The Nomadic Element in the Kushan Empire (1st–3rd Century AD)

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I. THE ORIGINS

Between the mid-second and the mid-first century BC, all the Greek possessions in Central Asia, from Sogdiana in the north to the Indus valley in the south, were gradually overrun by nomadic people who, according to a vague statement by the Greek geographer Strabon (11.8.2), “had set forth from the territories beyond the Iaxartes,” today the Syr-darya. In the first half of the first century AD these various peoples came under the domination of one of them in particular, the Yuezhi, who were by origin the easternmost of them all, their homeland being in Kansu. The dynasty of the Kushans, the leading clan of the Yuezhi, unified southern Central Asia with the north of India (fig. 1), and for nearly two centuries they appear to have imposed a uniform state apparatus over this whole expanse of territory. This apparatus had manifold aspects, many of which were in large part inherited from the Greeks. I mention only some of them: an imperial coinage spreading the same political and religious message everywhere; the transmission of supreme power from father to son, with minor accidents, for six generations, from Kujula Kadphises to Vima Takhtu, then Vima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huvishka, and Vasudeva; a state chancery using two languages, Bactrian

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written in the Greek script and Gandhari written in Kharoshthi, but also formulae transmitted from the Achaemenians; the use of the Macedonian calendar in official documents; and a network of imperial temples dedicated to the divine protectors of the dynasty, where statues of the royal ancestors were also erected. In surveying these facts, the question naturally arises of what—if anything—the Kushan empire had retained of its nomadic past.

It is important to remember that the nomadic invaders of the Greek kingdoms had come from very diverse horizons, though Greek and Latin authors tended to group all of them under the name “Scythians,” which by then had become a generic term for all nomads of the European and Asiatic steppes, and which medieval authors still applied on occasion to Turkish people. According to the Chinese Hanshu, the first wave of invaders had been Sai (in Ancient Chinese *Sak, i.e., Sakas, the term Scythians used
for themselves in their Iranian language), expelled from their pastures in Semirechie, today northern Kirghizistan and southeast Kazakhstan. According to the same source, their king “moved a considerable distance to the south.” It is tempting to relate this scanty textual evidence to two remarkable epigraphic discoveries, namely, two undeciphered inscriptions in a runic script. One specimen was on a silver cup found in the royal kurgan of Issyk in Semirechie, dating from the third or second century BC; the other on a silver ingot melted and inscribed, no doubt by some administrative authority, during the first nomadic occupation of the Greek city of Ai Khanum in eastern Bactria, shortly after 145 BC. These unique documents seem to bear witness to a rudimentary Saka bureaucracy migrating southwards with its king, and should serve as a warning not to automatically draw a distinction between the nomad way of life and the ability to deploy an administration.

Other invaders mentioned in classical sources include other “Saka” groups, such as the Sacaraucae who appear to have moved from the opposite direction: in fact the material found in graves attributed to them by archaeologists relates them rather to the Uralian and Pontic regions. During the first century BC, according to a cryptic statement in Pompeius Trogus, hegemony in the Bactrian region seems to have passed temporarily to another Scythian people, the Asii (Iranian plural form Asiani), whose name survives today (in another plural form) in that of the Caucasian Ossetes. Some archaeologists are inclined to recognize them, or the postulated “proto-Alans” related to them, as the first bearers of the so-called polychromic style attested to on jewels found in rich princely tombs in an area stretching from the Altai to Bactria and the Don, therefore documenting a principal east–west migration route with offshoots to the south. The immensely rich royal graves found at Tillia-tepe to the west of Bactra can be dated to around the mid-first century AD and have been tentatively attributed to one of their royal clans. The most recent publications, however, insist on the impossibility of defining an ethnos, arguing that there is a deliberate eclecticism in the choice of regalia and ritual practices, which find analogues in a wide range of traditions: Altaic Saka (the ultimate origin of the Asii, according to the “Alanic” hypothesis), Xiongnu (in particular, the women murdered and buried around the man, and the horse skull and small leg bones deposited over the wooden coffin), Yuezhi (possibly the origin of the main “queen”), Indo-Parthian (notably the torque worn by the king, identical with that worn by the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares), and Greco-Bactrian (source of the all-pervasive Hellenistic iconography).
The elaborate iconography displayed by the ornaments manifests a complex mixture of motifs belonging to the Scythian past (e.g., the ancestral river-god pictured in fig. 2), which local jewelers mixed with Hellenistic elements, often reinterpreted (Aphrodite, Athena, Dionysus, and Ariadne). A few images even lend themselves to distant comparisons with the Zoroastrian pantheon: a goddess holding two fish by their tails might hint at Anahita or her Scythian equivalent Api, embodying the descent of the waters (fig. 3); a character in Greek armor with the royal diadem (fig. 4), flanked by two cosmic trees each resting on an aquatic dragon and topped by a bird, can be interpreted as a symbolic image of power (khšathra), modeled on the appearance of the Greek rulers of the past. It seems possible to attribute to the same group a series of silver coins minted in western Bactria in the same period (fig. 5):\(^8\) they carry Greek legends and, just like on the buckle in figure 4, the ruler is shown as a helmeted Greek king; the reverse shows an astral symbol over a lion, explicitly identified as the goddess Nana (Nanaia). At Tillia-tepe the ruler wears a necklace with a cameo again showing the
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Figure 3. Tillia-tepe, gold pendant: goddess of the waters.

Figure 4. Tillia-tepe, gold buckle: armored king/god.
helmeted Greek ruler, and a gold belt with medallions showing Artemis seated on a lion, plausibly a Hellenized version of Nana (on the first coins of Kanishka, Nana has the same attributes: chignon, vase, and lion, here as a small figure topping a staff). The choice of the same symbols for coins and for the symbolically best-situated ornaments carried to the grave by the king can be taken as almost decisive proof of dynastic identity. It seems therefore that these nomadic chieftains were able to appeal to diverse symbolic vocabularies according to the various audiences to whom their messages were directed.

Figure 5. Top left, coin of Sapadbizes (from Rtveladze, Drevnie i rannesrednevekovye money , . . , plate 15); top right, cameo attached to the torque of the Tillia-tepe king; bottom left, gold medallion from his belt with an image of Artemis-Nana; bottom right, Nana (Nanaia) on a gold coin of Kanishka (Katsumi Tanabe, “Earliest Aspects of Kaniška I's Religious Ideology,” in In the Land of the Gryphons, ed. Antonio Invernizzi (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995), fig. 2:1).
Another group, called Yuezhi by the Chinese and Tokharians by Western authors, were destined for a more brilliant future. According to Chinese sources, the Kushans were originally a clan from the Yuezhi people who had migrated westwards after they had been repeatedly defeated by the Xiongnu between 208 and 160 BC. In the beginning of the first century AD, when they eventually emerged as a distinct political power in eastern Bactria, they already had a long and complex history behind them. The fact that, according to the Chinese, they originated from Kansu, on the northwest border of China, and that the name “Tokharian” was subsequently applied to the Indo-European but non-Iranian language of Turfan and Kucha, has led some scholars to assume that the Yuezhi originally spoke this language rather than an Iranian Saka one. But attempts to identify traces of it in the Kushan aristocratic onomastics have not proved convincing: it is more likely that the words which form the basis of this hypothesis, in particular the hypocoristic suffix –ēšk found in the names of several Kushan kings, belong to the Saka stock.

The first installation of the Yuezhi to the north of the Oxus, in the valleys of southeast Sogdiana and east Bactria where they had moved through Ferghana, is attested to by the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian who met them in 128 BC. Even as early as this they had the capacity to launch long-range forays into the west, the Parthian king Artabanus I being reported to have perished at their hand in 124/123 (Pompeius Trogus apud Justin 42.2.2); but until they started their expansion proper, one and a half centuries later, they seem to have kept their main bases in the grazing grounds between the Oxus river and the Hisar mountains. The indications transmitted in the Chinese Hanshu are precise enough to locate each of the five Yuezhi clans in one particular valley (fig. 6). Limited as they were, these pastures were rich enough to maintain a permanent force of one to two hundred thousand mounted archers, as mentioned in the Hanshu. At the same time, the five yabghus, the Yuezhi clanic rulers, maintained contact with their homeland in Kansu and, through it, dispatched embassies to the Chinese court, as recently proven by wooden documents unearthed in Dunhuang. The later Kushan emperors would not forget their geographical origins either: some of their military attempts would be directed towards Kucha and, presumably, southern Xinjiang where later records from the kingdom of Shanshan reveal the administrative legacy of the Kushan empire.
II. NOMADIC GROUPS WITHIN THE EMPIRE

As early as the first century BC, some of the *yabghus* had expanded their respective territories to the southern bank of the Oxus. Eventually, Kujula Kadphises, *yabghu* of the Kushan clan, whose reign probably extended from the 40s to the 80s, subjugated the other clans while pushing his conquests into Kapisa, the Kabul region, and eventually to Gandhara where he replaced the former Indo-Parthian dynasty whose connections were principally with the Arsacids of Iran. His coins, as well as those of his first successors, show strong Indian cultural influence, with no depiction of Iranian gods but, on the contrary, proclamations of devotion to Śiva, with attempts to depict him as an adaptation of Heracles.13

It was Kujula’s great-grandson Kanishka (c. 127–53) who completed the conquest of the Ganges plain, and stabilized the imperial construction by imposing some decisive cultural choices; the latter are set out in the inscription commemorating the foundation of a major temple at Rabatak in Bactria.14 From this inscription we know that in 128, the first year of his era, he decided to abandon the Greek language for official use and to replace it with the “Aryan” language, which in this case designates Bactrian, the local Iranian language transcribed through the Greek alphabet. To be sure, another language—which until now has remained undeciphered—had been used in official inscriptions during a previous reign and continued to be used sporadically; the script appears to be adapted (with additional signs taken from Kharoshthi) from the runic script we have previously encountered in a “Saka” context, and therefore it might well transcribe the ancestral language of the Kushans.15 Be this as it may, this is not the language Kanishka chose for his imperial needs. At exactly the same time, all gods depicted on his coins came to be identified by inscriptions as Iranian gods, though in fact the images of most of them were copied from Greek or Hindu deities. Therefore, at the stage when the empire reached its peak, it would seem that the links with the distant nomadic past were severed and that the conscious cultural self-identification was rather with the sedentary traditions of Bactria, the first country where the Kushans had settled. The Kushans also assumed the role of defenders of Bactria against invasion by more northern nomads, considerably reinforcing the defense system of the “Iron Gates” the Greeks had erected in the mountains bordering Sogdiana,16 which during the Kushan period was controlled by an independent confederation based in the Syr-darya region and the northern steppes; it was known under the name Kangju in Chinese sources.
Though such a picture of a “Bactrianization” of the Kushan power is probably true in broad outline, certain facts provide indisputable evidence that Kushan society and culture retained a nomadic component, albeit that the relative importance of this component is difficult to assess.

The scanty written sources we have about the Kushan empire in the period after it became properly established do not mention nomads, but it seems clear that there were nomadic groups within the Kushan territory. Such groups had in fact existed in the mountain regions since the Achaemenian and even pre-Achaemenian periods. The Avesta, the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, in a section probably composed in the sixth century BC, appears to allude to a seasonal migration from the mountains of Waziristan to the Tarnak valley south of Ghazni, a pattern which was still exactly followed in the twentieth century by Pashtun nomads belonging to the Ghilzai confederation. Pastoral nomadism also certainly existed in the Hindu Kush mountains. The modern Pashtun language is classified as belonging to the “Saka” group of eastern Iranian languages, and it has been suggested that it was introduced at the time of the Saka invasions. Incidentally, the earliest written mention of “Afghans,” one of the self-denominations of the Pashtuns,
Frantz Grenet was recently discovered in the Bactrian archive of the kingdom of Rōb north of Bamiyan, in a document dating from the mid-fifth century: here some “Afghans” are mentioned as having stolen horses. The Bactrian inscription commemorating the restoration of the great dynastic temple at Surkh Kotal, close to this area, under the Kushan emperor Huvishka, mentions a period of troubles when the sanctuary was deserted because of “fear of the enemies.” It seems possible that these “enemies” were nomads of the Hindukush who at that time had been able to threaten the main road between Bactria and Kapisa.

All this being said, there is only one sector of the Kushan empire where nomadic presence has been subjected to systematic archaeological investigation. This sector is the so-called Bishkent valley, in fact a plain once occupied by a lake fed by many springs. This “valley” belongs to one of the areas initially occupied by the Yuezhi clans, probably the one called “Bubak” in the Hanshu, just to the west of the area which was first occupied by the Kushan clan (see fig. 6). In this restricted space, roughly thirty kilometers

Figure 7. Bishkent cemetery, various types of graves (Litvinskii, Kul’ty i ritually, fig. 29).
by six, about 1,300 kurgans (stone cairns typical of nomadic graves) are documented, and among them more than 500 have been excavated (fig. 7). With the exception of a few supposedly aristocratic graves which were entirely pillaged in antiquity, the tombs are quite uniform in their structure and in the modest material they contained: weapons (swords, daggers, arrows), rings, earrings, beads (some imported from the Roman empire), and wheel-turned pottery obtained from the local sedentary people. Apparently not all the men buried here were warriors, and those who were had served in the common ranks of the Yuezhi cavalry. Neither the material culture nor the physical parameters of the skeletons allow for precise ethnic identification, and in fact analogies point to various directions in the northern steppes. The artificial skull deformation typical of royal Kushan portraits, with a high and flat forehead and occiput, is observed with only some of the skeletons. Some others have Mongoloid features, a characteristic which, contrary to a widespread opinion, does not apply to the Yuezhi aristocratic type as depicted in the iconography. One can deduce that the Yuezhi yabghus commanded troops who only partly belonged to their own ethnic group.

There has been considerable discussion about the chronology of these graves. Their first excavator, Anatolii Mandel'shtam, dated them from between the period of the first invasions in the last decades of the second century BC and the early first century AD, thus before the emergence of the Kushan state. In fact he considered that this nomadic population had migrated to the south in the wake of the conquests, and consequently entitled his first book *Nomads on the Way to India*. Subsequently Boris Litvinskii and Aleksandr Sedov resumed the excavations and proposed a considerably later chronology, from the first to the fourth century AD. According to them, the arrival of these populations was not directly connected with the invasions, but was rather a consequence of the favorable conditions the area offered to the pastoral way of life. Their argument rests on debatable principles, in particular a late numismatic chronology which is no longer accepted, but one can agree that this nomadic component was less transitory than Mandel'shtam had assumed, and that at some stage it coexisted with a sedentary population settled in villages built on the same plain. A final date as late as the second century AD seems indeed possible for the necropolis itself, while some isolated tombs actually belong to the second wave of nomadic invasions which overran Bactria in the fourth century.
III. NOMADIC SYMBOLS IN KUSHAN ART

At the very top of the social structure, there are indications that the Kushan rulers and their entourage did not reject their nomadic background. On official portraits (fig. 8) they wear heavy caftans and felt boots, adapted to the steppe climate but not at all to the Indian one, and only under Huvishka was this ancestral fashion replaced by a scale armor belonging to the real military equipment in Bactria and India.

Symbolic elements stemming from the past can certainly be observed in several pieces of visual propaganda commissioned at different periods by Kushan kings or aristocrats. One notable such piece is the cycle of clay reliefs which adorned a building at Khalchayan, again in the zone initially occupied by the Yuezhi. It is not clear whether this building was a temple or just a ceremonial pavilion. The reliefs have come down to us in a fragmentary state and all reconstructions so far proposed (including those reproduced here) are very hypothetical, but obviously its decoration as a whole was intended to celebrate the Kushan royal family at an early stage of the dynasty. Two scenes are static and show portrait groups of the royal clan (fig. 9), which includes an Arsacid king (top scene, fourth character from the left). I tentatively proposed to identify him as Vardanes I, who is said to have taken refuge “in the plains of the Bactrians” in 46 AD (Tacitus *Annals* 11.8–10). A third scene shows a cavalcade (fig. 10) involving Yuezhi archers with the same features and skull deformation as the Kushan family, and who ride without armor; they are
accompanied by heavily armored riders (cataphractarians), whose bearded faces belong to a more classical Scythian type. These two groups have been variously interpreted either as victoriously returning together,\(^\text{25}\) or as being engaged in battle against each other.\(^\text{26}\) In any case the symbols of victory were taken from various sources: Nike and Athena belong to the Greek sphere, and
the goddess standing in a chariot is probably one of the Iranian protectresses of royalty. At the same time, a severed head most probably hanging from the trappings of a horse\(^{27}\) finds close parallels in the war customs of nomads (fig. 11). One might refer in particular to a battle scene in a fourth century BC stone relief from the Taman peninsula (on the Black Sea) showing Scythians or Thracians in battle. Closer to our sphere is a scene engraved on a bone plaque found in a nomadic grave at Orlat near Samarkand, dating from the first or the second century AD,\(^ {28}\) and therefore contemporary with the Khalchayan reliefs or slightly later, but belonging to the Kangju, the northern enemies of the Kushans: one notices that the fighters use several weapons in turn, until they eventually fight on foot. Exactly the same idea, often met in epic tales from the steppe, is expressed by a bronze phalera found near Peshawar (now in a private collection in London; fig. 13):\(^ {29}\) the two
Figure 12. Takht-i Sangin, ivory plaque (Oxus. 2000 Jahre Kunst am Oxus-Fluss in Mittelasien (Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1989), no. 22).

Figure 13. Bronze phalera from the Peshawar region (courtesy of O. Bopearachchi).
protagonists are on foot and fight with swords, but the horses they have left behind and the seemingly empty quivers attached in front of their bowcases show that they first tried to shoot each other from a distance. Judging from their features the fighters are obviously Yuezhi, but the palm tree indicates that the real or epic episode this object illustrates took place during or after the conquests in India.

Another expression of power which the nomad chieftains shared with Iranian monarchs was the hunt, which is vividly depicted on an ivory plaque found among votive objects stored in the temple of the god Oxus at Takht-i Sangin (fig. 12). Here again the Yuezhi features and hairstyle are clearly indicated. Notice that one hunter shoots to the rear, a technique the Yuezhi shared with the Parthians.

The symbols inherited from the nomadic past are still present in a much later period, on a painting on cotton cloth showing King Huvishka (c. 153–91) (fig. 14). This painting, reportedly found in southern Xinjiang, is now in a private collection in Bangkok; I published an article on it jointly with the
late Boris Marshak. The subject matter is almost certainly the investiture of the crown prince, though the latter figure, kneeling in front of his father, is now missing. The costumes worn by the king and both attendants to the right still retain some details of nomadic origin: the felt boots, the golden *bracteatae* sewn on the tunics and on the king's hooded cap. The archer to the right, who obviously personifies the warrior's estate, has typically Yuezhi features, contrary to the plump dish-bearer in front of him who personifies the economic function. The symbols of power are indeed very eclectic: the winged *putto* bringing a garland to the king is inherited from the Hellenistic period, while the two characters to the left are Zoroastrian priests who are emerging from a temple; the taller one is apparently wearing the *padām*, the ritual mouth-cover. But the essence of the ceremony, if Marshak and I have interpreted it rightly from what is left, comes directly from the Scythian symbols of royal legitimacy: the king appears to be handing over a bow and a quiver, and according to Herodotus' account of the origins of Scythian royalty (4.10) the ability to draw the paternal bow singles out the rightful heir.

IV. ANCESTRAL GODS?

As I have already mentioned, the pantheon shown on Kushan coins belongs almost entirely to the Zoroastrian religion—which was the religion of the local population of Bactria at least from the Achaemenian period—though the iconographic types were mostly borrowed from Greece and India. A few deities, however, have strange names or attributes, and one might consider the possibility that they were inherited from the distant nomadic past of the Yuezhi.

Among these deities, two are mentioned by King Kanishka at the beginning of the inscription in the Rabatak temple, in a list of those “from whom the king has obtained kingship.” Five gods in this list belong to the Zoroastrian pantheon, but this is not the case for Muzhdwan and Umma. The name “Muzhdwan” is Bactrian and can be interpreted as an epithet meaning “gracious,” which is also the meaning of Śiva. In fact the image of Muzhdwan on rare Kushan coins (fig. 15) appears to hint at some secondary assimilation with Śiva, as shown by the trident, and possibly the double-headed horse which might allude to Śiva's ambivalent character. But on the whole the god is portrayed as a Yuezhi rider with a typical Scythian hooded cap, and it seems reasonable to suppose that Kanishka took this personal protector from his own stock of family gods. Terracotta figurines of horsemen with pointed
caps have been found in great numbers on Bactrian sites of this period and archaeologists tend to assign them to the same category of rider gods or “heroized ancestors.”

A goddess named Umma is also mentioned in the Rabatak inscription, described as welcoming in her presence all the other gods named here. Despite the apparent similarity of names she should not be confused with the Indian goddess Umā who is shown on some later coins. Her name is in fact Iranian and means “highest,” or “supreme.” Among the Scythian goddesses known to us from Herodotus, Tabiti might hold this title. Herodotus (4.59) identifies her as Hestia, which would be consistent with Umma’s epithet ufarr—“radiant,” “glorious.” Tabiti was also called “the Scythian queen” by Scythian kings themselves (Herodotus 4.127), and therefore was probably held to be the protectress of the king’s hearth fire, which could well explain her role as hostess of the other gods in Rabatak. Two different iconographic forms of Tabiti have been tentatively identified in Scythian art of the Black Sea region: one shows her holding a mirror, the other a drinking horn (fig. 16). In both cases she appears in the role of bestower of power. As in the case of the rider god, terracottas are known which might well correspond to the concept of Umma, as they display the same attributes as her possible Scythian counterpart Tabiti: a mirror turned towards the viewer (unlike Aphrodites’ mirror), and a drinking horn. This last image, again found in one of the territories first settled by the Yuezhi, shows strikingly Yuezhi facial features,
The nomadic element in the Kushan empire (1st–3rd century AD) is one more reason to consider her as representing an ethnic deity.

The Kushans, then, appear to have consciously assumed their responsibilities as statesmen as well as their status as heirs to a long succession of imperial powers; however, they certainly retained pride in their nomadic ancestry, and at the same time substantial parts of the population, especially along the northern frontier, preserved their former way of life and probably

Figure 16. Top left, gold plaque from the Metipol kurgan; top right, detail of gold headdress from the Karagodeuashkh kurgan (both from Schiltz, Les Scythes, figs. 134 and 138); bottom left, terracotta from Balkh (Jean-Claude Gardin, Céramiques de Bactres, vol. 15 (Paris: Mémoires de la DAFA, 1957), plate 10:1a); bottom right, terracotta from Zartépe near Termez (Gennadi A. Koshelenko, ed., Drevneishie gosudarstva Kavkaza i Srednei Azii (Moskva: “Nauka,” 1985), plate 114:17).
some of their ancestral beliefs as well.

NOTES


4 Prolegomena to Book 42: Reges Tocharorum Asiani, which can be understood either as “the Asiani (became) kings over the Tocharians [i.e., Yuezhi],” or as “Tocharian kings (and) Asiani.”


8 Edvar V. Rtveladze, Drevnie i rannesrednevekovyye monety istoriko-kul’turnykh oblastei Uzbekistana, vol. 1 (Tashkent: ”Media Land,” 2003), 145–62, see 161–62 for the proposed identification of the Tilla-tepe ruler (also contemplated as a possibility by Francfort). The rulers are named Sapadbizes (or Sapalbizes), Arseiles, Pulages, and Pabes, all Iranian names (Sapadbizes < *spāda-pati-ča- “army commander,” Arseiles < *aṛṣa(n)-ila- or *ṛṣa- ila-, hypocoristic of aṛṣa(n)- “male, warrior” or of ṛṣa- “bear”; Pabes < *pāpa- “father”). The hypocoristic suffix -ila- is a rare formation also met with in the Indo-Scythian ruler Azilises (“little Azes”). I thank Pavel Lurje and Nicholas Sims-Williams whom I consulted on this point.


10 See, for example, Werner Winter, Studia Tocharica (Posnań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1984), 29.

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15 Gérard Fussman is less committed on this point; see his *Le bouddhisme à Termez* (Paris: Collège de France, 2011), 133.


23 Some interesting information, though to be used cautiously, is transmitted in the Chinese version of the Buddhist treatise *Sampradāya-nidāna*, according to which Kanishka was suffocated under a blanket by his own generals during a hazardous campaign in the north: see Silvain Lévy, “Notes sur les indo-scythes,” *Journal Asiatique* 8 (1896): 482–83. Should this be authentic, it would hint at a taboo against shedding the royal blood, not characteristic of Iranian conceptions so far as we know them, but attested to much later with the Turks, Khazars, and Mongols.

24 F. Grene [Frantz Grenet], “Novaia gipoteza o datirovke rel' efov Khalchaiana,” *Vestnik Drevnei Istoriyi* (2000: 2): 130–35. According to this hypothesis, the main ruler, an aging man (see fig. 8 in this paper, top scene, in the middle), would be Heraos, the Kushan yabghu who preceded Kujula Kadphises and was probably his father. A possible alternative is to identify the Parthian king as Vologeses I (51–79), in which case the aging ruler would be Kujula. The facial features of both Parthian kings are very compatible with those of the Khalchayan portrait, but contrary to
Vardanes there is no record of Vologeses having allied himself with the "Bactrians" nor having campaigned against the Sakas in the territories in between.


25 This detail was first understood by Paul Bernard: see his review of "Eshchë raz o khalkhaianskoi skulpture," by Galina A. Pugachenkova, *Abstracta Iranica* 11, no. 222 (1988).

26 Jangar Ya. Ilyasov and Dmitriy V. Rusanov, "A Study on the Bone Plates from Orlat," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 5 (1997/98): 107–59. On this point at least, one can hardly accept the graphic reconstruction recently proposed by Markus Mode, where the severed head is being brandished by the rider; see “Khaltchayan, portraits des Kouchans”, *Dossiers d'archéologie* 341 (September–October 2010): 43.

27 My thanks to Osmund Bopearachchi, who is currently studying this object and authorized me to publish my own remarks here.

28 Cf. the Sogdian plate from Kulagsh (Perm region), 7th c.: Boris Marshak, *Silberschütze des Orientes* (Leipzig: VEB E. A. Seemann Verlag, 1986), 285–90, plate 198. Another depiction of duels on foot involving several Yuezhi warriors has recently come to light on a wool carpet found in a Xiongnu grave at Noin-Ula in Mongolia, obviously imported from Bactria and dating from the first century AD. At the moment I know it only from an article by the excavator in a popular journal (Natalia V. Polosmak, “My vypili Somu, my stali bessmertnymi . . . ,” *Nauka iz pervykh ruk* (Novosibirsk), no. 33 (2010): 50–59) and from the website http://kolyvanski.livejournal.com/35095.html. The war scene ends up in a cult scene of strikingly Zoroastrian character: the ruler stands in front of a fire altar of Zoroastrian type and holds a libation vessel, a cup on a high stem resting on an annular foot or tripod; such objects are known in ceramic versions in Kushan Bactria, and by their shape and function they seem to correspond to the vessels that modern Iranian Zoroastrians call *āfrīnāgān* (“thanksgiving”). In the article it is misinterpreted as a mushroom (fly agaric, supposedly used to produce the intoxicating drink *haoma*).

29 Boris A. Litvinsky detects Sasanian influence and consequently proposes a date as late as the 3rd c. AD; see his “The Bactrian Ivory Plate with a Hunting Scene from the Temple of the Oxus,” *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 7 (2001): 137–66. This late dating appears questionable.


36 Koshelenko, *Drevneishie*, 401, plate 114: 17 (from Zartepe near Termez).