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ZARIASPA AND THE “KUNDUZ” HOARDS

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I. Faults in Ptolemy’s *Geography*

Ptolemy (Klaudios Ptolemaios, ca. AD 100–180), was the author of works on astronomy (*Almagest*), geography (*Geographike Hyphegesis*), and other sciences. He was accused of dilettantism early on. In 1817, J.B.J. Delambre demonstrated the inadequacy of the geographical methods used and the unreliability of the positions given, even for places near Alexandria.¹ In 1977, R.R. Newton published the book “The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy,” in which he tore Ptolemy’s astronomical work to shreds, partly based on Delambre.² W. Ekschmitt quotes other modern authors in this vein, most of whom disparage the *Almagest* rather than the *Geography*, which has gained some respect for its wealth of geographical names, many of which have since fallen into oblivion.³

However, this leniency soon came to an end when members of the Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (DAFA) began searching for the ancient name of the formerly magnificent city of Ai Khanum, which it

¹ Delambre 1817, II, 520–543.

² Newton 1977.

³ Ekschmitt 1989, 174. For the sixth book on Bactria, Humbach / Faiss 1998 created a critical edition. The maps are topographically retraced in Humbach / Ziegler / Faiss 2002. For most references and the other chapters, the new complete edition by Stückelberger / Graßhoff 2025 was used.

had started to document. Despite careful excavations and excellent reports (*Mémoires*, MAFA), no clear solution regarding the ancient name could be found. Ptolemy's *Geographike*, with its related maps, covered Bactria, but to decide which one of the names it contained relates to Ai Khanum was all but clear. P. Bernard and H.-P. Francfort opted for Oxiana *or* Alexandria Oxiane (cf. map, fig. 4), admitting that the latter could also refer to Termez.⁴ They are only decided that neither term can stand for Takht-i Sangin. In contrast, Ptolemy's map allows for only Oxiana. It was F. Grenet and C. Rapin who, in 1998, tried to understand how the seeming disorder can be explained.⁵ Since a place termed "*Baktra basileon*" was found in the south-east instead of the south-west of Bactria, and Samarkand (*Marakanda*) south instead of north of the Oxus, the map of Ptolemy was declared to be "incomprehensible"⁶ and his work was called "distorted", "une source de confusion plutôt que de progress."⁷ Ten years later, É. de la Vaissière (2009) demonstrated that a similar chaos prevailed in the map east of the Pamir, which could be attributed to the work of an author who did not realize that the lists of sites he received contained duplicate entries with divergent geodata.⁸ Such duplicates are also found in India, where we find Ujjain-Ujjayinī twice⁹ as well as Paithan-Pratisthāna.¹⁰ The differences in diction and position prove that several informants with variant linguistic and geotechnical skills were at work. All this is granted and occurs more often the farther away the site is from the Roman Empire.

Bactria was the penultimate region before the Chinese trading posts that could be reached from Rome. The country benefited from Greek settlements for around three centuries. During the Hellenistic period, there was an intense exchange between Greece and Bactria. There were diligent geographers, foremost among them Marinus of Tyre, who worked with merchants who knew precisely how many days it took to travel from one station to the next based on the tariffs for pack animals. This intensive long-distance trade with Bactria may have actually prevented many of the errors for which Ptolemy is criticized today.

⁴ Bernard / Francfort 1978, 5.

⁵ Grenet / Rapin 1998.

⁶ Rapin 1998, *passim*.

⁷ Gorshenina in Gorshenina / Rapin 2015, 114.

⁸ De la Vaissière 2009.

⁹ *Geogr.* 7.1.60 Oxoamis at 115°30E, 22°20N; 7.1.63 Ozēnē at 117E, 20N.

¹⁰ *Geogr.* 7.1.64 Patistama at 121E, 25N; 7.1.82 Baithana at 117E, 18°10'N.

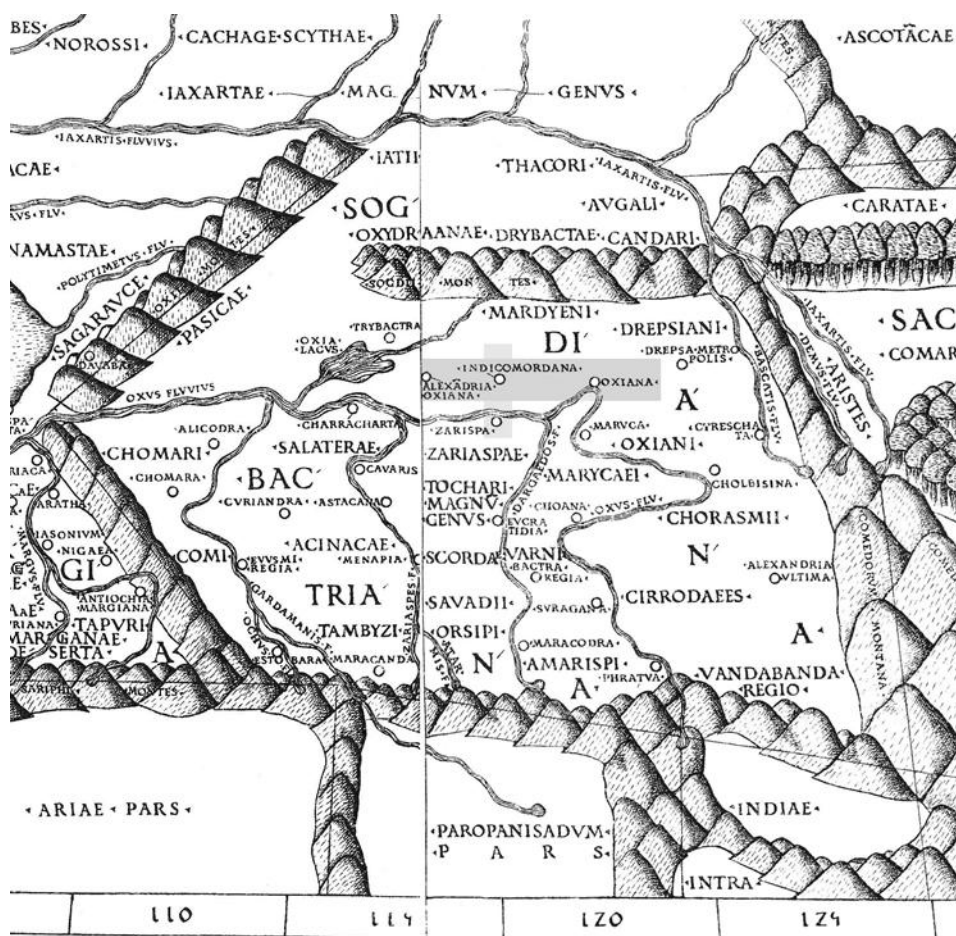


Fig. 1. Pamir: Map “7 of Asia”, illustrating Bactria in the *Geography* of Ptolemy.

It was fashioned in the early 15th century, preserving traits of the original (Nordenskiöld 1889). Running north from the Hindu Kush (Paropamisad), four rivers drain Baktria: 1) the Balkhāb (Ochus), 2) the Zariaspes (Khulmāb), 3) the Dargaedos (Kunduzāb), and 4) the Oxus (Warduĵ, Kokcha, Amu Darya). Note the gray crossed section containing Alexandria Oxiana (Kampyr Tepe?), Indicomordana (Kobardan), Zariaspa (Khisht Tepe), and Oxiana (Ai Khanum).

Frantz Grenet and Claude Rapin, who are most eagerly engaged in rearranging Ptolemy's map of Bactria, assume that some modern authors do not understand these processes, having therefore fallen into a trap of credulity.¹¹ As a remedy, they mirror some locations on the map from top to bottom and others from left to right to approximate the ancient realities they have in mind.

¹¹ Grenet / Rapin (1998, 81a) imagine a “prison of a ‘conservative’ interpretation of Ptolemy’s map”, as if a revolutionary interpretation were by its own nature flawless.

Ptolemy certainly made mistakes, as the two scholars suspect, but not all of their examples withstand closer scrutiny. In other words, I am voluntarily falling into the trap of credulity and would like to show that many of the relocated places are better off where Ptolemy saw them.

Regarding the historical aspects that depend on the relocated sites and rivers, the reconstructions of my French author friends and colleagues are mentioned occasionally in the following. However, a detailed comparison and discussion of the historical events would extend the essay to the length of a book, which would not serve anyone. Methodologically, Jeffrey D. Lerner's assessment seems accurate in that Rapin "anticipated the result and constructed it from the desired rotation."¹² Lerner's essay contains all the points of reference that I omit here.

In my opinion, very few of the new allocations made by French scholars are acceptable. In many cases, my concept of leaving a place where Ptolemy had positioned it led to alternative solutions or reconfirmed traditional identification. My view is based on the consideration that three centuries of personal contact between Greeks and Macedonians with Bactria cannot result in a completely unusable map. A work as enormous as Ptolemy's can never be free of errors, whether trivial or gross. Every modern commentator must also take this risk, hopefully with a lower error rate.

II. The Ochus Problem

When Alexander invaded Bactriane in 329 BC he was accustomed to considering the Oxus river, the modern Amu Darya, as the northern border of this country. The land north of the river belonged to Sogdiane. Within Bactria, three rivers were known to approach the Oxus (Ὠξος)¹³ from the Hindu Kush range in its south. From west to east, these are the Balkhāb, the Khulmāb, and the Kunduzāb, to use modern equivalents derived from the essential northern terminus points of Balkh, Khulm, and Kunduz. The ancient names are less clear. The Alexander historians never list them systematically. The geographer Ptolemy identifies the Balkhāb as Ochus (Ὠχος), the Khulmāb as Zariaspes (Ζαριασπης), and the Kunduzāb as Dargoitos (Δαργουιτος).

A serious problem arose from Alexander's second campaign against the Sogdians. After an only partially successful first attack on Sogdiana in 329 BC, he spent the winter in Zariaspa, allegedly a second name for Bactra, today's Balkh. He left

¹² Lerner 2016, 134.

¹³ The Greek terms are given without accents, but otherwise follow the partial edition of Humbach / Ziegler (1998), which lists the *variae lectiones* found in older editions. The complete edition of Stückelberg / Graßhoff (2017) is nowhere more precise.

Zariaspa with his troops, disappeared from view for eleven days, then crossed first the Ochus and then the Oxus and set out to invade and attack the Samarkand region again. If Balkh were called Zariaspa, it would have taken him eleven days to cross the river that flows just outside the city. This is unlikely. How can this confusing statement be explained? There are two solutions based on the same operation: Either Zariaspa or the Oxus must be separated from Bactra = Balkh. Some scholars who conducted archaeological work in Ai Khanum on the Panj = Amu Darya decided to consider Zariaspa and Balkh as identical, while moving the Ochus eleven days' march to the east, where this river flowed north past Ai Khanum. Its sources were in the Wakhan Valley, where the name comes from: Wakh-an → Ωχ-ος.

The alternative solution would leave the Ochus where Ptolemy placed it, but separate Zariaspa from Balkh. Initially, this solution was proposed only by F. von Schwarz (1893), who placed Zariaspa far to the west, on the Amu Darya below Bukhara.¹⁴ Recently, Cl. Rapin from the French scholarly group adopted parts of this argument, but placed Zariaspa near Samarkand.

A third solution is presented below: In the list of geographical data in Ptolemy's *Geographica* and correspondingly in the accompanying maps, Balkh and Zariaspa are located far apart. F. von Schwarz¹⁵ saw that Balkh would have been completely unsuitable for Alexander's military needs. He used the difference in the geographical data, while ignoring the data itself, to relocate Zariaspa to a location north of the Oxus and below Bukhara.¹⁶ Markwart was prepared to attribute “incredible blunders” (“unglaubliche Schnitzer”) to the geographer in every respect,¹⁷ followed by Grenet and Rapin (1998) in many aspects. Grenet¹⁸ identified Zariaspa with “Maracanda, the capital of upper Zerafshan”, as cited by Rapin.¹⁹ Rapin was followed by Rtvladze, who located Zariaspa in Mirzabek-Kala south of Samarkand.²⁰

However, Ptolemy's Zariaspa is not located south of Bukhara (v. Schwarz), nor at Balkh (Grenet and Rapin, among others) or near Samarkand (Rapin, Rtvladze), but on the southern, left bank of the Oxus between the confluences of Khulmāb and Kunduzāb (No. 38).²¹ The consequences are far-reaching.

¹⁴ Schwarz 1893.

¹⁵ Schwarz 1893, 42, 65-6. Rapin (1893, 62, note 83) seems to have confused Schwarz with Tomaschek. While the former considers Balkh and Zariaspa to be separate places, the latter never does.

¹⁶ See von Schwarz (1893, 42): “Wenn z. B. Arrian sagt, dass Alexander den Winter von 329 auf 328 in Zariaspa verbrachte, während Curtius erzählt, dass dies in Baktra geschehen sei, so ist dies in Wirklichkeit kein Widerspruch und beweist auch nicht, dass die Städte Baktra und Zariaspa identisch sind; Arrian hat einfach den Namen der Stadt angegeben, Curtius dagegen den Namen des Landes, in dem Zariaspa lag.”

¹⁷ Markwart 1938, 29.

¹⁸ Grenet and Rapin in Gorshenina / Rapin 2015, 115.

¹⁹ Rapin 2018.

²⁰ Rtvladze 2021.

²¹ In Humbach / Ziegler 1998, the geographical units are numbered according to their order in the text. These numbers are reused for the mechanically produced maps in Humbach / Ziegler /

1. What Is Meant by Bactra?

There must be a reason why no scholar has suggested anything similar before. If our approach is correct, where is the crucial error that made Ptolemy look ridiculous? The culprit can be found in almost all works on this subject and is cited as the principal witness for the equation Zariaspa = Bactra, as noted by Strabo (ca. 63 BC–23 AD). In his *Geography* 11.11.2, he says of the Bactrians: “Their cities were Bactra, also called Zariaspa, through which flows a river bearing the same name and emptying into the Oxus.”²² However, the river that flows through Balkh never reached the Oxus and therefore does not flow “into the Oxus.” This statement suggests that Strabo is referring to Bactra, also known as Zariaspa, or vice versa. Still, it does not compel us to believe that he is exclusively referring to Balkh. On the contrary, if “emptying into the Oxus” is taken literally, this proves that the river Zariaspa mentioned by Strabo cannot be the river of Balkh. A similar ambiguity arises in the case of Pliny (Gaius Plinius Secundus, AD 23/24–79), who in his *Natural History* (6.17/45) lists several distances. One of these measures the distance from the border of India to “Bactra, the *oppidum* they call Zariasta [sic]”²³, as if there were two Bactras, one of which is called Zariasta and the other obviously not. His most important statement for us follows in *NH* 6.18/48, where it says that the *oppidum* Zariasta was named after the river on which it lies, but “later” (*postea*) the name was changed to Bactra.²⁴ There are two ways to understand this text: either Zariaspa was the original name of Balkh and was later changed to Bactra, or Zariaspa was the original name of Baktra. However, this is quite unlikely, as the oldest sources are Iranian and Indian sacred texts,²⁵ none of which contain any references to a city called Zariaspa.²⁶ On the other hand, no source mentions Zariaspa before Alexander’s arrival in the region. The earliest mention comes from Eratosthenes (ca. 276–194 BC) in a calculation of distances ending in Zariaspa (Strab. 11.8.9). Eratosthenes based his calculations on Patroclus, who was active under Seleucus I (Strab. 11.7.3).

Faiss 2002, whereby straight connecting lines must not be confused with the straight form of a road or river. The map shown here, fig. 4b, connects three adjacent “Humbach” maps, each taken from a different paragraph of the *Geography*.

²² πόλεις δ’ εἶχον τὰ τε Βάκτρα ἥνπερ καὶ Ζαριάσπαν καλοῦσιν, ἣν διαρρεῖ ὁμώνυμος ποταμὸς ἐκβάλλων εἰς τὸν Ὠξον, καὶ Ἀδραψα καὶ ἄλλας πλείους· τούτων δ’ ἦν καὶ ἡ Εὐκρατίδεια τοῦ ἄρξαντος ἐπώνυμος.

²³ (...) inde ad Bactra oppidum, quod appellant Zariasta.

²⁴ Bactri quorum oppidum Zariastes, quod postea Bactrum a flumine appellatum est. Gens haec optinet aversa montis Paropanis exadversus fontes Indi, includitur flumine Ocho. Detlefsen 1904, 138; Olbrycht 2010, 308.

²⁵ Collected in Witzel 1980.

²⁶ The term as such is known from the Vedas on as *haryaśva*, “bay horse”, a term usually applied to Indra in a possessive sense, “having a bay-coloured horse”, which brings down the waters in spring. Rapin (in Gorshenina / Rapin 2015, 115) understands *Zarapša as “pourvoyeur d’or.”

If we take the classical sources seriously, we must assume that there were at least two Bactras, one that was called that from the beginning, then Zariaspa, which was named that “later,” and possibly a third, which appears on Ptolemy’s map at the southern end of the Kunduzāb as Βακτρα βασιλείον, *Bactra reagia*. The locations of the later capitals shifted from west to east. The first marked the border of Iran proper with Bactria during the Achaemenid period; the second was located in the center, from where Alexander controlled the Bactrians to the south and the Sogdians to the north of the Oxus. And the third clear case is Andarab, the ancient Drapsa, on the border between the Graeco-Bactrians and the Indo-Greeks.

2. Αλικοδρα–Αλιχοδρα is Alik Rabat near Balkh (42)

Based on the position on the map where Ptolemy places his river Ochus, we would expect to meet the Balkhāb with Balkh at its delta. However, instead of Balkh, the *Geography* and its maps show a settlement called Alikodra (Αλικοδρα) or Alikhodra (Αλιχοδρα). There is a certain phonetic similarity between Αλιχοδρα and Balkh, but it is not sufficient to dispel all doubts. If our Alikodra goes back to Baktra, then it would have lost at least an initial labial vowel. However, such a shortening is not necessary, if we imagine that a merchant, after crossing the Iranian desert, reaches the Balkhāb fan of channels. Coming from Merw or another eastern Parthian city, he would first arrive at a place called Alik Rabat (36° 49' 7" N, 66° 5' 2" E). The settlement is not large, but the second part of the name indicates that it houses a walled caravansarai (*rabāt*). Located on the edge of the desert, it will always be remembered as the welcome end of a long journey, where the reporting merchant first encountered the (lowest) waters of the Balkhab. This will have prompted him to note Alik Rabat at the end of the river concerned.

There is no difference between Alik Rabat and Αλικοδρα in the first part, and names have a long life in Bactria. But what about the second part of the compound? Rabāt refers to a caravansarai. Should *-o-dra* be interpreted similarly?²⁷ We have another *-o-dra* to come, in Marakodra. Kuriandra could be another example, and the Chinese hi-mo-ta-lo will add a final one. In all cases, a walled resting place makes sense.

Balkh itself is not mentioned by name on Ptolemy’s map and may have appeared to the merchant as just another settlement along the same river. As a trading site, the old city was often outdone by other nearby markets. The military and implicit political significance of the city of Balkh/Baktra should not be overestimated. Alexander was probably not impressed by its Achaemenid fortifications. If Strabo (11.11.3) is to be believed, Alexander found everything clean outside the walls of the *megapolis* of the Bactrians, but inside the walls, “most of the

²⁷ It could be related to Bactrian *dranga* “fortress”, see Humbach / Faiss (2012, 42) on the people of Ὀξυδράνκαι.

space was littered with human bones. Alexander put an end to this custom.” The description suggests that corpses had been deposited in the abandoned citadel for a long time. The same behavior can be observed in the city of Ai Khanum, where the theater seats were filled with skeletons of about a hundred people,²⁸ with no signs of violence that could have led to their death after the city was abandoned around 145 BC. As for Balkh, centuries later, Xuanzang found even the lowland city of Balkh sparsely populated,²⁹ possibly because Balkh is known for its unhealthy living conditions,³⁰ where Malaria is rampant. Coins from the Hellenistic period have been found, from Euthydemus (not Diodotus!) to Apollodotus. However, from Eucratides onwards, there is again a void until the Yuezhi repopulated the area.³¹ In summary, given the temporary political insignificance of Balkh, the absence of a clear term for “Bactra” should not lead us to criticize Ptolemy. Given the border site of Alik Rabat at the end of the Balkhāb waters, he was not wrong after all.

3. *Ochus is the Western River, the Balkhāb (R1)*

If the undisputed river Zariaspes flows into the Oxus at Zariaspa, then the Zariaspes cannot flow past Balkh at the same time. What, then, is the name of the river next to the Achaemenid Bakhtri? In nature, we find the Balkhāb on the left side, on the western border of the country. It dries up at all observable times in the desert, probably for thousands of years before Alexander marched from Balkh to the Oxus under the starlight over nothing but sand.³² Ptolemy gives the coordinates of a confluence, but his geodata often mark nothing more than the point where a traveler starting from Balkh meets the great river to cross it, since Ptolemy’s informants, in many cases, describe their itinerary without specifying whether their route follows a river or not.

The borders of Bactria are clearly defined by Pliny (*NH* 6.48): “This nation resides on the opposite side of Mount Paropanisus, opposite the sources of the Indus, and is enclosed by the river Ocho.”³³ The northern border is not mentioned, as it was assumed that the Oxus separated Bactria from Sogdiana (cf. Strab. 11.8.8). The southern border is referred to as the ridge of the Hindu Kush, i.e., the Paropanisus. The eastern border is marked by the Pamir and Karakorum, where the

²⁸ Bernard 1978, 439f. For similar conditions in Kampyr Tepe on the Oxus, see Rtveladze 2008, 129b.

²⁹ Watters 1904, I, 108.

³⁰ Barrow 1893, 27.

³¹ Bordeaux et al. 2019, 19. It would be essential to know whether the coins were found in the sprawling city or in the walled citadel.

³² See the illustration in Fouache et al., 2012, 3426, beginning with the Bronze Age. On Alexander’s pursuit of Bessus, see Curtius Rufus 7.5.1; von Schwarz 1893.

³³ Gens haec optinet aversa montis Paropanisi exadversus fontes Indi, includitur flumine Ocho.

sources of the Indus are located. The western border is formed by a river called Ochus, also known as $\Omega\chi\omicron\varsigma$ in Greek. This fits well with the fact that Apollodorus (ca. 100 BC) frequently mentions the Ochus as a river flowing near the Parthians.³⁴ The Parthians are located immediately west of Bactria.

Due to the similarity of the terms Ochus and Wakhan, the French historians assume that the Wakhan Valley with its river Panj bore the name Ochus as far as Takht-i Sangin, where it flows into the Wakhsh and both together form the Oxus.³⁵

This statement can be compared with what Strabo (11.11.5) compiled as descriptions of the disputed river Ochus. Despite all the differences, the quotations do not contradict each other, but rather complement each other:

– *“According to some, the Ochus flows through Bactriana.”*

This must be seen in the context of the general rule that “the Oxus separates Bactria and Sogdiana.” Bactria is the land south of the Oxus, which determines the location of the Ochus, namely somewhere in the southern land. For the alternative view that Ochus refers to any part of the Amu Darya-Panj east of Takht-i Sangin, this definition seems inappropriate.

– *“According to others, alongside it.”*

This definition places the Ochus at one of the borders of Bactria, south of the Oxus. This corresponds to the information cited above from Pliny and Apollodorus. It must be the western border, as the other three are fixed.

– *“And according to some, it is a different river from the Oxus as far as its mouths.”*

This means that not even the delta of the Oxus touches the Oxus. This is also a correct observation.

– *“Being more to the south than the Oxus.”*

The delta of the Ochus is meant, which is in the south of the Oxus line.³⁶ If Ochus was only the Amu-Darya east of Takht-i Sangin, “in the east” was to be expected rather than “in the south”.

It follows that both rivers flow into the Caspian Sea, which is only true if Strabo drew on sources that refer to the second Ochus, a completely different river in Hyrcania that branches off from the Oxus or flows into it, meaning that both once ended in the Caspian Sea. Humbach et al.³⁷ show this on a map, while

³⁴ Strab. 11.7.3 = *FGrHist* 779 F 4. I cannot follow Olbrycht (2010, 309), who searches for a river somewhere between Parthia and Bactria and finds an insignificant Āb-e Qaysar that “crosses the districts of Maymana and Andhkūy” west of Balkh. After crossing the desert from the west and reaching the Balkhāb, its sight alone would be enough to be sure that one has now left Parthia.

³⁵ Grenet / Rapin 1998, 80–81; Rapin 2005, 144; 2014, 182.

³⁶ Cf. the latest translation by Radt 2004: “Der Ochus soll nach Manchen durch die Baktriane fließen, nach Anderen an ihr entlang, und nach Manchen ist er bis zu seiner Mündung verschieden von dem Oxos - sein Lauf sei südlicher (...).“

³⁷ Humbach et al. 2002, 34, fig. 27.

Olbrycht identifies it with the Uzboi, which flowed into the southeastern part of the Caspian Sea.³⁸

The first part of these definitions can, in their entirety, refer to the Balkhāb, which lies within Bactria on the (western) border of Bactria and is independent of the Oxus. If the river had a name derived from the largest city on its course, then Greek Ωχος would have to be derived from the local *bāxδī*. Sanskrit *vāh-li* shows that the initial labial was transformed by lenition. Just as *vakṣu* turned to Ωξος, so *bāxδī*, *vāhli* could have become Ωχος.³⁹

Along the course of the Ochus, as defined by Ptolemy, there is nothing that even remotely resembles the course of the Panj or Amu Darya in any of its sections. Even if you turn the map upside down, the Panj has no tributary that is twice as long as itself. Ptolemy's Ochus-Balkhāb begins with a much longer tributary called Dargomanēs⁴⁰ and remains Ochus from the confluence onwards, while the term Dargomanēs is not used for the lower, northern section. This change of name is also reflected in today's usage. The long river is the Rud-i Band-i Amir, which flows from near Bamiyan for about 200 km to Dahānah,⁴¹ where it meets the Balkhāb, which at this point has only traveled 30 km. From the confluence onwards, only the name Balkhāb is used.⁴² The route from Bamiyan down to Balkh through the Band-i Amīr Valley is famous for its natural beauty, but for a long time it was not a popular trade route.⁴³ There may have been difficulties, the nature of which is currently unclear.⁴⁴

If we look at Ptolemy's map, we see that along the extended course of the Dargomanes / Rud-i Band-i Amir, which comes from the south, there is not a single settlement marked on the map, in contrast to the initial and southern part of the Balkhāb, where we come across Οστοβαρα, Latin *Estobara*, in the middle of the first

³⁸ Olbrycht 2010.

³⁹ With the /l/ of Balkh lost as in Ptolemy's Αστακάνα, known as Hastilgān in Kushan times. Different Grenet / Rapin 1998, 80–81.

⁴⁰ The mss vary in reading Darga/Dargo+manēs/manis in Ptol. *Geogr.* 6.11.2, and Garda/Darga+manis/manios in 6.18.2 (Humbach / Ziegler 1998, 154 fn. 7, 224 fn. 3).

⁴¹ 35°29'41" N, 66°32'28" E in Google Earth, literally the "mouth of a river". On some maps it is called Darrah-e Maghzār, below the Kuh-e Mazar, and Tay-e Mazar as one of the first villages.

⁴² This is the convention used in modern maps. At the time of the Muslim geographers, the Rud-i Band-i Amir was better known and its course was used for travel to Bamiyan. Since the destination had changed, the entire watercourse was referred to as Balkhāb (Minorsky 1937, 73 §24, 108 §67) and the provisional Dargomanes was long forgotten. With the modern roads, the entire river can be referred to as Rud-i Band-i Amir. Adamec (IV, 1979) lists the short beginning of Ptolemy's Ochus as Dara-i-duldul, "river of the heavenly horse."

⁴³ Often the river side has to be left for longdrawn detours, cf. Barrow (1893, 21): "It must be distinctly recollected that there is no military route down the valley of the Band-i Amir.", where "military" means "fit for the transport of guns."

⁴⁴ Adamec (1979, IV, 113) speaks of "gorges between Sar-i-pul (Balkh-Ab) and Ak Kupruk, [which] are quite impassable."

short 30 km section.⁴⁵ This difference in familiarity could be due to Ptolemy’s informant, who traveled from Balkh along the Ochus-Balkhāb to Ostobara. At least he knew that the confluent Dargomanes is much longer and comes from a hill in a southeasterly direction. Why would anyone march from Balkh to Ostobara and then return to their original destination without taking this detour?

The nature of the area can explain the seemingly limited knowledge of an informant: in these first 30 km of the Balkhāb, there are extensive copper mines, whose exploitation dates back to the late 2nd millennium BC. Many people working in metal processing will have only reached this point. Even today, the ore remains one of the largest copper deposits on Earth.⁴⁶ After transporting the ore, the carrier ends his journey in Balkh. The easy availability of copper and coal made Balkh an ideal place for coin minting in ancient times.

In addition to copper, the area is also rich in oil and natural gas. Pliny (*NH* 11.11.5) reports that an oil spring was discovered near the Ochus, a finding confirmed by recent investigations.⁴⁷ Although further oil deposits have been discovered east of Balkhab in the desert, extending as far as Taluqan, there are no reports of finds near the Amu Darya.

On Ptolemy’s map downstream from Ostobara, the next town is called Ebusmu Anassa, which Humbach / Faiss interpret as simply the Greek εὐοσμὸν ἀνασσα, “Queen of the Fragrant.”⁴⁸

In short, the sequence of the long Dargomanes, which meets the relatively short Ochus, perfectly reflects the long Band-i Amīr River, which meets the Balkhāb and continues to flow under its name. The settlement of Ostobara may have been a center of ore or coal mining.⁴⁹

The definition of Zariaspa and Ochus sheds new light on a controversial event. In the spring of 329 BC, Alexander disappeared from Zariaspa. He and his army were not seen for eleven days. Then, as two texts (Curt. 7.10.15; *Metz Ep.* 14) say, “he first crossed the Ochus and the Oxus” and then went to Margania,⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Humbach / Faiss (2012, 38) think of NP “*ustuwār* ‘firm, strong’”. There are few serious works on Ostobara / Estabara. One exception is Rapin (2005, 146 with fn. 15; 2021, 315), who suggests identifying the place as Ai Khanum. He refers to the medieval Peutinger map as a reference, on which we find ‘Scobaru’ that is hardly comparable to Ostobara. Scobaru is located south of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya, near *Damirice* = Dravidian India and directly near *Andre Indi* = Andhra. Since the name and location are so different, a relationship is more than doubtful.

⁴⁶ Peters et al. 2011.

⁴⁷ Cf. the map (Fig. 1) in Mehrad et al. 2020.

⁴⁸ Humbach / Faiss 2012, 37. Ronca (1971, 29) understands *anassa* as an attribute of a city and *ebousmou* as a personal name; cf. note on p. 30.

⁴⁹ Due to the eastward shift of the Ochus River by French scholars, the location of Ostobara on the Ochus also had to be shifted, so that Ostobara was considered by Rapin (e.g., 2005, 146f.) to be the old name of today’s Ai Khanum.

⁵⁰ Apart from Schwarz, most researchers assumed that the city of Margania (*ad urbem Marganiam*) was a mistake for the country Margiana. Von Schwarz (1893, 66) pointed out the military

a region assumedly in Sogdiana, where, for unknown reasons, he founded six settlements on hills.

If one agrees with the penultimate solution proposed by the scholars following Rapin, considers Balkh to be Zariaspa, and assumes that the Ochus rises east of and ends at Takht-i Sangin, Alexander would have led his army eastward from Balkh for eleven days to attack Sogdiana in the north. With our new assignments, the picture appears much more straightforward and coherent: After Alexander left Zariaspa on the Oxus, he remained hidden for eleven days while the Sogdians did not know from which direction he was approaching. The sources say that he first crossed the Ochus, i.e., the Balkh River near the mountains, and then crossed the Oxus at a point west of Kalf, where it was easier to pass than at his daring first crossing. He invaded from the south, while the Sogdians were most likely waiting for him at the Iron Gate.⁵¹

In summary, it can be said that the composite nature of Dargomanes cum Ochus perfectly reflects the duality of Rud-i Band-i Amir and Balkhāb. Leaving the city of Zariaspa on the middle Oxus and the Ochus River south of Balkh after eleven days makes sense both geographically and militarily.

4. *Kouriandra (44) on the Ochus?*

The Ochus has a straight riverbed, and its bends are easy to follow. On Ptolemy's map, however, it ends at Alikodra after two wide swings to the left and right, first to the east, towards Kuriandra, then back to the west, towards Chomara. On the oldest printed Ptolemaic map with its origins in the early 15th century, the river flows at a distance between them, thus presenting a relatively straight picture, while Kuriandra lies far to the east. The location is important to us, as its name ends in *-dra*, just like Alikh-o-dra. This makes it possible to ignore the suffix and search for a place that could be called *Kurian. There is a Khurram, not on the Balkhāb-Ochus, but on the Khulmāb, at about the same latitude as in Ptolemy, between Aibak and Rob, 14 km south of the now better-known Sarbagh. It is a "caravan stage" to Yule; but also a place where one turns off onto an east-west road. General Ferrier came from Aybak and turned here directly to the Balkhāb valley and from there to Sar-i Pul (in the direction of Shabergan).⁵²

nonsense and geographical inconsistency of a march to Merv. For the reading, see Atkinson 2000, 164 with fn. 47, comment on p. 478. Most editions and translations silently "correct" this to Margiana. The city of Margania remains undefined; the name is similar in structure to Menapia. Both appear only once in the literature. The plot requires Alexander to appear in a city in Sogdiana, which he enters from the south.

⁵¹ Such a deception was the basis of his attack on Porus on the Jhelum, as analysed in the best book on the subject by B. Breloer (1933).

⁵² Ferrier 1857, 215 and map.

If this assignment is correct, Kuriandra (also Chomara?) would be attributable to an informant who was probably able to determine the latitude but fell slightly short on the longitude. The Ochus would then also run on Ptolemy’s map as it does in nature.

5. *The Eastern River Dargoites (R3)*

Seemingly irrefutable proof of Ptolemy’s unreliability is his silence on Samarkand. Since the map shows a Marakanda near the ridge of the Hindu Kush in the south, while the former Marakanda = Samarkand⁵³ was located in the north, some scholars⁵⁴ assume that the entire map of Bactria, including some river courses, was misplaced and rotated by 180 degrees. The name of the river is given in the *Geography*⁵⁵ as Dargoidos, a river “that has traveled a long way.” This term lives on in Rūdh-i Darghām, as Muslim historians later referred to it.⁵⁶ A visitor traveling to Bactria would cross the Hindu Kush ridge and first encounter a mysterious place called Marakodra. This place can be reached from the Kabul plain via a road to the northwest through the Ghorband Valley. At Marakodra, the direction changes to the northeast. The next stop is called “royal Bactra” (Βακτρα βασιλειον). This epithet led some scholars to believe that Ptolemy’s cartographer had mistakenly located Balkh here in the mountains, 260 km from its actual location. Since Balkh is definitely not located in the Hindu Kush mountains and Samarkand cannot be found there either, the representation of this river course would be completely wrong, and Ptolemy would be rightly criticized. However, we have already seen that there were at least two places called *Baktra*, so a third should not be ruled out lightly.

At this point, we leave Ptolemy and return to Alexander. In search of Besus, he entered the territory of Bactria in 329 BC, on the trail of the murderer of the last Achaemenid ruler. A few of the places in Bactria mentioned in the narrative are named: Descending from the mountain pass in 329 BC, Alexander first reaches Drapsa, continues to Aornos, and then arrives in Bactra. From there, he crosses the Oxus north of Bactra at an unnamed location and continues toward the center of Sogdiana. After his not very successful first campaign in Sogdiana, he returns from the north across the Oxus and spends the winter break in Zariaspa.

Of these few places, Bactra, here Balkh, and the ford north of it give no cause for dispute, but Drapsa and Aornos are disputed, while Zariaspa was considered

⁵³ According to Strabo 11.11.4, Alexander completely destroyed Marakanda. There may have been good reasons why this city was not mentioned at all for a long time.

⁵⁴ Humbach / Ziegler 2002, 87; Rapin 1998, *passim*.

⁵⁵ The manuscripts read Dargoidos or Dargidos in Ptol. *Geogr.* 6.11.1 (Humbach / Ziegler 1998, 154 n. 16).

⁵⁶ Minorsky 1937, 71.

to be Bactra. According to one view,⁵⁷ Drapsa, the first settlement in Bactria reached by Alexander's army, is identified with present-day Kunduz, while the next stop, Aornos, is probably Khulm. Opponents argue that Aornos must be Kunduz and that Drapsa must therefore be located upstream and closer to the Hindu Kush, preferably somewhere near Baghlan or Surkh Kotal.

The understanding of Aornos is crucial in this debate. The Aornos = Kunduz faction⁵⁸ bases its argument on phonology and accepts Αορνος as the Greek rendering of the Achaemenid Varnu, which is itself mentioned in an Aramaic document from the time of Bessus⁵⁹ and a millennium later in a letter from 602 AD.⁶⁰ In both cases, the location is mentioned without any reference to its specific place. The connection to the people of the *varnoi*, who live somewhere between the Zariaspes and the Dargoites on Ptolemy's map, is more or less arbitrary.⁶¹ Due to the alliteration, these *varnoi* were first associated with a place called Varvalīz.⁶² This city is unknown to Ptolemy, but it is assumed that this place name remained in the memory of the Varnoi for centuries.⁶³

⁵⁷ E.g., Bernard / Francfort 1978, 75 fn. 57: „l'indentification de 'Αδραπσα . . . avec Qunduz est sure.”

⁵⁸ Rapin (2018, 262 fig. 3) is a good example of this and illustrates the detour via Kunduz in his map.

⁵⁹ Naveh / Shaked 2006, 18.

⁶⁰ Sims-Williams 2012, 58, Doc. L.

⁶¹ Arab geographers frequently mention a city called Warwālīz, which most researchers believe to be Qunduz. The classic explanation is based on the route Balkh-Khulm-Warwaliz-Taluqan, three stages each comprising two days of travel, and five more to Faizabad (Barthold 1968, 67). Since three places are precisely defined, Warwaliz must be sought halfway between Khulm and Taluqan. The only city in this position known today is Kunduz. But does this rule out other explanations? The Arab geographer Idrisi presents in his map from 1156 (Miller 1927; s. fig. 2) a sequence of Bamiyan-Kah-Malr (= *madad*)-Khulm (= *hulm*)-Warwaliz (= *uarualin*), all in a line, and after a bend and crossing of a river Taluqan (= *ja'lan*). It is important to note that the last Taluqan is not reached in a straight line, but after a right angle turn, and that Warwaliz touches the Oxus River. Considering that the first two stages pass through sandy wasteland and the last through cultivated land, the third stage may seem longer, although the effort remains the same. I suggest taking the mighty fortress of Qila Zal as Warwaliz, a real and huge fortress from the post-Kushan period. According to the *Hudūd* (Minorsky 1937, 109 § 73), it served as the capital (*qaṣaba*) of Tokharistan, 25 km east of the former Zariaspa, and was probably abandoned when the desert advanced to the borders of the fortress. Al Biruni connects the fortress with the Hepthalites (Minorsky 1937, 340 § 73), which is consistent with initial archaeological finds. Qila Zal is located near the Oxus-Amu Darya, as recorded by Idrisi, and requires a right turn towards Taluqan. Its southwestern corner is located at 36°58'55.75"N, 68°21'37.95"E. Occasionally, the fortress of Qila-i Zal, 28 km east on the Kunduz River, is considered relevant in connection with Alexander's activities in Bactria. Judging by the remains, it was built in the early Kushan period and abandoned in the Hephthalite period; cf. Ball 1982, 215a, No. 892 "Qal'a-i Zāl". Staviskij (1986, 96, 109, 274) emphasizes its importance due to its size and concludes that it is not mentioned by classical authors.

⁶² Markwart 1938, 45.

⁶³ One of the witnesses is Minorsky, (1937, 340 § 73), who confused the two rivers Tālaqān and Doshī with Khulmāb and Doshī, both of which "flow from the borders of Ṭukhāristān" near

The Aornos = Khulm fraction disputes the validity of this circular argument and points to several places named Aornos in Alexander’s vast Empire, all of which are located on high rock formations.⁶⁴ Khulm is unique in southern Bactria in that, unlike the circular hills in the Achaemenid style in Balkh or Kunduz, it has a remarkable stone fortress high above the city. Thus, a linguistic equation (Aornos = Varnoi = Varvaliz = Kunduz) contrasts with a more circumstantial one (Aornos = Tashkurgan = Khulm).

Both explanations of the term Aornos have some advantages, and the different perspectives have consequences for the location of Drapsa, which is either Kunduz (if Aornos = Khulm) or a place further south (if Aornos = Kunduz), i.e., upstream. Drapsa was the first city Alexander encountered after crossing the Hindu Kush, and thus the definition of Drapsa determines how the army’s march in search of Bessus can be reconstructed. We learn that Bessus had already ravaged places south of the Hindu Kush, and to an even greater extent on the route leading through the Panjshir Valley to the Khawad Pass. We can be sure that places at the end of the passage were also devastated and robbed of their supplies.

Where would a Macedonian army pursuing Bessus feel that the end of the pass was reached after having seen nothing but rock walls on both sides, with a peak of 3,848 meters in the middle of winter? The soldiers came down the mountain with frostbitten toes, freezing and hungry, after paying enormous sums just for body oil to protect themselves from the cold. The first place with a good agricultural tradition is not Baghlan, let alone Kunduz, but the valley of Andarab, which appears again on most modern maps as Banu. Usually, without sabotage units, Andarab is rich in grain⁶⁵ and has a defensible fortress called Banu.⁶⁶ Silver mines are located halfway up the Khawad Pass. For this reason, it was the place where silver coins were minted and stored for many centuries.⁶⁷ Alexander’s troops climbed the Khawad Pass from the Kabul side when the mountains were covered with snow. There were no supplies, no firewood, and soldiers died immediately when they fell to the ground, so they had to be lifted

Kah and Madr, bypass Valvālij (the Dōshī) and Khulm (the Khulm R.) and flow into the Jayhūn-Oxus-Amu Darya after they have (once) joined near Zariaspa-Khisht Tepe. The reference to Khulm in Minorsky’s understanding makes no sense.

⁶⁴ For discussion, see Naveh / Shaked 2012, 20.

⁶⁵ In 1922 (Koshkaki translated by Reut 1979, 33): “all kinds of grain, fruit trees, wet and dry agriculture, good livestock breeding and hunting grounds.”

⁶⁶ Koshkaki transl. by Reut 1979, 30-31: “Andarāb est très bien situé pour établir l’autorité gouvernementale. S’il s’avérait nécessaire pour le gouvernement afghan d’installer une seconde capitale dans le pays, il n’y aurait pas de meilleur endroit pour cela, car une armée limitée serait capable d’empêcher l’invasion d’une grande armée. c’est une région protégée par la nature, n’ayant qu’une voie d’accès”. This was written by a local in 1922. Cf. Ball (1982, 52b s.v. Banu): “An easily defensible, strategic site of an ancient town, consisting of rubble foundations covering a semi-isolated alluvial plateau.”

⁶⁷ Minorsky 1937, 109 §77, 341.

and forced to move to keep the blood circulating. To stave off starvation, they killed pack animals and ate their flesh raw, as they had no firewood. This army came down the Andarab Valley, decimated by nature and in a pitiful condition. A large number of horses had died on the pass or would die on the way to the Oxus and beyond (Arr. 3.30.6). The assumption that these troops, after two weeks of fighting against snow, cold, and hunger, with frozen feet, some of them being carried, marched another 100 km to Kunduz, shows ignorance of military necessities and possibilities. Andarab is clearly the end of the rocky Khawad Pass, as Wood confirms: “At the bottom of the pass lay the secluded valley of Inderab [Andarab HF], beyond which the snowy mountains rose like a wall, without any intervening ridge to veil their majesty.”⁶⁸ In Andarab, vegetation comes into view, and the people were accustomed to a pleasant life. Andarab could have supplied Alexander’s troops with provisions had it not been sabotaged beforehand by Bessus’s marauding troops.

According to a list of provisions published in Maithanaka,⁶⁹ Bessus had planned to march from Balkh to Varnu. The place name Varnu may live on in today’s Banu, the naturally fortified site of Andarab. Bessus may have expected Alexander to wait for more favorable weather conditions. When he heard of the march through the Khawad Pass into the Andarab Valley, he may have considered receiving Alexander there, but he soon realized it was too late. His own scorched-earth policy would have necessitated taking up supplies at a larger location along the way. When he changed his mind and wanted to flee north across the Oxus, the list of provisions had already been sent to Maithanaka and could no longer serve its purpose.

Anyone who identifies Varnu, Aornos, or Drapsa with Kunduz⁷⁰ must be able to answer the question of why Bessus, in his distress, would lead his army to Kunduz. Certainly not to confront Alexander, because Alexander’s army would have had time on its way from the Hindu Kush to Kunduz to stock up on supplies and recover to a certain extent. Since they would have arrived there first, they could even have occupied the fortress. If Bessus had been in Kunduz first, no Achaemenid-style fortress could have withstood Alexander’s engineers with their ballistic machines and the experienced storm troops following them. Alternatively, if Bessus’ Varnu is Banu in the Andarab region, an early attack by Bessus on the Macedonians there could have taken advantage of the poor condition of Alexander’s army at its arrival. Despite the plans evident from the provision

⁶⁸ Wood 1872, 270.

⁶⁹ Naveh / Shaked 2006, 178: This place Maithanaka has not been located so far. It is certainly “on the way from Bactra to Varnu” (Naveh / Shaked 2012, 18) if Varnu is Banu in Andarab. On Ptolemy’s map, on the way from Balkh to Andarab (Baktra basileion) there is the town of Menapia on the second river, the Zariaspēs-Khulmāb, certainly close to where Rob is today.

⁷⁰ Several theories are listed and discussed in Naveh / Shaked (2012, 20), none of which take Andarab into account, but instead argue whether Aornos refers to Kunduz or Khulm.

list, Bessus may never have gone to Maithanaka to fetch provisions and march to Varnu-Andarab, and for good reasons. On the other hand, all Alexander historians have Alexander march from Drapsa to Aornos and from there to Bactra without encountering any significant resistance.

If Andarab is definitely the first place at the end of the Khawad Pass, could its name have something to do with Δραψα-Drapsa? The order of /d/, /r/, and labials is the same in both. The spelling varies: in Darapsa there is a vowel after the /d/ (Strab. 11.11.2), in Adrapsa (Strab. 15.2.10) there is an /a/ at the beginning, and there is a modern form of Drapsaka used by Arrian and also known from the *Metz Epitome* (§32), where – in the description of the return journey to India – it is the last station mentioned before reaching the Kabul River from the north.⁷¹

The name *Drapsa* appears 400 years later as Lraf (ΛΡΑΦΟ) after the usual sound shifts in an inscription by Kaniška from Surkh Kotal (SK4, §4), which tells us that statues of deities “have been brought to Lraf, to Andēz,” ABO ΛΡΑΦΟ ΟΑΚΤΙΝΔΟ ABO ΑΝΔΗΖΟ, where the otherwise unknown Andēz appears as an apposition to Lraf, as a second name used in a second language group: Lraf has lost the final sibilant of Drapsa, while Andēz, short for Adrapsa, has retained it. A combination of the two forms, Lraf and Andēz, is the present-day Andarab, also known as Wood’s Inderab, located 130 km southeast of Surkh Kotal. As in so many other cases, a place in this region⁷² can have several names in different language groups, which have either developed from a common prototype, a simple translation, or a loan translation, or are completely independent traditional or newly created formations.

There may be a further argument, coming from the Chinese side. The Han time annals mention a capital city of Tocharistan named Lanshi, written 藍市 or 藍氏, a town that the Kushans later utilized in the same capacity. Could Lan-shi be a Chinese version of a local name derived from *dra-psa*? In East-Iranian languages, word-initial /l/ develops regularly from /d/, as in Lraf < Drapsa.⁷³ In a Chinese transcription of a local name, a nasal often renders a final /r/ in the foreign language.⁷⁴ And the closing *psa* may well have induced the *shi* or *si* (as pronounced in Cantonese). Ergo: /lansi/ would perfectly render MP *darsi, which is no long way from Drapsa. Support comes from the much younger Xien Tang shu 43b,

⁷¹ Different is another town called Drepsa known to Ptolemy in Khottalān.

⁷² The need to mention variants is therefore as old as the text from Surkh Kotal. Throughout Afghanistan, the worst conditions prevail in Badakhshan, the land between the Kunduz River and the Kokcha, where Turki, Dard, and Tajik-speaking people live side by side. Cartographers seem to focus on the vocabulary of only one ethnic group, so that Google Earth, for example, provides completely different names than the Freytag/Berndt map of Afghanistan on a scale of 1:100,000, which uses terms that are closest to those used by Xuanzang.

⁷³ Cf. the Aśokan parallel forms *dipi* and *lipi*, “writing, inscription”, with *dipi* being the older.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ālāra kālāma 阿藍迦藍, where *lār* and *lām* are both heard as 藍 *lan*; Darkot became 坦駒 *tan-ko*; Mirkan 瞢健 (MC) mjuŋ, (HC) kan/gan. This latter place is commonly equated with Munjan on Xuanzang’s return trip to China. But Munjan is out of his way and the term refers to a place called Mirkan or Ambadarreh on the Andarab–Faizabad route [36°27′48.33″N, 70°11′9.07″E].

新唐書/卷043下: 藍氏州以鉢勃城置。 where 藍氏 is used for the department, having *bōbó* 鉢勃 as its city. HC produces *pa-bu* instead, which looks like a misheard *ba-nu*, the Banu or Banow of modern maps.

Suppose the capital Lan-shi of the Chinese explorer corresponds to Drapsa of the Alexander historians in the land of the Warnu, today Banu, the varnoi. In that case, *Lan-shi* is also Lraf, alias Andēz, the two local versions known to the Kushans, and then Drapsa-Andarab can also be seen, where Ptolemy has his *Bactra basileion*. This equation would end two discussions: a) Where is the capital of the Bactrians that the Chinese found in 130 BC? and b) Why did Ptolemy not call Balkh *Baktra*? Andarab, as the capital *lan-shi*, is Drapsa and functions as *Bactra basileion*, while Balkh had long since lost its significance. Is this too simple to be true?⁷⁵

Andarab/Banu already played an essential political role in the Greco-Bactrian period, before the Chinese ambassador visited the “capital” south of the Oxus. Its function was maintained until the Eukratidides, Yuezhi, and Kushans. The reason for this is not only its control of the Khavad Pass, but there is also a second important road which branches off from the Andarab plain through the mountains to the northeast, leading directly to the modern Tokhar region with its connections to Taluqan, Ai Khanum, and Faizabad on the Kokcha River, disregarding the much longer and dusty road to Kunduz. Xuanzang used this road to Faizabad in Badakhshan on his return journey to China, while Babur came the opposite way to Andarab. If necessary, the bottleneck through the mountains can be easily defended.⁷⁶

In any case, Kunduz can be ruled out as one of Alexander's possible first destinations in Bactria, as the conqueror followed the usual route from Drapsa-Andarab to Aornos-Khulm (Arrian 3.21.1) and from there on to Bactra. It is unlikely that Kunduz was ever called Drapsa or Aornos. It was completely insignificant for a long time to come.

There is only one other place on this highest part of the river, called Marakodra. It lies west and south of the “Royal Bactra.” According to Ptolemy's map, a road leads south from there to the ridge of the Hindu Kush. As a term, Marakodra is unique, but it ends in *-dra* again. It has a relative in Marakanda on the middle river. As I will show below, the two are not only phonetically related but also refer to an identical traffic hub. The terms stand for a place that can be reached from both rivers, a fact that may not have been known to all of our Greek geographer's informants.

⁷⁵ The priority of Andarab for Drapsa is too obvious to have gone unnoticed. Beal (1884, II, 328b) was the first to mention this possibility: “Andarâb (...) in Badakshân, perhaps the Ῥδραπσα of the Greeks.” Without giving any reasons, Tomaschek (1905, 1698-9) follows suit: “Drapsaka, das heutige Anderâb.”

⁷⁶ Reut 1922, 31: “A proximité d'Andarâb est situé Khôst, qui est également un lieu sûr, car il n'y a qu' une seule route et si dix personnes étaient installées là, même mille personnes ne pourraient pas passer.”

6. The Middle River, *Zariaspes* (R2)

Ptolemy calls the river that reaches Zariaspa “Zariaspes”, following the habit that rivers can legitimately be given a name to a place they come from or go to, depending on the traveller’s destination. The Alexander historians never mention this river by name; only geographers preserve its memory. Today, it is called Khulmāb, as Zariaspa no longer exists, and the river only flows into the Oxus north of Khulm in cases of severe flooding. As early as the 19th century, its water was used up by farmers in a fan of canals along its entire course through the desert.⁷⁷

The Zariaspes River, today’s Khulmāb, is therefore crucial in leading us to the disputed Zariaspa. Here, too, we will see that Ptolemy describes this river in such a way that no doubt remains. He mentions only a few places along its course. According to his information, it has two source rivers on the ridge of the Hindu Kush, one of which touches a place called Marakanda, which reminds us of Marakodra on the third river. Below Marakanda, the Zariaspes then joins a short river called Atarmēs. The main course then continues northward, passing a place called Menapia, turning northwest to Astakana, meeting the Kauaris shortly thereafter, and then flowing northeast into the Oxus. Menapia only appears here, but lies on the route from Balkh to Andarab and could therefore be identical to the place Maithanaka of the Bessus period (cf. fn. 69). It is not far from the place called Rob–Rui, which is known from Bactrian documents.⁷⁸

I equate Astakana with Aibak and Kauaris with Khulm. The equation of Astakana and Aibak is inspired by the large inscription in Surkh Kotal (located only 20 km from Pul-i Khumri and 60 km from Aybak), where we learn towards the end that the well in Surkh Kotal was built by a Burzmihr who came from the city of Hastilgān, presumably a nearby place. With or without initial aspiration, the place name Hastilgan near Surkh Kotal can be compared with the form Ἀστακᾶνα from Ptolemy (*Geogr.* 6.18.8), a similarity that is too great to be coincidental. Caravans or troops coming from the Pul-i Khumri or Surkh Kotal area had to march through a short stretch of riverless terrain until they reached the Khulm River at Hastilgan (SK4) or Astakana (Ptolemy).

Once Astakana has been defined, Ptolemy’s Kavaris can only be Khulm. There are many reading errors in Ptolemy’s collection, and I suspect that Kavaris (KA-VAPIC, Καναρῖς) is nothing more than a misreading of KAMPIC or KAΛMIC. The oldest written form of the name is the Aramaic *ḫlmy*, which is found in one of the earliest letters (A8:3) of the Khalili collection⁷⁹ and is rendered as Khulm(i),

⁷⁷ Yule 1872a *apud* Wood 1872, lxviii. In the five years it took me to complete this work, I tracked all the rivers on Google Earth and similar devices. Around 2020, there was a narrow green strip running westward from Khulm toward Khisht Tepe, a remnant of an original water-course. In new images from 2025, this strip has completely disappeared halfway along its course, with the northeastern part now filled with sand.

⁷⁸ Sims-Williams 2007, 260 ρωβο; 2012, documents A,C,N,P, etc.

⁷⁹ Shaked 2003, 1522.

while Ptolemy's KAVAPIC shows that the final *-i* should not be omitted. It may even have been preserved in Pul-i Khumri, if this means “bridge to Khulm.”⁸⁰

Back to Alexander. After recovering in Drapsa-Andarab, he set off for Balkh, using this busy road, bypassing Rabatak and Aybak, reaching Aornos-Khulm, and from there Balkh. The reason for the Greek term Aornos was, as had been suspected long ago, the stone fortress on the mountain peak, which led to its second name today, Tash Kurgan, “stone building.” This means that the city of Khulm was given a Greek epithet.

The interesting thing about this river is that it originates in Marakanda, a term used in other cases for the former and present-day Samarkand. The important city of Sogdiana should certainly not be located in the Hindu Kush, but there is a solution that clarifies this seemingly glaring error. One of Ptolemy's informants may have inquired about the locations that could be found further upstream. If Menapia is indeed Rob-Rui, there are only two places further upstream that are better known, namely the two places Malr/Madr/Madar and Kah/Kamarda, which are already mentioned in the Bactrian letters. Together they form a contact zone between two watercourses, one being the Khulmāb, which rises in Malr and flows north, and the Surkhab-Dargamanes, which rises in Kah-Kamarda and flows east, joining the Doshi, where it merges with the Andarab River and continues on to Kunduz.



Fig. 2. Excerpt from the map of Idrisi presenting Bamian (*bamīān*)–Kah–Madr (*madad*)–Khulm (*hulm*)–Warwaliz (*varvalin*) in a row and Taluqan (*ta'lan*) at an angle, with the transliteration of K. Miller (1927).

Note that Andarab (*indarab*) is reached through Takhar, not along the Kunduz River. Sakalkand should be Ishkamish, with Bakiān being Borkeh.

⁸⁰ Dupree (1977, 368) presents the local view of “a bridge built by the lady Qumri”, but “ladies” are a common accessory in popular explanations, as in the modern names of Ai Khanum or Kampyr Tepe. Cf. the women waters, *mainā āp*, seen as the basis of Menapia by Humbach / Faiss 2012, 77.

Although Malr is small,⁸¹ the two inhabited places, Malr and Kah, between the barren rocks must have served as trading centers for an important commercial hub. The valleys are separated by a steep but short gorge called Bajgah, also known as Madr tangi.⁸² Idrisi’s map (Fig. 2) shows a straight line from Bamiyan to Madad (Malr), to Kah, and on to Khulm (and Varvaliz). Rui (alias Menapia?) cannot be found on Idrisi’s map, nor can Qunduz.⁸³ I suspect that the two economically linked places Malr/Madr/Madad and Kah/Kamard/Kahmanda were combined to form Malr-kamanda and this was mistakenly understood as a single place called Marakanda, the name of the city Samarkand still in the ear of Ptolemy’s informants.

According to Ptolemy’s records, the northward-flowing river system of the Khulm River begins in the south with two short tributaries. The western tributary branches off at a place called Marakanda, while the eastern one has its own name, Atarmēs. The two probably flow together at a place today called Rui do Ab, “Rui of the two rivers,” located less than 30 km upstream from Rui, the Rob mentioned in the documents, and approximately 20 km downstream from their two sources. How is it that such a short stream as the Atarmēs is mentioned by Ptolemy? There must be a reason for this, and I suspect that a traveler hiking uphill from the Kabul plain was very excited to finally reach a river flowing downhill and heard that it was called *atarmēs* or *atarmis*. Could this reflect **āb-e tarmīs*, “the river that leads to Termez”? In fact, it could lead there, depending on which side you leave Khulm, but the morphological⁸⁴ and linguistic⁸⁵ differences would still need to be confirmed.

This explanation assumes that the traveling reporter came from the south, from Charikar and the Ghorband Valley. He crossed the point where he could decide to either take the Atarmis route north or head west to Kah/Kahmard to get some rest. At least, the informant mentioned both options, which were also included on the map. If Atarmis is understood correctly, the trek in the first century would no longer lead to Zariaspa, but to Termez. A similar shift from Indikomardana-Kobadian to Termez is confirmed by Chinese historians who deal with the fifth Yabghu.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Adamec (1979, IV, 377) s.v. *Madar* lists 15 houses and “the ground is all on a slope”; s.v. *Kamard* or *Kahmard* (IV, 301) we learn that the place is much larger with close to five thousand inhabitants.

⁸² 35°20'54.0"N 67°48'07.6"E.

⁸³ Qunduz is often overlooked by authors. According to Montgomerie (1871, 191), it is a “town proverbially known to be unhealthy.”

⁸⁴ Ptolemy does not seem to mention Termez, but shows Alexandria Ōxeiane (Kampyr Tepe?) not far from it. The oldest forms are Tarmita, Tarmidha, HC *tumit* (都密). Rapin (in Gorshenina / Rapin 2015, 115 fn. 6) relocates Zariaspa to Samarkand and connects Artamis with the Ak-darya, “White River,” “l’une des branches du Zerafshan.”

⁸⁵ The spirantisation of an aspirate dental is common in the first century in Swat valley, e.g. with *tasa<tathā, prasamu<prathamam* in the Senavarma donation record. Merchants from Swat or Gandhara certainly visited Bactria frequently and may have brought their speech habits with them.

⁸⁶ The shift from Gaofu to Termez is reflected in Chinese chronicles (Falk ed. 2015, 73). I equate the location of Gaofu with Kobadian, the partner town of Khisht Tepe.

What Ptolemy lists as Marakanda on the second river and Marakodra on the third river is nothing more than the linkage between the two places, which was too important and too well known to be misunderstood. Today, the site marks the natural border between Tocharistan and Balkh.⁸⁷ Of the two sites, Kah is by far the more important. Perhaps because of its caravansarai, the name of the city can be extended by the suffix *-dra* (Ka-[o]-dra), just as Kahmard is as common today as Kah.

Thus, Ptolemy's (middle) Khulm River is perfectly depicted from its source to its mouth in or near the Oxus. Instead of a doubly misplaced Samarkand in the Hindu Kush, we encountered two related terms referring to the same source area of both the Zariaspes and the Dargaitos.

In summary, Ptolemy was correct in many respects regarding the three north-flowing rivers of Bactria. He presents Alik Rabat-Alikodra on the Ochus; he has the Khulm River in mind when he speaks of the Zariaspes, and he has a *Bactra metropolis* where it makes sense, in Andarab, the Drapsa of the Alexander historians and probably also the Lanshi of the Chinese.

7. *Zariaspa is Khisht Tepe (38)*

Ptolemy locates Zariaspa at the southern bank of the Oxus, somewhere between the deltas of the Khulmāb and Kunduzāb. Just north of this, on the same 115th parallel, less than one (Ptolemaic) degree of latitude away, is another place called Indikomardana (44). This is where we find Kobadian today, a place already known to Chinese historians of the Han period. There can be no doubt: if we travel straight south for 54 km from Kobadian along the Kafirnighan River, we arrive at a ferry landing, and the corresponding place on the southern bank is called Khisht Tepe (38), literally “brick hill.”⁸⁸

Why did Alexander choose this location to allow his army to rest during the winter months? Firstly, it lies in the middle of Bactria, on its northern border. The location itself signals how far Alexander had expanded his new possessions to the north: as far as the Oxus. Wherever rebellions broke out south of Zariaspa, he could march there with equal ease. The camp consists of a triangular headland measuring approximately 300 × 250 m, which forces the Oxus to flow around it on three sides. This makes it impregnable from the north and easy to defend on the fourth, southern side. It is also an ideal starting point for the planned second attack on Sogdiana: the river is 500 m wide here and should be navigable by ships. Inside the promontory, a hill⁸⁹ rises more than 10 m, which is ideal for a “citadel” where the leader could reside.

⁸⁷ Minorsky (1937, 64, 73, 109, 336) and his texts imply, in sum, that Madr was also governed from Surkhāb and Andarab, not from Balkh.

⁸⁸ On the name cf. Curiel / Fussman 1965, 9 with fn. 3; modern map services introduce Khosh Tepa or Khvash Tappeh,

⁸⁹ 36°56'38.25"N, 68° 5'10.43"E; cf. fig. 12.1 in Gardin 1998, with a top view and cut through the citadel in fig. 13.3.

According to Alexander historians, Zariaspa was large and had a fortress, which today appears as a “fortin ruiné”, as noted in the caption to Fig. LVI in Curiel / Fussman 1965, which shows Khisht Tepe. Arrian (*An.* 4.16.5) distinguishes between a barbican (φρούριον) and the actual city (πόλις) of Zariaspa.

After the winter of 329/328 BC, Alexander left Zariaspa and continued his conquests in the north. Zariaspa was left under the care of Craterus and a few emergency troops, who guarded the city and a large number of sick or mutilated soldiers. Taking advantage of this weakness, the supposed renegade Spitamenes raided a Macedonian fortress nearby in 329 BC and then moved on to Zariaspa (*Arr.* 4.16.5), where he did not kill any of the inhabitants but took plenty of booty and then set off again. Some Macedonian cavalry troops stationed there took some time to learn of this raid and then pursued Spitamenes and the Massagetae. A sparsely populated city guarded (in principle) by eighty horsemen explains the delayed response. This is the last we hear of Zariaspa during Alexander’s time.

F. von Schwarz, who knew the country well, claimed that the winter quarters in Zariaspa could not have been at Balkh for military reasons and transport problems.⁹⁰ For over a hundred years, he was the only scholar who questioned the equation Balkh = Zariaspa. C. Rapin contradicted von Schwarz and publicly declared his intention to separate the two places into Bactra = Balkh and Zariaspa = Samarkand, “ce qui offre une reconstitution très différente de la genèse de la conquête” (which offers a very different reconstruction of the genesis of the conquest).⁹¹ However, he did not provide details of his hypothesis until 2018.⁹² Here, Rapin listed all relevant texts, with the exception of those concerning the river Zariaspes. Rapin also mentions Ptolemy, but without going into detail.⁹³ He argued that the new location of the winter camp in Samarkand would have helped to keep Alexander in Sogdiana during his second campaign against the Sogdians, and that moving his “guests” to Zariaspa = Balkh would have been too arduous, involving a journey of about a thousand kilometers in both directions. However, these figures are exaggerated. From Samarkand to Balkh and likewise to Zariaspa, it is only about 300 km, a few days on horseback, nothing that would have made Alexander or his guests hesitate.⁹⁴ But at least Rapin finally recognized that identifying Zariaspa with Balkh was not an irrefutable necessity.

⁹⁰ Schwarz 1893, 67. His own incorrect assumption was Chardzhou, Türkmenabad, southwest of Bukhara on the left bank of the Amu Darya.

⁹¹ Rapin 2014, 157.

⁹² Maintained in Rapin 2021, 314.

⁹³ Rapin 2018, 265.

⁹⁴ To increase the value of Marakanda, Rapin (2018, 465) only counts guests from the north, but in fact they come from Parthyaia, Araia, “the sea,” and Syria, cf. *Arr. An.* 4.7.1–2.

To support his thesis, Rapin connects Zariaspa with Zerafshan east of Samarkand, claiming that one is the capital and the other is the “homonymous plain.”⁹⁵ I prefer to stick to Ptolemy’s map, which shows Zariaspa on the Oxus between the deltas of two rivers that flow into the Oxus on the left and right.

8. *The Upper “Oxus” = the Kokcha (R5)*

Ptolemy omits all tributaries of his Oxus from its source to where it receives the Dargoites = Qunduz River (s. Fig. 4). For us, the Oxus = Panj = Amu Darya is only shown from Oxeiana to the mouth of the Qunduz River, while the upper course of Ptolemy’s river in the east, which ends its northern course in Oxeiana with a sharp bend to the west, resembles the Kokcha and Warduj. These two rivers define the important road to the ridge of the “Caucasus” on the way to India or China. This means that Ptolemy shows no trace of the Panj=Amu Darya east of Oxeiana, because he primarily describes roads.

If the river flowing south is the Kokcha, then Oxeiana must be Ai Khanum.⁹⁶ If the Kokcha-Warduj path is what Ptolemy understood as part of the Oxus, then the highest point called Phratrua should be found at the end of the Warduj river, which is known to be near Ishkashim, where the Oxus leaves the Wakhan Valley and begins to flow north.

Phratrua has not yet been identified, but our expectations are met by the fact that several modern maps show a place called Fotur⁹⁷ nine kilometers southeast of Ishkashim at the location determined. The village has its own entry in Adamec (1972), “apparently the same as Paltu,” the lowest village belonging to Wakhan, separated from Ishkashim by a broad, down-like spur.”⁹⁸ On the Mirza’s map (Montgomerie 1871), it is entered as Patore, a few miles before the “road to Chitral” branches off. Faiz Buksh, a Munshee who spied for the British, visited the place and reported: “The border of Wakhán begins at Potar.”⁹⁹ Undoubtedly, all modern variants of the place name reflect something similar to Phratrua.¹⁰⁰ As tiny as the place may be, it allowed travel in six directions: first back north and down the Warduj-Kokcha to Ai-Khanum, or straight north along the Oxus-Panj to Shighnan, or Darwaza, or east along the Wakhan either to China or south via the Khatinza Pass to Chitral or, more conveniently, via the Darkot Pass to Bolor,

⁹⁵ Rapin 2018, 265. This idea is considered probable by Iliakis 2021, 38f. fn. 11, and Minardi 2023, 814.

⁹⁶ Both Alexandria Ōxeianē and simply Ōxeianē are considered by Bernard / Francfort (1978, 5), as candidates for Ai Khanum. Following Ptolemy, I prefer the latter.

⁹⁷ 36°41'9.22"N 71°38'52.18"E.

⁹⁸ Adamec 1972, I, 134 s.v. Pātūr Futūr.

⁹⁹ Yule 1872, 462.

¹⁰⁰ Humbach / Faiss (2012, 38) derive it from “OIr. fra-tarva/nt- ‘to advance/victoriously pursue one’s path’, primarily the name of a river and/or attribute of its deity.”

into the Gilgit Valley, or straight south to the Doha Pass to Chitral and Nangarhar. With Ai Khanum and Phratrua as cornerstones, our definition of Ptolemy’s “upper Oxus” as a road along the Kokcha and Warduj seems reliable.

South of Ōxeiana = Ai Khanum, the map shows two places called Cholbisina and Maruka. Their order suggests an S-bend, with Maruka being mentioned first even though it is further south. For this and other reasons, it has been suggested since Tomaschek that Cholbisina is a Greek version of today’s Hulbuk, a place in Khottalān, 70 kilometers further north, with no connection to the Kokcha River. The longitude is more or less correct east of Ai Khanum, but the latitude is too low. Cholbisina seems to have been shifted together with the next place, Maruka. The modern equivalent is usually given as Munk in upper Khottalān, the old name for today’s Baljuwān north of Hulbuk. Hulbuk was a royal residence during many phases, including under the Kushana, and Munk is a station on many trade routes known to Arab geographers. But was ancient Munk also Ptolemy’s Maruka? The authors¹⁰¹ described the equation as “less obvious, but possible.” A phonetic change should not be ruled out, but the location on the map south of Hulbuk argues against it. Munk-Baldjuwān is located further north than Hulbuk, while Maruka is located further south than Cholbesina on Ptolemy’s map. Grenet and Rapin believe that this is a horizontal mirror image. However, it appears easier to assume that a single informant gave the wrong latitude for both cities. If we measure the difference between the two locations, we get 0.66 degrees (0.33×2) in Ptolemy. If we apply this difference to Hulbuk in a southerly direction, we arrive near Parkhar on the Oxus, and there, only 5 km north of Parkhar, is a site called Mehrovar.¹⁰² The same river connects Munk, Hulbuk, and Mehrovar-Parkhar in that order, with Munk in the north and Mehrovar-Maruka in the south.¹⁰³ It is entirely possible to link Ptolemy’s Maruka with today’s Mehrovar: the distance between the two places in nature and on Ptolemy’s map is the same, while Munk is distant twice as far from Hulbuk. Today’s Parkhar appears in the works of Arab geographers¹⁰⁴ under the same name, but is located on the eastern side of the river, while Mehrovar is positioned on the western side and apparently formed the counterpart in a ferry system. The difference in latitude suggests that these two cities have been confused, with the lengths remaining correct, as Maruka = Mehrovar-Parkhar lies west of Ōxeiana = Ai Khanum¹⁰⁵ and Cholbēsina-Hulbug east of it. Instead of a horizontal mirror image, an incorrectly measured latitude would therefore suffice.

¹⁰¹ Grenet / Rapin 1998, 85.

¹⁰² 237°31’50”N 69°20’30”E.

¹⁰³ The connection between Munk, Hulbuk, and Parkhar is also highlighted in the Ḥudūd (Minorsky 1937, 91 §8).

¹⁰⁴ Barthold 1968, 69.

¹⁰⁵ Grenet / Rapin (1998, 85) assumed that doubts about the location of Ōxeiana were “no longer possible” since it was Takht-i Sangin. This famous place was violently destroyed during the reign of Heliocles I.

There are two more places left, Choana (No. 39) and Zorachana/Suragana (No. 40) on the Kokcha-Warduj trek. The first, Choana (Χοάνα), is located at the site of present-day Faizabad, exactly at an angle of 45° northeast of Andarab, the modern capital of Badakhshan on the lower Kokcha. Xuanzang knew it as 𑖀𑖦𑖦𑖪𑖱𑖫𑖞, HC hi-ma-ta-ra, commonly linked with the Indic *himatala*.¹⁰⁶ In a forthcoming paper the hi-ma will be linked to Ptolemy's Χοάνα, the old city name Kham-chān, and the Arabic river name of the Kokcha, Khan-āb. The remaining ta-ra can be nothing but the -dra used in case of caravansarais. The second place called Zorachana (Ζοράχανα) probably corresponds to today's Chākārān,¹⁰⁷ the "main village of the Warduj area."¹⁰⁸

In searching for errors in Ptolemy, we found at most two incorrectly placed locations in this easternmost section of the Oxus = Kokcha-Warduj (R4), in contrast to four proven or at least acceptable settlements in locations that correspond to the map.

The name "Oxus" for the Kokcha-Warduj Valley is also not an error on Ptolemy's part. The map compiled by Tomaschek¹⁰⁹ from ancient Chinese geographical works justifies the rule I referred to in 2023c, 2b regarding the Indus: In these mountains, all rivers in the upper reaches of a mighty river can be counted as parts of its own body and bear the same name. There are cases where the Kabul River, the Kunar or the Gilgit River are meant when Indus or *sindhu* is read. They all flow into today's Indus. It took Muslim geographers to put an end to this laxity.¹¹⁰ In Chinese maps, the term 縛蜀 *fūchú*¹¹¹ is used for *vakṣu*-Oxus. It is used for the Amu Darya, for the Kokcha and also for the Wakhsh = Kisilsu, in accordance with Ptolemy's custom.¹¹²

If we give Ptolemy at least some credence, his description of the upper course of the "Oxus" shows that it led travelers to a crossing at Phratrua with

¹⁰⁶ Watters 1905, II, 175.

¹⁰⁷ The Mirza (Montgomerie 1871, 191; map) knew it as Chokaran.

¹⁰⁸ Adamec 1972, I, 49. Google Earth shows a fortified acropolis (36°53'32"N 71°4'33.50"E).

¹⁰⁹ Tomaschek 1877, (map "Khang-kiü").

¹¹⁰ Not everyone was satisfied with the new principles. The author of *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam* (Minorsky 1937, 91, §7) complains that the Panj = Jayhūn is called Jayhūn only because it is longer, while this honor belongs to the Kokcha = Khanāb, as it is much stronger.

¹¹¹ Tomaschek "Fa-tsu", HC va/ba-chu/su.

¹¹² Yule correctly recognized that Wakhsh and Wakhan should be derived from an identical root. He assumed that "-sh" and "-an" were distinguishing suffixes meaning "smaller/larger" or "north/south," and had the Greeks change Wakhsh to Oxus and (somewhat hesitantly) Wakhan to Ochus. Yule's identification of Wakhan and Ochus was regarded by Grenet / Rapin (1998, 89b, "Additional note") as confirmation of their own model. However, repetition does not make speculation proof. The problem was analyzed by Lerner (2016, 215f.) with the same conclusions. We differ only in our understanding of what is meant by Ochus. We see that the Chinese in the east still hear the first syllable of *vakṣu* as *va*, while in the west the Greeks and Macedonians changed *va-* to *ō-*: *vakṣu-ōkṣu-ωζος* and *bāxdi-*valkhi-*ōlkh-ωζος*.

connections to Chitral and Nangarhar or Bolor and Taxila. Ptolemy’s only serious and misleading error was to mistake the northern course of the Amu Darya for the southern part of the Iaxartes and to overlook the east-west connection between this northern course and Ōxeiana = Ai Khanum. This is an old error, much older than Ptolemy, and it implies that no one in Ai Khanum was interested in marching eastward from that city along the Panj = Amu Darya. Compared to the narrow gorges of the winding Oxus,¹¹³ any trek from Ai Khanum to Cholbesina (Hulbuk) or Drepsa mētropolis (Kulob?) in the north or along the Kokcha to Phratrua in the south is child’s play.

9. *The Mistaken Iaxartes and East of It (R5)*

Much ink has been spilled in attempts to determine the location of a “stone tower” found on a road through the Pamir Mountains on the way to China. I have shown recently that the decisive “stone tower” cannot have stood in the Karategin Valley, as those who rely on Sir Aurel Stein’s combinations took for granted, but that the term must refer to Tashkurgan, literally “stone building,” as earlier research claimed.¹¹⁴ Sir Aurel Stein was a diligent researcher with unique achievements, but he was repeatedly mistaken in identifying historical sites on Earth.¹¹⁵

To salvage Ptolemy’s reputation at least in part, we can examine how he depicts the Pamir (Fig. 1), east of his Iaxartes, and admire the accuracy of his source.¹¹⁶

In *Geogr.* 6.13.3, Ptolemy lists several Scythian tribes in the valleys from north to south. To understand the location of these peoples, the lists in his prose without geographical references or a “Ptolemaic” map that is more recent than the oldest one are not helpful. Only the map with its source in the early 15th century provides clear information. The rapid decline in accuracy can be observed in just three of the many versions of Ptolemy’s map “Asia 7”:

¹¹³ Aptly described in Bernard / Francfort 1978, 8.

¹¹⁴ Falk 2018, 15–25.

¹¹⁵ He saw Alexander fighting Porus near Jalālpur instead of near the Jhelum, cf. Breloer (1933, 194–204): he found Aornos on Pir Sai instead of on Mount Ilam, cf. Olivieri (2015, 59); he took the rock on which Buddha dried his robe to be on the right side of the Swat River instead of on the left, cf. Falk (2016, 45b–46b); He sought the “hanging bridge” in the gorge of the Indus between Darel/Chilas and the plain, instead of at the southern end of the Yasin Valley, cf. Falk (2023b, 5b).

¹¹⁶ This raises the question of the extent to which the maps were part of Ptolemy’s book and whether they were produced by one or two authors. For an early summary, see Tudeer 1917. At the very least, the maps may have been part of the original concept, even if they were not completed for the market until a later date. The Pamir section (Fig. 3) differs graphically from most other parts in that the valleys are lined with trees, but this stylistic device is also found on maps of Europe and Africa.

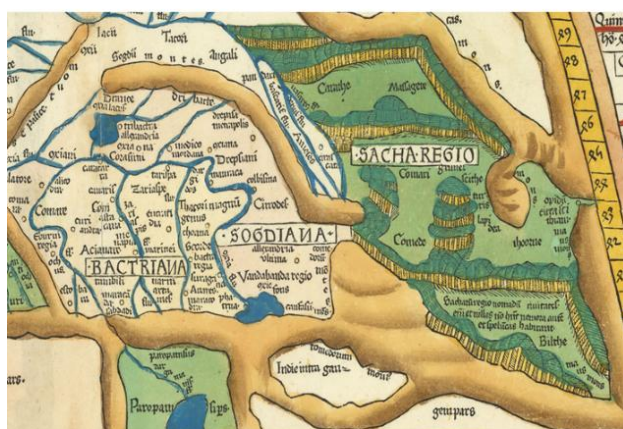
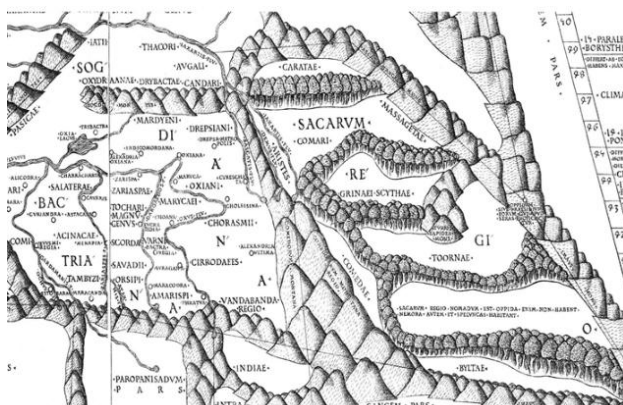


Fig. 3. Ptolemy's depiction of the Pamir region in three phases.
 Note the position of the "stone tower" in the Ghunt Valley on the oldest map with its sources in the early 15th century (Nordensköld 1889). On the middle map, which was made by Lienhart Holle in Ulm in 1482, the details are blurred. On the third map by Giacomo Gastaldi, Venice 1548, the valleys have entirely disappeared.

Because every cartographer copied and simplified his predecessors' work, the valleys in this part of the map were already shapeless or had even entirely disappeared by the end of the 15th century (Fig. 3c). The location of the tribes living there was mostly undefined by geodata in the *Geography*,¹¹⁷ which suggests that the map is necessary to understand much of Ptolemy's prose.¹¹⁸

The representation on the oldest surviving map, completed in Rome before 1478 AD (Fig. 3a), is quite different.¹¹⁹ The Pamir valleys follow one another from top to bottom, leading us to suspect that someone, possibly Maes Titianus, had a sketch of the wider surroundings made by a local. It begins at the northern end of the Pamir with a wooded valley running from west to east, in which he settles a people called *Καράται*/Caratae. This valley still is today known as Karateghin, the modern name being remarkably similar to that of its ancient inhabitants. The *Κόμαροι*/Comari live in the next valley to the south. The curved shape of the valley bears a resemblance to the lower reaches of the Bartang River before it flows into the Oxus. The next valley to the south is inhabited by the *Γρινάϊοι Σκύθαι*/Grinaei Scythae.¹²⁰ This is the Ghand¹²¹ Valley, a term that has also retained some of its ancient sounds. This valley leads directly to the *Λίθινος Πύργος*/Turris lapidea mons, the mountain with the famous stone tower. On the oldest map, this stone tower is beautifully depicted following at the end of the road along the Ghand Valley. The tower is accompanied by a legend describing its function. From the stone tower, a mountain range continues in a quarter circle to the northeast, representing the usual route from Tashkurgan (No. 10) to Igizyar or Yengi hissar.¹²² From there, travelers must turn south toward Yarkand (No. 5), which is described on the map as “Ὀρμητήριον/Oppidum, from where trade to China begins.” Whoever drew this map must have marched as far as Hormeterion near Yarkand.

In the Pamir section of Ptolemy's map, south of the Ghand Valley is the Wakhan, inhabited by the *Τοόρναι*/Toornae, an enigmatic ethnonym.¹²³ The next valley must be the valley of the Gilgit River, as it is home to the *Βύλται*/Byltae. This is a Greek form of the people of Bolor, who are ruled by the family of the Palolas. Beyond the next mountain range of the *Imaus mons* lies the *Intra-Gangem pars* in the Indian lowlands.

¹¹⁷ Humbach / Faiss 2002, fig. 31.

¹¹⁸ On this controversial topic, see Polaschek (1959, 17–18), who comes to the same conclusion.

¹¹⁹ Nordenskiöld 1889, Plate XXII, Septima Asiae Tabula; for his material, see p. viii, Introduction.

¹²⁰ Etymology from Humbach / Faiss 2012, 43.

¹²¹ In Falk 2018, I used the English form “Ghunt,” but a more accurate pronunciation can be found in Persian *ghand* (Koshkaki trad. Reut 1979, 194).

¹²² See map in Falk 2018, 8, fig. 4.

¹²³ Xuanzang uses 達摩悉鐵帝 da-mo-xi-tie-di HC: da/dha/d/dh-ma-s/si-?-ti/di, for Wakhan, sanskritized by Watters (1905, II, 280) to *dharmasthiti*.

The accuracy of this part of the world in this oldest version of Ptolemy's map is remarkable. It lists five parallel valleys running east-west in a rather inaccessible part of the earth: Karategin, Bartang, Ghand, Wakhan, and Gilgit, three of which still bear names that can be linked to their classical precursors. For the creator of this map, the middle path along the Ghand Valley undoubtedly leads to the stone tower, i.e. to Tashkurgan.¹²⁴

Ptolemy had great difficulty connecting this Pamir block of valleys with his Oxus, our Kokcha-Warduj. The Amu Darya, flowing northward, was known to him, or rather to his informant. Anyone familiar with Phratrua-Patur is also aware of the Amu Darya, which bends around Ishkashim. His problem only becomes apparent when one connects his multi-part descriptions as I did for Fig. 4b. How can his Iaxartes reach Ferghana from Phratrua? He had to move its source southward and, to do so, shifted the southeastward migration of his informant Maes Titianus downward by 5 degrees, so that now the "Gorge of the Comedes" begins at point (8), whereas in Maes' account it ended there. The southern source of the Iaxartes belongs to an old model according to which four great rivers flow from the roof of the world in the four cardinal directions. In Strabo's view (11.7.4), this leads to the view that "From the same Indian mountains, where the Ochus and the Oxus and several other rivers rise, flows also the Iaxartes." The sequence is from west to east, Balkh River (R1, "Ochus"), Kokcha-Warduj (R4, "Oxus") and Iaxartes (R5, northward running "Iaxartes" in Shighnan).

A side note concerns Maes. For his journey to Yarkand, he set off from Bactra and marched north. In my 2018 work, I assumed without question that Bactra must mean Balkh. However, from there, a march "north" to Dushanbe is incorrect. Starting from Zariaspa, the second Bactra, the first section leads through the Kafirnighan Valley, and this route actually points north.

In summary, I agree with Bernard / Francfort (1972, 8) that Ptolemy's work does not accurately reflect the course of the upper Oxus. The continuation east of Ai Khanum is missing, as is the long section within the Wakhan. Apart from that, however, there is no "grande confusion règne dans le système ptoléméen." Instead, there is a slight "confusion dans la hypothèse française". On a positive note, five river valleys of the Pamir and Karakorum are listed in perfect order, and the names of the Scythian tribes, known since Herodotus for not having permanent settlements, are repeated on the Ptolemaic map itself.

We can complain that the mighty Wakhsh is missing, as are Samarkand and the Panj, which connects Ai Khanum with Darwaza and Roshan. But Ptolemy's material consisted of travel reports from merchants, not surveys by geographers. And a number of places that they did not visit for various reasons were not mentioned.

¹²⁴ Compared with the Ghand route, the alternatively discussed Karategin offers no advantages. For a discussion see Falk 2018, 21.

III. Applying Geo-Data to Numismatics

Back to the beginning, to Zariaspa, Khisht Tepe. Now we can locate the place at a precisely defined spot on the Oxus. Balkh is not Zariaspa, nor is Samarkand. We know that Alexander was on the Oxus in the winter of 329/328 BC. According to the *Metz Epitome* (14), Bessus was executed in Zariaspa after being brought to Alexander’s camp by some collaborators in chains, naked, with his ears and nose cut off.¹²⁵ Zariaspa thus represents the final end of the Achaemenids and the legitimate acquisition of Bactria as a whole. From a military point of view, Zariaspa was well chosen as a winter quarter. According to Arrian (*An.* 4.1.5), the city of Zariaspa was for a time the “largest” settlement in Bactria. Who lived there after Alexander’s departure? We have no information about the Diodotoi. Of the following kings, at least Euthydemus I seems to have lived in Zariaspa. This is evident from Polybius who (10.49.15) describes how Antiochus III attempted to recapture Bactria from the Graeco-Bactrians in 207 BC after Euthydemus I had seized power from the Diodotoi. Antiochus III succeeded in crossing the Arius (today Tejen) and, through a cunning maneuver, invading Bactria, so that the Bactrian king fled to the city of Zariaspa (εἰς πόλιν Ζαριάσπαν τῆς Βακτριανῆς), most likely his capital.

Euthydemus sent his son to negotiate with Antiochus III, and the two agreed to grant Bactria independence. Euthydemus son may have been the last Greek-Bactrian king with a strong power center in Zariaspa. The next ruler, the usurper Eucratides I, seems to have moved the center of power closer to Andarab in order to control the mountainous access to his empire in the south, where he had driven the supporters of the former dynasty. They now lived exclusively south of the Hindu Kush.

The Kunduz Hoards and the Attic Standard Weight

The (first) Kunduz treasure was discovered in Khisht Tepe = Zariaspa (38), where 627 silver coins, mainly from the 2nd century BC, were initially found. This collection of coins tells a story about how power passed from the Euthydemids to Eucratides I and from the Eucratids to the Yuezhi, the founders of the Kushan Empire. To understand this process, we require a brief introduction to the metrology of the collected coins.

As long as the Greco-Bactrian kings resided north of the Hindu Kush, in Bactria and beyond, their coinage followed a single standard that also prevailed in other parts of the Hellenistic world. The basis was the Attic weight standard,

¹²⁵ The place where Bessus ended his life is given as the country of Bactria (*Metz Ep.* 14) or the city of Bactra (Arr. *An.* 4.7.3); a brother of Darius III is involved (Just. 12.5.11, and possibly Diod. 17.83.9), and wooden execution devices are used (*Metz Ep.*, Plut. *Alex.* 43.6; opaque Diod. 17.83.9). An execution in Ecbatana seems to be one of Curtius’ “scholarly” additions (7.5.40-43). The timing in winter makes Zariaspa the most likely location.

which was almost 16.8 grams of silver for the tetradrachm, corresponding to about 4.2 grams for the drachma.¹²⁶ Apart from its use in the eponymous region of Attica and on the Greek mainland, it was also adopted by all the Diadochi.

The Graeco-Bactrian rulers after Alexander and the first Seleucids had no reason to change this international habits regarding coin standards. From Diodotos I to the last kings of the Eucratides family all issued staters and drachmas in that standard. The period of the Eucratides family can be subdivided into three phases: a) Eucratides I from about 174 BC onwards dispelled all members of the Euthydemos clan and made them shift across the Hindu Kush into the Kabul area, Nangahar, and even beyond the Indus into Jammu, where they installed diverse “Indo-Greek” kingdoms. b) After the murder of Eucratides, his widow withdraws into the former Sogdian parts north of the Oxus, with the support of the freshly arrived Yuezhi nomads. The Bactrian parts of Tocharistan and Bactriane south of the Oxus are divided among sons of Eucratides I, at least with Eucratides II and Platon. Both issued silver coinage in nothing but the Attic standard. Around 100 BC, these sons disappear from Tocharistan and the Yuezhi penetrate and rule the lands south of the Oxus as well. Initially, the old Attic coinage was produced further, but its artistic and technical standards declined, as did the weight. The Indo-Greek families south of the Hindu Kush thought it necessary to introduce a new standard to facilitate commerce with the Indian states, which had their own weight systems.

The so-called Kunduz treasure was found in 1946 and first published by Bi-var in 1955. Its location is known to the nearest square meter within the triangle of the Khisht Tepe headland, the ancient Zariaspa. The treasure contained of great numbers of silver staters, collected in large pots. These coins could be ferry tariffs, or rather donations to a religious entity like a river god Oxus. This second possibility gains weight in light of another nearby river deity. Takht-i Sangin features a river sanctuary on the right side of the Wakhsh at a place where the Amu Darya joins in. This temple was rebuilt and extended several times. At certain places, the responsible priests hid golden and other donations in holes sunk into the floor. Building activities did not disturb the hidden treasures, which were left in place and covered over with plaster. Similar regard for religious donations could have prevented the hidden treasure at Khisht Tepe from being looted in antiquity.

The coins found at Khisht Tepe had been minted in the name of 19 Greek kings, which belonged to the two groups of a) those ruling exclusively in Bactria north of the Hindu Kush and also b) of the expelled ones, ruling south of the mountain range. In the north, we have Diodotus, Euthydemus I and II, Demetrius I and II.

Of the dispelled Euthydemide kings, Agathokles and Antimachus I continued with the Attic standard south of the Hindu Kush and issued commemorative coins

¹²⁶ Like any other standard, the Attic weight also exhibits a certain flexibility and a tendency to lose weight. For the relative stability of the Attic standard in Bactria, see Holt 2000.

showing rulers from Alexander, Antiochus I or II up to Pantaleon, thus demonstrating who they considered to be legal rulers. Agathokles adds a *dikaïou* to the reverse of all his commemorative issues, stressing the difference between each one of them and the usurper Eucratides and his lot, who were not considered “legal, justified” rulers.

In the Kabul plain, in Nangarhar and Jammu, many rulers are found who had adopted an Indian nominal weight of approximately 9.8 g, abandoning the Attic standard. They are Theophil, Lysias, Antialkidas, Philoxenos, Amyntas, Hermaios, and Archebios. According to the presently favoured chronology, they ruled successively and in part jointly from about 130 to 75 BC. Although all of these ruled outside Bactria and issued coins in the Indian standard, all of them also produced the heavier Attic coins in small numbers, often struck from superbly designed dies. Almost all of these rare versions are only found at Khisht Tepe, and never south of the Hindu Kush. Since this practice was followed for approximately 60 years by the aforementioned kings, with no Indic standard silver coins found at Khisht Tepe and no contemporary Attic standard coins discovered in India, there must be a reason.

There are several explanations still current:

- a) Some authors start with the idea that coins are made for people in their own land. And so some land on the Oxus where the Qunduz hoard was found should have still been, temporarily, in the hands of those Indo-Greek kings living in the south.¹²⁷ The basic assumption was refuted by several specialists.¹²⁸ As a variant, Fussman envisaged the same kings from Menander to Hermaios as believing that they still owned some isolated parts of Bactria, for which they minted coins in the old style, while the actual owners, the Yuezhi, simply did not care about what was going on or did not understand this sort of Indo-Greek self-deception.¹²⁹ This we could call the enclave solution.
- b) Many authors¹³⁰ start with the serious idea that coins are made to facilitate the exchange of valuables, be they merchandise or manual services. If coins from the south are found in the north, then there must have been goods or services that found their way from the north to the south. This is the commerce solution.
- c) Bopearachchi reported an alternative idea, orally communicated to him by G. Le Rider, who, however, never published this view personally.¹³¹ The idea was that the coinage in question was forwarded as a tribute to the nomads, to ward off the threat of their attacks. If we examine Mesopotamia and the sums the Romans had to pay to deter the Parthians and Sasanians from attacking, we see that those millions of dinars hardly compare to the few Attic tetradrachms

¹²⁷ Bivar 1955, 45; Jenkins 1968a, 247.

¹²⁸ Bernard firm 1974, 308, undecided 1985, 104; Bopearachchi 1993, 39.

¹²⁹ Fussman 1993, 128f.

¹³⁰ E.g. Bernard 1985, 104f.; Bopearachchi 1990, 99–101.

¹³¹ Bopearachchi 1993, 40.

on the Oxus. It is difficult to imagine Indo-Greek kings paying tribute to nomads, but certain aspects of this general idea will recur in my conclusion at the end. I call this the armistice solution.

- d) The Attic weight tetradrachms are very particular, in that they are fashioned according to the highest artistic standard, made to express a certain prestige. Bopearachchi names H. Nicolet-Pierre as referring to the tetradrachms as “objects of prestige.”¹³² At least one specimen minted by Amyntas, found only within the Qunduz hoard, is considerably larger than other silver pieces. The few attested find-places in and around Khisht Tepe show that the receiving locals lived outside the Indo-Greek borders.¹³³ Art and size, absence of wear and tear, rarity in number and distant location are classical characteristics of medallions.¹³⁴ In our case, we can add centrality of the dies on the flan: in most cases the ring of dots or bead-and-reel is fully preserved on the flan, testimony of particular care while hitting the die into the flan. Some authors, beginning with Lahiri¹³⁵ and Bivar, therefore saw no coins, but medallions, presented for extraordinary feats or at an extraordinary point in time. Such medallions may, but need not, go into monetary circulation. This is the medallion solution.

Most of these proposals met counterarguments. The enclave solution was unconvincing, at least if the initial conquest of Bactriane by the Yuezhi is taken for total. The commerce solution hurts itself due to the rarity of finds over a relatively long time span. The commerce would have been more than marginal, not deserving the artistic effort. The medallion solution is quite self-imposing, but so far lacks the necessary extraordinary feat or point in time for the presentation.¹³⁶

My proposal starts from the importance apparent in Zariaspa as a temporary center of power south of the Oxus. The place was called the “largest town” by Arrian (*An.* 4.1.5: Ζαριάσπα, τὸν μέγιστον πόλιν), a term that does not impose itself today when visiting the vast brick hills of Khisht Tepe, despite its unexplored citadel. A temple for Oxus can be safely presupposed, a conjoint altar installed by Alexander would be no surprise.¹³⁷

¹³² Bopearachchi 1990, 99.

¹³³ There are not many sites that have been reliably documented. The find from Khisht Tepe provides most of the evidence, supplemented by a coin of Philoxenos and Archebios, both found “in the Mazar-i Sharif region” (Bopearachchi 1990, 87, 92, 100). Even less clear is the coin of Menander from “Iran” (Jenkins 1968b, 109).

¹³⁴ Lorenz 2018.

¹³⁵ Lahiri (1965, 61): “(...) the monolingual Attic coins (...) were most probably ‘extraordinary’ issues - struck once and for a specific purpose. They were a sort of ‘commemorative medallions’ brought out for some special occasion like the ‘coronation ceremony’ or the celebration of victory.”

¹³⁶ Bivar (1955, 42) speaks of victory medallions, without naming the defeated party.

¹³⁷ On the *Peutingar Map*, south of the “fl. Oxus,” an *Ara Alexandri* is marked together with its symbol. However, this document should not be given much significance.

The sacred site, which received pious donations in the form of valuable coins, may have already been active during Alexander's time. The first treasure contained only one of his coinage, while the second container contained more of them.¹³⁸

After Alexander, two coins from the Seleucids were found, spaced far apart, probably regarded as obsolete in the time of the Diodotoi, who introduced five pieces of their own. With the Euthydemids, the donation of coins seems to become an established habit. Their standard types occur regularly. Most of these are from Demetrius II (50 pieces).

An altogether different phase begins with Eucratides I, the usurper, eliminating the Euthydemids in Bactria. The ensuing warlike time leaves 144 coins of Eucratides I. Eucratides II leaves 130, and Heliocles I leaves 204. The bellicose founder of the Eucratides dynasty left many coins at Khisht Tepe, as if a raging war had been one of the reasons for his visits. The second treasure came to light only recently, but it contained older issues, such as tridrachms and pentadrachms of Eucratides I, which are singular for Bactria. All show the king without a helmet and without the addition of ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ to his name. Instead, they are marked with Α, Γ, Δ, Ε to indicate that they are drachmas, tridrachmas, tetradrachmas, and pentadrachmas, with extra sizes and markings that he soon abandoned. All of these singular types he issued at the beginning of his reign and may have ordered the tridrachmas and pentadrachmas with nothing but Khisht Tepe in view. This idea of an “additional weight for Alexander” may later also have appealed to the kings of the “Indian” south.

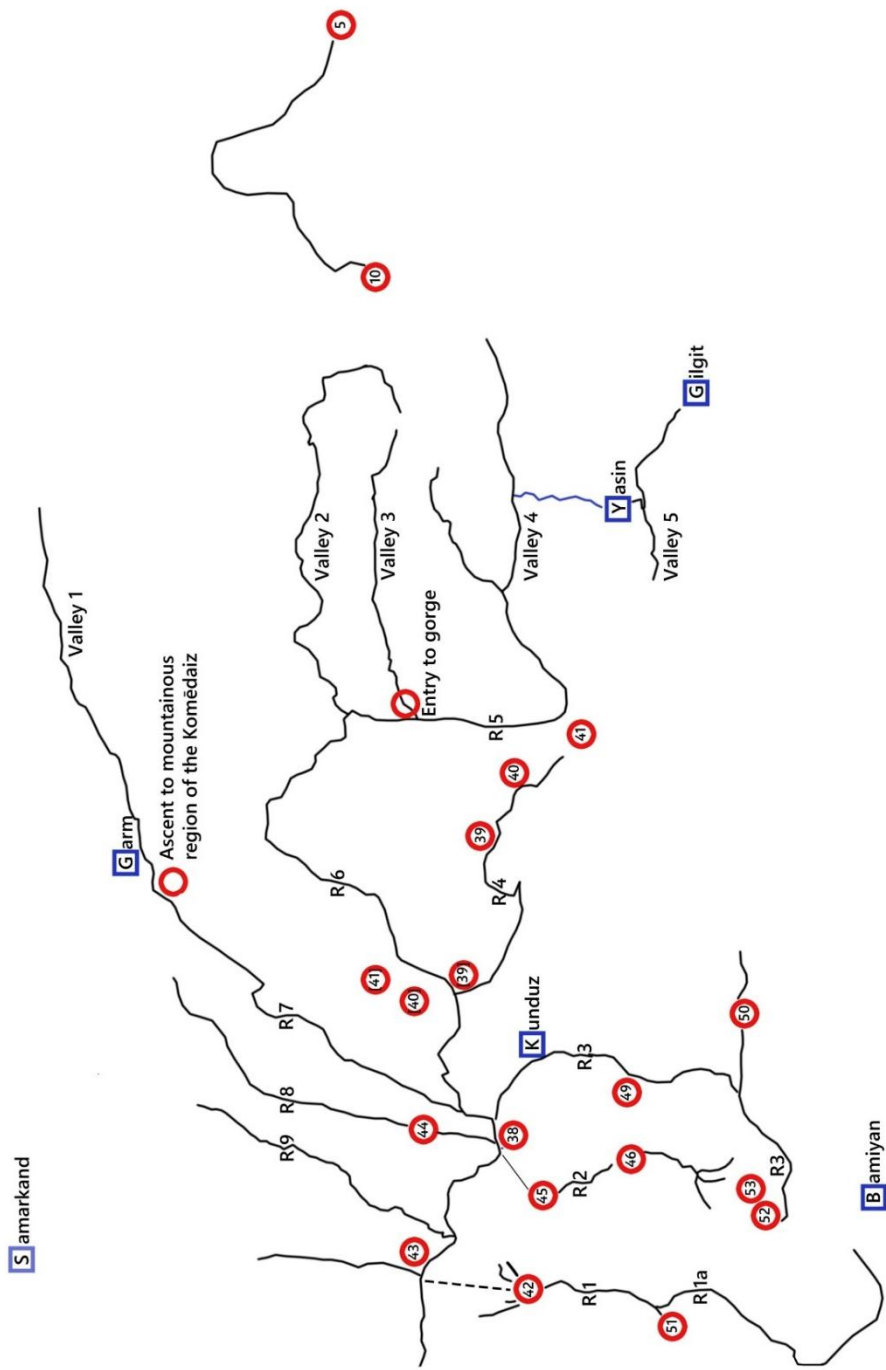
The Eucratids were outmaneuvered by the Yuezhi, who began to rule both lands, north and south of the Oxus, around the same time when the southern Indo-Greeks started to visit Khisht Tepe, beginning with Lysias around 120 BC. Their donations are few, only one to four pieces per king. While the Eucratid kings frequently came to Alexander's famous site, possibly to seek his help, the southern kings had different intentions. They came, brought specially minted coins with them, and left again. This phase lasted until Hermaeus around 90 BC, the last Indo-Greek to hold power south of the Hindu Kush.

Thus, the Attic tetradrachms of the southern kings found in Khisht Tepe, the Zariaspa of old, could point to an “Alexander solution”: kings from the south came to honor a local deity, Alexander, who had proven at this very place that he had the right to rule Bactria.¹³⁹ It seems that anything that did not conform to the classical Attic standard was considered unworthy of Alexander's greatness, while the portraits on the obverse gave the recipient an impression of what his legitimate successors looked like.

¹³⁸ Zeng 2022.

¹³⁹ A similar veneration of Alexander seems to have been expressed by Indo-Greek rulers, who show a horseman on a horned horse on the reverse, who can only be Bucephalus, cf. Glenn 2023.

Map



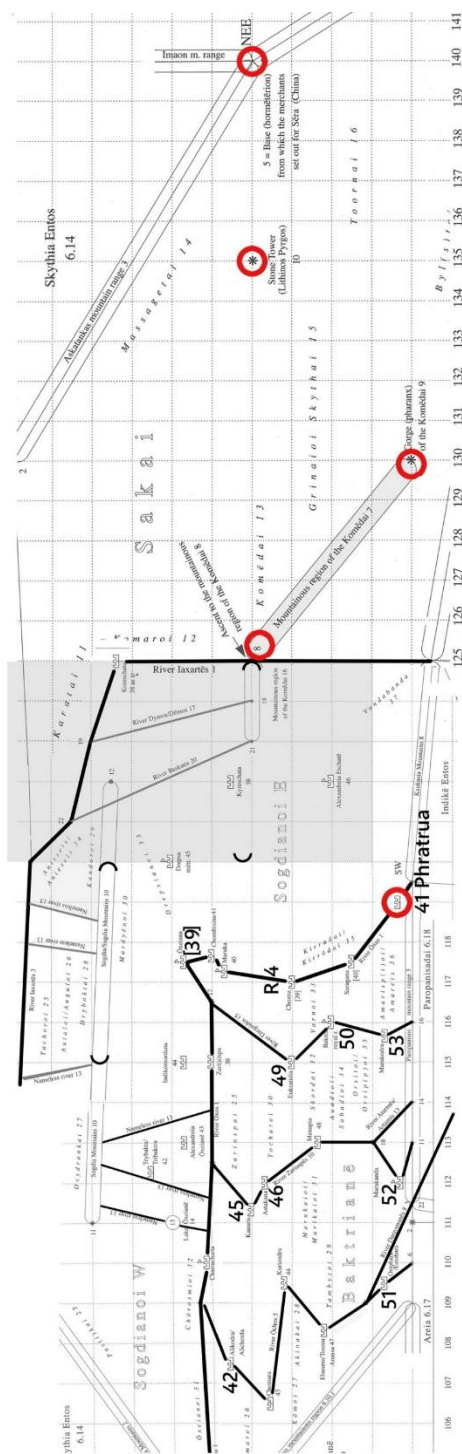


Fig. 4. Maps: Comparison of a numerical arrangement of Ptolemy's data by Humbach et al. (1998; 2002) (below) and the concerned cities and rivers on a modern map (above).

River 1/1a: *Dargomanes* & *Ochus* = Rud-i Band-e Amir & Balkhab. River 2: *Atarmes* & *Zariaspes* = Khulmāb. River 3: *Dargoites* = Doshi, Kunduzāb. River 4: *Oxus* = Warduj & Kokcha. River 5: *Yaxartes* = Amu Darya; upper part = Syr Darya. (38) *Zariaspas* = Khisht Tepe. (39) Faizabad? (40) *Suragana* = Charakān. (41) *Phratrua* = Patur. (42) *Alitodra* = Alik Rabat. (44) *Kurtandra* = Khurram. (45) *Kauaris* = Khulm. (46) *Astakana* = Aibak (49) *Eukratidia* = Surkh Kotal? (50) *Baktira basileion* = Andarab. (51) *Ostobara* = upper part of Balkhāb. (52+53) *Marakanda*= *Marakodra* = Madr/ Malr + Kah/ Kamard. (48) *Menapia*=*Maithanaka*? = Rui/Rui du āb? [39] *Oxtana* = Ai Khanum. [40] *Maruka* = Mehrovar. [41] *Cholbisina* = Hulbuk. [43] *Alexandria Oxiane* = Kampyr Tepe?. [44] *Indikomordana* = Kobardian. (5) *Hormeterion* = Yarkand. (8): Access to the Komedai Mountains. (9): *Pharauz*: beginning of the Gorge = Chorgh. (10) *Stone tower* = Tashkurgan. Move the gray part about 4 degrees up and 5 degrees west until the lower area marked (—) is positioned on top of the upper one. Then the ascent to the Komedai Mountains begins near Gharm (gray 8), and the entrance to the gorge follows near Chorgh, at the same altitude as Tashkurgan. This correctly identifies Baskatis and Dymos in the upper part with the two “nameless rivers 13” above the “Sugdian Mountains 10.” The shift of the entire block was necessary for Ptolemy to leave the source of the Yaxartes in the Caucasus.

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Abstract

Ptolemy’s *Geography* contains extensive data on Bactria, the land above the Hindu Kush and south of the Oxus (Amu Darya). A comparison of his data with the events surrounding Alexander’s Anabasis has revealed contradictions regarding the locations of rivers and cities. The most significant difficulty concerned the location of a river called Ochus (Ὠχος). We propose leaving the Ochus where Ptolemy knew it, namely as Balkhāb near Balkh. Furthermore, the city of Zariaspa is not considered a second name for Balkh, but is placed on the Oxus, south of Kobadian, following Ptolemy. A review of other places and rivers reinforces the impression that Ptolemy’s map of Bactria and the surrounding countries must be taken more seriously. If Zariaspa is located on the Oxus, then Alexander spent the winter of 329/328 BC there for military reasons. The imprisonment and possible execution of the last Achaemenid king, Bessus (Artaxerxes), at this location adds to the mythical character of the place where Alexander demonstrated his final conquest of the country.

It appears that Zariaspa, or a temple within it, represented Alexander’s presence, and that donations to the temple conferred legitimacy on all subsequent rulers throughout the Bactrian region. Under the controversial rulers Eucratides I, II, and Heliocles I, particularly large donations were made to the temple treasury. After the Yuezhi also conquered Bactria south of the Oxus, the non-Bactrian Indo-Greek rulers minted special coins with their portrait in the Attic style, which were donated almost exclusively in Zariaspa. A connection to Alexander could explain the rarity and numismatic peculiarity of the donations.