2 Central Asian Empires

I Introduction: Central Asia as an Imperial Space

I.1 From Imperial Frontier to Center: 300 BCE–300 CE

During the mid to late first millennium BCE, Central Asia underwent enormous political and cultural change. Through the military campaigns of the Achaemenid kings Cyrus II and Darius I, Central Asia came to form the empire's northeastern frontier by the late sixth century BCE.¹ As with the rest of the Achaemenid Empire, this space was subdivided into *dahyava* (countries) – preexisting cultural units refigured as satrapal administrative units – from which taxes, military personnel, and laborers could be levied. Bactria was an especially resource-rich and significant country, whose *satraps* were often drawn from the Achaemenid royal family, but it was also unruly and prone to revolt.² Here, the Achaemenid administration further developed the irrigation systems that had existed since the Bronze Age,³ and introduced the use of Aramaic as a chancellery language; the use of Elamite has been additionally attested in Arachosia.⁴

Between 329 and 327 BCE, Alexander the Great campaigned in Central Asia for two difficult years in the pursuit of Bessos (the *satrap* of Bactria who had murdered the king Darius III), all the while adapting himself to Persian modes of rule and largely preserving administrative structures he found in place.⁵ One important cultural ramification of Alexander's conquests was the introduction of demobilized Greek and Macedonian soldiers into the population through the foundation of new settlements with a strong military component.⁶ Garrisons were established within existing cities or as new outposts, existing cities were refounded, and new foundations were also established, such as Alexandria Eschate on the Jaxartes (mod. Syr

1 On Achaemenid Central Asia, see generally Briant 1984. Pre-Achaemenid forms of state control or development in this space are unclear, especially since Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988 cast doubt on the existence of the Median 'Empire.'

2 Wu 2017; Henkelman 2018.

3 Gardin 1998, 185; Mairs 2014, 38–39.

4 See discussion and bibliography in Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

5 On Alexander in Bactria, see Holt 1988.

6 On prior deportations of Greek communities to Bactria during the Achaemenid period, see Martinez-Sève 2012, 372. On the foundations and settlement policies of Alexander in Central Asia, consult the discussions in Fraser 1996; Fischer-Bovet and Mairs forthcoming.

Note: Thanks are due to Olivier Bordeaux, Omar Coloru, and Gunnar Dumke for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

Map 1: Central Asia and northern India at the time of the Greek Kingdoms. © Peter Palm.

Darya) River.⁷ Although two settler revolts followed in 325 and 323 BCE,⁸ Graeco-Macedonian occupation likely continued to some degree.

Following Alexander's death in 323 BCE and the first wars of his successors, Seleukos I led a campaign in ca. 305 BCE into Central Asia. An unsuccessful military venture across the Hindu Kush against the Mauryans resulted in a treaty: Arachosia, the Paropamisadaï, Gandhāra, and northwest India were ceded to Chandragupta Maurya along with a Seleukid princess, in exchange for five hundred war elephants.⁹ Seleukos appointed his son Antiochos I as co-regent in ca. 294 BCE with a particular concern for Bactria, due in part to the region's strategic significance but also Antiochos's own family ties; his mother, Apama, was the daughter of the Sogdian noble Spitamenes, who had been a prominent antagonist during Alexander's campaigns. Seleukid rule in Central Asia further culturally and economically integrated this space into the wider Hellenistic world. In Bactria and Sogdiana, the Greek language came into wider use, garrisons and larger settlements were founded and refounded (such as Antiocheia in Margiana), new settlers were introduced, and monetization began through the establishment of royal mints striking gold, silver, and copper coinage to the Attic standard used throughout the Hellenistic East.¹⁰

Then, in the mid-third century BCE, a new geopolitical phenomenon occurred, which shaped the following centuries in this space. Bactria was transformed from an eastern imperial frontier to become the locus of two new successive Central Asian 'empires': that of the Greek Kingdoms (map 1), and the Kushan Empire (map 2).¹¹ The rule of the Greek Kingdoms (ca. 250 BCE–10 CE) is usually regarded to begin with the secession of Diodotos I, the former Seleukid *satrap* of Bactria. He and subsequent kings ruling in Bactria are conventionally referred to as 'Graeco-Bactrian.' After the southern conquests of Demetrios I (ca. 200–180 BCE), the subsequent Greek kings thought to have ruled in Arachosia, the Paropamisadaï, Gandhāra, and the Punjab are now usually referred to as 'Indo-Greek.'¹² So much about these kingdoms remains unclear. Strabo, drawing on the now-lost *Parthika* of Apollodoros of Artemita (ca. 50 BCE), provided the most informative account surviving today. He described an independent Greek polity which had emerged from the agricultural prosperity of Bactria to become a far-reaching and multiethnic political entity:

The Greeks who caused Bactria to revolt grew so powerful on account of the fertility of the country that they became masters, not only of Ariana, but also of India, as Apollodorus of

⁷ The site of which remains archaeologically unconfirmed, see Holt 1988, 54–59.

⁸ See further in Holt 1988, 70–87.

⁹ For this episode, see Karttunen 1997, 260–263.

¹⁰ On Seleucid Central Asia, see Holt 1999, 21–29; Capdetrey 2007, 79–81; Martinez-Sève 2012, 375–376. For more on the Seleukid Empire, see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

¹¹ There are many orthographic variants for 'Kushan' in scholarship, and preferences differ according to disciplinary, historical, and methodological positionality. 'Kushan' is in widest use, but 'Kuṣāṇa' or 'Kuṣān' are also commonly seen.

¹² For more on these terms, see below.

Artemita says: and more tribes were subdued by them than by Alexander – by Menander in particular (at least if he actually crossed the Hypanis towards the east and advanced as far as the Imaüs), for some were subdued by him personally and others by Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus the king of the Bactrians; and they took possession, not only of Patalena, but also, on the rest of the coast, of what is called the kingdom of Saraostus and Sigerdis. In short, Apollodorus says that Bactriana is the ornament of Ariana as a whole; and, more than that, they extended their empire [*arche*, i.e., sovereignty or dominion] even as far as the Seres and the Phryni.¹³

Whether the Greek Kingdoms may be properly defined as a premodern empire as understood in current scholarship has not been extensively debated.¹⁴ Indeed, the Graeco-Bactrian polity has been described as an empire by a range of authorities over time without explicitly justifying the choice.¹⁵ Likewise, the Indo-Greeks under Menander have also been described as “an Indian empire with a small Greek ruling caste.”¹⁶ Yet, a recent treatment engaging with current discourse about premodern empires prudently does not commit to this definition in respect to the Graeco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks – largely because of the scarcity of the available (literary) sources – despite generally fulfilling the criteria discussed by the authors.¹⁷ Thus, although relatively short-lived and still structurally obscure, the Greek Kingdoms nonetheless appear to bear qualities of premodern empires and it is seen as productive in the present context to approach them as such.

Greek rule in Bactria collapsed in the mid-second century BCE from a combination of internal stresses – dynastic conflict, and discord from local elites and populations – and external pressures created by the eastward expansion of the Arsakid Empire and the migration of nomadic groups into and through southern Central Asia. A nomadic confederacy called the Yuezhi 月氏 (or Da [Great] Yuezhi 大月氏) in Chinese sources had arrived in Bactria after the mid-second century BCE, usually identified by scholars as the Tocharoi/Tochari mentioned in Greek and Latin sources,¹⁸ although the connection is not directly proven. Becoming sedentarized, the Kushan clan attained power among the Yuezhi and established a ruling dynasty conventionally beginning with the king Kujula Kadphises. From the beginning of their rule into the mid-second century CE, Kushan power rapidly expanded into an empire (ca. 50–350 CE) by military conquest, first into northwest India, then finally across the Gangetic plain. The heartland of Bactria-Tokharistan was lost in ca. 230 CE to the Sasanians, who subsequently established the so-called Kushano-Sasanian

¹³ Strabo 11. 11. 1, trans. Jones. For more on Strabo and Apollodoros in reference to Central Asia, see Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹⁴ For discourse on premodern empires especially in respect to the Hellenistic world, see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

¹⁵ Such as Tarn 1938, 409; Bernard 1994, 98, 100, 115; Mairs 2014, 165.

¹⁶ Tarn 1938, 258–260.

¹⁷ Hoo and Wiesehöfer forthcoming.

¹⁸ Strabo 11.8.2; Justinus *Epitome* (Just. *Epit.*) prol. 42; Ptolemy *Geographia* (Ptol. *Geog.*) 6. 11. 6.

kingdom. Kushan control over Gandhāra and the northern Punjab ended about a century later.

Many facets of Bactria's transformation into a locus of new imperial power require future interrogation, foremost the question of why the Kushan imperial project was more stable and wide-reaching than the Greek one. Some general observations may nonetheless be offered here. First, at this time, certain regions surrounding the core of Bactria – the Paropamisadae, Arachosia, and Gandhāra – were repeatedly subject to its political control. Although Margiana was only briefly under Greek rule before falling to the Arsakids in the second century BCE, it retained varying economic and cultural ties to Bactria, as did the virtually independent Chorasnia and Sogdiana. It should also not be forgotten that the iranophone peoples of Central Asia included both sedentary populations practicing agriculture and mobile pastoralist populations (nomads) living in desert-steppe areas and mountain piedmonts; these populations existed in something of a state of symbiosis.¹⁹ Connectivity between Bactria, northern India, and the Tarim Basin states also gradually increased during this period. Bactria and Gandhāra were host to exciting cultural innovations, especially in the realms of material culture and religion. Although many museum catalogs and edited volumes concerned with such material frequently cast this space as a “crossroads,”²⁰ this descriptor is flawed for implicitly characterizing Central Asia as a junction between real cultural entities. Indeed, the connectivity, prosperity, and innovation of this period may be associated with Central Asia's development as a new imperial center, even a global core region.

No discussion about Central Asia in antiquity can avoid the customary lament over the state of the art. The available transmitted literary sources are famously poor.²¹ The study of the Greek Kingdoms and the Kushan Empire exists on the fringes of different larger disciplines which do not always speak well to each other, and the existing scholarship can be difficult to navigate.²² Little should be taken as common knowledge, and radically significant new evidence sometimes emerges to change prevailing historical narratives.²³ The continuing reinterpretation of older evidence has also been crucial. This is seen in the sustained struggles to establish relative chronologies of kingship sequences and absolute dates for the historical eras inaugurated by rulers throughout this period, which have enormously hampered scholarly progress of the twentieth century.²⁴ Recent achievements in the in-

¹⁹ Recent treatments on the nomads of Central Asia in this period include Rapin 2007; Abdullaev 2007.

²⁰ Such as Allchin et al. 1997; Hiebert and Cambon 2011.

²¹ See Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

²² For further discussion, see Morris, ch. 16, this volume.

²³ The most salient case of this is the discovery of the Bactrian-language Rabatak inscription in 1993, discussed further below.

²⁴ For the political and cultic significance of reckoning time in new eras from the Hellenistic period onward, see most recently Kosmin 2018.

terpretation of literary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence appear to have finally fixed some dates, approved by wide scholarly consensus.²⁵ The beginning of the Greek (Yavana) era probably commenced in 175 BCE,²⁶ perhaps instituted to mark a co-regency between the Graeco-Bactrian king Antimachos I and the Indo-Greek king Apollodotos I.²⁷ The Azes (an Indo-Scythian king) era seems to have been established in 47 BCE and, judged from the affinity of the Arsakid and Azes calendrical systems, may have been a reinauguration of the Arsakid era of 248 BCE (year 1 of Azes = year 201 in Arsakid era).²⁸ The date of year 1 of Kanishka, i.e., the Kushan era, has been a particularly contentious subject of modern historiography.²⁹ Falk's reading of the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujiddhvaja, a third-century Sanskrit astronomical text, noted a formula for converting a year in the Kushan era into a Śaka-era date, the latter being an important historical era of India beginning in 78 CE. This study indicated that the two eras are not the same, and has fixed the beginning of year 1 of the Kanishka era in 127 CE.³⁰ The Kanishka era appears to be now equivalent with year 301 of the Greek era, indicating a reinauguration of this older era.³¹

Despite the clear historical interest in considering the Greek Kingdoms and the Kushan Empire together, the trajectories of current scholarship on these polities have differed profoundly. Usually restricted to the realm of specialists, the study of political history remains a central occupation of research into the Graeco-Bactrians, especially through the vast numismatic record they left behind.³² However, recent years have seen renewed interest in the cultural encounter prompted by Greek rule in Central Asia and northwest India, mobilizing a range of theoretical frameworks to explore its dynamics and implications.³³ Quite differently, the Kushans have long been associated with the growth of Buddhism into Central Asia and the Tarim Basin in the first centuries CE, and the flourishing of the Gandhāran (sometimes described as Graeco-Buddhist) idiom of sculptural art. Thus, much scholarship dealing with the Kushans exists in the orbits of Buddhist and religious studies, as well as art history. Otherwise, the Kushans frequently appear in scholarship dealing with long-distance trade in antiquity. Here, they are usually framed as middlemen, and their empire's prosperity is repeatedly associated with their putative control of long-distance trade routes. The Begram hoard – which contained over 400 objects largely from the Roman Mediterranean, India, and Han China – has been central to this

²⁵ Consult, conveniently, the discussion and further bibliography in Cribb 2018b; Baums 2018.

²⁶ Falk and Bennett 2009, 208.

²⁷ Rapin 2010.

²⁸ Falk and Bennett 2009, 209–211.

²⁹ See the range of positions represented in Basham 1968.

³⁰ Falk 2001.

³¹ Falk and Bennett 2009, 208–211.

³² Foundational historical works are Tarn 1938; Narain 1957. Recent numismatically conversant treatments are Coloru 2009; Widemann 2009.

³³ See, for example, relevant contributions in Kouremenos et al. 2011; Mairs 2014.

belief.³⁴ As new evidence emerges and the old continues to be critically reviewed, future scholarship will undoubtedly nuance these receptions.

The remainder of this chapter more sharply defines the Central Asian space and its environments and resources, and then presents essential contextual historical information on the Greek Kingdoms and the Kushan Empire. This includes a presentation of their political histories in broad strokes, their notions of kingship, patterns of settlement and urbanism under their rules, their respective militaries, and the administrative systems they mobilized.

I.2 The Central Asian Space: A Geopolitical and Cultural Perspective

The term ‘Central Asia’ emerged in the nineteenth century simultaneously in France and Russia, overlapping in part with what had been previously known as Tartary.³⁵ As this encompasses an incredibly diverse space without indisputable physical geographical boundaries, Central Asia has become a polyvalent and contested spatial designation, shaped by colonialist and imperialist perspectives as well as modern notions of the political, ethnic, geographic, and cultural characteristics of this space. Indeed, the most extensive study of the concept of Central Asia clarifies that our current situation is one of “terminological chaos.”³⁶

In current anglophone usage, this space is most recognizably identified in the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, which have been known collectively as *Tsentral’naia Aziia* since the 1990s. This space had been known as Turkestan under the Russian Empire, demarcated in the early postrevolutionary decades into new Soviet Republics (1924–1936). In the Soviet era they were collectively termed *Sredniaia Aziia i Kazakhstan* (Middle Asia and Kazakhstan, see also the German *Mittelasien*). The Russian and German terms translated as Central Asia (*Tsentral’naia Aziia*, *Zentralasien*) are traditionally broader, corresponding or overlapping with spaces sometimes called Central Eurasia or Inner Asia in English. Problematically, Central Asia as used in English (as in French, *Asie centrale*) does not make clear differentiations. It may equally refer to the Soviet *Sredniaia Aziia*, the present autonomous Chinese region of Xinjiang, and even Inner Asia or Central Eurasia. Definitions of this space still vary wildly in historical scholarship.³⁷ For example, the definition adopted for the UNESCO volumes on the history of Central Asia included Afghanistan, China, north India, northeast

³⁴ See further discussion in Morris, ch. 16, this volume.

³⁵ On the origins of the term ‘Central Asia’ and its early development, see Gorshenina 2014, 283–384.

³⁶ Gorshenina 2014, 539–544.

³⁷ Gorshenina 2014, 519–538.

Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, as well as *Sredniaia Aziia*.³⁸ Now, most archaeologists working on Central Asia in antiquity tend to adopt a minimalist definition, following the former Soviet Republics but with a northern extent drawn at the Eurasian steppe belt in Kazakhstan, and southern extent along the Kopet Dag and Hindu Kush ranges.

As the term ‘Central Asia’ remains inherently malleable, I have elected to use a similar definition of this space, but explicitly informed by its geopolitical and cultural situation in antiquity. Thus, ‘Central Asia’ is used here to refer to the core territory of Bactria and its adjacent regions (without insisting on fixed boundaries), including the Hindu Kush. Multiple conceptions of this space have been transmitted to us, constructed variously with regard to physical geography as well as ethno-cultural and political-administrative considerations, which do not overlap perfectly. The picture is complicated as the limits of certain spatial entities, such as Bactria, seem to have shifted over time.

The most developed historical geography of relevance is that of Achaemenid administrative geography, particularly Jacobs’s reconstruction of a hierarchy of putative great, main, and minor *satrapies* (*Groß-, Haupt- und Kleinsatrapien*) at the time of Darius III.³⁹ Thus the Great Satrapies of Bactria and Arachosia are subdivided into Main Satrapies which are assumed to be the standard units of imperial administration presented in the *dahyava* list of Darius I’s trilingual Bisitun Inscription.⁴⁰ The Great Satrapy of Arachosia thus perhaps included the Central Main Satrapy of Arachosia – with its capital at Kandahar, the putative location of Alexandria in Arachosia – in addition to Drangiana, Gedrosia, Sattagydia, and India. The Great Satrapy of Bactria is thought to have extended from the Hindu Kush at least to the Jaxartes (mod. Syr Darya). This included the Central Main Satrapy Bactria – itself subdivided into a Central Minor Satrapy of Bactria with its capital at Bactra (later known as Balkh) – in addition to Sogdiana, Gandhāra, Aria, and the lands of the Dahae, Massagetae, and Amyrgians.

It is particularly interesting that this reconstruction connects the administration of Gandhāra with Bactria, across the Hindu Kush, rather than northwest India. Additionally, in the Elamite and Babylonian versions of the Bisitun inscription, Gandhāra is instead rendered *Parrubaresana/Paruparesanna*, that is, Paropamisos/Paropamisadai and all variants in Greek.⁴¹ The latter may have been a minor *satrapy* of Gandhāra, perhaps its western center of gravity.⁴² While the Hindu Kush obviously physically restricted movement, it is mistaken to regard this massif as an impervious political or cultural boundary during the period of study.⁴³

³⁸ Miroshnikov 1992.

³⁹ As in Jacobs 1994.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., the Old Persian version, DBp I.12–17, in Schmitt 1991.

⁴¹ DBp I.16; DBe I.13; DBb 6.

⁴² Jacobs 1994, 217–220; Jacobs 2011.

⁴³ See similar observations in Thapar 2003, 39–40.

The names of the Main Satrapies are retained here as regional reference points, even if their boundaries and political affinities shifted over time. Presumably, their seats of regional government remained important centers, such as at Bactra and Old Kandahar, although new centers and administrative subdivisions were developed later. A specific example of a changing space may be cited in the case of Bactria, the northern frontier of which is a longstanding point of dispute. Some scholars maintain that literary sources place this frontier between Bactria and Sogdiana at the Oxus River, a perspective underlined most vocally by Rapin who nonetheless concedes that this frontier shifted north over time.⁴⁴ Others consider the frontier to be located at the Hissar Range, and refer to the space between there and the right bank of the Oxus as Northern Bactria.⁴⁵ This conception of Bactria overlaps with an important regional toponym of the Kushan period, Tokharistan (the land of the Tocharoi/Tochari), which was certainly in use by ca. 137 CE,⁴⁶ but probably inaugurated rather earlier. For the Kushan period, it is more appropriate to refer to this space as Bactria-Tokharistan.

Other exogenous ethno-linguistic perspectives considered Central Asia as an eastern Iranian space, for example, in the case of the Ar(e)iane/Ariana variously described in classical sources.⁴⁷ In the early Hellenistic period, Eratosthenes (cited by Strabo), considered Ariana – stretching between the Caspian Gates and Carmania to the Indus River, and from the Hindu Kush to the Arabian Sea – to constitute a single *ethnos*.⁴⁸ Strabo notes that this definition should also include part of Persia and Media as well as the Bactrians and Sogdians “for these speak approximately the same language,”⁴⁹ although this alleged linguistic unity has been dismissed as imaginary.⁵⁰

Some final words about the potentialities of imperial control across Central Asia are due. First, the diverse environments of this space did not have equal settlement or economic potential. While sedentary urban life was concentrated around river basins and irrigated plains, much space between these centers was either sparsely populated or virtually uninhabitable. A helpful analogy to visualize this has been proposed in respect to the spatial designation of ‘Turko-Persia.’ As the analogy goes, cartographies of states and empires in modernity tend to resemble monolithic “processed American cheese” with a uniform distribution and clear boundaries filled in with a single color on the map. However, Turko-Persia rather illustrated the “Swiss cheese model of the polity” where uniformity of landscape or control thereof is not assumed, and ruling strategies are concentrated around holes of different shapes

⁴⁴ Rapin 2007.

⁴⁵ For further details, see Staviskij 1986, 50–55.

⁴⁶ Silver dish of Nukunzuk, line 4, in Sims-Williams 2015, 257.

⁴⁷ For Ariana and the history of the idea of Iran, see Shahbazi 2005, 105–106.

⁴⁸ Strabo 15. 2. 8; 2. 1. 31.

⁴⁹ Strabo 15. 2. 8, trans. Jones.

⁵⁰ Panaino 2015.

and sizes, while nominal sovereignty could be asserted over peoples in marginal areas (i.e., desert, steppe, and mountains) within the boundaries of the state.⁵¹ Environment and climate may also shape power structures in other ways, for example in the development of seasonal capitals between which the court would travel. Historically, Kapisa and Kabul (located in the ancient Paropamisadai) have served as the location of a summer highland capital for multiple powers who also had winter lowland bases to the east at Jalalabad, Peshawar, or Taxila.⁵²

1.3 Environment, Climate, and Natural Resources

The environment of Central Asia is very diverse, encompassing oasis, desert, mountain, and steppe landscapes. Its climatic and ecological zones are accordingly varied, but the lowlands in the most part have a semiarid steppe climate with low rainfall occurring mostly in winter and spring. Although the region's climate appears to have been relatively stable for the last five thousand years, climate variations have been documented through proxy records, including a humid period between ca. 0–410 CE.⁵³ Sedentary settlement was clustered around piedmonts and river plains composed of fertile loess, and sustained by runoff from the high mountains of the region. These river plains supported denser flora, particularly tugai-dense riparian forests thriving in arid regions in addition to agricultural cultivation, which flourished since at least the Bronze Age through the installation of artificial irrigation systems. These systems continued to be developed and extended throughout the Hellenistic and Kushan periods.⁵⁴ On these irrigated plains, or where dry farming was possible, the main food resources cultivated appear to have been grains such as wheat, barley, and millet, i.e., both summer and winter crops. The agricultural output of Bactria was famously outstanding, a point emphasized in multiple Greek and Latin texts.⁵⁵ Meat and secondary animal products could be obtained through hunting and pastoralism practiced along a spectrum of mobility.⁵⁶ Comparably, mountainous regions, such as those of the Paropamisadai and Arachosia encompassed a great diversity of ecotopes created by rapid altitude changes. Lowland valleys, like Laghman and Jalalabad at less than 1,000 m above sea level, are relatively warm year-round and in modern times produce wet rice and citrus crops. However, the highlands (mod. Kabul at 1,800 m, Ghazni at 2,200 m, and Gar-

⁵¹ Barfield 2010, 67–68.

⁵² Barfield 2010, 53.

⁵³ See Gentelle 1989, 61–79; Yang et al. 2009.

⁵⁴ The available data is uneven. A synthesis of data from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age is to be found in Francfort and Lecomte 2002. The ample data for east Bactria are presented in Gentelle 1989, 81–106.

⁵⁵ See further in Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

⁵⁶ See, for example, the analysis of faunal remains at the Achaemenid period site of Kyzyltepa in north Bactria, indicating that the local economy included a market-oriented pastoral component, in Wu et al. 2015.

dez at 2,300 m) have cold winters which have traditionally supported the cultivation of wheat, barley, grapes, and fruit and nut trees. In a parallel manner to the ‘vertical archipeligo’ model of the Andes, the close proximity of such diverse ecotopes was likely attractive to the states wishing to exploit them.⁵⁷

Central Asia is host to rich metal deposits including silver, gold, tin, copper, and lead, and to precious and semiprecious stones, including lapis lazuli and garnet. Although direct evidence for the location of mines and their operation during antiquity is lacking,⁵⁸ they were likely economically significant and possibly controlled by imperial monopoly. Somewhat better documented is the case of lapis lazuli, which was found in Badakhshan and had been exploited and distributed through wide networks of exchange since the third millennium BCE. The most important sources were the Kokcha valley and Sar-i Sang, although archaeological research has not been undertaken at the ancient mining works.⁵⁹ However, at Ai Khanum, a Graeco-Bactrian city which lay downstream at the Kokcha’s junction with the Panj, a bag-shaped deposit of roughly 75 kg of unworked lapis was found abandoned in one of the rooms of the treasury,⁶⁰ suggesting some kind of state involvement with the stone’s exploitation.

No archaeometallurgical research has yet proven the precise sources of gold, silver, and copper used in the production of Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek and Kushan coinage. However, gold deposits are located in Badakhshan and the upper Indus. Potential sources of silver include the galena deposits in Panjshir valley and Farenjal in the Ghorband valley, both in the central Hindu Kush. The major copper deposit of Mes Aynak in the modern Logar province was certainly exploited from the late Kushan period, although earlier exploitation is also expected. The Zarkashan-Anguri formation, located in Arachosia, may have been a major source of copper, iron, gold, and tin.⁶¹

II The Greek Kingdoms of Central Asia

The Greek Kingdoms of Central Asia existed from ca. 250 BCE until 10 CE (map 1), emerging on the frontier of Seleukid rule in Bactria, with the last kings ruling in the eastern Punjab. These kings – *basileis* like their Hellenistic counterparts – were perhaps 45 in number, known mostly from coins. Only eight are mentioned in transmitted texts.⁶² It has become conventional to describe these kings as either ‘Graeco-

⁵⁷ Barfield 2010, 52.

⁵⁸ A project dedicated to ancient mining and resource use in Afghanistan has been established by the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut*, see Thomalsky et al. 2013.

⁵⁹ Bernard 1978.

⁶⁰ Rapin 1992, 50.

⁶¹ For further information on all deposits, see Thomalsky et al. 2013.

⁶² Bordeaux 2018, 29, n. 28.

Bactrian' or 'Indo-Greek,' designations which are partly geographical, chronological, and numismatic. The convention is most justified from a numismatic perspective. Graeco-Bactrian coinage developed out of Seleukid coinage and was struck to the Attic weight standard current in the Hellenistic east (*tetradrachm* of 16.80 g), while Indo-Greek coinage was struck to a lower standard (*tetradrachm* of 9.80 g).⁶³ The design of Indo-Greek coinage also differs. The names and titles of kings are usually given in Gāndhārī on the reverse of coins, sometimes Indic deities or symbols are depicted, and copper coins were often struck from square flans. The precise implications of these numismatic changes for the political and cultural orientation of the Greek Kingdoms remains an open question. In fact, some later Indo-Greek kings who certainly did not politically control Bactria also minted coinage of a Graeco-Bactrian style and weight; explanatory hypotheses suggest that these coins may have been intended for commercial exchange with Bactria, or as used as tribute payments for antagonistic neighbors.⁶⁴

Indeed, from the available evidence thus far, it appears that the Greek Kingdoms were modelled foremost on the political and administrative structures current in other Hellenistic monarchies, especially that of their Seleukid predecessors.⁶⁵ It is accordingly important to be aware of the possibility of political complexity that is not explicitly visible in our limited sources. Although the reconstruction of the sequence and territorial association of these kings seems exceedingly fragmented and disconnected, the possibility of coregencies and even alliances between kings must be taken into account, as well as inter- and intra-dynastic conflict (fig. 1). This is made plain by the first lines of the Asangorna parchment, an unprovenanced tax receipt from Bactria. This features a dating formula according to multiple kings: "In the reign of God Antimachos and Eumenes and Antimachos ... year 4, month of Olōus, in Asangorna."⁶⁶ This date appears to be given in the Greek era discussed above, possibly inaugurated to commemorate an alliance made between Antimachos I and Apollodotos I, meaning this document would have been drawn up in 171 BCE.⁶⁷ Indeed, recent analysis with infrared photography has proposed to reconstruct the lacuna to read "[and] Apollodotus" although this reading has yet to be adequately debated and accepted in scholarship.⁶⁸ Numismatic evidence indicates that Antimachos I ruled in Bactria, while Antimachos II ruled in the Indo-Greek realms (as did Apollodotos I). Eumenes is otherwise unknown. Essentially, while the terms Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek are retained here for lucidity, they are obviously problematic vis-à-vis their ethno-cultural baggage, as well as for obscuring the political and administrative organization of the period.

⁶³ Bopearachchi 1991, 13.

⁶⁴ Bopearachchi 1990.

⁶⁵ For which see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

⁶⁶ Rea, Senior, and Hollis 1994; see also Bernard and Rapin 1994.

⁶⁷ Rapin 2010.

⁶⁸ Jakobsson and Glenn 2018.

Approx. dates (BCE)	Graeco-Bactrian Kings		Indo-Greek Kings		
	Bactria	Paropamisadae	Arachosia	Gandhāra	Western Punjab Eastern Punjab
250	Diodotos I				
	Diodotos II				
230	Euthydemos I				
190	Demetrios I				
180	Euthydemos II		Agathokles & Pantaleon		
176	Antimachos I & Eumenes & Antimachos II		Apollodotos I		
	Demetrios II (west Bactria)		Antimachos II & Menander I		
171					
165	Eukratides I		Menander I		
162					
	Fall of east Bactria				
145	Eukratides II, Plato, Heliokles (west Bactria)		Menander I		
130					
125		Zoilos, Diomedes	Agathokleia & Strato I		
120		Lysias, Antialkidas	Strato I		
110		Philoxenos			
100		Theophilos, Thrason, Polyxenos, Demetrios III, Peukolaos, Epander, Nikias, Menander II Heliokles II, Amyntas, Archebios			
		Hermaios			
90			Maues (Indo-Scythian)		
80			Artemidoros	Telephos, Apollodotos II	
65			Hippostratos	Dionysios	
47				Zoilos II	
35				Apollophanes	
25				Strato II, Strato III	

Fig. 1: Kings and putative regional extent of the Greek Kingdoms (after Bopearachchi 1991, tab. 5; Coloru 2009, tab. 2; Bordeaux 2018).

II.1 Political History

In the mid-third century BCE, Diodotos I, the Seleukid *satrap* of Bactria, reportedly revolted and established an independent kingdom.⁶⁹ The precise date, between ca. 250–235 BCE, and nature of the Bactrian secession remains a subject of dispute.⁷⁰ Diodotos I was succeeded by a homonymous son, who was reported by Justin to have made an alliance with Arsakes, the founder of the Arsakid dynasty. This alliance apparently ended conflict between Parthia and Bactria and helped the other former Seleukid *satrapy* to likewise revolt.⁷¹

The Diodotids appear to have been overthrown by Euthydemos I (ca. 230–190 BCE), who Polybios described as being a native of Magnesia.⁷² The Hellenistic historian provided further details about a certain historical episode of conflict between the Seleukids and Graeco-Bactrians. In his grand eastern campaigns, the Seleukid king Antiochos III defeated Euthydemos in a battle near the Arius River (mod. Harirud) in 208 BCE, and Euthydemos retreated to his capital at Bactra, where he was besieged for two years.⁷³ During the siege, Euthydemos justified his actions to a Seleukid messenger as action taken against the original rebels, underlining his faculty as the last line of defense against approaching hordes of nomads. The siege concluded with a peace agreement, ratified in person by Euthydemos's son Demetrios I. This recognized Euthydemos's legitimacy, giving also a daughter of Antiochos III to Demetrios in marriage, while Antiochos III received Euthydemos's elephants and grain rations for his troops.⁷⁴ Demetrios (ca. 190–180 BCE) enacted the first major southward expansion of Graeco-Bactrian territory. Likely in imitation of Alexander the conqueror, he was represented on his coins as a bust wearing the scalp of an elephant.⁷⁵ His conquests included at least part of Arachosia, and possibly coincided with the foundation of a new city, Demetrias.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Just. *Epit.* 41. 4. 3–5.

⁷⁰ Holt's interpretation based on Diodotid coinage is most generally accepted. Holt concluded the secession was a gradual process beginning around 250 BCE, with Diodotos I first minting coins with his own portrait in Antiochos II's name, followed by complete independence in the reign of Diodotos II (Holt 1999, 87–125). Jakobsson proposed alternatively that the coins minted in the name of Antiochos were issued by a hitherto unknown Graeco-Bactrian king named Antiochos, a son of Diodotos I, who ruled after Diodotos II. This would imply Diodotos I's secession was sudden, ruling between ca. 255–250 BCE (Jakobsson 2010).

⁷¹ Just. *Epit.* 41.4. See also the discussion in Fabian, ch. 6, this volume.

⁷² Polybios (Polyb.) 11. 34. On Antiochos III's eastern campaign, see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

⁷³ Polyb. 10. 49.

⁷⁴ Polyb. 11. 34. 8–10.

⁷⁵ See von Reden, ch. 1, fig. 1, this volume. The elephant scalp iconography was widely adopted by other kings.

⁷⁶ Mentioned only in the Parthian-era Greek itinerary text *Stathmoi Parthikoi* 19, of Isidoros of Charax.

Demetrios was succeeded by Euthydemus II (ca. 180–177 BCE).⁷⁷ Euthydemus II's coinage has many similarities with certain issues of two contemporary Indo-Greek kings, Pantaleon (ca. 180–175 BCE) and Agathokles (ca. 180–174 BCE), who are thought to have ruled in Arachosia and the Paropamisadaï. Agathokles also minted Graeco-Bactrian weight and style coins. Some political arrangement between the three kings has been inferred.⁷⁸ Pantaleon and Agathokles perhaps expanded their control into Gandhāra, issuing the first Indo-Greek rectangular copper coins, with bilingual legends and depictions of Brahmanical deities rather than royal portraits.⁷⁹

Euthydemus II's reign seems to have been brought to a premature close by Antimachos I Theos (ca. 177–171 BCE). Antimachos and Agathokles minted special series of commemorative or 'pedigree' coins in silver, depicting portraits of prior rulers. This has been interpreted to indicate their political rivalry.⁸⁰ As discussed above, it is possible that an alliance was made between Antimachos I and the Indo-Greek king Apollodotus I (ca. 174–160 BCE). An apparent co-regency between Antimachos I and (his sons?) Eumenes and Antimachos II is documented in 171 BCE. During this time, a certain Demetrios II (ca. 174–171 BCE) may have ruled in east Bactria.⁸¹

Then, an usurper, Eukratides I (ca. 171–145 BCE), wrested power in Bactria. The Indo-Greek king Menander I (ca. 165–130 BCE) perhaps emerged shortly after in the Paropamisadaï, and it is possible that during this early period, Antimachos II ruled in Arachosia subordinately to him.⁸² Eukratides's early reign appears to have been marked by violent conflict, as Justin mentioned his wars with Sogdians, Drangians, and Indians.⁸³ Yet, his campaign into the Indic borderlands, probably in the 160s BCE, seems to have been successful. Its material outcome appears to be visible in the finds at the treasury of Ai Khanum, with luxury objects representing the capture of booty or even extraction of tribute.⁸⁴ A Hellenistic phase at Marakanda-Afrasiab in Sogdiana is thought to be associated with a brief reconquest by Eukratides, although the evidence is not conclusive.⁸⁵ The immense prosperity of Eukratides's reign is indicated by his prolific coinage and the enactment of a new building program at Ai Khanum, but it was short lived. Justin reported that, on the king's return from India, he was killed by his son, who drove his chariot through his father's blood and ordered the body to be cast out unburied.⁸⁶

77 Either the younger son of Euthydemus I (Narain 1957, 23; Bopearachchi 1991, 55) or the elder son of Demetrios I (Coloru 2009, 195).

78 Bopearachchi 1991, 56.

79 Bopearachchi 1991, 57; Coloru 2009, 203–206.

80 Bopearachchi 1991, 61; Coloru 2009, 200–202.

81 Coloru 2009, 208.

82 Bordeaux 2018, 140–141.

83 Just. *Epit.* 41. 6.

84 Rapin 1992, 281–287.

85 Lyonnet 2012, 167.

86 Just. *Epit.* 41. 6.

As a result of Eukratides's southeast expansion, conflict with Menander seems to have broken out. Menander probably also enacted an eastward program of conquest, as well as eventually reconquering the territory lost to Eukratides. Later Buddhist tradition places the capital of Menander at Sāgala (probably mod. Sialkot) in the Punjab.⁸⁷ Of all the Indo-Greeks, it is supposed that Menander's conquests were most extensive, if their precise limits remain uncertain. Later Indic literary tradition, foremost the *Yugapurāṇa*, seems to reflect a memory of a Yavana (here, Indo-Greek) invasion across the Gangetic plain. According to this text, the Indo-Greeks invaded Sāketa and Pāṭaliputra in an alliance with the Pañcalas and Māthuras. Having overthrown Pāṭaliputra, leaving all desolate and in disorder, they returned to their own realm as conflict had broken out there.⁸⁸ Equally difficult to validate is the claim presented in Strabo that the Greeks of Bactria took possession of Patalene, the kingdom of Saraostos, and Sigerdis, which perhaps also reflected the state of expansion under Menander.⁸⁹

The subsequent political history of the Greek Kingdoms is more poorly attested. In Bactria, Eukratides's campaigns might have spread power and resources too thinly. Internal pressures, such as dynastic conflict and possibly a local uprising, in combination with external ones, such as the Arsakid conquests of the western provinces and nomadic migrations into Bactria, caused the royal abandonment of Ai Khanum in ca. 145 BCE, marking the end of Greek control over the important region of east Bactria.⁹⁰ Plato and Heliokles I (ca. 143–130 BCE) appear to have been the last Greek rulers of west Bactria. The first nomadic group that migrated into Bactria during the second century BCE were perhaps the Saka/Sai, displaced by the arrival of the Yuezhi (Tochari/Tocharoi?), although the archaeological identification of these groups remains problematic.⁹¹

After Menander's probably violent death in ca. 130 BCE, Greek power in the Paropamisadai, Arachosia, Gandhāra, and the Punjab seems to have become more fragmented. Boppearachchi's numismatic study still provides the basis for the chronology and location of the kings, but the picture continues to be reassessed through

87 *Milindapañha* 1.2, a paracanonical Buddhist text that relates a fictitious dialog between king Menander and a Buddhist sage. Its first book was likely composed between 100 BCE–200 CE. For further discussion, see Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

88 *Yugapurāṇa*, 47–48; 56–57. See a parallel in Patañjali's commentary on Pāṇini's grammar, providing similar information in the form of a grammatical example (*Mahābhāṣya* 3.2.11). The *Yugapurāṇa* is a Sanskrit text of uncertain age, concerned with the decline of the *dharma*, which 'prophe-sizes' the *Yavana* invasion in the *Kali Yuga* (the age of strife). This should be compared to a wider tradition about foreign invasions into India's northern plains within Buddhist prophecies of decline, for which see Nattier 1991.

89 Strabo 11. 11. 1, discussed in Coloru 2009, 241.

90 For historiographical discussion on the treatment of the fall of Greek Bactria in modern scholarship, see Mairs 2014, 146–176. For the palatial abandonment of Ai Khanum and its later occupation, see Martinez-Sève 2018.

91 See Abdullaev 2007.

ongoing research. Coloru has observed that Indo-Greek rule at this point appears to have been divided into two large blocs governed by dynasties often in mutual conflict. Hypothetically, the western bloc might have comprised the Paropamisadai, Arachosia, and western Gandhāra. The eastern bloc perhaps included eastern Gandhāra to the region surrounding Sāgala, with the Sutlej River marking a frontier with Śunga territory.⁹²

Zoilos and Diomedes are thought to have ruled in Arachosia and the Paropamisadai after ca. 130 BCE, while joint issues of Strato I and Agathokleia (perhaps Strato's wife) have been placed in eastern Gandhāra and the Punjab, followed by sole issues of Strato.⁹³ Afterward, Antialkidas and Lysias perhaps ruled jointly in the Paropamisadai and Arachosia.⁹⁴ A unique document of diplomatic relations from this period is the Heliodoros pillar, an inscribed stone column topped with a sculpture of Garuda (the mount of Vishnu) erected in ca. 113 BCE in Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh). The two Prakrit inscriptions written in the Brāhmī script describe the pillar's establishment by Heliodoros of Taxila, a devotee to the god Vasudeva and the Yona (Greek) ambassador from *mahārāja Amtalikita* (i.e., Antialkidas) sent to Bhāgabhadra, who was either a local ruler or member of the Śunga dynasty.⁹⁵

Around the beginning of the first century BCE, Philoxenos might have briefly reunified the western and eastern blocs, followed by the rule of several coeval kings. Hermaios (ca. 90–70 BCE) was the last Indo-Greek king to rule in the Paropamisadai. His coinage was posthumously imitated in this region until the conquest of the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises. The authority responsible for striking these imitations remains unclear; perhaps it was the Yuezhi.⁹⁶

Between ca. 90 BCE and 10 CE, Arachosia, Gandhāra, and the Punjab developed as spaces of intensified political competition and diversity. Explication of the absolute chronology, political organization, and familial relations and alliances between rulers of this period remains a work in progress.⁹⁷ Indo-Greek kings ruled over a declining space in the east. Maues – the first of the so-called Indo-Scythian (Saka) kings – appears to have taken control of Taxila, with his dynasty ruling over Arachosia and Gandhāra thereafter.⁹⁸ Apollodotos II perhaps regained control over part of Gandhāra to the eastern Punjab, a space then divided by Hippostratos and Dionysios, while the Indo-Scythian king Azes followed Hippostratos at Taxila. Indo-Greek rule ended with the reigns of Zoilos II, Apollophanes, Strato II, and Strato III

⁹² Coloru 2009, 245.

⁹³ Coloru 2009, 246.

⁹⁴ Coloru 2009, 247.

⁹⁵ Discussed further in Mairs 2014, 117–133.

⁹⁶ Bopearachchi and Rahman 1995, 37–38.

⁹⁷ For one recent exposition, see Errington and Curtis 2007, 57–66.

⁹⁸ A familial relationship between Maues and the Indo-Greek Artemidoros has been postulated from the interpretation of a Gāndhārī legend of a rare copper series of Artemidoros, but for a critical discussion thereof see Bopearachchi 2008, 28–34.

in the eastern Punjab. At the turn of the first century CE, another dynasty initiated by the king Gondophares emerged in Arachosia and Gandhāra. This dynasty is conventionally referred to as the Indo-Parthian dynasty, due to the similarity between their own and Arsakid coins, although their political affiliation remains unclear. The Indo-Parthians ruled much of Gandhāra and Arachosia until the Kushan invasion of Kujula Kadphises. During this period, other local rulers and dynasties were entangled with regional political affairs and patronage of Buddhism: the Indo-Scythian Kṣatrapas; the Apracarājas, kings of the Apraca royal house in Bajaur who had repeated connections with Indo-Scythian rulers; and the neighboring Oḍi dynasty in Swat.⁹⁹

II.2 Kingship

The logic and challenges of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingship appear to have been similar to those of Hellenistic monarchies, so only characteristics specific to the Central Asian milieu are noted here.¹⁰⁰ In a political context of apparently constant violence and turmoil, the Graeco-Bactrian kings were compelled to communicate their legitimacy to a competitive peer group – the small Graeco-Macedonian settler class – as well as the Bactrian aristocracy who had allied with the conquerors.¹⁰¹ Strategies of communication included royal displays of resources, such as Eukratides I's building program at Ai Khanum,¹⁰² and propagandistic displays of a king's military achievements, most clearly seen on coinage. For example, the ideological justification of rule over spear-won land (*doriktetos chora*)¹⁰³ is reflected in some of Eukratides I's coinage, as on types where he is depicted in a helmet with cuirass (instead of the usual mantle), or on the new type he initiated depicting the spear-throwing king from behind.¹⁰⁴ This type was repeated by subsequent kings, in addition to Eukratides's epithet *megas* ('the great') and his choice of the Dioscuri as reverse deities. These references to Eukratides's military campaigns communicated a distinctively martial royal identity which was evidently attractive.

The choice to depict certain deities on the reverses of coins were perhaps intended to communicate dynastic legitimacy, such as the Diodotid use of Zeus with thunderbolt, or wider familial associations, such as Euthydemus II's depiction of Apollo on his nickel and copper coinage in reference to the Seleukids.¹⁰⁵ Likewise,

⁹⁹ For more on the Apracarājas, see Falk 1998, and for the kings of Oḍi, see von Hinüber 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Further discussion on Hellenistic kingship is found in von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

¹⁰¹ See further in Bernard 1981.

¹⁰² Martinez-Sève 2015.

¹⁰³ For the significance of spear-won land, see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

¹⁰⁴ Bopearachchi 1991, Eukratides I series 8.

¹⁰⁵ Bopearachchi 1991, 56. For a different perspective, see Coloru 2009, 195.

the commemorative issues of Antimachos I and Agathokles may be interpreted as attempts to convey legitimacy, used by both kings to connect themselves with past sovereigns of Hellenistic Central Asia.¹⁰⁶

Gaining the acceptance of wider subject groups was an important task that involved new cultural and linguistic challenges, and to this end, the ‘religious policy’ of the Greek kings of Central Asia appear to have been similar to that of their Seleukid contemporaries. They depicted or referenced popular local deities on their coins, used sanctuaries of local and syncretic deities as platforms for showcasing royal power, and most probably developed royal cults.¹⁰⁷ On Indo-Greek coinage, this manifested in the use of bilingual legends and the portrayal of Indic symbols and deities; most vividly, certain issues of Agathokles depicted the Brahmanical deities Balarāma-Saṃkarṣana and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Of course, such strategies are not evidence for any ruler’s adherence to local religions. Whether Menander converted to Buddhism remains a matter of debate, but for political purposes he might have supported the Buddhist community in some way; the use of the symbol of the wheel on some of his copper coins may be read as an attempt to communicate with his Brahmanical and Buddhist subjects.¹⁰⁸

II.3 Settlement, Fortifications, and Urbanism

While Greek and Latin literary sources mention the names of numerous foundations of the Hellenistic period in Central Asia, the admittedly uneven archaeological evidence indicates that it was more common for preexisting cities and settlements to be developed and renamed during this period, rather than for new foundations to be established.¹⁰⁹ Under Alexander, the Seleukids, and the early Graeco-Bactrians, new fortifications and garrisons were probably added to all major urban centers, including Marakanda-Afrasiab and Bactra, and smaller fortresses were created, like Kurganzol in northern Bactria, and Kampyrtepa, which was located at a strategic crossing point on the Oxus. The latter became more significant in the Graeco-Bactrian period, incorporating a residential area.¹¹⁰ A network of border fortifications across the Hissar Range was also developed possibly as early as the Seleukid period and maintained under the Graeco-Bactrians. This included the Iron Gate wall near Derbent, and Uzundara, a fortress located on top of the Suzitag controlling a second

106 Antimachos I depicted portraits and legends naming Diodotos I and Euthydemos I, while Agathokles depicted Alexander the Great, Antiochos II, Diodotos I, Diodotos II, Euthydemos I, Demetrios I, and Pantaleon.

107 Martinez-Sève 2010.

108 Coloru 2009, 242–244.

109 Leriche 2007, 138. Consult also Cohen 2013; Mairs and Fischer-Bovet forthcoming.

110 Martinez-Sève 2012, 376. On Kurganzol, see Sverchkov 2014. On Graeco-Bactrian Kampyrtepa, see Bolelov 2018, 11–18.

route between Bactria and Sogdiana.¹¹¹ In other cases, preexisting settlements in the Kugitang piedmont and the Surkhan Darya valley appear to have been abandoned in the early Hellenistic period and not developed again until the Kushan period.¹¹²

Ai Khanum remains the only extensively excavated Graeco-Bactrian city. Its origins are somewhat obscure; it is possible that the site was occupied in the Achaemenid period (e.g., with a garrison), although no archaeological layers from this time were detected during excavations.¹¹³ The city proper is generally regarded as a colonial Hellenistic-period foundation, perhaps established by the Seleukids, but developed profoundly by the Graeco-Bactrian kings into a royal residence and the capital of east Bactria.¹¹⁴ The city was home to only a small settler population, and had strong militaristic elements including fortifications and an arsenal, but also prestigious monumental and public buildings including temples, a palace with a treasury, and a *heroon* (sanctuary for a hero). During the reign of Eukratides, the Greek civic institutions of a theater and *gymnasion* were constructed, which remain by far the easternmost attested examples of both. However, it should be emphasized that Ai Khanum is thus far unique in the archaeological record of Central Asia, and thus should not be seen as a typical case of Graeco-Bactrian urbanism.

II.4 Military

The ability to mobilize and finance an effective army was central to the success of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings. Expansion by conquest was an important for a king's legitimacy, and the possibility of civil and external warfare was constantly looming. The structure, organization, tactics, and arms of the armies of the Greek Kingdoms seem to reflect those of the wider Hellenistic world, although direct information is scarce.¹¹⁵ A small standing infantry drawn initially from the Graeco-Macedonian settler community is to be expected, stationed at the numerous archaeologically attested military installations described previously, including forts, garrisons in larger fortified settlements, and the Iron Gate wall. By analogy with infantries of other Hellenistic states, they were probably composed of phalanx units armed with *sarissa* pikes.¹¹⁶

Some innovations are also visible to us. For example, finds of iron armor elements for a human and horse at Ai Khanum indicate that heavy-armored cavalry was in use by around the mid-second century BCE.¹¹⁷ The nature and power of the

¹¹¹ A discussion of the Iron Gate wall excavations is found in Rapin 2007. The latest report on excavations at Uzundara is Dvurechenskaia 2015.

¹¹² Augustinová et al. 2018, 130.

¹¹³ Martinez-Sève 2015, 21–22.

¹¹⁴ For this and the following, Martinez-Sève 2015, 26–41; Martinez-Sève 2014.

¹¹⁵ A survey is provided in Nikonorov 1997, 38–49.

¹¹⁶ Nikonorov 1997, 38.

¹¹⁷ Bernard 1980, 452–459.

army would have changed significantly with the integration of new local fighting forces and with access to elephants through conquests into Arachosia, Gandhāra, and the Indic borderlands. Further forces were likely also mobilized in times of need. Phalanx soldiers might have been supplemented by mercenaries from the local population serving as lightly armed auxiliary troops. Polybios numbers Euthydemus's cavalry for the battle of Arius at 10,000 horsemen,¹¹⁸ which probably was comprised of a substantial portion of indigenous Bactrian nobles.¹¹⁹ It is also likely that the Graeco-Bactrians took advantage of the manpower of the nomadic groups living within and beyond their frontiers by hiring them as mercenaries. The Amphipolis parchment appears to refer to such a payment of coined silver to "Scythian" mercenaries.¹²⁰

II.5 Administration

The data available on administrative practice in the Greek Kingdoms thus far indicates continuity from structures established and developed in Achaemenid and Seleukid periods of rule in Central Asia, as well as parallels with contemporary developments in the eastern Hellenistic kingdoms.¹²¹ Evidence of administrative practice in the Achaemenid period is thus important. The continuing study of recently edited documents from Bactria written in Official Aramaic – including tally-sticks as well as letter orders from the archive of Akhvamazda (presumably the *satrap* residing in Bactra) – indicates the replication of practices from the imperial center in the northeastern frontier, in addition to high mobility between the two.¹²²

Although Strabo stated that "the Greeks who took possession of the region divided it into *satrapies*,"¹²³ the shape of these administrative units remains unknown. Several offices familiar from the Hellenistic world are attested. The title *strategos* survived beyond Greek rule at Taxila into the first century CE, as did the title of *meridarches*, a civil provincial governor, attested in Gandhāra, in Swat during the Indo-Greek period, and later in Taxila.¹²⁴

Financial administration is likely to have followed Seleukid practices, to the extent that the Asangorna parchment has been considered an indirect source for Seleukid administration.¹²⁵ Within this text, Menodotos – a tax-gatherer or account-

¹¹⁸ Polyb. 10. 49. 1.

¹¹⁹ Polyb. 10. 49. 1. On the indigenous Bactrian cavalry in this conflict, see Leriche 1985.

¹²⁰ Mairs 2014, 150.

¹²¹ Aperghis 2004, 283; Coloru 2009, 265–268; Mairs 2014, 55–56. For more on practices in the Hellenistic kingdoms, see von Reden, ch. 1, this volume.

¹²² Henkelman 2018. See further discussion and bibliography in Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹²³ Strabo 11. 11. 2, trans. Jones.

¹²⁴ Coloru 2009, 265–266.

¹²⁵ Aperghis 2004, 283–283.

ant (*logeutes*) – acknowledges receipt from another individual (whose name is not fully preserved) of payments due from a purchase. A hierarchy of officials above Menodotos is seen: He acted in the presence of an official, who was sent out by two further officials (a Demonax and a Simos), all under the agency of Diodoros, the controller of revenues (*epi tôn prosodôn*).¹²⁶ A second text of the Graeco-Bactrian period, the Amphipolis parchment, records a payment of a sum, explicitly, of 100 *drachms* of coined silver, to Scythians (mercenaries?) and another fragmentary text notes that Archises had received something (a payment?) for transport, with some reference to stone.¹²⁷ Finally, a glimpse into the granular processes within the palatial treasury of Ai Khanum is provided by a corpus of notations applied to ceramic vessels with ink or incised post-firing.¹²⁸ These texts often describe the contents of the vessels (coins, olive oil, incense, and cinnamon), and transactions taken with revenue or commodities by officials (who are mentioned only by name), variously transferring, counting, and sealing the described contents. Coined money is represented conspicuously, counted in round sums of Greek *drachms* (500) and Indian *kārṣāpaṇas* (10,000).¹²⁹ In sum, it is evident that Graeco-Bactrian rule was supported by a sophisticated administrative system.

III The Kushan Empire

The Kushan Empire (map 2, ca. 50–350 CE) emerged from the Kushan clan within the Yuezhi confederacy of nomads in Bactria-Tokharistan (map 3). The absolute chronology for the Kushan kings, which remains a work in progress, as used here follows Cribb's reconstruction (fig. 2).¹³⁰ Through military expansion, by the middle of the second century CE, this empire appears to have stretched between Bactria-Tokharistan's northern frontier at the Hissar range and the city of Śrī-Campā on the Ganges, although the real extent of Kushan rule and its precise nature is not yet clear. The heartland of Bactria-Tokharistan was lost to the Sasanian king Ardashir I in ca. 230 CE, and the so-called Kushano-Sasanian kingdom was established there. Kushan power in Gandhāra and the northern Punjab appears to have ended about a century later.

Although 'Kushan' seems to operate as a dynastic name and is usually treated as such in scholarship, its origins and meaning are obscure. It might rather have functioned as a title, deriving from the clan name of the *yabgu* (see below) of the Guishuang 貴霜 (Kushan) when Bactria was under Yuezhi rule, or a place name

¹²⁶ For a general discussion, Mairs 2014, 46–54.

¹²⁷ Clarysse and Thompson 2007; Mairs 2014, 54.

¹²⁸ Rapin and Grenet 1983; see further discussion in Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹²⁹ Mairs 2014, 50.

¹³⁰ As in Jongeward et al. 2015.

Map 2: Central Asia and northern India at the time of the Kushan Empire. © Peter Palm.

associated with the clan that is no longer known.¹³¹ Epigraphic texts and coin legends known thus far associate ‘Kushan’ with the names of all kings from Kujula Kadphises to Vasudeva II, except for Vima Kadphises, who is nonetheless explicitly named as Kanishka’s father in the Rabatak inscription.¹³² The last three kings, Mahi to Kipunadha, are only known from their coins, but as they minted types distinct to the Kushans, they are appropriately considered as Kushan kings.

III.1 Political History

The origins of the Kushans are found in the Yuezhi, a confederacy of nomadic pastoralists. Although the matter is more complicated, Chinese sources conflated the two: “All the kingdoms call [their king] the Guishuang 貴霜 (Kushan) king, but the Han call them by their original name, Da Yuezhi.”¹³³ Prior to their migration into Bactria, the history of the Yuezhi is only tenuously known from Chinese historical sources,¹³⁴ which place their earliest known home in the Gansu corridor.¹³⁵ Multiple sources recount their conflicts with other nomadic confederacies – especially the attacks made by the Xiongnu on the Yuezhi from the late third century BCE – which instigated the latter’s gradual migration to Bactria, although their exact route remains a matter of contention.¹³⁶ The Yuezhi appear to have arrived here after the mid-second century BCE, after which their court was visited by the Han ambassador Zhang Qian in 128 BCE who unsuccessfully sought a military alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu.¹³⁷

At some point during their time in Bactria, Yuezhi rule was split between five *yabgu*, i.e., ‘allied princes.’¹³⁸ The realms and seat of governance of each Yuezhi *yabgu* were listed first in the *Hanshu* (*Documents of the Han*),¹³⁹ and have been tentatively located by Grenet within northern Bactria by comparing the attested Chi-

¹³¹ Cribb 2018a, 4; see also remarks in Falk 2015, 11.

¹³² Rabatak lines 13–14, edition and trans. in Sims-Williams 2004.

¹³³ *Hou Hanshu* 88.2921, trans. Hill 2015, 1: § 13.

¹³⁴ See the presentation and discussion of sources in Falk 2015, especially § 1–3. The frequently made equation between the Yuezhi and the Yuzhi 禺氏 – traders of white jade in the mountains bordering Khotan – is speculative. On the interpretation of Chinese sources in this historical context, see Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹³⁵ *Shiji* 123.3162; *Hanshu* 96A.3891.

¹³⁶ See the sources collected in Falk 2015, § 9–28.

¹³⁷ Zhang Qian’s report is described in *Shiji* 123. For further discussion see Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹³⁸ Rendered as *xihou* 翕侯 in Chinese sources, thought to be equivalent to the later Turkic title *yabgu*. Whether this title existed among the Yuezhi prior to their arrival in Bactria is not known. On its interpretation, see Sims-Williams and de la Vaissière 2007.

¹³⁹ *Hanshu* 96A.3891. See this and later sources collected in Falk 2015, § 44–46.

Map 3: Important settlements and sacred sites of Kushan Bactria-Tokharistan and surroundings.
© Peter Palm.

nese toponyms with historical toponyms of other languages and time periods.¹⁴⁰ Thus the *yabgu* of Xiumi with its seat at the town Hemo probably ruled in Karategin (in the upper Vakhsh); the *yabgu* of Shuangmi with its seat at the town of Shuangmi, probably ruled in Hisar (a realm including Khalchaian and Dal'verzintepe); the *yabgu* of the Guishuang (Kushan) with its seat at the town of Huzao, seems to have ruled in Wakhshu or Wakhshab (Vakhsh River, near to Takht-i Sangin); the *yabgu* of Xidun with its seat at Bomao, probably ruled the Kafirnigan valley; and the *yabgu* of Gaofu seems to have had its seat at Gaofu/Dumi, modern Termez.

Relatively early in their time in Bactria, it appears that the Yuezhi struck imitation coins of Eukratides I and Heliokles I, i.e., some of the last Graeco-Bactrian

¹⁴⁰ Grenet 2006; Falk 2015, § 48. For a different reconstruction, see Falk 2014.

kings ruling in west Bactria. These were followed by the enigmatic silver coinage of 'Heraios' (misread from an apparent title in the Greek legend *turannountos eiaou korranou*). These depict a distinctive bust of a moustachioed and diademed ruler on the obverse, and on the reverse the same ruler in Central Asian-Iranian dress on horseback, with a bow hanging from the saddle (ch. 9, fig. 4). This coinage seems to have emanated from the realm thought to have been ruled by the Kushan *yabgu*, and the issuing authority is thought to have been a pre-imperial Kushan *yabgu*, or perhaps the first known Kushan king, Kujula Kadphises, who came to power in ca. 50 CE.¹⁴¹ At the end of the pre-imperial period, the Arsakid king Vardanes I reportedly sought refuge in the plains of the Bactrians during a power struggle with his brother Gotarzes II, before regaining authority and leading a successful campaign against Gotarzes's Dahae (a nomadic group) army.¹⁴² This event may help to interpret the painted clay sculptures of Khalchaian, which is a Yuezhi temple or ceremonial pavilion of contested date (perhaps mid-first century CE). Several figures have similar physiognomy and dress to that on the 'Heraios' coins, and the sculptural program, which includes a mounted battle scene, appears to celebrate a victory over a Saka group.¹⁴³ The central sculptural panel includes an individual clearly identifiable as an Arsakid or Parthian noble, which Grenet has hypothesized may constitute a portrait of Vardanes I, although an earlier date and different historical circumstances remain possible.¹⁴⁴

The beginnings of the Kushan Empire remain shrouded in mystery, best known from their pithy retelling in *Hou Hanshu* (*Documents of the Later Han*), compiled in the fifth century CE:

More than a hundred years later, the prince [*xihou/yabgu*] of Guishuang, named Qiujiuque [Kujula Kadphises], attached and exterminated the four other *xihou*. He established himself as king, and his dynasty was called that of Guishuang. He invaded Anxi and took the Gaofu region. He also defeated the whole of the kingdoms of Puda, and Jibin. Qiujiuque was more than eighty when he died.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Kujula seized power among the Yuezhi, and captured at least Kapisa, Gandhāra, and Taxila; the toponyms given in this account are difficult to precisely locate.¹⁴⁶ The *Hou Hanshu* also provides information about the entanglement of the Kushans in the military and diplomatic activities of Ban Chao (Han protector-general of the Western Regions), which also sheds light on the Kushans' own diplomatic relations during this period. Reportedly, Ban Chao attacked Yarkand in 84 CE. Then, the king

¹⁴¹ See discussions in Falk 2015, § 57; Cribb 2018a, 11–14.

¹⁴² Tacitus *Annales* (Tac. *Ann.*) 9, 8–10.

¹⁴³ Bernard 1987.

¹⁴⁴ Grenet 2000; Olbrycht 2015, 347–349.

¹⁴⁵ *Hou Hanshu* 88.2921, trans. after Hill 2015, 1: § 13.

¹⁴⁶ See Hill 2015, 2: appendices D, F, G. For a numismatic perspective on Kujula's conquests, see Jongeward et al. 2015, 24. On the identification of Central Asian toponyms and ethnonyms in Chinese texts, see Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

Fig. 2: The Kushan kings. All photographs © American Numismatic Society.

of Kashgar revolted, receiving military help from the Kangju 康居 (another nomadic group controlling Chach and much of Sogdiana). The Kushans and the Kangju were newly linked by a recent marriage, so Ban Chao sent gifts of silk stuffs to Kujula and persuaded him to convince the Kangju to discontinue their support for the king of Kashgar.¹⁴⁷ When Ban Chao defeated Yarkand, the Kushans sent an envoy with tribute of precious stones, antelopes, and lions; however, their request for a Han princess in marriage was rejected, prompting animosity toward the Han thereafter.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ *Hou Hanshu* 47.1579–1580.

¹⁴⁸ *Hou Hanshu* 3.158; *Hou Hanshu* 47.1580.

In Kujula's final years, he also appears to have initiated the new 'Soter Megas' copper coinage – with the legend *basileus basileuon* [sic] *soter megas* ('king of kings, great savior') – which was struck to a reduced Attic standard. The majority of this coinage however appears to have been minted by Kujula's son and successor, Vima Taktu.¹⁴⁹

Vima Taktu continued attempts to expand Kushan rule through conquest. Chinese historical sources mention a failed military enterprise into the Tarim Basin in 90 CE. Vima Taktu reportedly led a force of 70,000 to attack Ban Chao west of Kucha. Short on provisions, Vima sent envoys with gold, silver, pearls, and jade to the king of Kucha to request aid, but Ban Chao laid an ambush to kill the envoys. Vima then sent an envoy to Ban Chao in a gesture of peace, and thereafter the Kushans reportedly paid tribute to the Han every year.¹⁵⁰ Vima's exploits in the southeast were more successful. He conquered Tianzhu 天竺 (northwest India up to Mathura) and installed a general in charge of its administration, which reportedly made the Kushans extremely rich.¹⁵¹ Vima appears to have consolidated his control in the Mathura region by establishing a *devakula* (house of the gods) at Māt. This poorly documented structure was furnished with over life-sized sculptures of the Kushan kings (some accompanied with inscriptions) and also deities, although the precise religious beliefs and practices involved remain unclear.¹⁵² Vima Taktu also established a trilingual inscription on a boulder on a ridge of Mount Qarabayu, perhaps intended as a proclamation of power or boundary marker. The languages used were Bactrian (the native spoken idiom of the country written in a modified Greek alphabet), Gāndhārī, and the so-called 'unknown language' in the undeciphered 'unknown script.'¹⁵³

Vima Taktu's successor, Vima Kadphises, is best known for introducing a regular gold coinage, struck to a new unit (ca. 8.0 g) conventionally referred to as the *dinar*.¹⁵⁴ On these coins, Vima Kadphises established distinctive and innovative designs reflecting Kushan royal identity.¹⁵⁵ A single rock inscription at Khalatse (near to Leh, see map 2) dated to 112 CE bears his name.¹⁵⁶ Between the years of 114–120 CE, i.e., during Vima Kadphises's reign, the Kushans also reportedly have become entangled with dynastic problems of Kashgar. The king of Kashgar's maternal uncle, Chenpan, was exiled to the Kushans, who are said to have become very fond

¹⁴⁹ Cribb 2014; Jongeward et al. 2015, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Hou Hanji* 13; *Hou Hanshu* 47.1580. For the interpretation of Vima Taktu's name in these texts, see Falk 2015, § 74–75.

¹⁵¹ *Hou Hanshu* 88.2921.

¹⁵² For a summary of the excavations, see Rosenfield 1967, 140–142. For the inscription on the base of the statue of Vima Taktu, Falk 2015, § 88.

¹⁵³ Fussman 1974, 2–50; Sims-Williams 2012, 76–77. See further in Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

¹⁵⁴ See further in Morris, ch. 16, this volume.

¹⁵⁵ Jongeward et al. 2015, 7, 53.

¹⁵⁶ Edition in Falk 2015, § 91.

of him. When the king of Kashgar died without an heir and a young relative was installed on the throne, Kushan soldiers escorted Chenpan back to Kashgar where he was made king.¹⁵⁷

Vima Kadphises was succeeded by his son, Kanishka I, who is relatively well known to history through memories and legends in later Buddhist texts relating his conquests, supernatural powers, wickedness, and his (historically dubious) conversion to and personal patronage of Buddhism.¹⁵⁸ Thankfully, two contemporary Bactrian inscriptions provide more concrete insight into Kanishka's accession and Indian conquests. The Rabatak foundation inscription was discovered by chance at an unexcavated *bagolango* (image temple) in 1993, and is packed with historical information that revolutionized Kushan studies.¹⁵⁹ This inscription mentions Kanishka's inauguration of a new era (year 1 = 127 CE) and notes that the king was busy pacifying "all India" for the first six years of his reign.¹⁶⁰ Here "all India" is conceived as the famous urban centers of the Gangetic plain that were captured, including Sāketa, Kauśāmbī (Kaushambi), Pāṭaliputra (Palibothra), until Śrī-Campā.¹⁶¹ The inscription on the silver dish of Nukunzuk records that the king returned from India to Bactria-Tokharistan in ca. 137 CE.¹⁶²

The historicity of Kanishka's other military campaigns and extent of power, transmitted in later texts, is difficult to pin down. The seventh-century CE Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang reported that he had learned that Kanishka had enlarged his territory into the Tarim Basin.¹⁶³ A fifth-century CE Chinese Buddhist text described an attack from the king of Anxi (the Arsakids), from which Kanishka emerged victorious.¹⁶⁴ The same text gives a moralizing and mythologized account of the king's end, in which his ministers – sick of Kanishka's insatiable desire for conquest – smothered him to death after he fell ill.¹⁶⁵

Yet Kanishka was not just a conqueror. The Rabatak inscription is an unequivocal representation of Kanishka's interest in new material and symbolic expressions

157 *Hou Hanshu* 88.2927.

158 See discussion in Rosenfield 1967, 28–39. A range of evidence, especially epigraphic, disputes the traditional association of the Kushans with Buddhism and its expansion. As Fussman (2015, 153) stated plainly, "The Surkh Kotal and Rabatak inscriptions prove beyond doubt that Kanishka was no Buddhist, and, judging by their coinage, no Kushan Emperor was ever a Buddhist."

159 The first publication is Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996. Refer now to the third edition and translation in Sims-Williams 2004.

160 Rabatak, lines 2, 19.

161 Rabatak, lines 5–6.

162 Silver dish of Nukunzuk, line 4; edition and trans. in Sims-Williams 2015, 257.

163 *Xuanzang Da Tang Xiyu ji*, Taishō Tripiṭaka, vol. 51, no. 2087, 1.0873c23; trans. Zürcher 1968, 377.

164 *Fu Fazang Yinyuan zhuan*, Taishō Tripiṭaka, vol. 50, no. 2058, 5.316b16–18; trans. Zürcher 1968, 386.

165 *Fu Fazang Yinyuan zhuan*, Taishō Tripiṭaka, vol. 50, no. 2058, 5.317a4–18; trans. Zürcher 1968, 387.

of his royal and dynastic authority. This is not only seen in his inauguration of a new regnal era, but in the central part of the Rabatak inscription, which records Kanishka's order for a *karalrang* (a high officer, discussed below) to establish a temple to a pantheon of gods (a number of which being Zoroastrian in origin), to be fitted with the images of these gods, and the images of Kanishka and past kings. The foundation act recalls Vima Taktu's establishment of the *devakula* at Māt, and that of the *bagolango* of Surkh Kotal.¹⁶⁶ Kanishka's reign also marks the abandonment of Greek as an imperial official language and its replacement by the Bactrian language. This is indicated in the Rabatak inscription, which states that Kanishka "issued a Greek edict (and) then he put it into Aryan,"¹⁶⁷ and likewise Kanishka's coin legends began to be inscribed in Bactrian exclusively. Thus, Kanishka's reign appears to see a conscious revival of an Iranian vocabulary of power.¹⁶⁸

The dimensions of the Kushan Empire appear to have crystallized in the reign of king Huvishka, yet some political problems encountered during his reign may be inferred. For example, the weight standard of his coinage dropped,¹⁶⁹ and the main inscription at Surkh Kotal refers to Nukunzuk the *karalrang*'s installation of a well at the sanctuary, an act framed as a pious response to an enemy attack.¹⁷⁰ Similarly little is known about the reign of Huvishka's successor, Vasudeva I, but some indications of diplomatic activities during his rule are available. Most significantly, Vasudeva appears to have sent envoys with tribute to the Chinese capital in 230 CE,¹⁷¹ possibly seeking assistance in anticipation of the Sasanian foe.

Nonetheless, a crushing blow was struck to the empire with the loss of Bactria-Tokharistan to Sasanian invaders under Ardashir I in ca. 230 CE, followed by the installation of the so-called Kushano-Sasanians (ca. 230–365 CE) whose kings called themselves *Kushanshah*. The Kushano-Sasanians were possibly a semiautonomous cadet branch of the Sasanian royal house, perhaps named 'Kushan' for ruling over an area of former Kushan control.¹⁷² While these kings bore names from the Sasanian world – Ardashir, Peroz, Hormizd, Varahran – their coinage mingled Sasanian and Kushan designs. The process and chronology of the Sasanian/Kushano-Sasanian advance across the former Kushan realm still requires further clarification. It would appear that Bactria-Tokharistan was invaded by the Sasanian king Ardashir I in ca. 230 CE, establishing a homonymous Kushano-Sasanian Ardashir at Bactra. Expansion into Kapisa might have begun around ca. 260 CE under the Kushano-

¹⁶⁶ See the discussion of the Kushan pantheon in Grenet 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Rabatak, lines 3–4; trans. Sims-Williams 2004. "Aryan" here does seem to simply designate the Bactrian language, but was a politically, ideologically, and ethnically charged term used in a parallel manner in Darius I's Bisitun inscription (Panaino 2015, 96–101).

¹⁶⁸ As proposed already in Fussman 1977.

¹⁶⁹ Jongeward et al. 2015, 89–90.

¹⁷⁰ Surkh Kotal 4 M, trans. Sims-Williams 2012, 78–79.

¹⁷¹ *Sanguo zhi* 3.97; trans. Zürcher 1968, 371. See also the sources discussed in Falk 2015 § 112–116.

¹⁷² Rezakhani 2017, 72–73.

Sasanian king Peroz I.¹⁷³ The trilingual inscription of Shapur I (240–270 CE) at Ka'ba-i Zartosht (Naqsh-e Rostam, Fars, Iran) described the Kushanshahr as reaching “as far as Peshawar,”¹⁷⁴ and Gandhāra appears to have remained a contested space between the Kushano-Sasanians and Kushans for almost a century thereafter. The Sasanian rock relief of Rag-i Bibi in northern Afghanistan (ca. 25 km southeast of Surkh Kotal), which depicts a figure identified as Shapur I hunting rhinoceros, attests to a direct Sasanian presence in this territory.¹⁷⁵

The historical record pertaining to the Kushan kings after Vasudeva is poor and contested. Indeed, we only know that the last three Kushan kings were named Mahi, Śaka, and Kipunadha, due to the Brāhmī inscriptions on their coins. A plausible reconstruction suggests that the Kushan realm gradually constricted in the wake of the expansion of burgeoning Kushano-Sasanian and Gupta power. The presence of both the Kushano-Sasanians and Kushans in Gandhāra and the northern Punjab was finally wiped out through the expansion of the Kidirate Huns from Bactria-Tokharistan.¹⁷⁶

III.2 Kingship

The logic of Kushan kingship has not been comprehensively treated in scholarship, but some general remarks may be offered. The Kushan monarchy appears to have been absolute and hereditary. The origins and legitimacy of the dynasty's kingship were regarded to derive from the Iranian goddess Nana, the head of the Kushan pantheon. More light on the conferral of kingship is shed by an unprovenanced painting on cotton of an investiture scene. The king in the center, perhaps a depiction of Huvishka, is depicted here accompanied by two figures to his left – perhaps representing military and civil estates – while the figures to his right appear to be Zoroastrian priests, preparing to solemnize a service to the sacred fire. A putto flies above, presenting an untied diadem. Although the central part of the scene is missing, it has been tentatively reconstructed to depict the investiture of the crown prince, to whom the king hands over a bow and quiver.¹⁷⁷

The Kushans drew on multiple vocabularies of power in their expressions of kingship, stemming from Iranian, Greek, and Indic worlds. In particular, the Central Asian-Iranian tradition was central to articulations of royal imagery. Kushan royal costume – the caftan, felt boots, and a cap – recalled the traditional dress of the region, and the Kushans also drew heavily on Arsakid royal iconography, as the

¹⁷³ According to the reconstruction proposed in Jongeward et al. 2015, 197–198.

¹⁷⁴ ShKZ I:24; trans. Huyse 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Grenet et al. 2007.

¹⁷⁶ See the extended discussion in Cribb and Bracey forthcoming.

¹⁷⁷ Marshak and Grenet 2006; Grenet 2015, 225–226.

predominant imperial power in the Iranian world of that time.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, some elements of Kushan royal imagery appear to recall the nomadic heritage of the dynasty.¹⁷⁹ From late in the reign of Kujula Kadphises, the Kushans referred to themselves as ‘King of Kings’ in the languages of their empire: in Greek *basileus basileon*, Bactrian *shaonano shao*, as well as the Gāndhārī *maharaya rayatiraya* and Sanskrit *mahārāja rājātirāja* (‘great king, King of Kings’). This title of Achaemenid origin had been previously introduced into the numismatic and epigraphic repertoire of Gandhāra by the Indo-Scythian king Maues, and its use by the Kushans was perhaps influenced by contemporary Arsakid usage.

A variety of epithets were also attached to the Kushan kings, perhaps the most contested being the Bactrian *bagopouro*, equivalent to the Gāndhārī and Sanskrit *devaputra* (‘son of god’). Scholars disagree as to whether this epithet actually indicated the king’s divinization.¹⁸⁰ Opinions likewise diverge as to the interpretation of the *bagolango/devakula* sanctuaries. Although frequently described as dynastic temples, they were fitted with both images of the gods of the Kushan pantheon and the Kushan kings. Whether the kings were in fact worshipped within a dynastic cult remains an open question.¹⁸¹ The Kushans were tolerant of the many religions current in their empire, which solidified the legitimacy of their rule among their subject populations. This approach is most visible in the occasional depiction of Indic and Greek deities on their coins, and donations made by officials and lay followers in Buddhist contexts seeking to confer merit on the king.¹⁸²

A crucial piece of the puzzle – the nature of the socio-political structures which bound the king to his inner circle and upper officials (see below) – remains obscure. The inscription of the silver dish of Nukunzük may hold a clue. Here, Nukunzük began by describing himself as a *marego* (‘servant, slave’) to Vima Kadphises in his former position as a (lower) official, an *amboukao*. He then framed his subsequent promotion under Kanishka I in similar terms of servitude: “he established me (as) equal(?) with (his) father’s and with (his) grandfather’s servants [*maregano*], with the foremost (people).”¹⁸³ This calls to mind the high-ranking men described as servants (O. Pers. *bandaka*) of Darius I, mentioned in the Bisitun inscription, who were chosen by the king as generals against those who rebelled against him.¹⁸⁴ These noblemen were apparently ‘bound’ to the king, a relationship perhaps sealed

¹⁷⁸ Sinisi 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Grenet 2012, 12–17.

¹⁸⁰ See Verardi 1983; Panaino 2009.

¹⁸¹ Compare most recently Shenkar 2017 with Grenet 2015, 209–210.

¹⁸² For religion under the Kushans, see Fussman 2015; Grenet 2015. Skinner 2017 approaches donative spheres, especially Buddhist, as central to imperial stability.

¹⁸³ Silver dish of Nukunzük, line 2; trans. Sims-Williams 2015, 257.

¹⁸⁴ Throughout DBp; edition and trans. in Schmitt 1991. I thank Frantz Grenet for drawing this to my attention.

with an oath.¹⁸⁵ The information provided about Darius's *bandaka* indicates that they were drawn variously from (at least) noble families and *satraps*, and were not always Persians. Yet, multiple sources for the comparative Kushan case may be hypothesized. For example, the institution of the *comitatus* (as it was known in Latin sources) – a loyal war band of friends sworn to defend their lord to the death – has been analyzed as a crucial component of the 'Central Eurasian Culture Complex,' key to the success of nomads in warfare, and a central and enduring structure in their rule.¹⁸⁶

III.3 Settlement and Urbanism

Two principle problems pervade research on Kushan-era settlement and urbanism: first, the relevant archaeological documentation is of uneven coverage; and second, the extent of imperial control is unclear and difficult to determine archaeologically. Indeed, widespread material cultural phenomena in northern India of the early historic period – such as baked bricks, red stamped ware, and terracotta figurines – have been traditionally characterised as 'Kuṣāṇa,' making it difficult to assess any specific characteristics of Kushan urbanism.¹⁸⁷ Kushan imperial control may be more safely postulated from the presence of inscriptions mentioning Kushan kings and substantial site or surface finds of copper coins. Thus, for example, from Vima Taktu's Dasht-i Nawur inscription and the copper Kushan coins in the collection of Kandahar Museum,¹⁸⁸ it may be inferred that Arachosia – a politically contested space between the fourth century BCE to the mid-first century CE – came under some form of Kushan control or influence. Yet, this mountainous and sparsely settled region remains largely archaeological terra incognita.

The most intensive research on settlement patterns and urban archaeology of the Yuezhi-Kushan period has been conducted across disparate micro-regions of the Kushan Empire's heartland, Bactria-Tokharistan.¹⁸⁹ In north Bactria, the number and coverage of sites increased, and former military colonies and fortresses became regional hubs, such as Kampyrtepa, or even urban centers, like Dal'verzintepe and Termez. Another urban center, although only partly archaeologically documented, is believed to have been established also at Shakhrinaw, in addition to a possible regional hub at Garav Kala (Iavan). The number of sites in east Bactria seem to have receded, but a new urban center in central Bactria was created, the unexcavated Qala-i Zal. Bactra was refortified, and the apparent former military colony

¹⁸⁵ Eilers and Herrenschmidt 1989.

¹⁸⁶ Beckwith 2009, 12–25.

¹⁸⁷ Pons 2016; Prasad 1973.

¹⁸⁸ MacDowall and Ibrahim 1978, 68.

¹⁸⁹ For the following, see Leriche 2007. For the main sites of Bactria-Tokharistan's Kushan period, see also Staviskij 1986, 261–279.

Dil'berdzhin was developed into an urban site. The expansion of Buddhism during this period also affected the archaeological landscape, seen in the construction of new Buddhist monasteries and monuments around old urban centers such as Bactra and Begram, and the new center of Termez.¹⁹⁰

III.4 Military

Expansion by military conquest was the foundation of the Kushan imperial project, so much that it came to the attention of outside commentators; the author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (first century CE) knew the 'Bactrians' only as a "very war-like people."¹⁹¹ However, there is limited concrete evidence for the shape and operation of the Kushan army.¹⁹²

The Khalchaian sculptures (discussed above) depict the Yuezhi vividly as light horsemen armed with bows against an opponent using armored horsemen. The Kushans probably drew on their nomadic heritage through an intensive use of light cavalry units. The use of elephant units may be inferred from the iconography of Huvishka's coinage, which sometimes depicts the ruler holding an elephant goad or riding an elephant. Nikonorov has postulated the existence of a professional order of 'horsemen' forming a military class of light- and heavy-armed mounted troops in the royal army, led by a high dignitary entitled 'chief of cavalry.'¹⁹³

The size of the Kushan army is also not clear from our sources. The *Hanshu* recorded that the Kushans possessed 100,000 men who could bear arms,¹⁹⁴ and the force led by Vima Taktu against Ban Chao comprised either 70,000 horsemen or 70,000 soldiers, according to two different Chinese historical chronicles.¹⁹⁵ These sources give rough and probably stylized figures, and therefore hardly constitute reliable evidence for the manpower that the Kushans could mobilize for any given campaign.

III.5 Administration

Although direct evidence remains limited, we may speculate that the Kushan Empire was supported by a complex administrative system. Epigraphic evidence attests to offices held by the intermediaries between the king and his subjects, if the nature of their roles and the hierarchy remains unclear. Bactrian-language inscriptions mention one of the highest offices, the title of *karalrang* ('lord of the marches,' 'mar-

¹⁹⁰ See generally Fussman 2015.

¹⁹¹ *PME* 47.

¹⁹² The only extended treatment is Nikonorov 1997, 56–68.

¹⁹³ Nikonorov 1997, 56.

¹⁹⁴ *Hanshu* 96A.3890, repeated in *Hou Hanshu* 88.2920.

¹⁹⁵ *Hou Hanji* 13; *Hou Hanshu* 47.1580.

grave').¹⁹⁶ This is equivalent to the later attested Middle Persian *kanarang*, a title given to the Sasanian northeastern frontier province warden.¹⁹⁷ A similar function may be inferred for the Kushan context, although the epigraphic evidence only documents *karalrangs* establishing or enriching *bagolangos*. The Surkh Kotal inscription clarifies the high status of this position, as Nukunzuk the *karalrang* is also described as “the lord’s favorite, who is most dear to the king ... the second-in-command(?)”.¹⁹⁸ The fact that two individuals, Pyash and Shafar, are associated in the Rabatak inscription with the title *karalrang* indicates that the position might have existed for multiple frontier provinces. The function of other titles mentioned in the Bactrian inscriptions, such as *amboukao* and *hasht-walg*, are not yet clear. However, in the epigraphic record, we witness most likely the same Nukunzuk rise from an *amboukao* under the reign of Vima Kadphises, to *hasht-walg* under Kanishka, and finally reaching *karalrang* in the reign of Huvishka.¹⁹⁹ This indicates a hierarchy of high offices, as well as mobility between them.

Other documented offices look more familiar to us. The titles of *kṣatrapa* (‘*satrap*’) and *mahākṣatrapa* (‘great *satrap*’), which are clearly of Iranian origin, are attested already in Gandhāra in the mid-first century BCE.²⁰⁰ Yet, when attached to the names of various Indo-Scythians from Jalalabad to Ujjain in the following centuries, these titles appear to variously indicate nobility, regional governance, or independent rule.²⁰¹ Nonetheless, the use of the title in clear contexts of Kushan rule may indicate a governing office. A unique legend on a ‘bull and camel’ coin issued by Vima Taktu (usually attributed to Kashmir), appears to name a descendant of the king as *mahākṣatrapa*.²⁰² Likewise, a Gāndhārī-inscribed reliquary casket from Manikyala stupa (east of Taxila) refers to a *kṣatrapa* of Kapisa, the son of another *kṣatrapa*;²⁰³ thus perhaps this office could be hereditary. With the advent of the Kushan invasion of India, professional titles of Iranian origin begin to appear in inscriptions in Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit.²⁰⁴ There are numerous examples, such as the titles *hamāarakāra* and *gañja-hāmāarakara*, which denote an account-keeper of the treasury. Another term, *kharāsalerapati*, has been explained as “chief of the army chiefs.”²⁰⁵

As documentary texts from the Achaemenid and Kushano-Sasanian periods in Bactria have recently materialized, it is probably just a matter of time before similar

¹⁹⁶ For example, in Rabatak, lines 7–8, 15–16; Surkh Kotal 4 M, lines 20–25.

¹⁹⁷ The etymology first proposed in Henning 1965, 77–79.

¹⁹⁸ Surkh Kotal 4 M, lines 6–9; trans. Sims-Williams 2012, 79.

¹⁹⁹ Silver dish of Nukunzuk, lines 1–2; Rabatak, lines 16–17; Surkh Kotal 4 M, line 7.

²⁰⁰ On the etymology of *kṣatrapa*, see Salomon 1974, 12–14.

²⁰¹ Falk 2010, 74, 78.

²⁰² Falk 2010, 78, Fig. 3.

²⁰³ CKI 150 in Baums and Glass, 2002–.

²⁰⁴ See Falk 2010, 78.

²⁰⁵ Falk 2010, 78; Falk 2015, 121–122.

material from the Kushan period is discovered. The later Bactrian-language corpus may also yield indirect information about practices in the Kushan period.²⁰⁶ There is limited evidence that Bactrian was used in lower level bureaucratic documentation in the mid-second century CE, as it was found written on slivers of papyri in an apparent archive at Kampyrtepa.²⁰⁷

IV Conclusion

This chapter has argued that from 300 BCE to 300 CE, Central Asia (as defined here) underwent a significant geopolitical transition. Drawing from rich resources, an unruly history, and new political ambitions, the rulers of Bactria transformed Central Asia from an eastern imperial frontier – as it was under the Achaemenids, Alexander and the Seleukids – into a new imperial space. Bactria was thus the locus of power of the independent Greek Kingdoms, followed by the Kushan Empire. These two polities, although still historically obscure, may be understood and productively compared and analyzed as premodern empires. This chapter has more sharply defined the Central Asian imperial space and presented essential historical information about its two empires during the period of study, including their political history, conceptions of kingship, patterns of settlement and urbanism, military, and administration, as far as they are understood in current scholarship.

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²⁰⁶ See Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

²⁰⁷ Rtveladze 2012, 234–240. For more, Morris, ch. 9, this volume.

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