

# THE GRECO-BACTRIAN MIRAGE: RECONSTRUCTING A HISTORY OF HELLENISTIC BACTRIA

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THE HELLENISTIC KINGDOMS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GRAECO-BACTRIAN CITIES OF AI KHANUM, BACTRA, AND TAXILA. MAP FROM: PAUL BERNARD, "AN ANCIENT GREEK CITY IN CENTRAL ASIA." SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, JANUARY 1982, 152.

Soon after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., three of his generals divided his kingdom among themselves and waged war with one another for the next 300 years. The Ptolemies in Egypt, the Antigonids in Macedonia and Greece, and the Seleucids claiming territory stretching from Israel to India, maintained an impressive, if precarious, hold over their dominions. Known by historians as the “Hellenistic Age” (from the Greek word ‘Hellene’, meaning ‘Greek’), it witnessed the fusion of Greek culture with various ethnic traditions. One of the most unique, though clouded, is that of a Greek civilization on the eastern Iranian plateau and Indus River valley. The Greek kingdom of Bactria, because of its instability and isolation from the west, encouraged this fusion to its greatest extent - even to its destruction.

The sketchy history of this region prevents a clear understanding of the history of this province on the eastern frontier of the Seleucid kingdom. We have few resources for reconstructing a framework of the rise and fall of Bactria. The study of coins (numismatics) is one exception. If not the most lucid, coins are certainly the most abundant source of evidence on ancient Bactria. Outside of numismatic evidence lies the more incomplete archaeological and literary evidence. Archaeological findings include city-sites like Taxila in India and more recently, Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan. The excavations have given historians a geographic focus for Greco-Bactrian history creating a broader, though shallower, base of evidence. Literary works include both those of ancient western historians such as Strabo, Polybius, and Justin and those of ancient Indian scholars such as Pâḍini and Patañjali. Indian sources, such as the *Milindapañha* and the *Yuga Purâna* have also shed some light on the activities of the later ‘Indo-Greeks’ However, none of the literary sources (both western and eastern) go into any detail on Bactria’s history. Unlike the Hellenistic kingdoms in the west, the Bactrian Greeks were separated from their homeland and confronted by extremely strong cultural influences that eventually overcame them.

In order to understand the pressures on the Bactrians, we must pay close attention to the earlier history of this region. Before the Seleucids and even Alexander the Great, Bactria was a Satrapy (or province) of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenid dynasty. Due to its remoteness and dry mountainous environment, it became a favorite destination for deporting Greek captives of the Achaemenids. The Greek geographer Hecataeus drafted a map circa 500 B.C. that marked Bactria and India as the edge of the world; Greek historians such as Plutarch reported distasteful

images of the people and region.<sup>1</sup> However, the modern historian Frank L. Holt points out that it is important to temper this view of mass deportations. These views he says, are, “Certainly not indicative of mass deportations of Greeks to central Asia, [yet] these reports do reinforce the reputation of Bactria-Sogdiana as a remote and punishing place from the Greek perspective.”<sup>2</sup> Some modern historians have likened Bactria to a kind of “Siberia” for the Persian kings.<sup>3</sup> With this perspective in mind, it is conceivable that the few Greeks banished to Bactria and cut off from Greek civilization, were unhappy with their lot.

Throughout the Hellenistic age Bactria gained a reputation as a fiercely independent people supportive of their Satraps. During the century long dynastic rule of the Achaemenids of Persia, Bactria revolted in support of the first Achaemenid king Darius and the brothers of later kings Xerxes and Artaxerxes.<sup>4</sup> The Seleucids of Syria fared even worse than the Achaemenids. Struggling in warfare on their western borderlands with the Ptolemies and Antigonids, Seleucus and his line could not easily spare the manpower to subdue a rebellion in Bactria. This time the rebellious elements were not only the indigenous Bactrians, but also the Greek mercenaries of Alexander that had decided, or felt compelled, to stay. “This fiery frontier had turned into a smelting pot, separating out the mercenaries by motive and mettle, and leaving behind a solid core committed to staying in the east.”<sup>5</sup> Cut off from direct contact with the Hellenistic kingdoms in the west, these Greco-Bactrians are not covered extensively in any literature of the period. The only abundant evidence of their kingdom has been preserved as coins issued by the various rulers of the region.

With the bulk of evidence coming from undated coins, naturally there are multiple conflicting theories about the chronology of the Greco-Bactrian succession. Although the evidence is scant, several historians became well known for tackling the problem of the “Greco-Bactrian mirage.”<sup>6</sup> First, William Woodthorpe Tarn published his book *The Greeks in Bactria and India* in 1938, this volume opened the age of the Greco-Bactrian kings to true historical study. Tarn saw the Bactrian kingdom as a fifth Hellenistic state, “For in the history of India the episode of Greek rule has no meaning; it is really part of the history of Hellenism, and that is where it’s meaning resides.”<sup>7</sup> The only counterpart to his work and the best challenge to his assumptions first came upon the scene nearly twenty years later with A. K. Narain’s publishing of *The Indo-Greeks* in 1957. Narain flatly rejects Tarn’s view saying that, “Their history is part of the history of India and not of the Hellenistic states; they came, they saw, but India conquered.”<sup>8</sup> This polar view of Greco-Bactrian history has been criticized by F.W. Holt in his recent publication of

*Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria.* To Holt, the truth lies somewhere in-between.

The difficulty in defining the rule of the Bactrian kings covers both chronology and geography. Oliver Guillaume in his book *Analysis of Reasoning in Archaeology* focused on the often conflicting accounts in the works of Tarn and Narain. His strict examination of the evidence has proven reconstructing a precise history nearly impossible. Thankfully, Guillaume admits that, “A certain number of kings (Diodotus, Euthydemus, Demetrius, Eucradities) are fairly well dated through texts by Justin, Strabo, Polybius and their coins could provide anchor points for any numismatical typology.”<sup>9</sup> It seems safe then to reconstruct a broad and tentative outline of Bactrian chronology using these monarchs as anchor points.

Still, the chronology has been difficult to pin down. Unlike modern coins, the coins of Alexander’s successors rarely, if ever, included a stamped date. The only dates are from classical authors who either stated them outright or correlated the Bactrian rulers with dateable events in the west. Tarn speculates a gradual secession undertaken by Diodotus I, considered to be the first of the Bactrian Satraps to successfully declare himself independent of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>10</sup> This view is supported by the coin evidence which shows some Diodotus coins with the reverse exactly as the Seleucus king Antiochus II minted, with his name in Greek “ANTIOXOS.”<sup>11</sup> Yet literary texts such as in Justin’s “*Epitome of Trogus*”, and the temperament of the region support Frank Holt’s conclusion that it is not unusual for the Greeks in Bactria to revolt, as they had done under Persia and Alexander. Narain, not surprisingly, disagrees with Tarn, but for different reasons.<sup>12</sup> Holt believes it was a combination of both, a gradual secession climaxing in a revolt somewhere between 256 and 250 B.C. The first dynasty of the Diodoti lasted only briefly, but they are the confirmed starting point for the rising of Greek Bactria.

Diodotus I took on the title of “Soter” upon establishing himself as ruler around the mid-third century BC. This means “savior” in Greek, but what it signifies is not exactly known. Perhaps a savior from an ‘oppressive’ Seleucid rule, or perhaps more relevant to their locality, a savior from the barbaric native peoples and Scythian nomads to the north. Nevertheless, Diodotus I created a precarious situation and needed to consolidate his power. One way of doing this was through the propaganda value of coins.

Several facets of the Diodoti rule have been deduced from the coins issued by him. The coins with a reverse of Zeus standing and holding a thunderbolt from his

upraised hand implies the power which Diodotus I held in Bactria.<sup>13</sup> Tarn's reconstruction of the Diodoti lineage includes the marriage of Diodotus I to a Seleucid princess. His basis rests on a so-called pedigree coin issued by a later Bactrian ruler Agathocles to show his royal descent. Yet it is known even by Tarn, that a pedigree was frequently distorted by these successors of Alexander to enhance their legitimacy.<sup>14</sup> Narain and Holt see the lack of corroborating evidence as the largest hole in Tarn's argument. Narain points out that the existence of this Seleucid princess is a mystery and her name unknown to any classical sources.<sup>15</sup> The former Seleucid Satrapy of Parthia (also claiming independence from the Seleucids after Bactria's revolt) feared the power of the Diodoti so much that upon Diodotus II's accession in the later 3rd century B.C., they quickly made an alliance with him.<sup>16</sup>

Antiochus III, monarch of the Seleucid Empire, marched to reclaim his lost satrapies of Parthia and Bactria around 208 B.C. as told by Polybius. By this time, Euthydemus I had deposed the Diodoti having, "possessed himself of the throne of Bactria by destroying their descendants."<sup>17</sup> In Polybius' "Histories", Antiochus III fought the cavalry of the Bactrian king Euthydemus on the banks of the Arius River.<sup>18</sup> Antiochus successfully routed the cavalry, "After the battle Euthydemus was terror-stricken and retired with his army to a city in Bactria called Zariaspa."<sup>19</sup> Zariaspa is also known as Bactra, the capital of Bactria. Euthydemus survived a siege for two years and finally convinced Antiochus to accept his sovereignty over Bactria. The besieged king played upon fears of a possible barbarian raid from the north in order to convince Antiochus of the need for a constructive resolution to the conflict. Demetrius I, the son of Euthydemus, ratified the treaty with the Seleucid on behalf of his father.<sup>20</sup>

The reign of Euthydemus I saw the extension of his holdings to include the satrapy of Aria in the south as shown by the location of the cavalry battle on the banks of the Arius River. Later, his son Demetrius I continued this southward push by annexing Arachosia and establishing the city of Demetrias on the Helamand River.<sup>21</sup> How could a weakened Demetrius I be so daring and reckless after his father's near defeat by a victorious Antiochus III? Although Antiochus had reasserted a Seleucid presence as far east as the Indian provinces on the upper Indus, problems in the west forced him to rush back to the Mediterranean theatre. Demetrius' conquests are believed by Narain to fall somewhere between the siege of 208 B.C. and 189 B. C. when Antiochus III was defeated by the Romans at the battle of Magnesia. Antiochus III was "the last Seleucid aggressor in the east."<sup>22</sup>

Demetrius I also pushed Bactrian rule into northwest India. Narain and Tarn

again disagree as to how extensive this “conquest” was, although Narain says that, “It is almost universally accepted that it was Demetrius who crossed the Hindu Kush and made himself master of the Kabul and Indus valleys.”<sup>23</sup> Tarn agrees with Demetrius’ crossing of the Hindu Kush mountain chain into the Gandhara region of northwest India, but he also believes that Demetrius advanced as far as the middle Ganges river, much further into India than Narain is comfortable with.<sup>24</sup> This conflict results from three types of problematic coinage found with the title “ἈΨΙΩΝΕΥΣ” (Demetrius). On one set of coins, he is depicted wearing an elephant scalp over his royal diadem. On the reverse is Heracles crowning himself, or a winged thunderbolt on some copper coins:



25

The second set of coins depicts a Demetrius wearing a flat ‘kausia’ style hat with the reverse of a standing Zeus holding a thunderbolt:



26

Finally, the third type exhibits a Demetrius with only the royal diadem and on the reverse a standing helmeted Athena holding a spear and shield:



27

These three coin types will be referred to as the “elephant scalp/Heracles Demetrius”, the “kausia/Zeus Demetrius” and the “diadem/Athena Demetrius” respectively.

Both Narain and Holt fault Tarn for lumping all three types under a single “Demetrius”.<sup>28</sup> A distinguishing feature of the coins is the use of Indian Karothshi script on the reverse of the “kausia/Zeus Demetrius”. The elephant headdress on the “elephant scalp/Heracles Demetrius”, is the same that Alexander wore upon defeating the forces of northwest India. On the obverse the deities symbolize very different aspects of rule. Heracles and Zeus are clear identifications with Alexander on those coins. The thunderbolt in Zeus’ hand and Heracles’ crowning himself propose an aggressive military leader and a strong ruler. Although difficult to ascertain, it seems that the faces on the first two Demetrius coins (shown above) are rather different than the third, “diadem/Athena Demetrius” coin. Also in contrast, Athena on the last set of coins is known as a defender of cities and a protectress of Heracles and the male warrior. She is not directly attributed to Alexander, as is Zeus or Heracles (although there is a legend that Athena was born when she sprung forth from the head of Zeus, her father).

Following Holt and Narain’s reasoning, the coins seem to be from two different Demetrii, not all from the known son of Euthydemus. The “elephant scalp/Heracles Demetrius” and the “kausia/Zeus Demetrius” is possibly Demetrius I, the one referred to by Justin as “Demetrius, king of the Indians”<sup>29</sup>. It is he who would also be the son of Euthydemus, as the crowning of Heracles may represent his own ascension. Demetrius II is represented by the “diadem/Athena Demetrius” and in Holts words, “Probably a son of Demetrius I.”<sup>30</sup> Holt says “probably” because all three historians disagree as to where to place Demetrius II. Holt is the only one to claim that Demetrius II is a son of the first Demetrius. Again, the problem stems from a lack of literary evidence. From the coin remains, twenty-eight different Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings have been identified, yet only the Diodoti, Euthydemus, Demetrius I, and Eucradities have accurate literary evidence outside of the numismatic finds.

Eucradities is the last king discussed in any detail by classical authors such as Polybius and Justin. They barely mention Menander, the most famous of the Bactrian kings, who is idolized in Indian literary works such as the Yuga Purâna and the Milindapñha. Although Eucradities is the last reliably dated king, Menander will also be discussed later because of his strong influence on Indo-Greek power and it’s growing concentration in northwest India.

Justin provides the basis for establishing the beginning of Eucradities reign around 170 BC. Justin writes “At about the same time that Mithridates was beginning his rule in

Parthia, Eucradities was beginning his in Bactria, both of them great men.”<sup>31</sup> Since Mithridates rise is dated between 175-170 BC, Eucradities must have gained power then. Tarn, Narain and Holt all agree that the seizure was a violent one, yet they disagree whether it was Demetrius I or Demetrius II who was overthrown. Justin titles Demetrius “king of the Indians”, but it is not clear which Demetrius he is referring to.

This second overthrow of a Bactrian monarch has caused historians to speculate where Eucradities came from. The only evidence is again coins, specifically the commemorative coins of Eucradities. These coins have a double portrait of Heliocles and Laodice, presumably Eucradities’ father and mother. Tarn believes Laodice to have been a Seleucid princess, therefore making Eucradities a relative of his contemporary in Syria, Antiochus IV. Eucradities was sent east to restore Bactria for the Seleucids with a force of only 300 men.<sup>32</sup> Tarn believes that the Bactrian Greeks wanted to rejoin the Seleucids by ousting Demetrius. Both Narain and Holt reject this theory and instead associate Eucradities’ mother with the Diodoti or Euthydemus I.

After Eucradities realized control of Bactria, he may have conquered outwards in all directions towards Sogdiana in the north, Arachosia, Drangiana and Aria to the south, and northwestern India. This conclusion by Narain is sketchy at best, based on a liberal reading of Justin XLI, 6. Justin says, “The Bactrians, for their part, were buffeted in various conflicts and lost not just their empire but their liberty as well. Worn down by wars with the Sogdians, Arachosians, Drancae, Arei, and Indians, they finally fell, virtually in a state of exhaustion, under the power of the Parthians, a weaker people than themselves.”<sup>33</sup> That the Bactrians fell to pressure from its neighbors does not infer that Eucradities must have conquered them. Yet, it is clear that after Eucradities took control Bactria’s fortunes changed for the better, at least for awhile.

The death of Eucradities as told in Justin, is generally accepted as true. Although speculation by both Tarn and Narain has not pinpointed which son is guilty, it is possible that the parricide may be Plato or Heliocles I. Narain believes Justin’s’ story at face value, yet Tarn has some doubts as to the actual events. We know that Justin, a Roman historian, worked from an unknown Greek source and was possibly confused by the events described therein. What most disappoints the historian is Justin’s failure to identify this son of Eucradities.

Control of Bactria (according to the quotation above by Justin) seems to have been lost by subsequent Greco-Bactrian kings. Monarchs such as Demetrius II, Agathocles, and Menander seem to have shifted the center of Greco-Bactrian power towards the Kabul River valley and upper Indus River, the region known as Gandhara.

Agathocles is the son of Demetrius I according to both Tarn and Narain's pedigrees. He was the first Bactrian king to mint coins in Greek and Kharoshthi script on a large scale. These coins contain his Greek title 'AGATHOKLEOYS ÄIKAIOS' (King Agathocles the "Just") and the same in Indian script, 'Rajane Agathuklayasa'.<sup>34</sup> Indian literary sources and coin finds of Menander, place his rule more firmly in Gandhara than any other previous Greco-Bactrian kings.

In the introduction to the *Yuga Purâna* translation by John E. Mitchner, he proposes through evidence of coin finds and the writings of Pânini, that not only is the historicity of a Greek invasion of India true, but it may have taken place earlier than Tarn and Narain believe. The Mauryan dynasty of India, at one time led by the great Buddhist king Asoka, had eroded to a skeleton of its former self at the close of the reign of Sâliúûka Maurya (around 200 BC). Yet the emerging kingdom of the Sunga's would not grow to fill the vacuum until after 187 BC. In Mitchner's words, "This would accordingly place the Yavana (Greek) incursion during the reign of the Indo-Greek kings Euthydemus or Demetrius [I]."<sup>35</sup> Earlier we witnessed the expansive desires of these two kings<sup>36</sup>, but is Mitchner correct with the chronology?

Although questions have arisen as to when the Yavana invasion took place, no Indian sources clearly allude to Euthydemus or Demetrius extending so far into north-central India. Menander on the other hand, is widely documented in Indian literature as a valorous king of the Yavanas. Whoever is responsible, this Greek incursion penetrated far down the Ganges River valley almost to its estuary. Alliances with breakaway Mauryan vassals from Pañcâla and Mâthura<sup>37</sup> strengthened the conquering army for an attack on the old Mauryan capital of Pâtaliputra. From sloka 48, "Then, once Puspapura (Pâtaliputra) has been reached [and] its celebrated mud [-walls] cast down, all the realms will be in disorder - there is no doubt."<sup>38</sup> The *Yuga Purâna* goes on to describe the suffering and fear of the Indian peoples in the Ganges valley until the Greeks agree to abandon their new territory because, "a terrible and very dreadful war having broken out in their own realm."<sup>39</sup> According to Mitchner, this civil war could be the result of the rise of Eucradities.<sup>40</sup> Still, most historians date this invasion later and ascribe it to Menander.

Menander was highly esteemed among the Indians after his death. During his lifetime, though, he apparently was much more controversial. Descriptions of his personality reveal a greatly admired figure as well as an intimidating ruler. "As a disputant he was hard to equal, harder still to overcome... And as in wisdom so in strength of body, swiftness, and valour there was found none equal to Milinda [Menander] in all India."<sup>41</sup> Having grown up in Gandhara, local Indians probably related

to him more as a native than as a foreign Greek.

The *Milindapañha* or ‘Questions of King Milinda’ briefly discusses the origins of Menander (Milinda in Indian sources). He was born, raised, and became king of the Greco-Bactrian territory around Sâgala (Saikot) in Gandhara.<sup>42</sup> Both Tarn and Holt believe Menander’s birthplace to have been a village called Kalasi not far from Alasanda (Alexandria-in-Caucaso, modern Begram).<sup>43</sup> He rose to power in Saikot sometime between 159 BC (Tarn’s early dating) and 150 BC (Holt’s late dating).<sup>44</sup> According to Narain, Menander’s prevailing coin type makes it likely that he may be connected to Demetrius II.<sup>45</sup> All three historians agree that Menander may have married a princess named Agathocleia. However, evidence confirming this or her origins no longer exists.<sup>46</sup>

Menander’s conversion to Buddhism is attested to in his dialogue in the *Milindapanha*. It is because of this act that in *A Guide to Taxila*, John Marshall believes the Greeks and the people of Gandhara were brought together. In his own words, “Greek and Buddhist happened to have a common enemy in the Sunga king, and it was this common enmity that threw them into each others arms.”<sup>47</sup> This Sunga king was Pusyamitra, the commander-in-chief who had murdered his superior the last Mauryan king.<sup>48</sup> Under the Mauryans, specifically Asoka, Buddhism became the official state religion. Because of this, Pusyamitra who was a Brahmin general took revenge on the Buddhists by declaring, “A price of one hundred gold dînâtras on the head of every Buddhist monk.”<sup>49</sup> Narain does not accept this explanation (supported by Tarn) about the reasons for Menander’s conversion. Instead, he points out coin evidence, agreeing that Menander was a Buddhist. The wheel symbol on the reverse of some of Menander’s bi-lingual coins, Narain speculates, symbolizes Menander’s conversion.<sup>50</sup>

Also, by tracing the evolution of art, architecture, and city planning one can see the synthesis of Greek and south Asian life. Aiding the historian, two notable archaeological sites have revealed these changes, in time and location, as the center of Greco-Bactrian power moved towards Gandhara. Taxila lies on the main trade route through Gandhara and Ai Khanoum, the only Hellenistic polis found east of Babylon, rests at the confluence of the Oxus and Kokcha Rivers in what was ancient Bactria (now Afghanistan). In the introduction to the *Milindapanha*, the thriving city of Saikot is painted by a unique illustration, probably similar to Taxila only 130 miles to the northwest on the main road out of India:

Well displayed are the innumerable sorts of costly merchandise with which its shops are filled. It is richly adorned with hundreds of alms-halls of various kinds; and splendid with hundreds of thousands of magnificent mansions, which rise aloft like the mountain peaks of the Himâlayas. Its

streets are filled with elephants, horses, carriages, and foot-passengers, frequented by groups of handsome men and beautiful women, and crowded by men of all sorts and conditions, Brahmans, nobles, artificers, and servants. . . . Shops are there for the sale of Benares muslin, of Kotumbara stuffs, and of other cloths of various kinds; and sweet odours are exhaled from the bazaars, where all sorts of flowers and perfumes are tastefully set out. Jewels are there in plenty, such as men's hearts desire, and guilds of traders in all sorts of finery display their goods in the bazaars that face all quarters of the sky. So full is the city of money, and of gold and silver ware, of copper and stone ware, that it is a very mine of dazzling treasures. And there is laid up there much store of property and corn and things of value in warehouses - foods and drinks of every sort, syrups and sweetmeats of every kind.<sup>51</sup>

Taxila came under the rule of the Greco-Bactrians soon after Sailkot did, somewhere between 190-170 BC.<sup>52</sup> The Taxilan historian, Professor Ahmad Dani suspects Eucradities was the conqueror of Gandhara and Agathocles the builder of the Greek city at Taxila. Other historians place the foundation of Grecian Taxila later, with the rise of Menander.

In either case, the excavations at Taxila have found three major sites of settlement: Hathial, Bhir Mound, and Sirkap. Professor Dani has proposed that Bhir Mound is actually a commercial and industrial suburb of Greek Sirkap<sup>53</sup> He has noted that, "Cultural homogeneity in the upper two strata of the Bhir Mound and the lower strata of Sirkap, suggesting that there was an overlap."<sup>54</sup> Thus, it seems, the Greeks extended the city across Tamra Creek along Sirkap's western edge. This development smacks of Greek synoecism, that is, the combining of one or more smaller communities into one, or moving out of an older population to create space for a new town.<sup>55</sup> The new town plan, most likely introduced by the Greco-Bactrians, is striking in its rigid geometric form. The use of wide avenues (*plateiai*) and narrower perpendicular side streets (*stenopoi*) give Sirkap a grid-like pattern and large areas districted for specific uses.<sup>56</sup> Ai Khanoum also displays this same rudimentary form. The layout of both sites is typical of classical Greek cities throughout the eastern Mediterranean and was first attributed to Hippodamus of Miletus.

Architectural patterns also betray a Greek influence on the creation of Sirkap. The Greeks introduced dressed stone masonry to Gandhara and, most impressive, are the remnants of Ionic and Corinthian columns found at Taxila.<sup>57</sup> The scroll-like Ionic and leafy Corinthian styles were introduced in the early 2nd century BC and the latter 1st century BC, respectively.<sup>58</sup> Corinthian columns at Ai Khanoum sport imitations of capitals on structures built by the Seleucid Antiochus IV.<sup>59</sup> Likewise the Ionic and

Corinthian styles at Taxila seem to be of Seleucid origin, introduced by the same Bactrian Greeks.<sup>60</sup>

Although Hellenistic influence on architecture and planning was substantial, there was considerable influence from the east as well. The homes of Taxila-Sirkap were planned around a central open courtyard most likely to direct the cooler evening breezes into the inner rooms.<sup>61</sup> Other oriental influences were the placing of Buddhist stupa shrines in the courtyards of private houses and the use of lion pillars, Indian gateways, and ogee-shaped arches.<sup>62</sup> Domestic life, more under the direction of private homeowners than the public architecture, exhibits a higher degree of eastern and western synthesis.

Fortifications, in contrast, again have more points in common with the Hellenistic west and Ai Khanoum, than the orient.<sup>63</sup> Professor Dar in *Taxila and the Western World*, explains that the four features of Hellenistic town defense: an acropolis (fortified hill), outward projecting wall towers, raised embankments between towers (to deter enemy siege craft), and the utilization of the natural topography are all apparent at Sirkap.<sup>64</sup> The walls were built exclusively out of stone masonry as in other Greek cities, surrounding the lower town and the acropolis.<sup>65</sup>

Greek construction expertise impressed the native Taxilans. However, "After accepting the technologies and some material elements that imperceptibly came with them," says Professor Dani, "the Taxilans continued in their own life patterns and followed their own social and religious traditions."<sup>66</sup> The Buddhist stupas found in the temples and monasteries in Hathial to the south of Sirkap, are evidence that traditional religious architectural styles persisted long after the Greeks vanished.<sup>67</sup> A certain religious conservatism returned as time went on and Hellenistic features became confined to certain architectural details and motifs.<sup>68</sup> Artistic styles were permanently influenced by Hellenism, but kept their own distinct Indian features. The 'Gandhara school of art' had its inception in Greek sculpture, and especially stucco figurines and pottery based on Greek mythological themes.<sup>69</sup> Later, Gandhara art turned to depictions from the life of the Buddha and visual representations of him bearing, "A youthful Apollo-like face, dressed in garments resembling those seen on [later] Roman imperial statues."<sup>70</sup>

Heading out of Taxila via the old royal road built by Darius I of Persia, the landscape would remain fairly level until crossing the fertile Indus River and entering the Hindu Kush. Winding its way through the Khyber Pass, the very way that Alexander took to enter India; the road emerges onto the wind-swept Iranian plateau. From here a

traveler, merchant, or nomad could head towards the city of Ai Khanoum at the junction of the mighty Oxus River and its tributary the Kokcha. Along this river route lie the principal cities of Bactria, culminating with the capital of Bactra itself.

Confined by a low mountain nearly 60 meters high to its southeast, Ai Khanoum occupies a triangle of land between the mountain acropolis and the steep banks of the Oxus and Kochka. A traveler in ancient times, as Paul Bernard suggests, may have called Ai Khanoum 'Alexandria Oxiana' or Alexandria on the Oxus.<sup>71</sup> Bernard's archaeological findings have suggested that Antiochus I or Seleucus I may have founded the city later than Alexander, but it definitely existed by the mid-third century BC.<sup>72</sup> The discovery of Ai Khanoum has been a boon for historians - for previous to its unearthing little was known about Bactrian life between 317 BC before the secession of the Diodoti and 189 BC when the Greeks founded Sirkap at Taxila.<sup>73</sup> In the words of Professor Dar, "Thus, Taxila together with Ai Khanoum, now fills up that missing gap (c.317-189 BC) which for over a century had been staring in the eyes of scholars."<sup>74</sup>

The first mark of a developed urban center observed from the irrigated plain surrounding the city, would have been the massive mud-brick walls rising ten meters from the dusty soil punctuated by outwardly thrust rectangular towers. Surrounding the city and the acropolis, this wall gives Ai Khanoum a distinct Hellenistic appearance. Less noticeable from afar, steep ditches emptied the space between towers to prevent siege craft from coming too close. Similar to Taxila, the defenses are based on Hellenistic concepts.

On the interior of the city (see map Page 23) Ai Khanoum is more blatantly Greek than Taxila-Sirkap ever was. Although it lacks the multiple avenues and settles on only one main road, the placement of the avenue along the base of the acropolis permitted the building of a palace unlike any ever found at Taxila. Running from the north gate to the south wall facing the Kochka, the street is lined with Hellenistic style public buildings, the most impressive a large palace on the western side of the road. Based on a Persian style, probably picked up by the Greeks as they marched with Alexander into Babylon, this palace dominates the lower city covering an area more than 20 acres in size.<sup>75</sup> Paul Bernard discovered that originally the palace was to be entered through a narrow passageway from the north, flanked at its entrance by two huge Corinthian columns, "Whose elements were found, for the most part, intact."<sup>76</sup> Further digging unearthed that the propylaeum (vestibule entrance) was extended eastward to connect with the main road and control access to the tomb of Kineas, the gymnasium,

and the palace itself.<sup>77</sup>

Three functions have been identified by the lay of the walls and archaeological finds in the palace (see map Page 24). First of all, it was a state structure, intended to host diplomatic envoys and the local patrons of the king as well as carry out official state duties. A great square courtyard with 118-columned walls enclosing an area measuring 137 by 108 meters opened up upon entering from the passageway entrance.<sup>78</sup> This courtyard was intended for state ceremonies while a smaller, more intimate courtyard to the southwest entertained less formal guests. The administrative heart lay south of the great courtyard and connected with three private apartments, probably the residence of the king and his family. This second function is indicated by domestic quarters with bathrooms and front courtyards for each dwelling. Finally, evidence exists that the palace contained a treasury for storing the valuables of the kingdom. A series of small rooms found with precious minerals and blanks for coins, surround a central courtyard on the west side. Several vases in the treasury bear Greek inscriptions indicating their former contents: deposits of Indian and Greek coins.

As noted earlier, the palace is based on Persian prototypes found further west in former Syrian territory. Some architectural elements combine principles of Greek architecture with oriental motifs and styles. Corinthian columns in the courtyards have acanthus leaves on the capitals with unusual ringed central stems; the two flanking the propylaeum rest on thick torus bases.<sup>79</sup> These columns belie this influence as does the evidence for flat roofs and walls built of mud bricks, smoothly plastered with a layer of clay and then whitewashed.<sup>80</sup>

Even more striking examples confirming Greek habitation of this city are found nearby. Unlike in Taxila, Ai Khanoum includes two other Greek urban features in the form of a gymnasium and theatre. The gymnasium was identified by an inscription dedicated to the gods Hermes and Heracles at the edge of a large courtyard in the northern part of the town.<sup>81</sup> These two gods are the traditional protectors of gymnasiums. An Hermaic pillar found at the site also confirmed the athletic function of this courtyard. Across the main avenue, a Greek theatre like the one in Delphi was found dug into the slope of the acropolis. Estimated to hold about 6,000 spectators, it is larger than the one in Babylon.<sup>82</sup> For Paul Bernard and the French archaeological team this was a most surprising find, as it is the only gymnasium found east of Mesopotamia. However Bernard noticed that, "A touch of Oriental influence is evident in this most Greek of institutions. Halfway up the slope stood three spacious loggias: ostentatious seats of honor that are practically unknown in the theatres of Greece."<sup>83</sup> These are

probably Greek modified replicas of Achaemenid originals somewhere in Persia.

A funerary monument north of the city gates and the tomb of Kineas next to the palace also reinforce the dominant Greek influence in the design of this city. The funerary monument resembles the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus with a cult room above the tombs. This feature as well as the placement of the tomb of a city founder called Kineas within the city walls, is traditional of most Greek cities.

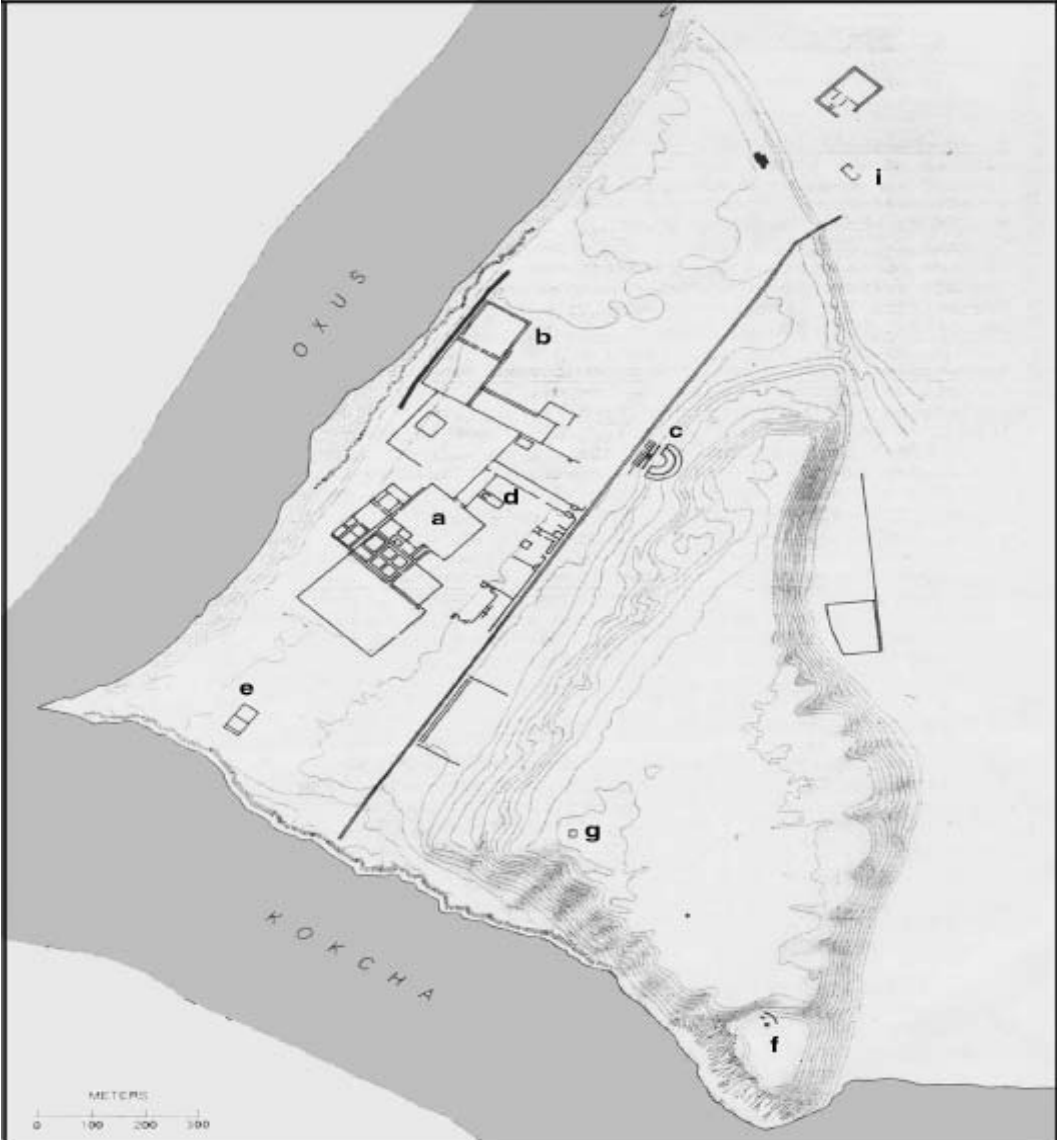
The Bactrian Greeks were not just living in a typical Greek and Persian inspired polis of the Hellenistic age, but also tried to remain faithful to the cultural traditions of Greece. In front of the tomb of Kineas, an upright stone stele was inscribed with 150 Delphic maxims about the ideal Greek copied from Apollo's sanctuary in Delphi. Although the stele has been broken off and lost, five of the maxims remain inscribed on the base reading, "In childhood learn good manners; in youth learn to control your passions; in middle age learn to be just; in old age learn to be of wise counsel; die without regret."<sup>84</sup> Likewise, imprints of long vanished manuscripts from the floor of a library, have been identified as, "Part of a philosophical treatise of the Aristotelian school and parts of a Greek poem,"<sup>85</sup> implying that the Greeks of Ai Khanoum attempted to maintain their traditional way of life.

Menander probably converted to Buddhism around the time of his ascension circa 155 B.C. Paul Bernard believes - based on Chinese literary texts - that ten years later, "The Greeks of Ai Khanoum were driven from their city by nomadic invaders, and before 100 BC all Hellenic central Asia was in the hands of the nomads."<sup>86</sup> If Eucradites and/or Demetrius had extended Bactrian power into Gandhara forty years before, then it is not surprising that we see influences of Indian religious culture on the Greeks at Ai Khanoum. They modeled small terra-cotta or ivory carved cult figurines of a female deity, either "fully clothed and laden with jewels or completely nude and quite voluptuous."<sup>87</sup> The worship of female deities in the Indus river valley was common long before the Greeks arrived and was sustained by Hinduism that eventually outlasted Buddhism in India.<sup>88</sup> It was not uncommon for Greeks to incorporate other deities, such as eastern cult gods, into the Greek pantheon of deities. Bactrian Greeks apparently did this to the point of adopting Oriental and Middle Eastern gods completely. If the archaeological evidence has anything to say, "Religious structures at Ai Khanoum bear no relation to Greek tradition. Instead they reflect oriental and middle eastern influences."<sup>89</sup> This trend to accept local gods or even whole religious orders culminated with Menander's conversion, only a decade before the Greeks lost control of Bactria proper.

The end of the Greek presence in Bactria and India was tragic and swift. The

flatness of the Iranian plateau made it easy for hordes of conquering nomads to descend on the fortified cities of Bactria. After claiming their land and destiny as their own, the successors to the Diodoti had found it difficult to maintain a stable kingdom. Frank Holt has theorized that the creation of a “march state” (an artificial militarized and ethnic barrier between two peoples) by Alexander may have caused tensions between the ruling Greeks and the Bactrian natives who relied on trade with the Scythian nomads for their livelihood.<sup>90</sup> Under Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian rule, the tensions were eased, but the Greeks remained suspicious of Scythian motives. Holt explains the situation with a comparison, “This was, of course, Greek prejudice but also the genuine fear that nomadic tribes might again join forces with native Sogdians and Bactrians. Just as Delphi had had to be saved from the marauding Gauls, so Ai Khanoum had to be protected from desert Scythians.”<sup>91</sup> Ultimately this fear came true with the invasion of Scythian tribes somewhere between 129 BC and 100 BC.<sup>92</sup> The Indo-Greeks, such as Menander and his progeny, managed to survive for a time but also disappeared between the pressure of the nomads on the Iranian plateau and the expansion of the powerful Sunga kingdom at the dawn of the first century BC.

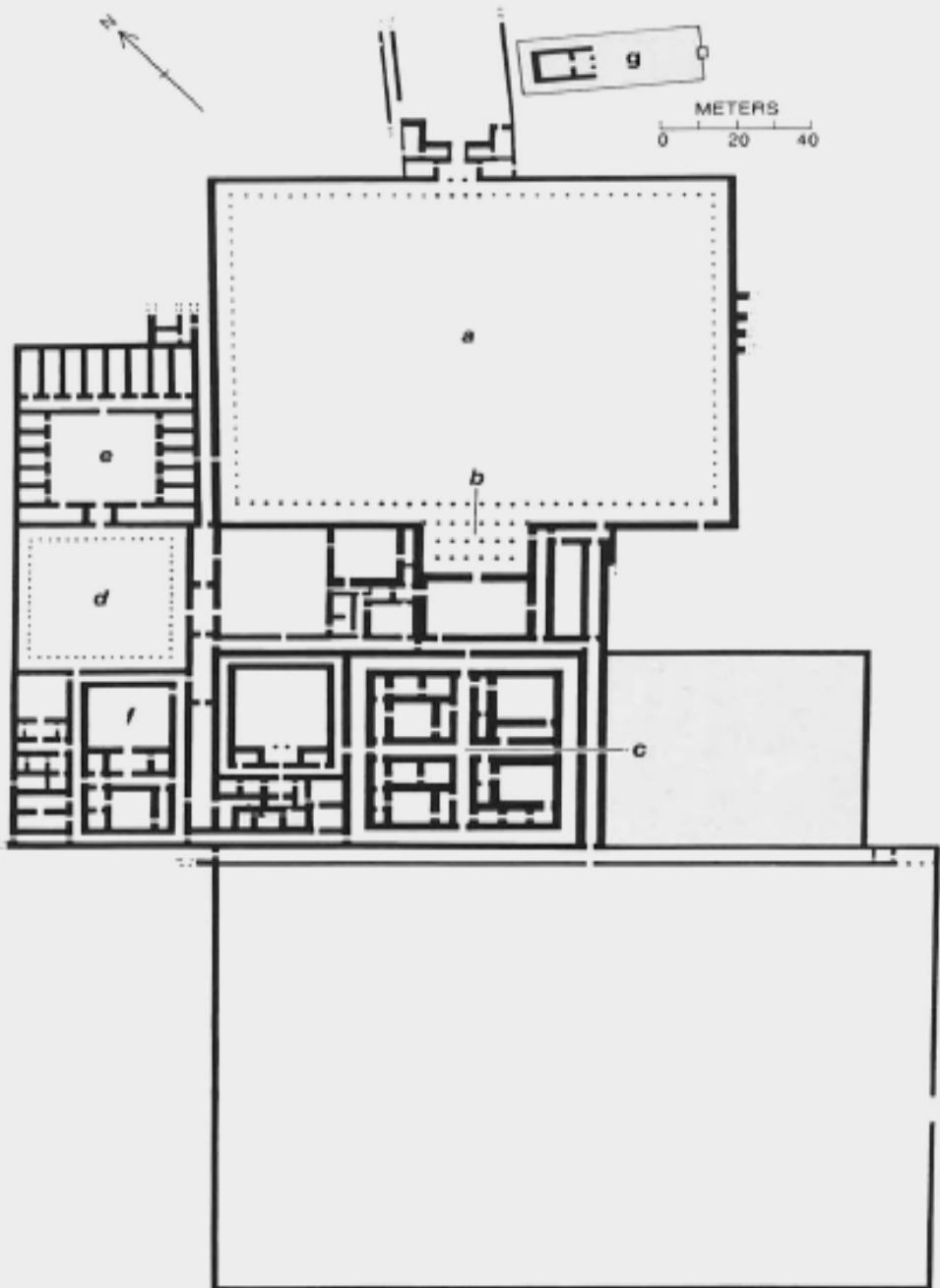
## MAPS &amp; ILLUSTRATIONS



**THIS MAP OF AI KHANOUM SHOWS THE TRIANGULAR LAYOUT OF THE SITE. THE 60 METER HIGH ACROPOLIS IS SHOWN WITH THE MAIN AVENUE RUNNING FROM THE NORTH GATE, ALONG THE FOOT OF THE ACROPOLIS, TO THE BANK OF THE KOKCHA RIVER. THE PALACE (A), GYMNASIUM (B), THEATER (C), TOMB OF KINEAS (D), AND ONE OF THE ELITE RESIDENCES (E) OCCUPY THE LOWER CITY. OTHER STRUCTURES ARE THE TEMPLE OUTSIDE THE NORTH GATE (I), AND THE OPEN-AIR TEMPLE PLATFORM (G) AND THE CITADEL (F) BOTH ON THE ACROPOLIS. (REPRINTED FROM BERNARD, *AN ANCIENT GREEK CITY.*)**



**LOOKING DOWN FROM THE ACROPOLIS TOWARDS THE MAIN AVENUE (GREY LINE) AND LOWER TOWN OF AI KHANOU. THE OXUS RIVER CAN BE SEEN IN THE UPPER RIGHT JUST BELOW THE MOUNTAIN. (REPRINTED FROM BERNARD, *AI KHANUM ON THE OXUS*)**



**PALACE ENCLOSURE** contained a great formal courtyard (a) with a vestibule (b) that gave access to the administrative buildings. The most notable of these (c), a square structure with its interior symmetrically divided by two corridors that cross at a right angle, evidently held two reception areas, at the right, and two suites of offices, at the left. A smaller courtyard (d) offered a more informal setting; beyond it in one direction stood the treasury with many store-rooms around a central court (e) and in the other direction one of three private apartments (f). The tomb of Kineas is shown near the palace entrance (g).

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12. Narain, 15-16.
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15. Narain, 18.
16. Narain, 18; Justin XLI, 4. 8-9
17. Polybius XI, 6. 39
18. Polybius X, 8. 49
19. Polybius X, 8. 49
20. Polybius X, 8. 39
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41. *The Questions of King Milinda*, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), 4. 9, pg 7.
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