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## THE GREAT INDIAN ROAD: INDIA - CENTRAL ASIA - TRANSCAUCASIA

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The Great Silk Road which in ancient times linked the countries of the Far East with the Mediterranean area by way of Central Asia is well known to the learned and general public. Much less known is the other great trade road, also through Central Asia, that ran from India to the Mediterranean shores. Unlike the Silk Road with its predominantly overland routes, the road from India was a compound of land and waterway routes, that is, parts of the road ran over land, others along rivers, and some parts across the sea.

This road started, in all likelihood, from Taxila, the capital of Gandhara, in north-western India, and crossed the Hindu Kush range into Bactria. After this it followed the Kokcha, Kunduz Darya, and Balkhab rivers to the Oxus (Amu Darya), and then down the Oxus toward Chorasmia. At Amul, or Chardzhou, a route branched off towards Margiana, Parthyene and the Atrek valley. From Chorasmia the main route continued along the Uzboi channel to the Caspian Sea, and crossing the sea, passed on to the mouth of the Kura river (ancient Cyrus); thence along the river and through modern Azerbaijan (Caucasian Albania) and eastern Georgia (Ancient Iberia) it crossed the Surami Pass to reach the valley of the Rioni river (ancient Phasis), where the ships, if we are to trust Strabo, were dragged along the ground. In the lower course of the Phasis (western Georgia, legendary Colchis), as reported by Pseudo-Scymnus, was situated a city bearing the same name and inhabited by people of various nationalities, including Bactrians and Indians (*Ad Nicomedem regem*, 934 [F 20]).



Thence by the Euxine the road led to the Greek cities of the Black Sea region and so ultimately to South-East Europe. No single or collective name for the entire trans-continental road in question has as yet been formulated. Scholars who have studied this route have given names only to separate parts of its long course, for instance, the 'Oxo-Caspian trade-route' (W.W. Tarn), the 'Caspian sea-route' (A.S. Balakhvantsev), or the 'Road of Strabo' (the last explaining neither the function of the road, nor its significance, or its considerable length).

In contrast to the Silk Road, the general direction of which, in Graeco-Roman sources, is always described as being from west to east (for example, in the itinerary of Maes Titianus), the description of our road, in the same sources, is given as east (from India) to west. From the same sources we also know that this road was used exclusively for transmitting Indian goods. It is in view of this that the name 'Great Indian Road' is here suggested.

There is good reason to believe that in the old days the road from Gandhara moved not only westwards, but also eastwards to south-west China. This is indicated by the report of Zhang Qian in which he says that during his mission in Central Asia (between 139 and 129 B.C.) he saw, in the markets of Baktria, bamboo and cloth from Shu, which, as the merchants told him, had been purchased in Shendu, not far from Shu. According to present knowledge, Shu corresponds to the province of Sichuan in China, whereas Shendu incorporated the territory of north-eastern India, parts of Burma, and Yunnan (a province in the south-west of China on the border with Vietnam).

There already existed, therefore, before the emergence of the 'Silk Road', a route between Baktria and south-west China that was used for commerce by Baktrian and Chinese merchants.

The Baktrian merchants seem to have travelled from Baktria through Gandhara and Kashmir, and then along the valleys of the Jumna and Ganges rivers to Burma, from whence they reached the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China.

Judging from a number of sources, the Great Indian Road took shape much earlier than the Great Silk Road. Hence it was the Indian Road that was the first trans-continental thoroughfare in the history of civilizations, which linked the Mediterranean world to Transcaucasia, Central Asia, Iberia, and possibly to China.

Like many other grand trade highways in antiquity, the Indian Road emerged only in sections, over several stages, the opening up which was the work of various ethnic peoples, those from Hindustan, Baktria, Chorasmia, as well as the peoples of Transcaucasia – Albanians, Iberians and Colchians.

The unification of all its parts into a single trade route seems to have been initiated by the Hellenes, starting with the legendary seafaring Argonauts' voyage to Colchis, the journey of Jason to the Caspian Sea, and the expedition of Alexander the Great with his army which opened up the riverine and overland routes from Central Asia to India, also the voyage of Patrokles commissioned by

Seleukos to explore the Caspian Sea. This paper presents the author's interpretation of some ancient textual and numismatic data which point to the relationship which existed between Central Asia and Transcaucasia in the Hellenistic and pre-Hellenistic periods.

## Baktrian traders in the south of China

As mentioned above, Zhang Qian in his report made to emperor Wudi (140–86) on returning from a trip to the Western Regions, wrote that in Daxia (Baktria) he had seen bamboo staffs and cloth made in the province of Shu, which the merchants told him they had brought from Shendu. He continues by saying that if Chinese emissaries were to go through the lands of the Qiang people, the latter would get angry, and if they were to go along the north, Chinese envoys would be caught by the Xiongnu (Huns). Zhang Qian concludes that it might be better therefore to take the route direct from Shu, because this route was not subject to raid.<sup>1</sup>

Shu, as mentioned before, is the ancient name of the present Sichuan province in south-western China, covering the Middle and Upper Yangtze areas, while Shendu, situated several thousand *li* to the south-west of Shu, occupied the territory of north-eastern India, the northern regions of Burma (Myanmar), and the western part of the Chinese province of Yunnan which is to the south of Shu (Sichuan) and abuts upon Burma in the west.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in view of the aggressiveness of the Qiang people who lived east of Tibet and the upper reaches of the Mekong and Salween rivers, and the threat of the Xiongnu hostility from the north, the best way to reach Daxia was to go direct from Shu to Shendu and thence on to Daxia, thus following the route used originally by Baktrian traders, from whom apparently Zhang Qian learnt about it.

It was quite natural therefore that the Chinese should have used the route by which the Baktrian merchants used to send their goods to north-eastern India and southern China.

Subsequently, Emperor Wudi ordered envoys to be sent from Shu and Jianwei, to search out and explore this route, from four different tracks passing over the domains of Di and Zuo in the north and Sui and Kunming in the south. It is reported, however, that the Chinese envoys failed to pass through Kunming, because its inhabitants, who had no king, were inclined to plundering and killing.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, one thousand *li* from Sui and Kunming there was the kingdom of Dian/Dianyue, where the inhabitants rode elephants, and which was some-

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<sup>1</sup> Bichurin 1950, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Bichurin 1950, 153

<sup>3</sup> Liu 2006, 7.

times used by the merchants from Shu, going secretly abroad for trade.<sup>4</sup> It would appear that the kingdom of Dian was to the east of India. Emperor Wudi was therefore seeking to first make contact with Dian, but after more than one fruitless attempts he decided to postpone this plan.

Meanwhile, Zhang Qian, who would seem to be the best aware of the routes leading from south China via India to Baktria, and probably of a track from Baktria westwards to the Caspian and Black Seas, persisted in exploring the routes from southern China into Baktria. Therefore, when he reported for a second time the possibility of entering Daxia (Baktria), attention was turned again towards the south-western neighbours.<sup>5</sup> We can infer from all this that there were several old roads from southern China into Baktria, from Shu (Sichuan), through Burma and northern India, or across Tibet and along the Himalayas, which had been in existence since time immemorial, used by Baktrian and Chinese traders before the Chinese expansion into the Western Regions under the Han dynasty, and before Han China opened up a network of traffic and routes, both in the north and in the southwest, to make contact with the Western lands, and in particular with India and Baktria.

Products imported into Baktria from China along these roads, as Zhang Qian notes, were cloth and bamboos. Bichurin states that Sichuan cloth was made of water cane and that the kind of bamboo which Zhang Qian saw in Baktria, known in China as *xiang-zhu* (Bichurin's "зян-чжу"), grew in Ya-zhou Fu in the Xiaoxiang mountains in the south of China.<sup>6</sup> A list of Chinese exports may have included other items as well, in particular those using silk. It is not impossible that the remains of garments made in Chinese silk, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which have been found near Stuttgart in Germany,<sup>7</sup> might well have arrived there along the Great Indian Road all the way from southern China, the principal silk-producing culture, by way of India and Baktria, and thence across the Caspian and Black Seas.

According to the Chinese researcher Zhijuan Liu, 'The earliest marine silk road across the South China Sea began with the land silk road in southern China. This started in Sichuan, and went through Yunnan via the region south of Yongchang (modern Baoshan) and ran along the Irrawaddy river until it arrived in Yangon (Rangoon). The route continued westward to India, and then crossed the Indian Ocean to either the Central Asian continent or to the Roman Empire'.<sup>8</sup> O.P. Kobzeva believes that Sichuan was traversed by one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Bichurin 1950, 154.

<sup>5</sup> Bichurin 1950, 154.

<sup>6</sup> Bichurin 1950, 153, n. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Liu 2006, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Zhijuan Liu 2006, 79.

routes of the Silk Road, a route little known to European scholars, which ran across Yunnan, northern Burma and along the Brahmaputra river to India, and thence along the Ganges to the Iranian plateau. This route, as she suggests, came into being more than 3000 years ago.<sup>9</sup>

In Mauryan times (317–180), especially under the great king Ashoka (268–239), whose power extended from the Bay of Bengal in the south-east till as far as Gandhara and the Kandahar region in the north-west, the most important line of communication was the route which led from the Mauryan capital Pataliputra (Patna) on the Ganges river through the Gangetic plain to Taxila (capital of Gandhara), and thence to Baktria. According to the Indian scholar, R. Thapar, this road was called the ‘Royal Highway’, and is the ‘Grand Trunk Road’ of India today.<sup>10</sup>

The Mauryas are known to have developed intensive inter-relations with the Seleukid and Graeco-Baktrian kingdoms. An ambassador of Seleukos I Megasthenes, who wrote the work *Indica* partially preserved in Arrian, spent much time at the court of Chandragupta (317–293), the founder of the Indian Maurya dynasty, in Pataliputra.<sup>11</sup>

If we now recall that under Seleukos I and his son, the first Antiochos (281–261), endeavours were made to have the road from India to the Caspian and Black Seas explored, we may assume that Megasthenes also surveyed the road from the south-east in the lower Ganges, where it met the road from Shu, China.

A number of scholars offer rather weighty arguments for the existence of early contacts between India and southern China. N. Barnard, for example, maintains that the lost-wax bronze casting technique was adopted in Yunnan from India. He relied on his survey of the bronze articles of the Zhou state of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. that encompassed the central and southern parts of China. Another sign of these contacts are the finds of cowries unearthed in tombs in southern China.<sup>12</sup>

Another hypothesis gave rise to heated discussions. The hypothesis, as put forward by several scholars, including Cheng and Schwitter, is that the nickel which was used in the copper-nickel coins of the Baktrian Greek kings Euthydemos II, Pantaleon, Agathokles, and Eukratides was mined in Yunnan, China, and then transported to Baktria.<sup>13</sup> The hypothesis has been severely criticised by S. Cammann.<sup>14</sup> F. Widemann addresses the issue substantially in his funda-

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<sup>9</sup> Kobzeva 2009, 129.

<sup>10</sup> Thapar 1973, 81–82.

<sup>11</sup> Bongard-Levin 2000, 36; Bongard-Levin, Bukharin, Vigasin 2002, 48–138.

<sup>12</sup> Widemann 2009, 80.

<sup>13</sup> Cheng, Schwitter 1957, 351–365.

<sup>14</sup> Cammann 1958, 409–414.

mental monograph, setting out the pros and cons of the arguments proposed by various scholars.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence, albeit indirect, of a passage from India to south-western China can be found in the biography of the famous Buddhist preacher, Kang Senghui, Sogdian by birth, which has been preserved in the chronicle by Huei-chiao. Here it is said that his ancestors had gone from Sogdia and settled in India; later Kang Senghui's father moved to Jiaozhi, i.e. northern Vietnam, where he did business. This leads to the conclusion that he reached northern Vietnam either by a long sea-route, or by the shorter land-route from India through south-west China.<sup>16</sup>

There is enough archaeological and historical evidence to suggest that communication between Central Asia and south-west China continued to be active in the early medieval period. In the first place, there is an inscription in stone written in vertical Sogdian script with carved depictions of crosses which was discovered in Ladakh, on the Kashmir and Tibet frontier, which states: "Year 210. I came from the interior. The Samarkand slave [of God] Noshfarn shall go to the Kagan of Tibet" (translation by V.A. Livshits). The inscription, dated to the Sasanian Era to King Yazdegird III, corresponds to the year 841/842 A.D.<sup>17</sup>

Another piece of evidence, of an even earlier date, which supports this assumption, is provided by a silver vessel with a Sogdian inscription recovered in the Chinese province of Canton near the border with Vietnam together with coins of Peroz (459–481). According to Y. Yoshida, the inscription on the vessel reads as follows: "This vessel belongs to [...] sp of the Chach people (Weight) 42 staters."<sup>18</sup>

Chach (Shash in Arab times) embraced the territory of the modern Tashkent region of Uzbekistan and the southern regions of modern Kazakhstan. It is noteworthy that a silver vessel, found in the village of Kerchevo in the Urals, also bears a Sogdian inscription affirming the direct association of the vessel with a Chach ruler named S'w.<sup>19</sup> A tamga which appears on all these vessels is similar to the one on the coins of Chach of the mid-3<sup>rd</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., including the coins of Zabbag and Wanun, the founders of the Chach dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

Archaeological confirmation of the connection between Sogdia with southern China comes from a Nestorian inscription (707–709) found in Guilin (south

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<sup>15</sup> Widemann 2009, 75–101.

<sup>16</sup> Huei-chiao 1991, 110–116; Rtveladze 1998, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Sims-Williams 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Yoshida 1996, 73–74.

<sup>19</sup> Livshits, Lukonin 1964, 170–172.

<sup>20</sup> Rtveladze 2008, 64–75.

China) which mentions some ‘An Cheng’. Judging from the first part of his name – ‘An’, he was a native of Bukhara.<sup>21</sup>

*Manshu* (a book on the Barbarians in southern China), compiled by Fan Chuo sometime during the Tang period (7<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.), contains a description of two routes leading into Burma and India which started from Yanshan on the Salween river in the province of Yunnan.

The northern route traversed the plains of Burma, from whence it went, after crossing the Black mountains, to the confluence of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. The southern route was down the Irrawaddy river and went first to the Pyū settlement in Mandalay, the royal capital of Burma under Tang rule. After Pyū it continued to the junction of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, where it joined the northern route. From there the road passed on through the Ganges and Jumna valleys and then via Mathura (Muttra) and Sagala (Sialkot)<sup>22</sup> to Taxila (near Rawalpindi), following the old Royal Highway of the Mauryan period and what is now the Grand Trunk Road.

### **Indicomardana. The city of Indian men**

The migration of Indians into the Oxus valley along the Great Indian Road is attested in Ptolemy, who mentions the city of Indicomardana among those situated between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Iaxartes (Ptol. 6.12), the name of which I.V. Piankov has translated with good reason as ‘the city of Indian people’.<sup>23</sup> The name Indicomardana is derived from the racial name for the peoples of Hindustan, and the word ‘mard’ means ‘man’ in the languages of Iranian origin, with the suffix ‘an’ indicating the plural form of the noun. Consequently, it is possible to translate the name, on the strength of I.V. Piankov, as ‘the city of Indian people’ or rather ‘the city of Indian men’. In this case, identifying Indicomardana with an ancient city-site requires that the name of the site should correspond to ‘Indicomardana’, and also that at least some or rather plenty of artefacts of Indian origin should have been found there. I.V. Piankov places Indicomardana at the site of Airtam, seemingly because certain Buddhist monuments have been uncovered there, of which the most striking is the famous relief frieze.<sup>24</sup>

However, archaeological considerations alone propose a better candidate for the identification of Indicomardana. This would be Ancient Tarmita (Old Termez), a repository of Buddhist constructions, in particular the grandiose Karatepa and

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<sup>21</sup> Yoshida 1996, 75.

<sup>22</sup> Widemann 2009, 86–87 (Carte figure 4–3).

<sup>23</sup> Piankov 1982.

<sup>24</sup> Masson 1933; 1935; Pugachenkova 1991/92, 23–43.



Faiaztepa monasteries, which surpass those at Airtam in both number and significance.<sup>25</sup> Yet the main point is that it is precisely at this place where a large number of inscriptions in Sanskrit and Prakrit were discovered, written in the Kharoshthi and Brahmi scripts, and which date from the first centuries A.D., i.e. the time of Ptolemy's *Geography*. The inscriptions have been thoroughly surveyed by V.V. Vertogradova,<sup>26</sup> and bear witness to the permanent establishment of people of Indian origin in ancient Tarmita, including members of a Buddhist religious community, laymen: traders, and also people from other social groups.

Nevertheless, all the cities of Bactria listed in Ptolemy's *Geography* have been identified, and Tarmita is not among them, although, as explicitly proved by W.W. Tarn, it was known by the name of 'Antiochia Tarmita' in the time of Antiochos I (281–261).<sup>27</sup> Ptolemy, in my opinion, depending on Marinus of Tyre who had relied in turn on Maes Titianus' itinerary, could hardly not have known the name 'Tarmita', but he used instead its other name 'Indicomardana', probably because it was widely used at the time, in the first centuries A.D., alongside the name 'Tarmita', because of the considerable Indian population dwelling in the city.

A parallel to the name 'Indicomardana', or 'the city of Indian men', has been detected in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In texts and coins of this period, Termez was often referred to as '*madinat ar-ridjal*' meaning 'the men's city'<sup>28</sup> which reflected, according to M.E. Masson, the manly qualities of bravery and courage of the city dwellers. It is possible that the appellation of Termez as '*madinat ar-ridjal*', irrespective of whether the brave city dwellers were Indians or not, became the traditional name for Termez, handed on from generation to generation for centuries.

## The Chorasmian king Pharasmanes and the ancient Georgian tribe of Colchians

There is a well-known story preserved in Arrian which concerns the Chorasmian king Pharasmanes (or Phrataphernes, in another account), Alexander the Great, and the Colchians – an ancient tribe of Georgian origin (their descendants being reputedly the Mingrelians), which inhabited the western part of modern Georgia known as Colchis.

The story goes that in 328 B.C. Alexander the Great received in his camp Pharasmanes, the king of Chorasmians, accompanied by cavalry numbering of one and a half thousand horsemen. Pharasmanes told Alexander that his lands bordered

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<sup>25</sup> KT-1; KT-2; KT-3; KT-4; KT-5; Albaum 1976, 43–46; Albaum 1974, 53–58.

<sup>26</sup> Vertogradova 1995; Vorobeva-Desiatovskaia 1983, 22–97.

<sup>27</sup> Tarn 1940, 90–94.

<sup>28</sup> Bartold 1965, 507 (s.v. Termez).

on the Colchians and Amazons and that should Alexander wish, after defeating the Colchians and Amazons, to conquer also the tribes round the Euxine, he would show him the way to the sea and supply whatever forces were required. Alexander thanked Pharasmanes and concluded a friendly alliance, but refused to march to the Euxine, regarding this as untimely (Arr. 4.15). This story, as narrated by S.P. Tolstov, has long attracted the attention of scholars. A. von Gutschmid and V.V. Bartold held it to indicate that the Chorasmian dominion stretched as far as the south-eastern part of eastern Europe. Thus V.V. Bartold wrote: 'Chorasmia and the south-eastern part of present-day Europe of the time..., so also under the sway of Mongols, were parts of a whole'.<sup>29</sup> W.W. Tarn, however, treated this claim quite negatively.<sup>30</sup> S.P. Tolstov, on the contrary, developed V.V. Bartold's idea to an even greater extent, stating that Pharasmanes had extended his power over the countries along the Volga river, and saw in the great expansion of the Sarmatians in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. 'a guiding hand of Chorasmian kings'.<sup>31</sup> But these are a priori guesses, unconfirmed by literary evidence. Moreover, such a political position of Chorasmia, which in no way accounts for Chorasmia being contiguous with the Colchians, is definitely contradicted by the fact that the huge expanses of steppes, and the foothills and mountainous terrain of the Caucasus mountains which lay between Colchis and the Volga river were occupied by the Sarmatians in the east,<sup>32</sup> and in the west by the Sindi and Maetotae who beyond any doubt had never been subject to Chorasmia.<sup>33</sup>

We shall consider the testimony of Arrian in quite another way. Legend has it, as has survived in Pliny (born in 23/24 A.D.), that the Albanians were the descendants of Jason (Pliny 6.15/38–39) – a legendary hero, the leader of the Argonauts, who set out for Colchis in his quest for the Golden Fleece which he retrieved with the help of Medea, daughter of the Colchian king Aetes. Still earlier, Strabo (64 B.C.–c. 20 A.D.) wrote that Jason himself, when he travelled to Colchis, wandered as far as the Caspian Sea and visited Iberia, Albania, most of Armenia and Media, where was situated a temple of Jason which, as Strabo points out, is sufficient proof of his sojourn in the country. Subsequently Medea ruled with Jason in the region. Medus, her son, 'is said to have been her successor in the kingdom, and the country to have been called after his name' (Strab. 11.13.10). Incidentally, Strabo was one of the first ancient authors to mention the Albanians, whom he places between the Caucasus mountains and the lower Cyrus, just on the coast of the Caspian Sea. Pliny has the same geography for the Albanian dispersal.

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<sup>29</sup> Bartold 1965, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Tarn 1985, 81, 83.

<sup>31</sup> Tolstov 1949, 108–109.

<sup>32</sup> Vinogradov 1979.

<sup>33</sup> *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza* 1988, 72–84.

Legends cannot of course be taken to be authentic historical sources. However, a legend cited by an ancient author who lived close to the time of the events described, and which can further be underpinned by toponymical evidence, could well allude to an historical event associated with the advance of the Greeks and Colchians toward the Caspian Sea, which was only five days distant from Colchis (Strab. 11.7.3).

If even the Baktrians and the Indians, as Pseudo-Scymnus writes, could traverse great expanses and settle in the city of Phasis close to the Black Sea, what would it have cost the Colchians to cross much shorter distances and reach the Caspian? There is, to my thinking, nothing strange in this.

The words of Pharasmanes addressed to Alexander regarding his country bordering on the Colchians may well reflect the political situation of the times, i.e. in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Chorasmia at that time, as stated by A.S. Balakhvantsev, was a mighty and independent state which had already passed out of Achaemenid hands, at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., that is long before Alexander's campaigns of conquest.<sup>34</sup> Its sphere of influence extended as far west as the Caspian Sea, and Chorasmia was probably in control of the waterway linking the Oxus to the Caspian by way of the Uzboi channel.

The Colchian state in the 6<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., as the investigations of Georgian historians have shown, was the most powerful state in Transcaucasia. It embraced the whole territory of modern western and south-western Georgia in the west till the Surami range in the east which divided Eastern (Iberia) from Western (Colchis) Georgia inhabited by the Saspeirians and Colchians respectively.<sup>35</sup> It is no accident that Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) names only three tribes – Colchians, Saspeirians, and Medes – as living in the territory between the Caspian and the Black Sea.

Among the notices of Herodotus, is one that says 'from Colchis it is not far to pass over to Media' (Herod. 1.104) which occupied by then the territory up to the Caspian. This testifies very clearly that there was a route between the Black Sea and the Caspian which was in use already in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and possibly even earlier (if one gives credit to the legends about Jason's journey: 8<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.). That is, at the same time that the waterway along the Uzboi from the Oxus (in Chorasmia) into the Caspian Sea was in use.

Present-day scholars propose that communication between the Oxus and the Caspian Sea was possible by way of the Uzboi channel, and which at that time and right up to the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. carried a great volume of water down to the Caspian and was navigable. The Chorezmian archaeological and ethnographical expedition, including the Turkmen archaeologist Kh. Iusupov,

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<sup>34</sup> Balakhlantsev 2006, 376.

<sup>35</sup> Lordkipanidze 1989, 219–256; Lordkipanidze 1978.

revealed that both shores of the Uzboi were inhabited from the I millennium B.C. to the early centuries A.D. They also excavated the Parthian stronghold of Igdy-kala, which had been built in the extreme north of the Parthian state with a view, as Kh. Yusupov suggests, to control the river traffic.<sup>36</sup> That there existed a trade waterway from Central Asia down the Oxus into the Caspian and thence up the Cyrus river and down the Phasis to the Black Sea is further supported by the recent discoveries at Ichan-depe and Kalali-Gyr of pottery ware from Caucasian workshops.<sup>37</sup>

Taken together, these facts prove, to my mind, that the Chorasmian king Pharasmanes, challenging Alexander to fight the Colchians and offering to guide him to the Euxine, knew of or intended to take the shorter and easier route to the Black Sea by way of the Caspian and Transcaucasia,<sup>38</sup> rather than the difficult and circuitous route which went from Chorasmia over the steppes, and thence, skirting the Caspian, to Ciscaucasia, and then crossing the Caucasus mountains to Colchis. The evidence also testifies that already in the mid-I millennium B.C. there was in existence the great waterway from Central Asia to Transcaucasia, the Black Sea, and the regions beyond.

### The Baktrians and Indians in the city of Phasis

There is a very important piece of information in Pseudo-Scymnus, which has generally been omitted by scholars. The first scholar to take note of it was P. Leriche,<sup>39</sup> with reference to whom I have also used it as proof of the existence of the Great Indian Road.<sup>40</sup> P. Leriche kindly communicated to me that in the *Géographes Grecs* published in Paris in 2000, edited by D. Marcotte, which comprises Pseudo-Scymnus' work *The Circumnavigation of the Earth*,<sup>41</sup> there is a description in particular of the territory from the Strait of Gibraltar till the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Pseudo-Scymnus dedicated this work to either Nikomedes II (149–127) or to Nikomedes III of Bithynia (127–97). It can thus be dated, as D. Marcotte concludes, in the period between 133–110/107 B.C.

According to Pseudo-Scymnus (*Ad Nicomedem regem*, 934 [F 20]), the Baktrians used to travel, in particular to the west, because at Phasis on the river Phasis there was a 'Greek city of Milesian origin, where men of sixty nations come

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<sup>36</sup> Iusupov 1984, 77–97.

<sup>37</sup> Vainberg 1994, 67–81.

<sup>38</sup> Balakhlantsev 2005, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Leriche 2007, 122.

<sup>40</sup> Rtveladze 2009 (in print).

<sup>41</sup> Marcotte 2000.

together, speaking different languages: men of Barbarian origin from India and Baktria would meet there'.<sup>42</sup>

The testimony of Pseudo-Scymnus indicates that as early as even before the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in Phasis, the main city of Colchis, there appears to have been founded a trading station of Baktrians and Indians, which proves, in spite of the doubts proclaimed by many scholars, not only the actual existence but also the operation of a great trans-continental thoroughfare from India through Baktria to the eastern coast of the Black Sea prior at any rate to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

## Graeco-Baktrian coins in Transcaucasia

Graeco-Baktrian coins have been discovered in the Kura valley and other nearby sites. These finds, albeit extremely rare, have been recorded by E.A. Pakhomov; onwards their number increased insignificantly. Most of the Graeco-Baktrian coins are those reported from Kabala and Tbilisi.

**Kabala – the capital city of Caucasian Albania.** A hoard which included five Graeco-Baktrian coins (one tetradrachm of Diodotos and four tetradrachms of Eukratides) was found here in 1952.<sup>43</sup>

**Tbilisi.** A hoard of six Graeco-Baktrian coins was found by accident while building a girls' high school in 1874. An analysis of the circumstances connected with the find and close examination of fifteen Graeco-Baktrian coins from the collection of the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia led A.S. Balakhvantsev to conclude that the hoard comprised four tetradrachms of Euthydemos I, one commemorative tetradrachm of Agathokles, which was minted in the name of Antiochos II, and one tetradrachm of Eukratides.<sup>44</sup> The holdings of the Museum also contain nine Graeco-Baktrian coins<sup>45</sup> which could well have been found also in Transcaucasia.

Also notable in this connection is the private collection of a resident of Essentuki, I.D. Malyujenko, in which alongside a large number of Hellenistic coins there are also Graeco-Baktrian coins which he acquired from the locals of Azerbaijan and Georgia before the Russian Revolution, and which I examined in the 1960's.

Many explanations have been put forward to explain the presence of Graeco-Baktrian coins in Transcaucasia. S.A. Dadasheva, for example, supposed that they had found their way into Kabala through Media and indicated a military alliance between Eukratides and Timarchos, the Seleukid satrap in Media (whose

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<sup>42</sup> Leriche 2007, 122, n. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Dadasheva 1976, 106–109.

<sup>44</sup> Balakhvantsev 2005, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Bernard 1985, 55–71.

coins are similar to those of Eukratides) against the common enemy, the Parthian king Mithridates I. She also made a conjecture that Eukratides supported his ally financially, and that this eventually created the conditions for Timarchos to start minting his own coins imitating those of Eukratides.<sup>46</sup>

A.S. Balakhvantsev, however, considered that the Graeco-Baktrian coins could have made their way into Transcaucasia by way of the route using the Caspian Sea, and not along the northern area and around the Caspian and Ciscaucasia, where none such coins have been found, that is, not through Media.<sup>47</sup>

The appearance of Graeco-Baktrian coins so distant from their place of manufacture, in Transcaucasia in particular, was very likely bound up with the considerable actual value of the coins, which was due to their high silver content. They may have been used, in distant lands, not as money, but as trade-pieces or as a medium of exchange.

All the above instances offer evidence for doubtless contacts between the peoples of Central Asia and the peoples of Transcaucasia. The Chorasmians were fully aware of the ancient Georgian tribe of Colchians already in the last third part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and probably from much earlier, and most likely because of the existence of the Caspian Sea-route. The Baktrians found themselves living in Phasis – the principal city of Colchis situated at the mouth of the Phasis river as it entered the Black Sea. The intercourse between the Chorasmians and the Colchians developed both via overland and maritime routes – using the Caspian route, which could be arrived at by three main routes along Central Asian rivers: 1) along the Kelif Uzboi and Oxus into Margiana where it joined the route from Amul; 2) along the Oxus up to Amul and then to Margiana (Merv), Parthyene and the valley of the Atrek river, which flows into the Caspian; 3) along the Oxus to Chorasmia and thence to the Caspian by way of the Uzboi.

Judging by the find-spots of Graeco-Baktrian coins, the major route from the Oxus to the Caspian was the first, and especially the second route, for on it have been found 24 Graeco-Baktrian coins (Old Merv/Gyaur-kala) – 20 specimens, Garry-Kyariz – 1 specimen, Nisa – 2 specimens),<sup>48</sup> while on the third route only three Graeco-Baktrian coins have been uncovered over all the years of excavation in Chorasmia.<sup>49</sup> The second route reached the mouth of the Atrek river, from where Turkmen seafarers set sail on the Caspian in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>46</sup> Dadasheva 1976, 108–109.

<sup>47</sup> Balakhlantsev 2005, 36.

<sup>48</sup> A portion of the route from Parthyene into Margiana is described in detail by Isidore of Charax (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.), see Schoff 1914. The stations along the route are identified by M.E. Masson 1951, 27–31. On the Graeco-Bactrian coins found along the route, see Smirnova 1999, 246.

<sup>49</sup> Vainberg 1977.

I suspect that it was from this point that the maritime route of the Great Indian Road began to be used to cross the Caspian Sea and to continue along the Kura (Cyrus) valley to the Black Sea.

Everything stated above indicates the importance of the Great Indian Road, and calls for the need for further profound and thorough study of the history of the formation and the operation of this great thoroughfare on the basis of archaeological, literary, and other sources.

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## Abstract

The Great Silk Road which in ancient times linked the countries of the Far East with the Mediterranean area by way of Central Asia is well known to the learned and general public. Much less known is the other great trade road, also through Central Asia, that ran from India to the Mediterranean shores. Unlike the Silk Road with its predominantly overland routes, the road from India was a compound of land and waterway routes. This road started from Taxila, the capital of Gandhara, in north-western India, and crossed the Hindu Kush range into Baktria. After this it followed the Kokcha, Kunduz Darya, and Balkhab rivers to the Oxus (Amu Darya), and then down the Oxus toward Chorasmia. At Amul, or Chardzhou, a route branched off towards Margiana, Parthyene and the Atrek valley. From Chorasmia the main route continued along the Uzboi channel to the Caspian Sea, and crossing the sea, passed on to the mouth of the Kura river (ancient Cyrus); thence along the river and through modern Azerbaijan (Caucasian Albania) and eastern Georgia (Ancient Iberia) it crossed the Surami Pass to reach the valley of the Rioni river (ancient Phasis). In the lower course of the Phasis (western Georgia, legendary Colchis) was situated a city bearing the same name and inhabited by people of various nationalities, including Baktrians and Indians. Thence by the Euxine the road led to the Greek cities of the Black Sea region and so ultimately to South-East Europe. The available data indicate the importance of the Great Indian Road, and calls for the need for further profound and thorough study of the history of the formation and the operation of this great thoroughfare on the basis of archaeological, literary, and other sources.

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