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**PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORY AND CULTURE
OF BAKTRIA IN LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EXCAVATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA[♦]**

Keywords: Bactria, Takht-i Sangin, Hellenistic period, Oxos, Central Asia

More than 8,000 items, including objects of high artistic quality, were unearthed during the excavations of the Temple of the Oxos. It can be safely surmised that this Baktrian temple's repository contained a great number of gold and silver items, most of which are now lost. Where can they be? I.P. Pichikian and I believe that the items from the famous Amu Darya hoard¹ used to be a part of the Temple of the Oxos treasure. The exact location of the discovery of Amu Darya hoard remains unknown, but T.I. Zeimal and E.V. Zeimal upon analyzing Russian travelers' reports concluded that it was found at Takht-i Qubad,² 5 km south of the fortified settlement of Takht-i Sangin and the Temple of the Oxos. When they reached this determination in 1962, how-

* The great orientalist, historian and archaeologist, Professor Boris Anatolievich Litvinskii passed away on August 20, 2010, at the age of 87. He submitted the present paper to *Anabasis* shortly before his death.

♦ The editor thanks Prof. Jeffrey D. Lerner (USA) for specialist assistance with the English version of the text (MJO).

¹ It concerns the Amu Darya hoard, or the Oxos Treasure, in the British Museum (Dalton 1964; Zeimal 1979). The term "Amu Darya hoard" first appeared in Russian publications following the work of Tolstoi, Kondakov 1889, 129. The hoard was found not far from Kabul. Some of its purported contents are now on exhibit at the Miho Museum, Japan.

² Zeimal, Zeimal 1962.

ever, the Temple of the Oxos had not yet been excavated and thus could not have been taken into account.

In connection with these excavations, I reexamined Russian literature and old maps from the second half of the nineteenth century, allowing me to ascertain some new evidence. J. Curtis, a renowned British scholar, has recently published documents found in the British archives as well as in various Indian and British writings.³ These documents suggest that probably between 1876 and 1880, although a date as late as 1886 cannot be ruled out, near the confluence of the Pandj and the Vakhsh, local people found a great number of gold and silver items including coins. The following scenario will help us to reconstruct the origin of the Amu Darya hoard. As invaders, presumably nomads, approached, the temple's priests emptied repositories filled with gold and silver and buried them in the bank of one of the rivers (it is senseless to argue whether they buried this treasure nearby or at some distance from the temple). For whatever reason, the priests did not recover the treasure, so that some 2,000 years later when the river bank had eroded precious objects began to appear and were collected by local people.

Another concern that arises is why the temple was built in such a remote location, especially since the environment is so harsh. P. Bernard has pointed out that the temple's construction formed a constituent part of Seleukos I's religious policy and symbolically reflected the role of irrigation in this region.⁴

It seems to me quite possible that the site of the temple, where the Pandzh and the Vakhsh merge at which point the river becomes known as the Amu Darya (in ancient Greek it was called the Oxos, a derivative of Vakhsh), was selected not by chance. This junction of the two most important rivers in Baktria (personified by a Water deity and other similar divine beings) became the site of the Temple of the Oxos, because presumably nearby another temple dating from the Achaemenid period, which has yet to be found, was similarly dedicated to the great River Oxos. Since numerous votive offerings from the Achaemenid period formed part of the treasure from the Temple of the Oxos, it is likely that they derive from another temple that perhaps had been destroyed when the Temple of the Oxos was built.

The political history of Baktria in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods spans some four centuries from the late sixth to the second century B.C. As history shows, although these two epochs differed greatly, there existed in the Hellenistic era an inextricable connection and continuity of preserving Achaemenid traditions in political and cultural life, especially in architecture, the most monumental of all arts.

³ Curtis 1997.

⁴ Bernard 1992, 509.

As is known, the excavations at Takht-i Sangin resulted in the discovery of the Temple of the Oxos with its structures almost intact. They also revealed a portion of the ancient city's citadel fortifications and more than 8,000 items, not including ceramics, such as coins and other objects of high artistic quality dated from sixth to the second century B.C. The Temple of the Oxos, like the site of Ai Khanoum, is regarded as one of most important and representative monuments of Hellenistic Bactria, which has radically changed our conceptions of the architecture, art and religion in this area. The finds from these excavations have furthered our understanding of the nature of Bactrian and Greek interactions as well as the continuity of Hellenistic culture in later periods. This issue is important not only for the history of Bactria itself, but for all of Central Asia and even India. Many foreign scholars have incorporated these ideas in their works, the result of which has led to diverse approaches to the subject.⁵

The architectural traditions of the Near East, especially that of the Achaemenids, is easily detected in the architecture of the Temple of the Oxos. This is important for discussions that involve the nature of the Seleukid Empire. P. Briant, for example, has undertaken a thorough review of this subject. As he sees it, there are still historians who view Seleukid rule through the lens of colonial ideology and politics. Yet, he raises doubts about the validity of the concept of the "Hellenization of the East." For example, prominent scholars, like E. Will, believe that there is no historian who would seriously adhere to the idea a deep-rooted Hellenization of Middle Eastern society, while others emphasize the need for understanding cultural continuity and stable economic relationships in the Seleukid kingdom. In his work, P. Briant examines the retention of an Achaemenid heritage under the Seleukids⁶ and argues that not only is this based on an Achaemenid legacy but also one that draws on that of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Elamites. He cautiously concludes: „It seems that in the Hellenistic period Graeco-Macedonians simply added their own traditions to a multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual state, but did not know how, or did not wish, or were not able to achieve a unity (least of all a fusion) centred on their own socio-cultural values”.⁷ In this respect, the excavations at Takht-i Sangin have added new information about this highly complex process, which we intend to elucidate in future publications.

⁵ See Sherwin-White, Kuhrt 1993 and the articles by E. Will, A. Kuhrt, S. Sherwin-White, P. Briant, G. Le Rider, P. Bernard, O. Bopearachchi, A. Invernizzi, P. Leriche, B. Lyonnet, Cl. Rapin, M. Isamidinoy, J.-F. Salles, put in *Topoi. Orient-Occident*, vol.4, 1994, 430–610.

⁶ Briant 1977; 1978; 1982; 1990.

⁷ Briant 1990, 61.



Fig. 1. Takht-i Sangin. Sheath of dagger (*akinakes*). Ivory. Achaemenid period



Fig. 2. Takht-i Sangin. Alexander the Great's image on miniature makhaira sheath. Ivory

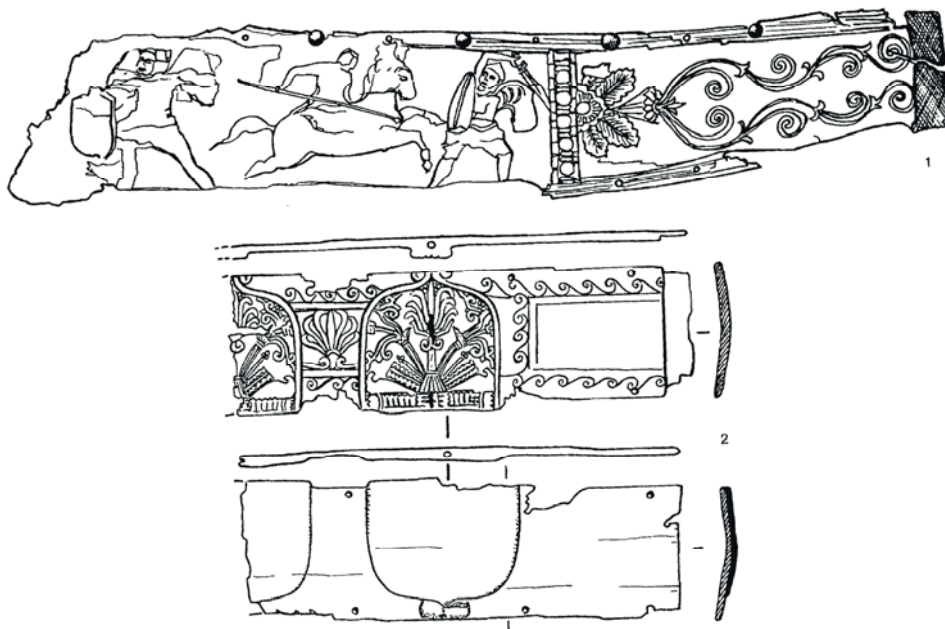
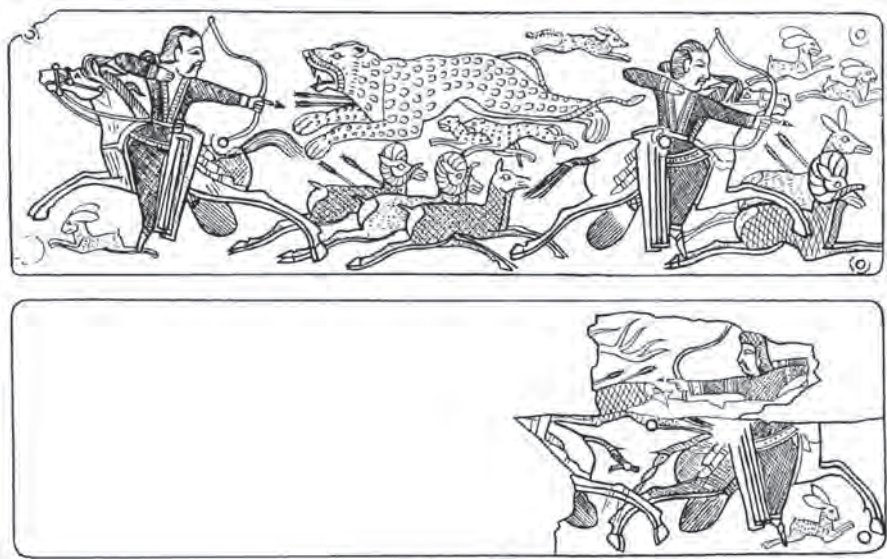


Fig. 3. Takht-i Sangin. Decoration on sheaths of ceremonial swords.
Drawing after B.A. Litvinskii



Fig. 4. Takht-i Sangin. Bone plate with hunting scene. Fragment



**Fig. 5. Takht-i Sangin. Bone plate with hunting scene. Dimensions 216 x 62 x 7 mm.
Drawing after B.A. Litvinskii and J. Ilyasov**

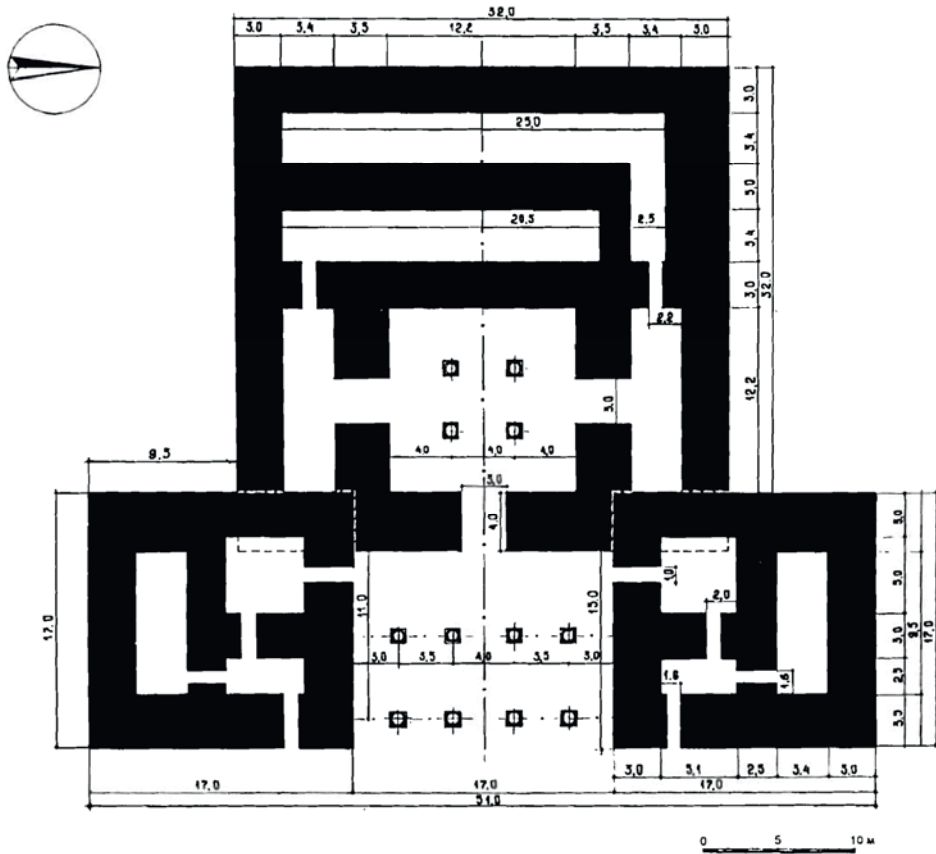


Fig. 7. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building. Plan

As mentioned above, the discoveries from the Temple of the Oxos contain numerous objects. We shall not focus, however, on those items dated to the Achaemenid period, especially as many of them will be published in detail in volume III of *The Temple of the Oxos in Bactria*. We only note here that some of them are indeed masterpieces. Instead, we will focus our attention on objects attributed to the Hellenistic period and provide some necessary revisions of their interpretation that I.R. Pichikian and I had previously made. Thus among the Hellenistic objects found at the Temple of the Oxos are large clay sculptures, a small bronze portrait plaque, bronze reliefs, and ivory sculptures to list but a few.

One of the most striking works of art is an ivory relief depicting the head of Alexander the Great engraved on the mouth of a miniature votive sword sheath – *makhaira*.⁸ Alexander is portrayed slightly turned to the left, tilting towards his

⁸ Litvinskii, Pichikian 1983, 67–77; Pichikian 1983; 1983a; Litvinskii 2001, 251, no. 1134, pl. 71.

left shoulder; the shape of his face is round, with his eyes wide open. He sports a helmet made of a lion's skin with its upper jaw crowning Alexander's forehead, while its lower jaw forms the helmet's cheek-guards. Doubtlessly, the lion's skin was thrown over the figure's shoulders and its paws were arranged into a "Herakles knot" on the chest, but this fragment is not preserved below Alexander's head. The portrait is executed perfectly. The engraver was a talented artist, who modeled Alexander's features subtly and skillfully. We see here a young hero, who is strong-willed and determined. The whole iconographic tradition confirms that this figure is Alexander, particularly when one compares this image with those of a younger Alexander found at Vergina.

It is well known that most of Alexander's images in the Hellenistic period were created by Lysippos along with a multitude of other sculptors, painters, goldsmiths and die engravers.⁹ There are a great many images of Alexander depicting him in the guise of Herakles. The episode when Alexander allegedly slew a huge boar occurred in Central Asia, near Marakanda (Curt. 8.1.11–17), which presumably served as the impetus for associating Alexander with Herakles. The image of Alexander as Herakles was widespread during his lifetime. Although there are a great number of images similar to this one at Takht-i Sangin, their prototype remains unknown. We can date this Alexander-Herakles from the Temple of the Oxos to the third century B.C.

Alexander the Great and his achievements on the battle field are associated with another work of art found at the temple. It is a fragment on the side of a sheath of a miniature votive *makhaira* depicting in a meticulously engraved ivory bas-relief a battle scene between a horseman and a foot soldier. The rider mounted on a galloping horse to the right leans forward holding a spear in his right hand with his arm bent as he takes aim at the foot soldier before him, who, in his turn, raises his *makhaira* in his right hand above his head in a striking position as he protects himself with a shield in his left. Another foot soldier appears in the preceding panel, facing left, holding a shield before him. The faces of both foot soldiers are well preserved as they were intricately carved. Judging by their weapons and clothing, both are Persians, while the rider appears to be a Greek. These extremely expressionistic and dynamic images are the work of a skilled artisan and not merely that of a craftsman.¹⁰

The analysis of these figures enables us to conclude that they represent the standard motif of a battle scene between Alexander and Persians, portrayed in many works of art (Pliny, *N.H.* 35.93.110), such as the Sidon sarcophagus,¹¹ the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii¹² and the painting on the Makedonian tomb at

⁹ Moreno 1995 (with detailed bibliography).

¹⁰ Litvinskii 2001, 262, no. 1170/1, pl. 72/1.

¹¹ Winter 1912; Von Graeve 1970.

¹² Winter 1909; Andreae 1977.

Lefkadia (Naossa), as well as others found at Vergina. On the basis of an iconographical analysis, I had earlier suggested that the Takht-i Sangin relief dates to the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.¹³ A closer examination of some of the details has caused me to revise this date. For example, the Persian confronting Alexander holds an oval shield with a medial straight edge. This is typical of the *thyreos* type of shields, which originated in Greece toward the beginning of the third century B.C. As a result, this work could not have been composed before the middle of the third century B.C.¹⁴

In terms of clay sculptures, there are two significant heads. Each wears a diadem, is imbued with great expressiveness and portrayed in an elegant and fluid manner. They are confidently rendered in all their details. Yet, they differ from each other stylistically as one appears with more subtlety than the other. Clearly, both images realistically convey the personalities of two different individuals. A logical question naturally follows: who exactly do these sculptures portray? The opinions of the excavators differ, which appear in our previous publications. Eventually, I. R. Pichikian resolved that they are two kings, a father and son: Seleukos I and Antiochos I.¹⁵ For my part, I have undertaken a detailed comparative analysis of these sculpted heads from the Temple of the Oxos with those of the Seleukids as they are depicted on their coins, carved gems and sculptures in the round. I have concluded that the Takht-i Sangin sculptures are not portraits of any Seleukid king. Indeed, R. Fleischer even included one of these heads, whose photo he published, under the classification “keine Seleukiden”.¹⁶ Likewise, a comparison of portraits on Graeco-Baktrian coins reveals only superficial similarities: both groups are rather stylistic and there are some commonalities in hairstyle with the portraits of Euthydemos I (ca. 230–200 B.C.). As a result, the sculpted heads from the Temple of the Oxos depict either anonymous aristocrats or local Greek rulers, who lived at the end of the fourth or at some point in the third century B.C.

I.R. Pichikian believed that a Hellenistic sculpture of a naked youth standing with his head turned to the left represented Apollo, since a string slung across his right shoulder crossed his chest to the left, which he took to be from a bow, was commonly used as an attribute of the god.¹⁷ I, on the other hand, have reached a different conclusion. A closer examination between the iconography associated with Apollo and this sculpture reveals that there is nothing suggestive about this sculpture to warrant such identification. The sculpture from the Temple of the Oxos represents a boy, not a youth, who is not at all muscular. As is common in

¹³ Litvinskij, Pichikjan 1997, 17.

¹⁴ For more detailed information on the history of the “thyreos” type of shield, see Litvinskii 2000.

¹⁵ Pichikian 1991, 192–194.

¹⁶ Fleischer 1991, 90, 142.

¹⁷ Pichikian 1991.

Hellenistic sculpture, the head is disproportionately large. The string slung round his right shoulder is really a ribbon, ubiquitous for sculptural figurines of children to which various amulets were sometimes attached. Thus the statue is that of a boy or perhaps even of Eros datable from the third to the second century B.C. as is a series of female clay sculptures.

There is also a group of bronze and silver works of art. For example, there is a concaved circular bronze medallion. A hole pierced in its upper register, allowed the medallion to be hung up, or due to a pin fixed on the bottom the medallion could be mounted on a stand. It bears a relief consisting of the right profile of a male figure. He is helmeted with cheek-guards reminiscent of those on Boeotian helmets. His expression is stern and determined. At first glance, this image is akin to the iconographic tradition of depicting rulers on Graeco-Baktrian coins, but this example by comparison is rendered much less skillfully. Thus the face is far rougher, characterized by a heaviness atypical of Graeco-Baktrian coin portraits. Although one might be inclined to associate the portrait with the “barbaric” coin imitations of Eukratides I, there are enough differences to suppose that the image on the medallion is not so much an attempt to imitate Eukratides’ portrait as it is more likely made “on the basis” of a coin portrait of one or even a number of different Graeco-Baktrian kings with additional details supplied by the metalworker. We may date the medallion to the second or first century B.C.

Beside this apparently local artistic creation, there are also highly artistic works made by talented, professional artists. One such work is the figure of Marsyas who is depicted on an altar accompanied by a Greek inscription stating that the work is a dedication on behalf of a certain Atrosokes. The altar, inscription and figure date to the second century B.C. Marsyas is portrayed as a grotesque image of Silenus: a naked bald old man having a disproportionately large head and drooping belly, playing the double-barreled aulos.¹⁸

A gilded silver plate with the relief of Helios surrounded by a halo serves as another example of high artistry. The young man’s head is slightly bent to the right with curls falling below his ear. His eyes are portrayed in a non-descript manner, plump lips protrude above his rounded chin. The figure’s face is round, the neck corpulent. Long and short rays in the form of arrows, twelve in number, radiate from behind his neck. This type of Helios image originating in the fourth century B.C. became especially popular in 333–304 B.C. The Helios of Takht-i Sangin finds many counterparts in figural sculpture, architectural sculpture, toreutics, jewelry, and coroplastics. It is particularly similar to the images of the Helios on the terracotta “votive shields” from “The Tomb of Eros” in Eretria.¹⁹ A great number of similarities allow us to date our Helios to the first half of the third century B.C.

¹⁸ Litvinskii, Vinogradov, Pichikian 1985, 84–94.

¹⁹ Vollmoeller 1901, fig. 8; Cat. New York 1984, 153, fig. 93.

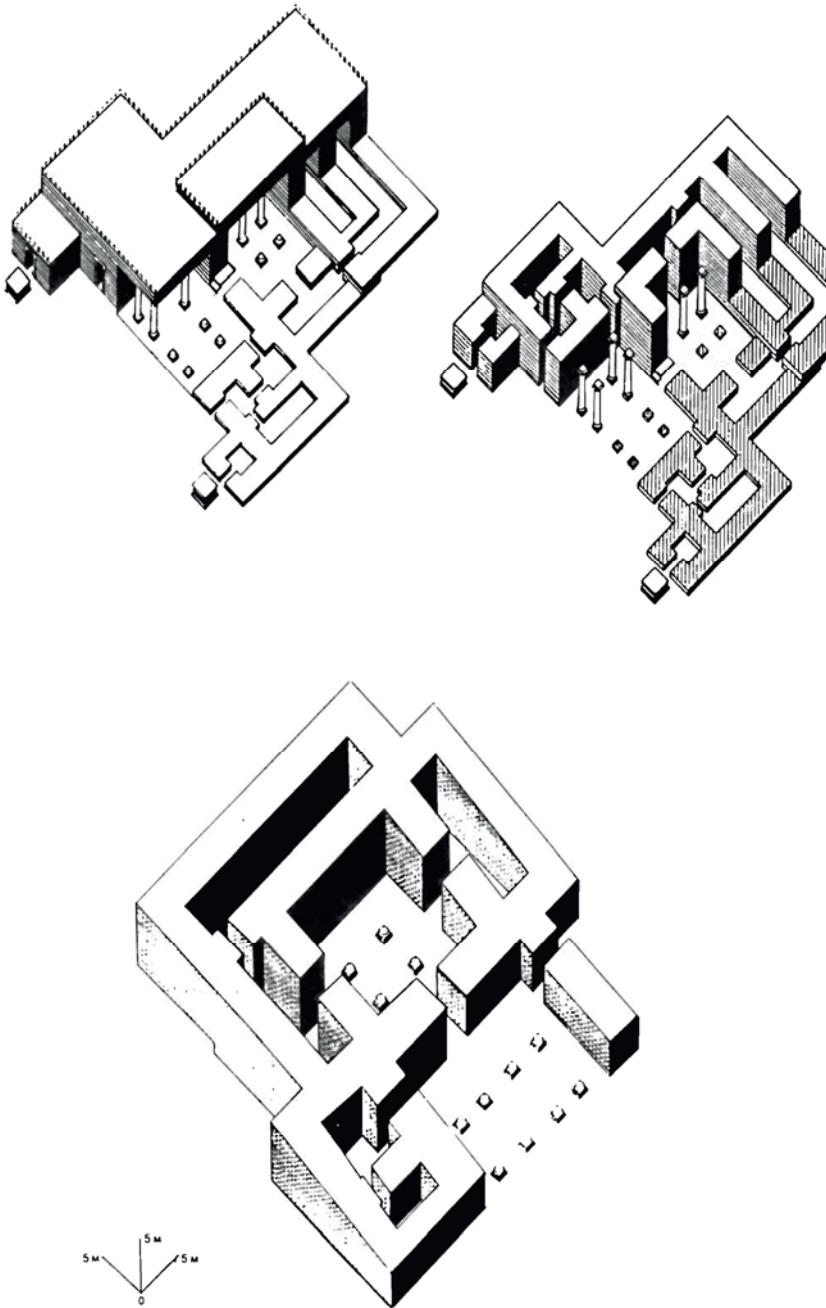


Fig. 8. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building.
Reconstruction by I. Pichikian and G. Arzumanov

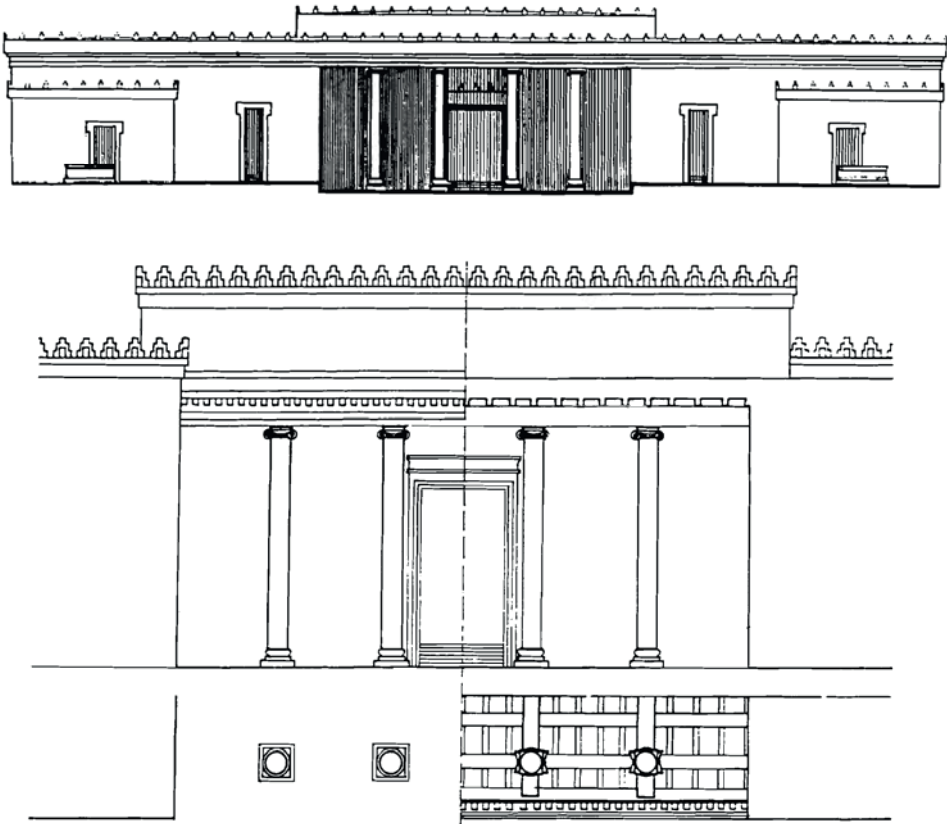


Fig. 9. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building. Eastern façade.
 Reconstruction by I. Pichikian and G. Arzumanov

Other works of Hellenistic art have likewise been found at the Temple of the Oxos, but it falls outside our scope to describe each even briefly. We do note, however, that almost fifty fragments of composite bone flutes, all of them parts of Greek auloses, have been recovered suggesting that not only Greek tragedies but also beautiful Greek melodies were enjoyed in theaters like Ai Khanoum on the banks of the Oxos.²⁰

Thus Hellenistic art, imported or manufactured locally, was kept in the repositories of the Temple of the Oxos. The influence of the Lysippan school is evident in the local Hellenistic sculpture. A great number of Greek ceremonial sword sheaths found at the site provide us with new opportunities to study Greek weaponry, while others are reflective of everyday life, such as the ivory legs in the form of lion paws used in furniture based on Greek models.

²⁰ Litvinskii 2006.



Fig. 10. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Columned hall (aivan) of the main building. View from the south

The magnificence of this great temple and the richness of its treasures naturally invoke associations with western Hellenistic temples and give rise to hypotheses about the sanctuary and the role that the Temple played in the religious, political and economic life.

The materials recovered from the Takht-i Sangin excavations are of considerable value when discussing issues of historical importance. For example, a comparison of what we have gleaned from the excavations of the Temple of the Oxos with the results achieved from the excavations at the site of Ai Khanoum reveal some striking differences. Ai Khanoum is a Greek city with a predominantly Hellenic population, thinking, speaking, writing and reading in Greek and worshipping Greek gods. The native Baktrian residents, though few in number,

were evidently utterly hellenized. The architecture of Ai Khanoum reflects a mixture of Greek, Middle Eastern, and Baktrian features, unlike the situation at Takht-i Sangin where Baktrians practiced their local indigenous religion alongside a minority of Greeks, who undoubtedly were bilingual. A combination of purely Greek and Graeco-Baktrian elements are noticeable in some spheres of spiritual and everyday life. Thus Near Eastern features, especially those of Achaemenid origin, are noticeable in the architecture of the Temple of the Oxos, while Greek influence is visible in stone objects, such as altars and capitals of columns.

The cults and rituals practiced in Hellenistic Baktria are just now beginning to be taken up by scholars. The problem of worship at the Temple of the Oxos is extraordinarily complicated. The existence of two *ateshgakhs* points to the cult of a water deity and to another devoted to fire. Nowadays Zoroastrians use only a fire altar in their temples, but in antiquity the situation was apparently different. The specific forms of this cult can be ascertained when considering late Zoroastrian writings, ancient and medieval sources, as well as the religious practice of modern Zoroastrians living in Iran and India. According to our research, the Temple of the Oxos was at the very least one of the most important fire temples in all of Baktria. The cult of fire, however, was not the only cult practiced at the sanctuary. At some point, Greek altars exhibiting typically Hellenistic forms were also installed as was the worship of Greek gods. Evidently, both religions peacefully coexisted.

Apparently, there were three *zones* of Hellenization in Baktria: one consisted of areas where compact groups of Greeks lived in *poleis* and military colonies with their life-style reflective of the kind enjoyed at Ai Khanoum; a second was composed of the area adjoining Greek cities in which Greeks and Baktrians maintained a vibrant ethno-cultural and religious way of life. The former was a fairly homogeneous culture, typified by the Greek language that was spoken and written widely throughout Baktria.²¹ The latter was more complicated, because it was connected with the internal transformation in varying degrees of the semantic meanings of particular images, customs and rituals. One of the variants of this model is the correlation of phenomenon of extraneous culture with the isomorphic phenomenon of the indigenous culture and its incorporation by the indigenous peoples in the same or in a slightly altered form, consisting of the same or hybrid meaning; Atrosokes' votive is one such example.²² The third zone had a few elements of Hellenism that are noticeable in the local culture. In Baktria and neighboring areas these elements were represented by architecture (primarily, stone bases of columns and roof tiles) and ceramics, not only as the result

²¹ Schmitt 1990, 53.

²² Litvinskii, Vinogradov, Pichikian 1985.

of direct importation, but also as the result of borrowing and spreading various forms and techniques. The kind of architecture and engineering techniques that were created in this type of zone, for example, is seen in Hellenistic fortifications.²³ Phenomena, such as the three noted here, occurred not only in Bactria, but in other parts of Central Asia as well, especially, as P. Bernard and C. Rapin have shown, in Sogdiana.²⁴ On the other hand, we are unaware of the location of these areas and lack even an approximate number of the Greeks who lived there. According to A.B. Bosworth, “we have no indication how many cities were established [by Alexander] in Bactria and Sogdiana, but they were clearly numerous and when combined with the garrisons in the native citadels and the satrapal army of occupation they amounted to a concentration of European settlers unparalleled elsewhere in the empire”.²⁵

In its broadest sense, the development of culture in Hellenistic Central Asia depended largely on how the Greek and Hellenized population retained its sense of ethnic identity. Although it is impossible to list all of the characteristics that made up this brand of Hellenism, we can consider a few of the more important aspects. After the decline of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, the Greek language fell out of use rather quickly, even though the Greek alphabet was retained as the basis of writing by the Kushans and the Hephtalites until the seventh century A.D. Recent discoveries of Bactrian,²⁶ however, indicate that the Greek alphabet continued to be employed by isolated mountainous communities in Bactria and elsewhere in Central Asia right up to the eleventh or even twelfth century. It has long been viewed that due to cultural interactions in Western Asia the Greeks influenced the early development of Islamic science and philosophy. This is no longer the case. The discovery of the philosophical text at Ai Khanoum²⁷ has made it clear that the writings of Greek philosophers had been available in Central Asia centuries prior to the advent of Islam either in the original or in translation. In terms of the survival of Greek religion and art, we may note that the Temple of the Oxos and its accompanying Greek stone altars were not destroyed by the Yuezhi or the Kushans as there is every reason to believe that it continued to function throughout both periods. Moreover, the Greek custom of placing “Charon’s obol” in the mouth of a corpse remained a common practice during the Kushan and post-Kushan periods.²⁸ In addition, Greek mythology became part of the Kushan and post-Kushan iconographic repertoire. Thus Zeus, Helios,

²³ Rapin, Isamidinov, 1994.

²⁴ Bernard 1996.

²⁵ Bosworth 1980, 248.

²⁶ Schmitt 1990; Sims-Williams 1997.

²⁷ Hadot, Rapin 1987.

²⁸ Litvinskii, Sedov 1984, 150–160.

Athena, Selena, the Dioskouroi (Kastor and Pollux), Herakles, Eros and others²⁹ gradually became “barbarized” even as they remained in use throughout Central Asian art for centuries. This is especially true during the Yuezhi and Kushan period when Hellenistic art intermingled and influenced the formation of local Baktrian and Kushan art. Such is the remarkable example of the Tillya-tepe complex with its resplendent display of Hellenistic motifs.³⁰

During the Kushan period, a steady flow of Roman goods, including works of art, appeared in both India and Central Asia, which is seen by the finds made at Taxila and Begram. The Temple of the Oxos, unlike Ai Khanoum, survived the Yuezhi conquest and existed throughout the Kushan period; indeed, according to my analysis of the votive finds, it did so until the fourth century A.D. Among the votive objects recovered from the temple is a series of bronze appliques of Eros, including one figure of Eros made of ivory. I would date the latter to the first century B.C. or first century A.D. I would date the former, composed of appliques of Eros naked or clothed, to the second or third century A.D. It is no coincidence that there are characteristics of late Roman art evident in this iconography of Eros. Late Roman art, well-known thanks to the monuments of Palmyra and Dura Europos, appeared throughout Central Asia as the paintings at Fayaztepa, Toprak-kala and Mirana demonstrate. Moreover, the affect that Hellenistic art had on the development of Baktrian sculpture is seen in the magnificent gallery of images at Khalchayan and Dalverzin-tepe.

Gandhara art, too, which spread throughout modern northwestern India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan, was influential. There have been debates among specialists about the origin of Gandhara art for a long time. In the first half of the twentieth century A. Foucher argued that the impact of Greek art on the creation of Gandhara art was due to an influx of Greeks into northwestern India after the fall of the Graeco-Baktrian kingdom. Later, these ideas were developed by D. Schlumberger, while other prominent scholars, including B. Rowland and G. Ingholt, asserted that there was strong influence from the Roman world and that it came by way of Palmyra and Dura Europos. Finally, there are still those who prefer to look for the origin of Gandhara art in India itself.³¹

The excavations at Ai Khanoum and the Temple of the Oxos considerably reinforce the position of those who hold that Gandhara art originated from Greeks who came from Baktria. However, as it has been mentioned before, the archaeological material, particularly from the Temple of the Oxos, contains a great deal of Roman influence as well. Thus Gandhara art is composed of all these elements that were combined and superimposed on a school of art that

²⁹ See, in particular, Rosenfield 1967, 14–26; Sarianidi 1989, 46ff.

³⁰ Sarianidi 1985; Pfrommer 1993.

³¹ Theories review offers Zwalf 1996, 67–69.

originated in India and did so within a Buddhist framework. The rapid standardization of Buddhist iconography took place between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. as evidenced by the materials recovered at Taxila and Butkara. Local architects, sculptors, and painters already familiar with the Hellenistic tradition, combined all these different elements to develop their own artistic repertoire, canons and models in a form that we easily recognize today as “Gandhara art.”

But Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Roman artistic influence did not end with Gandhara art as it continued well into the fifth and even eighth century A.D. as seen in the replicas of antique sculpture in the coroplastics of Sogdiana.³² At the same time, metalworkers in Central Asia manufactured bowls decorated with illustrations of Euripides’ tragedies, but did so probably without understanding their context which explains why there are so many distortions;³³ apparently, the art of Sogdiana, and in particular that of Penjikent, preserve purely Hellenistic motives in ornamental decorative works.

Hellenistic culture also indirectly influenced the development of ancient and early medieval architecture in Central Asia to a great extent. The architectural orders of the Kushan and early medieval periods descended from those of the Classical canon,³⁴ albeit with fundamental changes and transformations, as seen in the columns themselves and their elements. Such architectural compositions as the four-columned hall encircled by corridors or the columnated *aivan* in the Temple of the Oxos were developed and employed in subsequent architectural monuments. Many kinds of other material culture, like ceramics, in terms of appearance and the kind of technology used to produce them also date to the Hellenistic era.

It is plausible to assume that the Greek cities of the Hellenistic Far East influenced the development of local native urban areas in terms of fortification, city planning, the types of public and private buildings and facilities as well as the internal structure and notion of self-government. This is especially plausible when we consider the presence of Baktrians in the city administration of Ai Khanoum. We can also well imagine that there was interaction between social and economic classes of the Greeks and Baktrians, thereby forming a homogeneous cultural and historical phenomenon that we call “Graeco-Baktrian.”

The objects of artistic value from the Temple of the Oxos in Takht-i Sangin and those from Ai Khanoum provide us with a comprehensive idea not only about the monumental and applied arts, but also about the culture of Hellenistic Bactria itself. The Hellenization of art and culture in Bactria after 329 B.C. was

³² Meshkeris 1978; Marshak, Raspopova 1988, 49–51.

³³ Marshak 1978.

³⁴ Voronina 1977; Litvinskii, *Kalai-Kafirnigan* (forthcoming).

stimulated by the establishment of Makedonian political power and the foundation of new Hellenistic *poleis* and fortresses, whose architecture contained both local and oriental traits. During the Hellenistic period when Baktria was a part of the Seleukid Empire and in the succeeding period of the prosperous Graeco-Baktrian era, contacts with Mediterranean Greek cities were regularized. They were also encouraged by subsequent waves of colonists, as seen in those schools of art that contain influence from Seleukid art.

In summarizing the most important issues concerning the culture of Achaemenid Baktria, it should be emphasized that the information derived from archaeological excavations is relatively insignificant. For the most part, the presence of Achaemenid layers have only been detected, while the cities dating back to this period remain unknown due to the massive constructions of subsequent periods. Indeed our primary evidence of Baktrian cities in the Achaemenid period remains the writings of ancient authors, but even they are extremely few in number. On the basis of these sources, we can surmise a typology of cities, which is enhanced by archaeological research conducted in large metropolitan centers, small towns and frontier fortress-towns as well as by the presence of an occasional acropolis, palace or temple in the capitals of the Upper Satrapies. This urbanism that originated in the Achaemenid period was further developed by Alexander and, since the imperial authority relied on the *polis* structure for its political organization, additional architectural complexes were added.³⁵

The monumentality of the Temple of the Oxos, its perfection as a structure and the implementation of advanced building techniques to create it are outstanding testimony of the high level of older, indigenous Baktrian architecture that began in the Bronze Age and was infused with other architectural traditions from the Middle East and Greece.

To form a proper understanding of the Temple of the Oxos, we need compare it with the architectural and archaeological context of the fire temples at Susa, Kuh-e Khwaja and Persepolis, which are typologically closest in architectural composition, as opposed to other sanctuaries that housed a monumental statue of the deity to which they were consecrated and thus served a fundamentally different purpose, such as those at Ai Khanoum and Dilberjin. Of interest to us is the former group. As shown in our study, the distinctive features of these fire temples are the *ateshgakhs* on the facade and the sacred ash storage within the temple precinct.

The Temple of the Oxos is thus a classic example of the Baktrian fire temple. Compositional and architectural principles and ideas embodied in it played an important role in the further development of fire temples and temple architecture,

³⁵ Koshelenko 1979.

in Bactria-Tokharistan, Parthia, Khorezm, Sogdiana and other areas of Central Asia.

In the Sogdian building tradition, square bricks were used. Fortifications, for example, were strengthened thanks to recesses and platforms that were installed for ancient catapult artillery.³⁶ It was also in this period that city walls were decorated with pilasters set close to each other, a technique derivative of Near Eastern traditions.³⁷

Clay sculpture is of particular importance in this regard³⁸. Excellent examples of sculpture of non-fired clay, which date back to the end of the fourth century B.C., were found in king Nicocreont's cenotaph at Salamis (Cyprus). I should add that information about clay sculpture is also recorded in literary sources. For example, Pausanias (1.2.5) wrote that there were such sculptures in the building connected with a cult of Dionysios, while Pliny the Elder provided an observation about the manufacture of such statues (*N.H.* 35.155).

Fragments of sculptural objects found during the excavations at Ai Khanoum, Elkharas and Takht-i Sangin suggest that only after the Graeco-Makedonian invasion in Central Asia did this art form change, having first appeared in the Bronze Age. Subsequently, clay sculpture played an important role in the art of Bactria at Khalchayan and of Khorezm at Toprak-kala. The high quality of work evident in these sculptures speaks to the participation of Greek masters or their disciples. A comparison of the sculptures at Takht-i Sangin and Nisa suggests that the latter were of better quality. It is significant to note that Hellenistic sculpture is in harmony with the monumentality of the architecture which accompanies it.³⁹

Clearly, the Greek sculptors who came to Bactria brought with them their knowledge of creating large clay sculptures. The local masters who followed a tradition of producing sculpture made of non-fired clay that went back to the Bronze Age, were not only introduced to a more complicated technology of creating clay and alabaster sculptures, but also the aesthetics and other elements characteristic of Greek imagery. These artists of various Baktrian schools kept the spirit of Greek sculpture alive, but also interjected their own ideological content and different technical methods. At its inception Baktrian sculpture betrays a degree of influence unique to Gandhara. When these varied traditions finally matured, the result was masterpieces of Baktrian sculpture, the likes of which have been found at Khalchayan and Dalverzin.

³⁶ Chichkina 1986, 73–74, fig. 289, 290, 293–295.

³⁷ Chichkina 1986, fig. 289.

³⁸ In the chapter entitled “Sculptural portraits” that will appear in volume III of *The Temple of the Oxos in Bactria*, I provide information about the manufacture of clay sculptures in Classical Greece.

³⁹ Bongard-Levin, Koshelenko 2005, 46–49.

The study of the art from the Temple of the Oxos allows us to conclude that it is unquestionably a Baktrian inspired temple, whose adherents included both ordinary and elite Baktrians. In addition, a significant portion of the art assembled in the sanctuary's repositories originated in Iran, Asia Minor, and the Hellenistic Mediterranean. I conclude that in the Hellenistic era up to the first century B.C. large city centers, including those with temples, like the Temple of the Oxos, served as "melting-pots," where art, technology and ideas fused to create a new intense historical and cultural synthesis, thereby becoming the Baktrian school of Kushan art. This in its turn co-existed with the school of Indo-Gandhara art. Such is just one example of the diffusion of cultural traditions. Indeed, the range of these sorts of interactions was much wider geographically than is normally credited as the latest finds of Greek mythology and iconography from Ferghana show. Moreover, there are other spheres in which Greek culture had a significant impact on the evolution of culture in Central Asia, including architecture, toreutics, coroplastics, religious and mythological themes and musical instruments among many others.

As I have mentioned, during the excavations of the Temple of the Oxos over 8,000 artifacts, apart from ceramics, were discovered. Many are represented as multiples of hundreds of copies. That is why in the second volume of *The Temple of the Oxos in Baktria* (Moscow 2001) devoted to weaponry, and the third one in the series which is forthcoming, devoted to art, I was compelled to select as the focus of my study only those pieces that I felt represent the most characteristic works of art. The volume is intended less an inventory of archaeological objects than a general description of artifacts. For example, among the most important objects of the study are weapons, which bewildered some scholars, including F. Grenet.⁴⁰ I can only hope that my French colleague has acquainted himself with inventories common to ancient Greek temples in which weaponry composes a significant part of the inventory. Having anticipated that questions about many of the objects would be raised, in the second volume of *The Temple of the Oxos in Baktria* I drew upon data from ancient literary sources concerning military detachments associated with Zoroastrian temples and related vestiges still in practice among Zoroastrians.

The settlement, where the Temple of the Oxos was erected, was enclosed in the north and south by formidable walls. The temple itself is located inside the citadel surrounded by walls and towers. Researchers in my expedition have demonstrated that the Kobadian oasis on the lower reaches of the Kafirnigan downstream from the Vakhsh adjoining the Temple of the Oxos was protected from invaders from the north. In the fifth century B.C., at about the same time as when the Kalai-mir fortress was constructed in the Kobadian oasis, another for-

⁴⁰ Grenet 2005, 377–378.

treasury was built in the middle of the Kafirnigan, subsequently known as Kalai-Kafirnigan fortress, which remained in existence until the Arab conquest. Along the Kafirnigan River a direct route connected the Kobadian oasis to the lower Vakhsh. We can assume that one of the main tasks of this fortification system was to defend the temple of Takht-i Sangin⁴¹ against any possible invasion of nomads from the north.

It is imperative that I limit my conclusion to only a few monuments, for were I to do otherwise I would have to undertake an analysis of all the material gleaned from the temple and construct a history of the evolution of the fire cult in Central Asia while also defining the nature of temple life from the first millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D. Needless to say, these considerations fall far beyond the limits of this study. I, therefore, leave them as the subjects of future investigations.

The formation of an eastern brand of Hellenistic architectural and artistic *koine* over a vast region of the Orient is seen in the development of fine arts and the subsequent “golden age” of art schools based on a common Achaemenid-Baktrian heritage. It is out of this cultural synthesis of Greeks and Baktrians that the phenomenon that we term “Graeco-Baktrian” emerged to dominate all spheres of everyday life.

My research of all the data obtained from the excavations of the Temple of the Oxos, along with data collected from other sources in Central Asia, the Middle East and the Greek world allows us to conclude the following:

1. It remains unclear as to when an identifiable Baktrian culture first formed. The Bronze Age graves on the west bank of the Vakhsh River, including the region of the Temple of the Oxos, which contain artifacts of “Vakhsh culture,” seem typologically to come from the Baktria-Margiana archaeological complex and might serve as the precursor of Baktrian culture. The enormous chronological gap, however, between this complex and Baktrian culture still needs to be bridged.

2. At the beginning of the first millennium B.C. the Elamite culture appeared in the territory of Central Asia (e.g., in Baktria and Fergana). According to P. Amiet, its appearance was evidently due to the penetration of Elamite vagrant craftsmen.

3. The Achaemenid conquest of Baktria and its organization into a satrapy resulted in the production of Achaemenid art and other forms of material culture in the region.

4. The Greeks whom the Achaemenids had deported from Ionia appeared in Baktria while it was still a satrapy. It was from this point that Greek culture rapidly spread in all spheres of everyday and spiritual life, stimulated as it were by

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the fortification system, see Litvinskii, *Kalai-Kafirnigan* (forthcoming).

two essential factors: a high standard of technology, especially in the realm of construction, and the interaction of Greek and Avestan mythology. Thus during the pre-Achaemenid and early Achaemenid period, two intense cultures appeared simultaneously in Baktria that greatly affected its cultural formation. This is a process that I have termed, “the Greek impact.”

5. The culture of Baktria from the pre-Achaemenid period to almost the end of the first millennium B.C. was heterogeneous rather than homogeneous in nature. For this epoch the term “the culture of the Baktrians” seems more appropriate than simply “Baktrian culture.”

6. The processes of adaptation, adoption and assimilation of Achaemenid and Greek culture began in the Achaemenid period and accelerated under the Seleukids and Graeco-Baktrians. The territorial and regional character of this process has already been discussed. It need only be repeated that Ai Khanoum and the Temple of the Oxos serve as excellent examples.

7. The degree of Hellenistic and Roman influence fueled by the popularity of Gandhara art in Central Asia increased during the Kushan period. In addition, we also see at this time the influence of Parthian and Palmyran art. By the beginning of the first century A.D., all these elements became so closely and creatively intertwined that it is possible to discuss a fully matured “Baktrian art.” In this context, the complexes of Khalchayan and Tillya-tepe are of paramount importance.

8. Certain elements of Hellenistic spiritual and material culture survived in Baktria and even in the whole of Central Asia throughout the period of the Kushans and the subsequent Hephtalite Empire until the Arab conquest, while architectural influence remained intact much longer.

It is clear from all this that the impact of Hellenism on Central Asian society and culture, despite the opinion of P. Briant and his supporters, consisted of many factors and was far deeper than they are prepared to accept. In conclusion, antiquity not only formed the basis of Western European civilization but it also formed the basis of a Central Asian civilization that drew heavily from its Hellenistic (and Hellenistic-Roman) roots.

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Figures

1. Takht-i Sangin. Sheath of dagger (*akinakes*). Ivory. Achaemenid period.
2. Takht-i Sangin. Alexander the Great's image on miniature makhaira sheath. Ivory.
3. Takht-i Sangin. Decoration on sheaths of ceremonial swords. Drawing after B.A. Litvinskii.
4. Takht-i Sangin. Bone plate with hunting scene. Fragment.
5. Takht-i Sangin. Bone plate with hunting scene. Dimensions 216 x 62 x 7 mm. Drawing after B.A. Litvinskii and J. Ilyasov.
6. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. General plan.
7. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building. Plan.
8. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building. Reconstruction by I. Pichikian and G. Arzumanov.
9. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Main building. Eastern façade. Reconstruction by I. Pichikian and G. Arzumanov.
10. Takht-i Sangin. Temple of the Oxos. Columned hall (*aiwan*) of the main building. View from the south.

Abstract

The Achaemenid conquest of Baktria and its organization into a satrapy resulted in the production of Achaemenid art and other forms of material culture in the region. The Greeks whom the Achaemenids had deported from Ionia appeared in Baktria while it was still a satrapy. It was from this point that Greek culture rapidly spread in all spheres of everyday and spiritual life, stimulated as it were by two essential factors: a high standard of technology, especially in the realm of construction, and the interaction of Greek and Avestan mythology. The processes of adaptation, adoption and assimilation of Achaemenid and Greek culture began in the Achaemenid period and accelerated under the Seleukids and Graeco-Baktrians. Ai Khanoum and the Temple of the Oxos serve as excellent examples.

The formation of an eastern brand of Hellenistic architectural and artistic *koine* over a vast region of the Orient is seen in the development of fine arts and the subsequent “golden age” of art schools based on a common Achaemenid-Baktrian heritage. It is out of this cultural synthesis of Greeks and Baktrians that the phenomenon that we term “Graeco-Baktrian” emerged to dominate all spheres of everyday life.

The study of the art from the Temple of the Oxos allows us to conclude that it is unquestionably a Baktrian inspired temple, whose adherents included both ordinary and elite Baktrians. In addition, a significant portion of the art assembled in the sanctuary’s repositories originated in Iran, Asia Minor, and the Hellenistic Mediterranean. In the Hellenistic era large Baktrian city centers, including those with temples, like the Temple of the Oxos, served as “melting-pots,” where art, technology and ideas fused to create a new intense historical and cultural synthesis, thereby becoming the Baktrian school of Kushan art. This in its turn co-existed with the school of Indo-Gandhara art. Greek culture had a significant impact on the evolution of culture in Central Asia, including architecture, toreutics, coroplastics, religious and mythological themes and musical instruments among many others.

The degree of Hellenistic and Roman influence fueled by the popularity of Gandhara art in Central Asia increased during the Kushan period. In addition, we also see at this time the influence of Parthian and Palmyran art. By the beginning of the first century A.D., all these elements became so closely and creatively intertwined that it is possible to discuss a fully matured “Baktrian art.” In this context, the complexes of Khalchayan and Tillya-tepe are of paramount importance.

Certain elements of Hellenistic spiritual and material culture survived in Baktria and even in the whole of Central Asia throughout the period of the Kushans and the subsequent Hepthalite Empire until the Arab conquest, while architectural influence remained intact much longer.

Antiquity not only formed the basis of Western European civilization but it also formed the basis of a Central Asian civilization that drew heavily from its Hellenistic (and Hellenistic-Roman) roots.

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