An Inquiry into Non-Buddhist Religious Elements in Gandhāra from the 3rd BCE to the 3rd century CE

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Originality Statement

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Daniela Pizarro

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Abstract

Gandhāra, an ancient name for a region in the north-west of Pakistan, was home to many religions. This thesis aims to uncover the complex network of religious traditions embedded in Gandhāra's ancient history between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. It focuses on non-Buddhist practices, particularly pan-Indian and pre-Buddhist traditions, the ancient forms of Hinduism, referred to as Brahmanism, and religious practices hailing from ancient Iranian traditions. This thesis will trace the evidence of non-Buddhist religions using archaeological and ancient literary sources. As each chapter examines the timeline of non-Buddhist traditions, this study has observed two significant factors influencing Gandhāra's complex religious scene. The first notable pattern was how dominant religious groups such as Brahmanism and Buddhism integrated local religious elements into their literature and art. This pattern maintained the memory of non-Buddhist religions throughout Gandhāra's history. By embracing foreign religious elements, particularly pan-Indian characters such as nāgas, yakṣas, and local goddesses, Brahmanism and Buddhism maintained these pan-Indian traditions in Gandhāra's memory. The second significant factor was the repetitive incursions of foreign powers establishing their base in Gandhāra and its surroundings. These rulers, specifically the Indo-Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, and the Kushans, implemented two significant changes. They brought their own religious traditions to Gandhāra and embraced local Indic traditions. Thus, pooling Greek, Iranian, Indian and Central Asian religious practices into Gandhāra's religious character. The dominancy of major religious groups and the cultural syncretism implemented and supported by foreign rulers were the principal factors that sustained non-Buddhist religions in Gandhāra from the 3rd BCE to the 3rd century CE.

1.0 Introduction

Before undertaking this thesis, my perception of religion in an ancient society was relatively simple. From my understanding, religion was often perceived as an independent phenomenon, separate from the threads that held ancient societies together. Yet, undertaking this research has shown me how interconnected and fluid religions can be and how they function as a glue to connect and unite diverse groups.

In the study of ancient Gandhāra (a region that corresponds to present-day eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan), most research has approached religion with a relatively narrow attitude by primarily focusing on Buddhism, particularly during its dominant period of approximately the 1st century BCE to the 4th century CE, with most other religious practices and traditions being ignored. In this thesis, I aim to show that Gandhāra, although exhibiting a highly unique and valuable Buddhist face in the ancient world, was home to a diverse range of interesting religions with which Buddhism interacted and was influenced, which are worthy of exploration. These traditions encompass local, pan-Indian traditions, as well as early forms of Brahmanism and Iranian religious influences.

The core of this thesis consists of three chapters. The first will define and explore pan-Indian and local traditions, examining the evidence of nāga, yakṣa, fertility cults, and seasonal festivities associated with viticulture and animal sacrifice. The second chapter will define and explore Brahmanism in Gandhāra, the ancient form of Hinduism, using archaeological and literary records. The third chapter will examine Iranian elements in Gandhāra and attempt to understand the growth and decline of Iranian religion in this region. Initially, a fourth chapter was planned to explore Greek religious elements in Gandhāra. However, due to time constraints and the extensive and complex nature of this topic, it was not included, though I plan to revisit it in future research. This has allowed me to examine the three traditions, or religious spheres, mentioned above in more detail, to uncover their complex relationships, and reveal the factors that contributed to their visibility and persistence in Gandhāra.

Due to the limitations of size and time, this research is restricted to the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, covering the period from the inception of Buddhism in Gandhāra to its peak. This period sees many shifts in power in the region, including the invasions of the Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans. Using this tumultuous timeframe, and utilising archaeological reports, inscriptions, ancient literary sources, and later pre-Islamic traditions to construct our understanding of Gandhāra's non-Buddhist religious landscape.

This thesis will utilise academic sources to examine Gandhāra's religious landscape and explore several contentious and widely debated topics in Gandhāran studies. For example, the Kushan chronology and the reign years of King Kanishka are highly debated topics. Although there are many interpretations[1], for this thesis, I will use Falk's (2001: 130) dates for Kanishka's reign: 127 CE-156 CE.

Another aspect that is widely contentious in Gandhāran studies is the ambiguity behind much of the archaeological material. For this reason, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulty in identifying and categorising many artworks, artefacts and figures. For example, it is difficult to identify many figures found in Gandhāran coins and those depicted in stone pieces. Their

[1] See fn. 48 for a more detailed overview.

identities can be affiliated with deities from various pantheons, including Buddhist, Brahmanical, Iranian, and pan-Indic.

Considering these two points, this thesis will attempt to unravel the complex academic dialogue on non-Buddhist religions in Gandhāra. Although challenging, the ambiguity that characterises many Gandhāran artefacts reveals the purpose of this thesis. The tendency for Gandhāran religious characters to escape clear and specific identification reveals how religion in this society is fluid and highly intricate. I hope this thesis demonstrates the complex and interconnected network of various religious traditions in Gandhāra.

1.1 Evidence of Pan-Indian, Local Religious Elements from the 3rd-1st century BCE in Gandhāra

The Literature

To begin with, I would like to clarify the key concept of this chapter, which has been a thorny issue in my research. What are pan-Indian (pre-Buddhist) local religious elements, and why are they significant to understanding religions in Gandhāra?

In this thesis, the term "pan-Indian elements" encompasses expressions of nature worship, such as the veneration of the universal "mother deity" and animal or nature spirit deities, including the lore of nāgas and yakṣas associated with the landscape. Additionally, local pan-Indian elements manifested as seasonal festivities and celebrations of natural phenomena, such as winemaking and harvests, alongside animal and human sacrifice. Piecing together evidence from archaeological, written, and anthropological sources, this chapter will attempt to portray the nature of local pan-Indic beliefs that are often overshadowed by more dominant religions, such as Buddhism. In Gandhāran studies, there has been and remains a focus on the major religions, especially Buddhism, to the exclusion of other religious traditions, resulting in a limited view of religion in Gandhāra. Instead, this chapter will examine the evidence, visibility, and endurance of pan-Indic traditions and discuss the current academic stance on pre-Buddhist local religions in Gandhāra. This will be done by extracting the local pre-Buddhist traditions from a complex tapestry of early Indo-Aryan-related religious traditions, including early forms of Brahmanism and Buddhism, from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

However, before I examine these Vedic and post-Vedic sources, I would like to address two points. First, I wish to highlight that although Vedic and post-Vedic texts were composed during and after the 1st millennium BCE, their dissemination most likely involved numerous internal changes in their lore, resulting in the creation of new branches of Brahmanical narratives, which likely date back to the 1st century BCE (Witzel 2006b: 484).

The second point refers to another cluster of written sources I will use to examine the religious landscape from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century BCE in Gandhāra. These include the Manusmṛti (1st CE-3rd century CE[2]), the Arthaśāstra (1st- early 2nd century CE[3]) and grammar texts by Paṇīni (early/mid 4th century BCE[4]) and Patañjali (2nd century BCE[5]). Although their exact dates are still contested and can overlap or extend into earlier or later periods, their contribution to our understanding of religious practices is relevant to the 3rd-1st century BCE in Gandhāra.

The earliest texts, such as those of the Vedic and early post-Vedic period, are pivotal to understanding the early history of Gandhāra. They are much more than recordings of world knowledge; they provided a way of life that was the basis of Indian philosophical thought and the foundation of Indian culture, tradition, social stratification, and identity. The early Vedic

[2] Bronkhorst 2012: 146; See Olivelle & Olivelle 2004: 18-25 for detailed discussion of dates and Sakar 2022: fn. 8. for a list of different sources.
[3] See Olivelle 2013: 25-29 for a discussion on dates.
[4] Vergiani 2024: 73. See Cardona 1976: 260-262, 268 for a complete discussion of Pāṇini's date.
[5] Vergiani 2024: 73. See Cardona 1976: 263-266 for an in-depth discussion on Patañjali's date.

texts were composed by the Indo-European people, known as the "Aryans", whose "arrival" in South Asia is a highly debated topic in academic research. Nevertheless, Witzel, who has addressed this topic, suggests that Indo-Aryan groups gradually migrated into South Asia after 1900 BCE (Witzel 1997b: 3-4).[6]

Although most of the later post-Vedic texts were composed in mainland India, the Punjab region is where the early Ṛg Vedic tradition was born (Witzel 2006b: fn. 53) and which describe encounters with the region's Indigenous peoples, describing them as 'dark-skinned' and 'lawless' (Skt. *dasus* or *dasyus*) peoples who were later defeated with Indra's help (Avari 2016: 80). If these indigenous peoples were our localised communities, we could learn much from them. According to Witzel, other writings such as the Kāṇvīya texts in the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa refer to the original inhabitants of Punjab as 'outsiders', i.e., Skt. *bāhīka,* and in later entries, travelling to these regions is prohibited (Witzel 2006b: 476-477. fn. 53 and fn. 54; Witzel 1987: 199 and fn. 90).

In Gandhāra's periphery, non-Brahmanical kingdoms are identified by their "barbaric" lifestyle:

> *māndhātovāca*
> *yavanāḥ kirātā gāndhārāś cīnāḥ śabarabarbarāḥ*
> *bāhlīkāś ca turuṣkāś ca pāñcālāś ca tathā smṛtāḥ*
> *śakās tuṣārāḥ kahvāś ca pahlavāś cāndhramadrakāḥ*
> *oḍrāḥ pulindā ramaṭhāḥ kācā mlecchāś ca sarvaśaḥ*
> *brahmakṣatraprasūtāś ca vaiśyāḥ śūdrāś ca mānavāḥ*
> *kathaṃ dharmaṃ careyus te sarve viṣayavāsinaḥmadvidhaiś ca kathaṃ sthāpyāḥ sarve te dasyujīvinaḥ* (MhB 12.65.13) [7]
>
> Māndhātar said: Greeks, mountain folk, Gāndhārans, Chinese, savages, barbarians, Śakas, Tuṣāras, Kahvas, Persians, Andhras, Madrakas, Oḍras, Pulindas, Ramaṭhas, Kācas, and Mlecchas all, and men who are sons of brahmins and kṣatriyas, and also vaiśyas and śūdras: How can all of these who live within a kingdom do Meritorious Lawful Deeds? How can all those who live as barbarians be kept within Law by men like me? [8]

In this entry in the Mahābhārata, Gandhāra and other kingdoms are distinguished as non-practitioners of the Brahmin tradition. Further evidence for this is also found in the Maṇusmṛti. The kingdoms, such as the Yavanas and the Kambojas, which encompass areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are reputed to have engaged in 'bad practices' (Misra 1973: 59).

> *śanakais tu kriyālopād imāḥ kṣatriyajātayaḥ*
> *vṛṣalatvaṃ gatā loke brāhmaṇādarśanena ca*
> *pauṇḍrakāś cauḍradraviḍāḥ kāmbojā yavanāḥ śakāḥ*
> *pāradāpahlavāś cīnāḥ kirātā daradāḥ khaśāḥ*
> *mukhabāhūrupajjānāṃ yā loke jātayo bahiḥ*
> *mlecchavācaś cāryavācaḥ sarve te dasyavaḥ smṛtāḥ* (Manusmṛti 10.43-45) [9]

[6] The exact dates of their settlement in Gandhāra are still inconclusive; however, refer to pages 31-32 for a more detailed account of the archaeological studies of prehistoric Gandhāra that account for the evidence of Indo-European (Indo-Aryan) arrival.
[7] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 12,065.013-12,065.015c (revised version by John Smith, Cambridge).
[8] Tr. Fitzgerald 2004: 328.
[9] GRETIL Manusmṛti 2020: 10.43-45 (version by Michio Yano and Yasuke Ikari).

> By neglecting rites and by failing to visit Brahmins,* however, these men of Ksatriya birth have gradually reached in the world the level of Sudras— Pundrakas, Codas, Dravidas, Kämbojas, Yavanas, Sakas, Paradas, Pahlavas, Cinas, Kirâtas, and Daradas* All the castes in the world that are outside those born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet—whether they speak foreign or Ārya languages—tradition calls Dasyus.[10]

According to studies by Misra (1973) and Babkiewicz (2021), the Daradas were based in the Gilgit Baltistan, north Kashmir, Pakistan, and the Kambojas were situated in the Pamir mountain range, modern-day Tajikistan, and along the river Oxus (Misra 1973: 65-66; Babkiewicz 2021: 26; Sheikh & Tantray 2020: 232). The kingdom of the Kirātās is a clan associated with the Himalayan regions but also with the Udīcya/Uttarāpatha region, a term usually coined for Gandhāra (Bhattacharya 1999: 70; Witzel 2011: 3). Even so, later texts, such as the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, declare that the Punjab communities were identified as non-Brahmanical in their customs and traditions, i.e. “barbarians” (Witzel 2006b: 485-486. fn. 109).

Yet, in later post-Vedic texts, the region of Gandhāra is mentioned in the Mahābhārata, an epic telling the story of the infamous war between the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava families. For example, the antagonists of the epic, the Kauravas, were linked to the Gandhāran region. Gandhārī, a princess of Gandhāra, was the wife of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Gandhārī’s brother, Śakuni, and her son, Duryodhana, are prominent rivals in the epic (Moitra 2017: 106).

Other entries in post-Vedic texts describe Gandhāra as a centre of high Brahmanical education. For example, a post-Vedic story recounts a Brahmin sending his son to the Gandhāran city of Takṣaśila, also known as Taxila, for his education (Witzel 2011: 3. fn. 18).

Additionally, the Gandhāran region is known for its "high" distinguished speech, believed to be superior to other dialects in India proper (Witzel 2011: 3. fn. 18).

> *tasmād.udīcyāṃ.diśi.prajñātatarā.vāg.udyate /*
> *udañca.u.eva.yanti.vācaṃ.śikṣituṃ / (soma: prāyaṇīyeṣṭi)*
> *yo.vā.tata.āgacchati /*
> *tasya.vā.śuśrūṣanta.iti.ha.sma.āha /*
> *eṣā.hi.vāco.dik.prajñātā / (soma: prāyaṇīyeṣṭi)* (Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa 7.7. 36-40)
>
> Therefore in the northern quarter is speech uttered with more discernment, and northwards go men to learn speech; he who comes thence, to him men hearken, so he used to say, for this was the quarter discerned by speech [11]

Indeed, it is in the Gandhāran town of Śalātura that Pāṇini compiled his famous Sanskrit grammar, the Aṣṭādhyāyī, thus reinforcing the potent presence of Brahmanical culture in Gandhāra once again (Witzel 2006b: 460).

In light of these early texts, we know that the early history of Gandhāra shows that the Indigenous *dasus* or *bāhīka* were subsumed under the Indo-Aryans, a migrating people, who later established the Brahmanical structure of life and culture. Later, two contrasting streams

[10] Tr. Olivelle & Olivelle 2004: 210.
[11] Keith 1920: 387.

of evidence define Gandhāra: first, as a *ṣoḍaśamahājanapada*[12], that is, as one of the 16 great kingdoms (Moitra 2017: 109). It also attracted many Brahmanical elites and families and was known for its elite speech. Yet, on the other hand, Gandhāra's proximity to the "barbarian" kingdoms, such as the Greek, Iranian, and Śakas, as well as the localised Indigenous peoples of the Darada kingdoms, is reported to have led to Gandhāra's lack of Brahmanical structure and practice (Moitra 2017: 105).

Other sources, besides post-Vedic texts, also report on non-Brahmanical clans and tribes in the Gandhāran region. The Roman historian Arrian, who reported on Macedonian expeditions, states that when they arrived in the Swāt Valley, they encountered three local clan groups, the Guraeans, the Aspasians, and the Assakenoi.[13] Initially, these non-Brahmanical communities resisted the Macedonian forces; however, once their cities[14] were taken, these Gandhāran clans were overcome (Tribulato & Olivieri 2017: 128). This also coincides with Herodotus' writings, which describe the people of the Gandhāran region as resembling the practices and language of the northern Bactrian kingdoms.[15]

More evidence to account for Gandhāra's non-Brahmanical culture is linked to the Gandhāran city of Taxila, whose founding story is based on a nāga myth. Nāga, one of the many Sanskrit words for "snake," first appears in Vedic, post-Vedic, and Buddhist literature. Initially, in Vedic lore, nāgas, formally known in Sanskrit as *ahi* or *sarpa*, are described as supernatural creatures linked to rainfall (Ete 2023: 749). In later Vedic texts, the *sarpas* became known as nāgas, divine serpent beings with impressive powers. These figures seamlessly integrated into the Brahmanical literature, either as veneration figures accompanied by pleas for protection or as figures associated with magic spells to heal snake bites (Ete 2023: 749-750).

In the Mahābhārata, there are accounts of the founding of the city of Taxila in Gandhāra involving a great nāga king and the Pāṇḍava princes. This city is said to have been founded by a nāga prince named Takṣaka, the rival of the Pāṇḍava hero Janamejaya (Hasan Dani 1986: 2-3).

> *gandhāra-viśaye siddhe tayoḥ puryau mahātmanoh*
> *takṣasya dikshu vikhyātā ramyā takṣaśilā purī* (Vāyu Purāṇa 88. 189-190).[16]
>
> In Gandhāra district, of the great cities, the city of Takṣaśilā is beautiful, well-known for the consecration of Takṣa [Prince of the Serpent Tribe].[17]

In the Mahābhārata and the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, we see the outcome of such conflicts as Janamejaya's defeat of the nāga prince, known as the "great snake sacrifice" (Skt. *sarpa-sattra*), and the subjugation of the nāga kingdom (Hasan Dani 1986: 3-4). After this defeat, the sons of Prince Bharata, Prince Takṣa and Puṣkala, ruled the cities of Taxila and Puśkalavati (Pushkalavati).

[12] This is based on a Buddhist text, the Aṅguttaranikāya.
[13] Arrian IV.23.1-5. Tr. Chinnock 1884: 249.
[14] Massaga, Ora, and Bazira. Massaga is yet to be identified in the archaeological record, yet Ora and Bazira have been identified at the ancient sites of Udegram and Barikot in Gandhāra (Tribulato & Olivieri 2017: 128).
[15] Herodotus, Book III: 98-103. Tr. Cary 1904: 192.
[16] Hasan Dani 1986: 1.
[17] Tr. Hasan Dani 1986: 1.

As these nāga beings integrate into the Brahmanical narrative, they become revered and feared creatures. In Macedonian accounts, written accounts confirmed the locals' veneration of snakes during Alexander's arrival in India in the late 4th century BCE. Aelian (1st-2nd century BCE) writes:

> When Alexander threw some parts of India into a commotion and took possession of others, he encountered among many other animals a Serpent which lived in a cavern and was regarded as sacred by the Indians who paid it great and superstitious reverence. Accordingly, Indians went to all lengths imploring Alexander to permit nobody to attack the serpent, and he assented to their wish. Now as the army passed by the cavern and caused a noise, the serpent was aware of it. (It has, you know, the sharpest hearing and the keenest sight of all animals.) And it hissed and snorted so violently that all were terrified and confounded. It was reported to measure 70 cubits although it was not visible in all its length, for it only put its head out. At any rate its eyes are said to have been the size of a large, round Macedonian shield.[18]

Strabo (c. 1st century BCE) also records, more importantly, a mountainous region near Taxila, referred to as Ambisaras, that was known to keep gargantuan serpent creatures.

> Above this country [Taxila], in the mountains lies the country of Abisarus, who, according to the ambassadors that came from him, kept two serpents, one eighty cubits in length and another one hundred and forty… At any rate, others speak of the serpents, saying that they are caught in the Emodi mountains and kept in caves.[19]

Although these sources were written after the late 4th century BCE, they are valuable for demonstrating that knowledge of nāga lore was present when Macedonian forces marched into the Gandhāran region.

Other local deities absorbed into the Brahmanical narrative are the infamous yakṣas and yakṣis. From their pan-Indian origins, the yakṣas were considered spirits or semi-divine beings with supernatural powers affiliated with the natural landscape. However, they also became revered deities and formed a group of powerful supernatural beings, even Brahmanical deities referred to as yakṣas in later texts.[20] Nevertheless, some earlier references to yakṣas are found in the Atharvaveda. Yakṣas are first referred to in Sanskrit as *itarajanāḥ*, meaning "other folks," or *puṇyajanāḥ*, meaning "sacred folks" (Banerjea 1956: 337). The Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini, born in Gandhāra, claims that devotion (Skt. *bhakti*) was typically directed towards mahārāja, a term referring to the King of the Yakṣas, Kubera (also known as Vaiśravana) (Misra 1981: 20).

> *mahārājāṭṭhañ | padāni | vṛtti*
> *mahārājaśabdāt ṭhaj pratyayo bhavati so 'sya bhaktiḥ ity etasmin viṣaye. aṇo 'pavādaḥ* (Aṣṭādhyāyī IV 3.97)[21]
>
> The affix *-ṭaja* comes in the sense of 'this is his object of veneration', after the word *mahārāja*[22]

[18] Aelian XV. 21. Tr. Scholfield 1958: 243.
[19] Strabo 15.28. Tr. Jones 1928: 47-49.
[20] Indra, Soma, and Varuṇa are referred to as yakṣas in the Dīgha Nikāya 32.49. Tr. Walshe 1987: 477.

[21] Vasu 1891: 782.
[22] Tr. Vasu 1891: 782

A secular Indian text by Kauṭilya, the Arthaśāstra, confirms that religious images must be constructed to worship significant deities. It mentions a list of deities, including the yakṣa Vaiśravana.[23] Another example can be found in Patañjali's commentary, the Mahābhāṣya, where he claims that pedestals holding images on a platform to honour Vaiśravana (Misra 1981: 21).

Thus, Brahmanical literature portrays the integration of yakṣas and nāgas into the Brahmanical fold and their acceptance into the Brahmanical pantheon of deities.

The last example of pre-Buddhist elements in literary sources is the veneration of household cults and the practice of seasonal festivities based on viticulture and animal sacrifice. For this example, I will use Aśoka's pillar edicts, which explicitly address the rituals and rites performed by women. Aśoka, the most prominent Mauryan ruler of the time, issued laws and edicts influenced by Buddhist thought. In his 9th Rock Edict, Aśoka explicitly addresses the rituals and rites of the populace and reproaches these practices in favour of good ethics.

> *devanaṃpriyo priyadraśi r[a]ya evaṃ ahati jano uchavuchaṃ maṃgalaṃ*
> *karoti abadhe avahe yivahe pajupadane pravase ataye añaye cha ediśiy[e]*
> *jano ba* maṃgalaṃ karoti atra tu striyaka bahu cha bahuvidhaṃ cha*
> *putika cha niraṭhiyaṃ cha maṃgalaṃ karo[ti] so kaṭavo cha [va] kho*
> *maṃgala apa-phala[ṃ] tu kho eta imaṃ [t]u kho maha-phala ye ma-maṃgala* [24]
>
> People perform auspicious rites of diverse kinds—during an illness, at the marriage of a son or daughter, at the birth of a child, when setting out on a journey. On these and other similar occasions, people perform numerous auspicious rites. At such times, however, womenfolk perform many, diverse, trifling and useless auspicious rites. Now, clearly, auspicious rites are going be performed. But, equally clearly, such auspicious rites bear little fruit. But this, clearly, is what bears copious fruit, namely, the auspicious rite of dharma.[25]

As Aśoka openly condemns ritual practices, his acknowledgement of these practices confirms their presence in the religious landscape during the Mauryan period. These festivities are also mentioned in the 1st Rock Edict:

> *[aya] dhrama-dipi devanapriasa raño likhapitu hida no kich[i] jive*
> *ara[bhitu p]rayuhotave no pi ch[a] sama[ja] kaṭava ba[hu]ka [hi]*
> *dosha sa[maya]spi devaṇapriy[e] priadraśi ray[a da]khati*
> *[a]sti pi chu ekatia samaye sasu-mate devanapiasa priadraśisa raño*
> *pura mahana[sas]i [devana]pr[i]asa priadraśisa raño anudivaso bahuni*
> *pra[ṇa]-śata-sahasani [arabhi]yis[u] supaṭhay[e] s[o i]dani yada aya*
> *dhrama-dipi likhita tada trayo vo praṇa haṃñaṃt[i] majura duv[i] mrugo so pi*
> *mrugo no dhruva[ṃ] eta pi praṇa trayo pacha na arabhiśaṃti* [26]

[23] Arthaśastra 2.4: 17-20. (For translation of passage, see Olivelle 2013: 106.17).
[24] Ninth Major Rock Edict. Hultzsch 1925: 61.
[25] Translation of Ninth Major Rock Edict. Tr. Olivelle 2024: 289-290.
[26] First Major Rock Edict. Hultzsch 1925: 51.

> This writing on dharma has been made to be inscribed by the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi. Here no living creature is to be slaughtered and offered in sacrifice. And no festivals are to be held, for the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much evil in festivals. There are, however, some festivals that the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, considers good. Formerly, in the kitchen of the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, many hundreds of thousands of creatures were slaughtered every day to prepare stews. But now when this writing on dharma is being inscribed only three animals are slaughtered to prepare stews: two peacocks and one game animal, and the game animal also not always. Even these three animals are not going to be slaughtered in the future.[27]

Greek records of Alexander's arrival in Gandhāra also account for "local" festivals and ritual practices in the early history of Gandhāra. According to the Roman author Curtius Rufus, when the Macedonians arrived at a city known as Nysa in Gandhāra, the locals were reported to worship a god associated with wine-making and festivities, whom the Greeks dubbed Dionysius but who was most likely a localised variant.[28] Other accounts, such as by Chares of Mytilene, record the god's name Soroadeios, which translates to "winemaker" (Coloru, Iori & Olivieri 2024: 184). Later, the locals, having surrendered to the Macedonians, revealed that their city, at the base of their sacred mountain, was founded by Dionysius (Rolfe 1946: 317). Other classical writers also report that the locals claimed the mountain housed a sacred structure dedicated to said deity (Coloru, Iori & Olivieri 2024: 182). Alexander and his troops then travelled to the holy mountain and performed specific rites honouring Dionysius. Then, they were entertained with lavish banquets from their newfound allies and celebrated in all sorts of revelry for ten days (Rolfe 1946: 317-319).

Based on Vedic, post-Vedic, Greek, Roman, and Mauryan literary sources, Gandhāra's affiliation with local pre-Buddhist elements, such as nāga and yakṣa worship, is evident. Additionally, Aśoka's edicts provide evidence of rituals and festivals that involved viticulture and animal sacrifice. Therefore, it is time to transition to archaeology; can the archaeological record confirm the practice of these local religious elements?

The Archaeology

The first evidence of yakṣas appeared in two ancient cities, Mathura (Singh 2004: 383-384) and the Mauryan capital, Pāṭaliputra (Asher 2011: 434-437), in the Mauryan Empire, which extended from modern-day Andhra Pradesh to the ancient Bactrian kingdoms in Afghanistan. These cities became the heartbeat of early pan-Indian sculpture, portraying the earliest yakṣas from the 3rd century BCE.[29] The art assemblage from these cities portrays the growing iconography of local figures, first with yakṣa and nāga statues and female terracotta figurines. However, can this also be said for Gandhāra? As Gandhāra formed a part of the Mauryan Empire, shouldn't it have had the same corpus of art? Based on various factors, the most significant being their cultural influences and geographic distance, Mathuran art differs stylistically and categorically from Gandhāran art. These two cities gave rise to two distinct schools of art. In Mathura, yakṣas are depicted in human form as early as the 3rd century BCE (see Figures 1.1 [i] and [ii]). Yet, Gandhāra's repertoire of artworks at this time was steered in a different direction.

[27] Translation of First Major Rock Edict. Tr. Olivelle 2024: 281-282.
[28] Curtius Rufus VIII.X. 7-18. Tr. Rolfe 1946: 315-319.
[29] Singh 2004: 383-384. For a discussion of the dates of these sculptures, see Asher (2011: 434-437).

i) A yakṣa, originating from the ancient Patna district in Bihar. 3rd BCE -1st century CE. Made from polished buff sandstone. Indian Museum, Calcutta. [30]

ii) Statue of Yakṣī Didarganj. 3rd -2nd century BCE. Patna Museum. [31]

As there are no examples of yakṣas in human form attested in Gandhāra at this time, early excavations yielded a variety of statuettes, one form of which has been suggested to represent a yakṣa. According to Marshall's excavation (1951: 100), these particular statuettes are pot-bellied dwarves (Figure 1.1 [iii]) dating to the 3rd century BCE and have been found in the Bhir Mound site, one of the earlier complexes in Taxila, Gandhāra.

This particular yakṣa, Kubera, is usually described as a round-bellied, dwarf-like figure (DeCaroli 2021: 3). Thus, it has been suggested that these figurines represent the infamous yakṣa, Kubera or Pañcika, as specific texts such as the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa describe his image in detail:

> *Mārkaṇḍeyaḥ: kartavyaḥ padmapatrābho dhanado naravāhanaḥ*
> *cāmīkarābho'dhanadaḥ sarvābharaṇabhūpaṇaḥ*
>
> *lambodaraścaturbāhurvāmapiṅgalalocanaḥ*
> *udīcyaveśaḥ kavacī hārabhārārpitodaraḥ*

[30] Misra 1981: Fig. 26.
[31] Misra 1981: Fig. 27.

dve ca daṃṣṭre mukhe tasya kartavye śmaśrudhāriṇaḥ
cāmena vinatā kāryā maulistasyāsyārīmardinī (Viṣṇudharmaottara Pūrāṇa 53.1-3).[32]

Mārkandeya said 'The wealth-giver Kubera should be made having the colour of a lotus-leaf and a man as his Vahana (earner) He must be having the colour of gold, all kinds of ornaments, a big belly, four hands and yellowish eyes, a dress of northerners and many necklaces resting on his belly'. He must have two large teeth in his mouth, and moustache-beard on his face. On his head, the crown crushing his enemies should be made inclined towards the left' [33]

iii) Terracotta pot-bellied dwarf figures from Bhir Mound, Taxila. 3rd century BCE. [34]

Interestingly, these dwarf figures are only attested in Taxila, Gandhāra; however, another type of terracotta figurine that appears more ubiquitously in Gandhāran sites is known as the "nude mother" or "fertility goddess" as seen in Figure 1.1 (iv) (Marshall 1951: 108; Samad 2020: 187-188; Iori 2023: 111-112). From this collection emerged a subtype, usually referred to as the Baroque Ladies, appearing in ancient sites such as Taxila (Petrie 2014b: 658), Shaiken Dheri (Hasan Dani 1965: 47-48), Charsadda (Petrie 2014a: 517-518), and Barikot (Olivieri & Iori 2020: 90).

[32] Shah 1958: 175.
[33] Shah 1990: 186.
[34] Samad 2020: Fig. 8.2. Museum unspecified.

iv) Baroque Ladies from Bala Hisar, Charsadda. 4th-2nd century BCE. [35]

v) A square votive tank with oil lamps on the corners. Sirkap. Taxila 2nd century BCE. It is suggested that it is affiliated with the Jain tradition; however, this is inconclusive. Islamabad Museum. [36]

Further support for the practice of local traditions comes from the Bhir Mound settlement in Taxila, which yields artifacts such as ritual tanks and ring stones (Figures 1.1 [v] and [vii]) dating to the 3rd-2nd century BCE (Marshall 1951: 463, 503). For instance, the ringstones are circular stone objects that display an intrinsic carving of female goddesses, suggesting the sacred veneration of womanhood (Sharma 1997-1998: 118-119; Rahman 1965: 378-379; Marshall 1951: 503). The ritual tanks are small, rectangular, box-like terracotta vessels with

[35] Dar 2021: Pl. 10. Museum unspecified.
[36] Shahid 2023.

moulded mini-figurines inside a hollow cavity, implying their connection to water or ablution rites relevant to fertility goddesses or nāga worship (Marshall 1951: 465).

Other terracotta artefacts also suggest that their ritual purpose was connected to local gods and goddesses. Their appearance in the archaeological record, particularly that of female terracotta figurines in proto-historic graves in South Asia, dates back to the 3rd to 1st millennium BCE (Zahir 2016b: 9). However, as I will discuss terracotta figurines in more detail later, for now, I will divert the reader to the topic of proto-historic grave sites.

These graves reveal abundant information on particular material goods and funerary and burial practices of the people in Gandhāra (Zahir 2016a: 274). Most commonly known as the "Grave Culture" or "Gandhāran Grave Culture", these burials play a significant role in understanding the local religious elements of Gandhāra. Although these grave sites date from the late 4th millennium to the 3rd century BCE (Zahir 2016a: 284), they are important to this paper as they play a role in the later location of Mauryan and Buddhist structures.

Interestingly, these prehistoric local sites play a role in the geographic placement of religious and non-religious structures in Gandhāra after the 3rd century BCE. In a survey studying the location of Aśoka's Minor Rock Edict Sites, Falk states that these rock edicts were constructed in locations linked to "folk" or local religious traditions (Falk 2006: 56-57). By using these locations, Aśoka was most likely harnessing the popularity of these local sites to bridge the gap between Buddhism and local traditions (Falk 2006: 57). Additionally, the function of Major Pillars was also explored and some suggestions have shown that in addition to their dharmic messages, they functioned as locations of festivities, for example marriages, drinking, music and venereal gatherings (Falk 2006: 148).[37]

Protohistoric gravesites dating to the mid-1st millennium BCE have also been discovered in the layers beneath the foundations of Buddhist structures in Gandhāra. In Gandhāra, 48 burial remains are recorded beneath Butkara II (Faccenna 1964: 56-62; after Schopen 2004: 365). Saidu Sharif, a monastic site dating back to the 2nd century BCE, was built over a prehistoric funerary site consisting of 18 burials, three of which date to the 5th-4th century BCE (Filigenzi & Olivieri 2016: 23, 27-28). Tucci (1977: 10; after Filigenzi & Olivieri 2016: 27) also suggests that these funerary sites were always located near a hill or body of water, again, perhaps alluding to the worship of fertility goddesses or nature spirits such as the yakṣas and nāgas. Thus, this indicates that these burial sites retained their ritual significance in the Mauryan period, as evidenced by the construction of many Buddhist stūpas over or near them in Gandhāra.

[37] This is further illustrated in a relief from Mathura, dating to the 1st century BCE, of a couple touching an Aśokan Pillar, assumed to represent a marriage ceremony (Falk 2006: 148). Additionally, these revelry events are connected to not only the ancient pre-Buddhist local cultures of Gandhāra but also the pre-Islamic Kafir traditions, which will be explored later.

Consequently, the archaeological record indicates that many pre-Buddhist streams of tradition, such as the Gandhāran grave culture and terracotta artefacts, remained relevant after the 3rd century BCE.

vi) Baroque Lady terracotta found in Charsadda. 3rd century BCE. [38]

vii) Ringstone from Bhir Mound, Taxila. 3rd-2nd century BCE. Figures of female goddesses in the inner circle. Taxila Museum. [39]

After the fall of the Indo-Greeks in the late 1st century BCE, a rapid succession of Indo-Scythian and Parthian groups ruled Gandhāra until the mid-1st century CE. From an archaeological perspective, our understanding of local religious elements primarily focuses on the production of terracotta figurines and votive tanks.

In an archaeological survey by Hasan Dani (1967: 32) in Timurgarha, Dir District, Pakistan, a terracotta figurine dating to the 9th-7th century BCE was found in the pelvic area of the deceased, alongside snake bones. According to Stacul (1966), anthropomorphic terracotta figures are typically placed on or near the body, and Hasan Dani suggests that they functioned as totems or emblems of clan groups (Stacul 1966: 49; after Hasan Dani 1967: 32).

The exact function of these terracotta figurines has been assumed to be affiliated with household rites (Figure 1.1 [vi]) (Dar 2021: 2); however, other academics have explored other possible uses for these terracotta figurines. For example, one interpretation by Alterio and Esposito (2023: 288) is that they were linked to culinary or everyday occupations; another

[38] Samad 2020: Fig. 8.1. Museum unspecified.
[39] Samad 2020: Fig. 8.3.

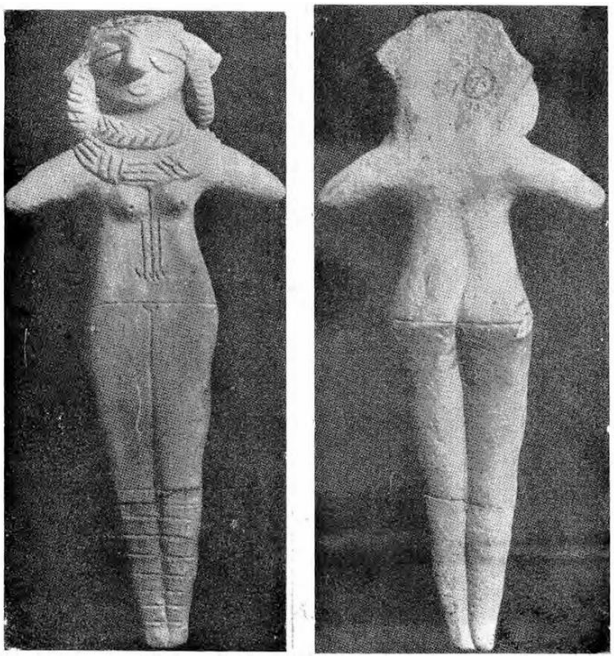
suggested they were used for Brahmanical circumambulation processions (Bautze 1990: 618-625).[40] An alternative is that they, alongside votive tanks, functioned as Buddhist protective charms for children (Schopen 2014: 14-15). These studies are all valuable to understanding the possible function of these figurines; however, as an overarching consensus identifies these figurines as household fertility goddesses, this paper will continue that line of thought.[41]

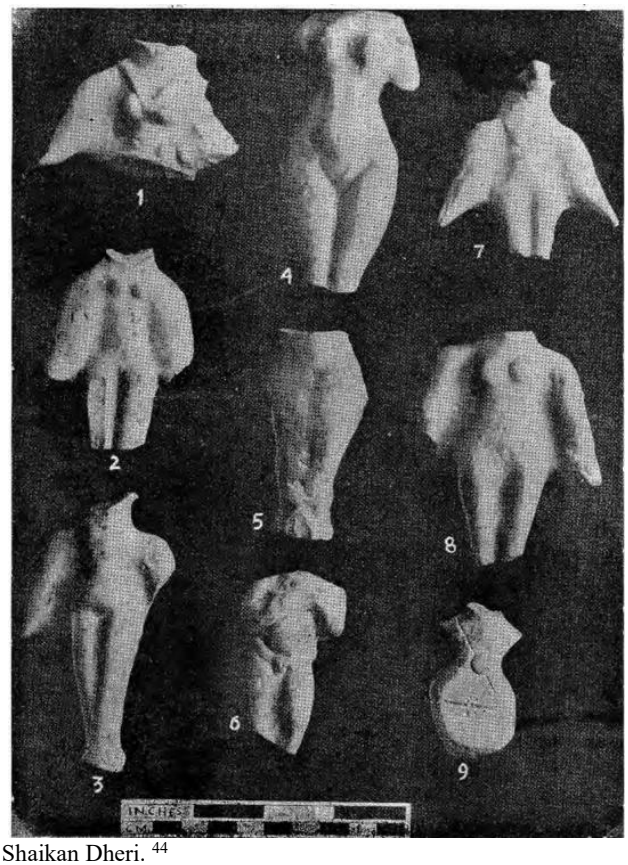
In examining the distribution of these artefacts, most Gandhāran cities and sites yield terracotta figurines[42] (Dar 2021: 3). However, I will study three specific sites that will deepen our understanding of the religious environment of the time and examine how these figurines relate to the religious practices of the populace in Gandhāra.

In Shaikan Dheri, a city founded by the Indo-Greeks in the Charsadda settlement, Ahmad Hasan Dani and a team of excavators revealed three distinct phases: Greek, Scythian-Parthian, and Kushan (Hasan Dani 1965: 24-25). During these different periods, female terracotta figurines appeared on all layers until the reign of Vāsudeva (187-232 CE) in the Kushan era (Hasan Dani 1965: 47).

In this study, Hasan Dani observed that from the Indo-Greek period, star-shaped terracotta figurines with a nipped nose and an ornate headdress with pronounced, closed eyes were recovered; these are usually referred to as "Baroque Ladies"[43] (refer to Figure 1.1 [viii]). This style is generally attributed to the 3rd-1st century BCE (Dar 2021: 5). Alongside this style, a Hellenic form emerged in the Indo-Scythian period; these figures exhibit curvilinear bodies and legs, as well as a definition of muscle and body mass. Reflecting the Greek sculptural style, these are called Single Moulded Flat Figurines (see Figure 1.1 [ix]).

[40] Note that Bautze's study involved terracotta figurines from Mathura and not Gandhāra.
[41] Wheeler 1962: 104-105; Tucci 1977: 29-30; After Zahir 2016b: 9; Hasan Dani 1986: 31; Banerji 2021: 85.
[42] Settlements in Gandhāra include Taxila, Charsadda, Sar Dheri, Turlandhi, Akra, Pir Manakrai, Ranigat and Thareli (Dar 2021: 3).
[43] Indeed, Baroque ladies are said to have appeared as early as pre-Greek levels in a close by site, Sar Dheri (Dar 2021: 4).





viii) Female figurines - Baroque Ladies. Indo-Greek Period. Shaikan Dheri. [44]

ix) Female figurines - Single-moulded flat figurines. Indo-Scythian period. Shaikan Dheri. [45]

The transition from the early Baroque ladies to the Single-Moulded flat terracotta figurines reflects how non-Indian powers, such as the Indo-Greeks, Scythians, and Parthians, began to administer the local art in Gandhāra (Dar 2021: 2, 5-6), producing these terracotta figures with a Hellenic flair.

Another study by Callieri (2006) also examined archaeological assemblages of the ancient city of Barikot, situated northwest of modern-day Islamabad. His paper discusses how the archaeological assemblage did not display any artefacts linked to Buddhism until the 2nd century CE, suggesting that Buddhist worship and practice was not a preferred medium of worship amongst the local people in this city (Callieri 2006: 74). Instead, Callieri (2006: 62-63) points out that the assemblage reveals the presence of local cults and Brahmanical artefacts and suggests the active worship of other non-Buddhist streams of religious expression amongst the people. He suggests that despite the proliferation of Buddhist architecture after the 2nd century CE, local cults are evident from the presence of female figurines (Callieri 2006: 65).

Lastly, an analysis led by Coningham and Edwards (1997) in Lower Sirkap, Taxila, southeast of Barikot, revealed similar findings. Sirkap was a city founded by the Indo-Greeks in the 2nd

[44] Hasan Dani 1965: Pl. XXIV. Location unspecified.
[45] Hasan Dani 1965 . Pl. XXX. Location unspecified.

century BCE, and this study focused on the distribution of religious sites in public and private spaces within the city. Their work identified six public and three private shrines (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 49).

By comparing the assemblages from other stūpas, namely Kalawan and Dharmarājika, with the public religious spaces in Sirkap, the researchers found that all stūpas share a similar assemblage, including stucco decorations, ritual tanks, incense burners, and bells. In particular, Sirkap's public spaces yielded numerous types of terracotta ritual tanks: two terracotta ritual tanks in courtyard 1A and a stūpa structure, and four ritual tanks in shrine K (Figure 1.1 [x]) (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 58). As discussed above, ritual tanks are usually associated with local traditions as suggested by Hasan Dani (1986: 93; after Coningham & Edwards 1997: 58), therefore, further supporting the idea that these public shrines were more associated with localised rites and culture. Additionally, according to Singh (2004: 392), this type of temple complex shares the same structural apsidal shape as the infamous nāga shrine in Sonkh, reinforcing its local cultic function.

The assemblages of the private spaces, allocated to 3A, 1E, and Block K (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 50), yielded three female nude mother figures, a statuette of Harpocrates, three ritual tanks, and two collections of silver and gold artefacts (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 59-60). Like Callieri's findings, Coningham and Edwards' study demonstrates that Sirkap's household spaces were religiously diverse rather than solely Buddhist (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 60).

x) Votive tank with a female figurine inside, oil lamps on each corner and sculpted birds resting on the walls. Sirkap. Indo-Scythian period. British Museum. [46]

Although the sites examined above focused only on Shaikan Dheri, Barikot, and Sirkap, two key aspects were revealed in our study of terracotta. The first is their evolving styles, especially after the Indo-Greek period. First appearing as Baroque Ladies, their style later transitioned to their Graeco forms in Barikot and Shaikan Dheri until their disappearance in

[46] Ahuja 2005: Fig. 10.

the 2nd century CE[47] (Hasan Dani 1965: 47; Callieri 2006: 74). The second is that by studying relevant settlements, we know that these small figurines were still popular with the local populace, as the terracottas consistently appeared in the domestic and public spaces in the Indo-Scythian period. This leads to our most important conclusion: assuming that the terracotta figurines represent a local fertility cult, we can assume that this local goddess tradition was actively practised in Gandhāra during the Indo-Scythian and Parthian periods.

All in all, pre-Buddhist local religious elements are evident from our study of early records in Gandhāra. Firstly, it manifested as nāga tales linked to cities and mountains, as well as reports of "barbaric" warrior-like clans clashing with Indo-Europeans and Macedonians. During Aśoka's reign, we have the most archaeological and literary substance. His edicts openly acknowledged women's rituals, revelry festivals, viticulture, and sacrificial practices. Additionally, the early Buddhist stūpas and the pillars have demonstrated their geographic affiliation with proto-historic graveyards. However, after Aśoka's reign and the Mauryans' fall, our primary evidence for local traditions is the female terracotta figurines that were continually manufactured until their decline in the 2nd century CE. Although these are our primary sources of evidence, these artefacts appeared in high numbers in the private homes of city settlements in Gandhāra, suggesting that local goddess or fertility worship was widespread and a favourite amongst the locals.

1.2 Local Religious Elements in Gandhāran Buddhist Art 1st-3rd century CE

During the 1st to 3rd century CE, Gandhāra was seized by the Kushans, a powerful Central Asian group originating from the western provinces of China. Formally known as the Yüeh-zhi, the Kushans migrated westward toward East Iran and Bactria (Neelis 2011: 132; Skinner 2017: 25-26). They settled in Gandhāra in the 1st century CE and eventually expanded their kingdom, reaching central India under Kanishka's reign (127-150 CE)[48] (Neelis 2011: 132-133). In many ways, the Kushans adopted a similar governing approach to their predecessors, the Indo-Scythians and Parthians. One particular way was through their acceptance and sponsorship of various mainstream traditions, such as Greek, Brahmanism, and Iranian traditions (Rezakhani 2022: 324).

However, Buddhism, the tradition this thesis specifically does not address, received sufficient investment and patronage to become a prominent religious body, especially during the Kushan period.[49] Thus, it was one of the principal instruments propelling the production of religious art and literature in Gandhāra.

Why would this be relevant to our study of pre-Buddhist local religious traditions? Like the Brahmanical texts, which integrate local elements into their narratives and lore, Buddhism

[47] Which according to Callieri, the decreasing appearance of female terracotta figurines, coincides with the increase of Buddhist artefacts in the Barikot (2007: 74).
[48] In this thesis, I intend to follow Falk's (2001: 130), Allon et al.'s (2006: 285-288), and Bracey's (2017: 204) dating of the reigns of Kushan monarchs. The dating, especially concerning Kanishka's reign, has always received particular attention, often dated to the Śaka period, i.e., 77-78 CE. However, based on Falk's (2001: 130) study of astronomical occurrences from a Yavanajātaka inscription and Allon et al.'s (2006: 287-288) dating of the Senior Manuscripts, these two papers both support that Kanishka's reign began in 127 CE. In stating this, I intend to follow the chronological table of the Kushan kings' lineage provided by Bracey (2017: 204).
[49] Although the Kushan monarchs' religious policies and tendencies varied, King Kanishka and Huvishka patronised relevant Buddhist architecture, artefacts, and coinage (Neelis 2011: 138-142).

adopted a similar approach to local traditions. In this segment, I will examine how Buddhism incorporated local elements into its literature and art.

As explored in early Vedic and post-Vedic texts, local figures such as nāgas and yakṣas were prone to becoming absorbed into mainstream traditions. The most prevalent one linked to Gandhāra is Taxila's origin story, involving the nāga prince, Prince Takṣila and his defeat by Janamajeya. As we continue to observe other texts, such as the Buddhist records and the writings of Chinese travellers, the worship and tales of nāgas did not entirely subside and continued after the 1st century CE in Gandhāra. For example, in Buddhist texts, the most notable Buddhist narrative set in Gandhāra involving a nāga is the tale of Apalāla.

i) Buddha with Nāga Apalāla and his wife, depicted with serpent hoods to the left of the Buddha. 2nd-3rd century CE. Peshawar Museum.[50]

This tale is recorded in the Divyāvidāna and Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya texts (DeCaroli 2019: 16) and has various versions, also recorded by later Chinese travellers. For example, Xuanzang, a Chinese traveller in the 7th century CE, reports how the Buddha subdued and converted the evil nāga, Apalāla, who was causing extreme rains and floods in the Swāt valley (Deeg 2008: 101-102; Khan 2015: 78-79; Deeg 2021: 56). In Figure 1.2 [i], the Buddha stands over King Apalāla and his wife. They are both in *añjali mudra*, kneeling towards the Buddha. Above them, a yakṣa is flying over them, supposedly striking the face of the mountain to cause the rocks to fall into the lake.

This type of story is repeated in various nāga tales within Buddhist literature. It usually features a troublemaking nāga creature that is the source of the region's freshwater or rain problems, impacting nearby communities or villages (DeCaroli 2019: 16). However, after the Buddha visits these creatures, they become tamed and convert to Buddhism.

Another example is the tale of Nāga Elāpatra. This story is confirmed to have been set near Taxila, Gandhāra, by Xuanzang (Glass & Allon 2007: 24) and attested in Buddhist manuscripts such as the Robert Senior Manuscripts, Fragment 24, titled Ṇala and Elāpattra. This story tells of a Buddhist monk, Ṇala, and a nāga creature, Elāpattra. Elāpattra sought the

[50] Ali & Qazi 2008: 237.

Buddha, who helped him return to his human form and taught him to lead a dharmic life (Glass & Allon 2007: 17). Figure 1.2 [ii] depicts the conversion of the Nāga Elāpattra. The Buddha is at the centre and is portrayed with a snake (believed to be the serpent form of the Nāga Elāpattra). To the far left is the Elāpattra, with a serpent hood to refer to his prior form as a nāga.

In Gandhāran Buddhist art, there is another depiction of a nāga conversion. For example, in Figure 1.2 [iii], the lower scene depicts the Buddha with Nāga Kalika and his wife Nagani. These figures have hooded snakes over their heads and are pictured standing inside a water tank (Ali & Quazi 2008: 109). These particular characters are depicted in the Buddha's story as characters who sing hymns, praise, and pay homage to the Buddha as he progresses through his journey.

ii) Buddha converts Nāga Elāpatra. 2nd-3rd century CE. Sahri Bahlol. Peshawar Museum. [51]

iii) Nāga Kālika and his wife Nāginī sing hymns and salute the Buddha. 2nd-3rd century CE. Charsada. Peshawar Museum. [52]

In addition to these artistic depictions, a Chinese pilgrim, Songyun, from the 6th century CE, provides valuable insight into the veneration of a nāga creature inhabiting a lake in the Swāt district of Gandhāra.

> A l'ouest de la rivière se trouve un lac où habite un nāgarāja ; sur le bord du lac est un temple avec plus de cinquante religieux; chaque fois que le nāgarāja fait un prodige, le roi de ce pays l'implore et lui demande la permission de jeter dans le lac de l'or, du jade, et des joyaux, puis ce qui ressort de l'eau, il

[51] Ali & Qazi 2008: 239.
[52] Ali & Qazi 2008: 109.

invite les religieux à le prendre; pour les vêtements et la nouriture (des religieux), ce temple compte sur l'aide du dragon; le peuple l'appelle le temple du nāgarāja.[53]

Thus, combined with the artistic depictions and the reports from Chinese travellers, the evidence shows that the worship of nāgas was practised during the Kushan era, and their stories continued to be disseminated in the 6th century CE in Gandhāra.

iv) The Buddha (centre) and Yakṣa Atavika (right) holding a child as a gift to the Buddha (most likely King Ataki's son). (Left figure) a yakṣa hurling a disc-like object over his right shoulder. 2nd-3rd century CE. Sahri Bahlol. Peshawar Museum. [54]

Another class of deities incorporated into Buddhist literature and art during the Kushan period is the yakṣa (Bignami 2014: 634; Cohen 1998: 380), the local entities of the Pan-Indian world. They appear in Buddhist art as supporters of the Buddha or, similarly to the nāgas, as dangerous, powerful beings that later convert to Buddhism.

Although not recorded in Buddhist scriptures, one notable Buddhist story is the tale of the yakṣa Āṭavika and the local ruler, King Ātavi (Ali Khan 2017: 126). The story recounts how King Ātavi struck a deal with the yakṣa, Āṭavika, and, to save his own life, the king agreed to offer one of his company members for each day to appease the yakṣa (Ali & Quazi 2008: 226-227). The king did as he promised, but soon broke his oath with the yakṣa once he was forced to sacrifice his son. The Buddha then seeks out the yakṣa and converts him as displayed in Figure 1.2 (iv) (Ali & Quazi 2008: 226-227, 241). Other variations of this story, as provided by Zwalf, tell how the yakṣa Āṭavika would kidnap his victims, especially children. Once he came across the Buddha, he challenged the Buddha with three questions. Once surpassing them with his answers, the Buddha converted the yakṣa, and the kidnapped infant survived (Zwalf 1996: 191).

A figure of much greater renown and characteristically featured in Buddhist texts and Gandhāran art is Hārītī (Rowan 2002: 49). Originally, she was a pan-Indian goddess from Rajgir, in the Gangetic Plains, who was absorbed into Buddhism, eventually becoming a Buddhist fertility goddess. However, her name also hints at the malevolent origins of this

[53] Chavannes 1903: 410.
[54] Ali & Qazi 2008: 240.

goddess, as the Sanskrit root hṛ means “take” or “steal”. In her origins, Hārītī embodied a terrifying aspect and was known to kidnap and feed children to her five hundred demon infants (Rowan 2002: 50-51; Padma 2011: 5). She is also affiliated with smallpox and is regarded as the healer of this disease (Lamotte 1988: 689; Padma 2011: 6).

Later Chinese travellers who visited India via Gandhāra also reported on the cities, describing the cultural lifestyle, the political landscape, and the religious scenery. According to Xuanzang's writings, the Sare-Makhe-Dheri stūpa was dedicated to a local goddess known as Hārītī (Rowan 2002: 51. fn. 8; Zahir 2016b: 11; Bagchi 2023-2024: 650).

> More than fifty li to the northwest of the stupas built by Brahmā and Indra there is a stupa that marks the place where Śākya Tathāgata converted the goddess Hārītī to prevent her from doing harm to people. Thus it became the custom of the country to pray to the goddess for offspring [55]

This highlights a highly significant assimilation process of non-Buddhist elements into Buddhist art in Gandhāra. As this local goddess is incorporated into Buddhist lore, Hārītī’s narrative changes to a benevolent figure, the epitome of motherhood, bearing and holding children as the supreme mother figure (Rowan 2002: 51-54; Padma 2011: 5). For example, Figure 1.2 (v), Hārītī is shown sitting, surrounded by children, whilst cradling a baby in her arm. Her other hand holds grapes and foliage in an *abhaya mudra* position (Rowan 2002: 306). Her dress is long, and she wears an elaborate shawl over her shoulders, adorned with a Hellenic crown, i.e., a polos, and decorated with heavy jewellery (Rowan 2002: 306).

[55] Rongxi 1996: 66.

v) Hārītī surrounded by children in House of Naradakha. Charsadda. Early 2nd century CE. Peshawar, Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Peshawar. [56]

vi) Pancika and Hārītī statue. Shahji-ki-Dheri. Unknown date. Peshawar Museum. [57]

This statuette is particularly important as it was found in a Buddhist monk's living space, the Naradakha House in Charsadda, implying her seamless integration into Buddhist space and contexts (Callieri 2006: 73). Hārītī is also displayed numerous times[58] as a consort with Pancika/Kubera, a yakṣa, sometimes called the king of the Yakṣas. These two figures represent ancient Gandhāra's ideal divine masculine and feminine figures; see Figure 1.2 [vi] (Rowan 2002: 95).

Similar to nāgas and other yakṣas, Hārītī was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon. She functioned as a Buddhist protectress and mother figure, yet her identity as a yakṣinī remained. Cohen refers to her as a trans-local deity (Cohen 1998: 382), a deity from a localised substratum adopted by Buddhism and propagated into other South Asian regions (Padma 2011: 10-11). In this way, Hārītī became an instrument for Buddhists to localise themselves in different areas (Cohen 1998: 383).

Yet, one can't help but see that Hārītī portrays a Graeco-Iranian front in Gandhāra. It is well known that Gandhāran art exhibits an array of artistic syncretism, particularly among the goddesses. The identification of these goddesses in Gandhāra is a complex topic, and Hārītī's identity is intertwined with that of other goddess types, such as Lakṣmī, Śrī, Tyche, Demeter, Dūrgā, Ardaksho, Nana, Umma, and others. According to Rowan (2002: 52-53; Carter 1968: 132), Hārītī's form absorbs Hellenic and Iranian traits that she later takes on, such as the cornucopia and their vestments (see Figure 1.2 [vii]). According to Rowan, the definitive attributes linked to Hārītī are her company of children,[59] as well as her holding a drinking vessel, a fruit, or a flower (particularly a lotus) and the cornucopia (Rowan 2002: 52-53, 59).

[56] Rowan 2002: Fig. 36.
[57] Rowan 2002: Fig. 64.
[58] It should be noted this pairing is much more frequent in Mathura than in Gandhāra (Rowan 2002: 85).
[59] Rowan 2002: 52-53.

Of these attributes, other statues from Gandhāra have been tentatively identified as Hārītī. For example, statuettes from the 4th-5th century CE in Barikot have been suggested to represent a Hārītī or Śrī figure (see Figure 1.2 [viii]) (Callieri 2006: 71). This particular example shows a seated goddess with a cornucopia (however only the head of a goat is visible), and a flower in her right hand.

vii) Standing Hārītī figure with children. From Sikri. Unknown date. Lahore Museum. [60]

viii) A seated female goddess holding a cornucopia (with a goat's head) and a flower in her other hand, found in Barikot, 4th-5th century CE. [61]

The identity of these goddesses and whether they represent a version of Hārītī or other Brahmanical, Iranian or Buddhist deities is still disputed. This is often the case with Gandhāran deities; their exact identities are so ambiguous that it is difficult to categorise them. Additionally, as explored above, another aspect that defines not only pan-Indian goddesses but also yakṣas and nāgas is that they functioned as trans-local deities, as some originated from outside Gandhāra and were later introduced in Gandhāra through Buddhism. By exploring the ambiguity and trans-locality of pan-Indian deities, we further deepen our understanding of how local traditions interweave into larger vehicles of religions such as Buddhism and Brahmanism.

In the same vein, I would like to direct the reader to a subject that has emerged in the study of local traditions associated with the identity of some Gandhāran statues. In particular, I wish to draw attention to a collection of statuettes from Gandhāra that portray a deity figure holding a goat's head and a cup or goblet. From our recent understanding, the latter belongs to Hārītī's

[60] Rowan 2002: Fig. 32.
[61] Rowan 2002: Fig. 45. Location unspecified.

visual repertoire. Yet, the goat's head is an element that is not usually attributed to Hārītī nor any of the other goddess types from Hellenic, Iranian or Indian traditions.[62]

The symbolic (or ritual?) function of the dead goat and the goddess has been explored in Gandhāra with surprising academic depth. One of the earliest articles to explore this was by Giuseppe Tucci, a pioneer in religious and archaeological studies in Gandhāra. In his work, he studied the relevance of goddess worship and its affiliation with goats or ibex appearing in sculpture and art in Greater Gandhāra.

In his 1963 paper, Tucci highlights the relevance of caprids in rituals, drawing on his study of an 8th century CE disfigured statuette from Guligram. Although this statuette falls outside the time frame of this paper, and the paper itself is dated, the ideas Tucci raised remain relevant to the study of pre-Buddhist religions in Gandhāra. Tucci examined this statue (Figure 1.2 [ix]) in detail and first identified it as the Brahmanical goddess, Dūrgā Mahiṣāsuramardanī, an eight-armed deity, channelling her indomitable power and defeating her enemy, the demon buffalo (Tucci 1963b: 147). However, with the assistance of other researchers, Tucci identified the animal beneath the goddess not as a buffalo, but as a caprid (Tucci 1963b: 152).

ix) Stele of an eight-armed female goddess killing an ibex. Guligram. 8th century CE. Swāt Museum.[63]

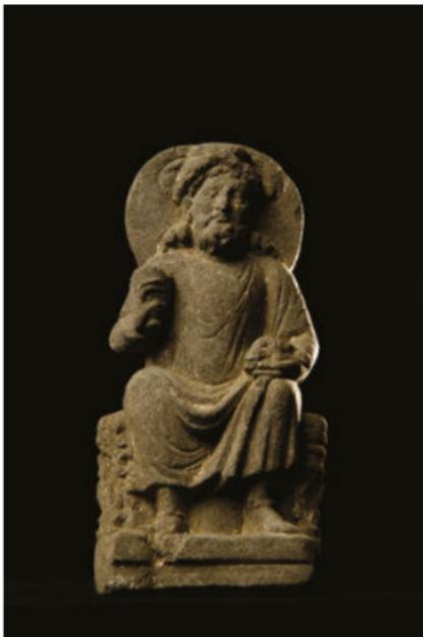
To continue our study on caprids in local traditions in Gandhāra, further studies, such as Di Castro (2015: 269-272) and Filigenzi (2019a: 74-75, 77), analyse the presence of caprids in

[62] It should be noted that the male deity, Śiva/Weš is usually portrayed with a dead stags head, however he will not be included in this study as Siva/Weš is a male god and I will discuss his iconography in more detail in the next chapter.
[63] Di Castro 2015: Fig. 13.1.

Gandhāran art by drawing on anthropological studies on the pre-Islamic local beliefs of the Kafir communities located in east Afghanistan and north-west of Pakistan. For example, according to Jettmar's studies (1975: 251), in modern-day Kafir culture, the goat was the ideal sacrificial animal, and in their collection of deities, two local goddesses are linked to sacrifice and the veneration of goats. The goddess, Sanjü was usually offered goats alongside bread and other edibles as a sacrifice (1975: 95). Alongside this, another goddess, Disani, goddess of all animals, was known to appear as a goat, and whoever passed through her lands needed to offer a goat sacrifice (Jettmar 1975: 100, 167).

Thus, in Di Castro's study, he further examines how the cornucopia containing a caprid's head can also potentially symbolise a rhyton, a drinking vessel usually linked to sacrificial rituals. This is further supported by Melikian-Chirvani (1996: 97-98; after Di Castro 2015: 286), whose study on ancient wine horns, which often feature an animal's head, symbolises a ritual involving sacrifice. Based on this, Di Castro further suggests that the identity of the Gandhāran goddess, holding a goat head as well as a goblet, could be identified as Hārītī or Dūrgā (Di Castro 2015: 276).

However, in another article by Filigenzi (2019a: 75), she suggests that this type of Gandhāran statue (Figure 1.2 [xx]) is linked to the localised deity echoing the practice of caprid sacrifice that is highly embedded in Kafir culture. Therefore, although it cannot be attributed with certainty, the identity of these figures may represent a localised substratum of deities in Gandhāra during the Kushan period.



x) Deity holding a cup and a goat's head found in Barikot. Swāt Museum. [64]

xi) Goddess holding drinking vessel and animal's head. 2nd century CE from Gandhāra. Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, India. [65]

[64] Filigenzi 2019a: Fig. 3.16.
[65] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 12.

xii) Deity with an animal head holding an ibex head and a cup from Gandhāra. 2nd century CE. Sherrier Collection, UK. [66]

In light of these statues, we are provided with another area to segway. The Gandhāran figures also hold drinking vessels alongside the severed goat's head. Cups like these are common among deities in Gandhāran sculpture; however, when combined with the goat's head, these ornaments can be ritually charged and hold significance in local traditions.

Filigenzi explores this and identifies it as "revelry" elements or scenes, typically characterised by merriment and festivities, including wine drinking, dancing, singing, music, banqueting, love play, and animal sacrifice.

This coincides with material collected from the other end of the chronological spectrum; the anthropological studies also confirm the practice of sacrifice alongside wine drinking and festivities. For example, Jettmar (1975: 90) and Klimburg's (2014: 58) record that the god Indr[67] was affiliated with good harvest and wine. An image of this god is erected in a sacred place referred to as the Indra-tã, a small boulder reserved for the veneration of this god (Klimburg 2014: 59). Numerous animal sacrifices, including goats and oxen, were followed by banqueting, dancing, and licentiousness (Klimburg 2014: 59-60).

This knowledge has become instrumental to understanding some of the surrounding panels on Buddhist structures, particularly those demonstrating "revelry" scenes. Some examples are found on a Buddhist pillar in Saidu Sharif (Figure 1.2 [xiii] and [xiv]).

xiii) Relief showing events of Buddha's life (below) and ritualistic scenes (above). Saidu Sharif. Museo Nazionale di Arte Orientale, Rome. [68]

xiv) Relief depicting Buddha's life (below) and "revelry" scenes (above). Saidu Sharif. Museo delle Civiltà, Rome. [69]

[66] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 13.
[67] A supposed variation of the Vedic god Indra (Edelberg 1965: 194).
[68] Filigenzi 2019a: Fig. 3.12. (Inv. MNAOR 4152, MAI S 704, deposito IsIAO).
[69] Moscatelli & Filigenzi 2024: Fig. 4. (Inv. No. S 418 MNAOr. Acc. No. 4107).

The reason these “revelry” scenes are displayed in Buddhist art is rather complex. Filigenzi summarises that it was Buddhism’s way of incorporating local identities and rites into the fold of Buddhist spaces (Filigenzi 2019a: 73-74).

However, alongside these “celebratory scenes” are images of athletics, erotica and everyday life. Considering this, perhaps the purpose of such varied scenes in Buddhist art functioned for a different purpose. A study by Galli (2011: 321) suggests that these scenes reflect the lifestyle of the local elite and the society’s engendered values: the typical masculine and feminine qualities and sense of community. Furthermore, regarding scenes of love play between couples, Gombrich suggests (2014: 141; after De Notariss 2024: 46. fn. 92) that Buddhism was aiming to portray a sense of beauty and aestheticism, which were fundamentally linked to the sensuality of feminine beauty and glimpses of erotica. As for the prototypical masculine values, portrayals consisted of wrestling and weightlifting, thus implying the values of bravery and physical fitness (Galli 2011: 321).

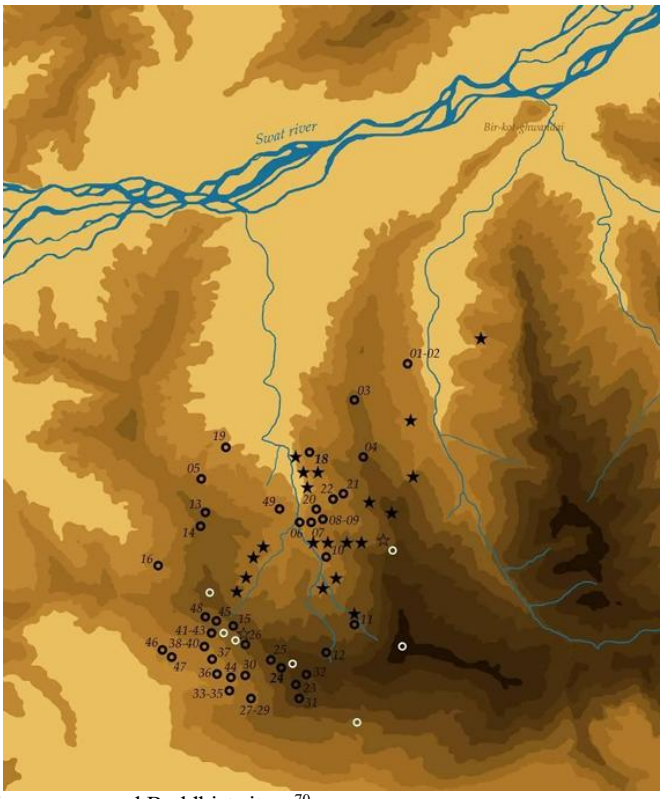
In light of this study, the exact purpose behind the “revelry” scenes demands a sense of generalisation that most Gandhāran artworks demand. Although this attempt was to find evidence of local traditions in art, these reliefs can be interpreted in different ways. For example, the scenes portrayed in Buddhist reliefs are not strictly linked to the seasonal celebrations of local rites; they can be expanded to display the time’s prominent ideas and value systems.

In saying this, I do not intend to set aside Filigenzi and Di Castro’s work because although it is important to address the nuances that Gandhāran artefacts demand, their work has shown that local traditions may not have been swept under the mainstream traditions of the time. Their studies have provided valuable insights into how pre-Buddhist traditions integrated into the religious landscape, adapting where necessary.

Yet, although art is challenging to interpret due to its nuances, studying the ancient sites of wine presses in Gandhāra has deepened our understanding of the relationship between wine production and the local communities. A study by Coloru, Iori and Oliveri (2024: 193) states that in the northeast of modern-day Peshawar, near the Kotah and north-easterly valleys, there are 22 grape-pressing sites, with proximity to rock art paintings and Buddhist monasteries (Olivieri 2011: 136). As mentioned earlier, harvesting wine is a significant seasonal custom in Kafir cultures in Gandhāra. As proposed by Falk (2009b: 74), the proximity to these Buddhist monasteries (see Figure 1.2 [xv]) suggests that Buddhism played a role in the production of wine, which was a highly significant resource to the popular local festivals. Some studies even suggest that these events were linked to the worship of certain yakṣas (Falk 2009b: 74), also portrayed in Gandhāran revelry and drinking scenes. The sheer number of grape-pressing boulders can indicate the popularity of these events, and it is estimated that they produced at least 6,000-8,000 hl of wine annually (Oliveri 2011: 135). Even more so, Buddhist works such as the Mūlasārvāstivāda report of the Buddha and his followers in the northwest region recount an encounter with a yakṣa who gifted the Buddha grapes (Brancaccio & Liu 2009: 226; Coloru, Iori, & Olivieri 2024: 201. fn. 99).

The correlation between wine production, local communities, and Buddhism is interesting, as it may reveal a parallel with another similar study based in Sanchi in the Raisen district in Madhya Pradesh, Central India. This study by Julia Shaw (2013) examined the correlation between water management and Buddhist monasteries. The study explored how Buddhism actively connected with the local communities from the fringes of urban centres, such as the

rural and country folk and became involved in the production and distribution of rice (Shaw 2013: 100). In a way, Buddhism again was bridging the gap between the isolated locale, but at the same time disseminating their tradition.



xv) Map of wine presses and Buddhist sites. [70]
Legend: Black Star > Winepresses;
Empty Star > Vats;
White Circle > High Mountain Buddhist Sites.

Due to its proximity to wine presses, rock art has also been affiliated with ritual significance to the local substratum of Gandhāra. The identity of the artists behind these paintings, as suggested by studying the themes of the art, was that of agriculturalists who lived outside the urban complexes in Gandhāra (Olivieri 2011: 126). Rock art has become instrumental in understanding the relationship between local communities and emerging Buddhist groups by examining the subject matter. Olivieri studied the drawings from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, located north of Swāt, and established a dating bracket from the Bronze Age to the late 7th century CE (Olivieri 2011: 125). The earliest rock art, dating to 1700-1400 BCE, portrays a more rural community culture unimpeded by Buddhist or foreign elements, such as caprids/felines, human-like figures, cup-marks, and hunters/farmers (Olivieri et al. 2006: 143; Olivieri 2011: 139). The next phase, spanning 1400-300 BCE, features more figures on horses, chariots, and cup marks. The latter may symbolise the significance of wine (Olivieri et al. 2006: 143). Later rock art, dating from the 3rd century BCE to the 5th century CE in the Kyber Pass region of Swat and Malakand, instead portrays riders, bow people, Buddhist architecture, and solar images (Olivieri et al. 2006: 143).

Although the earlier and later phases share little regarding subject matter, they demonstrate two significant points. The first is the transition of subject matter over time; the ibex and the

[70] Olivieri 2011: Pl. 3.1.

cup marks are both relevant aspects of local culture. However, they disappeared from the record after the 3rd century BCE; yet, their sacredness may have continued to be remembered in the religious traditions of later eras. The second is the integration of Buddhism in the geographic periphery of these mountain communities. As Olivieri suggests (2011: 134), this represents the "coexistence" of Buddhist and local rural communities, perhaps sharing the manual labour and effort to harvest local resources, e.g. procuring and processing grapes for wine.

In sum, we explored two relevant topics during the 1st to 3rd century CE in Gandhāra. The first is how local deities were incorporated into Buddhist literature and art. Nāgas, yakṣas, and the most popular yakṣī goddess, Hārītī, were deeply embedded in the lore of the Buddhist tradition. Secondly, we examined how Buddhist art and literature represented local rituals involving animal sacrifice and wine consumption. It demonstrates that Buddhist art and literature played a significant role in upholding these local traditions during this era. Yet, it is vital not to overlook external sources, such as records from Chinese travellers and anthropological studies of pre-Islamic Kafir cultures, which also lifted the shroud over the rather subtle body of local traditions in Gandhāra from the 1st to the 3rd century CE.

1.3 Conclusion

Compared to most previous studies of religion in Gandhāra, which have mainly centred on Buddhism, this chapter investigated a branch of Gandhāran religion that is seldom addressed, namely, "pan-Indian elements" and "local religious traditions", and the three main ways they manifested in Gandhāra.

The first and most significant way local elements appeared was through their integration into mainstream traditions, such as the Brahmanical oral literary traditions, and later into Buddhist literature. For example, by studying the early Post-Vedic texts, we understand that Gandhāra had a conflicting early reputation. Gandhāra was known to be the centre of high Brahmanical education; contrastingly, it was also dubbed a foreign society, following the lifestyles of the barbaric kingdoms in its surroundings. Yet, behind this façade of contrasts, Gandhāra also embodied a pan-Indian culture, consisting of legends featuring nāgas, yakṣas, and goddesses. The most notable story was the Mahābhārata legend of Taxila's pan-Indian origins, the city established by a nāga royal and later defeated by a Pāṇḍava prince. Thus, from the earliest records, we see that Gandhāra's local elements were interwoven into larger vehicles of religious traditions, such as post-Vedic epics.

Later, this transitioned into the Gandhāran Buddhist art world. In this way, we see how the local nāgas and yakṣas were interwoven into the Buddhist narrative as initially malicious characters who later converted under the Buddha's guidance and became followers of the dharma. These localised deities functioned within a Buddhist context, but examples such as Hārītī, initially originating from outside Gandhāra, became Buddhism's means of appealing to the local population in different areas in South Asia (Padma 2011: 11).

The mass production of artefacts found in archaeological excavations of Gandhāran settlements also helped us construct our understanding of local traditions. The most important were the assemblages of nude fertility goddesses that appeared alongside other figurines from different traditions. These goddesses were discovered in the private domestic spaces of

Sirkap and high numbers in Barikot, and have been interpreted as representing a type of mother goddess associated with a fertility cult that persisted until the 2nd century CE.

Lastly, local traditions were studied using anthropological reports on pre-Islamic belief systems in the Kafir communities. Using these sources, this chapter explored how wine consumption, seasonal festivities, and animal sacrifice all aligned with a set of local rites that pertain to an ancient Gandhāran and pre-Islamic Kafir culture. By studying the geographic distribution of wine presses, rock art, and Buddhist monasteries, we also examined the cultural identity of local rural communities and agriculturalists in Gandhāra and their relationship with mainstream traditions, such as Buddhism.

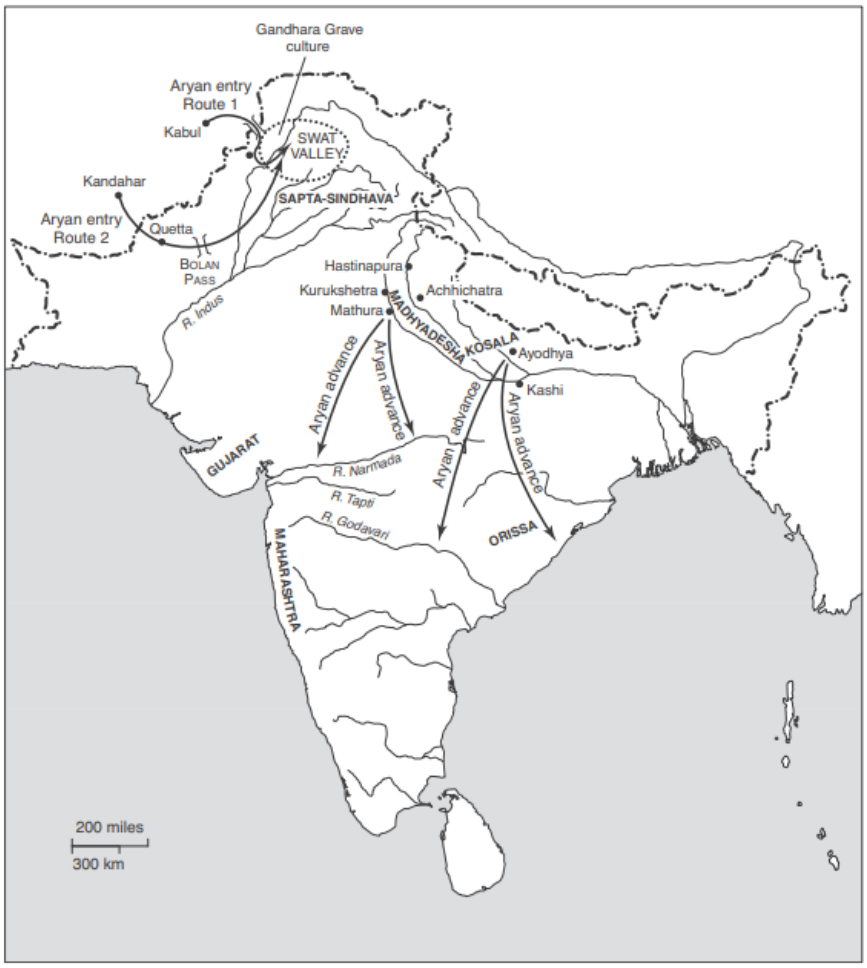
In conclusion, although the focus on Buddhism in Gandhāran studies has overshadowed pan-Indian and local traditions, this chapter has revealed a significant pattern of evidence that exposes a substantial body of pan-Indic local traditions in Gandhāra. By studying Brahmanical and Buddhist literature and art, as well as the continued production of terracotta figurines, and aligning these with anthropological and ancient sources, this chapter has sufficiently delineated the body of pan-Indian, pre-Buddhist, local religions within the rich tapestry of cultural and religious layers from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE in Gandhāra.

2.1 Brahmanism in Gandhāra

Origins and early evidence of Brahmanism

The earliest evidence of Brahmanical tradition dates back to approximately 1380 BCE, as attested in the Hittite-Mitanni agreement. This text mentions a list of gods, four of which are the major Vedic deities: Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, and the Nāsatyas (Aśvins) (Witzel 1997b: 4). This text is the first textual record of the Vedic gods. It demonstrates the linguistic and cultural lineage of Indo-European/Indo-Aryan migration from Iran and India. It deepens our understanding of the Indo-European language family and the linguistic ties between these cultures (Avari 2016: 70).

The Indo-European/Indo-Aryan migrations into South Asia, which began circa 1900 BCE (Witzel 1997b: 4),), was followed by development of the early Vedic Sanskrit tradition (Avari 2016: 70). Witzel (1987: 176) suggests that the early forms of the Ṛg Veda geographically allocates to the northern regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, reaching the Yamunā River (refer to Figure 2.1 [i] for early migratory routes). Evidence to support this lies in the proto-historic burials in the Swat Valley dating to 1200 BCE-1700 CE (Narasimhan et al. 2019: 2) as well as the Ṛg Vedic vocabulary corresponding to the geography and environmental landscape of Afghanistan and northern Pakistan (Witzel 1987: 176; Witzel 1997b: 4). The study of proto-historic assemblages in Gandhāra, reveals a shift in burial customs and ceramic styles after 1700 BCE. This evidence suggests the arrival of an outsider group settling and beginning the acculturation process with the area's indigenous peoples (Mallory 1989: 47; after Avari 2016: 79-80).

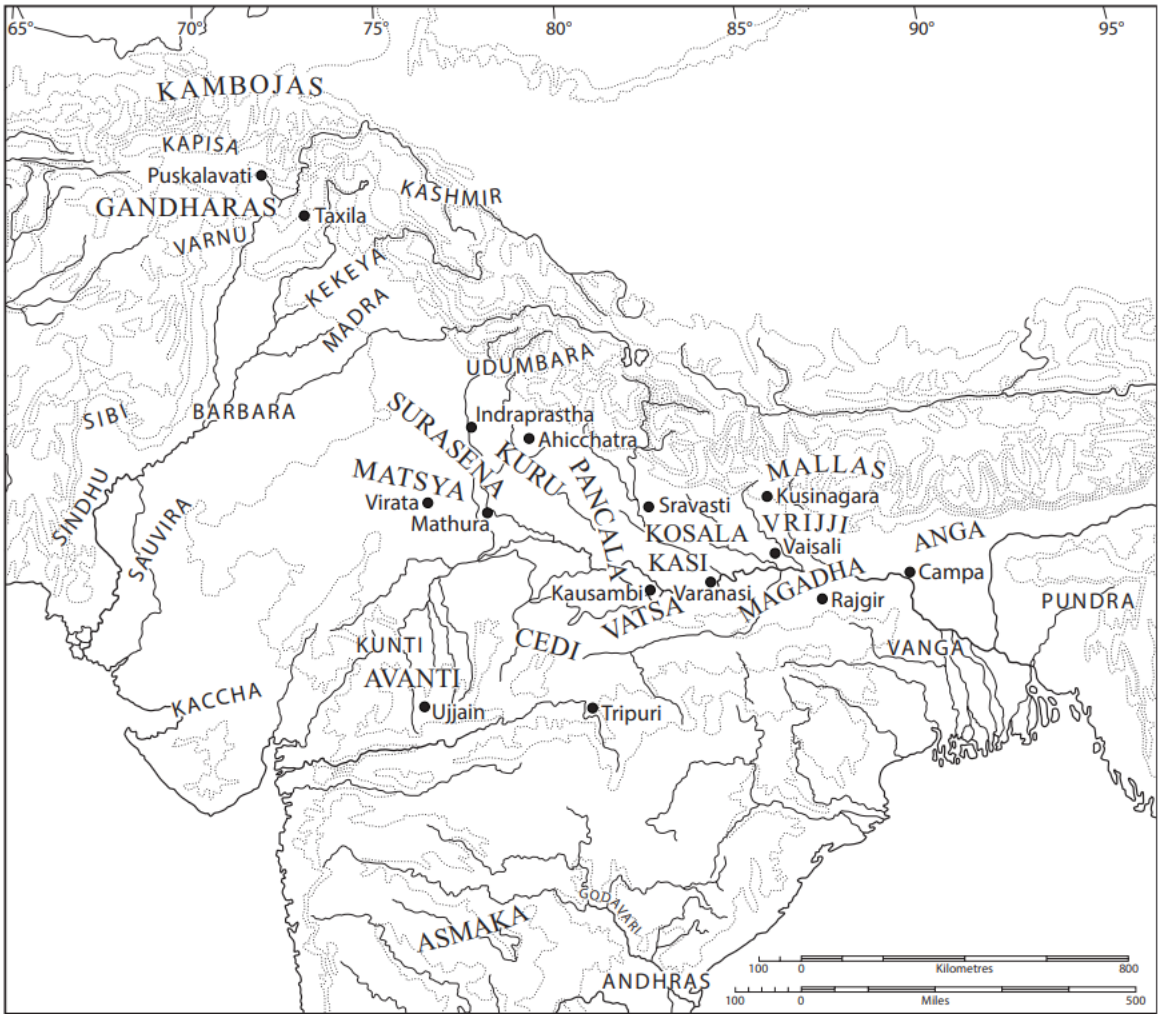


i) Migratory routes in South Asia. [71]

After 1400 BCE, Witzel (1987: 177) suggests that these early Vedic speakers began to disperse to the south of mainland India, intermixing with local groups and basing themselves in India proper (Witzel 1997b: 5). After the 6th century BCE, province states known as the Mahājanapadas emerged as displayed in Figure 2.1 (ii) (Ramesh 2023: 111-112).

However, since the belt of the Gangetic plain became the foundation of Indo-Aryan culture during the mid-1st millennium BCE (Salomon 2018: 40), Gandhāra never left the periphery of the Indian world (c. 600 BCE). This is evident in the earliest literary sources, such as the Post-Vedic texts, including the Purāṇas and the Rāmāyaṇa, which mention Gandhāra's cities, Takṣaśilā and Puṣkalāvatī (Moitra 2017: 110). Even more so, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the antagonists of the Mahābhārata war, such as Duryodhana, his mother Gāndhārī, and his uncle, Śakuni, all originate from and are based in the Gandhāran region (Moitra 2017: 106).

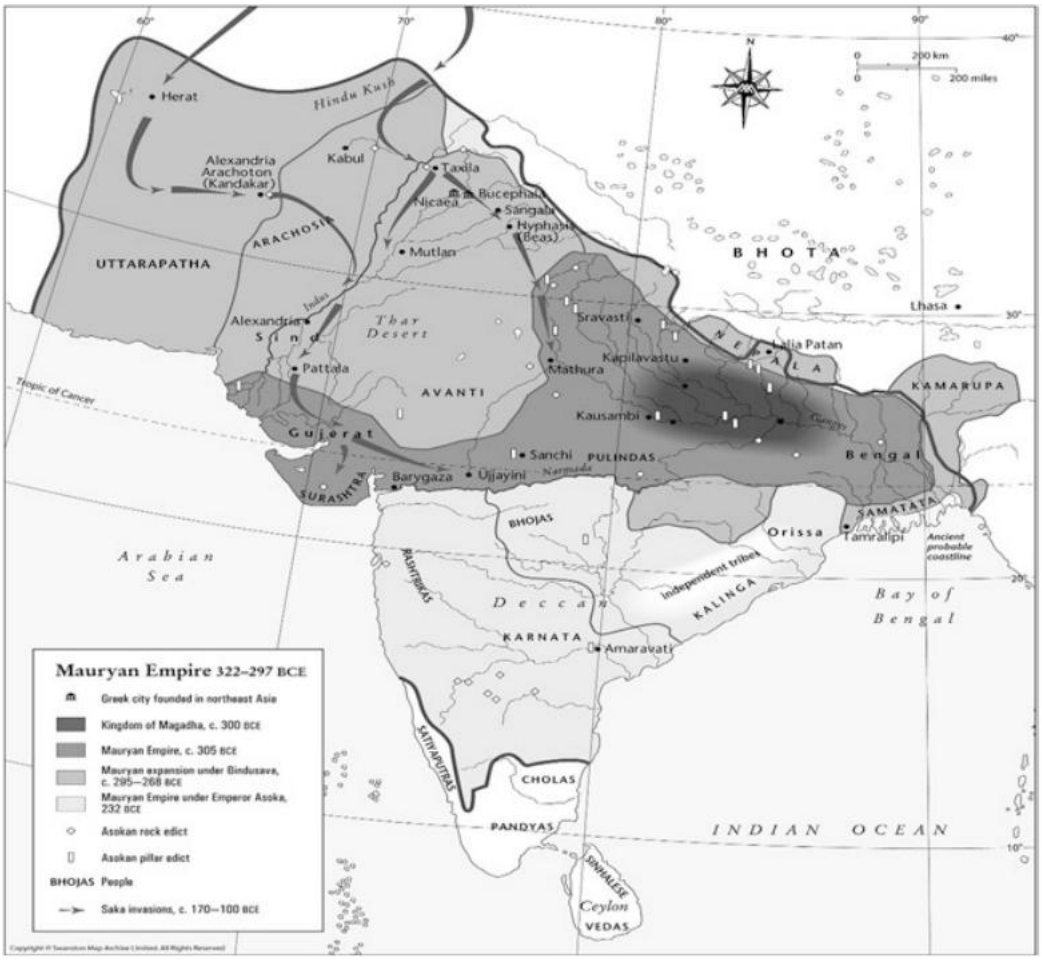
[71] Avari 2016: 82.



ii) The 16 *Mahājanapada* Kingdoms in South Asia 4th century BCE. [72]

After 600 BCE, Gandhāra experienced several incursions; for example, in the 5th century BCE, it became a satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. From an archaeological perspective, this introduced Iranian elements and archaeological material; however, it did not disturb Indo-Aryan traditions and practices in Gandhāra. Gandhāra retained its Indo-Aryan identity and culture with additional Iranian elements (Petrie & Magee 2012: 18; after Bronkhorst 2024: 202. fn. 58 and fn. 59).

[72] Stoneman 2019: Fig. 2.2.



iii) Mauryan Empire. 4th-3rd century BCE. [73]

Later, with the arrival and occupation of the Macedonian forces in the 4th century BCE in Gandhāra, Gandhāra was quickly retaken by the Mauryan Empire (see Figure 2.1 [iii]). Therefore, although this paper begins from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, literary sources from earlier periods will be referenced, as they provide insight into how Brahmanical culture pervaded and was perceived. This chapter will draw on various ancient literary texts and relevant archaeological material to help us understand the Brahmanical elements in Gandhāra from the 3rd century BCE.

In the following sections, I will discuss Brahmanism during the Indo-Greek, Indo-Śaka, and Indo-Parthian periods (late 2nd BCE-1st century CE) and conclude with the Kushan period (1st -3rd century CE).

Brahman elements in early literary sources (from Pāṇini to Megasthenes)

Before the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, Gandhāra underwent significant change. The rise of the Mauryan Empire (Figure 2.1 [iii]) from Mathura, central India, expanded to the

[73] Ramesh 2023: Fig. 6.1.

Gandhāran region, forcing the Greeks to retreat into Bactria in the late 4th century BCE.[74] This saw the Gandhāran region become part of the Mauryan empire until its decline in the late 2nd century BCE.

What we know of the Brahmanical elements in Gandhāra during the 3rd century BCE is based on writings from ancient Indian and Hellenic sources. I will begin with the ancient Indian literary sources and examine their contribution to our understanding of Brahmanical culture in Gandhāra from the 3rd century BCE.

As mentioned above, early Ṛg Vedic texts mention Gandhāra, demonstrating the region's inclusion in the Indo-Aryan world of ancient India (Witzel 1997a: 332; Witzel 1997b: 4; Witzel 1987: 189). For example, the famous epic, the Mahābhārata, composed approximately after c. 600 BCE (Avari 2016: 82), states that Vaisampayana, a disciple of Vyasa (the renowned author of the Mahābhārata), narrated the epic to an audience in Taxila during the snake sacrifice (Jain 2019: 16).[75]

It is from these Indian texts that we know that Gandhāra's cities were also renowned for their grandeur and high level of Brahmanical education. Greek writers, such as Arrian (96 CE-180 CE), who describe Alexander's conquest, mention Taxila: "Then starting from the Indus, he arrived at Taxila, a large, prosperous city, in fact, the largest of those situated between the river Indus and Hysaspes".[76] Buddhist Jataka texts[77] as well as Indian texts such as the Kauṣitaki Brāhmaṇa,[78] have also led researchers to understand that the city of Taxila and the "northern" provinces were renowned for their elite Brahmanical learning. These cities were also mentioned in early Sanskritic texts as elite Brahmanical centres of education for high-class sons of nobles (Witzel 2011: 3).

Even more so, the renowned Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini (5th BCE - early/mid-4th century BCE) was born in Śalātura, a village in Gandhāra (Vergiani 2024: 72-73). The time of Pāṇini predates the 3rd century BCE; however, his work is significant to our study of Brahmanical culture in Gandhāra. For example, in his work, the Aṣṭādhyāyi, Vāsudeva and Arjuna are mentioned as revered personages of worship, particularly the object of *bhakti* (Skt. devotion) (Agrawala 1953: 359), i.e. *vāsudevārjunabhyam vun* (Aṣṭādhyāyī 4.3: 98)[79] (Solís 1980: 773). Additionally, in the Sutra Jivikarthe chapanye (Puri 1957: 182; Agrawala 1953: 361), Pāṇini mentions how statues of deities were used as a means of worship, which was strictly not used for sale or to procure gold, but rather for religious purposes in temples. These works by Pāṇini demonstrate how the concept of Indian (Brahmanical)[80] deities, such as Arjuna and Vāsudeva, were already circulating, and there are records of revered images of these figures being constructed at this time.

Another writer is Kauṭilya, also referred to as Viṣṇugupta or Canakya (late 4th century BCE) (Witzel 2006a: 62). His work, the Arthaśāstra, is an ancient text on rulership and governing law in India, and it also supports Pāṇini's testimony on the religious practices of that time.

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[74] The Achaemenid Empire seized Gandhāra in the 5th century CE, and later, Alexander of Macedon and his troops briefly conquered Gandhāra in the 4th century BCE.
[75] See Witzel (1987) for a detailed study on references to Gandhāra and Gandhārī people in South Asian texts.
[76] Arrian. Book 5, Chapter 7. Tr. Chinnock 1884: 279; after Majumdar 1960: 29.
[77] Hasan Dani 1986: 42.
[78] Witzel 2011: 3.
[79] GRETIL Aṣṭādhyāyī 2020: 4.3.98 (version by Mari Minamino).
[80] In this thesis, I intend to use Brahmanical and Indian as interchangeable terms.

The Arthaśāstra mentions shrines dedicated to deities and sacred spaces for worshiping deities. For example, the Arthaśastra passage is as follows:

> *kośagṛha vidhānena madhye vāsa gṛham, gūḍha bhitti saṃcāraṃ mohana gṛhaṃ tan madhye vā vāsa gṛham, bhūmi gṛhaṃ vā āsanna caitya kāṣṭha devata apidhāna dvāram aneka suruṅgā saṃcāraṃ tasya upari prāsādaṃ gūḍha bhitti sopānaṃ suṣira stambha praveśa apasāraṃ vā vāsa gṛhaṃ yantra baddha tala avapātaṃ kārayet, āpat pratīkāra.artham āpadi vā* (Arthaśastra 1.20: 2) [81]
>
> He should get the living quarters constructed following the plan for the treasury - either a labyrinthine building containing passages within false walls with the living quarters at its centre or an underground chamber equipped with a door concealed by an adjacent **wooden statue of a sanctuary deity** and with passages through several underground tunnels and above it the mansion; or else living quarters with a stairway inside a false wall and a hollow pillar providing entrance and exit—as well as a floor connected to a mechanical device that would drop it down as a safeguard against a calamity or for a time of calamity [82]

In another passage in the Arthaśastra, Kauṭiliya discusses the layout of a city landscape and specifically mentions the construction of temples dedicated to Indian gods for active worship:

> *apara ajita apratihata jayanta vaijayanta koṣṭhān śiva vaiśravaṇa aśvi śrī madirā gṛhāṇi ca pura madhye kārayet. yathā uddeśaṃ vāstu devatāḥ sthāpayet. brahma aindra yāmya saināpatyāni dvārāṇi bahiḥ parikhāyā dhanuḥ śata apakṛṣṭāś caitya puṇya sthāna vana.setu bandhāḥ kāryāḥ, yathā diśaṃ ca dig devatāḥ* (Arthaśastra 2.4: 17-20) [83]
>
> In the middle of the city, he should have these built: shrines for *Aparājita, Apratihata, Jayanta,* and *Vaijayanta*, and abodes for *Śiva, Vaiśravaṇa, Aśvins, Śrī,* and *Madirā*. He should install deities of the building sites according to the location. The presiding deities of the gates are *Brahmā, Indra, Yama*, and *Senāpati* [84]

Although these textual sources do not specifically refer to Gandhāra, the works of Pāṇini (5th BCE-early/mid-4th century BCE) and Kauṭilya (late 4th century BCE) may have reflected the practices that could have applied to many early Indian kingdoms, including Gandhāra.

Other evidence comes from earlier Greek literary sources, such as writings from Alexander's campaign in the Gandhāra region (mid-4th century BCE) and the accounts of the Greek ambassador Megasthenes (4th-3rd century BCE) on the Mauryan court in Mathura. These sources have also been invaluable in shedding light on the encounter between Greeks and Indians during Alexander's arrival (mid-4th century BCE) and the Greek perspective on Indian life during the reign of King Chandragupta (late 4th century BCE). It is worth mentioning that some Greek and foreign literary accounts are based on second-hand accounts of the original text. Still, they provide an account of a Greek perspective of Gandhāra before and during the 3rd century BCE. Many of these sources also reference Brahmins and

[81] GRETIL Arthaśāstra 2020: 1.20: 2 (version by Muneo Tokunaga).
[82] Tr. Olivelle 2013: 95.
[83] GRETIL Arthaśāstra 2020: 2.4: 17-20 (version by Muneo Tokunaga).
[84] Tr. Olivelle 2013: 106. For more examples, see Samad 2020: 24.

Śramanas, the latter referring to various types of ascetics, including Buddhist and Jain practitioners (Stoneman 2019: 329).

Yet, the term Śramanas, or any term for "Buddhists" or "Jains" in Alexander's classical accounts, is not mentioned (Stoneman 2019: 329). This can be attributed to the author's inability to distinguish between such sects and the diverse ascetic branches that developed alongside Brahmanism (Stoneman 2019: 329; after Bronkhorst 2024: 192-193). For clarity, this chapter will focus solely on references to the Brahmins.

The brief settlement and occupation of the Greeks in the late 4th century BCE in Gandhāra was recorded as having received both a welcome reception and violent resistance. For example, the Roman historian Quintus Curtius (1st century CE) recorded that an Indian ruler, King Poros, and his army carried and presented a Herakles statue before the battle of Hydaspes against Macedonian forces. This, according to early researchers, is claimed to represent Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, a yakṣa or Śiva (Jain 2019: 17-18; Coomeraswamy 1927: 42. fn. 5; after MacDowell 2007: 257).

> A statue of Hercules was carried at the head of the infantry force; this was a very great incentive to the combatants, and to have abandoned those who were carrying it was held to be a military disgrace. [85]

Additionally, Quintus Curtius also mentions that the ruler of Taxila, King Taxiles (sometimes referred to as King Omphis or Ambhi [Hasan Dani 1986: 46]), received Alexander favourably with gifts and coinage (Stoneman 2019: 53). Yet, the Indian troops of Taxila and other cities did not keep to this treaty and continued to fight in protest, eventually leading to their slaughter. The philosophers are also reported to have condemned the Indian nobles who allied with the Greeks and were executed for stirring rebellion among the locals (Bronkhorst 2024: 193; Majumdar 1960: 195).

iv) Coinage of King Telephos, an Indo-Greek King. The obverse portrays Zeus, and the reverse portrays an ascetic (the inscription hints that this ascetic could be affiliated with "kalanakramasa", i.e. the Sanskrit equivalent "*kalyāṇakarmasya*", "doing beneficiary acts" or "acting like Kalyāna", i.e. Calanus, i.e. [80-75 BCE]). [86]

Greek literary sources not only commented on the tension between Brahmins and the Greeks but also the lifestyle and practices of Brahmins. Based on Strabo's (64 BCE-21 CE) work,

[85] Quintus Curtius. Book 8.14.11-12. Tr. Rolfe 1946: 349.
[86] Samad 2020: Fig. 2.6. Location unspecified.

Geography, he reports that Alexander's companion, Aristobulus, claimed Brahmins were highly respected among the locals of Taxila and practised austerities in public. [87]

Arrian (86 CE-160 CE) also reported the exchange between Alexander and the Brahmins in his work The Anabasis of Alexander.

> Again, when he arrived at Taxila and saw the naked sect of Indian philosophers, he was exceedingly desirous that one of these men should live with him because he admired their power of endurance. But the oldest of the philosophers, Dandamis by name, of whom the others were disciples, refused to come himself to Alexander and would not allow the others to do so [88]

From Arrian's writings,[89] we know that another Brahman, Calanus, joined Alexander's company and became a notable figure, disparaged by Brahmins but accepted by the Greeks (Stoneman 2019: 305). This figure is claimed to have been later featured on Indo-Greek coins (see Figure 2.1 [iv]) (Bopearachchi 1995: 8-9).

Majumdar (1960: 446-447) provides a 5th-century Latin text about the exchange between Dandamis and Alexander's messenger, elucidating the religious debate between the Greeks and Indians.

> When, therefore, the above-mentioned messenger came to Dandamis, he addressed him thus: "The emperor Alexander, the son of the great Jupiter, who is lord of the human race, has ordered that you should hasten to him, for if you come, he will give you many gifts, but if you refuse he will behead you as a punishment for your contempt." When these words came to the ears of Dandamis, he rose not from his leaves whereon he lay, but reclining and smiling, he replied in this way: — "The greatest God," he said, "can do injury to none, but restores again the light of life to those who have departed. Accordingly, he alone is my lord who forbids murder and excites no wars. But Alexander is no God, for he himself will have to die. How, then, can he be the lord of all, who has not yet crossed the river Tyberobds, nor has made the whole world his abode, nor crossed the zone of Gades, nor has beheld the course of the sun in the centre of the world? Therefore many nations do not yet even know his name [90]

Greek officers in Alexander's ranks also reported on Brahmans; in particular, a general of Alexander, Onesicritus, was sent on behalf of Alexander to report on the Brahmins. He confirmed that they were naked and practised various yogic postures for long periods outside the city walls.[91] Other Greek officers, such as Nearchus, also report the broader role of Brahmins in society, as he mentions they were involved in politics and were advisors to the rulers of the time.[92]

Although these sources refer to the last quarter of the 4th century BCE and are second-hand accounts of Macedonian officers, they provide adequate evidence of Brahmins just before the beginning of the 3rd century BCE.

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[87] Strabo. 15.1.61. Tr. Jones 1928: 105.
[88] Arrian. Book 7.2. Tr. Chinnock 1884: 371.
[89] Arrian. Book 7.2. Tr. Chinnock 1884: 372.
[90] Excerpt from Palladius's 5th CE works in Peri ton tes Indias ethnon Kai ton Bragmanon. De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus. De Moribus Brachmanorum (after Majumdar 1960: 446-447).
[91] Strabo. 15.1.63. Tr. Jones 1928: 109.
[92] Strabo 15.1.66. Tr. Horace Jones 1928: 115.

Another particularly significant source of literary evidence on Brahmins is given by Megasthenes (4th-3rd century BCE). His work Indika was written after Alexander died (323 BCE) and when Gandhāra was retaken by the Mauryan king, Chandragupta. Megasthenes was an ambassador from the Seleucid Empire sent to Chandragupta's court in Pāṭaliputra, Central India. His works provide an insight into Indian culture from the late 4th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE. However, as no record of his writings survives, we rely on other ancient authors to report Megasthenes' Indika, which relays essential observations of the Brahmins. A translation is provided below:

> Megasthenes makes another distinction also regarding the philosophers, asserting that there are two kinds, whom he calls respectively the Brahmanes and the Garmanes.[93] The Brahmanes have a much higher reputation because they are more consistent in their doctrines. Even while they are still in the womb, they are under the care of learned men, who go to the mother under the pretext of singing incantations to promote an easy birth, but in fact, to ply them with advice and precepts.
> The women who most enjoy listening to them are believed to be the most fortunate in their children. After the birth, a series of different men undertake the care of the children, who, as they grow older at each stage, receive the most suitable teachers.
> The philosophers dwell in a grove outside the city in a suitable enclosure, living frugally on straw mattresses and skins, abstaining from the flesh of living things and from sex, listening to serious discourses, and sharing their lives with those who wish it. The listeners are not permitted to speak or to cough, or even to spit; anyone who does so is ejected from the company for that day as being unable to control himself [94]

Yet, it must be acknowledged that sources produced outside India and by non-Indian writers can be influenced by personal bias and inaccuracies. Megasthenes was one of these writers, and the credibility of his work was questioned when he reported on the presence of contorted and malformed beings he saw in India (Stoneman 2021: 55-56). An example of Strabo's (1st century BCE-1st century CE) comments regarding Megasthenes' claims on the fantastical beings in India is:

> But Megasthenes, going beyond all bounds to the realm of myth, speaks of people five spans long and three spans long, some without nostrils, having instead merely two breathing orifices above their mouths [95]

Although Megasthenes reports that educated locals imparted this information to him (Stoneman 2021: 8-9), his writings, as shown above, can delve into the imaginary and fantastical. Regarding his account of the Brahmins, his work appears credible, as the descriptions align with our current understanding of modern-day Brahmins. However, as with all ancient written sources, the writer behind the text is subject to inaccuracies, influences, and biases.

[93] These are commonly referred to as Śramanas.
[94] Strabo 15.1.58. Tr. Stoneman 2021: 69. Another translation is provided by Horace Jones 1928: 99.
[95] Strabo 15.1.57. Tr. Horace Jones 1928: 95. Another translation is provided by McCrindle 1877: 74.

In conclusion, the earlier literary sources written by Indian and Greek writers are highly significant in our study of Brahmanism in Gandhāra. They contain a continual stream of dialogue and information relevant to our specific epoch. Yet, ancient written texts must be used cautiously, as they also include elements of human nature, including subjectivity.

Brahmanical elements in Gandhāra from the 3rd to the late 2nd century BCE. Punch-marked coins, Aśoka's Pillars and the Pillared Hall

Excavation sites dating to the Mauryan period have yielded various materials; however, the most prominent are the numismatic assemblages. These coins are better known as "punch-marked coins", an extensive collection of square and round coins found in Taxila, Charsadda, Udegram and other cities in the ancient Gandhāran region. These coins portray images and motifs that are ambiguous. The topic of their meaning and possible interpretations is much disputed, and academics have not established a clear consensus. Yet, coinage is relevant to our understanding of the motifs and rulers of the time and, therefore, valuable in this study of religions such as Brahmanism.

In Gandhāra, the earliest currency measurements are the silver "bent bars" and the "punched" dented coins, dating back to the Achaemenid Empire's invasion in the 5th century BCE (Ahmad 2012: 229). At the time when Alexander's forces entered Gandhāra in the 4th century BCE, ancient Greek writers such as Arrian and Plutarch recorded that the ruler of the time, Taxiles (as well known as Ambhi or Omphi), presented Alexander with a "thousand talents" of coins (Bhandare 2017: 70). There are a variety of interpretations (see Thapar 2012: 368-375 for a detailed discussion) of these images. Below, I will summarise such ideas and how they relate to our understanding of Brahmanism in this era.

v) Taxila coin. Assumed to portray a *liṅga* or stūpa (3rd-2nd century BCE). [96]

[96] Samad 2020: Type A. Location unspecified.

One of the earliest researchers, Cunningham (1891: 61), reports that the early coins predate the Greek conquest of Gandhāra and display Buddhist and Indian characters, explicitly mentioning the bodhi tree, stūpas, chaityas and swastikas. This is further supported by Falk's more recent study, proposing that coins like Figure 2.1 (v) display a Buddhist bell or gong (Falk 2021: 20). On the other hand, Prasad (1937-1938: 61) suggests that these coins are affiliated with the Mauryan period as similar symbols appear on the Sohgaura inscription dated to the Mauryan period and earlier Indus Valley seals. However, researchers such as Handa (2019) and Samad (2020) suggest they are affiliated with early Brahmanical elements. For example, Samad indicates that some examples can demonstrate the early representation of Brahmanical motifs, such as the Śiva *liṅga* (Samad 2020: 48) (see figure 2.1 [v]). Handa (2019: 2) proposes that a particular type of punch-marked coins (Pāñcāla Viṣṇumitra) depict Vāsudeva with his distinctive features, including the wheel (Skt. *cakra*) and Garuḍa (Figure 2.1 [vi]).

vi) Coin a) Pāñcāla Viṣṇumitra coin. [97] Coin b) and c). Vāsudeva figure with a wheel (Skt. *cakra*) on a punch-marked coin. [98]

As such, the discussion of motifs and icons on coinage and their exact meanings is quite complex; more importantly, there is currently little conclusive consensus on what images they represent, as there are many interpretations (see description of Figure 2.1 [vii]). Although Samad (2020: 48) and Handa (2019: 2) both suggest that they could represent Brahmanic characters (Figures 2.1 [v] and [vi]), this is also supported by Bopearachchi (2016: 24; 2017: 24. See fn. 65 and fn. 66). However, across the broad spectrum of academia, Bhandare (2017), Thapar (2012: 367-375) and Goyal (2000) have provided a thorough summary of the complex academic discussion of punch-marked coins, and Bhandare (2017: 99-100) specifically points out that although there are many interpretations, the meaning and function of these coins are still not established, and more data is needed.

[97] Hadar 2019: Fig. 5. Location unspecified.
[98] Peiper 2014: 36-59. Figure unspecified (after Bopearachchi 2016: 24). Location unspecified.

vii) 3rd-2nd century BCE. A uniface coin from Taxila portraying a bodhi tree, stūpa and *swastika.* (Identified by Cunningham (1891: 61) and supported by Foucher (1917: 14-15). Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Another interpretation is that they are Mauryan coins with royal Mauryan symbols (proposed by Prasad 1937-1938: 61-62; after Bhandare 2017: 80). The last relevant interpretation is that they portray a guild or province, along with royal motifs of rulers. I.e., the tree represents the Aśoka tree (Thapar 2012: 374). [99]

Despite their ambiguity, early Mauryan coinages utilise many significant motifs that exhibit an Indic flavour. Whether Brahmanical, Buddhist, or originating from a pan-Indian stream of tradition, these coinages demonstrate the development of aniconism in Indic traditions at this time (Samad 2020: 46).

However, after Alexander died in 323 BCE, Greek control in Gandhāra weakened, and the Mauryan empire, led by Chandragupta, took over Gandhāra, pushing the Greeks to the north into Bactria (present-day north Afghanistan). During the reign of Chandragupta's grandson, King Aśoka (273-238 BCE), it was a significant period of Buddhist diffusion with the construction of Aśoka's pillars and edicts, built in proximity to Buddhist structures, and dispersing morality based on Buddhist ethics (Olivelle 2024: 91, 188-199). In these pillars and edicts, we first see the literary mention of Brahmans alongside Śramanas[100] and Buddhists. Below is a translation of the Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict XIII in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

> *ye tatra vasati bramaṇa va śrama[ṇa] va a[ṃ]ñe va prashaṃḍa gra[ha]tha va yesu vihita esha agrabhuṭi-suśrusha maṭa-pitushu suśrusha guruna suśrusha mitra-saṃstuta-sahaya-ñatikeshu dasa-bhaṭakanaṃ samma-pratipa[ti] driḍha-bhatita tesha tatra bhoti [a]pag[r]atho va vadho va abhiratana va nikramaṇaṃ* [101]
>
> But this is deemed even more grievous by the Beloved of Gods, that Brahmins or Sramanas, or other Pasandas or those staying at home and dwelling there who are well cared for—among whom are established obedience to authority, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders and proper

[99] Bhandare 2017: Fig. 3.2.
[100] Śramaṇas refers to ascetics and spiritual wanders.
[101] Rock Edict XIII. Hultzsch 1929: 67.

> regard to friends, companions, associates and relatives, and to slaves and servants, and firm devotion—that they endure there the injury, killing or deportation of their loved ones. [102]

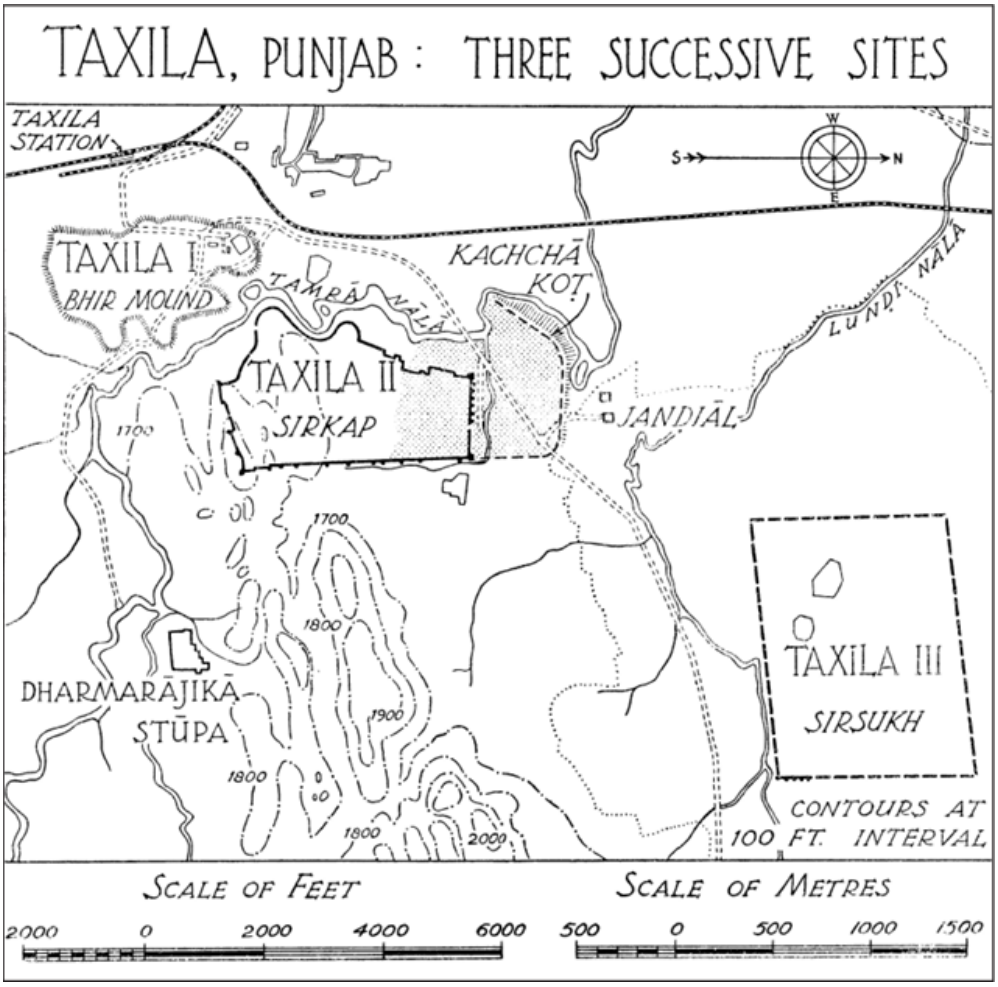
Another example, from Rock Edict 13, also states that the class of Brahmins and other śrāmaṇas were present outside the Mauryan kingdom (Thapar 2012: 209-210). These edicts contribute greatly to our understanding of religious orders that existed at the time of Aśoka. Yet it is worth noting that although these edicts appear in the Gandhāran region (Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra), edicts and pillars were constructed over the entirety of Aśoka's empire, thus most of these inscriptions generally do not apply solely to Gandhāra, but to the large expanse of Aśoka's kingdom.

Regarding other material evidence, archaeological excavations have revealed little to attest to Brahmanical statue worship or temple spaces at ancient sites in Gandhāra. The assemblages and sites comprise ceramics, coins, and various metals used for tools, which enhance our understanding of other areas, such as metallurgy, motifs, and tool types. Yet, regarding religion, little can be concluded.[103] One site I will discuss is Bhir Mound in Taxila. I will discuss the results of these sites, which yield layers dating from the 3rd to the late 2nd century BCE, and any possible affiliations with early Brahmanism and Hinduism.[104]

[102] Translation of Rock Edict XIII. Tr. Olivelle 2024: 295

[103] For a complete overview of Gandhāran archaeology of the ancient sites, see Olivieri (2022: 9-14) and Olivieri (2021: 391- 408).

[104] Some relevant findings have been found; however, they do not allocate to our specific timeframe. For example, the apsidal-shaped structure in Charsadda dates back to the 1st millennium BCE (Coningham & Ali 2007: 67). As well, work on rock art in Swāt also attests to non-Buddhist communities and suggests their affiliation with Indian and Hindu traditions, however, Vidale and Olivieri date these artworks to the 1st CE-3rd century CE (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 188-189).

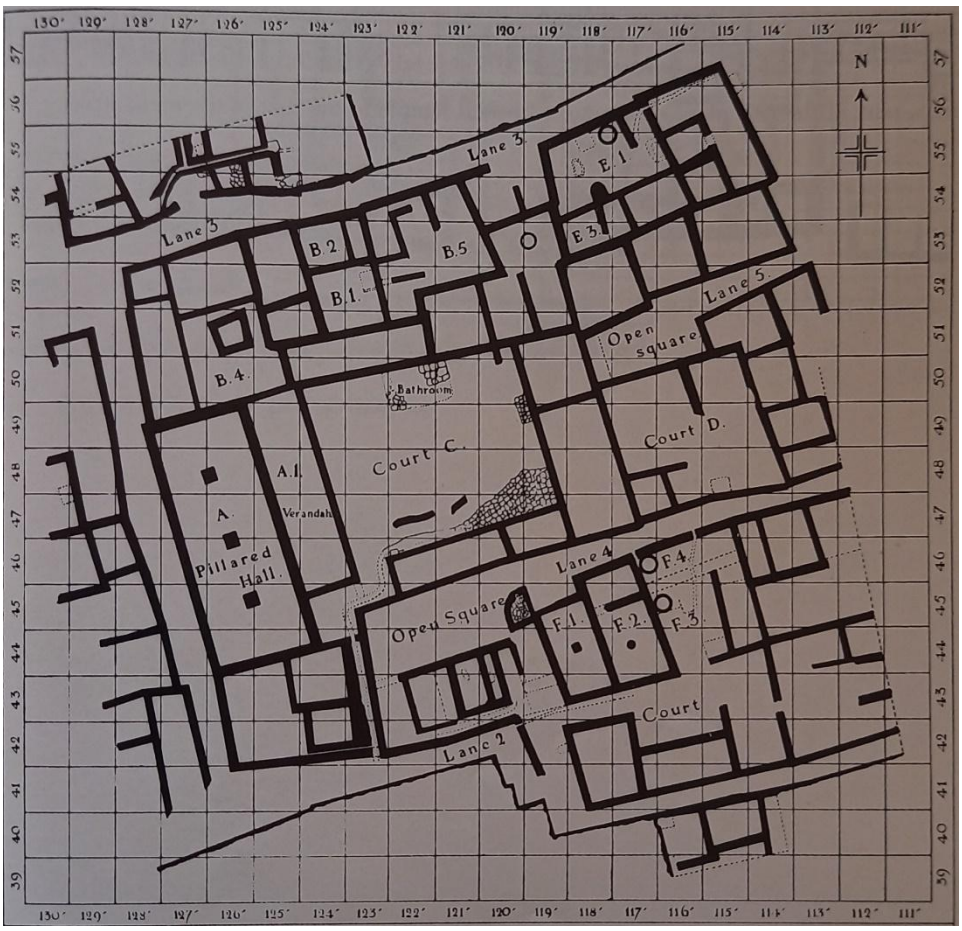


viii) Map of Taxila. [105]

Fussman (1994: 19; after Olivieri 2021: 391) rightly noted that Taxila is a deserved enigma. This is because, despite the early excavations of the sites, beginning with Cunningham (1872) and Marshall (1951), the publications released after these works did not synchronise, and the dating of the layers remains disputed.[106] Nevertheless, in Taxila, five sites have been recovered: Sarai Khola, Hathial Mound, Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh. The Bhir Mound (see Figure 2.1 [viii]) is one of the oldest sites in Taxila, with layers dating to the mid-millennium BCE (Olivieri 2022: 11). According to Marshall's study (1951), the most significant religious structure at the Bhir Mound site is a temple, or "pillared hall", with multiple small separate rooms attached (Marshall 1951: 98-99). The small rooms attached to this pillared hall feature terracotta figurines, specifically depicting male and female figures, which are believed to have served a cultic purpose (Marshall 1951: 98). Marshall suggests that the rooms beside the Pillared Hall were ancient production and selling centres for religious figurines. His findings suggested evidence of an ablution tank, presumed to have a ritual purpose, located at B4 in Figure 2.1 (ix) (Marshall 1951: 100). Marshall's assessment (1951) alludes to the affiliation of Brahmanism; however, this statement is inconclusive due

[105] Wheeler 1950: 37.
[106] For an in-depth summary and discussion of the results of previous excavations, see Iori 2018: 49-52.

to the ambiguity of the site and the discrepancies in the chronology presented by other researchers.



ix) Bhir Mound. The Pillared Hall and B4 room. B4 contains a presumed ritual tank. [107]

Therefore, the research in Taxila necessitates a reassessment of the radiocarbon dates of the layers to definitively understand the chronology. However, in studying the assemblage found in the 3rd century BCE layer,[108] Callieri tentatively suggests that the Bhir Mound site (layers assumed to date from the 3rd to 2nd century BCE by all researchers except Dittman [1984]), represents a strong presence of Indo-Gangetic traditions (Callieri 1995: 294).

[107] Hasan Dani 1986: Pl.25.
[108] Which specifically allocates to Stratum II, assumed to belong to the 3rd to 2nd century BCE by all researchers except Dittman (1984), see Figure 2.1 (x).

Marshall (1951)	Erdosy (1990)	Sharif (1969)	Bahadar Khan et al. (2002)	Dittmann (1984)	Vogelsang (1988)
Stratum I, 2nd century BCE Autonomous	Late/post-Mauryan period	Period IV, 2nd-1st century BCE	Period V, 2nd-1st century BCE	2nd-1st century BCE	2nd-1st century BCE
Stratum II, 3rd century BCE, Mauryan Period	Mauryan period	Period III, 3rd – 2nd century BCE	Period IV, 3rd – 2nd century BCE	Indo-Greek period (=Ch. IID)	3rd – 2nd century BCE
Stratum III, 4th century BCE, visited by Alexander	Achaemenid/early Mauryan period	Period II, 3rd century BCE	Period III, 4th-3rd century BCE	3rd century BCE (= Ch. IIC/IID)	4th century (= Ch. IIA)
Stratum IV, 6th-5th century BCE, Achaemenid	Achaemenid period (at least 4th century BCE)	Period I, 4th-3rd century BCE	Period II, from late 6th century, early Achaemenid	Mauryan Period (= Ch. IIC)	4th century BCE or earlier (= *c.* Ch. IB)
			Period I, up to *c.* 525 BCE		

x) Summary of results and chronology on Bhir Mound after Marhsall's (1951) study. [109]

A possible reason for the absence of material evidence of Brahmanism during this epoch can be found in its unique approach to "worship". It is worth acknowledging that early Brahmanism was centred on worshipping the gods and *yajña*, i.e., "sacrifice" (Sen 2022: 33). The latter involved offerings of meat, food, or drinks to the gods for appeasement and blessings. Usually, this ritual was accompanied by meditation in a location outside the city complexes, such as next to a body of water or in a sheltered, rural area (Fussman 1994: 40). Hence, an alternative understanding can be that Brahmanism was not centred on temples or sacred spaces but rather on the hearth areas and fire rituals in private and rural settings (Sen 2022: 33). This factor plays a significant role in why there is little evidence of material and architectural remnants of Brahmin worship during the 3rd to 2nd century BCE.

In conclusion, the literary works of Indian and Greek sources provide strong evidence for Brahmins and their practices in Gandhāra from the 3rd to the late 2nd century BCE. Regarding the archaeological record in Gandhāra, the ancient sites do not yield any explicit evidence of Brahmin deity worship or sacred shrines. However, it is worth noting that Brahmanism was not a tradition centred on temples but instead on fire rituals performed in temporary spaces. Consequently, the perishability of organic materials such as wood, meat, food, and liquid will not be visible in the archaeological record. However, we find examples of Brahmin architectural and material development in regions outside Gandhāra proper.[110] Iconography

[109] Iori 2018: Table 1.5.

[110] For example, the remains of an elliptical structure dating to the 3rd century BCE located beside the Garuḍa Pillar in Besnagar is suggested to be a Viṣṇu temple (Khare 1987: 150-155; Bhandakar 1998: 130; after Shāh 2014: 48-49). Other artefacts, including a Śiva *liṅgam* statuette, were found in Guḍimillam, dating to the 3rd-1st century BCE (Fleming 2009: 445). As well as the four-headed Śiva *liṅga* with an inscription found in Bhita dating to the 2nd-1st century BCE (Leiden University Libraries 2024).

and architecture were in development then, and we can presume they did not reach Gandhāra until later.

As for the early numismatic sources, Handa (2019) and Samad (2020) suggest that the punch-marked coins could portray Brahmanical elements; however, due to the lack of unanimity amongst Gandhāran researchers, these coins can't be attributed to Brahmanism with certainty until more data surfaces. It was not until the late 2nd century BCE that Brahmin deities were definitively identified under the Indo-Greek rulers.

2.2 Brahmanical elements during the Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian eras in Gandhāra (late 2nd BCE- early 1st century CE)

After Aśoka's death, the Mauryan empire began to weaken due to two significant factors: the political independence of city-states (Taxila) and regions, which internally weakened the political structure of Gandhāra, and the looming forces of the Graeco-Bactrian kings in the north, which pressed and gradually annexed Gandhāra, region by region (Iori 2018: xiii). The eventual annexation by a foreign power, such as the Graeco-Bactrians (later known as the Indo-Greeks), marked the beginning of a unique era in Gandhāra, during which the archaeological footprint of Brahminism began to emerge.

The following segments will discuss the archaeological evidence of Brahmanical culture, examining literary works, coinage, artefacts, inscriptions, and architecture associated with the Brahmanical tradition.

Brahmin Elements in Indo-Greek Coins

As the Greeks continued to expand towards Gandhāra, they brought an influx of numismatics, which has helped archaeologists construct the chronology of monarchs who ruled Gandhāra during this period. However, numismatics have also become valuable for understanding how early deities, especially those from the Brahmanical tradition, were portrayed.

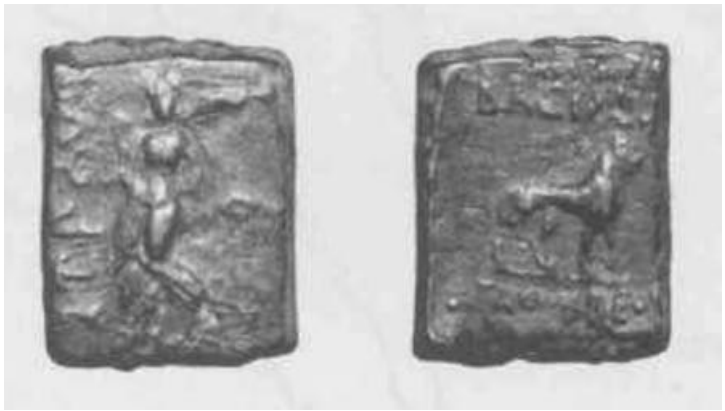
For example, the first Graeco-Bactrian king to become an official ruler of the Indian territories of Arachosia and Paropamisadae was Demetrius I in the late 2nd century BCE (Bernard et al. 2004: 271; after Iori 2018: xiv). When Demetrius I launched his coinage, he depicted himself with an elephant cast over his head, interpreted to represent the "conqueror of India" (MacDowell 2007: 240; Bernard et al. 2004: 274). However, more importantly, on his coinage, we also see the first appearance of the Indian goddess Lakṣmī, or the sister of Vāsudeva and Balārama, Subhadrā (Bopearachchi 2016: 20[111]), holding a lotus flower (see Figure 2.2 [i]). This is the first example of Greeks absorbing the Brahmanical tradition and pantheon into their repertoire of numismatic imagery.

[111] Bopearachchi 2016: 20* (Slide 20).

As the Graeco-Bactrian monarchs later conquered Gandhāra, various rulers began to divide the regions. Gandhāra was allocated to two specific rulers: King Pantaleon and King Agathocles (Bopearachchi 1991: 58; after Iori 2018: xiv).

For example, King Agathocles (190-180 BCE)[112] is one of the most famous examples, as his coins depict Saṃkarṣaṇa Vāsudeva in an anthropomorphic form (Figure 2.2 [iv]). Although this coin was found in Ai Khanoum, a Bactrian city in modern-day northern Afghanistan, this example is one of the earliest depictions of Vāsudeva with his most well-known attributes: the wheel (Skt. *cakra*), the plough, and the pestle. More examples also come from King Pantaleon, who reigned between 190 and 180 BCE[113] (see Figure 2.2 [ii]), portraying a female goddess holding a lotus flower, most known as the "Dancing Indian Girl", who is also believed to represent Lakṣmī. Other examples of Lakṣmī were also issued by King Agathocles (see 2.2 [iii]).

i) The coin of King Demetrius I (190-180 BCE) portrays Lakṣmī. Private Collection. [114]
ii) King Pantaleon's (190-180 BCE) coin portrays a "dancing Indian girl" identified as Lakṣmī. Private Collection. [115]



[112] Hasan Dani 1986: 62.
[113] Hasan Dani 1986: 62.
[114] Bopearachchi 2016: 23.
[115] Bopearachchi 2016: 20.

iii) Coin issued by King Agathocles (185-170 BCE) depicting Lakṣmī/yakṣi featuring a Brāhmī and Greek inscription.[116]

iv) Coin of King Agathocles (170 BCE) depicting Balarāma, Saṃkarṣaṇa, and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa with a plough and a wheel (Skt. *cakra*). Written in Brāhmī and Greek, "of the king Agathocles". Kabul National Museum.[117]

v) Coin of Apollodotus I portraying an elephant (obverse) and a bull (reverse) with Brāhmī inscription.[118]

vi) Antialcydas and Amyntas coin. Zeus enthroned and led by an elephant. [119]

Indo-Greek coinage also included noteworthy Indian elements. For example, Figure 2.2 [v] portrays an image of an elephant and a bull, both highly associated with the Indian deity, Śiva. Additionally, as confirmed by the writings of the Alexandrian lexicographer Hesychius, we know that the bull was the principal god of Gandhāra (MacDowell 2007: 246-247). Additionally, these animals are often depicted alongside the Greek gods. For example, Figure 2.2 [vi] depicts Hellenic Zeus sitting in an elephant-drawn chariot. This is relevant, as the elephant is also known to be the vehicle of Śiva, demonstrating the developing syncretism between Indian and Greek traditions in coin art during the Indo-Greek period (MacDowell 2007: 249).

Coinage, in this way, has revealed two significant aspects of Brahmanical tradition during the Indo-Greek period. Firstly, it is well known that the Greeks had a reputation for embracing Indian deities (Rapin 1997: 288). Hence, the evidence above signals that the Indo-Greeks were aware of Brahmanical culture and accommodated it into their coinage (Iori 2018: xiv). However, closer examination reveals that the Indo-Greeks formally incorporated it into their cultural identity and complex. Thus, by using Brahmanical deities to distinguish their reigns and themselves, they created a unique code of Hellenic hegemony over Indian society.

Writings, Artefacts and Structures associated with Indian deities

Before I analyse artefacts and structures, this section will briefly discuss literary works, particularly Patañjali's Mahābhāsya, and examine how it can help us understand Brahmanical culture and deities in Gandhāra. Like Pāṇini and Kauṭilya, Patañjali's literature provides insight into the development of the canonisation of Brahmanical tradition during the mid-2nd century BCE. Patañjali is claimed to have lived circa 150 BCE (Vergiani 2024: 73) and written a commentary on Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyi, the Mahābhāsya. In this particular work, Patañjali, like Pāṇini, references the terms "archa" or "pratikr̥tti", which are translated as "images of worship" (Agrawala 1953: 361). Additionally, Patañjali refers to Vāsudeva and Kr̥ṣṇa as the same deity, i.e. as incarnations of each other. As well, he identifies a worshiper

[116] MacDowell 2002: Fig. 4. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
[117] Bopearachchi 2016: 3. Location unspecified.
[118] MacDowell, 2007: 245. Fig. 9.29. Location unspecified.
[119] MacDowell 2007: 249. Fig. 9.39. Location unspecified.

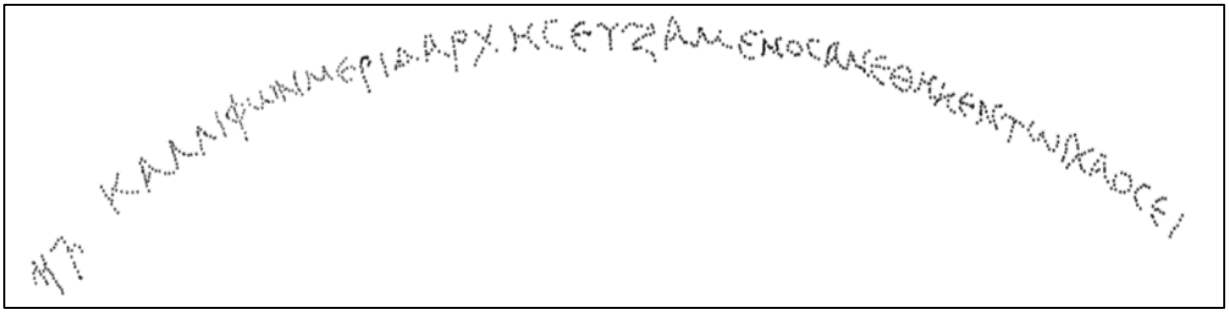
of this deity as a Vāsudevaka, and mentions temples dedicated to Kesava, Rāma, and Kubera (Srinivasan 1979: 50). Patañjali's work also mentions evidence of Śiva Bhāgavata followers (Agrawala 1953: 359). This additional evidence further supports the notion that worshipping these gods was a common practice and testifies to the existence of specific temples dedicated to them. It also demonstrates that the cycle of god-like avatars emerging in different lifetimes was developed and circulating by the mid-2nd century BCE (Agrawala 1953: 359). Thus, Patañjali's work demonstrates that the Brahmanical tradition was active and crystallising during the mid-2nd century BCE.

The following section will focus on various artefacts and structures related to the evidence of Brahmanical tradition in Gandhāra during this period. The first item sheds valuable light on the relationship between Indian and Hellenic religious practices. Several Greek-style bronze bowls have been recovered in Gandhāra, yielding evidence of Indo-Greeks venerating Indian deities. A study completed by Falk (2009a) examined several phialē (see Figure 2.2 [vii]) found in the Mohmand Agency, near the mountain range known as the Khyber Pass, Pakistan (Falk 2009a: 25). These phialē were donated to a holy sanctuary by a military captain (a *meridarches*[120] named Kalliphōn) (Falk 2009a: 25). Dating to 150-50 BCE, these objects are inscribed with ancient Greek and Kharoṣṭhī and are dedicated to an Indian god, Boa, a name referring to Bhāva, one of the forms of the Vedic god Rudra.

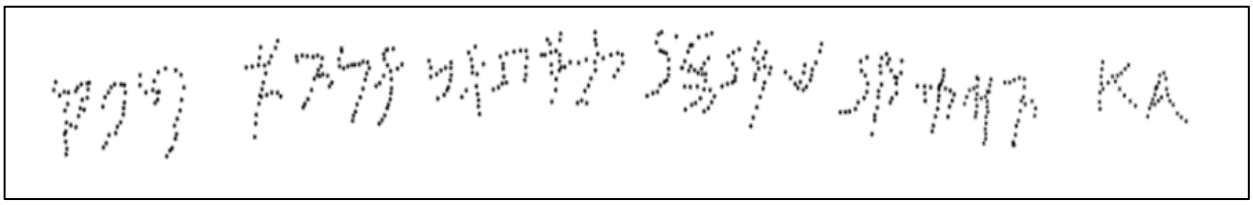
Figures 2.2 [viii] and [ix] provide translations of the ancient Greek and Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions: the Greek inscription dedicated to Chaos and the Kharoṣṭhī inscription to Boa (or Bhāva). Like the Indo-Greek coinage, the phialēs serves as a testament to the absorption of Indian deities into Greek religious practices, representing a unique fusion of Hellenic and Indian traditions.

vii) 2nd-1st century BCE Greek phialē dedicated to Bhāva, a Vedic God. Private Collection. Britain. [121]

[120] Greek term for a civil governor or administrator.
[121] Falk 2009a: Fig. 2-4.



viii) Kharoṣṭhī inscription: "By Kalliphðn, the Meridarchës, after a promise, (this) was repaid for Boa (Bhāva)." [122]



ix) Ancient Greek inscription: "Kalliphōn, the Meridarchēs, after a vow dedicated (it) to Chaos." [123]

Another interesting example of Brahmanical culture and its interaction with other traditions is Bopearachchi's decorative plates (2021).[124] The study of these decorative plates, which he dates to the 2nd-1st century BCE, usually displays several Greek heroes and Greek narratives (Bopearachchi 2021: 944).

However, Bopearachchi proposes that some Gandhāran plates portray a mix of Hellenic, Iranian, and Indian traditions, as well as a hybridisation of their respective sun gods: Sūrya, Helios, and Mithra. First, I will briefly explore the imagery of these gods and then discuss their portrayal in the decorative plates. From studying other historical panels, the Indian solar deity Sūrya is typically depicted in a chariot driven by four horses, accompanied by two female warriors, Uṣas and Pratyuṣas, and a male driver, Aruṇa (Bopearachchi 2021: 943). As for Helios, the Greek sun god, earlier portrayals on Bactrian coinage portray the god with a solar nimbus, holding a spear, and standing in a quadriga (2021: 942). And lastly, (as I will explore in the next chapter) Mithra[125] appears on Indo-Greek coinage as a syncretised pairing with Zeus, usually portrayed with a Phrygian cap and solar nimbus.

These Indian, Hellenic and Iranian elements are seen in Figure 2.2 (x). This plate depicts a sun god with the Graeco-Iranian solar nimbus and a sceptre adorned with an Indian *makara dhvaja* (Skt. a crocodile flag or emblem) (Bopearachchi 2021: 945). The plate also portrays two women and a male driver beside the sun deity. Supposedly, the inclusion of these extra personages alludes to Uṣas, Pratyuṣas and Aruṇa from Sūrya's mythology. One of the women

[122] Falk 2009a: 27.
[123] Falk 2009a: 26.
[124] Also known as toilet trays, Hasan Dani 1986: 70.
[125] One aspect that needs to be addressed in Bopearachchi's article is the assertion that syncretism mainly occurs between Indian and Hellenic traditions. For the latter, he suggests that the sun's rays radiating from the head is an image strongly associated with the Greek Helios. Of course, there is a co-alignment between Hellenic and Iranian traditions on the rayed sun deity; Helios and Mithra are portrayed with rayed solar beams around their heads. As Bopearachchi stresses the **Hellenic** origins of this motif, I will explore in the next chapter how this motif is prominently linked to the Iranian sun god Mithra, whose image appeared on Indo-Greek coinage and whose image is suggested to have earlier Iranian antecedents. According to Shenkar, the earliest attestation of Mithra in Western Iran was on a Lycian coin from the Achaemenid Empire. This coin portrays a rayed deity and the king's name; Mitrapata; suggesting the correlation between the Mithra and the ruler's name. (Shenkar 2015: 102).

is dressed in Greek attire, reminiscent of Athena's form and attributes, including the thunderbolt and shield. The other wields a bow and arrow, and the male driver is assumed to be Aruṇa (Bopearachchi 2021: 944). The quadriga, drawn by four horses, is uniformly Hellenic; however, it is also shared by the Indian Sūrya's iconography. The second example (Figure 2.2 [xi]) depicts the same sun god, this time wielding a thunderbolt, a traditional Greek weapon, in a scene similar to that of the two women battling their attackers (Bopearachchi 2021: 944-945).

From these examples, the personages assume Hellenic garb and elements, including weaponry and motifs. However, Indian elements, such as the *makara dhvaja* (crocodile flag/emblem) and two female warriors beside the sun deity, show the gradual integration of Indian/Brahmanical mythology within Graeco-Gandhāran art.

x) Decorative plates depict Sūrya, Mithra, or Helios holding a sceptre and a *makara dhvaja* (Skt. crocodile flag) on a chariot, accompanied by Uṣas and Pratyuṣas. Private Collection, Pakistan. [126]

xi) Decorative plates with Sūrya/ Mithra/ Helios depicted wielding a thunderbolt with Uṣas and Pratyuṣas. Hirayama Ikuo Museum of Art. [127]

The decorative plates demonstrate two significant aspects of Brahmanical tradition. Firstly, they demonstrate how art served as a vital vehicle for conveying the prevailing ideas of the period. Gandhāran art is renowned for its hybrid character, and the intertwining of various attributes from different traditions into a single scene reflects the porous relationship between religious traditions.

As such, these artworks cannot be interpreted singularly as Greek or Indian, as they display a unique amalgamation of religious pantheons. Therefore, this practice shows how religious traditions like Brahmanism synchronise with other pantheons to portray a familiar and recognisable scene. In these Gandhāran artworks, each tradition, including Brahmanism, functions like a puzzle piece, contributing various elements with other cultic iconographies to produce a highly hybridised and layered narrative.

[126] Bopearachchi 2021: Fig.10.
[127] Bopearachchi 2021: Fig.12.

The last two examples I will discuss relate to ancient sites and structures. The first is the Garuḍa Pillar (see Figure 2.2 [xii]). This pillar, in actuality, is not located in Gandhāra but in Besnagar, Madhya Pradesh, central India; nevertheless, it is the inscription that links to Gandhāra. Atop the pillar, a statue of Garuḍa, the flying animal of the Indian god Viṣṇu, is a Brāhmī inscription:

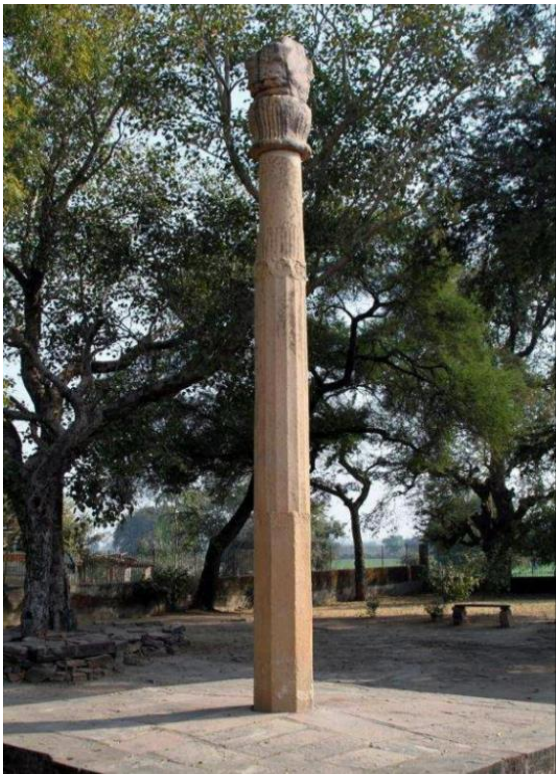
> *[de]vadevasa v[ā][sude]vasa garuḍadhvaje ayaṃ. karit[e] i[a?] heliodoreṇa bhāgavatena diyasa. putreṇa ta[khkha]silākena. yonadūtena āgatena mahārājasa. aṃtalikitasa upa[ṃ]tā sakāsaṃ raño. kāsīput[r]asa bhāgabhadrasa trātārasa. vasena ca[tu]dasena rājena vadhamānasa*
>
> This Garuḍa-pillar of Vāsudeva, the god of gods, was constructed here by Heliodora (Heliodoros), the Bhagavata, son of Diya (Dion), of Takhkhasila (Taxila), the Greek ambassador who came from the Great King, Amtalikita (Antialkidas) to King Kaslputra (KasTputra) Bhagabhadra, the Savior, prospering in (his) fourteenth regnal year. [128]

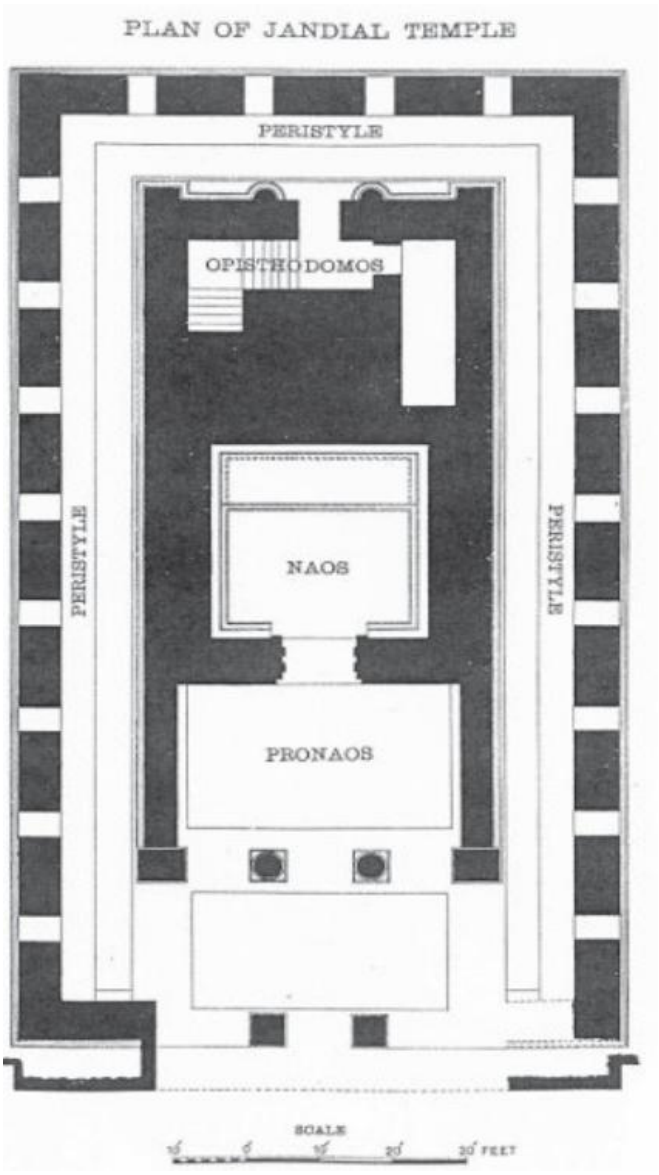
The inscription reveals two significant points: the active presence of the Vāsudeva cult in Taxila, Gandhāra, and the adoption of Indian religious practices by the Greeks. Regarding the former point, according to Jain (2019), there is also evidence of another pillar dedicated by the Śunga king, Maharaja Bhagavata, to the god Viṣṇu (Jain 2019: 19). Archaeological excavations conducted in the vicinity of the Garuḍa Pillar have also shown the remains of a 4th-3rd century BCE elliptical structure proposed to be the remains of the Viṣṇu shrine (Shāh 2014: 49; Jain 2019: 20). The Garuḍa Pillar is also suggested to be part of a collection with seven other pillars, facing the east. Other examples outside of Gandhāra include the Mora Well and the Ghoṣūṇḍī inscriptions attesting to the devotion to Vāsudeva (Chanda 1998: 163, 166; Srinivasan 1979: 50, 51; Shāh 2014: 50). These inscriptions in India proper suggest several shrines were dedicated to Vāsudeva in this region (Jain 2019: 19-20). However, this statement does not intend to neglect Gandhāra. The fact that Heliodoros, a Greek ambassador from Taxila, was also a Vāsudeva follower and issued a pillar dedicated to this Indian deity suggests that Gandhāran temples could also be dedicated to Indian gods.

A possible candidate for a Brahmanical sacred structure dedicated to Indian gods in Gandhāra is the Jaṇḍiāl C temple near Sirkap. Upon initial examination, Marshall interpreted the raised tower in the centre of the temple and the limited finds of statues as indicating a Zoroastrian complex (Marshall 1951: 225-226). However, Rapin has suggested that this Greek-style temple instead housed Brahmanical deities for veneration (Rapin 1997: 290). The temple dates back to the 2nd-1st century BCE and is designed with a highly Hellenised structure. It has a rectangular floor plan, following the Greek *sekos*[129], with an inner room and a porch. Two Greek-style columns flank the entrance (see Figures 2.2 [xiii] and [xiv]).

[128] Salomon 1998: 266-267.
[129] Sekos is an inner enclosure or space.

Although the decorations and model are typically Greek, various features render this site a space for Indian rituals. Such features include a peripheral corridor with windows (most likely used for circumambulation), the northerly/southerly orientation (whereas most Greeks and Iranians face east), and the staircase structure leading to a second level with a platform designed to display statues (Rapin 1997: 288-289; Barbar & Trapani 2016: 147). Rapin suggests that due to the dual essence of Greek and Indian culture in this structure, the temple was used for the syncretic fusion of Greek and Brahmanical cults. It would not be unlikely to suggest that the deities were a synchronised representation of Indian and Greek gods. Barbar and Trapani also support this hypothesis by providing examples of Greek-style temples accommodating local religious traditions (Barbar & Trapani 2016: 147). Examples include the Temple of Bel and Baalbek in modern-day Syria, which also demonstrate many parallels with the Jaṇḍiāl C temple in Taxila, such as the northern/southerly orientation, the platform beside the wall to display deities, and a staircase leading to the secondary floor, with most likely a tower built atop (Barbar & Trapani 2016: 147).





xii) 2nd century BCE Pillar of Heliodoros in Besnagar. [130]
xiii) Floor plan of the Jaṇḍiāl Temple, Sirkap. [131]
xiv) The base of the column from the *pronaos* in Jaṇḍiāl Temple. [132]

Thus, the discussion above demonstrates that Brahmanical structures are attested in Gandhāra. The Besnagar Pillar, although located in Central India, was issued by a Taxilian Greek ambassador. The additional inscriptions in Central India also testify to other structures dedicated to Vāsudeva in this region. However, in Gandhāra, alongside other relevant artefacts, such as Indo-Greek coinage, decorative plates, and phialēs that portray the synthesis of Greek and Indian religious traditions, Rapin's suggestion that the Jaṇḍiāl C temple, a Greek-style temple with Indian structural elements, is Brahmanical is not an unlikely interpretation.

In conclusion, the Indo-Greek period in Gandhāra highlights four significant aspects related to Indian deities. Firstly, they appear for the first time in a canonised form with recognisable attributes in Indo-Greek coinage. Secondly, they actively interact with Greek traditions and deities, appearing in syncretised forms in Greek art, as seen on the decorative plates. Thirdly, Indian deities are absorbed into Greek cultic traditions as recipients of Greek-style votive offerings, such as the phialē. Lastly, the earliest attestation of Vāsudeva worship in Gandhāra is proved by Heliodoros' Pillar in Besnagar, Central India. Thus, the evidence above is a testament to the Greeks' syncretic approach to foreign religious rituals, absorbing and synchronising Brahmanical elements into their numismatic art, sculptural iconography, and, more importantly, their own cultural identity and psyche.

In the next phase of Gandhāra's history, I will explore how the ensuing conquerors, the Scythians (or Śakas) and Parthians, boosted the archaeological visibility of Brahmanical culture in Gandhāra until the 1st century CE.

2.3 Brahminical Elements on Indo-Scythian and Parthian Coinage (90 BCE-60 CE)

Following the Indo-Greeks are the Indo-Scythian and Parthian eras, spanning from the mid-1st century BCE to the early 1st century CE. These two groups, Scythian and Parthian, originated from Central Asian and Iranian backgrounds and ruled Gandhāra until the early 1st century CE. This section will draw on relevant Brahmanical material from the Indo-Scythian and Parthian periods to provide a comprehensive overview of Gandhāra from the late 1st century BCE to the early 1st century CE.

According to recent archaeological papers (Coloru, Iori & Olivieri 2021: 110), the Indo-Scythian and Parthian periods were pivotal to Gandhāra's expansion of urbanisation and trade. Increased contact with Greece and the Mediterranean led to the importation of Western art styles, techniques, tools, and objects into Gandhāra. Investment in cities and their urban planning improved, leading to a surge in growth, especially in Barikot and Sirkap (Coloru, Iori & Olivieri 2021: 112, 118-119).

[130] Bopearachchi 2016: 28.
[131] Barbar & Trapani 2016: Fig. 0.2.
[132] Barbar & Trapani 2016: Fig. 0.3.

We primarily rely on numismatic and archaeological evidence regarding the Brahmanical religious traditions. To examine the evidence of Brahmanical tradition, I will first focus on the numismatic records of this era, the appearance of Indian deities and elements in coinage, and how they influenced the later Kushan coinage. Next, I will focus on the academic discussion surrounding the Brahmin temples and shrines in Gandhāra. Lastly, I will examine the archaeological record and discuss how Indian deities and elements emerged, what this can reveal about the populace and the interaction between Brahmanism and other traditions. Hence, this section will examine coinage, architectural, and archaeological studies to understand how the Brahmanism tradition manifested in this period.

To begin, it is worth noting that the Indo-Scythian and Parthian monarchs continued the same style of architecture and city planning as the Indo-Greeks while also retaining their Hellenic-style goods and language (Harmatta et al. 1994: 192, 195-196). Thus, it is not surprising that their coinage also reflects the same Indo-Greek style, displaying a host of Greek deities and imagery with a flair for Indian elements while adding their own Parthian and Central Asian elements to their repertoire of imagery (MacDowall 2007: 250; Harmatta et al. 1994: 197). [133]

For example, Figures 2.3 (i) and (ii) display the earliest Indo-Scythian kings with an Indian-style deity. King Maues's copper coinage portrays Balarāma with his typical features, a plough and club (MacDowell 2007: 252). His inheritor, King Azilises, also depicts an Indian deity; however, this time, it takes the form of Lakṣmī, accompanied by two elephants watering her.

i. Indo-Scythian coin: King Maues portrays Vāsudeva Balarāma with a club and a plough. [134]
ii. Indo-Scythian coin, King Azilises coin (130 BCE) portrayal of Lakṣmī. British Museum.[135]

Other Indian deities also suggested to appear in Indo-Scythian and Parthian coinage are Śiva and Skanda. According to studies by Falk (2007: 22; after Samad 2020: 170), Skanda's form can be identified in the Indo-Scythian coinage, specifically on King Azilises' coin type, with a spear, a cape, and a hand on the hilt (as seen below in Figure 2.4 [xvi]). Comparing these coins with the later Kushan coins of Mahāsena (an alternate name for Skanda), Falk sets the chronological beginnings of Skanda's emergence as early as the Indo-Scythian period and continuing into the Kushan era (see Figure 2.4 [xviii]). This demonstrates how the Indo-

[133] This will be further explored in Chapter 3: Religious Iranian elements in Gandhāra.
[134] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.63. Location unspecified.
[135] Bopearachchi 2016: 22.

Scythian era may have played a significant role in the later Kushan numismatic iconography, specifically in the iconography of Indian deities, such as Skanda.[136]

As for Śiva, the iconography of this deity is highly debated because, before the 1st century CE, Śiva's image shared many elements with other male gods from different pantheons, especially the Iranian god, Oesho or Weš, and prominent Greek gods such as Zeus, Poseidon, and Herakles.[137]

Thus, many coins from the Indo-Scythian period are interpreted to portray a Śiva-like character (MacDowell 2007: 252-253). For example, Figure 2.3 (iii) portrays King Azes II's coin with a Zeus/Poseidon/Śiva type figure with a trident (MacDowall 2007: 252). Figure 2.3 (v) shows King Maues' coinage with a male figure with an elephant goad (Skt. *aṅkuśa*) (an element associated with Śiva in the next era of the Kushans) (MacDowall 2007: 253).[138]

iii. Indo-Scythian, King Azes II coin depicting Zeus/Poseidon/Śiva figure. [139]
iv. Indo-Scythian coin, King Maues and Azes's coinage depicts Śiva/Poseidon figure with a trident standing over a small figure. [140]
v. Indo-Scythian, King Maues coin depicting Śiva holding an elephant goad (Skt. *aṅkuśa*).[141]
vi. Indo-Parthian, King Gondophares' coin depicting Śiva/Poseidon figure.[142]

Figure 2.3 (iv) displays another example of King Maues and Azes' coinage, with a male figure holding a trident standing over a minor character (MacDowall 2007: 253). A later Indo-Parthian coin issued by King Gondophares also features a Śiva figure (Figure 2.3 [vi]) (MacDowall 2007: 255).

Indo-Scythian and Parthian coinage also portrays relevant animals and icons associated with Brahmin tradition. The first significant example is the depiction of the Indo-Scythian monarchs seated cross-legged (see Figure 2.3 [viii]) (Sinisi 2017: 857). Although this is not Brahmanical per se, this posture is unequivocally linked to Indian ascetic and yogic traditions, demonstrating the unique way the Indo-Scythians added Indian elements to their coinage. This motif is also seen in Kushan coinage, reiterating the ripple effect of Indo-Scythian coinages on later Kushan coins (see fn. of figure 2.3 [viii]).

[136] See Mann 2011: 101-107 for an alternative suggestion that this particular form originated from an Indic group called the Yaudheya.
[137] However, it should be noted that Śiva's iconography consists of other influences, not just Greek, including local, Indian, and Buddhist traditions (Samad 2020: 125-127).
[138] MacDowell 2007: 252.
[139] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.61. Location unspecified.
[140] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.66. Location unspecified.
[141] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.65. Location unspecified.
[142] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.72. Location unspecified.

Another example is the portrayal of an elephant and bull motif typically associated with Indian and Brahmin deities (Figure 2.3 [vii]). The bull, in particular, has been closely associated with Śiva. The evidence of its affiliation with Gandhāra is found in written records provided by Hesychius, a Greek writer who reported that an Indian cult worshipped the bull named Gandaros, whose namesake originates from Gandhāra. This bull deity is said to be the principal god of Gandhāra (Colliva 2007: 24; MacDowell 2007: 246-247).

vii. Indo-Scythian coin, King Azes II coin displays an elephant and bull motif. [143]
viii. Indo-Scythian coin, King Maues is depicted as cross-legged with the obverse of an elephant. [144]

By incorporating Brahmanical elements into their coins, the Indo-Scythians and Parthians maintained the same numismatic style and governance approach as the Indo-Greeks (Harmatta et al. 1994: 197-198). However, coinage also presents a carefully curated image of a monarch or a kingdom; thus, like many rulers of Gandhāra, the Indo-Scythians/Parthians most likely incorporated Indian elements to visually portray their support and inclusion of these Indian traditions within the Gandhāran kingdom.

Brahmin Structures and Artefacts in the Indo-Scythian and Parthian era in Gandhāra (90 BCE-60 CE)

Regarding the construction of religious buildings in Gandhāra, recent studies have noted the investment towards Buddhist sanctuaries during the Indo-Parthian period (Coloru, Iori, & Olivieri 2021: 121-124). However, what can be said about the non-Buddhist, particularly Brahmanical shrines and temples, and is there any evidence of their remains?

Studying epigraphic sources can help us navigate our way to find evidence of such remains. For example, an inscription found in central India confirms the presence of a temple dedicated to the five Pañcavira brothers (Banerjea 1956: 93; Shāh 2014: 50). Additionally, the Besnagar Pillar, otherwise known as the Garuḍa Pillar, as mentioned in the earlier section, also elucidates the presence of multiple shrines and temples dedicated to Vāsudeva (Jain 2019: 19-20). Thus, researchers such as Shāh and Jain suggest that if these shrines and cults

[143] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.67. Location unspecified.
[144] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 17A-B. CNG e-auction 224 (16-12-2009), lot 299. Location unspecified. Sinisi also provides other examples with a coin by King Huvishka and Vima Kadphises, portraying the kings sitting cross-legged (Fig. 15B, 16B and 16D).

were prevalent in central India, Gandhāra would have been no different (Shāh 2014: 50; Jain 2019: 19).

Other written accounts from this era, notably those of a Greek philosopher, Apollonius, are also highly relevant to this study. Apollonius was a Pythagorean sage from Tyana, Asia Minor, who lived in the 1st century CE (Bäbler & Nesselrath 2016: 3). His travels were later recorded by Philostratus, who described a particular "sun" temple in Taxila (Stoneman 2019: 462). This temple features numerous columns and is said to be dedicated to the sun deity, featuring an elephant statue named Ajax. He also describes the shrine's interior, stating that it contained statues of Alexander and Poros, as well as scenes revering their deeds and heroic lives.

> In fact, art sometimes represents the sun himself with his four horses, which is the way they say he appears in these regions, and sometimes again blazing in heaven, when art represents the heavens and the home of the gods…(Philostratus Book II: 22). [145]

> …They say there was also a shrine of the Sun, to whom Ajax the elephant had been consecrated, and statues of Alexander in gold and others of Porus which were of dark bronze. The walls of the shrine were of red stone that had a golden sheen, giving off a light like the sun's rays. The image itself was of mother-of-pearl, made in the symbolic shape that all barbarians use for their holy objects (Philostratus Book II: 24). [146]

Early researchers have explored this reference. Marshall (1951: 702, 758-759), in particular, with his in-depth study of Taxila, proposed two ideas linked to Apollonius' text: first, he identified a possible Sūrya figurine and also emphasised the presence of Brahmanical tradition in Gandhāra, as evidenced by the regular appearance of elephants in coinage. The link between elephants and Apollonius' sun temple in Gandhāra will be explored below.

The Sūrya artefact is a free-standing stone figure (see Figure 2.3 [ix]); the right hand is in a *jñāna-mudrā* pose, while the other hand is on the hip. The figure wears a knee-length tunic, high boots, and a himation. Marshall identifies the figure as Sūrya based on their high boots.[147]

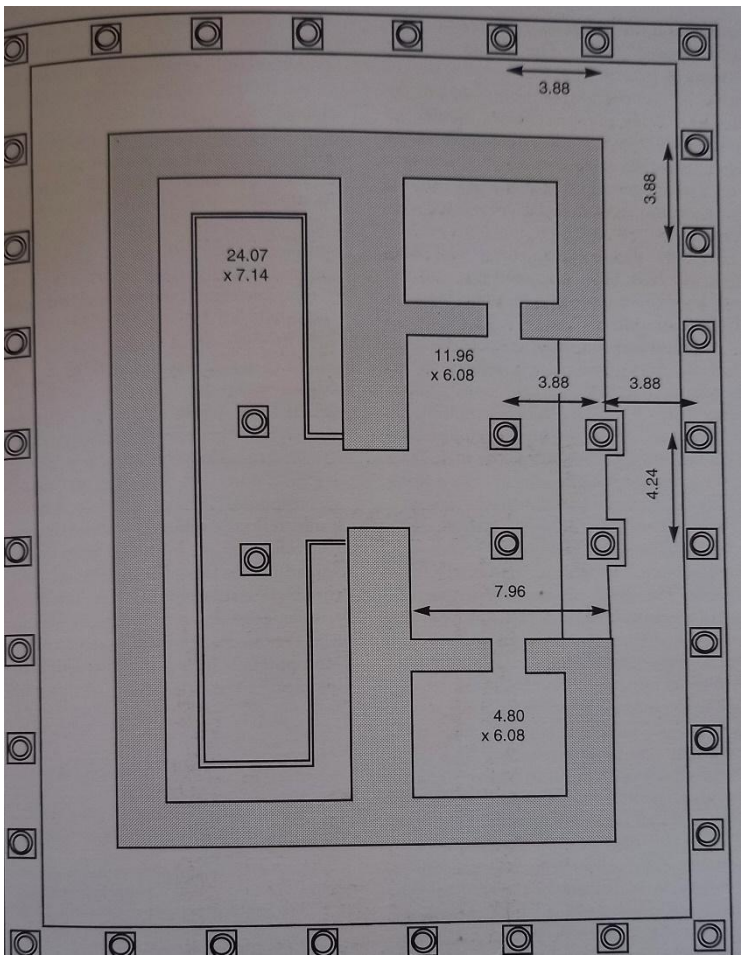
Marshall's second proposition concerning Apollonius' temple is linked to the elephant deity and the frequent appearance of elephants in Gandhāran coinage. As it is stated in Philostratus' text "a temple to which Ajax the elephant was consecrated…", Marshall proposes that the elephant deity in Gandhāra is linked to Brahmanical tradition, as the elephant is known to be the travel companion of Indra, an alternate manifestation of the Indian solar deity, Sūrya (Marshall 1951: 847). This supports the suggestion that the sun temple in Apollonius's text was dedicated to an Indian deity.

One proposition for the location of Apollonius' temple is the Mohrā Maliārāñ complex (see Figure 2.3 [x]). The rectangular complex has a raised platform or sofa and a small entrance room with two square chambers. The raised platform has led researchers (Rapin 1997: 286) to suggest that it served a cultic or ritual purpose. When first excavated by Cunningham, he

[145] Tr. Jones 2006: 181. This description of a sun god also supports Bopearachchi's study on decorative plates (2021), which displays a syncretised form of the sun god, Sūrya/Mithra/Helios, in a chariot drawn by four horses.
[146] Tr. Jones 2006: 187.
[147] Also displayed in Hasan Dani (1986. Pl. 36).

speculated this temple was Buddhist (Cunningham 1875: 69; Marshall 1951: 9). However, due to its characteristically Greek style, Marshall regarded it as a former Greek temple that later became Buddhist (Marshall 1951: 7-8; Bäbler & Nesselrath 2016: 86; Hasan Dani 1986: 114). Other researchers, such as Saifur Rahman Dar (1980: 108), suggested that from the pictorial reliefs and their architecturally Hellenic style, it was the "sun temple" in Apollonius' memoir (Dar 1984: 61-62; Hasan Dani 1986: 114).

Yet, Rapin disagrees with this statement due to the inconsistency of the sculptural and artistic remains and Philostratus's geographic description of the temple's location (Rapin 1997: 284-286). Instead, Rapin suggests that this temple is linked to Zoroastrian or Irano-Indian cultic tradition (Rapin 1997: 287).



ix. Sūrya figurine found in Sirkap, dating to the Scythian period. Taxila Museum. [148]
x. Floor plan of Mohrā Maliārāñ. [149]

In truth, the studies surrounding the "sun temple" in Apollonius' text appear highly contested and inconclusive (Stoneman 2019: 463). In such cases, it is necessary to observe the reliability of Philostratus' text. In many respects, statements in this text, written almost 200 years after Apollonius' era, have been called into question. How accurate are these reports of

[148] Hasan Dani 1986: Pl.36 (Also pictured in Marshall 1951: Plate 212. No.7).
[149] Rapin 1997: Fig. 9.

India's sights and experiences? Later Sanskrit texts, such as the Āgamaśastra, attest to two Greek characters visiting India, Apulunya and Damīśa, which supposedly refer to Apollonius and Damis (Stoneman 2019: 467). However, Gandhāran researcher Hasan Dani (1986: 70) references the text while also voicing his scepticism regarding its reliability; Rapin (1997: 286) and Fussman (1993: 88. fn. 38) also doubt the veracity of Apollonius' account (after Stoneman 2019: 467).

Bäbler and Nesselrath propose that Philostratus' text is not intended to provide historical accuracy but to convey a sense of Hellenic accomplishment (2016: 89, 96-97). The Hellenic sage Apollonius travelled to two of the farthest edges of the Greek world, Taxila and Gadeira[150] (the latter being in modern-day Spain), to which he describes encountering two highly Hellenized societies.

In Taxila, Apollonius reports that the community is flourishing with prominent Greek overtones; for example, the monarch of the time, Phraotes (proposed to be another name for the Indo-Parthian king, Gondophares[151]) is fluent in Greek and practices Greek-style sports. The locals are also fluent in Greek, and Apollonius admires the Greek-style temples with impressive spectacles of Alexander's triumph (Bäbler and Nesselrath 2016: 95-96; Stoneman 2019: 463, 471). This, as suggested by Bäbler and Nesselrath, reflects that the purpose of this text is much more centred on philhellenism than providing a realistic account of the Taxilian temple architecture.

Although this suggestion offers us a greater appreciation for how Taxila was featured in Greek literature and how it served as a Hellenic emblem of success, it does not significantly contribute to our understanding of the temples in Gandhāra. Thus, until more research and data emerge, the whereabouts and function of the "sun temple" and Mohrā Maliārāñ will remain uncertain.

Although our epigraphic evidence confirms the presence of Brahmanical shrines and temples, archaeological evidence is more challenging to establish. Regarding Moḥrā Maliārāñ, research suggests a variety of interpretations, but the exact function behind this temple remains elusive. However, another example in Sirkap, the Apsidal Temple in Block D (see Figure 2.3 [xii]), will provide valuable insight into the discussion of Brahmanical and religious structures during this era.

Marshall (1951: 150-154) identified it as a Buddhist stūpa gṛha, otherwise known as an apsidal structure (Marshall 1951: 150; after Colliva 2007: 21). As Marshall's study was one of the earliest interpretations of the site, his conjecture that this temple served a Buddhist function is primarily based on its apsidal structure and the archaeological items. Regarding its structure, Marshall compares this style to the stūpa of Kārlī (Pune District, Maharashtra, western India) and other Buddhist temples of this era and supposes that the apsidal temple in Sirkap had an ogee archway and an arched roof (Marshall 1951: 153).

The archaeological finds have also yielded an assemblage of statues and artistic objects. This includes some items found in the apsidal temple that are now lost; however, some details were recorded upon its discovery. Cunningham's report (1872: 126-127) includes three large heads and two right hands, one holding the drapery folds (Marshall 1951: 151-152). Upon

[150] These places are the extent of Alexander of Macedon's conquests.
[151] Tarn 1984: 341; after Bäbler & Nesselrath 2016: 88-89.

examination, the clay was found to be burnt, and Cunningham suggests that, judging by the size of the heads and hands, these statues were at least 9-10 feet in height.

Other finds were recorded in the two smaller buildings, or as Marshall suggests, stūpas. These finds included Greek-style stucco heads (see Figure 2.3 [xi]) identified by Marshall as Bodhisattvas (Marshall 1951: 154). Thus, from Marshall's initial studies, this temple has been primarily regarded as a Buddhist complex.

xi. Stone stucco Greek-style heads found in the two buildings or *stūpas* of the Apsidal Temple in Block D, Sirkap. Taxila Museum. [152]

xii. Sirkap Apsidal Temple, Indo-Parthian period. [153]

However, two points that counter Marshall's proposition will be discussed. The first is Marshall's assumption that apsidal temples are singularly linked to Buddhism. This has been refuted in a study by Ray (2004: 348-349), who stresses that Buddhism was not the only religious group to utilise this architectural form. Archaeological studies in India have found evidence of apsidal structures associated with Jain and Brahmanical traditions. Furthermore, evidence outside of Gandhāra, such as Sonkh in Central India (Singh 2004: 392; Härtel 1993: 425; after Colliva 2007: 21), has found apsidal temples associated with the Nāga cult, therefore elucidating that other religious traditions utilised these architectural styles and are not only related to Buddhist space (Callieri 2006: 75).

Secondly, Colliva (2007) also elucidates that the archaeological finds in this complex need to be more convincing to identify this as a Buddhist structure. The large heads and hands holding drapery uncovered during Cunningham's early excavation have been lost and stolen and cannot be examined for further detail. The only information Cunningham stated was that the figures were seated and "similar to those seen all over Barma [Burma]" (Cunningham 1872: 127). Yet Colliva argues that a hand holding a cloth is not reminiscent of the Buddha's or Boddhisatva's familiar positioning in Gandhāran Buddhist art. Another aspect that Colliva mentions is that the stucco heads do not reflect a standard Boddhisatva; they do not portray a halo or the *ūrṇā* (a dot between the eyebrows). Instead, their noble attire suggests they portray generic nobles or patrons (Colliva 2007: 22-23).

[152] Marshall 1951: Plate 148.
[153] Colliva 2007: Fig. 1.

Thus, recent studies have demonstrated that the apsidal temple in Sirkap is much more complex. The apsidal style is not typically associated with Buddhist temples, and the clay and stucco statues cannot be attributed to Buddhist art. Therefore, the idea that this temple instead housed a Brahmin or local cultic tradition is not so far-fetched.

By studying the apsidal structure in Block D and Moḥrā Maliārāñ, it is clear that identifying the religious cult behind the limited remains in the archaeological record is a complex matter. Yet, as discussed in the above section, early Sanskrit literature explicitly states that images of Indian gods were constructed and venerated in temples.[154] Again, the 2nd century BCE Garuḍa Pillar confirms this. Based on coinage from the Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian/Parthian periods, the Gandhāran landscape suggests the presence of Brahmanical followers, particularly those devoted to Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa (Shāh 2007: 50). Another study of the archaeological remains in Sirkap may yield further evidence from both public and private shrines.

xiii. A Grandiose Kubera figure found in Sirkap, circa 1st century CE. Displayed with curly hair, a moustache, and holes for water. Museum of Taxila. [155]

xiv. Seated Hārīti on the throne, wearing a long dress, holding a cornucopia with a Hellenic-style *polos* over her head. 1st century CE. Museum of Taxila. [156]

xv. Māyā figurine (front) or miscellaneous female city goddess found in Sirkap. Museum of Taxila. [157]

xvi. Māyā figurine (back). Museum of Taxila. [158]

The study of Sirkap, conducted by Coningham and Edwards (1997), examined this city's private and public sectors during the Parthian period. In particular, to the public shrines in this city, Coningham and Edwards found some cultic figurines, including a Hārīti stone sculpture and a female statuette holding an offering (see Figure 2.3 [xiv], [xv] and [xvi]) (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 59; Marshall 1951: 191-192, 699-701). Additionally, a Kubera-like figure was found in the large, private homes in Block H (Marshall 1951: 169). In the house of Block E, an Egyptian infant deity, Harpocrates, was found, as well as various other female and male figurines (Coningham & Edwards 1997: 59; Marshall 1951: 159). This

[154] See Arthaśāstra 1.20.17.95; 2.4 22.106 (Olivelle 2013).
[155] Marshall 1951: Pl.213. No.14.
[156] Marshall 1951: Pl.211. No.1.
[157] Marshall 1951: Pl.211. No.5a.
[158] Marshall 1951: Pl.211. No.5b.

study reveals that private homes served as sanctuaries for various religious traditions, including worship of the Brahmanical god Kubera and the pan-Indian goddess Hārīti.

As explored in the previous chapter, Callieri's study (2007: 62-65, 74) emphasises that the assemblage in Barikot during the pre-Kushan and Kushan eras has shown a prominence of Indian and local cultic traditions. His study found evidence of Indian elements in the local assemblage, including the typically Indian symbol of the swastika etched on potsherds and the prevalence of female terracotta figurines.

This line of thought is also reflected in a collection of seals found in Taxila. For example, a study on the inscriptions on seals dating to the Śaka period shows that there are many more Indian and Brahmanical names compared to Buddhist (Fussman 1994: 40; after Callieri 2006: 66). As well, the imagery of these seals is linked to Brahmanical content, for example, some seals from Taxila include a copper seal with a Śiva figure (Rapin 1997: 279. fn. 16; Marshall 1951: 681, no. 26), the icon of Nandi's foot (Skt. *nandipāda)* and a meditating Brahman (Konow 1929: 101-102). Furthermore, amongst these seals, a particular example portrays Herakles defeating a bull-dragon figure with the legend, "of the young Brahmin Viśvamitra," which Banerjea proposes represents a syncretism of Śiva-Herakles (Banerjea 1956: 121; Konow 1929: 102). Thus, the evidence above demonstrates the active proliferation of Brahmanical-related material and the close interaction and syncretism between Hellenic and Indian traditions.

In many ways, the Indo-Scythian and Parthian rulers demonstrated a similar style of rulership to their predecessors, the Indo-Greeks. This is primarily observable in their coinage and syncretism between Hellenic and Indian traditions, such as the iconographic syncretism between Śiva, Zeus, and Poseidon in numismatic sources, the Śiva-Herakles seal, and Greek-style temples that may have been used for Brahmanical rites.

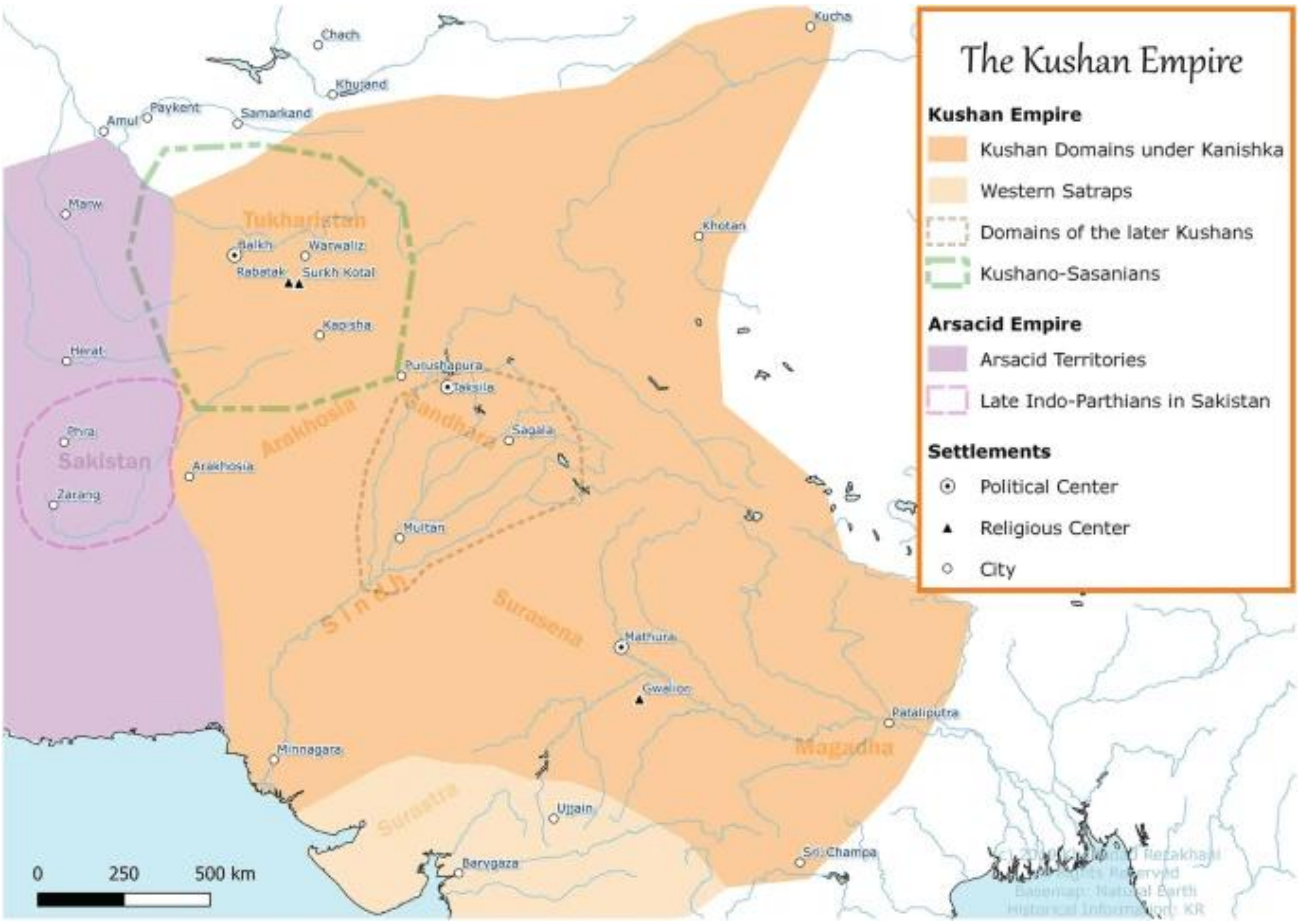
However, this era yields additional Brahmanical materials and structures. For example, from the increased trade of goods, materials, and tools, studies in Gandhāra confirm the appearance of Brahmanical deities and elements in seals and statuettes found in private shrines, indicating that the Brahmanical tradition was practised among the locals. Another example is the investment in infrastructure; two specific temples in Gandhāra have been studied for their prospective Brahmanical characters, specifically Moḥrā Maliārāñ and the Apsidal Temple in Sirkap. Although their Brahmanical character remains unsettled, as more data and research emerge, continuing the dialogue and inquiry on Brahmanical temples in Gandhāra is essential. Lastly, the increase in contact with the Mediterranean led to Taxila's mention in Philostratus' biography of Apollonius, demonstrating the scope of Gandhāra's unique Hellenic character, which was imbued with Indian traits.

In conclusion, the above evidence demonstrates that the Indo-Scythians and Parthians maintained Gandhāra's Hellenic character, gradually marrying it with Brahmanical traditions, elements and deities.

2.4 Brahmanism in the 1st-3rd century CE in Gandhāra

During the 3rd-2nd century BCE, a faction from the Chinese tribe, the Yüeh-zhi (Rezakhani 2022: 304), split and migrated westward into Eastern Iran. Having been defeated multiple times by a more dominant and powerful Chinese tribe known as the Xiongnu, the Yüeh-zhi entered Central Asia around the 3rd-2nd century BCE. Later becoming known as the Kushans, they migrated, conquered and established their empire (1st-3rd century CE), spanning from Bactria and Gandhāra to central India, as shown in Figure 2.4 (i) (Rezakhani 2022: 304)

For the next three centuries, the Kushans ruled Gandhāra, opening trade, issuing coinage, artworks and structures. The religious landscape of this period is predominantly studied through archaeological material, particularly in numismatics, art, architecture, and literary records, such as inscriptions and ancient texts.



i) Map of the Kushan empire. [159]

Brahmanical elements and Composite deities in Kushan Coinage

In studying numismatics between the 1st-3rd century CE, the coinage shows that the Kushans maintained the same style as their predecessors, displaying Hellenic deities and iconography, with the monarchs in Iranian/Central Asian clothing and on horseback (Jongeword, Cribb & Donovan 2014: 5). This is shown in the issues of the two earliest Kushan kings, Hēraos (31

[159] Rezakhani 2022: Fig. 1.

CE-57 CE)[160] and Kujula Kadphsises (50 CE-90 CE) (Grenet 2015: 205-206). Hēraos continued this numismatic tradition; however, Kujula Kadphises exhibited a slight eccentricity, as he adopted the same style but introduced a coinage similar to Augustus's in Rome.[161] Yet, both rulers were mainly conservative in the coinage, and their affiliation with Indian tradition was somewhat limited. The only distinguishable ascetic or yogic element was the portrayal of the monarchs sitting cross-legged (Figure 2.4 [ii]). This Indian ascetic or yogic posture was borrowed from a previous Indo-Scythian monarch, King Maues, as mentioned above (refer to Figure 2.3 [viii]).

ii) Kujula Kadphises copper coin. Kujula portrayed sitting cross-legged. [162]

Like the Indo-Scythian and Parthian coins, the Kushan coins adopted and repeated many motifs from earlier reigns and rulers. It is from these Hellenic, Central Asian, and Iranian roots that the iconography of Indian deities developed and canonised. For example, the most contentious figure in Kushan coinage is the Indian god, Śiva. Based on Cunningham's initial assessment (1888: 100-101), scholars, including today's, have established that one of the most popular Kushan deities, Weš, is based on Śiva's iconography.[163]

Weš[164] is a composite deity comprising multiple elements from Hellenic, Central Asian and Iranian traditions. He is often identified with Śiva, as they share many attributes. For instance, the general catalogue of items associated with Śiva and Weš is as follows: a bull in the foreground whilst holding either a diadem, a club, an animal pelt, a thunderbolt/trident, an elephant goad (Skt. *aṅkuśa*), a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a water pot (Skt. *kamaṇḍalu*), or a lotus/wreath (Srinivasan 2016: 75-77; Samad 2020: 81-84). This god is also represented with multiple heads and arms, a third eye, and is usually ithyphallic and naked (Samad 2020: 81-84).

The shared attributes between Śiva and Weš are heavily based on arch-male deities of the Hellenic pantheon, Zeus, Poseidon and Herakles. This has been shown by researchers who have explored the origins of Śiva/Weš' iconography. It is usually Vima Kadphises who is credited to have launched Weš' first image in coinage (Figure 2.4 [vi] and [vii]) (Taasob 2020: 83-84; Samad 2020: 80). This can still be veritable; however, research undertaken by

[160] According to Grenet (2015: 205), Hēraos was the ruler of the early Kushan kingdom based in Bactria. Once his son Kujula Kadphises became king, the new monarch drove away other Bactrian kingdoms in the region and expanded the Kushan empire into Gandhāra, thereby commencing the Kushan era in the northwest area of Pakistan. It also should be noted that Cribb (1993: 107) proposes that Hēraos and Kujula are the same historical figure.
[161] His reign is also affiliated with Śaiva or Buddhist tradition, as he is described as Skt. *dramaṭhida*, i.e. 'Steadfast in the Law' (Grenet 2015: 206).
[162] Sinisi 2017: Fig.3.A-B. Location unspecified.
[163] This is supported by many scholars such as Banerjea 1956: 121-126; Rosenfield 1967: 92-94, MacDowell 1978: 310-311; Carter 1995: 143; Marshak 1995-1996: 305; after Gnoli 2009: 148; Cribb 1997: 11-12, 24; Shenkar 2015: 154-155; Samad 2020:106-107.
[164] Not to be confused with Oado, the god based on Greek Anemos.

Bopearachchi (2008: 25-26) has found that Śiva/Weš' iconography is based on earlier coinage dated to Kujula Kadphises' reign. According to Bopearachchi, Kujula's coinage (Figure 2.4 [v]) depicts a Herakles character resembling Vima's Śiva/Weš figure. The parallelism between these two images is evident in their shared attributes; both are depicted as naked, holding a long trident or staff with an animal pelt draped over their forearm. The only difference is that one is ithyphallic (Vima's), whereas the other (Kujula's) is not. Yet, their similarities demonstrate that Śiva/Weš' iconography is based on Herakles' image from Hellenic coinage from King Agathocles' reign, as shown in Figure 2.4 (iv) (Bopearachchi 2008: 29; Srinivasan 2016: 74).

This leads to a contentious and widely debated topic: Is this Śiva, or are we seeing a Hellenic deity or an Iranian god known as Weš? Indeed, more studies have revealed the Iranian-Indian elements that comprise Weš. Humbach (2014: 5-6) has linked the etymology of the word Weš to the nominative of Vāyus, the Avestan deity of wind (after Grenet 2010: 89). This was further supported by Tanabe, who suggests the name Vayus changed to Veš or Weš during the second half of the common era (1997: 267; after Samad 2020: 86; Tanabe 1993; after Bracey 2012: 202).

Based on these linguistic studies, Grenet (2010: 89) suggests that this god is the Iranian Vayus/Veš/Weš, who is portrayed with typical Indian elements or "garb", as indicated by the Saivite or Indian attributes (see Figure 2.4 [iii]) such as the multi-armed figures, the dhoti, the elephant goad (Skt. *aṅkuśa*), the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghata* or *kamandalu*), and a thunderbolt. Grenet suggests that the cross-identification between Vayus and Śiva was an attempt to connect the Brahman and Iranian cults (2010: 89). Further studies to support this link were found in Manichean texts, which have found that the word Vayus or Vaiiuš is also cognate with the term "Mahādēva", a title usually allocated to Śiva (Humbach 2014: 6).

iii) Weš wearing a dhoti, pouring a water flask, holding an antelope skin, an elephant goad, and a thunderbolt on Huvishka gold coin. [165]

As Grenet identifies Weš as Vayus, with his appearance based on the Indian god Śiva, other publications have suggested Weš' imagery can also be linked to Iranian tradition. For example, Weš' waterpot has often been construed as an element of Śiva; however, it has also

[165] Taasob 2020: Fig. 5. (American Numismatic Society, 1944.100.63654). Location unspecified.

been interpreted to be an Iranian-style vessel, also seen to be held by Anahita, a Zoroastrian River goddess in the Taq-e Bostan stone relief in Iran (Boyce 1993: 38).

In particular, Grenet explores the relationship between Vayus and Śiva, emphasising that the elements of both gods coincide (2010: 89). For example, Vayus also shares a similar position to Vedic Śiva as eminent deities in their respective pantheons, as well in their character as they both share benevolent and fierce aspects (Grenet 2010: 89; Taasob 2020: 94). Additionally, Avestan scriptures also associate Iranian Vayus as a rain god and with bull worship (Taasob 2020: 94).

This has led researchers (Grenet 2010: 88-89; Cribb 1997: 13-14; Bopearachchi 2016: 31-41) to suggest that Weš comprises elements from Hellenic, Iranian, and Indian traditions.

iv) King Agathocles commemorating Demetrios' coin, with a Herakles figure on the reverse. Private Collection, Germany. [166]

v) Kujula Kadphises bust coin, featuring a Herakles figure on the reverse. Cabinet des Médailles BNF. [167]

vi) Vima Kadphises' reverse coin shows Śiva's three-headed (antelope on the left, human in the centre, and old-bearded man on the right); he's holding a trident attached to an axe (the middle), a thunderbolt (the top), and a wheel (Skt. *cakra*) (the bottom). [168]

vii) Vima Kadphises' reverse coin, Śiva as the same as above. [169]

Yet, regarding the Brahmanical god Śiva, Srinivasan's study (2016) suggests that the attributes we associate with him, such as the trident, the bull, the multi-headed arms, and the

[166] Bopearachchi 2008: 23. Fig. 4.
[167] Bopearachchi 2008: 23. Fig. 5.
[168] Bopearachchi 2008: 2. Location unspecified.
[169] Bopearachchi 2008: 3. Location unspecified.

thunderbolt, are not exclusively identified with Śiva in other pre-Kushan or Kushan material. Instead, they derive from the visual vocabulary of Greek and Indo-Scythian pantheons or visual markers (linked to Indian deities) that developed after the Kushan period (Srinivasan 2016: 75-76).

According to Srinivasan (2016: 75-77), the definitive Śaiva feature that can be attested in Gandhāra during or before the Kushan period is the raised *liṅga*. She states this is not coincidental, as a raised phallus is also relevant to Iranian tradition, particularly that of the Iranian wind god, Vayus (Srinivasan 2016: 83-84). Again, this reiterates the previous point of the close role of Śiva and Vayus in creating this composite god Weš. By applying shared Indian and Iranian elements to a solitary god, such as Weš, the Kushans created avenues of value for all religious cults. Other examples include the trident, accessible to the Greeks as Poseidon's trident and the Indians as Rudra's trident (Skt. *śūla*) (Srinivasan 2016: 77).

However, Falk (2019) is more convinced that Weš' identity is Indian. He distinguishes between ithyphallic and non-phallic figures in Kujula and Vima's Herakles and Śiva/Weš figurines in his study. He interprets the ithyphallic character not as Śiva, but as a trio of Indian gods encapsulated into one form: Agni-Prajāpati-Skanda. According to ancient Sanskrit literature, Agni fits this portrayal as this figure has "flaming hair" (Falk 2019: 15). Additionally, alongside the raised *liṅga*, which he interprets to refer to Rudra/Prajāpati's story in Brahmanical literature, the god whose seed created the cosmos, which in turn, and also sprouted the growth of Skanda/Kumara/Kartikeya (Falk 2019: 16-17). The goat head is incorporated into this Agni-Prajāpati-Skanda identification, as Falk suggests that this goat head is a manifestation of Naigameṣa, the "born from the back" goat head of Agni (Falk 2019: 17-18). He also discusses how the commonly attributed trident (Skt. *triśula*) is not a trident but, with the added axe, is referred to as a *paṭṭiśa*, a weapon usually wielded by Indian deities, including Rudra and Skanda (Falk 2019: 20-21). He also discusses that the *paṭṭiśa* is also attested in earlier coins from the Audumbaras clan, an Indian tribe that lived southeast of Gandhāra during the 1st century BCE (Falk 2019: 22).

The last aspect Falk addresses is the bull Nandi, which is usually accompanied by his Agni-Prajāpati-Skanda figure. Falk states that Nandi, the bull of Śiva, was not yet canonised or developed during the Kushan period. Instead, he proposes that, based on linguistic and literary studies (Falk 2019: 18), the bull behind the deity represents a cow. In early Vedic literature, cows are often associated with the kingdom or land; this is unsurprising as the Sanskrit word *go*, meaning "cow", also refers to "land". Falk proposes that the cow represents the prosperous kingdom, of which Agni-Prajāpati-Skanda is the protector (Falk 2019: 19).

As shown above, Grenet (2015), Falk (2019), and Srinivasan (2016) suggest that the different interpretations of Weš' identity can be configured as Šiva, as Prajāpati-Agni-Skanda, or simply as an Iranian Weš portrayed with a Śiva element (the raised phallus).

However, one relevant point that Falk's study distinguishes is the difference between Vima's (Figure 2.4 [viii]) and Kanishka's (Figure 2.4 [ix]) versions of Weš. Falk states that Kanishka's Weš cannot be identified as the Prajāpati-Agni-Skanda trio, as Kanishka's Weš lacks some of the relevant characteristics he associates with it. For example, Kanishka's Weš loses the multi-headedness; he wears a dhoti (thus losing his naked and ithyphallic appearance) and adopts multiple arms holding an elephant goad (Skt. *aṅkuśa*), a thunderbolt/sceptre (Skt. *vajra)*, a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and a dead goat (Falk 2019: 33).

viii) Standing Weš displayed with a trident (Skt. *triśula*/*paṭṭiśa*), flaming hair, animal pelt, naked, ithyphallic on Vima Kadphises coin. [170]

ix) Standing Weš displayed with multiple arms (holding an axe, a thunderbolt/sceptre (Skt. *vajra*), a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and a corpse of a goat), wearing a dhoti with a surrounding halo on Kanishka coin. [171]

With this in mind, perhaps we can suggest that Kujula's Herakles, Vima's and Kanishka's Weš/Śiva are all versions of the same deity, but different expressions from different reigns and eras. After all, each king differs in their approach to coinage and how they manipulate the gods in their pantheon.

Therefore, exploring whether Weš is Śiva or if Śiva is Weš does not give credit to this god's complexity. Attempting to understand this god's identity based solely on the issues of one Kushan king yields a surface-level understanding; however, examining the different reigns of the kings who authorised this god's changes and attempting to understand their objectives can lead to a different conclusion.

As mentioned above, the early coinage of Kujula's reign adhered to traditional Hellenic coinage (Figure 2.4 [iv]), resulting in the Herakles form (Figure 2.4 [v]). Vima Kadphises continued this similar tradition, adjusting the Herakles figure by adding a raised *liṅga* and (in other variations) a bull, thereby becoming the famed Weš/Śiva (Figure 2.4 [viii]). In the following reign, Kanishka moved away from Hellenic and instead opted for Iranian traditions; Kanishka redirected the formally Hellenic pantheon to an Iranian one, switched from Greek to Bactrian script, and introduced the former Herakles/Śiva to Weš, a figure with an Iranian name and multiple arms holding Indian, Hellenic and Iranian elements (Figure 2.4 [ix]). Thus, the question shifts from "Is this god Śiva or Weš?" to "How has this composite deity manifested throughout the Kushan reigns, and how can we identify the Śaivite or Brahmanical elements?"

As Srinivasan states, the attribute that can be concretely linked to Śaivism before the 3rd century CE is the raised *liṅga* (Srinivasan 2016: 77). Many other qualities, such as the multi-

[170] Samad 2020: 103. Location unspecified.
[171] Falk 2019: Fig. 24.c. (CNG 73, 545). Location unspecified.

headed/armed imagery, cannot be attributed to Śiva as there is no evidence of Śiva (or a male god) with multiple limbs/heads in Gandhāra until the 3rd century CE (Srinivasan 2016: 76). However, based on literary evidence, the multi-headed and multi-limbed conceptualisation of Śiva and Vaiśvaite deities existed before the Kushan period. For example, in literary works such as the Mahābhārata, compiled and conveyed approximately 600 BCE (Avari 2016: 88), Arjuna sees the proper form of Kṛṣṇa/Vāsudeva and describes him thus:

> *anekabāhūdaravaktranetraṃ, paśyāmi tvāṃ sarvato 'nantarūpam*
> *nāntaṃ na madhyaṃ na punas tavādiṃ, paśyāmi viśveśvara viśvarūpa* (BhG 11.16) [172]
>
> I behold Thee with innumerable arms, stomachs, mouths, (and) eyes, on every side, O thou of infinite forms. Neither end nor middle, nor also beginning of thine do I behold, O Lord of the universe, O thou of universal form. [173]

As such, the concept of a deity with multiple arms or multiple heads is intended to suggest a being with infinite powers and omnipresence. Therefore, although this description is suited for Vaiṣṇavaite deities, it demonstrates that the conceptualisation of a multi-bodied deity was already known and disseminated in South Asia. At present, Gandhāra does not yield any proof of deities or figures with multiple arms or heads until after the Kushan period (Srinivasan 2016: 76). However, the geographic expansion of the Kushan empire extended into Mathura, north-central India, which was a stronghold of Brahmanical culture and the birthplace of early Indian art forms (Srinivasan 2016: 92). For instance, many sculptural portrayals from Mathura depict Vāsudeva/Vaiṣṇavaite deities with multiple arms and heads (Figures 2.4 [x], [xi], and [xii]). Although these examples are found in Mathura, they show that the iconography of these gods was in the process of crystallising in the Kushan Empire.

x) Multi-armed Viṣṇu Trivikrama. Kushana period. Government Museum, Mathura. [174]

[172] GRETIL Bhagavad Gita 1999: 11.16 (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[173] Ganguli 1986: 80.
[174] Srinivasan 1997: Pl. 18.14.

xi) Multi-armed Viṣṇu. 4th century CE found in Mathura. Sotheby's Incorporation, New York. [175]

xii) Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. Kushana period. Mathura Museum. [176]

As this evidence is relevant to Vaiṣṇavaite deities, there is a reference to Śiva as a multi-limbed and multi-headed form. According to Srinivasan (1997: 149), Śiva is described in the Mahābhārata as:

> *muṇḍo virūpo vikṛto daṇḍimuṇḍo vikurvaṇaḥ*
> *haryakṣaḥ kakubho vajrī dīptajihvaḥ sahasrapāt*
> *sahasramūrdhā devendraḥ sarvadevamayo guruḥ*
> *sahasrabāhuḥ sarvāṅgaḥ śaraṇyaḥ sarvalokakṛt* (MhB 13.17.128a-129c). [177]
>
> Thou art he who is bald. Thou art he who is deformed, and terrifying in appearance…
> Thou art he who bears a staff and a skull, [ever] changing…
> Thou art he who is identical with the green-eyed king of beasts [i.e. the lion]/ Thou art he with tawny eyes.
> Thou art the form of all the points of the compass. Thou art he who is armed with the thunder.
> Thou art he who has a hundred tongues. Thou art he who has a thousand feet and a thousand heads.
> Thou art the lord and chief of the celestials. Thou art he that is made up of all the gods. Thou art he the [great] teacher. Thou art he who has a thousand arms… Thou art he whose protection is sought by everyone. Thou art he who is the creator of all the worlds.[178]

> *sarvataḥ pāṇipādas tvaṃ sarvato 'kṣiśiromukhaḥ* (MhB. 13.15.41a) [179]
>
> Thy arms and feet extend to every place, and thy eyes, head and face are everywhere.[180]

[175] Srinivasan 1997: Pl. 18.15.
[176] Srinivasan 1997: Pl. 18.11.
[177] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 13.017.128a-129c. (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[178] Based on Ganguli 1986: 94, with modifications assisted by Assoc. Prof. Mark Allon.
[179] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 13. 015. 041a (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[180] Ganguli 1986: 65.

Thus, the Sanskrit epics indicate that the multiple-limbed and multi-headed attributes are linked to Vaiṣṇavite deities[181] and Śiva.

Additionally, following Srinivasan, the raised *liṅga* is a clear connotation of Śiva, especially in ancient Sanskrit texts. The *liṅga* represents the cosmological seed from which all life stems; thus, according to Srinivasan, Kṛṣṇa venerates Śiva by paying homage to the *liṅga* (Srinivasan 2016: 148). Below is an example of the veneration of Śiva's liṅga, as stated in the Mahabharata:

> *sthāpitaṃ triṣu lokeṣu śivaliṅgaṃ mayā priye*
> *namaskāreṇa vā tasya mucyate sarvakilbiṣaiḥ*
> *iṣṭaṃ dattam adhītaṃ ca yajñāś ca sahadakṣiṇāḥ*
> *śivaliṅgapraṇāmasya kalāṃ nārhanti ṣoḍaśīm*
> *arcayā śivaliṅgasya parituṣyāmy ahaṃ priye*
> *śivaliṅgārcanāyāṃ tu vidhānam api me śṛṇu*
> *gokṣīranavanītābhyām arcayed yaḥ śivaṃ mama (*MhB 13.134.057d.015.4365 - 4371)[182]
>
> O dear one, Śiva's liṅga has been fixed by me in the three-fold world,
> Nevertheless, one is released from all sin by the worship of it,
> Sacrifices, together with the rewards, to what is desired, given, and attained, are not worth a sixteenth part of honouring the Śiva linga.
> O dear one, I am pleased with the worship of the beloved Śiva's linga,
> But listen to my rule/method of worshipping the Śiva linga,
> [One] should worship my Śiva with butter and milk.[183]

Additionally, the passage below further elucidates the bull as Śiva's vehicle. Other entries in the Mahābhārata also clarify that Śiva wields a thunderbolt and is adorned with animal skin.

> *aśanī śataghnī khaḍgī paṭṭiśī cāyudhī mahān* (MhB 13.15.104). [184]
>
> Thou bearest the thunderbolt. Thou art armed with the hundred-killer. Thou art armed with the sword. Thou wieldest the battle-axe. Thou art armed with the Sula (trident). [185]

> *evam uktvā tu bhagavān vareṇyo vṛṣavāhanaḥ |*
> *maheśvaro mahārāja kṛttivāsā mahādyutiḥ |*
> *sagaṇo daivataśreṣṭhas tatraivāntaradhīyata* (MhB 13.18.37) [186]
>
> Having said these words unto me, the adorable Deity having the bull for his vehicle, viz. Maheśvara of unrivalled splendour and clad in animal skin. [187]

Regarding archaeological evidence, Srinivasan states that the appearance of numerous body parts on a Śaivite deity did not occur in Gandhāra until the 3rd century CE (Srinivasan 2016: 76). However, outside of Gandhāra, there is evidence of a Śiva statue with three heads dating

[181] This includes the earlier forms of Viṣṇu, i.e. Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu Trivikrama.
[182] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 13.134.057d.015.4365 - 13.134.057d.015.4371. (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[183] Translation assisted by Assoc. Prof. Mark Allon.
[184] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 13,017.042c. (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[185] Ganguli 1986: 78.
[186] GRETIL Mahābhārata 1999: 13,018.037a-13,018.037e (revised edition by John Smith, Cambridge).
[187] Ganguli 1986: 103.

to the 2nd century BCE from Bhitar, Uttar Pradesh, as well as proof of *liṅga* worship (see Figure 2.4 [xiii] and [xiv]). As for the trident (Skt. *triśula*) or *paṭṭiśa*, Falk notes that it is a symbol that appears frequently in Audumbaras coinage, a 1st century BCE Indian tribe located southeast of Gandhāra (Falk 2019: 22). Therefore, this symbol is accredited to be part of a visual vocabulary belonging to an Indian tradition as well as a Hellenic one, i.e. Poseidon's trident (Falk 2019: 22). However, regarding Śiva's bull (Nandi)[188] and tiger skin; little archaeological evidence from the Kushan period links them with Śiva's form.

As shown in Sanskrit literature, the bull, animal skin, trident, multi-armed and multi-headed imagery, and raised phallic symbols are potent symbols of Indian deities. As Śiva/Weš symbolically integrate these elements into their appearance, their image is characterised by a Indian flavour that Hellenic and Iranian traditions can also value (Srinivasan 2016: 77). Yet, as not all Śiva/Weš' elements, such as Nandi or tiger skin, can be attested in the archaeological record, they are supported by literary evidence from the Mahābharata. As Srinivasan states, these attributes may have been chosen as they are also recognisable in other traditions, e.g., Herakles with a tiger skin and Poseidon with his trident (Srinivasan 2016: 77).

[188] Srinivasan does note one example of Śiva portrayed with a bull statue during the Kushan Period; however, she discards it (Srinivasan 2016: 76).

xiii) Pañcamukha *Liṅga* statue. Bhiṭā, Uttar Pradesh, India. 2nd-1st century BCE. State Museum Lucknow. [189]

xiv) Scene of the veneration of the Śiva *liṅga* by Indo-Scythians. 1st century BCE. Government Museum, Mathura. [190]

Alongside Weš, I will discuss two other composite gods that appear in Kushan coinage. Weš is the most popular example; however, these other gods demonstrate how the Kushans adopted Indian elements to create composite deities throughout several reigns. For instance, Manaobago, like Weš, is a deity with Iranian roots, deriving from the Iranian god, Wāhman or Vohu Manah, translating to "Good Thought" (Grenet 2010: 89). Yet the imagery of this Avestan deity is portrayed with Indian elements in Huvishka's (150-187 CE) coin; he is shown as a multi-armed deity, holding a wheel (Skt. *cakra*) (Vāsudeva), a plough (Balarama), an Iranian diadem and a money bag (Figure 2.4 [xv]) (Cribb 2008: 124). Another example is also found in his successor, Vāsudeva (187-232 CE), who portrays a Weš-like deity called Bazodeo, with multiple arms holding the same elements as Manaobago: a conch (Viṣṇu), a wheel (Skt. *cakra*) (Vāsudeva), a money bag and a club (See figure 2.4 [xvi]) (Cribb 2008: 124).

This shows that Weš' character stirred a domino effect; he inspired the successive Kushan rulers to create other composite deities, drawing on the Indian Epics and notions such as multi-armedness and the weapons and attributes of Indian deities to curate their image, i.e., Manaobago and Bazodeo.

[189] Paul & Paul 1989: Fig. 4.
[190] Paul & Paul 1989: Fig. 5.

xv) Huvishka coin, reverse displaying the Manaobago deity with multiple arms, holding a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a plough, a money bag, and a diadem. British Museum. [191]

xvi) Vāsudeva coin, reverse displaying Bazodeo deity with multiple arms, holding a conch, a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), and a money bag. [192]

Based on the discussion in this section, we can make the following two remarks. The first point is that the Indian elements associated with Śiva and Vaiṣṇavite deities should not be overlooked or downplayed in the composite deities discussed above. As demonstrated earlier, Sanskrit epics show that the raised *liṅga* is a strong testament to Śiva's presence. Additionally, the multi-limbed or crowned form of a deity, derived from ancient Sanskrit texts, is also associated with Śiva (and Vaiṣṇavite deities) and can be archaeologically attested in stone sculptures from Mathura and Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, this study has demonstrated that Weš and other composite deities heavily embody core elements of Indian culture. However, on a deeper level, they functioned as a canvas of multi-faith attributes, displaying the Kushans' culturally broad approach to religion in their kingdom.

This leads to the second point, in that this Weš cannot be solely identified as a deity from a singular tradition, i.e. as Indian (Śiva or Agni-Prajāpati-Skanda) or Iranian (Vayus)[193]. As Falk and Srinivasan both provide excellent analyses of this god, the above discussion has instead focused on how the motivation and style of each Kushan successor have shaped the imagery of this composite god, eventually assuming a multifunctional role and providing an avenue for the creation of other composite deities, i.e. Manaobago and Bazodeo (Samad 2020: 95; Grenet 2010: 89; Cribb 2008: 124). From his Hellenic origins as a Herakles to a complex, multifaceted deity, Weš became an emblem of multiculturalism, incorporating Indian and Greek characteristics with an Iranian name.

Vima Kadphises', Huvishka's and Vāsudeva's link to Indian Deities

In the search for Indian/Brahmanical elements in Kushan coinage, these kings were highly affiliated with Indian deities. A particularly notable example is a Kushan king whose namesake is a venerated Indian god. Vāsudeva, a Kushan king who reigned from 187-232

[191] Cribb 2008: Cat. No.95.
[192] Grenet 2010: Fig. 9 (after Cribb 2008: 124). Location unspecified.
[193] It should be noted that the Iranian and Indian pantheons both have a wind god referred to as Vayus. These gods share similar traits, yet they have some differences, for example, their distinctive portrayals in Kushan coinage. I will discuss their appearance in these coins in this chapter and Chapter 3 (see Grenet 2010: 89; Taasob 2020: 90-91).

CE, with his name singlehandedly shows the Indicization of the Kushan monarchy.[194] Onto the other two kings, Vima Kadphises (110-127 CE) and Huvishka (150-187 CE), these two were linked to worshipping and promoting Indian deities in their coinage.

As discussed above, Vima Kadphises formally introduced a Śiva/Weš character featuring a raised *liṅga* and a bull. There is also evidence of Vima's affiliation with Brahmanism in his numismatic inscriptions. For example, an inscription on his coinage suggests that the Kushan king himself was a Śaiva follower. For instance, in studying Vima's coinage, the inscription reads "Great Lord of the Earth" (Skt. *sarvalogeśvara mahīśvara*[195]) (Taasob 2020: 89-90; Grenet 2015: 207). In this declaration, Bopearachchi (2016: 31), alongside Harmatta et al. (1994: 311) and Grenet (2010: 88), propose that Vima declares himself a *maheśvara*[196], a worshipper of Śiva.[197] However, other researchers, such as Falk and Cribb, suggest *mahīśvara* ("lord of the earth") is a phrase of personal elevation to the status of a god, i.e. self-deification (Falk 2010: 76; after Falk 2019: 28) or a secular way to refer to himself, meaning "lord of the world" or "great lord" (Cribb 2015: 88-89). Thus, the topic remains divided among researchers, and until further research is conducted, our understanding of Vima's motivation behind this inscription will remain indefinite.

The grandson of Vima Kadphises, Huvishka (150-187 CE), harnesses a similar approach to his father, Kanishka, in that he introduces several new deities from Roman, Egyptian, Iranian and Indian traditions (Bracey 2012: 199-200; Samad 2020: 68). Yet recent research has found that some of these deities, specifically Roman and Egyptian are fundamentally based on the Iranian pantheon (Bracey 2012: 199-200). That leaves our study of Huvishka's pantheon to consist of Iranian and Indian elements, the latter featuring deities such as Viṣṇu/Viṣāka and Rāma (see Figures 2.4 [xxiii] and [xxiv]).[198] The former has three distinct personages, all of which are strongly associated with war: Mahāsena, Kumāra and Viśākha. Studies by Falk (2007: 22; after Samad 2020: 170) have shown that Mahāsena's form has an antecedent found in Indo-Scythian coins (Figure 2.4 [xvii]), thus demonstrating that Mahāsena's form is based on earlier Hellenic/Central Asian numismatic iconography in Gandhāra.

However, another paper by Mann (2011) has also suggested that Skanda's form is based on the coinage (see Figure 2.4 [xviii]) found in Uttar Pradesh and near the Himalayan mountain range, attributed to the Yaudheya Indian tribe (Mann 2011: 101-107). These coins are dated before or during the beginnings of the Kushan's dissemination into mainland India; therefore, their coinage alongside that of the Indo-Scythians (see Figure 2.4 [xvii]) may have influenced the Kushan portrayal of Skanda (Mann 2011: 109-110).

[194] See Bracey 2012: 204 for complete Kushan lineage.
[195] *sarvaloga iśvara mahi iśvara* (undeclined).
[196] *mahā iśvara* (undeclined). This term usually refers to Śiva or a worshipper of Śiva.
[197] Grenet outlines ambiguity regarding whether this phrase refers to Śiva, Rudra, or Iśvara (2010: 88).
[198] Figure 2.4 (xxiv) is proposed as Viśākha (or Viṣṇu), a personage of the Indian god Karttikeya. However, this image portrays the god with multiple arms, perhaps again incorporating the Indic multi-limbed imagery from Weš/Śiva figure.



xvii) Indo-Scythian coin of King Azilies displaying Mahāsena-like figure. [199]
xviii) Yaudheyan coin depicting Brahmaṇyadeva. Ex-Deyell Collection. [200]
xix) Legend: MAACHNO. The Huvishka coin features a haloed Mahāsena, a typical warrior or commander figure. One hand is on the hilt, and the other holds a standard with a bird. British Museum. [201]

Regarding Māhasena's three personages in Kushan coinage, these figures appear in a single, paired, or triad system; an amalgamation process occurs when their identities are merged into one and recognised as a collective deity under a single name. For example, figure 2.4 (xvii) demonstrates Mahāsena displayed as a solitary figure. He is standing full frontal, holding a banner with a rooster; his other hand is at the scabbard. The following example, Figure 2.4 (xx), depicts Skanda-Kumara and Viśākha standing beside each other; Skanda has his hands on his hips, while Viśākha holds a long trident. The last two examples, Figures 2.4 (xxi) and (xxii), depict the three figures: Skanda-Kumara (left), Māhasena (middle), and Viśākha (right), on a platform. Figure 2.4 (xxi) has three names inscribed: Skanda-Kumara, Māhasena, and Viśākha. However, Figure 2.4 (xxii) has only one: Māhasena.



xx) Legend: SKANAO-KOMAPO BIZATO. The Huvishka coin features two warrior figures, Skanda-Kumara and Viśākha, depicted holding spears and grasping the hilts of their swords or hands on their hips. British Museum. [202]
xxi) Legend: SKANDA KUMARA VIŚĀKHA MAHĀSENA. Huvishkha gold coin with three war deities with four names: Skanda, Kubera, Viśākha and Mahāsena (with solar radiate). British Museum. [203]

[199] Samad 2020: Fig.7.2. Location unspecified.
[200] Mann 2011. Fig. 2.a.
[201] Samad 2020: Fig.7.3.
[202] Samad 2020: Fig. 7.6a.
[203] Samad 2020: Fig. 7.8.

xxii) Legend: MAACHNO. Huvishka gold coin displays three war deities but only one name, Mahāsena. British Museum. [204]

This particular example demonstrates a potential reason why the Kushans syncretised their deities. Like the acclaimed Egyptian and Roman gods in the Kushan pantheon, other research has shown that these foreign deities were rooted in Iranian tradition. For example, the "Roman" goddess Rishti appears on only two dies during Huvishka's reign. The reverses of these dies are also used to depict the Iranian goddess Ardaksho (Bracey 2012: 200), thus demonstrating the visual similarity between Rishti and Ardaksho. Additionally, the cultural roots of Sarapis, an acclaimed Egyptian god, have been refuted by Bivar (1988: 15-16; after Bracey 2012: 200), who suggests that Sarapis' name is instead based on an Iranian tradition, specifically the xšaθrapati tradition, a sect of Mithraism. Thus, these studies demonstrate that having multiple deities operating with similar functions becomes superfluous, eventually merging with their antecedents. In the case of Mahāsena, this deity eventually assimilates with his personages, Skanda-Kumara and Viśākha, as shown in Figure 2.4 (xxii), subsumed into one entity: Mahāsena.

xxiii) Huvishka coin displaying Rāma figurine, with Kharoṣṭhī inscription, "Yodhavade",[205] i.e. "In praise of our warriors". J.P Rawlins Collection, British Museum. [206]

xxiv) Huvishka's coin displays an eight-armed Viṣṇu/Viśākha figure. (Cat no. 98). British Museum. [207]

In sum, these coinages reveal two aspects: first, they demonstrate that the Kushans copied and continued previous coin figures from Indo-Scythian/Parthian or Indian tribes, such as the Yaudheya, to depict their deities (e.g., Mahāsena). Second, the Kushan pantheon demonstrated a creative and flexible approach to its gods. They reduced their pantheon by combining the identities of these deities from the same creed (Mahāsena, Skanda, Viśākha) or across different traditions (Rishti, Ardaksho).

[204] Samad 2020: 7.7.
[205] *yodha* - 'warrior' and *vaṃdhe* - 'praise' = 'In praise of the warriors' pointed out by Falk (discussed with Bopearachchi [2016: 102]).
[206] Cribb 2008: 152.
[207] Cribb 2008: 125.

Epigraphical sources on Brahmanical Deities and Structures in Gandhāra (1st-3rd century CE)

As demonstrated above, coinage can reveal many aspects regarding Brahmanical elements and deities. Yet, as more inscriptions from the Kushan period have surfaced, our understanding of the religious scene in Gandhāra has become more refined. Mathura, one of the principal cities of the Kushan empire, yields a valuable and rich assemblage of inscriptions, art, statues, and architectural remains from this period. Whereas in Gandhāra, the archaeological records yield a smaller assemblage yet still provide valuable insight into the religious communities, specifically Brahmanical groups. This section will examine remnants of inscriptions and literary works that help us understand the deities, temples, and sacred spaces constructed for or by Brahmin communities.

The first example is the Rabatak Inscription. This inscription was discovered in 1993 in Afghanistan, north of Pul-i-Kumri in Rabatak Province (Cribb 1999: 179). Although the exact date of its creation is ambiguous, it does provide relevant events from Kanishka's reign (Skinner 2017: 77). The Bactrian writing is carved on the stone, providing a rich history of the Kushan monarchs and their pantheon of gods (Skinner 2017: 77). As such, the translation below elucidates the syncretic relationship between the Kushan-Iranic gods Sroshard and Narasa and the Indian gods Mahāsena and Viśākha:

> Then King Kaniṣka I ordered Shafar, the lord of the marches to make in this place the temple which is called "God's water,' in the Kasig plains, for these gods who have come hither into the presence of the glorious Umma, that(?) (is), the above-mentioned Nana and the above-mentioned Umma, Aurmuzd, the Gracious one, Sroshard, Narasa, (and) Mihir. [In smaller letters above the line: **'who in the Indian (language) is called Mahāsena and is called Viśākha.']** And he gave orders to make images of the same, (namely) of these gods who are inscribed, hereupon [208]

This inscription reveals many significant aspects regarding the Kushan pantheon. For example, it demonstrates that the pantheon of gods revered by the Kushans was either Iranian or Mesopotamian in origin: Nana, Aurmuzd (Ahura Mazda), Mozdoano (referred to as the Gracious One), Sroshard, Narasa, and Mihir (Mithra).[209] However, it also includes the Indian gods, Mahāsena and Viśākha, not as additional figures but as **equivalent** gods to Sroshard and Narasa.[210] According to Bracey (2012: 206), both Sroshard and Narasa embody similar attributes to Mahāsena: war, victory, and strength. This can also be seen in the coinages, as Sroshard and Narasa are similarly configured to that of Mahāsena and Viśākha (Bracey 2012: 206). Thus, unsurprisingly, the Kushans created a syncretic identity between these figures, demonstrating their fluidity amongst traditions and aligning both Iranian and Indian pantheons.

The second example is a Gāndhārī inscription located in the Panjtar region of Pakistan. Dating back to the reign of Kujula Kadphises, 75 CE, it provides the earliest evidence of a Śiva temple by a Brahmin devotee named Moika.

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[208] Skinner 2017: 257
[209] I will explore the Iranian component in Chapter 3: Iranian Elements in Gandhāra.
[210] Narasa is also included in this syncretism as Bracey contends Narasa and Sroshard share similar iconographies, rendering them both as personages of Karttikeya/Mahāsena (Bracey 2012: 206).

1. saṃ 1 100 20 1 1 śravaṇasa masasa di praḍhame 1 maharayasa guṣaṇasa raja[mi]
2. [ka]suasa praca [deśo] moike urumujaputre karavide śivathale tatra [ca] me
*3. daṇami tar[u]ka 1 1 p(*u)ñakareṇeva amata śivathala rama ? ? ma* [211]

Year 122, on the first - 1 - day of the month of Śrāvaṇa, in the reign of the Great King, the Kuṣāṇa, in the eastern region of Kasua, a Śivathala (Śiva temple) was made by Moika, the son of Urumuja. And there in my gift (are) two trees. Through this meritorious deed… immortal places of bliss [212]

This inscription demonstrates that Śivaite groups existed as early as 75 CE and were actively engaged in the Gandhāran community. Further evidence of this includes an undated Gāndhārī inscription describing a donation of a well in Peshawar, Gandhāra. According to Skinner, this is the only Gāndhārī inscription mentioning Brahmins to date (Skinner 2017: 207). In this example, the Brahmin Vāsudeva dug out and dedicated the well to the community.

1. maha[raja]sa///
2. masasa di… iśe kṣuṇaṃmi khaṇavide [kuve]
3. vasudeveṇa idradevaputreṇa [bra]m[h]aṇeṇa
4. obha[ra]vastaveṇa daṇas[y]a avaptir astu [213]

Of the Mahārāja… on the… day of the month… - at this moment - this well was caused to be dug by the Brahman Vāsudeva, the son of Indradeva, a resident of Obhara. May there be obtainment of (the meritorious results of) the gift [214]

Archaeological studies have further proven the presence of Śiva worship in Gandhāra. For example, a study by Carter (1995: 143, 146) revealed two examples of terracotta panels dating to the 2nd-4th century CE, featuring a painting of a worshiper venerating a deity, whom she suggests is Weš/Śiva. In addition, Khan's study (2003: 247) confirmed the finding of a Śaivite temple in Kashmir Smast, Pakistan; additionally, other evidence includes the terracotta Hindu temple models found in various locations in Pakistan, including Kashmir Smast, Pir Pai, Shahji-ki-Dheri, and Aziz Dheri (Khan 2009: 160). Khan has suggested that, based on their architectural style and location, they are associated with early Brahmanical cults dating to the 3rd-5th century CE (Khan 2009: 166). These archaeological finds and the Panjtar Inscription denote that Brahmanical practices were more widely practised throughout the Kushan era.

Even so, in other areas of the Kushan empire, such as Mathura, epigraphic evidence also suggests the active presence of Brahmanical groups. One notable example is an inscription recording a generous donation to a Brahmin shrine (Skt. *puṇyaśālā*) (Skinner 2017: 273-274). Another is a pillar inscription detailing a fire ritual performed by the Brahmin, Brāhmaṇa Droṇala (Skinner 2017: 331). Although these sources are found outside Gandhāra proper,

[211] Panjtar Inscription (Skinner 2017: 247).
[212] Panjtar Inscription. Tr. Skinner 2017: 248.
[213] Peshawar Museum Well Inscription Text (Skinner 2017: 343).
[214] Peshawar Museum Well Inscription. Tr. Skinner 2017: 343.

Mathuran inscriptions can sharpen the idea that Brahmanical groups were actively functioning in many regions of the Kushan empire.

Later written sources from Chinese travellers also provide insight into the state of Buddhist and Brahmanical communities in the Peshawar Valley, Gandhāra (Wriggins 1996: 56-57). In his travels, Xuanzang, a Chinese traveller who lived in the 7th century CE, reported that the famed city of Puruśapura was in ruins, leaving many Buddhist temples vacant and in a state of disrepair (Wriggins 1996: 57). Yet, he accounts for the numerous deva temples and the famed worship sites for Brahmanical deities near cities such as Puśkarāvatī and Varṣa, in Gandhāra (Rongxi 1996: 65-67). This demonstrates that, with the decline of Buddhism, Gandhāra's Brahmanical communities became more visible in the religious landscape in the 7th century CE (Wriggins 1996: 57). Xuanzang on Gandhāra writes:

> There were more than a thousand monasteries but they are now dilapidated and deserted, in desolate condition. Most of the stupas are also in ruins. There are about a hundred deva temples inhabited by various heretics [215]
>
> …At more than fifty li to the northeast from Varṣa one reaches a lofty mountain, on which there is a bluish stone image of Bhīmādevī, wife of Maheśvara. The local people said that this image of the goddess existed naturally. It showed many marvels and many people came to give prayers. In all parts of India people, both noble and common, who wish to pray for blessedness flock to this place from far and near. Those who wish to see the physical form of the goddess may get a vision of her after fasting for seven days with a sincere and concentrated mind, and in most cases their wishes will be fulfilled. At the foot of the mountain there is a temple for Mahesvara in which the ash-smearing heretics perform ceremonies [216]

Although these writings are dated to the 7th century CE, they demonstrate the continuity of Brahmanical tradition in Gandhāra. Additionally, it is important to distinguish the see-saw rise and decline of Buddhism and Brahmanical traditions throughout the ages. During the Kushan era, Buddhism experienced significant growth. Although not quite sharing Buddhism's archaeological footprint, the Brahmanical communities were sustained as an undercurrent, consistently appearing in each era.

The last example is another architectural complex dating to the 4th century CE. However, we first learn of it from an inscription in Abbottabad, Pakistan, which elucidates the construction of a Skanda temple, reportedly built in the 4th century CE. According to Falk (2004: 152), this inscription was issued by an Iranian soldier serving King Mayūravarman.

1. *sa(ṃ) 20 5 mārgaśira di pratha kārito ya*
2. *kumārasthānaṃ gaśūraṇa makaputreṇa*
3. *ṣāphareṇa mahārāja-kadambeśvaradāsa-ra(?)[e?]*
4. *data(ḥ) bhak(ṣ)a(ḥ)* [217]

> Year 25, first day of Mārgaśīrṣa,
> this place for Kumāra was caused to be made by
> the Gaśūra Śāphara, son of Maka, [during the reign?] of the Mahārāja [called] the 'Servant of the Lord

[215] Rongxi 1996: 59.
[216] Rongxi 1996: 67.
[217] Falk 2004: 148.

of the Kadamba[-tree]'.
- Food has been provided [218]

Evidence of such a temple has yet to be recovered; however, the inscription attests to the active practice of donative offerings to Brahmanical and Indian gods and that Iranian peoples made and contributed extensive offerings to these deities.

In sum, the Gandhāran inscriptions have provided valuable insights into how individuals interacted with the Brahmanical tradition, either by constructing temples dedicated to Indian gods or by Brahmins contributing to their community. They demonstrate how interwoven and prevalent Brahmanical tradition was in the Kushan Empire.

Brahmanical Gods in Gandhāran Buddhist Art

Regarding Brahmanical art in the Kushan world, most examples are found in Mathura, North-central India, the Kushan's second principle city (Ghose 2006b: 99). As seen above, when discussing the iconography of Śiva and other Indian deities, the birthplace of Brahmanical imagery emerged in Mathura (Paul & Paul 1989: fn. 63). However, although the assemblage of artworks and statues in Gandhāra is smaller than that of Mathura, it still grants value and demonstrates the potency of Indian deities appearing in Buddhist art.

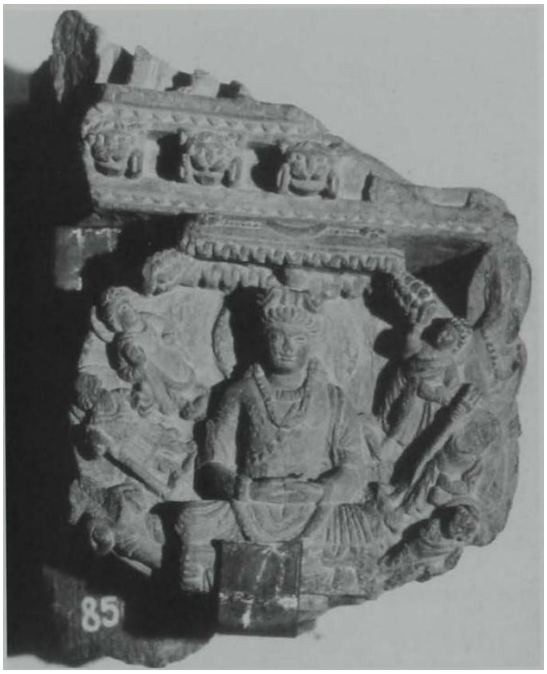
Indeed, Gandhāran religious art was a dominant form of cultural expression during the Kushan period, featuring both Brahmanical and Buddhist deities, as it was funded and supported by wealthy patrons, travellers, and Buddhist communities (Callieri 2006: 78; Srinivasan 2009: 130). For this reason, the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanical tradition is highly intertwined, as artistic depictions of Brahmanical deities first appeared in a Buddhist context. [219]

However, as Callieri points out, Buddhist art served as a method of disseminating and expanding Buddhist institutions and the Buddha's teachings in the Kushan Empire (Callieri 2006: 79; after Liu 2024: 124). In saying this, the way this impacted Brahmanical traditions can be elucidated by the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka, a Buddhist text translated by De Mallman (after Taddei 1987: 275):

> O fils de famille, il est des mondes où le Bodhisattva Mahâsattva Avalokiteçvara enseigne la loi aux créatures sous la figure d'un Buddha…à certaines creatures le Bodhisattva Mahåsattva Avalokiteçvara enseigne la loi sous la figure de Brahmâ…à ceux qui sont susceptibles
> d'être convertis par Içvara, il enseigne la loi sous la figure d'Içvara; à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par Maheçvara, il enseigne la loi sous la figure de Maheçvara; à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par un roi à la roue, il enseigne la loi sous la figure d'un roi à la roue; à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par un demon cannibale, il enseigne la loi sous la figure d'un démon cannibale; à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par Vaiçravana…à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par Senâpati, il enseigne la loi sous la figure de Senâpati; à ceux qui sont susceptibles d'être convertis par un brahmane, il enseigne la loi sous la figure d'un brahmane…Ainsi, ô fils de famille, le Bodhisattva Mahâsattva Avalokiteçvara est pourvu de qualités inconcevables.[220]

[218] Falk 2004: 148.
[219] This does not include numismatic sources in Gandhāra.
[220] Mallman 1948: 31-32.

Thus, this perception of the Buddha's multiple forms illustrates that Buddhism actively integrated local and Brahmanical traditions into Buddhist narrative. Consequently, Gandhāran Buddhist art reflects this blending of non-Buddhist entities in Buddhist iconography. For example, Figure 2.4 (xxv) demonstrates the meditating Buddha with six figures emerging from his frame, including the Brahmanical figures: Śiva, Brahmā and Kumara. Another example (Figure 2.4 [xxvi]) shows the Buddha in a central position, while Indra and Brahma stand on either side.



xxv) Multiplication Scene, the Buddha with six figures (from left) as identified by Taddei, a young male, Śiva, Brahmā, a yakṣa, Kumara, and a Buddha. Peshawar Museum. [221]

xxvi) The Buddha Preaching with Bodhisattva Maitreya (left) and Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (right). Behind the Buddha, Indra stands with a thunderbolt (left), and Brahma holds a water container (right). Peshawar Museum. [222]

In more detail, many Buddhist artworks interweave Brahmanical deities with significant events of the Buddha's life. For example, at Siddhartha's birth (Figure 2.4 [xxvii]), Indra and Brahmā are present, even as Queen Maya passes Siddhartha to Indra (whose figure is defaced), and behind him, Brahmā stands with his hands in the *añjali mudrā.*

[221] Taddei 1987: Fig.1.
[222] Ali & Qazi 2008: 145.

xxvii) Siddhartha's Birth. Queen Maya holding a tree branch, and passing Siddartha to Indra. 2nd-3rd century CE. Peshawar Museum. [223]

This leads us to question why these Brahmanical deities were incorporated into such specific scenes with the Buddha. As mentioned above, art served as a vehicle that helped propagate Buddhism while reflecting the world of Buddhist literature. The Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Buddhist text is only one example of how Buddhism actively incorporated Brahmanical figures and elements of Brahmanical legends into Buddhist literature. According to Appleton (2016), other Buddhist Jātakas, such as the Samyutta Nikāya, the Mahāvastu, the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, and the Ghata-Jātaka, feature Brahmanical deities, including Indra, Brahmā, Rāma, and Kṛṣṇa.[224] This paper cannot succinctly discuss the reason behind this, as it is a highly intricate and dense topic.[225] Yet, it can be surmised that Brahmancial personages were appropriated for various literary functions, such as serving as a protector against a common enemy or their indulgent and furious characters later evolving to embody dharmic qualities (Appleton 2016: 176). However, as Appleton emphasises, we also forget that this interchange of characters worked in both directions; Brahmanical texts are also known to have absorbed Buddhist (and Jain) aspects (Söhnen-Thieme 2009: 23; after Appleton 2016: 176). Thus, examining the broader spectrum, it becomes clear that the literary relationship between these traditions was highly reciprocal (Appleton 2016: 181).

Thus, this reciprocity is reflected in the world of archaeology in Gandhāra. An excellent example is a well-known reliquary known as Kanishka's Casket. This 2nd century CE casket was found in Kanishka's stupa in Shah-ji-ki-dheri, Peshawar. At the pinnacle, a figure of the Buddha is flanked by Indra and Brahmā, both in *añjali mudrā*, paying homage to the Buddha. This casket gives valuable insight into the subjugation of non-Buddhist deities and the

[223] Ali & Qazi 2008: 52.
[224] Appleton (2016: 27-28 on Indra, 69-72 on Brahmā, 95-96 on Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in Buddhist texts).
[225] See Appletone 2016: 170-184 for a detailed discussion on including Brahmanical characters in Buddhist texts.

dynamic between the major religions of the time, Buddhism, Brahmanical and Iranian traditions. The Buddha is the central figure venerated by both Brahmā and Indra. In contrast, the Iranian gods, Mithra and Māo, have a stronger affiliation with the Kushan monarchy, as they are shown coronating the Kushan King.[226]

These examples demonstrate that Brahmanical deities are depicted in Buddhist art, paying homage to the Buddha and intertwined within the Buddha's narratives. Although some examples feature Brahmanical figures recognisable by their Indian imagery, their exact identities or purposes are not easy to ascertain. For instance, a railing at a stūpa in Butkara, in the Swat Valley, Gandhāra, portrays a multi-armed figure (Figure 2.4 [xxviii]) holding pan-Indian/Brahmanical elements: the wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a sword (Skt. *asi*), the thunderbolt/sceptre (Skt. *vajra*), and Śiva's trident (Skt. *śula*). Researchers such as Gnoli (1963: 36-37) suggest this figure is Śiva. In contrast, Agrawala and Taddei (1966: 83-85) indicate that this figure is Skanda-Kumara or a Syrian deity, Shadrafā. However, a more nuanced approach by Bopearachchi (2016: 82-85; Voyages into the Past, 2021) renders this as a "composite" deity, combining the elements of various Indian gods into one singular form. This suggestion seems most likely, as other composite deities, such as Weš, Manaobago, and other Kushanic deities, were already established and known in the Kushan iconographic repertoire.[227]

xxviii) A six-armed deity holding a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a sword (Skt. *asi*), a thunderbolt/sceptre (Skt. *vajra*), and Siva's trident (Skt. *śula*) on Butkara Relief. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome. [228]

[226] I will explore this further in Chapter 3: Iranian Elements in Gandhāra.
[227] There is an additional example cited by Samad (2020: 141-143), who suggests the Brahmanical importance of the image of a bird snatching a snake figure on the schist Boddhisatva's turban seal. Samad suggests this is Garuḍa, Viṣṇu's mount fighting a *nāga/nāgī*. However, in a detailed assessment of this piece, Rhi (2009: 153) instead suggests that by studying Buddhist texts such as the Mahāprajñāpāramitā (5th century CE), the text compares the Buddha to a bird, saving the earthly creatures from their suffering. Another female Brahmanical deity appearing in Buddhist art; see Samad (2020: 197) for Earth Goddess Pṛthivī.
[228] Filigenzi 2019b: Fig. 10.20.

In summary, the above evidence suggests that by incorporating Indian gods and goddesses into Buddhist art, Indian deities assumed a distinct role as patrons of the Buddha and benefactors of Buddhism. Yet, although the identity and function of some Indic figures can be ambiguous, it demonstrates that Buddhist art was not always about portraying a specific deity, but instead using Indian elements and motifs to represent the essence of something, rather than an explicit figure.

Brahmanical Goddesses in Gandhāran Art and Artefacts

This section will focus on the portrayal of Brahmanical goddesses in Gandhāran art. As mentioned above, the Kushan period witnessed a surge in Brahmanical imagery; for the first time, female and male Indian gods were portrayed in statue form. Like the male gods, Indian goddesses first appeared in Gandhāran coinage, dating back to the Indo-Scythian age, specifically in the portrayal of King Demetrius as Lakṣmī or Śrī Lakṣmī (See Figure 2.2 [i]). In her earlier portrayals, Śrī-Lakṣmī is portrayed with lotuses, elephants, and the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*) (Srinivasan 2010: 78). Outside of Gandhāra, in Mathura, there are Kushan depictions of this deity, portraying a female figure cupping her breast with configured elephant and lotus motifs (Srinivasan 2010: 78). In Gandhāra, this imagery is found in seals dating to the early Kushan period (date conjectured by Srinivasan 2010: 81).

Yet it was during the Kushan period that Śrī Lakṣmī underwent a process of syncretism with goddesses such as the Iranian Ardaksho and the Hellenic Tyche. She began to embody Graeco-Iranian elements such as the long dress, cornucopia and the palm branch (see Figure 2.4 [xxix]). This eventually led to the amalgamation of Śrī Lakṣmī and Graeco-Iranian elements configured into one goddess figure on a seal: the Iranian and Hellenic cornucopia, the grapes and the halo added with the Indian elephants, the lotus stem, and the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*) creating a composite deity (See Figure 2.4 [xxx]) (Srinivasan 2010: 83).

xxix) Statuette of Srī-Lakṣmī with Kharoṣṭhī inscription translation "image of Śrī". 1st-2nd century CE. British Museum. [229]

xxx) Seal of a composite female deity, portraying Śrī-Lakṣmī's elephants standing atop lotus stems and the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), situated below the child, and Ardakśo's robe, as well as the cornucopia (left hand) and grapes (right hand). Late 2nd century CE. Aman ur Rahman Collection. [230]

Thus, Gandhāran art during the Kushan period demonstrates Śrī Lakṣmī's key attributes, such as the elephant, the water pot (Skt. *purṇa ghaṭa*), and the lotus, incorporated into the visual vocabulary of female goddesses in Gandhāra. Additionally, her image is influenced by Graeco-Iranian elements, which portray her with a unique blend of Indic and non-Indic attributes.

The next category of female deities I will discuss is linked to a non-Indic goddess. This particular figure, Nana, is a Mesopotamian deity whose worship and popularity led her to Gandhāra in the 1st century CE, making her the arch-deity of the Kushan pantheon and the bestower of Kushan kingship. Nana[231] is typically portrayed astride a lion with a crescent moon, wearing a long dress, holding a sceptre (or a sword/a cup), and surrounded by a halo (Ghose 2006b: 99; Samad 2020: 202). It is her image, alongside other Greek, Indic and Central Asian influences, that shapes the iconography of female Brahmanical deities, such as Durgā/Mahiṣāsuramardinī, the fierce warrior goddess, and Umā, the wife of Śiva.

The first goddess I will examine is Durgā/Mahiṣāsuramardinī. In Mathura, this fierce goddess type appears in thirty-eight statues (Srinivasan 1997: 282). However, in Gandhāra, only one image of the fierce goddess statue can be attested (Samad 2020: 208). Yet Samad also suggests that the two other statues (see Figure 2.4 [xxxii]) are linked to Mahiṣāsuramardinī and Durgā as they both portray a goddess with fanged teeth, holding a trident (Skt. *triśula)*/spears/ daggers or cups- one is clasping a child from the hair (Samad 2020: 208).

Other suggestions of Durgā's appearance in Gandhāra by Paul and Khanna (2002: 75-76; after Ghose 2006b: 100) propose Gandhāra's seated goddess, which holds a cup and the head of a goat or animal (see Figure 1.2 [xxi]). Other researchers, such as Srinivasan, stress that this specific seated deity is instead influenced by Mithraic qualities (Srinivasan 1997: 300). As I examined this type of goddess within local traditions in the previous chapter, I will not delve further into what this statue represents. However, I emphasise Filigenzi's paper (2019a: 75, 77) on the importance of the goat head in local traditions and their association with local female deities. In light of this paper, I draw a parallel between these local goddesses and Durgā, suggesting a syncretism between these two figures.

As there are limited representations of Durgā in Gandhāra, Mathura has the only piece demonstrating Nana's contribution to Durgā's imagery, her lion as shown in Figure 2.4 (xxxiii) (Srinivasan 1997: 297-298; Potts 2001: 27). This particular example illustrates the syncretic transition from Nana to Durgā (Ghose 2006b: 102). The female figure is portrayed bare-breasted, wearing only a skirt with a sash, and standing over a lion; her left hand is in *vyavṛtta mudrā*, and her right hand holds a trident (Skt. *triśula*). In an additional study, Härtel

[229] Srinivasan 2010: Fig. 11.
[230] Srinivasan 2010: Fig. 9.
[231] This goddess will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, Iranian elements in Gandhāra.

(1992: 88; after Ghose 2006b: 102) adds that this figure was modified. The trident (Skt. *triśula*) was previously a sceptre, and two more arms were added, holding a knife and a shield.

These elements are also relevant as Srinivasan discusses how Durgā's imagery was influenced by other Indic and non-Indic sources. For example, she suggests that Śiva and Mithra's attributes were both bestowed upon Durgā, such as Śiva's trident (Skt. *triśula*) or Mithra's similar position and body stance as a buffalo slayer (Srinivasan 1997: 299-300) (compare Figure 2.4 [xxxi] and [xxxviii]).

As for evidence of this Nana-to-Durgā transition in Gandhāra, Samad tentatively suggests Figure 2.4 (xxxiv) (Samad 2020: 205). Yet this figure had been previously proposed to represent Hārītī; there is no lion, the figure standing frontally, haloed and with four arms holding the trident (Skt. *triśula*), the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), a cup and a small child (Rowan 2002: 304). Hence, this figure does not quite portray a convincing, fierce character such as Durgā. Instead, she might represent a mix of iconographies between Durgā and other female goddesses.

xxxi) Durgā killing a buffalo, right-hand holds a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and spear. Government Museum, Mathura. [232]

xxxii) Two female goddesses are shown holding daggers and children with fangs. [233]

[232] Srinivasan 1997: Pl. 20. 2.
[233] Samad 2020: Fig. 8.12 and Fig. 8.13. Location unknown.

xxxiii) Nana/Durgā (right) multi-armed deity standing atop a lion, right hand holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and left hand in *vyavṛtta mudrā*. 2nd-3rd century CE Mathura. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, Germany. [234]

xxxiv) Nana/Durgā/Hārītī deity. Peshawar Museum. [235]

xxxv) Huvishka's coin with reverse, Nana (left) and Weš (right) and obverse with Umā (left) and Weš (right). 2nd century CE. British Museum. [236]

Henceforth, Dūrga's imagery reveals that multiple deities, including Nana, Śiva, and Mithra, have contributed to her iconographic composition.

This is one aspect that makes the identification of Brahmanical goddesses in Gandhāra a complex topic. This analysis of Durgā and Śrī Lakśmī has demonstrated that goddesses tend to portray various elements from a vast corpus of goddess types, as they represent a blend of Graeco-Iranian and Indic deities. Yet, perhaps shifting our perspective can give us a better understanding of goddess types in Gandhāra. By understanding that these statues display a fusion of iconographies, we will not restrict these deities to a singular goddess name or type, but approach them with the idea that they are composite deities.

The next female deity affiliated with Nana is Omma, who appears most commonly during Huvishka's reign (150-187 CE) on coins. This particular goddess appears as the consort of Weš/Śiva (see Figure 2.4 [xxxvi]) (Ghose 2006b: 99). The roots of Omma are usually attributed to the Indian goddess Umā, a personage of Parvati, the wife of Śiva (Samad 2020: 203). However, there is still speculation, and other researchers have also suggested that its etymology is linked to Indo-Scythian goddesses (Grenet 2015: 210-211).

Yet, as a Brahmanical goddess, Umā is revered as an archdeity of the Kushans, a role shared with her Iranian counterpart, Nana. These two goddesses share similar numismatic images (refer to Figure 2.4 [xxxv], but they also have their distinguishable attributes.

[234] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 22.
[235] Samad 2020: Fig. 8.10.
[236] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 9a and 9b.

In contrast to Nana, who is known for her lion and sceptre (or sword), reflecting her Mesopotamian roots, Umā dons the sari and holds a mirror and flowers, mirroring the forms of Hellenic and Iranian goddesses such as Ardaksho and Aphrodite. An example is a 2nd century CE schist portrayal of Umā and Śiva/Maheśvara from the Peshawar Museum (see Figure 2.4 [xxxvi]). Umā is haloed, her hair is styled similarly to Śiva's, and she is wearing an Indian sari while holding a mirror and flowers. One could suppose that she portrays a more Indian goddess with Indian elements, such as the sari. However, the exact origins of other attributes, such as the mirror and flowers in her portrait, are derived from Iranian and Hellenic traditions.

Grenet further supports this, stating that a collection of female statuettes, most likely portraying goddesses, found in Bactria, Margiana, and Chorasmia, are also depicted holding a mirror. Grenet suggests that these terracottas could depict the Iranian goddess Ardakdsho, whose Hellenic counterpart, Aphrodite, also holds a mirror in her imagery (Grenet 2015: 225). Another collection of Parthian-Scythian terracottas displays seated female deities holding a flower (in other instances, the women have a pomegranate). Thus, these two examples suggest that Umā's iconography may have originated from non-Indic elements, mainly Iranian and Hellenic.

Again, this conclusion revisits the composite nature of the goddesses; Umā, like Śrī Lakṣmī and Durgā, demonstrates a fluidity amongst the cultural traditions, showing their capacity to appear Indianized or Graeco-Iranianised.

xxxvi) Schist statue of Maheśvara and Umā. 2nd century CE. Peshawar Museum. [237]

[237] Samad 2020: Fig. 5.5.

The final Brahmanical goddess I will examine is unrelated to Nana; it is a goddess initially worshipped in South India (Bolon 1992: 12; after Samad 2020: 210), and she is known as the squatting goddess, Aditi or Lajjā Gaurī (Bolon 1992: 1). A study by Khan (2002: 85) has provided evidence of the veneration of Lajjā Gaurī in Kashmir Smast from the 2nd CE-5th century CE on multiple bronze seals. One particular example portrays a host of motifs; on the top right is a water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), followed (left) by a trident (Skt. *triśula*), a female figure, squatting with legs wide, suggesting this is Lajjā Gaurī, and a dancing figure (Khan 2002: 85). This seal dates to the 2nd- 5th century CE and portrays not only an Indian female deity, but also other Indian elements, such as the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), the trident (Skt. *triśula*), and dancing figure (perhaps alluding to Śiva), thus supporting it's Brahmanical nature (Figure 2.4 [xxxvii]).

xxxvii) Bronze seal depicting several motifs, including a water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*) at the top right, a trident (Skt. *triśula*), Lajjā Gaurī, and a dancing figure. 2nd-5th century CE. Kashmir Smast. Private Collection. [238]

In conclusion, portraying goddesses in Gandhāran art and artifacts during the Kushan period reflects two significant points. First, this study has shown that goddesses in Gandhāra are highly composite figures. They are deeply layered with an amalgamation of Indic and non-Indic sources and portray a syncretic relationship with other goddesses. This helps us understand that Gandhāran goddesses cannot be categorised into a singular identity. Instead, it allows us to appreciate that Kushan art and religious artifacts were dedicated to syncretising deities, thereby creating a unique hybridisation of religious figures from various traditions.

Secondly, it can be understood that the imagery of these Gandhāran goddesses emerged within a highly interconnected graphic system that freely adopted and combined elements from both Indic and non-Indic sources, thus creating a system of composite Gandhāran deities within the Kushan pantheon.

Brahmanical Gods in Gandhāran Art- Skanda, Śiva and Viṣṇu

One of the most popular Indian gods during the Kushan era was Skanda, an Indian war god known by various names, including Kartikeya, Mahāsena, Skanda-Kumāra, and Guha (Mann

[238] Khan 2002: 85.

2007: 725). The multiple names lend a different personality to this Skanda-Kumāra figure; however, in Gandhāran art, we mostly see the general or warrior aspect (Mahāsena) of Skanda-Kumāra (Mann 2011: 124). Indeed, the Mahābhārata confirms that Skanda-Kumāra's function was to serve as an exemplary warrior, defeating the rivals, the aśuras (i.e., demons), specifically to slay the buffalo aśura, Mahiṣa (see Figure 2.4 [xxxviii]) (Samad 2020: 165). Alas, amidst the rich corpus of Vedic, Epic, and Puranic texts, there is little commonality among them regarding Skanda's birth, role, and story in the dense collection of Brahmanical lore (Samad 2020: 164; Mann 2007: 726). Nevertheless, the image of this figure appears frequently in Kushan coinage, and like other Indian deities, Skanda's numismatic image is continued in statue form. Thus, Skanda in Gandhāran art appears donned with Scythian armour (and a *dhoti* underneath), holding a spear and, on the other hand, a rooster (see Figure 2.4 [xxxix]). He also appears haloed, wearing a turban, and carries a sword on the hilt of his belt (Mann 2011: 123).

There are two key elements I would like to discuss. The first element is Skanda's Scythian armour. Unlike Śiva/Weš's character, who either appears wearing a *dhoti* or nude, Skanda wears both a dhoti and Scythian armour (Mann 2011: 124). As an Indian god, the fusion of Indian and Scythian clothing provides additional clues about his iconographic makeup. Ultimately, this has led researchers to suggest that an Indian god portrayed in Scythian attire indicates his inclusion in the Irano-Scythian religious psyche of Gandhāra (Srinivasan 1997/1998: 237-239; after Mann 2011: 124).

Further evidence can also support this statement, as Skanda is also portrayed holding a rooster/cock. This element is a curious addition to his image, as South Asian coinage rarely portrays roosters in their visual vocabulary (Jansari 2020: 492). Yet, according to Jansari, the Mahābhārata does mention Skanda alongside cockerels, so how is Skanda's imagery relevant in Iranian traditions? For one, we can consider that, much like the Weš/Śiva image, many of the elements portrayed in Skanda's image are valuable and multi-layered, not intended solely for one community but for multiple communities living in Gandhāra.

Furthermore, additional research indicates that the rooster is closely associated with divine power in Parthian tradition, often paired with an Iranian war deity, symbolising the concept of khvarenah, the Iranian term for the divinely granted power to the monarch (Mann 2011: 125). The Iranian war god in question is Sroshard, and based on the Pahlavi, an ancient Aramaic text, Sroshard is heavily associated with a rooster and a dog as his instruments to defeat his opposers and establish peace in the world (Mann 2011: 126-127). As Skanda is portrayed with a rooster, Mann proposes that syncretism occurred between Skanda and Sroshard (Mann 2011: 127). The relationship between these two deities is closely intertwined in the Kushan era, as evidenced by texts that confirm their parallelism. For example, the Rabatak Inscription states that Mahāsena and Viśākha are equivalent figures to those of Sroshard and Narasa. Later Vedic texts, such as the Upapurāṇa, also confirm the close equivalency between Sroshard and Skanda (Mann 2011: 127). Thus, as Srinivasan puts it, Skanda's image may be "multi-valent", having significance not only in Indian traditions but also being valuable to Iranian communities.[239]

[239] Srinivasan uses this keyword, "multi-valent", to describe the composite nature of Weš/Śiva (Srinivasan 2016: 73, 93)

xxxviii) Skanda killing Mahiṣa. Sub-Regional Office, Peshawar. Museum. [240]
xxxix) Skanda, standing heavily armoured with a spear and a rooster. Kushan period. British Museum. [241]

Unlike Skanda's imagery in art, Śiva's is much more straightforward, as we can recognise a clear reflection of Śiva/Weš's numismatic image carried to the schist forms of Śiva in Gandhāra.[242] Yet, it is worth mentioning again how the iconography of Śiva/Weš fluctuated constantly throughout the Kushan era. As a result, the statues of Śiva also portray inconsistent and diverse elements (Carter 1995: 146). However, Samad's study on Hindu deities in Gandhāran art (2020: 108-109) has identified five aspects that help us distinguish Śiva's appearance in Gandhāran art. He established that the third eye, the multi-armed/heads, and

[240] Samad 2020: Fig.7.10.
[241] Mann 2007: Fig. 6.
[242] As the statue form of Gandhāra's Weš/Śiva is drawn from Gandhāran Kushan coinage (Srinivasan 2016: 66), he is thus portrayed with multiple arms and heads, the *liṅga*, the trident (Skt. *triśula*), the animal pelt, and the thunderbolt. Yet, as Srinivasan states, the iconography of Śiva in Mathura differs from that in Gandhāra (Srinivasan 2016: 64-65). In Mathura, Śiva's image is associated with the raised *liṅga*, the one-faced Śiva (Skt. *ekamukhaliṅga*), and the physical form of Śiva (Skt. *mūrti*); however, in Gandhāra, these elements do not appear until after the 2nd century CE (Srinivasan 2016: fn. 3). See Shāh 2009: 87-91, for example of a Śiva *ekamukhaliṅga* found in Bannu, in Lakki Marwat, Pakistan dating to 2nd-3rd century BCE.

his attributes (raised *liṅga*) and weaponry (the trident [Skt. *triśula*]) are all relevant motifs associated with Śiva (Bopearachchi 2016: 42).

For example, as Śiva is referred to as a multi-armed and headed being in the Mahābhārata, this element is commonly seen in the many schist examples in Gandhāra (See Figure 2.4 [xl]). These portraits also present Śiva with a third eye in the centre of the forehead.

xl) Three-headed, four-armed Śiva with the third eye, holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), standing with raised phallic under dhoti. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. [243]

xli) Three-headed, six-armed Śiva standing with Nandi. Śiva is holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), a water pot (Skt *pūrṇa ghaṭa*). Peshawar Museum. [244]

[243] Carter 1995: Fig. 7.
[244] Samad 2020: Fig. 5.2.

xlii) Śiva (left) and Umā (right) figures from Dagai, Pakistan. Śiva (three-headed) is holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), a water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), and a necklace (Skt. *akṣamālā*). [245]

In addition to these elements, there are some examples of Śiva portrayed beside a bull or with his female counterpart, Umā (see Figure 2.4 [xli] and [xlii]).

This evidence demonstrates a seamless continuity from the Kushan coinage to the schist art forms in Gandhāra; nevertheless, it reflects a much more significant movement. Samad suggests that these schist forms reflect the commencing crystallisation of Śiva's iconography, laying a foundation for the later pictorial versions of Śiva of the oncoming eras, preserving and carrying these elements into other historical contexts (Samad 2020: 121).[246]

As for our last deity in question, Viṣṇu or his antecedents, Vāsudeva/Kṛṣṇa, there are limited sources that portray this god, save for two. These two examples demonstrate that the lore surrounding Vāsudeva began manifesting in Gandhāran art during the Kushan period and continued into later eras. For instance, there is an attested image of Kṛṣṇa in combat with a Keśin, a villain who transformed himself into a horse (Figure 2.4 [xliii]). Based on the literary description, Kṛṣṇa defeats his opponent by jutting his elbow into the horse's mouth, eventually killing the creature (Samad 2020: 147). This story, as demonstrated by Samad (2020: 147-148), also links to the Hellenic story of Herakles defeating a mighty horse creature from the island of Thrace or a Nemean lion (Figure 2.4 [xliv]) (Srinivasan 2022: 62). Perhaps again, this alludes to the multi-valency of epics and scenes that Gandhāran art likes to emphasise, appealing to the multitude of different cultures.

xliii) Kṛṣṇa killing the Keśin disguised as a horse. Taxila Museum. [247]
xliv) Herakles with tiger pelt and club, wearing a diadem with ribbons in combat with a Nemean lion. Gandhāra. Metropolitan Museum of Art. [248]

[245] Bopearachchi 2016: 50. Location unspecified.
[246] See Carter 1995: Fig. 15 for a 6th-century CE Khotanese Śiva painting from Dandan-oilik. Śiva portrayed with three heads, four arms and two bulls.
[247] Samad 2020: Fig. 6.5.
[248] Srinivasan 2022: Fig. 9.

Another example that alludes to Vāsudeva's lore is the representation of his incarnations as various animals. In Gandhāra, there is one limestone that can be attested to represent Varāha, the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu (Figure 2.4 [xlv]). This particular example dates to 3rd-5th century CE (Srinivasan 2009: 137; Khan 1992: 71) and was found in Bannu District, Pakistan, displaying the head of a boar and the body of a human male with four arms; he stands on top of a snake, holding its tail. Khan reports that in his hands he has a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a conch shell, and the other is on his thigh (Khan 1992: 68; after Samad 2020: 145).

xlv) Varāha, with four arms, stands over the Sesa serpent; beside him, Pṛthivī, the Indian earth goddess, stands on Varāha's shoulder, found in Bannu District, Pakistan. National Museum, Karachi, Pakistan. [249]

The earth goddess Pṛthivī stands on his shoulder as the Varāha battles the serpent, Sesa. Khan also suggested that this site was an ancient temple, based on other artefacts found alongside this Varāha image, such as the profuse number of baked bricks, some engraved with floral patterns (Khan 1992: 71). Yet, as the bracket of this artefact's dating extends after the 3rd century CE, it is still relevant to mention as it shows how the lore surrounding Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu was becoming more prevalent in South Asian art and continued after the Kushan period (Srinivasan 2009: 137).

[249] Khan 1992: Fig. 2.

Thus, this section has highlighted three significant aspects of Indian deities depicted in Gandhāran art. Firstly, they can be represented with Indian and non-Indian elements, such as Skanda's rooster and the Scythian armour. Secondly, their iconography in statue form is based on their numismatic imagery, as reflected in Śiva's imagery on Gandhāra coinage. Thirdly, their appearance in this era was gradually expanding to represent more specific Indian narratives, for example, Viṣṇu's Varāha incarnation, as well as Kṛṣṇa's battle with the demon horse. Overall, the portrayal of Indian deities in this era contributed to the canonisation of their visual forms, laying a foundation for later artists and subsequent Brahmanical communities.

2.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the term "Brahmanical" has taken us further in understanding the early expression of Hinduism in Gandhāra. Although dedicated to unveiling this tradition in Gandhāra, the term "Brahmanical" was used in this chapter with a dose of flexibility and nuance. In Gandhāran studies, it is important to acknowledge the depth of the grey area that many artefacts, literary works, and artworks demand. As I have liberally applied the term "Brahmanical", there are many cases in which this sole term strips away the complexity of the Gandhāra's multifaceted cultural character. Many artefacts or statues demonstrated their ability to embody Buddhist, pre-Buddhist, local, or Iranian traditions. Is it fair, then, to dedicate this chapter to the "Brahmanical" presence in Gandhāra, when Gandhāra's religious and cultural communities became so intertwined that it becomes difficult to distinguish them?

In saying this, there are limited alternative ways to identify the early practices of Brahmanism. Many research papers and academic works freely discuss the "Brahmanical" and "Hindu" elements and evidence in Gandhāra. Based on their work, I compiled this chapter to demonstrate that throughout Gandhāra's early history, this region was highly associated with Brahmanical culture, as evidenced by the Mahābhārata, Pāṇini, and various Greek sources. Even so, after the 3rd century BCE, "Brahmanical" elements appeared in multiple forms in Gandhāra, as evidenced by coinage and archaeological material. For example, after the 2nd century BCE, when Indo-Greek and Central Asian powers invaded Gandhāra, they adopted "Brahmanical" or pan-Indian elements into their cultural character, producing coinage that depicted Brahmanical figures and donative structures such as the Garuḍa-Vāsudeva Pillar. This early era was marked by a combination of Indo-Hellenic artifacts, influenced by Iranian and Central Asian elements, with Brahminical elements still prevalent in these complex layers.

Using literary sources, such as those from Indian and Greek writers, we also know of several claimed Brahmanical temples and shrines dedicated to Brahmanical deities. Yet, as several architectural remains in Gandhāra have ambiguous religious characters, the possibility that these spaces were devoted to Indian deities or for a Brahmanical function is a strong prospect.

Brahmanical elements also emerged in Kushan coinage, composite deities, Buddhist art, and inscriptions during the final segment of Kushan rule. This line of evidence also demonstrates the fluidity between other traditions. For example, coinage portrayed how the Kushans created composite deities, blending Indian, Iranian, and Hellenic figures to create a unique pantheon of gods and goddesses. Art also witnessed the emergence of Brahmanical deities,

such as Indra, Brahma, Śiva, and Skanda, who were initially subordinated by the Buddha but were later adopted into the Buddhist pantheon. Brahmanical elements also influenced the visual representation of Gandhāran goddesses, resulting in unique composite deities. This era yielded several relevant inscriptions linked to Brahmanism, providing researchers with valuable insights into eyewitness accounts (i.e., those of Chinese travellers) and validating the presence of Brahmin devotees and shrines dedicated to Śiva and Skanda in Gandhāra.

Although discussing the Brahmanical elements without drawing on many other traditions is challenging, these traditions are integral to understanding the Brahmanical component and its place within the interconnected web of religions in Gandhāra. Based on this evidence collection, I suggest that Brahmanism was not a dominant religion but a consistent and durable culture sustained in Gandhāra and interwoven with other traditions from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

3.1 Religious Iranian elements in Gandhāra 3rd BCE-1st century CE

The impact of the Achaemenid Empire

On the rock face in the Kermanshah Province, Iran, an Achaemenid inscription known as the Behistun inscription was issued by King Darius I (522-486 BCE). This inscription mentions the regions of the Achaemenid empire that were bequeathed to King Darius I when he became ruler in 522 BCE (Siddiqui 2009: 81).

> King Darius says: These are the countries which belong to me. By the favour of Ahura Mazda I was their king: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the People-by-the-sea, Lydia, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, **Gandhāra**, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia and Maka; altogether twenty-three countries….These are the countries that belong to me. By the favour of Ahura Mazda, they are my subjects: they brought tribute to me. What I said to them, either night or day, that they did [250]

During the mid-6th century BCE, the local Indian king of Gandhāra, King Pushkārasarin (also known as Pukkusāti), died, and the Gandhāran region subsequently fell into disrepair (Hasan Dani 1986: 41). During this period of weakness, the founder and king of the Achaemenid empire of the time, King Cyrus (558-530 BCE), seized Gandhāra. According to ancient Greek writers, such as Herodotus, Gandhāra is identified as the seventh satrapy of the Achaemenids, alongside three other tribes in the surrounding area: the Sattagydians, the Dadikai, and the Aparytai (Cary 1904: 190). Herodotus also confirms that the tribute or tax from the Gandhāran province was substantial, compared to other regions, and that Indian soldiers, elephants and chariots were conscripted in various battles whilst under Achaemenid control, including the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE (Jairazbhoy & Rafique 1963: 39). An inscription from the Palace of Susa confirms the origins of many of the resources used to construct the palace, mentioning yaka timber from Gandhāra (Siddiqui 2009: 84).

The exact boundary of the Gandhāran satrapy is still unclear (Iori 2018: 333). However, in Gandhāra proper, there is evidence of a strong Iranian demographic presence in archaeological and written sources. Traces of the Achaemenid presence in Gandhāra are found in the production of terracotta, script, Persian goods and, most importantly, in the religious practices (Jairazbhoy & Rafique 1963: 40-47; Siddiqui 2009: 85-89). According to classical accounts,[251] Aristoboulos, a Greek writer accompanying Alexander, reported that the locals of the Northwestern region performed Zoroastrian funerary rites (Boyce et al. 1991: 131). To support this, archaeological evidence provided by Hasan Dani (1986: 41; 1967: 41) also suggests that sites in Balambat, Swāt, and the Dir district in Pakistan have found evidence of fire altars, which Hasan Dani presumes to imply these rooms functioned as fire worship areas.

Other examples of Iranian presence recorded in Gandhāra include the terracotta, specifically the tulip bowls found at sites such as Barikot, Bhir Mound in Taxila, the Swāt Valley, and Charsadda (Iori 2018: 306-307). These bowls are found in the core regions of the

[250] Behistun Inscription (Siddiqui 2009: 84; after Docherty 2008: 12).
[251] Strabo XV.1.62. Tr. Horace Jones 1928: 109.

Achaemenid Empire and also in Gandhāra, dating to the 5th-4th century BCE. They continue to be sporadically produced in later periods, such as the Indo-Greek layers (late 2nd BCE-1st century BCE).[252] The discovery of these terracotta styles suggests the cultural imprint of the Achaemenids in the 4th-5th century BCE (Magee et al. 2005: 725; Petrie et al. 2008: 11).

The evidence above suggests that, following Achaemenid control, Gandhāra's cultural identity was characterised by a mix of local, Indian, and Iranian influence. However, after the 3rd century BCE, the language and script were the most prominent Iranian features retained in Gandhāra. Evidence of this is found in the earliest literary works distributed by King Aśoka, one of the most esteemed kings of the Mauryan period (268-232 BCE). These inscriptions, known as the Aśokan Pillars and Rock Edicts, were issued across the empire; they were inscribed in Brāhmī, the court language of Aśoka's central ruling area, Pāṭaliputra, extending to Mathura (Boyce et al. 1991: 132).

However, in the northern regions, such as Gandhāra, the pillars and rock edicts are written in the developed form of Kharoṣṭhī, a script derived from Aramaic used to represent the local Prakrit language, Gāndhārī (Vergiani 2024: 71, 75; Saloman 1998: 46). As a script reserved for administration and business by the Achaemenids (Siddiqui 2009: 86), it was subsequently introduced in Gandhāra during the Achaemenid period, and remained to become a distinctive souvenir of Gandhāra's period as a satrapy of their previous Iranian rulers. Distinguishing it from the rest of the Indian municipalities, Aśoka's choice to issue these pillars and edicts in Kharoṣṭhī in the Gandhāran region is summarised by Bloch (1950: 86; after Boyce et al. 1991: 136): "It is a sign of the durable character of Iranian influences in the northwest."

Indo-Greek Coins (189 BCE-90 BCE)

After the decline of the Mauryan Empire in the late 2nd century BCE, the Graeco-Bactrians seized Gandhāra, marking the beginning of the next phase in Gandhāran history: the Indo-Greek period. Like the Achaemenid period, the exact locations of the Indo-Greek kingdoms in Gandhāra remain unclear. However, by constructing the chronology provided by numismatic sources, we obtain an elaborate list of Indo-Greek rulers who controlled small pockets of principalities, which fluctuated and shifted throughout this period (Ghosh 2017a: 374).

More importantly, these coins are precious to our understanding of the cultural and religious landscape of the time. They were designed Hellenistic, portraying rulers, symbolically relevant motifs, legends, and deities. In this way, we gain valuable insight into the chosen iconography and the time's relevant religious groups and pantheons: Greek, Indian, and Iranian.

[252] Iori 2018: 85-86.

i) King Amyntas' coin displays Zeus-Mithra. [253]
ii) King Hermaeus coin displaying reverse Zeus-Mithra on the throne with a rayed Phrygian cap. CNG 97, 448. [254]
iii) Rayed crown, bust of King Hermaeus. [255]
iv) Bust of King Amyntas displayed with rayed crown and sceptre. Private Collection. [256]

In the early phase of the Indo-Greek period, the Greek rulers heavily relied on their Hellenic pantheon, mostly portraying Greek gods and goddesses, including Zeus, Herakles, Apollo, Athena, Dionysius and the Dioscuri (MacDowell 2007: 258; Ghosh 2017b: 1). However, once the Indo-Greek rulers became established in Gandhāra and neighbouring regions, the scope of religious deities expanded and began to include other non-Greek elements. The primary Iranian deity featured on these coins is Mithra. Mithra is a solar deity in the Zoroastrian pantheon, represented by flames and rays emanating from the crown of the head, as well as the Mithraic/Phrygian cap. This god is not shown as a solitary deity, as his principle elements are merged with those of mainstream Greek deities, such as Zeus, Helios, and Apollo (as shown in Figure 3.1 [i] and [ii]) (Ghosh 2017b: 6). The Indo-Greek ruler King Amyntas, one of the earliest Indo-Greek kings, is depicted on a Zeus-Mithra bust wearing a Phrygian cap (see Figure 3.1 [iv]). Another King, King Hermaeus, portrays himself with rays surrounding his head (see Figure 3.1 [iii]).

The evidence of Iranian gods on Indo-Greek coins suggests two points. The first example demonstrates the Greeks' openness to incorporating local deities into their coinage. In many respects, the Greeks were adaptable in their approach to religious matters, often finding equivalents to their deities in foreign pantheons. As discussed above, evidence also shows that they incorporated local Indian gods into their coinage and interacted with Buddhist groups- a notable example is the Questions of Menander. Thus, the Greeks were not unfamiliar with foreign pantheons and cults, and in many cases, they were known to create a syncretism between such groups.

The second point follows from the first: By interacting with and portraying local gods on their coins, specifically the Iranian god Mithra, the Greeks demonstrated that elements of Iranian religions were still prevalent in the region. This attempt to synchronise imagery

[253] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.44. Location unspecified.
[254] Falk 2019: Fig. 1a. Location unspecified.
[255] Falk 2019: Fig. 1b. Location unspecified.
[256] Falk 2019: Fig. 1c.

between the head solar deities, namely Zeus, Apollo, and Mithra, was a means to forge a connection between Iranian and Hellenic communities in Gandhāra.

In conclusion, the Indo-Greek period demonstrates the first appearance of Iranian deities. More importantly, it displays the Greek rulers' active push for syncretism between the Hellenic deities Zeus and Apollo and the Iranian Mithra. As for their motives, we can only speculate. However, from a political standpoint, it was most likely intended to address and incorporate the Iranian communities belonging to their kingdoms, thereby creating cultural harmony between Hellenic and Iranian traditions.

The Impact of the Greek, Indo-Scythian and Parthian coinage on the Kushans (1st BCE-1st century CE)

After the Indo-Greeks, the numismatics of Gandhāra became quite complex as the region faced subsequent invasions from multiple groups, including the Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans. In the Scythian and Parthian periods (early 1st BCE to 1st century CE), although brief and tumultuous, this era saw the production of coinage that has assisted researchers in understanding the succession of monarchs as well as the development of iconography from Indo-Greek to Scythian/Parthian traditions that eventually would appear in Kushan coinage (Ghosh 2016: 1). The Kushans, who will later reign in Gandhāra from the 1st-3rd century CE, will produce a rich and valuable assemblage of Iranian religious elements in their coinage. However, it is poor scholarship to study Kushan coinage as an isolated phenomenon. Kushan coinage incorporates many aspects from the predecessors of Gandhāra, including the Indo-Parthian, Scythian, and Greek kingdoms. It must be established that these earlier coins reflect an array of components used by the later Kushan monarchs in their numismatic iconography and portrayal of Iranian deities. Therefore, this section will be dedicated to understanding how the Scythian, Parthian, and Indo-Greek coinage influenced the numismatic iconography and visual language the Kushans adopted when they gained power.

As explored above, the iconography established by the Indo-Greeks in the 2nd-1st century BCE created a ripple effect in Gandhāran history. The Indo-Greek rulers in Gandhāra introduced their traditionally Greek-style figures and motifs in coinage, which later became the region's visual lingua franca. When the Indo-Scythian and Parthian rulers gained control over Gandhāra, they continued to use Greek deities and motifs (e.g., the thunderbolt, trident, and animal pelt) on their coinage (MacDowell 2007: 249-250, 254). However, although little attention was paid to Iranian deities, the continuation of the Hellenic-style coins was the focus of Indo-Scythian and later Parthian rulers. As Zeus-Mithra is displayed on Indo-Greek coinage, Figure 3.1 (v) shows a Bactrian coin that mirrors the deity with rays emanating from the crown of the head (MacDowell 2007: 256). During the Kushan period, however, the sun's rays were exclusively used to represent Mithra, as shown on the coin below (see Figure 3.1 [vi]).

Another example that demonstrates the continued use of Greek motifs in Indo-Scythian and Kushan coinage is shown in Figure 3.1 (vii). This coin features a figure holding a trident, famously associated with Hellenic Poseidon, which is also depicted in Indo-Scythian coinage. The male figure, wielding the trident, rests his foot on a small figure, rendering his identity still contested. Researchers such as Taasob (2020: 93) and MacDowell (2007: 253) claim it

could be Poseidon. Tarn (1951: 328-329; after MacDowell 2007: 253) suggests that this deity can be identified as an Indus River god, whereas Banerjea (1956: 121; after MacDowell 2007: 253) proposes that it is an early depiction of the Indian god Śiva. Whoever the deity is, the symbolism of the trident motif continued into Kushan coinage (Figure 3.1 [viii]), echoing the linkage to a powerful male deity, namely a composite figure unique to the Kushan pantheon, Weš, often identified as either the Indian Śiva or the Iranian Vayus. This god will be discussed in more detail in the Kushan segment. The iconography of these Indo-Greek coins demonstrates that they were highly influential, laying the foundation for the development of iconography in the later Gandhāra kingdoms.

v) Zeus-Mithra on a Bactrian coin. [257]
vi) Mithra on Kushan coin. [258]
vii) Poseidon or Śiva with a trident on Indo-Scythian coin. [259]
viii) Weš/Śiva with trident and bull on Kushan coin. [260]

Although the Indo-Greeks heavily influenced the Indo-Scythians' coinage, the Indo-Scythians also introduced a few unique divergences. For example, the Indo-Scythians incorporated Central Asian themes and symbols, such as the torque (a hoop-like shape, symbolically relevant in Scythian culture), as well as deities and monarchs depicted in traditional Central Asian clothing or seated on horseback as displayed in Figure 3.1 (ix), (x) and (xi) (MacDowell 2007: 249- 251; Sinisi 2017: 870-872). It should also be noted that Nike placing a wreath overhead the monarch is a Parthian custom and continued onto Kushan coinage.

ix) Indo-Scythian coin, King Aziles on horseback. [261]

[257] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.77. Location unspecified.
[258] Grenet 2015: Fig. 1. ('Mihir'). Location unspecified. See Figure 2.4 [viii] for a similar coin.
[259] MacDowell 2007: Fig. 9.66. Location unspecified.
[260] Grenet 2015: Fig. 1. ('Weš with bull'). Location unspecified.
[261] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 23.a. (Senior 2001.II: 8, no. 33.1T). Location unspecified.

x) Indo-Parthian coin, King Gondophares on horseback with Nike overhead placing a wreath. [262]
xi) Kushan coin, King Hēraos on horseback with Nike overhead, placing wreath. [263]

The rule of the Indo-Parthians, which commenced immediately after the Indo-Scythians in the 1st century CE, maintained the same style of coinage as their predecessors but with an added hint of Parthian influence (MacDowell 2007: 254). For example, the Kushan coins distributed by the earliest Kushan king, Hēraos (or Sanab), demonstrate a clear continuity of artistry and tradition from the Indo-Parthian coins. An example can be seen in the flying Nike figure, which places a wreath on the monarch's crown, as displayed in the Indo-Scythian coin in Figure 3.1 (x) and the Kushan coin in Figure 3.1 (xi) (Sinisi 2017: 870-872). Although featured briefly, this example is still essential to show the influence of the Parthians and the Kushans' attempt to continue this style.

Additionally, during this Parthian era, significant Kushan deities began to appear on numismatic coins. For example, the legend NANAIA or Nana, the Mesopotamian goddess who would become the principal deity of the Kushan pantheon, is inscribed for the first time on Bactrian coins (Figure 3.1 [xii]) of King Agesiles and Sapadbizes with her proto image, a lion (Ghose 2006b: 98; MacDowell 2007: 256). Despite these coins being found outside Gandhāra, this goddess would feature prominently as a significant arch-deity in the next era of Gandhāra's conquerors, the Kushans. Evidence for the worship of this goddess is attested in northern Afghanistan during this era (Ghose 2006b: 98), and the eventual diffusion of her worship into the Gandhāran region demonstrates the growth of her popularity.

xii) King Sapadbizes coin from Bactria. 1st century BCE. The reverse displays the legend NANAIA with a lion image. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. [264]

By the end of the Indo-Parthian period, Gandhāran coinage was complex and interlayered, with a core based on Indo-Greek coins and additional layers of Scythian and Parthian influences. Therefore, coinage from the Greek, Scythian, and Parthian eras had significantly shaped the numismatic iconography that by the time the Kushans invaded in the 1st century CE, the Kushans encountered an organised and elaborate iconographic vocabulary to use. Yet, what the Kushans did with this system was create a rather unique and even more complex

[262] Sinish 2017: Fig. 23.b. (Rauch Summer 2008 Auction) Location unspecified.
[263] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 23.c. (CNG e-auction 308 [7-8-2013]), lot 214. Location unspecified.
[264] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 3a.

pantheon of deities and motifs that would eventually tilt the spotlight on Iranian deities.

3.2 Kushan Coinage (1st-3rd century CE)

It was not until a group from the Yüeh-zhi clan in western China, formerly known as the Guishang, yet later coined as the Kushans (Rezakhani 2022: 305; Grenet 2015: 205), migrated to Bactria and established their base in Lanshi,[265] by the end of the 2nd century BCE (Skinner 2017: 27). Yet their significance to Gandhāra would not manifest until the 1st to the 3rd century CE, when the Kushans eventually expanded their empire into the Balkh region in Afghanistan to Mathura in Central India (Skinner 2017: 22) and to the southerly pockets of Uzbekistan and the Xinjiang province in western China (Salomon 2018: 66). A significant early example of the Kushans rise to power is found in Takht-i-bāhī inscription. Dated during the reign of Gondophares, it states the overarching rulership of the Indo-Parthian king, Gondophares, whilst acknowledging Kujula Kadphises as 'prince Kapa' (Skinner 2017: 50).

Throughout the 1st to 3rd century CE, the coins, art, and architecture in Gandhāra reveal a unique religious landscape. Coins primarily offer valuable insights into how the Kushan monarchs managed religious diversity within the empire. In particular, Iranian religious practices and deities experienced a prominent surge in popularity under the Kushan monarchs.

Iranian deities and Kushan Kings

The grandson of King Hēraos, Vima Taktu (c. 90 BCE), employed a wide variety of images on his coinage.[266] Among his assemblages, Vima Taktu was the first king to portray a supposed Mithraic deity (see Figure 3.2 [i]). This is the first appearance of an Iranian god in Kushan coinage, and the exact identity of this deity is still ambiguous. Falk suggests that the figure with rays emanating from the crown represents Mithra, whereas Grenet suggests a Hellenic-Iranian syncretism between Apollo and Mithra (Grenet 2015: 207; Falk 2019: 7).

i) The Vima Taktu (also known as Sōtēr Megas) coin displayed rays emanating from his crown, which suggested Mithraic imagery. [267]

[265] Suggested to be located in Baghlan, Afghanistan; however, see Skinner for alternative suggestions on the whereabouts of Lanshi (Skinner 2017: fn. 19).
[266] According to Falk's study, Vima Taktu incorporated Roman (displaying the god of war, Mars) and Indian elements (the pot of plenty Skt. *pūrṇaghaṭa*). He also continued the previous Indo-Scythian and Parthian coinage types but, most importantly, issued the first appearance of the Iranian rayed sun god, Mithra (2019: 7).
[267] Falk 2019: Fig. 5a. Location unspecified.

The following ruler relevant to our study of Iranian deities is Kanishka (127-150 CE), who launched a coinage that created a significant shift in the Kushan pantheon. Figure 3.2 (ii) displays a table provided by Bracey, which shows the most frequently appearing deities on the coinage of the reigns of Kanishka and his son, Huvishka. The results demonstrate that these gods (except Weš and Nana[268]) were mostly Iranian: Mithra, Māo, Pharro, and Ardoxšo. Indeed, King Kanishka and his successor, King Huvishka (150-187 CE) are reported to have portrayed fifteen Iranian deities derived from the Zoroastrian pantheon (Grenet 2010: 88). They also incorporated regional deities from modern-day Iran, such as the Oxus River god Oaxsho (see Figure 3.2 [ii]), and Yima, a legendary king from Indo-Iranian lore and lord of the underground world (Daryaee & Malekzadeh 2015: 109-111; Grenet 2010: 88). Some scholars even suggest that the Kushan pantheon was quasi-Zoroastrian (Cribb 1998: 89).

Although the most popular deities on Kanishka's coinage are Iranian, Hellenic imagery played a prominent role in their iconography.[269] This is evident at the beginning of Kanishka's reign, when he launched a bold and innovative religious scheme: he directly inscribed the names of the deities on his coinage (Falk 2019: 31).[270] The coins identified the gods for the first time in Kushan coinage. In his first issue, Kanishka's coins inscribed the names of the Greek deities: Helios, Selene, Hephaistos, Anemos, and Nanaia (Bracey 2012: 199). Yet, Kanishka was not finished; he launched a second wave of coins, displaying the same images but with their Iranian equivalents and names in Bactrian:[271] Mirro, Māo, Athso, Oesho, and Nana (Bracey 2012: 199).

[268] Nana should be identified as a Mesopotamian goddess; however, in antiquity, her form was combined with that of the Iranian goddess Anāhitā. Therefore, based on this syncretism, Nana can be considered Iranian (Grenet 2015: 222).
[269] See Shenkar (2014: 47-167) for a comprehensive analysis of Iranian gods on Kushan coins.
[270] This custom is suggested to have been inspired by Emperor Nero in Roman coinage, who also began inscribing the names of the deities on coinage (Cribb 1998: 88; after Falk 2019: 31).
[271] An Iranian-based language written in the Greek alphabet (Cribb 1998: 84).

Huvishka				Kanishka			
Iranian/Bactrian		Gandharan		Iranian/Bactrian		Gandharan	
Ardoxsho	25%	**Wesho**	6%	**Nana (Nanaia)**	22%	**Wesho**	26%
Miiro	20%	Karttikeya	2%	**Miiro (Helios)**	18%	**Buddha**	1%
Mao	12%	**Heracles**	<1%	**Mao (Salene)**	15%		
Nana	11%	Umma	<1%	Orlagno	8%		
Pharro	11%			**Athsho (Hephaistos)**	4%		
Shaoreo	5%			**Ardoxsho**	3%		
Athsho	2%			Manaobago	2%		
Oanindo	1%			Pharro	1%		
Oaxsho	1%			Lrooaspo	<1%		
Manaobago	1%			Mozdooano	<1%		
Sarapis	1%			**Oado (Anemos)**	n/a		
Rishti	<1%						
Teiro	<1%						
Ahura Mazda	<1%						
Ashaixsho	<1%						
Lrooaspo	<1%						
Yamsho	<1%						
Oado	n/a						

ii) The table displays the frequency of deities appearing on reverse gold dies of King Huvishka and Kanishka. *The deities in bold also appear in copper. [272]

As several elements of Greek numismatic imagery are present in early Kushan coinage, it is tempting to attribute Kanishka's deities (Helios/Mithra, Selene/Māo) to Greek influence.[273] However, the relationship between these gods' identities and iconography is much more complex, and these two components must be studied separately as they cannot be identified with only one religious tradition, i.e., Greek or Iranian.

Firstly, scholars cannot underplay the influence of Greek imagery on the iconography of many Kushan deities. As Sinisi (2017: 865) states, Gandhāra, from the Indo-Greek period, and the surrounding area were exposed to an "iconographic language of Greek derivation". He alludes mainly to the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coinage, which undoubtedly influenced Kushan numismatic traditions. This is further supported by Grenet (2012: 8), who also confirms that many Iranian Kushan deities are based on Greek imagery.

[272] Bracey 2012: 203.

[273] Shenkar's study proposes that ancient Iranian gods displayed on Kushan coinage can be visually and symbolically linked to Greek deities. These Iranian deities, for example, Māh/Māo (moon deity), Xvarənah/Pharro/Farn (god of wealth), Šahrewar/ Šaoreoro (god of war), Arštāt/Rišto (female warrior deity), Aši/Ardoxšo (goddess of fecundity), and Ātar/Athšo (god of fire), are linked to Greek counterparts, Selene, Hermes, Ares, Athena-Roma, Tyche-Fortuna and Hephaistos (Shenkar 2015: 99, 136, 88, 83, 92).



iii) Oaxšo, the river god on King Kuvishka's coin. British Museum. [274]
iv) Rišto/Athena figure on gold Huvishka coin. [275]
v) Gold coin depicting warrior Nana with typical Artemis form. [276]

For instance, the god of wind, known as Anemos or Anemoi, later known in the Iranian pantheon as Oado, is based on Greek iconography (Tanabe 1990: 53; after Bopearachchi 2020: fn. 10). Even non-Greek deities, such as the Mesopotamian Nana appears with more Greek attire, similar to Greek Artemis or Athena (compare Figure 3.2 [iv] and [v]) (Cribb 1998: 93). Additionally, gods of Iranian origins, such as Ōoromozdo/ Ahura Mazdā (supreme god of Zoroastrianism) is portrayed with Greek-style clothing, and Oaxsho (Oxus River god) is suggested to be inspired by the figure of Poseidon (see Figure 3.2 [iii]) (Shenkar 2014: 129).

In light of this, studies focusing on the motivation behind Kanishka's switch to Iranian gods have been examined and thoroughly disputed; in Cribb's discussion (1998: 89-90), he points out that many scholars agree these gods reflect an Iranian religious system and should, in their nature, be regarded as Iranian (Bracey 2012: 199). Sinisi (2017: 911) further supports this claim, stating that although Hellenic imagery was pervasive in coinage, especially during the Indo-Scythian and Parthian eras, the Kushans used their coinage to promote their traditional Bactrian and Iranian heritage.[277]

In addition to Vima Taktu's portrayal of Mithra and his grandson, Kanishka, I will discuss four points below that highlight the significant role of Iranian religious tradition and culture in Kushan coinage. The first point is a valuable strand of thought relevant to religious practice in the Kushan Empire. According to Ghosh (2012: 1), Kushan kings propagated a cult devoted to worshipping the rulers as divine embodiments of the gods. This is first seen in Kajula Kadphises' reign (c. 50 CE), declaring himself as the "son of god", creating a filial connection to a divine source, echoing the practice of many ancient societies (Falk 2019: 44-45). This phrase shifted during Vima Takto's reign (c. 90 CE), as shown in Bactrian and Gāndhārī inscriptions, such as the Dasht-e Nāwūr, proclaiming himself as the "god worthy of worship" (Falk 2019: 45). The alteration from "son" of a god to a definite god continues into

[274] Shenkar 2015: Pl.19.
[275] Grenet 2010: Fig 3; after Göbl 1984: 170, type Rišto 1. Location unspecified.
[276] Bracey 2012: Fig. 7.9. (R158, BM1879.0501.12, G234/01). Location unspecified.
[277] Sinisi asserts that "traditional" is different to the "nomadic" style of the Scythian and Parthian rulers (Sinisi 2017: 911-912).

the following reign of Vima Kadphises (110-127 CE). Vima adjusted the phrase "son of the lord of the worlds" (Skt. *loka-iśvara-ja*) to the "lord of all worlds" and "lord of the earth" (Skt. *sarvalogaiśvarasa mahiśvarasa*) (Falk 2019: 28).[278]

This practice was also reflected in coinage, as Kushan kings are depicted with attributes reminiscent of gods, particularly those of Mithra, the Iranian solar deity. For instance, Vima Kadphises, Kanishka and Huvishka all depict their figures surfacing over rocks on their coinage (see Figure 3.2 [vi] and [vii]) (Falk 2019: 5). This symbology refers to Mithra's origin story, as the god is known to emerge from a rocky terrain (Falk 2019: 4). Therefore, as the kings portray themselves with Mithraic qualities and scenes, they demonstrate their familiarity and well-versed understanding of Iranian lore.[279]

vi) Three Coins of King Vima Kadphises, Kanishka, and Huvishka all depict themselves as emerging from the rocks, resembling the Iranian god Mithra. [280]
vii) (Far right) Iranian god, Yima, on King Huvishka's coin. [281]

Another example of their affinity with the Iranian pantheon is their portrayal of a local Iranian deity called Yima (Figure 3.2 [vii]). Such specific figures are not as random as we think. A study by Daryaee and Malekzadeh suggests that the Kushan kings were well-educated in Iranian lore and, as demonstrated above, based their royal image on Iranian legends. For example, King Huvishka portrays Yima, an exemplary Iranian king known in Avestan texts, whose reign was associated with abundance, peace and prosperity (Daryaee & Malekzadeh 2015: 110). Additionally, on Huvishka's coin, he is portrayed with a bird, which has been suggested to be a lark or a čakāvak. Middle Persian literature usually associates čakāvaks with music and devotional singing, as well as the heralding of answered prayers and the dawn of a new age (Daryaee & Malekzadeh 2015: 111-113). In this way, Daryaee and Malekzadeh suggest that King Huvishka utilised these Iranian elements to enhance his royal sovereignty, and by adopting Yima and the čakāvak, he portrays the beginning of an abundant and idyllic kingdom. The Iranian god Yima and the Mithraic scene depicted on the Kushan Kings' coinage are compelling examples of how the Kushans incorporated Iranian deities into their coinage.

[278] In this way, Kadphises uses terms that was only used for the deities in Sanskritic literature to refer to himself, therefore elevating himself to god-like status (Falk 2019: 28).
[279] It should be noted that other gods from Greek and Indian pantheons were also adopted to elevate the status and god-portrayal of Kushan rulers. See Chapter 2 on Brahmanism in Gandhāra and the Kushan Kings.
[280] Falk 2019: Fig. 3.a,b and c. (Triton 11, 369, CNG 100: 1657, and CNG 91: 459). Location unspecified.
[281] Daryaee & Malekzadeh 2015: Fig. 1. Location unspecified.

However, visual Iranian elements and motifs also appear to characterise deities and kings alike, rendering these figures with a distinctive Iranian character. According to Cribb (1998: 93), Iranian motifs are discernible in Kanishka's coinage. For instance, the Greek Helios and Iranian Mithra coinage (the same image but different names, see Figure 3.2 [viii]) exhibit Iranian visual elements. These include the halo surrounding their heads, their wavy hair tied with a diadem and ribbons, a long-sleeved tunic/dress with a sword attached at the belt/waistline, and the over-cloak tied at the chest.

viii) Two gold coins of Kanishka portraying a solar deity: Helios (left) and Mithra (right). The same figure, however, is identified with different names. [282]

ix) A coin of Kanishka portrayed with a caftan, pressed woollen boots, tiara/headdress and full beard. [283]

x) A coin of Vima Kadphises with a caftan, pressed woollen boots, tiara/headdress and full beard. [284]

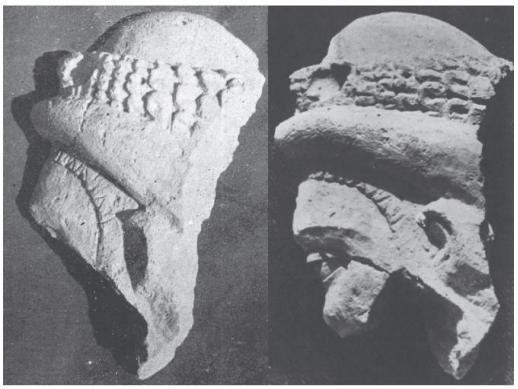
Perhaps Kanishka's Iranian garb can be attested to his father, the Kushan King, Vima Kadphises (110-127 CE). This particular ruler is credited with introducing the Iranian and Central Asian attire of Kushan kings to his coinage. Indeed, it is shown that after Vima Kadphises' reign, the Kushan kings continued this tradition, portraying a traditional knee-length tunic called a caftan, as well as thick, woollen boots, a long-shaped tiara/headdress, and most were depicted with a full beard (see Figure 3.2 [ix] and [x]) (Grenet 2012: 12). This began their disentangling from the primarily Greek/Roman portrayal of earlier Kushan kings and implementing their unique style to their royal image.[285] Grenet (2012) further explores this aspect and refers to it as a "nomadic" element of the Kushans, particularly in the dress of the rulers and their depictions. He asserts that the Kushans maintained a sense of pride in their "Iranian/nomadic origins" from studying this imagery.

However, Sinisi further explores the exact origins of such imagery (2017). His study found a visual correlation between Vima's coinage and the artistic depictions in the neighbouring Iranian kingdom, the Arsacids. He stresses that the visual aspects shared between these two kingdoms cannot be confined to coins, but also include other media sources, such as statues and friezes. For example, he notes that the similarity between Vima Kadphises' portrayal with a tiara and full beard is comparable to a stone relief of a king from Bard-e-Neshandeh, a site

[282] Bracey 2012: Fig. 7.1a. BM 1888.1208.537, MK25/1. and 1b. BM 1894.0506.16 MK31/3. Location unspecified.
[283] Grenet 2012: Fig. 8. Left. Location unspecified.
[284] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 36B. (CNG Triton X 9-1-2007, lot 469). Location unspecified.
[285] As mentioned before, the previous Kushan kings all introduced different imagery to their numismatics; Hēraos continued Indo-Scythian/Parthian and Greek style, Kajula Kadphises launched a style similar to Augustus' coinage in Rome (Falk 2019: 5-6); Vima Taktu/Soter Megas portrayed a mix of Roman, Iranian, Greek and Indian elements (Falk 2019: 11). (For a comprehensive discussion of their coinage, see Falk 2019: 5-31.)

in Western Iran, which depicts an Arsacid-Elymaean ruler wearing a similar tiara (see Figure 3.2 [xi]). This is compared to the stone friezes with tiaras in Greater Gandhāra (Figure 3.2 [xii]) (Sinisi 2017: 883, 893).[286] Sinisi also identified certain pictorial scenes, such as the ruler performing a sacrifice and holding or pouring over a fire burner, as motifs shared by both Kushan and Arsacid numismatics and art, as shown in Figures 3.2 (xiv) and (xv) (2017: 888). Even the Central Asian headdress of the Kushans is also shared with the Arsacids (see Figure 3.2 [xiii]).

Hence, the above examples demonstrate that Iranian visual elements played an active role in the imagery of Kushan deities and kings. The relationship between the Arsacid and Kushan empires also reflects the transmission of Iranian motifs and scenes, providing a better understanding of the factors that shaped the Kushan coins, which display a prominent Iranian flavour.



xi) Stone relief depicting an Arsacid-Elymean royal with a similar tiara/headdress performing a fire ritual. Bard-e-Neshandeh, Iran. [287]

xii) A Gandhāran stone relief from Lahore, Pakistan, depicting a Kushan royal patron wearing a tiara or headdress. Lahore Museum. [288]

xiii) A broken stone head with a ribbed pattern over the headdress, possibly depicting a wreath. Surkh Kotal, Afghanistan. [289]

Furthermore, detailed studies on the deities in the Kushan pantheon have observed a tendency for it to reflect the Iranian pantheon rather than the Greek. For example, Tanabe (1990) explored the iconographic origins of Anemos/Oado, the god of the wind. Tanabe first found that the iconography of this god was primarily based on the Hellenic pantheon. He also found that earlier issues portrayed the Greek name Anemos; in contrast, the later issues showed the Iranian name Oado (1990: 53). This is not surprising nor new, as we know that Kanishka first

[286] Although Sinisi notes that the tiaras of Vima Kadphises and the next Kushan rulers reflect their idiosyncrasies, their derivation from the Arsacids cannot be disputed.
[287] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 28. C.
[288] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 32. C.
[289] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 33. A-B. Location unspecified.

launched his coins with Greek names, then switched to Iranian names and that many Kushan deities are inspired by Greek iconography.

However, Bopeaerachchi's study (2020) provides a more detailed approach to exploring the identity of this wind deity. Based on Greek mythology, Bopearachchi defines Anemos or Anemoi as a group of winged deities with specific attributes linked to the winds of the earth (Bopearachchi 2020: 3). This is relevant to our study as the Kushan portrayal of the Anemos and Oado differ; the Greek Anemos is portrayed winged; however, the later issues depicting Iranian Oado are not (Bopearachchi 2020: 6). Thus, this suggests the disengagement from Hellenic mythology, reflecting the progression to an Iranian character.

In conjunction with this, Grenet's study (2015: 214) further explores Anemos and the purpose of Kanishka's other Greek deities, Helios, Selene, Hephaistos, and Nanaia. As mentioned, Kanishka's reign shifted to favour and worship Iranian deities. Grenet surmises that these deities were chosen because they reflect an ancient Iranian tradition of devotion to the elements.[290] According to Herodotus, the Persians were known to sacrifice to Zeus and worship the sun, the moon, fire, water, wind and earth (Grenet 2015: 214). Thus, Grenet suggests that Kanishka's motivation behind these Greek deities was to adhere to an Iranian tradition of element worship. Hence, Helios refers to the sun, Selene to the moon, Hephaestus to fire, Anemos to wind, and Nanaia to the earth and water.[291]

xiv) Bisutun stone carving of Arsacid ruler making a sacrifice. Kermanshah Province, Iran [292]
xv) The copper coin of Vima Kadphises, making a sacrifice. [293]

Another way the Kushans observed Iranian tradition is shown in the distinction between the moon gods in Greek and Iranian traditions. Selene, the moon deity in the Greek tradition, is female; in contrast, on Kushan coins, Selene is masculinised to Māo, most likely conforming to the masculinised Iranian moon god, Māh (Grenet 2015: 214).

[290] Grenet specifically suggests that the Greek word "Anemos" does not explicitly refer to a 'god of wind' but to the element of wind (2015: 214).
[291] As suggested by Grenet, Nana is portrayed holding a jug and an animal (mostly a stag with a lion's head), which symbolises water and earth (2015: 214).
[292] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 28. A.
[293] Sinisi 2017: Fig. 29. C. (Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung (152. 10-10-2006. Lot 1593). Location unspecified.

Whether there is a Greek or Iranian influence in Kushan imagery of kings and deities, it has been demonstrated that the latter should not be underestimated in its contribution to Kushan numismatics. As shown in this discussion, although the iconography of deities can incorporate Hellenistic elements, relevant Iranian features, such as the Mithraic display of kings, the portrayal of specific Iranian gods, and the representation of deities with specific Iranian elements, cannot be ignored. Acknowledging the unmistakable Iranian influence on the apparel of Kushan kings and the impact of outside sources, such as the Iranian kingdom of the Arsacids, is essential. Furthermore, a detailed study of the Kushan pantheon's basic structure reveals that the framework was again based on an Iranian tradition. Therefore, Iranian culture and religion played a substantial role in Kushan numismatics, as they provided the underlying framework of the Kushan pantheon.

Composite Deities in Kushan Coins

As each ruler demonstrated a unique approach to managing their reign and royal image, the scope of deities varied from monarch to monarch in the Kushan period. As shown above, Iranian deities were favoured prominently by Kushan rulers. However, another category of deities emerged at this time. Their identity and origins, whether Iranian, Greek, or Indian, have been the subject of extensive research. In particular, two examples, such as Weš and Manaobago and their affiliation with the Iranian tradition, are prominent examples.

xvi) A multi-armed seated Manaobago is shown with a Greek helmet, holding an Iranian diadem, Balarama's plough, Vāsudeva's wheel, and royal fillet. [294]

As Weš' and Manaobago's affiliation with the Iranian tradition was discussed in the previous chapter (see pages 65-67, 74), I will keep this summary short. Weš and Manaobago's names are of Iranian origin and incorporate valuable Iranian elements into their iconography. Yet like Weš' iconography, Manaobago is also portrayed with a variety of non-Iranian elements, such as a Greek helmet, two lunar crescents, his (multiple) hands hold a wheel (Balarama-Samkarsana), a plough (Vāsudeva), and a royal fillet (Hellenic) as portrayed in Figure 3.2 (xvii) (Grenet 2010: 89; Falk 2019: 35).

Based on linguistic and iconographical grounds, Manaobago's and Weš' attributes (the former explained in the previous chapter) derive from an Iranian tradition. Yet, as their iconographic makeup consists of Hellenic, Indian and Iranian elements, these deities are more likely to be "composite deities". By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of Manaobago and Weš,

[294] Falk 2019: Fig. 25a. (GM 240, 296). Location unspecified.

scholars can now appreciate the dynamic and layered identities of these gods, which embody various elements from the region's traditions. These elements are primarily derived from archetypal male deities, such as Śiva, Vayus, Zeus, Poseidon, and Herakles, across the Indian, Iranian, and Greek pantheons. Thus, by incorporating elements of the male deities across each pantheon, the Kushans facilitated a smooth transition to introduce these new, composite arch-male figures of veneration.

The motivation behind the formation of these deities is how the Kushans managed the diverse traditions of the land. These composite deities were fixed with specific attributes that were universally recognised and valued by each specific tradition (i.e. Śiva's water pot/Anahita's water vessel, the bull linked to Iranian Vayus and Śiva) (Taasob 2020: 97). Even combining these significant motifs as multiple instruments to a singular deity (Manaobago wielding Vasudeva's wheel, the Iranian diadem, the Greek royal fillet and Balarama's plough). Therefore, although Weš and Manaobago can be linguistically and iconographically linked to Iranian tradition, they were inspired by not one but multiple pantheons: Iranian, Indian and Greek.

3.3 Kushan Art and Temples

Iranian Elements in Buddhist Art

In contrast to coinage, Iranian deities in art and architecture feature very little in Gandhāra (Rosenfield 1967: 72; Rowan 2002: 36). During the Kushan period, Buddhist groups predominantly managed and produced fine examples of art and religious architecture in Gandhāra. Therefore, many of these artworks primarily depict Buddhist scenes and deities, and numerous architectural and religious spaces are associated with Buddhism. However, Gandhāra, known for its cultural hybridity and inclusion of non-Buddhist elements, does portray some examples of Iranian elements. Therefore, this section will be structured into two parts. I will first examine examples of Iranian elements in Buddhist art, primarily focusing on stone friezes and sculptures. Then, I will examine Iranian elements in non-Buddhist materials, including inscriptions and temples associated with Iranian tradition. Both these sections will explore the factors that supported and produced Iranian art and temples during this period.

As mentioned above, during the Kushan period, Buddhism was one of the principal vehicles that produced religious art, literature, and architecture in Gandhāra. Its relationship with other religions, such as Iranian traditions, certainly portrayed a syncretistic approach. Therefore, the examples below display Iranian elements, mostly deities, incorporated into the Buddhist narrative. The Kanishka Casket is one of the most famous Buddhist artifacts depicting Iranian deities. This is a 2nd century CE bronze perfume box from King Kanishka (127-150 CE). This casket (see Figure 3.3 [ii]) was discovered in the stūpa, also known as Kanishka's stūpa, in Shah-ji-ki-dheri, Peshawar.[295] The casket displays a central figure, a Kushan King (most likely Kanishka) crowned with wreaths by two Iranian deities, Mirro (Mithra), the solar deity, and Māo, the moon deity (see Figure 3.3 [i]) (Ghosh 2017b: 14; Scott 1990: 59; Loeschner

[295] This stūpa was first reported by Chinese writer Faxian (5th century CE), who described it as the tallest structure in India. Later, another Chinese traveller, Xuanzang (7th century CE), described its location in detail, helping modern-day researchers to find its remains (Asher 2012: 147).

2012: 33).[296] The Kharoṣṭhī inscription is translated below:

> *kaniṣ[kapu]re ṇagare [a]yaṃ gaṃdha[ka]raṃḍe + t (mahara)jasa kaṇi*
> *ṣkasa vihare mahasenasa saṃgharakṣitasa agiśala-navakarmiana*
> *deyadharme sarvasatvana hitasuhartha bhavatu*
> *acaryana sarvastivatina pratigrahe*
>
> In the city of Kaniṣkapura, this incense box… in the vihāra of the Great King Kaṇiṣka I by Mahāsena (and) Saṃgharakṣita (?) May this pious gift be for the welfare and happiness of all beings. For the acceptance of the Sarvāstivādin teachers [297]

Another significant aspect is the pinnacle; the casket depicts the Buddha flanked by two Brahmin figures, Indra and Brahma. Representing Iranian and Indian deities is significant for understanding non-Buddhist elements in Gandhāran art. As analysed by Dobbins (1968: 160; after Scott 1990: 59), the Brahmin deities pay homage to the Buddha, and the Iranians inaugurate the king; both Brahmanical and Iranian deities play a supportive role to the principal figures, i.e., Kanishka and the Buddha. Dobbins also points out that Mithra performs a sacred Iranian coronation ritual by placing two wreaths overhead (1968: 160). Therefore, regarding Iranian deities, this example first demonstrates the inclusion of Iranian deities and motifs in Buddhist art, but more importantly, their function as supportive links to the Kushan Kings.

i) Scene displaying King Kanishka crowned with wreaths by Iranian gods, Mirro (Mithra, the sun god) and Māo (moon god) on Kanishka's Casket. Peshawar Museum. [298]
ii) Kanishka's Casket. Peshawar Museum. [299]

Another relevant example is the portrayal of Iranian deities Ardaksho and Pharro. In Buddhist art, tutelary couples are usually represented by the Indian and local deities Pancika and Hārītī. Pancika, also known as Skanda or Vaiśravana, is an Indian war god, and Hārītī is a well-known local and Buddhist female goddess, typically recognised for her dual nature: a fierce

[296]Huvishka's coins display the dual deity Mirro-Māo, perpetuating the supportive role of the Iranian deities connected to the Kushan rulership and royal propaganda (Scott 1990: 59).
[297] Skinner 2017: 271.
[298] Loeschner 2012: Fig. 31.
[299] Rosenfield 1967: Fig. 60.

and benevolent, motherly character. These two deities appear as a tutelary couple, representing military security, fecundity, and prosperity. However, Pancika and Hārītī's identification is usually difficult to distinguish as they share many iconographic and symbolic values with their Iranian counterparts, Pharro and Ardaksho. As pointed out by Rowen, Iranian deities also generally appear in Buddhist art in already established roles, i.e., the divine couple of Pancika and Hārītī (2002: 36). The question now arises: How can we ensure that the examples we are studying display the Iranian deities, Pharro and Ardaksho?

iii) Huvishka's gold coin with classical Ardoksho. [300]
iv) Drawing of Huvishka's coin with Ardoksho holding cornucopia. [301]

According to Rosenfield's and Rowan's studies on Kushan coins in Gandhāra (Rosenfield 1967: 74; Rowan 2002: 36), Pharro and Ardaksho's numismatic image was an instance where the Gandhāran coin image was mirrored in sculpture. Specifically, Ardaksho's numismatic image (Figure 3.3 [iii] and [iv]) shares features similar to those of Nana, whose image, as discussed above, was inspired by the Hellenic Tyche and Demeter, a woman with a classical form, holding a cornucopia and a diadem, occasionally accompanied by wheat stalks (Rosenfield 1967: 74; Kreidl & Choksy 2021: 26-27).

Pharro, on the other hand, is a male god with flaming shoulders and a winged hat. He holds a staff or raises his hand with an upturned forefinger (Rosenfield 1967: 96; Kreidl & Choksy 2021: 43). At times, he is also depicted wearing knee-high boots, holding a money bag, or offering a fire vessel (as shown in Figure 3.3 [v] and [vi]).

[300] Kreidl & Choksy 2021: Fig. 2. Location unspecified.
[301] Stančo 2015: Fig. 374. Location unspecified.

v) Huvishka's gold coin depicts Pharro with flaming shoulders and outreached hand with raised forefinger. [302]
vi) Drawing of Kanishka's reverse gold coin with Pharro, holding a money bag and a spear/staff. [303]

The attributes of both Ardaksho and Pharro are recognisable in the statue friezes found in Gandhāran Buddhist art. For example, in the frieze found in Takhti-i-Bāhi (Figure 3.3 [vii]) these two deities are portrayed. Ardaksho is surrounded by genii, holding a cornucopia filled with fruit, and the end shows an antelope head. Pharro is depicted with a kylix and accompanied by a minor deity holding a money bag (Rosenfield 1967: 247; Lyons 1957: 147). Bachhofer (1937: 13) proposed that the Iranian deities chosen to represent the beneficiary couple are not random; the Kushans intentionally selected them as a political statement to counter the rising popularity of Indian deities.

However, other researchers have contradicted this idea (Rosenfield 1967: 247; Rowan 2002: 88) as the Kushans depicted Iranian and several Indian deities in their coinage, showing their support for many traditions and also fusing many cultural elements, creating hybridised deities that characterise the Kushan pantheon.

Contrary to Bacchofer, Rowan (2002: 88) suggests that by using Iranian and Indian gods to represent the divine couple, the Kushans drew on elements from both traditions. For example, by representing Iranian deities, the Kushans implemented a prominent Iranian belief known as kingly glory or khavareno, which refers to the gods bequeathing their holy consecration upon the Kushan rulers (Rowan 2002: 91).

[302] Kreidl & Choksy 2021: Fig. 11. Location unspecified.
[303] Stančo 2015: Fig. 383. Location unspecified.

vii) Tutelary couple showing Iranian gods, Pharro (wearing knee-high boots with a tunic, holding a kylix and facing a minor deity with a money bag) and Ardaksho (holding a cornucopia) from Takhti-i-Bāhi. British Museum. [304]

viii) Tutelary couple showing Iranian gods, Pharro (holding money bag and staff) and Ardaksho (holding cornucopia) from Sahri Bahlol. Lahore Museum. [305]

Another relevant example of Iranian deities in Buddhist art is a Buddhist frieze displaying Oado, the Iranian god of the wind. From Kushan coinage (Figure 3.3 [ix]) to the statue form (Figure 3.3 [x]), Oado is portrayed within an oval shape, representing the element of wind. In this statue example, two other figures, dressed in Indo-Scythian-style clothing, stand beside Oado as they pay homage to the Buddha (Rosenfield 1967: 72).

The Kanishka Casket, along with the statues and examples of Pharro, Ardaksho, and Oado, reveal three significant factors. First, coinage influenced the imagery of Iranian gods in statues and friezes in Gandhāra. Second, we can see the absorption of non-Buddhist elements in Gandhāran Buddhist art. This is not an innovative revelation, as Gandhāran Buddhist art is known for its hybrid character and absorption of non-Buddhist elements. However, as Iranian deities are shown as subsidiary figures compared to the Buddha, these examples demonstrate Buddhism's capacity to absorb yet subjugate other religious traditions. Lastly, these examples reveal the royal function of Iranian deities as the divine advocates of Kushan sovereignty.

[304] Rosenfield 1967: Fig. 78.
[305] Lyons 1957: Fig. 345.

ix) Oado displayed on King Kanishka's gold coin. Private Collection. [306]

x) Oado is shown beside Indo-Scythian men, who are likely paying tribute to the Buddha. [307]

However, other examples of Iranian elements in Buddhism are more complex to identify and understand, such as the fire ritual scenes in Buddhist art (see Figure 3.3 [xi]). These fire scenes are usually portrayed on the base platform, underneath a statue of a seated Buddha, and their exact meaning has sparked debate. Researchers have discussed the interpretation behind these scenes at length, offering valuable insights into this ritual, its connection to the Buddha, and what it reveals about the practices of the people in Gandhāra. The following sections will explore whether these scenes demonstrate Iranian, Buddhist, or Brahmanic practices.

To begin with, I will discuss Falk's study (2008), which explored the relevance of fire rituals in Buddhism by studying Buddhist reliquaries. This study identified burnt objects inside these offered Buddhist relics. As he researched further, Falk found evidence of burnt jewellery and precious stones at various stūpa sites in Taxila and Gandhāra (Falk 2008: 74). By studying the archaeological evidence, Falk suggests that these fire ritual scenes reflect the ritual of burning offerings dedicated to the Buddha.

Other researchers, such as Verardi (1994) and, by extension, Tadikonda (2007), claim these fire scenes represent an Indianized ritual not affiliated with Iranian religious practices. In more detail, Verardi's research suggests that these fire scenes portray the Buddhist fire rituals (Skt. *homa*), which involve lighting a fire, offering and burning grains, and reciting mantras, as elucidated in later Buddhist texts (Verardi 1994: 17-18).

[306] Bopearachchi 2020: Fig. 1.
[307] Rosenfield 1967: Fig. 76. Location unspecified.

xi) Fire scene below fasting and seated Buddha in meditation posture (Skt. *dhyānamudrā*). Lahore Museum. [308]

However, in Tadikonda's paper, he suggests the scenes are reminiscent of worshipping the Vedic god Agni as the Buddha. He proposes that the symbology of fire with the seated Buddha displays a syncretism of Brahmin and Buddhist iconographies (Tadikonda 2007: 41-42). Therefore, this suggests that the fire scenes portray the worship of the Buddha through fire, i.e. Agni, as the same.

The papers provided by Falk, Verardi, and Tadikonda offer a valuable interpretation of the fire scenes; however, Bivar (2005) provides a more nuanced approach to understanding them. Bivar's first point is purely theoretical; however, it holds ground, as he suggests that during this period, Gandhāran Buddhism regularly incorporated foreign elements into its art, specifically non-Buddhist deities. Thus, the idea that Buddhist artists portray a non-Buddhist religious practice, such as a fire ritual scene, to a demographic well-versed in Iranian culture, i.e., Zoroastrianism, suggests that the most obvious interpretation is usually correct.

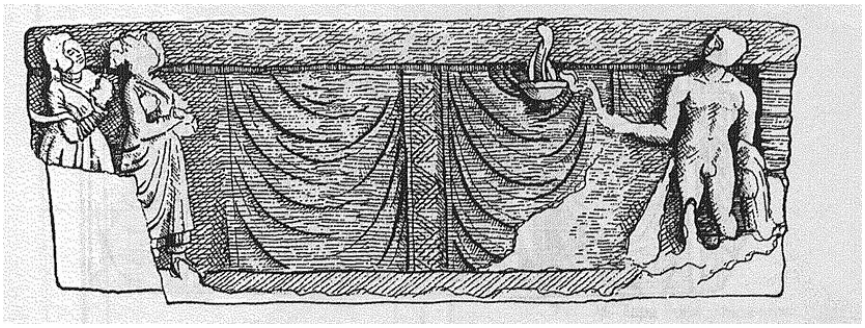
Yet, although Bivar maintains that Verardi and Tadikonda's analysis is still relevant, he claims that the variety of fire scenes can be interpreted in multiple ways. Thus, his paper presents a specific example, portraying the Greek hero Herakles (see Figure 3.3 [xii]). He asserts that this example can be linked to Iranian religious practices. For instance, Bivar (2005: 37) claims that Sassanian Persian fire rituals were closely affiliated with the Iranian god Vahrun/Verethragna (or Artagne). Vahrun is an Iranian deity representing triumph and success, which also aligns with the attributes of the Greek hero Herakles. With these similar attributes, both gods underwent a degree of syncretism in Hellenic-Iranian kingdoms during the early common era. This is illustrated by the inscription of Antiochus of Commagne at Nimrud Dagh in Turkey, dating to the 1st century BCE, which shows the shared identity of

[308] Tadikonda 2007: Fig. 1 & 2.

Herakles and Vahrun (also known as Artagne).

> Wherefore, as you see, I have set up these divine images (agalmata) of Zeus Oromasdes and of Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes and of **Artagnes-Heracles-Ares** and also of my all-nourishing homeland Commagene [309]

Thus, the portrayal of Herakles in Gandhāran fire ritual scenes is not a mere coincidence but, as Bivar suggests, mirrors the Sassanian Persian fire rituals, which are thus affiliated with Iranian religious practices linked to Zoroastrian cults (2005: 37).



xii) Relief of Herakles holding a lit torch and two female devotees. Lahore Museum. [310]

xiii) Practitioners are performing fire rituals for the Bodhisattva. Collection de Marteau, Brussels. [311]

Falk, Verardi, Tadikonda, and Bivar's papers present convincing arguments, yet despite their efforts, a unanimous academic decision has yet to be reached. In creating these fire depictions, Gandhāran artists intended to portray a ritual scene; however, the type of religious practice depicted cannot be identified. However, in light of the above papers, it is sufficient to say that this topic has been granted a diplomatic conclusion (Bivar 2005: 39). It is significant

[309] Boyce et al (1991: 323). Agalmata refers to a Greek statue.
[310] Verardi 1994: Fig. 31.
[311] Verardi 1994: Fig. 25.

to remember that just because these scenes portray fire or a fire altar, it does not mean they all represent the same narrative. In some instances, Brahmin/Buddhist devotees pour oil into the fire, while others portray Herakles lighting a lamp, and some are empty of devotees. In a highly diverse region such as Gandhāra, a universal practice like fire worship in art cannot be interpreted so fixedly to represent a single religious group. The density of religious practices in this region is layered and complex, and analysing these scenes with their nuance and the detail they represent is much more valuable. The question of whether these fire scenes are Vedic, Buddhist, or Iranian does not resolve our question; we must be aware that designating only one religious practice for this art category seriously strips away the meaning of their storytelling and a chance to understand what is being portrayed in this art piece. Therefore, until more data emerges and additional studies are published, it is essential to acknowledge that such a ubiquitous ritual warrants a more open-minded approach.

The Rabatak Inscription

A few valuable non-Buddhist inscriptions and temples have yielded precious information on the Iranian religious practices in Gandhāra. One of these is the Rabatak Inscription, an ancient text discovered in the Rabatak region of Afghanistan in 1993, alongside other disarticulated sculptural and building fragments (Cribb 1999: 179). When first deciphered, this ancient Bactrian text shed light on many aspects of Kushan history.[312] However, in our study of Iranian religious elements, this inscription revealed the close and interconnected relationship between Kushan kings and the deities they worshipped. For example, lines 7-11 demonstrate King Kanishka's order to construct a temple with the following images of the gods (see page 79 for the inscription).

This statement encompasses three aspects that require further exploration. Firstly, most of the gods mentioned are either Iranian or uniquely Kushan.[313] Secondly, Kanishka's order to construct a temple for these gods shows their affiliation with the royal Kushan elite and that there are indeed temples associated with Iranian deities. Thirdly, there is a syncretism between the Iranian/Kushan deity Sroshard, Narasa and the Indian Mahāsena/Viśākha. I will first explore the gods in question and discuss their Iranian identities and how they are represented in coinage and other materials. Then, I will continue to discuss Iranian gods in temples and the syncretism between Iranian and Indian gods in Gandhāra.

The first god mentioned in the Rabatak Inscription is Nana. This particular goddess has already been discussed at length in this paper, and for good reason: she is the arch-deity of the Kushan pantheon. Her origins have been extensively researched with cuneiform sources confirming Nana's earliest presence in Mesopotamia (Potts 2001: 25). Gradually, her worship spread to Bactria as confirmed by a Scythian iron belt and Seleucid plaque, depicting a goddess travelling astride a lion or pulled by a lion-chariot (Ghose 2006b: 98). Progressively absorbed in Gandhāra during the Kushan period (Ghose 2006b: 99); her image adopted elements from other goddess types, and she began to appear on coinage (Figure 3.3 [xiv]), holding diadems, cross-bows, sceptres and swords (Potts 2001: 25-26). Her identity is often

[312] For example, Kushan chronology, the lineage of rulers, and the proclamations of conquests and successes during King Kanishka's reign.
[313] Kushan, meaning the Kushans have created them based on the elements of Iranian or other deities. Additionally, although Nana has Near Eastern origins, her cult spread to Gandhāra, and in this process, her identity and imagery merged with those of Iranian Ardaksho and Umma/Umā. Therefore, although her origins are Near Eastern, her identity absorbed other elements from Iranian, Hellenic and Indian traditions.

merged with other goddess types such as Ardaksho/Anahita, Cybele/Artemis, Omma/Ūma, Lakṣmi and Durga in coinage and art (Potts 2001: 26-27; Ghose 2006a: 263; Ghose 2006b: 98).

Particularly with the goddess Umā, whom both share the role as arch-deity in the Kushan pantheon, they also share the role of companion to Weš/Śiva in numismatics (Figure 2.4 [xxxv]). Despite their similarities, the iconography of their statues differs slightly (Grenet 2015: 210; Ghose 2006b: 99; Samad 2020: 203). According to Ghose, Nana's appearance in statues and numismatics in Gandhāra usually portrays her holding a sceptre (or a sword) and sitting with a lion at her feet (Ghose 2006a: 260-261).

Like Umā, who incorporated Graeco-Iranian and Indic elements into her iconographic makeup, Nana also demonstrates a blend of Indian and Hellenic elements in her portrayal in Gandhāran art. For example, in an ivory artefact from Gandhāra, Nana was displayed in a *lalitāsana* pose (Figure 3.3 [xv]); in another schist statue, she is portrayed wearing a garland with a lotus (Figure 3.3 [xvi]) (Ghose 2006a: 260-261).

xiv) Nanaia is on King Kanishka's gold coin (reverse). 2nd century CE. The goddess is displayed with a halo, a lunar crescent, and a sceptre with a lion protome. British Museum. [314]

[314] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 6.

xv) Nana sitting in *lalitāsana* pose on a lion. 2nd century CE. Ashmolean Museum. [315]
xvi) Nana sits on a lion with a sceptre and lotus garland. 2nd century CE. Sherrier Collection. [316]

The Rabatak Inscription also reveals Nana's significant role in the legitimacy of Kushan rule. In lines 1-2, Nana is declared the bestower of their kingship and rightful claim to rule.

> …the great salvation, Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god worthy of worship, who has obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods [317]

Additionally, as explored above in Bracey's table[318] Nana is the most featured deity in Kanishka's coins and the fourth most popular (Iranian) god in Huvishka's coins. King Huvishka's coin further supports this by showing the monarch bowing to Nana (Figure 3.3 [xvii]).

[315] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 15.
[316] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 16.
[317] Sims Williams 2004: 55-56.
[318] See Figure 3.2 [ii]. (Bracey 2012: 203).

xvii) King Huvishka kneeling before Nana, holding a sceptre. [319]

As shown in the above examples, Nana was an extremely prevalent deity during the Kushan period. She is portrayed as a consort to Weš on coinage and statues, which may have influenced the iconographic development of the Śiva and Durga's iconography in later periods (Potts 2001: 27). Although Weš is not mentioned in the Rabatak inscription, another similar deity known as Muždhuwan, "the Gracious one", is amongst the revered personages (Shenkhar 2015: 115). The exact identity of Muždhuwan is more ambiguous, as he does not originate from the Zoroastrian/Iranian pantheon (Grenet 2010: 89). However, he seems to be a unique Kushan deity, sharing similar iconographic attributes with Weš and Śiva, while also reflecting the same iconographic features of the Kushan kings (Figure 3.3 [xviii]). The imagery of this figure is typically depicted as bearded, wearing Kushan headgear, riding a two-headed steed, and holding a trident, as shown in Figure 3.3 (xix) (Shenkhar 2015: 114; Grenet 2010: 89; Kreidl & Choksy 2021: 33).

xviii) Reverse gold coin of King Kanishka I displaying Muždhuwan. British Museum. [320]
xix) Reverse coin of Soter Megas (Vima Taktu) coin portraying the king himself or Mithra on a horse, holding a sword. [321]

[319] Ghose 2006b: Fig. 7d.
[320] Grenet 2010: Fig. 7.
[321] Falk 2019: Fig. 5.b. Location unspecified.

Research into Muždhuwan's identity has suggested his connection to other gods in the Kushan pantheon, such as Ahura Mazda and Weš/Śiva. As for the former, Ahura Mazda (Aurmauzd), the supreme deity of the Zoroastrian cult, is rarely featured in coinage except on one gold coin of Huvishka (Grenet 2015: 210). His mention in the Rabatak inscription alongside Muždhuwan testifies to their distinction.

However, regarding Weš, studies of the coin mints confirm that Muždhuwan and Weš were indeed distinct deities. Bracey's study on mints used during the Kushan period demonstrates that the Muždhuwan mint was already used when Weš' mint was introduced (Bracey 2012: 206). However, additional research has associated Muždhuwan with Śiva, as he holds a trident (an element also shared with Weš). As explored in the previous chapter, although the trident is a popular element in Hellenic tradition, it is also a valued symbol in Indian literature linked to high gods such as Śiva, Rudra and Skanda [322] (Falk 2019: 20). Additionally, researchers have also suggested that the two-headed horse symbolises a Rudra-Śiva personage (Grenet 2010: 89; Kreidl & Choksy 2021: 34). The fact that neither Śiva nor Weš are mentioned in the Rabatak inscription further suggests Muždhuwan's identification with them.

Another interpretation of Muždhuwan's identity is that he represents a deified Kushan king (Shenkar 2015: 115). This is because the figure shares features similar to those of the Kushan kings, such as headgear, diadem, and royal attire. Although Kanishka is never depicted astride a horse (Shenkhar 2015: 115), previous Kushan kings, such as Soter Megas, have portrayed themselves riding a steed. This is shown in Figure 3.3 (xix), the Soter Megas coin, although the figure has also been suggested to portray Mithra (Falk 2019: 7).

This brings the discussion to Mithra or Mirro/Mihir in the Rabatak Inscription. He is one of the primary deities in the Iranian Zoroastrian pantheon. He first appeared in Soter Megas' coinages and again in Kanishka's, becoming a well-known and established deity in the Kushan pantheon. Recognisable by his familiar sun rays and Mithraic cap, his identity is well-attested in coinage.

To conclude the inscription analysis, the last deities in question are Sroshard, Mahāsena, Viśākha and Narasa. Bracey (2012: 206) contends that the latter, Narasa, although attested as a separate Avestan god, shares many iconographical similarities with Sroshard, rendering them the same. This leaves us with Iranian Sroshard, Indian Mahāsena, and Viśākha.

The last section of the Rabatak Inscription clearly states a parallelism between Iranian and Indian gods; Sroshard, an Avestan military god known for his strength and role as a defender of the world (Shenkar 2015: 146), and the Indian god of war Mahāsena (and Viśākha). Although Sroshard is not attested in Kushan coinage, there is evidence of Mahāsena (or Maaseno) and his other variations of names, i.e. Viśākha and Skanda-Kumara (Shenkar 2015: 145-146; Bracey 2012: 206; Samad 2020: 173-174).

Yet the Rabatak Inscription's ambiguity has been questioned, especially by Mann (2011: 136-137), who addresses the challenges to understanding Mahāsena's position and relationship

[322] Although Falk asserts that in some instances, the trident (Skt. *triśula*) can be interpreted as the *paṭṭiśa*, a weapon wielded by Rudra and Skanda (Falk 2019: 20).

with other gods. However, based on the study of Kushan coins, Mann concurs that syncretism is visible between the Indic gods, such as Viśākha and Skanda-Kumara.

Indeed, as discussed on pages 77-78, comparing various coins of Mahāsena, Viśākha and Skanda-Kumara shows how closely aligned these Indic gods were (Samad 2020: 173-177). However, another interpretation, proposed by Mann (2011: 139-140), suggests that due to Mahāsena's central positioning in the trio and his slightly larger frame compared to the two side figures, his overarching importance among other Indic gods is implied.

Although there are variations in interpretation, the relationship between these Indic gods, Skanda-Kumara, Viśākha, and Mahāsena, is nevertheless closely aligned. Additionally, studying coinage is valuable to understanding religious pantheons because it reveals that smaller-scale assimilations occur within a larger system of syncretism, i.e., between Indian Mahāsena and Iranian Sroshard. This way, we can understand how Kushan rulers approached their kingdom's religious and cultural diversity and how they brought together Iranian and Indian traditions.

Therefore, there is a clear syncretism between Sroshard, Narasa, Mahāsena, and Viśākha, as the inscription perceives these gods as a singular war-like, military deity. Even so, Mahāsena and Viśākha also demonstrate a case of internal syncretism with other variations of Indian gods, such as Skanda and Kubera, showing that Mahāsena is closely identified with Iranian deities as well as a collection of Indian ones. Therefore, the Rabatak inscription and Kushan coinage reveal that syncretism functioned on varying levels: within and between religious traditions.

The *devakula/bagolango* in Gandhāra

Although we know that most of the architectural and artistic remains were produced by Buddhist groups, there are also examples of non-Buddhist temples and art objects. For instance, as explored above, the Rabatak Inscription clearly states that the Kushan emperors issued sacred structures dedicated to venerating their deities and rulers. Five have been identified over the vast empire of the Kushans: Surkh Kotal, Rabatak, Ayrtam, Kalchayan and Maṭ (Bracey 2012: 205-209).[323] They are known by their Bactrian term, *bagolango*, or the Sanskrit and Pali term *devakula* (Ghosh 2017b: 12). These structures were referred to as god houses or temples, serving a dual religious and political purpose, which will be explored below.

Although the Ayrtam and Kalchayan sites, as well as the Maṭ temple in Mathura, sit outside Gandhāra proper, they are relevant to our understanding of *devakulas*.

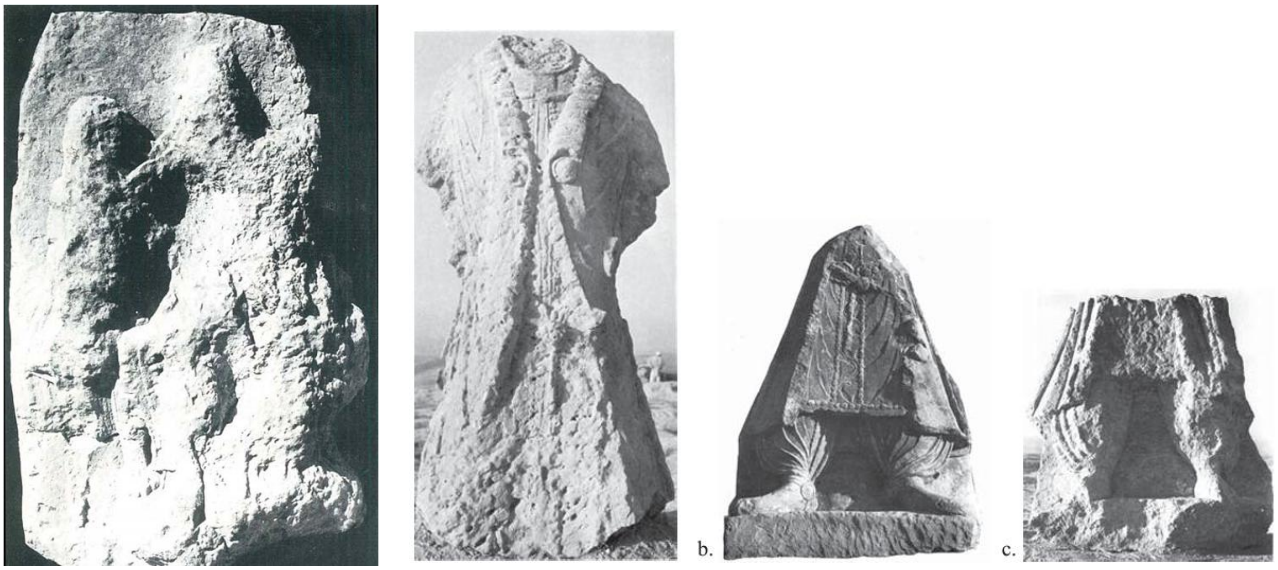
For example, the Ayrtam site, located south of Uzbekistan, contains an inscription based on a statue depicting a male and female figure. It details the construction of the statues of the divine couple, Pharro and Ardaksho (Bracey 2012: 208). Kalchayan has yielded no inscriptions; however, multiple disarticulated sculptural pieces have been found. Cribb

[323] Three other sites also yield evidence of temples dedicated to Iranian or local deities; however, they are located outside Gandhāra proper. Two are located in Afghanistan: Dil'berdzhin (the Temple of Dioscuri; Grenet also suggests that the temple is devoted to Weš, 2015: 230) and Takhti-i Sangin (a temple dedicated to the Oxus River deity) (Grenet 2015: 229-230). One site in Uzbekistan, Dal'verzintepe, features evidence of a shrine with terracotta figurines, suggesting a cultic, ritualised space. However, Grenet has also stated that this area can be interpreted as Buddhist (Grenet 2015: 230-231).

suggests that the finding of a male and female deity may represent Nana and Mithra (Cribb 1995: 109; after Bracey 2012: 206). Regarding the Maṭ temple in Mathura, statues of the gods and Kushan rulers have been discovered. The identification of a female statue with a lion in the backdrop has been suggested to represent Nana (Rosenfield 1967: 150; after Ghose 2006b: 99). However, it was also first proposed by Agrawala to represent Durgā (1949: 152) after Ghose 2006b: fn. 44). Other statues found in Maṭ include the portrayal of Kushan rulers such as Kanishka and Vima Taktu (Skinner 2017: 57, 89).

Temple sites in Greater Gandhāra include Surkh Kotal and Rabatak, found in modern-day Afghanistan. The Rabatak site has yet to be excavated (Grenet 2015: 209); however, the Rabatak inscription provides literary evidence of the sacred deities constructed in the Rabatak temple: Nana, Umma, Aurmauzd (Ahura Mazda), Muždhuwan, and Sroshard, otherwise known as Mahāsena (Narasa and Viśākha).

On the other hand, the site of Surkh Kotal is a large complex surrounded by a *peribolos*, measuring 75 metres on each side, with the entrance opened by an impressive staircase reaching 55 metres in height (Schlumberger 1959: 82; Rosenfield 1967: 154). This site provides evidence of eroded steles and statues with inscriptions, which have contributed to our understanding of the site. For example, according to an inscription inside the temple, it was referred to as a "Victorious Kanishka shrine" (Ghosh 2012: 214). However, the construction of this structure began with Vima Kadphises (110-127 CE), who initiated the infrastructure (Ghosh 2017b: 13), and was later continued and completed by Kanishka (127-150 CE). Among the assemblages in this temple, a poorly preserved stele (Figure 3.3 [xx]) believed to depict a seated Kushan King, attributed to Vima I Taktu (50-90 CE), and a standing figure, most likely King Huvishka, were found (Olivieri & Sinisi 2021: 144-147).



xx) (Left) A poorly preserved stele found in Surkh Kotal, suggested to portray a seated Kushan King (Vima Taku) beside a standing figure (proposed to be King Huvishka). Sub-Regional Office collection of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar. [324]

[324] Olivieri & Sinisi 2021: Fig. 2.

xxi) (Right) Three statues of Kushan Kings found in Surkh Kotal. Kabul Museum. [325]

Alongside this stele, three statues were found (Figure 3.3 [xxi]); two were broken but still revealed the lower part of the legs of the Kushan kings, and another badly eroded statue was recovered. These kings have been identified as King Huviskha (150-187 CE), Kanishka (127-150 CE) and Vima Kadphises (110-127 CE) (Olivieri & Sinisi 2021: 148-152). Studying the Rabatak Inscription further highlights a significant aspect of the royal Kushan practices: the sanctification and deification of kings. Based on Sims William's translation, we understand that Kanishka ordered the statues of kings to be constructed alongside the figures of the deities.

> And he gave orders to make the images the same (namely of these) gods who are inscribed thereupon and he gave orders to make images of these kings: King Kujula Kadphises, (his) great grandfather, and King Vima Taktu (his) grandfather, and king Vima Kadphises (his) father, and himself, King Kanishka [326]

In this way, we understand that these *devakulas* were spaces of worship reserved for the Kushan deities and the previous Kushan kings (Ghosh 2017b: 12-13).

Another significant aspect of these *devakulas* is their proximity to water. Sims-Williams (2012) translated the building inscription found in Surkh Kotal and reported that the eventual breakdown of the temple's irrigation system led to the structure's abandonment and the relocation of the gods' statues.

> When the citadel was first completed, it did not require (an) internal water (supply), but the citadel was waterless, and when there was an attack by enemies, then the gods were displaced from (their) seat, then they were taken to the stronghold (of) Lraf and the citadel was abandoned [327]

According to Sims-Williams' translation, the temple was later repaired by Nukunzuk, a close official of the Kushan kings, Vima Kadphises, Kaṇishka and Huvishka (Skinner 2017: 97). Although the inscription asserts that the gods' images returned after the reparation, no statue or stele of a deity has been identified in the assemblage at Surkh Kotal. The Rabatak temple was also referred to as "God's water" in the Rabatak Inscription:

> Then King Kaniṣka I ordered Shafar, the lord of the marches, to make in this place the temple which is called "**God's water**," in the Kasig plains…[328]

According to Bracey, water is a necessary attribute for these temples. As shown in the Surkh Kotal inscription, once the water system site became redundant, the gods were moved until it was repaired. Another example can be found in the inscription at Artyam, a site outside of Greater Gandhāra (Bracey 2012: 208). The inscription mentions the "waterless" stronghold,

[325] Olivieri & Sinisi 2021: Fig. 8a-c.
[326] Line 11-14 of Rabatak Inscription. Tr. Sims-Williams 2004: 56-57.
[327] Tr. Sims-Williams 2012: 78. Lraf refers to Drapsaka, a Greek city in Bactria.
[328] Skinner 2012: 257; See Sims-Williams 2004: 63 for linguistic discussion; 55-57 for translation.

rendering this site unsuitable for the gods.

> King [is] Ooesko (Huvishka), the Era year is 30 when the lord king presented and had the Ardaksho Pharro image set up here. At that time when the stronghold was completed then Sodila ... the treasurer was sent to the sanctuary. There upon Sodila had this image prepared, then he [is] who had [it] set up in the stronghold. **Afterwards when the water moved farther away, then the divinities were led from the waterless stronghold**. **Just therefore, Sodila had a well dug, then Sodila had a water conduit dug in the stronghold.** Thereupon both divinities returned back here to the sanctuary. This was written by Miirozada by the order of Sodila [329]

Indeed, holy sanctuaries relying on a water source are also seen in other locations, such as Dilberjin, in northern Afghanistan outside of Greater Gandhāra. The inscriptions, as translated by Harmatta et al. (1994: 416-417), tell us that Vima Kadphises dedicated a sanctuary to the worship of Weš. However, once the temple lacked water, the king ordered the workers to construct a well to appease the gods and prevent them from leaving (Harmatta et al. 1994: 416).

Considering the above examples, Bracey proposes that although our evidence of *devakulas* mainly derives from inscriptions, we now understand three noteworthy aspects of these sacred structures. One is that these temples were intended to venerate both Iranian deities and past and present Kushan rulers. In this way, the Kushan kings effectively fostered their divine status by utilising temples and sculptures, thereby developing a royal cult in all but name (Mukherjee 2004: 280; after Chakraborty 2024: 333). The second is the significant function of water. As an essential feature of *devakulas*, Kushan kings constructed sanctuaries near bodies of water or founded wells at the site, thereby perpetuating the temple's ceremonial and ritual purpose. The third aspect is the number of sanctuaries across the kingdom. The inscriptions suggest that there were several *devakulas* in the Kushan landscape.

By studying *devakulas* in more detail and examining inscriptions more closely, we can understand that sanctuaries dedicated to Iranian gods were often associated with water and the deification of past and present Kushan rulers. It demonstrates that the liaison between the Iranian deities and the Kushan kings was inextricable. By dedicating a temple to an Iranian god, the kings also took the opportunity to create an avenue of devotion directed at themselves, the Kushan monarchs. As Ghosh suggests, this kingly deification could be accessible to all of the communities in the realm and aimed to establish a common religious ground among the empire's traditionally diverse communities (2017b: 13).

3.4 Conclusion

The timeline of Gandhāra's history, from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, demonstrates that Iranian religious traditions peaked during the Kushan period (1st-3rd century CE). However, the early beginnings of Gandhāra's history indicate that the first seeds of Iranian culture were planted when the Achaemenids took over in the 6th century BCE. They imported Iranian pottery, language, and religion to Gandhāra, where they ruled until the arrival of the Macedonian armies led by Alexander in the 4th century BCE. The next era witnessed a tumultuous period of three different powers invading Gandhāra within a short

[329] Bracey 2012: 208.

period: Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, and Indo-Parthian, which produced various coin images. Namely, in Indo-Greek coins, Iranian deities appear as syncretised forms with Hellenic gods (e.g., Mithra-Zeus). The early era of Gandhāra demonstrates that Iranian culture was established among the diverse plethora of religious communities, although it was not as widely adopted as Greek or Indian traditions.

Yet, from the 1st-3rd century CE, two significant forces emerged that would elevate the significance of Iranian religious elements and strengthen their foothold in Gandhāran history: the Kushans and the rising power of Buddhism. This period saw Iranian deities and culture take centre stage as the Kushans nominated Iranian gods as the patrons of their dynasty. In particular, their coinage reflected an Iranian-influenced theme and dress, again evoking their Bactrian-Iranian lineage. Alongside this, the Kushan rulers also constructed temples that surrounded the worship of Iranian deities and the Kushan kings, elevating the monarchs to a divine-like status on par with their Iranian gods. The reason behind this, as mentioned above, was to enhance their legacy from Bactria, where the early Kushans, the Yüeh-zhi, were first exposed to Iranian traditions and later adopted them in the 2nd century BCE (Skinner 2017: 26).

However, this does not mean that the Kushan monarchs were limited to Iranian culture; the Kushans supported a wide range of traditions throughout their various reigns. Yet, we can identify four prominent rulers who boosted Iranian religious elements: Sōtēr Megas (Vima Taktu), Vima Kadphises, King Kanishka, and Huvishka. These rulers were significant in producing coins, art and temples dedicated to Iranian religious deities. They employed a range of strategies to make these Iranian deities familiar and welcome to the diverse eyes of their kingdom. For example, Kanishka's transition from Greek to Iranian gods in his coins establishes a syncretic equivalence between Greek and Iranian pantheons. This is also demonstrated in the parallelism between Sroshard and Mahāsena in the Rabatak Inscription.

The second highly influential factor that elevated Iranian tradition in Gandhāra was Buddhism. Buddhism was the primary influence that shaped religious art and architecture during the Kushan period. However, it also employed a syncretic approach, incorporating elements of Iranian culture, particularly in Buddhist art. Therefore, we find examples of Iranian deities portrayed as subsidiary figures to the Buddha (Māo, Mirro [Mithra], and Oado) or assuming an already established role (Pharro-Ardaksho and Pancika-Hariti). Although we only have a few examples, they demonstrate the unique, hybridised face of Iranian deities interwoven in Buddhist art.

Therefore, by studying evidence of Iranian tradition in Gandhāra, we can see that these two groups contributed to the popularity of Iranian religious traditions: the Kushans, who ruled Gandhāra, and the growing power of Buddhist art.

4. Final Conclusion

To what extent can we discuss non-Buddhist religions in Gandhāra? As each chapter in this thesis explored the continuous stream of local, Brahman, and Iranian religious traditions, Gandhāra has demonstrated itself to be a highly layered and intricate web of diverse religions and cultures. This counters the assumption that Gandhāra can derive most of its religious material from studying Buddhism. In fact, this study has instead shown that non-Buddhist religions significantly shaped Gandhāra's religious landscape from the 3rd BCE to the 3rd century CE.

To begin this research, it was necessary to define and identify each non-Buddhist tradition. Pre-Buddhist local traditions consisted of belief systems linked to the earth, such as spirits connected to the elements and surroundings, including nāgas and yakṣas, as well as archetypal goddess worship known as fertility cults. Early writings, such as post-Vedic legends, associate Gandhāra with "barbarian" and non-Brahmanical lifestyles and practices. These writings also reveal the emergence of nāgas and yakṣas as they became incorporated into the Vedic and Post-Vedic canon, a development later reflected in the legend of Taxila's founding story, which features the nāga prince Takṣaka. Another segment of pan-Indian practice was explored in Aśoka's pillars, which also inform us about the rituals and local festivals linked to women's rites, viticulture, and animal sacrifice present in Aśoka's empire.

Although the written component entails a rich account of pan-Indian traditions, archaeologically, Gandhāra is much more limited. The key artefacts and findings related to pan-Indian traditions include terracotta figurines, the most famous types being the Baroque Ladies, as well as other variations of terracotta, such as ritual tanks and ringstones. In Sirkap and Barikot, high numbers have been confirmed, with their exact role, which is mainly assumed to reflect an ancient form of fertility worship. This led researchers to believe these fertility rites were practised until their eventual disappearance in the 2nd century CE.

During the Kushan period, Buddhism began to play a role in upholding the memory of many pan-Indian elements. For example, Buddhist literature began to incorporate many pan-Indian elements, which were then mirrored in Gandhāran Buddhist art. Nāgas and yakṣas emerged as characters who paid homage to the Buddha, or, like Hārītī, a trans-local deity from the Ganges, became a convert goddess, representing fertility and motherhood in the Buddhist pantheon.

The last topic explored was the festivities associated with viticulture and animal sacrifice, as mentioned in Aśoka's pillars and edicts from the mid-2nd century BCE. This study examined a range of sources from outside our ancient time bracket, drawing on pre-Islamic folk traditions from the Nuristan communities. By studying their traditions and lore, academics have observed a parallelism of animal (ibex) sacrifice and rituals associated with viticulture, also present in the ancient Buddhist architectural reliefs displaying "revelry" scenes, as well as the other ancient statues of deities holding a beheaded ibex and wine goblets.

Other studies exploring the relationship between Buddhism and the locals examined the Gandhāran wine presses and rock art near Buddhist monasteries, suggesting Buddhism's involvement in local wine production and its approach to building good rapport with the locals outside city complexes.

Thus, by collecting these studies, this chapter has established four notions. First, it has defined a coherent body of practices constituting pan-Indian local traditions in Gandhāra. Second, at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, we primarily rely on post-Vedic texts to inform our understanding of the "local" communities of the Gandhāran region and other literary sources, with terracotta figurines serving as the earliest archaeological evidence. These post-Vedic sources already integrated pan-Indian elements, such as nāgas and yakṣas, elucidating their early adoption into the Brahmanical pantheon. Thirdly, archaeologically, terracotta figurines are our principal source of pan-Indian traditions. Their continual production and appearance in key cities like Sirkap and Barikot show how religious spaces, public or private, in Gandhāra practised local fertility rites until their disappearance in the 2nd century CE. Lastly, after the 1st century CE, Buddhism became a significant factor in developing close ties with the locals by becoming involved in seasonal festivities that included wine production and incorporating pan-Indian elements into their art and literature.

Hence, although most academic works studying religion in Gandhāra focus on Buddhism, this chapter has pieced together written and archaeological sources to verify the active presence of local, pan-Indian traditions in Gandhāra from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE. Adopted by larger, more dominant religious organisations and sustained, the memory of these local traditions was preserved and maintained from the 3rd BCE to the 3rd century CE.

The second chapter, which focuses on Brahmanism, follows the ancient expression of modern-day Hinduism. The earliest evidence of Brahmanism in Gandhāra is recorded in literary texts. As the birthplace of the great Sanskrit grammarian, Pāṇini, post-Vedic legends famously identified Gandhāra as the region with the "highest" speech quality and a sophisticated Brahmanical education centre. These writings, particularly those by Pāṇini and Kauṭilya, also described the veneration of statues of specific Indian gods, such as Śiva, Brāhma, Śrī, and the Aśvins. Yet, the archaeological world of Gandhāra attests to little early evidence of Brahmanism, save for the punch-marked coins and the apsidal temple found in the Bhir Mound, Taxila. Both are valuable as they belong to the Gandhāra's archaeological matter; however, regarding Brahmanism, both are too vague and ambiguous to testify to a specific religious group.

However, it was not until the foreign powers seized Gandhāra that Brahmanical deities emerged with more definition and clarity. Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Parthian coinage all testify to a growing corpus of Indic figures, supposedly portraying Indian deities and relevant iconographic Brahmanical or yogic symbols. In other areas, such as everyday artefacts and architecture, the Indo-Greek era saw the emergence of Brahmanical artefacts, such as Greek-style phialēs, the Garuḍa pillar, and decorative plates. Additionally, one particular set of remains, the Jaṇḍiāl C temple near Sirkap, has been regularly referred to as a Buddhist temple. However, recent studies, specifically by Rapin (1997), have suggested its Indo-Hellenic function.

Following the Indo-Greeks, various archaeological and epigraphic sources from the Indo-Scythian and Parthian periods attest to the continuation of Brahmanical culture in Gandhāra. For instance, in a study of seals, researchers identified many with Brahmanical character and names. Other South Asian inscriptions also attest to the presence of Brahmanical temples, furthering the possibility of their presence in Gandhāra.

Yet, current research can only offer speculation in confirming definitive remains of these Brahmanical temples in Gandhāra. In particular, the Greek account of Apollonius's visit to Taxila reported the presence of a "sun temple" in Taxila. Currently, two locations have been suggested: Mohrā Maliārāñ and the apsidal temple Block D in Sirkap. However, studying their limited and ambiguous archaeological material makes it challenging to identify the function and role of these temples. Furthermore, the veracity of Apollonius' account is also questioned, and it is suggested instead that these accounts were intended to embellish a sense of philhellenism among Greek readers. Therefore, although these sources are valuable to our study, the topic remains inconclusive until further research is conducted.

During the Kushan period, a surge of Brahmanical material was depicted in Gandhāra through coinage, art, and architecture. In Kushan coinage, three areas were explored: composite deities, syncretisation of deities and the indicization of various Kushan kings. The term "composite" deities has surfaced many times in this thesis, as deities, especially during the Kushan period, were often portrayed with various visual elements from multiple traditions, including Indic, Greek, Iranian, and Central Asian. It is significant, especially during this chapter, because the creation of composite deities marked the beginning of the development of the visualisation of the Indian god Śiva. In Śiva/Weš's case, there are clear Brahmanical elements and visual markers linked to the Śaivite (or Vaiśvaite) deities as attested in post-Vedic texts. Yet, these elements are also shared and valued in other traditions, thus broadening the recognisability and value of this god to a diverse collection of religious communities in Gandhāra.

The above discussion led to further study of the Kushan monarchs and their religious inclinations. Most Kushan kings openly supported various traditions, including Iranian and Buddhist ones; however, some research suggests that Vima Kadphises was a Śiva follower. Yet, recent studies on "*sarvalogeśvara mahīśvara*" have suggested the phrase to self-deify the Kushan king as "[Vima Kadphises] lord of the worlds". The most prevalent example of the indicization of Kushan kings was Vāsudeva. The king's name itself warrants the Kushans' attempt to Indianize their identities, which is further supported by the Garuḍa Pillar elucidating the presence of the Vāsudeva cult in Gandhāra in the 2nd century BCE.

Other epigraphic sources during this era also yield valuable information on the deities in the Kushan pantheon. For instance, the Rabatak Inscription confirmed the syncretic relationship between the Iranian war deities, Sroshard and Narasa and their Indian counterparts, Mahāsena and Viśākha, demonstrating their fusion of identities. In further instances, epigraphic sources dating to this period also provide information on temples built for both Śiva and Skanda, as well as evidence of Brahmins performing acts of service within their communities. Sources from outside Gandhāra, especially those from Chinese travellers in later periods (7th century CE), also report on the religious landscape, describing in detail the popularity of Brahmanical sites that venerated Indian deities.

In art and literature, Buddhism became a significant instrument in boosting the visuality of Brahmanical deities in Gandhāra. In Gandhāran art, many stone pieces portray the visual development of various Indian goddesses and gods. For instance, Brahmanical goddesses, particularly those of Durgā, Ūma, and Śrī Lakṣmī, have demonstrated how their iconography is based on three sources: the Mesopotamian goddess Nana, Greek/Iranian archetypes of female deities, and Indian visual elements. Yet, due to their blend of cultural amalgamation, it

is challenging to ascertain which tradition they belong to. Consequently, this has led researchers to recognise the composite nature of their identities.

In studying the key male Indian gods such as Skanda, Śiva and Viṣṇu, their analysis yielded similar results. Their representation incorporated Indic and non-Indic elements (i.e., the Iranian value of Skanda's rooster), their coinage mirrored their sculpture form, and later Gandhāran pieces began to portray more detailed and deeper Brahmanical concepts.

This second chapter highlights four key aspects of Brahmanism in Gandhāra: firstly, we primarily rely on early writings to attest to the early evidence of Brahmanism in Gandhāra. Vedic/post-Vedic, South Asian, and Greek writings all confirm the presence and practice of Brahmanical traditions. Secondly, after the Indo-Greek invasion, followed by the Scythians, Parthians and Kushans, more Brahmanical material began to appear, particularly in coins, artefacts, pillars, stone pieces, and inscriptions. This leads us to our third point, where Brahmanism came into contact with other traditions, and religious hybridisation and fluidity began. Material studies have shown that many art pieces, coins, and religious figures are syncretised, portraying Brahmanical elements mixed with Greek, Iranian, Buddhist, or pan-Indian influences. Thus, many objects in question require in-depth discussions of multiple interpretations of their cultural identity, i.e., the creation of composite deities and the development of Śiva/Weš' iconography. Therefore, although the term "Brahmanical" was used with flexibility and nuance, there are many instances where the boundary is somewhat blurred, and the identity of these objects remains unclear. Thus, this study has shown how the archaeological footprint of Brahmanism gradually became more pronounced after the end of the Mauryan period. Yet, in the process, it became blended and hybridised with non-Indic elements throughout the 2nd BCE to the 3rd century CE.

This thesis's final chapter explored Iranian elements, beginning in the 5th century BCE, when the Achaemenid empire conquered Gandhāra. The script Kharoṣṭhī, the tulip-styled pottery, and funerary practices attest to Gandhāra's previous Achaemenid rulers. However, it was not until the Indo-Greek period that Iranian deities emerged as part of the Gandhāran coinage pantheon. Mithra, the Iranian solar god, first appears in a syncretised form with Zeus and is portrayed with rays and a Mithraic cap on Indo-Greek coinage. Yet, as we continue into the Indo-Scythian and Parthian periods, Gandhāran coinage yields little direct evidence of Mithra, who appears only once on a Bactrian coin, again as Zeus-Mithra. Nevertheless, this period was pivotal for creating the foundation for the later Kushan monarchs, who would prioritise and celebrate many Iranian deities.

During the reign of Vima Taktu, Kushan coinage shows the first portrayal of Mithra with his sun rays and Mithraic cap. Yet, Kanishka's coinage was the turning point that dramatically shifted the Kushan pantheon to an Iranian one. His collection of Greek deities was soon translated and identified with their Iranian counterparts, labelled with their Iranian names and written in Bactrian script. Although the iconography of these gods is often attributed to Hellenic imagery, this chapter also examines other ways in which Iranian traditions and culture influenced Kushan coinage. Firstly, by studying the numismatic representation of Kushan kings, researchers found that they styled themselves to resemble Iranian deities, such as Mithra and Yima. Secondly, Kushan kings often portrayed themselves with distinctively Iranian clothing styles and accessories, again promoting their Iranian ties. Thirdly, by closely examining the representation of certain Iranian and Greek gods, such as Oado and Anemos,

researchers have suggested that the Kushan pantheon is based on an Iranian system of deities/traditions rather than a Greek one. Yet, two figures, Weš and Manaobago, can be excluded from this. As Weš was discussed above in the Brahmanism section with his duality as an embodiment of Śiva, his ties with the Iranian tradition cannot be overlooked. Both Manaobago and Weš' names are of Iranian origin; yet, both deities embody various elements from Indian, Greek, Iranian, and Central Asian visual vocabularies. Therefore, instead of being identified as a solitary Iranian deity, they belong to the collection of composite deities.

Within the scope of Gandhāran art, Iranian deities and traditions made their appearance in Buddhist art through interactions with the Buddha or as tutelary divine couples, portraying the ideal masculine and feminine ideals (Pharro and Ardaksho). Fire scenes, usually depicted below a seated Buddha or Boddhisattva, received particular attention, as multiple interpretations have rendered them Buddhist, Brahmanical or Zoroastrian. Despite the diverse analyses, this thesis must again draw on Gandhāra's ambiguous and complex art character. As there are variations of different fire ritual scenes, this approach gives each piece's idiosyncrasies the chance to convey their unique meaning.

Other significant artefacts and remains include the Rabatak Inscription and the royal religious temples, called *devakulas* or *bagolangos*. The Rabatak Inscription again reveals the complex identities of the principal deities of the Kushans (Muzdhuwan), and, as mentioned above, the syncretic relationship between Iranian and Indian deities, i.e., Sroshard, Narasa, Mahāsena, and Viśākha. The Rabatak Inscription also yields evidence of the collection of gods the Kushans venerated in statue form in the *devakulas*. Again, these temple houses were highly ceremonial, specifically built near water sanctuaries. These spaces were dedicated to venerating both the Kushan gods and their kings, reiterating the kingly cult that had begun to develop within the Kushan empire.

Therefore, this chapter found that from the 3rd BCE to the 1st century CE, Iranian tradition lingered subtly in the archaeological and literary sources, only manifesting with much more visibility during the Kushan period (1st to 3rd century CE). The Kushans used these Iranian deities to legitimise their right to rule and to glorify their Iranian ancestry and roots. They proudly championed their Iranian deities, shifting the pantheon to fit an Iranian system of deities, and portrayed them in their coins, art, offerings, and temples. Thus, the Kushans were the primary initiators who introduced an extensive vocabulary of Iranian deities and culture to Gandhāra from the 1st to the 3rd century CE.

In conclusion, as each tradition was studied based on its available material, all three have revealed a unique narrative of growth, maintenance, popularity and decline. These three religions reflect three significant points. First is their capacity to syncretize. By studying Gandhāran material, many artefacts, gods, and iconographies appear to be hybridised. Secondly, due to the syncretic bond between these traditions, religious material in Gandhāra is highly culturally ambiguous, making it challenging to identify and distinguish each tradition. Thirdly, by understanding that Gandhāra's cultural and religious atmosphere was highly porous, this thesis has shown that "cultural/religious ambivalence" defines the essence of many coins, gods, religious art and architecture in Gandhāra. Examining a range of objects revealed that they were either highly syncretic or culturally ambiguous. Therefore, the study of religion in Gandhāra should not exclusively focus on Buddhism. In fact, by expanding studies to include non-Buddhist religions, this thesis has adjusted the previous lenses that

have observed religion as stagnant, unmoving, and solely centred on Buddhism. Instead, this paper has demonstrated that the nature of religions in Gandhāra is highly mobile and porous, closely interlaced with other creeds of religious systems, resulting in a unique expression of syncretic religious art, deities, and practices. Thus, by carefully examining the various streams of religions, it can be concluded that the religions in Gandhāra belonged to an elaborate, highly interwoven, and sophisticated network, upheld and sustained by multiple factors, including other dominant religious groups such as Buddhism and Brahmanism, as well as foreign rule and monarchical support.

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xxi. Huvishkha gold coin with three war deities with four names: Skanda, Kubera, Viśākha and Mahāsena (with solar radiate). British Museum.

xxii. Huvishka gold coin displays three war deities but only one name, Mahāsena. British Museum.

xxiii. Huvishka coin displaying Rāma figurine. J.P Rawlins Collection, British Museum.

xxiv. Huvishka's coin displays an eight-armed Viṣṇu/Viśākha figure. British Museum.

xxv. Multiplication Scene, the Buddha with six figures (from left): a young male, Śiva, Brahmā, a yakṣa, Kumara, and the Buddha. Peshawar Museum.

xxvi. The Buddha Preaching with Bodhisattva Maitreya (left) and Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (right). Behind the Buddha, Indra stands with a thunderbolt (left), and Brahma holds a water container (right). Peshawar Museum.

xxvii. Siddhartha's Birth. Queen Maya is holding a tree branch and passing Siddhartha to Indra. Peshawar Museum.

xxviii. A six-armed deity holding a wheel (Skt. *cakra*), a sword (Skt. *asi*), a thunderbolt/sceptre (Skt. *vajra*), and Siva's trident (Skt. *śula*) on Butkara Relief. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome.

xxix. Statuette of Srī-Lakṣmī with Kharoṣṭhī inscription translation "image of Śrī". British Museum.

xxx. Seal of a composite female deity, portraying Śrī-Lakṣmī's elephants standing atop lotus stems and the water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), situated below the child, and Ardakśo's robe, as well as the cornucopia (left hand) and grapes (right hand). Aman ur Rahman Collection.

xxxi. Statue of Durgā killing a buffalo, right-hand holds a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and spear. Government Museum, Mathura.

xxxii. Statue of two female goddesses are shown holding daggers and children with fangs.

xxxiii. Nana/Durgā is shown as a multi-armed deity standing atop a lion, right hand holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*) and left hand in *vyavṛtta mudrā*. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, Germany.

xxxiv. Statue of Nana/Durgā/Hārītī deity. Peshawar Museum.

xxxv. Huvishka's coin with reverse, Nana (left) and Weš (right) and obverse with Umā (left) and Weš (right). 2nd century CE. British Museum.

xxxvi. Schist statue of Maheśvara and Umā. Peshawar Museum.

xxxvii. Bronze seal depicting several motifs, including a water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*) at the top right, a trident (Skt. *triśula*), Lajjā Gaurī, and a dancing figure. Kashmir Smast. Private Collection.

xxxviii. Statue of Skanda killing Mahiṣa. Peshawar. Museum.

xxxix. Statue of Skanda, standing heavily armoured with a spear and a rooster. Kushan period. British Museum.

xl. Statue of three-headed, four-armed Śiva with the third eye, holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), standing with raised phallic under dhoti. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.

xli. Three-headed, six-armed Śiva standing with Nandi. Śiva is holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), a water pot (Skt *pūrṇa ghaṭa*). Peshawar Museum.

xlii. Statue of Śiva (left) and Umā (right) from Dagai, Pakistan. Śiva (three-headed) is holding a trident (Skt. *triśula*), a water pot (Skt. *pūrṇa ghaṭa*), and a necklace (Skt. *akṣamālā*).

xliii. Scene of Kr̥ṣṇa killing the Keśin disguised as a horse. Taxila Museum.

xliv. Scene of Herakles with tiger pelt and club, wearing a diadem with ribbons in combat with a Nemean lion. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

xlv. Varāha, with four arms, stands over the Sesa serpent; beside him, Pr̥thivī, the Indian earth goddess, stands on Varāha's shoulder, found in Bannu District, Pakistan. National Museum, Karachi, Pakistan.

Chapter 3

3.1

i. King Amyntas' coin displays Zeus-Mithra.

ii. King Hermaeus coin (reverse) displays Zeus-Mithra on the throne with a rayed Phrygian cap.

iii. Bust of King Hermaeus displayed with a rayed crown.

iv. Bust of King Amyntas displayed with rayed crown and sceptre. Private Collection.

v. Zeus-Mithra figure on a Bactrian coin.

vi. Mithra figure on Kushan coin.

vii. Poseidon or Śiva with a trident on Indo-Scythian coin.

viii. Weš/Śiva with trident and bull on Kushan coin.

ix. Indo-Scythian ruler, King Aziles on horseback.

x. Indo-Parthian ruler, King Gondophares on horseback with Nike overhead placing a wreath.

xi. Kushan coin, King Hēraos on horseback with Nike overhead, placing wreath.

xii. King Sapadbizes coin from Bactria. Reverse displays the legend NANAIA with a lion image. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

3.2

i. Vima Taktu's (also known as Sōtēr Megas) coin displayed rays emanating from his crown, suggesting a portrayal of a Mithra figure.

ii. Table displaying the frequency of deities appearing on reverse gold dies of King Huvishka and Kanishka.

iii. Oaxšo, the river god on King Kuvishka's coin. British Museum.

iv. Rišto/Athena figure on gold Huvishka coin.

v. Gold coin depicting warrior Nana with typical Artemis form.

vi. Three Coins of King Vima Kadphises, Kanishka, and Huvishka all depict themselves as emerging from the rocks, resembling the Iranian god Mithra.

vii. Iranian god, Yima, on King Huvishka's coin.

viii. Two gold coins of Kanishka portraying a solar deity: Helios (left) and Mithra (right). The vestments and iconography of both figures are the same; however, they are identified with different names.

ix. A coin of Kanishka portrayed with a caftan, pressed woollen boots, tiara/headdress and full beard.

x. A coin of Vima Kadphises with a caftan, pressed woollen boots, tiara/headdress and full beard.
xi. Stone relief depicting an Arsacid-Elymean royal with a similar tiara/headdress performing a fire ritual. Bard-e-Neshandeh, Iran.
xii. A Gandhāran stone relief from Lahore, Pakistan, depicting a Kushan royal patron wearing a tiara or headdress. Lahore Museum.
xiii. A broken stone head with a ribbed pattern over the headdress, possibly depicting a wreath. Surkh Kotal, Afghanistan.
xiv. Bisutun stone carving of Arsacid ruler making a sacrifice. Kermanshah Province, Iran
xv. The copper coin of Vima Kadphises, making a sacrifice.
xvi. A multi-armed seated Manaobago is shown with a Greek helmet, holding an Iranian diadem, Balarama's plough, Vāsudeva's wheel, and royal fillet.

3.3

i. Scene displaying King Kanishka crowned with wreaths by Iranian gods, Mirro (Mithra, the sun god) and Māo (moon god) on Kanishka's Casket. Peshawar Museum.
ii. Kanishka's Casket. Peshawar Museum.
iii. Huvishka's gold coin with classical Ardoksho.
iv. Drawing of Huvishka's coin with Ardoksho holding cornucopia.
v. Huvishka's gold coin depicts Pharro with flaming shoulders and outreached hand with raised forefinger.
vi. Drawing of Kanishka's reverse gold coin with Pharro, holding a money bag and a spear/staff.
vii. Statue of tutelary couple showing Iranian gods, Pharro (wearing knee-high boots with a tunic, holding a kylix and facing a minor deity with a money bag) and Ardaksho (holding a cornucopia) from Takhti-i-Bāhi. British Museum.
viii. Statue of tutelary couple showing Iranian gods, Pharro (holding money bag and staff) and Ardaksho (holding cornucopia) from Sahri Bahlol. Lahore Museum.
ix. Oado displayed on King Kanishka's gold coin. Private Collection.
x. Oado is shown beside Indo-Scythian men, who are likely paying tribute to the Buddha.
xi. Fire scene below fasting and seated Buddha in meditation posture (Skt. *dhyānamudrā*). Lahore Museum.
xii. Drawing of relief of Herakles holding a lit torch and two female devotees. Lahore Museum.
xiii. Drawing of practitioners performing fire rituals to the Bodhisattva. Collection de Marteau, Brussels.
xiv. Nanaia on King Kanishka's gold coin (reverse). The goddess is displayed with a halo, a lunar crescent, and a sceptre with a lion protome. British Museum.
xv. Nana sitting in *lalitāsana* pose on a lion. Ashmolean Museum.
xvi. Nana sits on a lion with a sceptre and lotus garland. Sherrier Collection.
xvii. Drawing of King Huvishka's coin depicting the Kushan king kneeling before Nana, holding a sceptre.

xviii. Reverse gold coin of King Kanishka I displaying Muždhuwan. British Museum.

xix. Reverse coin of Soter Megas (Vima Taktu) coin portraying the king himself or Mithra on a horse, holding a sword.

xx. A poorly preserved stele found in Surkh Kotal, suggested to portray a seated Kushan King (Vima Taku) beside a standing figure (proposed to be King Huvishka). Sub-Regional Office collection of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

xxi. Three statues of Kushan Kings found in Surkh Kotal. Kabul Museum.

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