

tre of the region, whose ruler is known as the 'khar of Rob'. The open copy refers to "the city of Kandban". This seems to be an earlier name for the same town, which is found only in the earliest documents.

A letter dated in the year 239 refers explicitly to the Sasanian emperor, the Shahan-shah. The writer identifies himself as "Meyam, the steward (and) ruler of the houses of the illustrious, successful Peroz Shahanshah". If the era indeed began in AD 233, the year 239 should correspond to AD 471, during the reign of the Sasanian ruler Peroz. The apparent reference to his name, therefore, seems to confirm the chronological framework which had been deduced from the inscriptions of Tochi. However, "peroz" may also have been intended as a mere epithet meaning "victorious". Similar formulae in later documents suggest that this may, in fact, be the correct interpretation.

Hephthalite Arrivals

A later group of documents reveals the presence of the Hephthalites as a new political power. Three documents, dated in the years 260 (= AD 492) to 295 (= AD 527) refer to a property tax payable to the Hephthalites or to "the Hephthalite lords". The vendors are referred to as servants of the king ("shah") and the purchasers as servants of a lord with the Persian name "Shabur Shaburan". The persistence of a Persian aristocracy suggests that there was no abrupt break whereby the rule of the Hephthalites succeeded and replaced that of the Sasanians. On the contrary, it is likely that the local dynasty of the "khars of Rob", at whose court this contract was drawn up, continued to wield power at a local level, acknowledging the long-established overlordship of the Sasanians, but also paying tribute to the Hephthalites, who had more recently arrived in the region. Unfortunately, the references to the Hephthalites do not indicate even approximately the date of their arrival in the northern Hindukush. They provide only a *terminus post quem*: by the year 260 (= AD 492) at the latest, the Hephthalites had arrived and established themselves in sufficient strength to be able to exact the payment of taxes or tribute from the local population.

The Turks as Overlords

The next new arrivals, the Turks, are first attested in the year 407 (= AD 639). The *khar* of Rob now has Turkish instead of Hephthalite titles, but his name and patronymic in the texts show that he is no Turk. In the year 478 (= AD 710), a Turkish ruler is named in a deed recording a donation by "Bag-aziyas, the great Turkish princess ...". Although she is described as a princess of the Turkish tribe of the Khalach, her name is evidently Bactrian. She belongs to the Bredagan family, which is attested as far back as the year 247 (= AD 479) as the ruling family of the otherwise unknown city of Lan. Probably Bag-aziyas was the daughter of a local ruler, who had been given in marriage to a Turkish *qaqhan*.

Increasing Arab Domination

The Arabs are named in two of the latest texts. The first of these is a purchase contract dated in the year 507 (AD 739). While earlier texts had expressed prices in gold *dinars* or in Persian silver *dirhams*, here they are given in "Arab silver *dirhams*", which

are specifically described as locally current. A further stage in Arab economic domination is revealed in a document from the year 525 (= AD 757), which refers to the payment of taxes to the Arabs. In a document of two years later, a son of the local landowner bears the name "Khamir", probably a local form of the Arabic title *amir*. Soon afterwards, Arabic would replace Bactrian as the language of the local administration, as is clear from a group of Arabic tax records which appear to have come to light together with the Bactrian documents.

The documents described above have already made it possible to decipher Bactrian script, revealing a previously unknown tongue which, in its heyday, was one of the world's most important languages. In this brief survey, I have

only been able to hint at the contents and importance of an immense new body of material. The new documents cover a period of more than four centuries, including some periods for which we have hardly any authentic sources. The publication of these texts will soon be completed with the appearance of the second volume of my *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*, which will include the letters and Buddhist texts. Then the whole of the material will be available to students of many disciplines, to be compared with Chinese and Arabic sources and confronted with archaeological and ethnographic data. I confidently expect that the result will be to cast new light on many aspects of the history and culture of ancient Bactria and modern Afghanistan. <

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Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams of the SOAS in London is an expert on Sogdian and Bactrian languages. Together with Joe Cribb of the British Museum, he deciphered and interpreted the newly discovered Rabatak inscription in northern Afghanistan.

E-mail: ns5@soas.ac.uk

More info >
See also <http://www.gengo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~hkum/bactrian.html> (in English and Japanese).

The Destruction of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage

Afghanistan's civil war, raging between rival groups fighting for political power, gave birth to the systematic looting of archaeological sites, such as Ai Khanum, Begram, and Hadda. Their willful destruction, coupled with illicit diggings and vandalism in pursuit of material gain, obliterated the ancient heritage of sculptures and paintings. On 22 March 2001, three weeks after decreeing that all the statues of Afghanistan should be destroyed, the Taliban briefly opened the National Museum to journalists. They revealed a gloomy, near-empty labyrinth of rooms missing virtually all of its treasures.

Forum >
Afghanistan

By Osmund Bopearachchi

Not a single coin is now left in the cabinets where once over 30,000 coins were stored; among them were coins from hoards recovered at Mir Zakah, Chaman-i-Hazuri (Kabul), Qunduz, and from the excavations at Ai Khanum and Begram. Most of the artefacts stolen from the Kabul Museum surfaced a few days later in the Peshawar bazaar and, from there, found their way to private collections. Among them are the invaluable ivory plaques excavated at Begram by French archaeologists in 1937.

Hoards of Ancient Coins

The Mir Zakah II hoard was the largest ancient coin deposit ever attested in the history of mankind. It was named after Mir Zakah, the village where it was found in 1992, 53 km north-east of the city of Gardez. The hoard must have consisted of approximately 550,000 gold, silver, and bronze coins. Of these, I managed rapidly to examine six sacks full of coins, each weighing at least fifty kilos, in February 1994 in the Peshawar bazaar. We still do not know under what circumstances the Mir Zakah deposit was found. According to witnesses who visited the findspot, the Mir Zakah II hoard

The ancient site of Ai Khanum, before the illicit diggings.

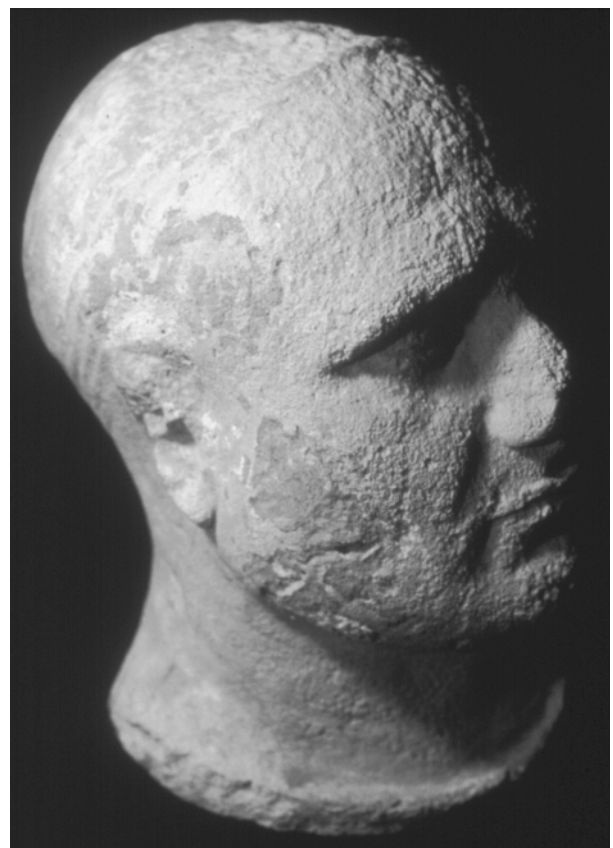


Professor Paul Bernard, 1978.



Hin-Tchi-Ono, May 1993.

The ancient site of Ai Khanum, after the illicit diggings.



Faience head of a Graeco-Bactrian king from Ai Khanum.



Kabul Museum after its destruction

also contained more than 300 kilograms of silver and gold objects. Of course, such second-hand information should be handled with care, as informers tend either to exaggerate or to romanticize the event.

Among the artefacts were gold and silver vessels: for example, a gold censer in the shape of a high beaker on a round base from which thin trails imitating wisps of incense twist upwards. Another piece among them was a squat silver bowl with an out-turned rim, with, on the inside of the base, the impressed image of a sea-horse or Hippocampus, its curled tail terminating in a crescent-shaped curve.

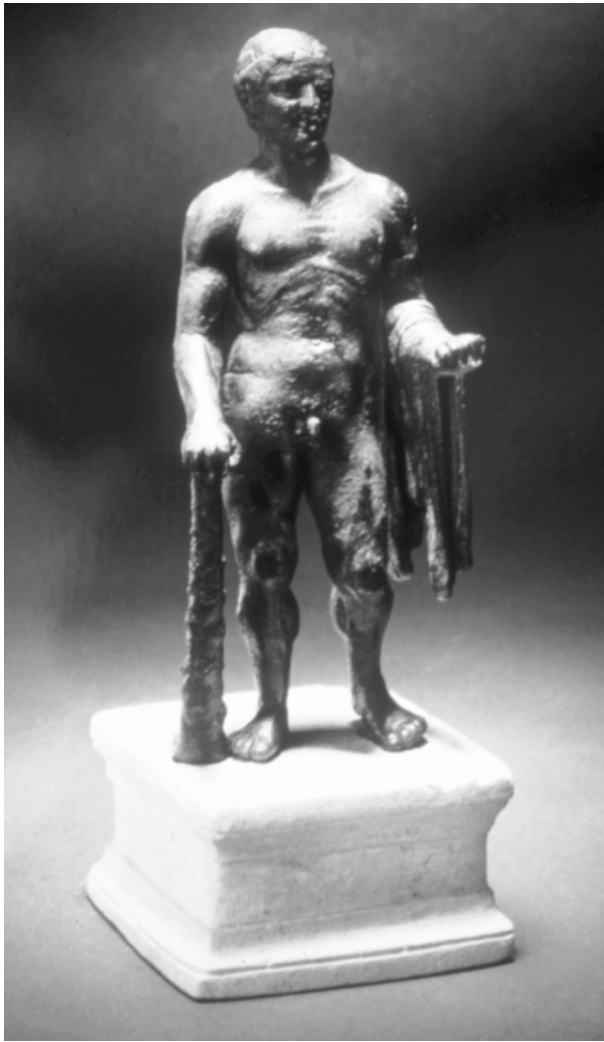
Among the sculptures from the deposit, many depict Zoroastrian priests, figurines, gold plaques, rings, and intaglios from the Hellenistic period. A repoussé intaglio depicts a galloping *biga*; two repoussés show the Greek god Hermes wearing a conical helmet; two carnelian intaglios depict a standing helmeted Athena holding a long spear and a shield in typical Greek style. The jewelry in the hoard, in particular pendants, earrings, and bracelets, amounted to several kilograms in weight!

The numerous coins in the Mir Zakah II hoard were mainly early Indian bent-bar and punch-marked coins from Greek, Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian, and Kushana origins. Coins of the Indo-Scythian King, Azes II, and posthumous imitations of coins of Hermaeus comprise the largest portion. The hoard also brought to light an unprecedented number of new varieties, such as a *tetradrachma* of Attic weight standard struck for King Menander I with unknown type and legend arrangement.

The most sensational numismatic discovery was a coin of Nasten, a hitherto unknown Iranian ruler in India. On the obverse, within a bead-and-reel border, the coin carries a bust of the diademed king to right wearing a helmet with a long, flowing crest and a mantle. The reverse shows the king on a prancing horse riding to the right. He wears a helmet with a long, flowing crest. The Greek legend reads *Nastenes / Xatrannou*, "Nasten, son of Xatran". Judging by his name, Nasten was presumably not a Greek, but an Iranian, probably a Bactrian Iranian.

The reconstruction of the history of the Greeks and their nomadic successors in Bactria and India depends mainly on the evidence offered by numismatic finds such as these.

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Bronze statuette of Heracles from Ai Khanum.

Osmond Boppearachchi, 1999.

Sacks full of coins from Mir-Zakah, each weighing at least 50 kg.



Osmond Boppearachchi, February 1994, Peshawar Bazaar.

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Ancient texts, inscriptions, and data obtained in archaeological excavations, though important, are secondary compared to the rich and vast amounts of information conveyed by coins.

The fairy tale built around Mir Zakah II has now become an unending nightmare. The political instability in Afghanistan has left no scope for a proper exploration of the immense historical importance of these coins, nor for getting them preserved in a museum for further studies. The gold coins and jewellery items of high value from the hoard were sold to Japanese, English, and American collectors for millions of dollars. According to some reliable sources, two-and-a-half tons of the Mir Zakah II deposit have been taken to Switzerland for sale. If UNESCO does not take some initiative, one day all these coins, except for the best specimens among them, may go to the melting pot.

A Sad Fate for Famous Sites

The monastic complex of Hadda is situated in Jalalabad, half-way along the road from Kabul to Gandhara. The ruins of this ancient town, with Buddhist stupas and caves, were excavated by the French Archaeological Delegation to Afghanistan under J. Barthoux. A large and well-preserved Buddhist monastic complex near Hadda, at Tepe Shotor, was excavated between 1974 and 1979 by Prof. Zamaryalai Tarzi, the then Director General of Archaeology and Conservation of Historical Monuments of Afghanistan. He was able to unearth a stupa decorated with magnificent stucco figures dating back to the second century AD. By now, looters have systematically pillaged and destroyed Tepe Shotor: small statues were taken to Pakistani bazaars for sale; huge statues that could not be removed were smashed.

One of the most significant sites contributing to a better understanding of the presence of the Greeks in ancient Bactria was the ancient Greek city of Ai Khanum on the left bank of the river Oxus at the confluence with its tributary, the river Kokcha. It was well placed as a military outpost controlling the eastern territories of ancient Bactria. A hill, about sixty meters higher than the rest of the city and protected by the two rivers from the west and south, provided a natural site for an acropolis and made it an ideal choice for the Greek city planners. The residential quarters and public buildings (such as a gymnasium, a temple, fortifications, the royal palace, and administrative buildings) were built at the lower part of the site, which was less exposed to the winds than the acropolis.

The discoveries at Ai Khanum by the French archaeologists led by Professor Paul Bernard demonstrate how its Greek artists not only remained attached to the Greek traditions, but, in some ways, even perpetuated an outdated classical style. For example, the mosaic floor of the palace bathroom, displaying dolphins, sea horses, and sea monsters, was made by setting a field of dark red pebbles instead of the square-cut stones used in works of the later style.

For the last ten years, Ai Khanum was targeted for sys-

tematic illicit diggings, as well. This remarkable city that revealed the Greek heritage left by Alexander the Great in ancient Bactria no longer exists. Treasure hunters seem to have used metal detectors originally brought to the country to detect Russian land mines. Photographs taken in May 1993 by Professor Hin-Ichi-Ono from Japan show the city's surface turned into a lunar landscape. The lower city was completely devastated. Where the large temple once stood, now only a crater remains. Some of the Corinthian and Doric capitals unearthed by the French archaeologists were taken away and now serve as a base for columns in a teahouse.

Illicit diggings at Ai Khanum have recently brought new discoveries to light: hundreds of ivory pieces, jewellery, intaglios, plaster medallions, and bronze items have reached the Pakistani bazaars and private collections. Among them are several sculptures that once more underscore the Greek contribution to the art and culture of Bactria and India. These include a bronze statuette of Heracles (I) and a faïence head of a Graeco-Bactrian king.

The bronze Heracles, 21 cm in height including pedestal, was solid cast with a fully-fashioned back. The naked, beardless young god wears a broad-leafed wreath, stands facing forwards, and is holding in his left hand the lion's skin while his right rests on a club. It is not at all surprising to find many images of Heracles in Ai Khanum; an inscription, found *in situ*, reveals that the gymnasium was dedicated to this divinity.

The faïence head of a Graeco-Bactrian king (ill. on p.13) was found in June 1998 in unrecorded circumstances. It once belonged to an acrolithic statue: the horizontally cut edge below the head was meant to fit into a wooden structure representing the rest of the body. So far, the fragments of a cult statue found in the *cella* of the main temple at Ai Khanum



Empty trays of the Coin Cabinet, Kabul Museum.

and this faïence head are the only examples of acroliths that have been found in Bactria.

Save What is Left

In the history of mankind, there are many instances of world cultural heritage falling victim to the ignorance and intolerance of a few pushed by religious, ideological, and political motives. However, in the case of Afghanistan, we have witnessed, for the first time in human history, the state taking the initiative to decree its subjects to destroy their own past. The state became the worst enemy of its own culture and heritage, leading the way to the destruction of the efforts of several generations of archaeologists, numismatists, and art historians, and the collective memory of 3,000 years of the history of the Afghan people.

How can we channel our pain, despair, and anger towards those who destroyed the cultural heritage of Afghanistan, once the greatest melting ground of Central Asia, a crossroads between East and West? One can not restore what has been destroyed. Let us fight to save at least what is left, for ancient Bactria is part of the cultural heritage of the whole of humanity, not just of a distant country often forgotten and abandoned to its sad fate. <

Dr Osmond Boppearachchi is a specialist on Indo-Greek coins and Director of Research at C.N.R.S., Paris.
E-mail: Osmond.Boppearachchi@ens.fr

The Chaman-i-Hazuri Hoard

Among the now lost coins from the plundered cabinet of the National Museum in Kabul are those from the hoard of Chaman-i-Hazuri, named after its provenance, a parade ground in Kabul. This treasure, which also included pieces of jewellery, was discovered in 1933 when foundations for a house were being dug. Informants reported that some 1,000 silver coins were recovered, but this assessment was never supported by coin evidence; some 127 coins, all definitely from the Chaman-i-Hazuri hoard, found their way to the Kabul Museum.

From the composition of this find it is clear that the hoard must have been buried somewhere in the fourth century BC, possibly not long after circa 380 BC. This *terminus ante quem* is based on the presence in the hoard of a coin from a series that copies a sixth-century Athenian coin type, but was actually struck in the early fourth century BC. Most of the coins in the hoard are much older: sixty-three of the Chaman-i-Hazuri coins were struck by the Greeks before 550 BC (cp. 4); eight coins were issued in the name of the Achaemenid King Darius I, who ruled between 521 and 486 BC (cp. 2). Of unknown date are twelve bent-bar coins in the hoard carrying punched wheel symbols. (1) These coins are typically found in early Gandhara, but their exact period of circulation is not known so far. Finally, the hoard contained forty-three coins, apparently of local manufacture, which have been punched with animal motifs on two sides. (3) The hoard thus illustrates that Greek, Iranian, and local Gandharan coins may have circulated in the area of Kabul shortly before its burial. The hoard forms a perfect numismatic illustration to the blended cultural entourage of fourth century BC Afghanistan.

A.D.H. Bivar and, more recently, Joe Cribb of the British Museum have argued that these fourth-century BC local Gandharan punch-marked coins are among the earliest of their kind in South Asia. The technique and concept of producing punch-marked coins would subsequently have spread from the North-West to other regions of the subcontinent and triggered the manufacture of many, regionally differing, series of punch-marked coins. Other scholars have questioned the validity of dating the local punch-marked coins on the basis of the presence of the fourth-century BC copy in the hoard. They are in favour of an earlier date which, however, remains to be defined more precisely. Usually the Ganges Valley is indicated as the region in which, in the wake of a period of rapid urbanization, the concept of the use of coins may have taken root, perhaps as early as the sixth century BC. — (EMR) <



Josephine Powell, courtesy of SPACH.