84</sup> Edelberg 1965.

<sup>85</sup> Falk 2009b, 76.

<sup>86</sup> Falk 2005, 451.

<sup>87</sup> Falk 2005, 448-51.

In the year 51, on the 13th day of the month Kārttika, at this time, donation of Vāira to the community of the four directions, at Kridaṅka, in the Puyaka Monastery, in the possession of the Kāśyapīya masters, for the gift of health of the novice Uvajaya, in honour of all beings.

The inscription contains no explicit mention of the practical purpose of the vessel, though we may note with a view to the following that its donation is supposed to further the health of Uvajaya.

Already in 1972, a comparable bowl had been found in Termez in Uzbekistan, and was interpreted by its first editor as a water container.<sup>88</sup> It has an incompletely preserved inscription (CKI 234) on top of its rim that reads:

*ayaṃ suyikuḍa ... ṅatisalohidaṇo puyaa sarvasatvana hidaye suhaye saṃp(u)[r]yadu ○*

This pure bowl ... shall be filled in honour of relatives and kinsmen, for the well-being and happiness of all beings.

Falk's new interpretation of this bowl as a receptacle for wine hinges on the understanding of *suyikuḍa*. The most straightforward parsing of the compound is as above, as a karmadhāraya meaning 'pure bowl', possibly with an implication of the bowl being pure due to its content. Falk prefers to take the compound as a tatpuruṣa meaning 'bowl for cleaned or filtered (liquid)',<sup>89</sup> namely wine, and refers to the Vedic term *śucipā* 'drinker of what is pure' (there meaning Soma).

To close his argument, Falk refers to a third large vessel found in or before 2005 in Takht-i-Bahi, with two incompletely preserved copies of what appears to have been the same inscription (CKI 545) on its inside and its outside:

*bhavāiraevasami nigadaka kha ///*

*/// ? ? [n]i[gadaka kha]rarakṣidasa vavamukhe*

Combining these, one can tentatively translate:

At *bhavāiraevasa*, the *nigadaka*(?) is a donation(?) of Khararakṣida.

The word division and interpretation of *bhavāiraevasami* are, in my opinion, unclear, but in any case it appears to designate the place

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<sup>88</sup> Vorob'eva-Desiatovskaia 1974, 177.

<sup>89</sup> Falk 2009b, 72.

of the donation. (Falk divides and translates *bhavaī raevasami* “at Bhava, at the residence of the king”, which, one may note, would appear to designate a non-Buddhist context.) The key term is *nigadaka*, taken by Falk as “(vessel) with salubrious (content)” from Skt. *nir-gada* ‘healthy’. This is phonetically possible (though one might have preferred *nigadaga*), and no other plausible interpretation (always assuming the word division at the beginning of the string is correct) comes to mind. If it is correct, then the content of this vessel is ‘healthy’, just as that of the preceding one is ‘pure’.

Falk’s argument is ingenious, but even combining the inscriptions with the similarly-looking vessels depicted in wine-production scenes, I am not entirely convinced that the three inscribed large bowls (and similar other ones) must have been used as wine containers in monastic contexts, as Falk argues. This shape and size of vessel (whether with common lotus ornamentation or without) lends itself to the processing or temporary storage of any liquid. In the reliefs, this is evidently wine, but notably without any other indications of a monastic presence in its processing. In the case of the three inscribed large bowls, at least two of which are from Buddhist contexts, it could have been any other liquid, such as simply water for the purpose of drinking which, if it was kept clean (*suyi*) would certainly be conducive to health (*aroga*, *nigada*), or maybe water for cleaning oneself externally before entering the monastery, such as the water troughs provided at the entrance of any Japanese Buddhist temple. A globular clay water pot was certainly considered a suitable donation to a Buddhist monastery in Termez, and an elaborate, metrical donative inscription running around its shoulder (CKI 841)<sup>90</sup> explicitly refers to its ‘beryl-coloured water’ content.

## 7 The Goblet of Kharayosta and Indravarma

Keeping all this in mind, one inscribed vessel of the goblet type discussed earlier in this article, whose original purpose was certainly the consumption of wine, was in fact converted to a decidedly Buddhist purpose: the famous silver reliquary of the Apraca prince Indravarma (CKI 241; Salomon 1996). In contrast to all the vessels discussed so far, the Indravarma reliquary consists of two parts: a base of the same shape as the goblets already discussed, and a similarly-styled lid crowned by the figure of an ibex. Both pieces appear to have been produced at the same time and from the same raw material, to fit each other for the original use of the vessel as a drinking

<sup>90</sup> Scherrer-Schaub, Salomon, Baums 2012, 159-68.

cup.<sup>91</sup> If the lid had been added only later, on conversion of the vessel to a reliquary,<sup>92</sup> then one might further have expected a Buddhist subject in place of the ibex. Base and lid of the vessel together are 28.5 cm high, measure 12.3 cm in diameter, and weigh 1,155.9 g. The findspot of the object is unknown.

The original inscription on the goblet, attached upside down on the outside of the rim of its lid, is:

*mahakṣatrapaputrasa [ya]guraṃṇa khara[yosta]sa [śa] 20 4 4 ana  
4 ma 2*

Of the *yagu* king Kharayosta, son of the great satrap. 28 staters, 4 dhānaka, 2 māṣa.

In place of the title *yaguraṃṇa*, Falk suggests reading *egaraṃṇo*,<sup>93</sup> but Salomon's reading is borne out by his fig. 12.<sup>94</sup> Conspicuous is the mistake in the abbreviation for stater, *śa* instead of *sa*, *ana* instead of *dha* for dhānaka, as well as the use of the smallest unit māṣa, unique among the vessels discussed in this article. The weight specification refers to the lid alone.

The bottom of the base bears the single akṣara *naṃ*, presumably an artisan's mark and therefore also original, but it originally lacked any indication of ownership or weight.

At a later point in time, and following the change of ownership to Indravarma, the following two inscriptions were added on the rim of the lid (upside down) and on the rim of the base (right side up):

*idravarṃsa kumarasa sa 20 4 4 dra 1*

Of prince Idravarma. 28 staters, 1 drachm.

*iṃdravarṃsa kumarasa sa 20 20 1 1 1*

Of prince Iṃdravarma. 43 staters.

Finally, after the conversion of the goblet into a reliquary, a relic-donation inscription in the name of Indravarma and his wife was added, in one copy each on the lid and the base, both right-side up. As they do not concern the topic of the present article, the reader is

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**91** Salomon 1996, 435.

**92** As Baratte 2001, 297-8 suggests.

**93** Falk 2001, 311.

**94** Salomon 1996, 426.

referred to Salomon, and to Baums for them in the context of other Gandhāran relic inscriptions.<sup>95</sup>

The conversion of a wine-drinking vessel into a Buddhist reliquary is remarkable, and it is tempting to see in it a conscious symbolism of conversion similar to the often remarked-upon arrangement of wine-drinking scenes in the lower registers of a Buddhist stūpa, followed by properly Buddhist motifs in the higher registers as one ascends. On the other hand, it must also not be forgotten that the repurposing of vessels originally intended for more mundane purposes to become containers for Buddhist sacred content is widespread. One example are the water pots that contained the Buddhist manuscripts of the British Library and Robert Senior collections,<sup>96</sup> another the vase from Merv with hunting and banquet scenes that contained Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript fragments.<sup>97</sup>

## 8 A Third Silver Hoard of Unknown Findspot

Finally, yet another hoard of unprovenanced inscribed silver vessels and utensils, photographed in 1996 in the collection of Aman ur Rahman, but now in unknown hands, contained a further three goblets of the type discussed above (in addition to a bowl, a cup, and two ladles). In contrast to the objects discussed so far, these three goblets do not bear any inscriptions related to an original use as drinking vessels, but only donative inscriptions to monastic recipients of the same type as on the large stone bowls investigated in section 6. Salomon read these as follows:<sup>98</sup>

*saghami [cadu]diśa[mi kuṇa](śi)[iami] viharaṃmi u[ta]rode[a]mi  
pa[r]ṇavaḍi[e] dhama[ka]bharyae daṇamu[khe] sarvasatva puyāi-  
ta ? ? [mavi] ? ? (CKI 1182)*

*sagha(mi) caūdi(śami) [utaro]de[vami vi]harami [k](oṇa)śilie [a]ca(r)  
ya(ṇa sar)va[sti]vada parigrahami [avhe]mi[trae] bhikkuṇie [daṇa]  
mukhe (madapi)[da pu]yāita (CKI 1183)*

*(saghami) caūdiśami [u]tar[o]deva[mi ko]ṇaśi[li]e (viha)[ra](mi) [a]  
(car)yana sarva[stivadana] (pa)[r](i)g(rahami) ?.i ? (bhi)kh(u)ni[ye]  
(da)ṇamu[khe] (CKI 1184)*

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<sup>95</sup> Salomon 1996; Baums 2012, 233-4, no. 25.

<sup>96</sup> Salomon 1999, 214-17; 2003, 74-8.

<sup>97</sup> Koshelenko1966.

<sup>98</sup> Salomon 2022, 273-6.

All are donations (*danamukhe*) by one laywoman (Parṇavaḍi, wife of Dhamaka) and two nuns (Avhemitra and one whose name is damaged) to the Utarodeva monastery in an unknown location Konaśīlia, in the possession of a Sarvāstivāda community, in one case in honour of all beings, in another in honour of the donor's parents. The inscriptions are entirely typical of the Gandhāran Buddhist donation formula, and as in the case of the goblet of Kharayosta and Indravarma, these are thus drinking vessels put to a Buddhist religious use. What remains unclear in this case is whether any use as ordinary drinking vessels (and thus a repurposing) preceded their donation, and what precisely their function (if any) was to be after their donation. Again, we thus have wine-related utensils in a Buddhist context that do not, however, constitute any direct evidence for wine production or consumption in monasteries.

## 9 Conclusion and Outlook

As we have seen, the inscriptions on vessels actually used for wine-drinking in Gandhāra limit themselves to naming their owners and specifying their weight (and thus value). The main result that may be drawn from them is that the population engaging in wine-drinking in Gandhāra (whether recreational or ritual) bore Indian as well as Greek, Iranian, and etymologically opaque 'local' names and one Iranian-Indian hybrid name. This reflects the onomastic composition of the wider Gāndhārī epigraphic corpus and, as shown elsewhere,<sup>99</sup> little can be deduced from this state of affairs about the ethnic composition behind the names. With Jihonika, Aśpavarma, Kharastoes, Indravarma, and possibly Maues, the nobility is well-represented. There are also three Buddhist names among the owners: Budhavaḷa, Budhila, and Budharaḷṣida, who may have been lay followers rather than monastics. One object has been converted from a wine goblet into a Buddhist reliquary, and three other wine goblets were the objects of donation to a Buddhist monastic community, without any necessary connection between original and ultimate purposes other than the fine quality and value of the vessels. Whether large stone bowls found in Buddhist monasteries were used in wine festivals organised by monastics, or simply served as containers for more innocuous liquids such as water, remains unclear.

A conspicuous absence from the Gandhāran epigraphic corpus, including manuscripts as well as inscriptions, are documents relating to viticulture. Such documents are, in contrast, richly attested from the Central Asian kingdoms of Kroraḷina and Kucha. These

<sup>99</sup> Baums 2018b.

are outside the geographical scope of the present article, and significant climatic and cultural differences doubtless prevailed between the two regions. The Central Asian documents give a general indication, however, of what the concerns of viticulture were, and of some Gāndhārī technical terms relating to it. Thus Niya document CKD 565 tells us that that vineyards were called *masuśaḍa* (Skt. *madhuśāla*; a very frequent term in the Niya documents), and were to be ploughed (*kriṣana*), sowed (*vāvana*), and tilled (*ukṣivana*) under the Zodiac sign Pīg. From CKD 586, we learn that vines were propped (*ṣgabhana*) and knocked down (*nihanamṇa*), grapes (*trakṣi*) were cut (*chinamṇa*), and wine was, naturally, drunk (*pivamṇa*). Wine was measured in *khi* (Greek *khous*; a term attested in numerous distribution lists), and several varieties of wine were distinguished using unclear terms such as *śuka* and *potgoña*.<sup>100</sup>

Documents such as these must have existed in Gandhāra as well. Their absence among the currently known manuscripts, most of which come from monastic contexts that did preserve some legal and accounting documents (such as CKM 278 and CKM 297), would seem to indicate that Gandhāran monasteries did not in fact have any major involvement in the wine business (whether or not wine was consumed in Buddhist contexts), though further discoveries of monastic documents may change this picture. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Gandhāran manuscripts with unknown findspots, but from apparently non-monastic contexts, is coming to light and is gradually being studied. It is possible that some of these will cast further light on the wine culture of ancient Gandhāra more generally.

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**100** Burrow 1937, 107, 125-6 lists three possible Indian derivations for the former, each with phonetic difficulties, and can only note that the latter appears to be of non-Indian (possibly Iranian or Tocharian) origin.



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# Strabo on Wine in Ancient India

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**Abstract** In book 15 of his *Geography*, Strabo presents a portrayal of Central Asia and India heavily influenced by accounts provided by Megasthenes and historians of Alexander the Great, such as Onesicritus. Strabo intermittently incorporates observations regarding winemaking and consumption in India, along with references to the association of these regions with Dionysus and his civilising influence. This contribution seeks to scrutinise the evidence presented by Strabo regarding vine cultivation and wine production in India, drawing upon the description of Musikanos' kingdom and the utopian context in which information related to wine is situated.

**Keywords** Greek Geography. Roman Geography. Onesicritus. Musikanos. Utopia. Winemaking.

**Summary** 1. Musikanos' Kingdom: India Between Reality and Utopia. – 2. Vine Cultivation and Winemaking in Ancient Utopia. – 3. Onesicritus' on Wine in Musicanus' Kingdom: A Purely Utopian Trait?

Strabo authored an extensive 17-volume geographical treatise encompassing the entirety of the inhabited world. Throughout his work, Strabo exhibits a distinct inclination towards exploring the resources of the regions he describes. Strabo's deep interest in resources becomes especially conspicuous concerning those he perceives as indicative of the level of civilisation attained by the populations in question, namely wheat, olive trees, and vines. The consumption of the Mediterranean triad, comprising wheat, wine, and olive oil, is considered a prominent indicator of cultural advancement. Conversely,

the utilisation of butter, beer, and non-wheat flour is perceived to suggest a certain level of barbarism.<sup>1</sup>

Although deemed technically as barbarians, the Indians held an esteemed reputation among the Greeks, primarily owing to their renowned wisdom and the modesty reflected in their customs.<sup>2</sup> This admiration and evaluation were undoubtedly influenced by India's geographical location, situated at the farthest edge of the inhabited world, which fostered an idealised perception of Indian culture. Paradoxically, despite its peripheral geographical position – or possibly due to it – India exerted a profound impact on Greek intellectual history. Undoubtedly, Alexander the Great's expedition and the subsequent historiographical works pertaining to it held profound significance in shaping the understanding and description of India.<sup>3</sup> However, two aspects were consistently featured in its representation: the marvels inherent to the Indian world and the degree of civilisation exhibited by its inhabitants. Strabo, for instance, inferred India's level of civilisation based on several factors. Firstly, the multitude of cities present in the country (including notable ones such as Nysa, Taxila, and Pataliputra) served as indicators of its cultural advancement.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the prevailing social organisation within India also contributed to the perception of its level of development.<sup>5</sup>

Amidst the indicators of civilisation, particular attention is accorded by Strabo to the cultivation of the vine and the production of wine. Strabo displays a keen interest in vineyards and wine, consistently devoting attention to specific vineyards and distinct wine varieties originating from various regions (and even taking note of their absence). Consequently, in his depiction of India, Strabo provides valuable insights into the cultivation of vines, the production and the consumption of wine:

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**1** Cf., for instance, Strab. 3.3.7. Strabo appears to have devised a meticulous scale for assessing such degrees (cf. Almagor 2005, 52): when describing the habits of the inhabitants of Britain, Strabo notes a resemblance to some aspects of Celtic culture while simultaneously deeming them “simpler and more barbarous” (ἀπλούστερα καὶ βαρβαρώτερα) in other respects (4.5.2). Moreover, certain people are unequivocally labelled as “totally barbarian” (τέλειως βάρβαροι), with the Ligurians, who inhabited the mountains, serving as an example (4.6.4). In addition to Almagor 2005, for Strabo's conception of the barbarians, cf. Van der Vliet 1984; Dueck 2000, 75-84; Dandrow 2017.

**2** India represents a distinctive case within Greek ethnography, consistently maintaining a highly positive image: it appears to transcend the constraints of the dichotomy between the Greco-Roman and the barbarian world (cf. Arora 1982, 481-2; Leroy 2016, CII; Coloru 2024, 191).

**3** Cf. Marcotte 1998, 267; Gehrke 2015; Leroy 2016, XXVI-XXVII; Coloru 2024.

**4** On the urbanisation and political organisation as a sign of civilisation in Strabo, see Pédech 1971; Thompson 1979, 221-4; Van der Vliet 1984, 48-56.

**5** On the social structure of a people as an indication of its level of civilisation, see Van der Vliet 1984, 39; Jacob 1991, 161.

- 15.1.7-8: Strabo engages in a critical refutation of the mythical tradition attributing a triumphant campaign by Dionysus against the Indians, wherein he supposedly established the city of Nysa, a tradition that purportedly found its validation in the presence of vines and ivy in the region;
- 15.1.22: Strabo inserts the description of Musikanos' kingdom, in which grapevine and wine production are said to be present;
- 15.1.53: the Indians partake in wine solely during sacrificial rituals, and their libations consist of a wine crafted from rice, not from barley;
- 15.1.55: a woman who commits regicide by slaying an inebriated king is granted the opportunity to marry his successor;
- 15.1.58: according to Megasthenes, the Indian philosophers residing in the mountainous regions of northern India venerate Dionysus and exhibit evidence of his presence through wild vines that solely thrive in their vicinity. However, Strabo endeavours to discredit this assertion by highlighting the production of wine in regions situated beyond the Euphrates, such as Karmania, Armenia, Persis, and Mesopotamia.

The present contribution will focus on the passage dedicated to Musikanos' kingdom, since this particular passage provides a noteworthy glimpse into Strabo's methodology and the manner in which the information he presents ought to be examined.

## 1 Musikanos' Kingdom: India Between Reality and Utopia

Among Alexander the Great's historians, Onesicritus of Astipalea situates the territory of Musikanos in the lower reaches of the Indus River.<sup>6</sup> The domain ruled by Musikanos has been identified with the Alor region, proximate to the modern-day site of Sukkur, where vestiges of its presence endure.<sup>7</sup> The kingdom notably occupied a

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<sup>6</sup> On the life and work of Onesicritus, cf. Brown 1949; Pearson 1960, 83-111; Pédech 1984, 71-157; Albaladejo Vivero 2003; Goulet-Cazé 2006; Leroy 2016, XLVIII-LI. On the land of Musikanos, see Brown 1949, 54-61; Pearson 1960, 100-3; Pédech 1984, 114-23; Bosworth 1996, 85-7; Albaladejo Vivero 2003, 23-32; Arora 2005, 90-101. Ancient accounts include Diod. 17.102.5; Curt. 9.8.8-16; Arr. *Anab.* 6.15.5-17.2.

<sup>7</sup> Leroy 2016, 162 (with previous bibliography) locates the kingdom of Musikanos in Upper Sind and supposes that Musikanos may represent Sanskrit *Mūṣika* (perhaps to be identified with modern Moghshi, cf. Arora 2005, 91 and Stoneman 2019, 247). Indeed, Onesicritus places the kingdom of Musikanos in the far south of India (Strab. 15.1.21: τὰ ἐν τῇ Μουσικανοῦ [...] ἅ φησι νοτιώτατα εἶναι τῆς Ἰνδικῆς): Brown 1949, 154 fn. 3 notes the different placement of the region between Arrian and Onesicritus and states: "Perhaps he [sc. Onesicritus] referred to this whole section of India, including the Delta, as

strategic position at the terminus of a significant trade route interlinking it with Gandhāra via the Bolan and Khojak passes. This geographical context may elucidate the considerable prosperity encountered by the Macedonians in the area. Evidently, as detailed in Arrian's *Anabasis*, Musikanos, apprehensive of the Macedonian military force, promptly submitted to Alexander and dispatched opulent offerings.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a subsequent uprising unfolded, culminating in a confrontation with the satrap Peithon. After a decisive defeat, Musikanos faced capital punishment and his kingdom suffered extensive pillaging.

Beyond the restoration of events deduced from historiographical sources like Arrian, the representation of Musikanos' kingdom is shaped by the account provided by Onesicritus. Grounded in his narrative, Strabo provides the ensuing depiction:<sup>9</sup>

λέγει δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς Μουσικανοῦ χώρας ἐπὶ πλέον, ἐγκωμιάζων αὐτήν, ὧν τινα κοινὰ καὶ ἄλλοις Ἰνδοῖς ἱστοροῦνται, ὡς τὸ μακρόβιον, ὥστε καὶ τριάκοντα ἐπὶ τοῖς ἑκατὸν προσλαμβάνειν (καὶ γὰρ τοὺς Σῆρας ἔτι τούτων μακροβιωτέρους τινές φασι), καὶ τὸ λιτόβιον καὶ τὸ ὑγιεινόν, καίπερ τῆς χώρας ἀφθονίαν ἀπάντων ἐχούσης, ἴδιον δὲ τὸ συσσίτια τινα Λακωνικὰ αὐτοῖς εἶναι δημοσίᾳ σιτουμένων, ὅσα δ' ἐκ θήρας ἐχόντων· καὶ τὸ χρυσῶ μὴ χρῆσθαι μηδ' ἀργύρῳ, μετὰλλων ὄντων· καὶ τὸ ἀντὶ δούλων τοῖς ἐν ἀκμῇ χρῆσθαι νέοις, ὡς Κρήτες μὲν τοῖς Ἀφαμιώταις, Λάκωνες δὲ τοῖς Εἰλωσι· μὴ ἀκριβοῦν δὲ τὰς ἐπιστήμας πλὴν ἰατρικῆς· ἐπὶ τινῶν γὰρ κακουργίαν εἶναι τὴν ἐπὶ πλέον ἄσκησιν οἶον ἐπὶ τῆς πολεμικῆς καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων· δίκην δὲ μὴ εἶναι πλὴν φόνου καὶ ὕβρεως – οὐκ ἐπ' αὐτῷ γὰρ τὸ μὴ παθεῖν ταῦτα, τὰ δ' ἐν τοῖς συμβολαίοις ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἐκάστῳ, ὥστε ἀνέχεσθαι δεῖ, ἐάν τις παραβῇ τὴν πίστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσέχειν ὅτῳ πιστευέον καὶ μὴ δικῶν πληροῦν τὴν πόλιν.

He also speaks about the land of Musikanos, praising it at length. Some things recorded about it are common to other Indians, such as their longevity – which is thirty years beyond a hundred (and some say that the Serians live still longer) – and their simple life and healthiness, even though their country is abundant in everything.

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νοτιώτατα". Pearson 1960, 100, fn. 67 associates the region with the lower course of the Indus, arguing that Onesicritus could not have described it as νοτιώτατα since he knew he had not reached the southernmost limit of India, "but he could still have said that this was the most southerly point he had reached"; cf. also Leroy 2016, 139. Radt 2009, 161 amends ἄ [...] νοτιώτατα τοῖς ἴν [...] νοτιωτάτην (though this correction appears unnecessary) and interprets it as the southernmost point of India, arguing that Onesicritus was unaware of the true extent of India. Cf. also Winiarczyk 2011, 102, fn. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 6.15.5-17.2.

<sup>9</sup> 15.1.34 = *FGrHist* 134 F 24.



Peculiar to them is common dining in the Lakonian style (in which they eat in public with food from what they have hunted), that they do not use gold or silver although having mines, and that they use young men in the prime of life instead of slaves, as the Cretans use the Aphamiotians and the Lakonians the Helots.<sup>10</sup> They do not investigate knowledge accurately (except for medicine), since too much practice of it is considered by them to be malignant, especially military and similar matters. They have no legal proceedings except for murder and violence. One cannot avoid experiencing these, whereas contracts are in one's own hands, for one must bear it if anyone were to overstep faith, as well as pay attention to who must be trusted and not fill the city with legal proceedings.<sup>11</sup>

The description of Musikanos' kingdom by Onesicritus, as relayed by Strabo, exhibits certain discernible utopian attributes, since it is likely coloured by his philosophical inclinations.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the depiction of India within classical sources consistently manifests diverse utopian traits, which can be classified across categories encompassing the natural environment, the physical human traits, and facets of private as well as societal existence.<sup>13</sup>

1) The climate is temperate, marked by ample water sources, and characterised by a profusion of wild fruits, along with extraordinary flora and fauna features.

2) People enjoy a prolonged lifespan, coupled with robust health and a notable stature.

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**10** The comparison is imprecise, yet the assimilation to the Helots could be part of Onesicritus' seemingly attempted parallel between Sparta and the kingdom of Musikanos (cf. also the Spartan-like *syssitia* and the avoidance of precious metals): cf. Leroy 2016, 166. The idealisation of the Spartan (and also Cretan) regime had widely spread in Greek literature (cf. Atack 2021). In this regard, the absence of slavery also appears to evoke Cynic thought, which seems to have been averse to slavery (cf. Diog. Laert. 6.55; 6.74).

**11** Transl. by Roller 2014. The influence of Cynic political thought has been acknowledged in these customs: cf. Brown 1949, 40 and Albaladejo Vivero 2003, 31.

**12** According to Plutarch (*De Alex. fort.* 331E; *Alex.* 65), Onesicritus is said to have been a disciple of Diogenes of Sinope, hence a follower of Cynic philosophy: cf. Brown 1949, 60; Stoneman 1995. It is likely due to his philosophical background that he was chosen by Alexander as an envoy to the so-called "gymnosophists" (Strab. 15.1.63): on the encounter between Onesicritus and the gymnosophists, as well as the content of their conversations, cf. e.g. Brown 1949, 41; Stoneman 1995; Karttunen 1997, 61; Goulet-Cazé 2006; Winiarczyk 2009; Kubica 2021.

**13** Cf. Winiarczyk 2011, 231-59; Stoneman 2019, 241-2. Cf. also Tola, Dragonetti 1986, 188-9; Coloru 2024, 165. For a definition of 'utopia' see the comprehensive surveys by Winiarczyk 2011 and by Napolitano 2022.

3) Individual and social qualities encompass piety, equity, self-discipline, the absence of avarice, and the absence of slavery.

Stated differently, there emerges a form of idealisation concerning both the Indian landscape and society. However, this idealisation becomes intertwined with the established tradition of portraying the 'barbarian'.<sup>14</sup> One of the most striking hallmarks within the Greek portrayal of the 'barbarian' lies in the presence of pronounced contradictions. The Persians, as an instance, can simultaneously be depicted as fearsome and feeble, devoted to opulence yet highly adept in warfare, marked by cunning and formidable as warriors. Turning to the context of India, Strabo asserts on two occasions that the land yields treasures, even though the Indian populace remains unfamiliar with the extraction of precious metals and holds wealth in disdain.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, their outward appearance sharply belies this apparent simplicity of manners, evident in the vivid hues of their clothing and the profuse employment of precious gemstones, pearls, and gold ornaments.<sup>16</sup> Within the Greek conceptualisation, this opulent attire is attributed to all Eastern populations, yet for the Indian societies, this opulence is compounded by the prosperity of the nature in which they live. Consequently, we encounter in the classical sources a seamless fusion of nature and societal attributes when it comes to India.<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Vine Cultivation and Winemaking in Ancient Utopia

Similar paradoxes arise in relation to the consumption of wine: the inhabitants of India are recognised for their temperance, yet concurrently, they are ascribed an excessive penchant for wine.<sup>18</sup> Strabo categorises India as a region characterised by being ἄοινος, indicating

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**14** The representation of the 'barbarian' has been the subject of extensive scholarly literature, notably beginning with Hall 1989 and Hall 1997. Nevertheless, this literature is often compromised by an overly schematic approach and is significantly shaped by Athenian propaganda, which framed the Persian Wars as a fundamental clash of civilisations. For a different perspective see Vlassopoulos 2013.

**15** Strab. 15.1.30;34.

**16** Strab. 15.1.30;54. A parallel observation pertains to Indian military inclinations. Within Strabo's *Geography*, the Indians are delineated as a peaceable populace, not inclined towards warfare (15.1.6). However, historical records indicate that they faced defeat only at the hands of Alexander the Great and by Dionysus in mythical times. In contrast, they have consistently rebuffed assaults from the Assyrians under Semiramis and from the Persians led by Cyrus (15.1.7-8). Cf. Parker 2008, 86; Coloru 2024, 177.

**17** Leroy 2016, CXIII.

**18** Cf. Athen. 10.49.437a-b = Chares *FGrHist* 125 F 19a and Curt. 8.9.30. See Coloru 2024, 180.

the absence of wine production. It is within this precise context that an excerpt from Onesicritus surfaces in Strabo's narrative:<sup>19</sup>

ἐν δὲ τῇ Μουσικανοῦ καὶ σῖτον αὐτοφυῆ λέγει πυρῶ παραπλήσιον καὶ ἄμπελον, ὥστ' οἰνοφορεῖν, τῶν ἄλλων ἄϊνον λεγόντων τὴν Ἰνδικήν.

He speaks of a wild grain similar to wheat, in the territory of Musikanos, and a vine that produces wine, although others say that Indike has no wine.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to most historians recording Alexander the Great's campaign, Onesicritus situates vine-cultivation and wine-production within the territory of Musikanos. Notably, the growth of vines appears to be spontaneous in this context. The Greek sentence, however, introduces a potential ambiguity: the adjective αὐτοφυῆ could pertain exclusively to σῖτος, or alternatively, it could be construed as predicative of both σῖτος and ἄμπελος. Both grammatical interpretations remain plausible. Considering Strabo's *usus scribendi* and the subsequent mention of the abundant production of various fruits in the land of Musikanos, a stronger inclination arises to interpret the adjective as extending to both nouns. Furthermore, Strabo himself attests to the existence of wild vines in Gandhāra, citing Megasthenes as his source. It is noteworthy that Megasthenes suggests that the local inhabitants believed themselves to be descendants of Dionysus due to the presence of these wild vines.<sup>21</sup>

Could the notion of winemaking and spontaneous vine growth in the kingdom of Musikanos be plausible, or does it merely serve as another element within the utopian narrative? It is essential to acknowledge that the spontaneous abundance of the earth's produce is a characteristic hallmark of Greek utopian views.<sup>22</sup> An influential precedent, such as that offered by Homer, might have played a role in shaping Onesicritus' perspective. In the 9th book of the *Odyssey*, Ulysses, having departed from the Lotophagi, arrives in the land of the Cyclopes, a region depicted by the poet in the following manner:<sup>23</sup>

ἔνθεν δὲ προτέρω πλέομεν ἀκαχήμενοι ἦτορ.  
Κυκλώπων δ' ἐς γαῖαν ὑπερφιάλων ἀθεμίστων  
ἰκόμεθ', οἳ ρα θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν

<sup>19</sup> Strab. 15.1.22 = *FGrHist* 134 F 22.

<sup>20</sup> Transl. by Roller 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Strab. 15.1.58.

<sup>22</sup> In general, caution is needed before applying the category of utopia, as discussed by Winiarczyk 2011 and Napolitano 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Hom. *Od.* 9.105-11.

οὔτε φυτεύουσιν χερσὶν φυτὸν οὔτ' ἀρόωσιν,  
ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα πάντα φύονται,  
πυροὶ καὶ κριθαὶ ἢ δ' ἄμπελοι, αἵ τε φέρουσιν  
οἶνον ἐριστάφυλον, καὶ σφιν Διὸς ὄμβρος ἀέξει.

So we left that country and sailed with heavy hearts. And we came to the land of the Cyclopes, a fierce, lawless people who never lift a hand to plant or plough but just leave everything to the immortal gods. All the crops they require spring up unsown and untilled, wheat and barley and vines with generous clusters that swell with the rain from heaven to yield wine.<sup>24</sup>

Within the land of the Cyclopes, all manner of vegetation, including vines and wheat, flourishes spontaneously.<sup>25</sup> This paradigm was assuredly not unfamiliar to Greek authors, as evident in another passage of Strabo's own work where he exposes the characteristics of the region of Albania:<sup>26</sup>

οὐδὲ γὰρ τῇ γῆι χρώνται κατ' ἀξίαν, πάντα μὲν ἐκφερούσῃ καρπὸν καὶ τὸν ἡμερώτατον, πᾶν δὲ φυτὸν· καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἀειθαλῆ φέρει· τυγάχει δ' ἐπιμελείας οὐδὲ μικρᾶς “ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα πάντα φύονται”, καθάπερ οἱ στρατεύσαντές φασι, Κυκλώπειόν τινα διηγούμενοι βίον· πολλαχοῦ γὰρ σπαρείσαν ἅπαξ δις ἐκφέρειν καρπὸν ἢ καὶ τρίς, τὸν δὲ πρῶτον καὶ πεντηκοντάχουν, ἀνέαστον καὶ ταῦτα οὐδὲ σιδήρῳ τμηθεῖσαν ἀλλ' αὐτοξύλῳ ἀρότρῳ. ποτίζεται δὲ πᾶν τὸ πεδίον τοῦ Βαβυλωνίου καὶ τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου μᾶλλον τοῖς ποταμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὕδασι· ὥστ' αἰεὶ ποώδη φυλάττειν τὴν ὄσιν· διὰ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ εὐβοτόν ἐστι· πρόσεστι δὲ καὶ τὸ εὐάερον ἐκείνων μᾶλλον. ἄσκαφοι δ' αἱ ἄμπελοι μένουσαι διὰ τέλους, τεμνόμεναι δὲ διὰ πενταετηρίδος, νέαι μὲν διετεῖς ἐκφέρουσιν ἤδη καρπὸν, τέλειαι δ' ἀποδιδόασι τοσοῦτον ὥστ' ἀφιᾶσιν ἐν τοῖς κλήμασι πολὺ μέρος.

They do not use their land according to its value, which bears all fruit - even the most cultivated - and every plant, even producing evergreens. Not even slight attention happens to be paid to it, “but everything is produced without tilling and plowing”,<sup>27</sup> and those who have made expeditions there say that they possess a sort of Kyklopeian life. At any rate, the land, when sown only once, produces two or three crops, the first with a yield of fifty

<sup>24</sup> Transl. by Rieu, Rieu 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the Cyclops and their way of life, particularly as depicted in Euripides' satyr play, see Nicolai 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Strab. 11.4.3.

<sup>27</sup> Hom. *Od.* 9.109.

fold, unplowed and never cut with iron but with a wooden plow. The entire plain is better irrigated with its rivers and other water than the Babylonian or Egyptian ones, and thus always retains a grassy appearance, because of which it is good pasture. In addition, the air is fresher there. The vines are not dug around but remain complete, yet are cut in the fifth year, and the new ones produce fruit in the second year, and when grown they yield so much that a large part is left on the branches.<sup>28</sup>

The allusion to the Cyclopes distinctly indicates a deliberate affinity with the Homeric passage, a connection that is to some degree overtly acknowledged. However, the portrayal of Albania also bears significant resemblance to that of India. In India, the land yields two annual harvests,<sup>29</sup> akin to the neighbouring Aria region where the vines yield grape clusters measuring one meter in length, underlining the bountiful environment.<sup>30</sup>

This abundance owes much to the copious water resources which typify both the Indian regions and Albania. In this regard, the distinctive attributes of the Indian and Albanian climates substantiate the distinct qualities inherent in the utopian imagination, thus bestowing a certain degree of realism upon it. This implies that the grandeur and profusion of the plant life and the peculiarities of the fauna are not merely products of a divine benevolence, but rather are explicable by geographical factors. Indeed, Strabo adeptly employs the unique attributes of India's botanical and zoological components, the temperate nature of its climate, and its propitious atmospheric conditions as evidence to establish India's location within the temperate zone of the world.<sup>31</sup> Paralleling the notions of Eratosthenes, Strabo establishes a connection between India's fertility and the harmonious equilibrium between humidity and warmth.<sup>32</sup> Like-

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**28** Transl. by Roller 2014.

**29** Strab. 15.1.20.

**30** Strab. 2.1.14.

**31** Already, the historians of Alexander went beyond mere descriptions, seeking to provide rational explanations for the phenomena they depicted: cf. Marcotte 1998, 267-9; Winiarczyk 2011, 106-8. However, it was the Alexandrians who consistently integrated the information gathered by the historians of Alexander into a systematic framework that correlated atmospheric conditions, flora, fauna, and ethnography. It was precisely based on this reflection that Eratosthenes corrected the dimensions of India and its placement on map: cf. Jacob 1986; Marcotte 1998, 269-74; Bianchetti 2013. On the relationship between Strabo and Eratosthenes, see Bianchetti 2006.

**32** As expounded by Eratosthenes and subsequently embraced by Strabo (15.1.8), an excessive amount of rainfall in northern India would hinder the ripening of grapes, as they would prematurely drop before reaching full maturation. This assertion, however, appears to diverge from observable reality: vine cultivation and wine production are undoubtedly attested in ancient Gandhāra, a northwestern region of India where

wise, within Strabo's perspective, the temperate and propitious climate is accountable for engendering the distinctive physical, societal, and ethical attributes exhibited by the Indian populace. This rationale serves to validate the traits that have been perceived as utopian in nature.<sup>33</sup>

### 3 Onesicritus' on Wine in Musicanus' Kingdom: A Purely Utopian Trait?

What remains to be investigated is the extent to which Onesicritus crafted a narrative imbued with utopian elements around the kingdom of Musikanos. Unfortunately, only fragments of his historical account endure. Onesicritus had actively participated in Alexander the Great's expedition as king's helmsman and was the author of a historiographic work concerning Alexander, a text that Strabo references on twenty occasions within his *Geography*. The extant excerpts indicate that Onesicritus exhibited a particular inclination towards scientific and philosophical inquiries, with his portrayal of India often bearing traces of cynical philosophical thought. It is noteworthy that Strabo's assessment of Onesicritus is decidedly unflattering:<sup>34</sup>

ὑπὲρ δὲ ταύτης ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἡ τοῦ Ἀβισάρου χώρα, παρ' ᾧ δύο δράκοντας ἀπήγγελλον οἱ παρ' ᾧ δύο δράκοντας ἀπήγγελλον οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ πρέσβεις τρέφεσθαι, τὸν μὲν ὀγδοήκοντα πηχῶν τὸν δὲ τετταράκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἑκατόν, ὡς εἶρηκεν Ὀνησίκριτος, ὃν οὐκ Ἄλεξάνδρου μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν παραδόξων ἀρχικυβερνήτην προσείποι τις ἄν.

Above it in the mountains is the land of Abisares, who raised two serpents - according to the ambassadors who came from him - one of which was 80 *pecheis* and the other 140, as Onesicritus says, who would not so much be called the chief pilot of Alexander as of incredible things.<sup>35</sup>

Undoubtedly, Strabo's evaluations tend to be unfavourable towards a substantial majority of historians recording Alexander's conquests,

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viticulture was known well before the arrival of the Greeks (see Karttunen 1985, 207-10; Francfort 2007-08; Falk 2009; Klimburg 2016), to the extent of being considered one of the oldest wine-producing regions in the world (see Spengler et al. 2021). Moreover, as evidence of the widespread vinicultural production, excavations in the Swat Valley, at Barikot and Taxila, have revealed the presence of distilleries during the periods of Saka and Kushana dominance in the region (see Allchin 1979; Callieri, Olivieri 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Strab. 12.1.4.

<sup>34</sup> Strab. 15.1.28.

<sup>35</sup> Transl. by Roller 2014.

such as Onesicritus, and likewise, towards many authors who have expounded upon India, Megasthenes being among them.<sup>36</sup> Strabo's assessments, however, are not devoid of rationale: during the first century BC, treatises dealing with India had virtually evolved into a distinctive literary genre, possessing a pronounced interest in themes such as the marvellous and philosophical utopia. These works manifested as a form of pseudo-geographical literature, amplifying the fantastical for the reader's gratification. This was accomplished not merely due to the author's own credulity but more so to exploit the readers' unfamiliarity and satisfy their craving for the extraordinary.<sup>37</sup> Hence, Strabo's overarching objective lies in harnessing the reliable information he encounters and situating it within a framework of geographical thought imbued with determinism. In doing so, he seeks to rationalise the myriad of remarkable attributes ascribed to India. Even the portrayal of Musikanos' kingdom as delineated by Onesicritus is incorporated by Strabo into his discourse, albeit accompanied by a degree of scepticism. For instance, when it comes to the matter of wine, Strabo underscores the unanimous assertion of all other authors that India does not produce wine, despite Onesicritus' contention regarding the presence of vine in the land of Musikanos.

Certainly, authors such as Onesicritus and Megasthenes frequently encounter accusations of having produced descriptions of India excessively influenced by philosophical and political utopian ideals, particularly concerning the topic of slavery.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, as previously discussed, it is also accurate to acknowledge that a substantial portion of the attributes categorised as utopian possesses a tangible foundation: the humid climate, the fecundity of the land, and the abundance of precious metals are indeed rooted in reality, as is the hierarchical social structure. According to Richard Stoneman, if

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**36** However, Strabo draws heavily from their works in the 15th book of his *Geography*: Strabo is aware that accounts of India have been manipulated to some extent, for instance by the historians of Alexander for political reasons, creating a kind of imaginary India. On the construction of the image of India in classical sources, see Dihle 1963; Karttunen 1985; Gómez Espelosín 1995; Jacob 1995; Bruno Sunseri 2001; Albaladejo Vivero 2005; Winiarczyk 2007; Parker 2008. Strabo's awareness of the reliability of accounts about India leads him to establish a hierarchy of sources, with the aid of which he selects and corrects information based on plausibility: on this point, see Jacob 1986; Leroy 2016, LXXII-LXXVII.

**37** Leroy 2016, XXXI; cf. also Jacob 1995. Undoubtedly, interest in the Indian populations may have increased due to the diplomatic interactions between the Indians and Augustus: on the Indian ambassadors sent to Augustus cf. Leroy 2016, X, 231; Coloru 2024, 187-8.

**38** Onesicritus asserts the absence of slavery in the kingdom of Musikanos (Strab. 15.1.54 = *FGrHist* 134 F 25), while Megasthenes extends this assertion to the entirety of India (Arr. *Ind.* 10. 8 = *FGrHist* 715 F 16; Diod. 2.39.5 = *FGrHist* 715 F 4; Strab. 15.1.54 = *FGrHist* 715 F 22).

one was to equate the Greek notion of *dike* with the Indian concept of *dharma*, even the distinct concept of justice attributed to Indian moral values would not be a mere idealisation, but rather would be substantiated by factual evidence.<sup>39</sup> A parallel observation can be extended to Strabo's perspective. As previously explained, Strabo presents most utopian attributes within his portrayal of India as being grounded in geography and climate, factors that exert influence over the botanical and zoological aspects, societal configurations, and cultural expressions. While certain elements can indeed be characterised as utopian, it remains insufficient to interpret Strabo's depiction as inherently utopian.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, reality undergoes a certain degree of transformation due to Onesicritus' cynical philosophical thought, thereby presenting Musikanos' kingdom as an idyllic realm.<sup>41</sup> Within the framework of this portrayal, a portion of this idealisation undoubtedly revolves around the notion of spontaneous vine growth and wine production. It is plausible that the factual existence of these elements in the nearby Gandhāra inspire Onesicritus' reference to the grapevine and wine in the land of Musikanos. However, we do possess evidence - albeit sporadic - of the existence of the grapevine outside the strictly defined region of Gandhāra.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, it cannot be excluded that the kingdom of Musikanos had at least a small local production of wine and that Onesicritus used this to bestow upon the kingdom of Musikanos an air of civilisation, as perceived through Greek eyes.<sup>43</sup> Onesicritus might have strategically presented these aspects to construct an image of an idealised and exemplary land, as one cannot disregard the significance of wine, wheat, and olive oil - commodities that shape the markers of civilisation within a culture. From this perspective, grapevine and wine serve as a device to introduce an element distinctly tied to the broader level of civilisation of the Indian population, and specifically of Musikanos' kingdom.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Stoneman 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Parker 2008, 109-10.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Trüdingen 1918, 138-9. The depiction of the Musikanos' kingdom may not perhaps be understood as a utopia *stricto sensu*: Onesicritus does not seem to have aimed at creating a political utopia in a broader sense; instead, he incorporated utopian motifs within his description, motifs that, however, were already present in the traditional representation of India: cf. Winiarczyk 2011, 113.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Karttunen 1989, 209; Biffi 2005, 173-4. Our records provide detailed references to grapes and grape juice in India: if grape juice was significant enough to be included in a list of eight beverages attested in the Buddhist monastic code in Pāli known as *Vinaya*, grapes could not have been scarce or considered an overly exotic fruit: cf. De Notariis 2023. This issue will be addressed in a forthcoming publication.

<sup>43</sup> To Strabo's account, in the section dedicated to Musikanos' land, which echoes Onesicritus' narrative, this kingdom assumes a semblance of a Greek *polis*: cf. Leroy 2016, CVI.



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