

**Emergence of Hinduism in Gandhāra**  
**An analysis of material culture**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Gandhāra – melting pot of cultures

Gandhāra is the ancient name of the Peshawar valley region, situated today in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, between the Suleiman mountains along the Afghanistan border in the west and the Indus river in the east. The term Gandhāra is, however, often used in a broader sense to refer to what might be called “Greater Gandhāra” (Rosenfield 2006: 10). The latter comprises, besides Gandhāra proper, several neighboring regions, particularly Swat and other river valleys to the north, the region around the great city of Taxila to the east, and the eastern edge of Afghanistan to the west. These and later on other, more distant regions came under the cultural influence of Gandhāra proper in the period with which we are concerned, namely, the first few centuries before and after the beginning of the Christian era. This was mainly the result of being incorporated into the several Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian, and Kuṣāṇa empires that were centered in Gandhāra proper. The Gandhāran character of the culture of these regions is most clearly attested by their adaptation of the distinctive eclectic style of Gandhāran art and by their use of the Gandhārī language.

Gandhāra played a major role as crossroads and melting pot of different cultures. Until modern time Gandhāra was the principal point of encounter of the Indian world to the east with the Iranian world to the west, and thence with the ever shifting cultural mosaic of central Asia. On an even broader scale, through these connections Gandhāra has also been the contact zone, usually indirectly but at certain points in history directly as well, with the western world, including both the Middle East and Europe.

Three great waves of migration and invasion from central Asia that fundamentally shaped the history of the Indian world passed through the gateway of Gandhāra: first, the Indo-Aryan immigration in, probably, the second millennium BC, next the conquest by the Bactrian Greeks, Scythians, Kuṣāṇas, and associated ethnic groups around the beginning of the Christian era; and finally the series of Afghan, Turkish, and Mongol incursions.

## 1.2. Gandhāra and Buddhism

The earliest reference to Gandhāra in literature is already found in the most ancient Indian text: the Ṛg-Veda (1.126.7), thus showing that this region since old belonged to the core-land of Indian culture.

Later Gandhāra became one of the Satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire and is mentioned in the Behistun rock inscription of Darius 1 (inscribed 528-19 BC). It remained under Persian domination until it was conquered by Alexander the Great.

The Mauryan Empire took its hold after the departure of the Macedonian army. Most probably, it was Aśoka who introduced Buddhism into the region of Gandhāra, which became one of the most distinctive features of its culture during several successive centuries. Aśoka's control of the region is attested by two rock edicts engraved in Kharoṣṭhī script at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra (Falk 2006: 127-129, 132-135). Apart from that, at least three early Indian style *stūpas* clearly belong to the Mauryan period: Dharmarājika (at Taxila), Jamalgarhi and Butkara I (near Mingora, Swat). Significantly, they belong to the whole region of Greater Gandhāra, not only to the Peshawar valley. The Bactrian Greeks came to power afterwards and were followed by the Scythians and Parthians in the 1st century BC. Especially this period and the subsequent centuries witnessed the early culmination point of Buddhist culture and art in this region and beyond. Under the Kuṣāṇas, who were conquerors from central Asia, especially in Kaniṣka's period (starting 127 AD), two of India's most important art styles were developed and reached to their climax between the 2nd and 5th c. AD: Gandhāra Art and the Art of Mathurā (Zwalf 1996, Sharma 1993).

The Gandhāra style was profoundly influenced by 2nd century BC Hellenistic art and was itself highly influential in central and eastern Asia. The style mirrors cultural influences of Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian, Iranian, and Indian art. The way of depicting deities and ideological conceptions moreover reflects a high degree of religious syncretism which was borrowing not simply forms but also ideas from different cultures and merged them into a highly complex system.

A multitude of monasteries spreading on large areas of ancient Greater Gandhāra, forming “networks” of Buddhism over the whole territory. This network supported the spread of Buddhism in its peculiar Gandhāran shape to Central Asia and further on to China, Korea and Japan. In the same way, Gandhāra attracted Buddhist students from all over the world. Many of them were coming for studies in the Taxila University, which was considered one of the most influential Indian educational institutions at that period.

### **1.3. Gandhāra and Hinduism**

Until recent times it was believed that the earliest evidence of Hinduism in Gandhāra can be traced back to the Hindu Śāhīs period in the 7th-8th century AD. At that time the Hindu Śāhīs dynasty established its capital at Waihind (modern Hund) (Rahman 1979).

However, recent research work in Kashmir Smast<sup>1</sup> gives clear evidence to Hinduism in the region for the 3rd-4th centuries AD (Nasim Khan 2001: 218-301, Falk 2003: 1-18). Contemporarily in the heart land of Indian civilization, i.e. the Ganges valley, the Gupta dynasty came into power. The Gupta emperors were Hindus, and during their reign, Hindu temple architecture developed, in order to shelter the cult image of a divinity to which a particular temple was dedicated. It seems that almost at the same time we observe a rise of Hinduism in Kashmir Smast. Side by side with Buddhist institutions and obviously strongly influenced by them a completely new type of religious institution came into being: the Hindu monastery/institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Kashmir Smast (the ‘Kashmir Cave’ ) is located 50 km north of Mardan, at a latitude of N 34°25.760, a longitude E 72° 13.704 and an altitude of 1135 m.

Significantly, a natural cave had been at the center of a cult of the local goddess Bhīmā devī and obviously developed into a pilgrimage site attested from the epic period onwards.<sup>2</sup> Kashmir Smast shows a strong and lively Hindu substructure in an apparently predominantly Buddhist cultured region. This had been supposed by many sculptural evidences and Kuṣāṇa numismatic iconography, but Kashmir Smast now leads the way to comprehending the syncretistic character of Gandhāran Hindu Art. Besides the expected Śaiva there have been found Vaiṣṇava, Buddhist and even Iranian Zoroastrian traces and the whole complex was also known under the name: *ahuramayza-nagara* “town of Ahura Mazda” (Falk 2003, 2006).

#### 1.4. Summary of the previous research work on Hinduism

While Buddhism in Gandhāra and its art history has been multifariously researched, the development of Hindu art did not attract as much attention. Even if in the last few decades some important studies have been published the development of Hinduism in Gandhāra is still poorly understood. Taddei (1962, 1985, and 1987) was the first to initiate the detailed discussion on composite deities of the Kuṣāṇa art in Gandhāra. Srinivasan (1997-98, 2008, 2010) was the next one who combined efficiently Indian literary and visual evidence and took the discussion further on. Her work on “*Skanda Kārttikeya from the North West*” is the best example of her approach. Abdur Rehman (1979) wrote an essential work mainly on Hindu Śāhī. Nasim Khan (2001, 2003, 2006) presented Kashmir Smast as a Śaivite monastic complex and Falk (2003, 2006) discussed and reinterpreted Kashmir Smast in detail by combining archaeological and literary sources.

#### 1.5. Outline of the present research work

The early development of Hindu religion and the beginnings of Hindu art in Gandhāra is the main focus of the present work.

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<sup>2</sup> “From there one should travel to the prominent site of Bhīmā (sic); by bathing there, in the womb, a man will become goddess’ son, wearing a body with earrings of refined gold, and obtain the great reward of a gift of a hundred thousand cows. Proceeding to Girimunja, famed in the three worlds, and paying homage to the grandfather, one obtains the reward of a thousand cows”. Mbh 3. 80. 100-102 (Falk 2003: 17).

Setting sculptural pieces of crucial iconographical importance into perspective with religious representations on safely dated coinage, literary evidence and archaeological data I want to achieve a basic structure for a sequence of iconographic phenomena of Hindu Art in Gandhāra.

This first task will facilitate investigations in the development of early Hinduism in its regional form of Gandhāra and its relation with Buddhism. In the light of the literary sources of early Hinduism and by combining them with fresh archaeological data, I intend to show how certain features of this religion came into being under the special conditions of the religious and cultural syncretism of Gandhāra.

For literary evidence, sūtras from Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī, Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya, Mahābhārata, and some Greek sources have been consulted. Great importance has been given to Pāṇini, as he was a native of Gandhāra and his text provides rare data on the local religious scenario. Pāṇini's name was *Dākṣīputra* (Mahābhāṣya 175, 13 and III 251, 12 cf. Scharfe 1977: 88). He was from *Śalātura* (present choṭa Lahur, Swabi district) and known as *Śalāturiya* "a man from *Śalātura*". This place was visited by the Chinese monk Xuan Zang in 7th c. AD. : "To the north west of *U-to-kia-han-c'ha* (i.e. Attock), 20 li or so we come to the town of *So-lo-tu-lo* (*Śalātura*). This is the place where the *ṛṣi* Pānini, who composed the *Ching-ming-lun* (*vyākaraṇa*), was born." (Scharfe 1977: 88, cf. Beal 1885: 114-116). Pāṇini's work is dated between 6th to 4th c. BC (for 6th c. BC date see Scharfe 1977: 88).

Numismatic data are supplied by coins from Indo-Greek dynasties, local coin types of Taxila and Puṣkalāvātī, Scythian and Kuṣāṇa coins.

The sculptural art of Gandhāra has been distributed over several museums of the world. Special importance as a matter of course have the vast collections of Pakistan that have been examined for the present work.

The material is grouped according to historical and conceptual principles. While the first two chapters investigate the early pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa periods the remaining chapters

contain information about the major spheres of Hindu religiosity, i.e. about the material remains of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults and of the worship of Skanda and female deities.

Usually, the main results of the discussion are subsumed at the end of each chapter.

## Chapter 2

### The initial stage of Hinduism in Gandhāra

Literary, numismatic and archaeological sources provide valuable but scarce evidences for the early phase of Hinduism and the religious situation of a rather unknown period of the Gandhāran cultural history between the 4th to 1st centuries BC. To follow the several strands of devotional traditions that link early religious concepts and their deities to later Hinduism yields rich insight into this formative process. The discussion is based mainly on the available visual evidence, but we cannot exclude the possibility of worshipping aniconic objects during that period, such as worship of trees and mountains and so on.

#### 2.1. Literary sources

##### 2.1.1. Hindu gods in ancient grammatical literature

Pāṇini and Patañjali speak very little about local religious faiths and those deities, which were in a later period associated with Hinduism. Therefore, their references to a few names that can be attributed to later gods are of special value. The Gaṇapāṭha *ad* Pāṇini 2.4.14 refers to Skanda and Viśākha, Śiva and Vaiśravaṇa and Brahman and Prajāpati. Moreover, Pāṇini's sūtras mention names of the epic hero Arjuna and of the god Vāsudeva (4.3.98) as examples for objects of worship. Patañjali adds names of deities like *Skanda-Kumāra*, *Viśākha-Mahāsenā*, and Baladeva.

##### 2.1.2. Hindu Gods in the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra

The Arthaśāstra is one of the earliest texts that provide information of Indian cultural history even if the exact date of the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra remains a controversial topic. The

Arthaśāstra mentions the presence of temples and images of deities in different contexts and refers to them by different terms. Thus we find in the chapter on royal residences a “wooden deity in a nearby sanctuary” (*āsannacaityakāṣṭhadevatā*, KA 1.20.2, tr. Kangle 1972: 48). The term *caitya* also appears in the compound *daivatacaitya* “sanctuary of a deity” (KA 5.2.39). Other references include *devatāgrha* “house of deity” (KA 12.5.3) and *devagrha* “house of a god” (2.36.28). That these buildings contain images or rather sculptures of gods is indicated by terms like *daivatapratimā* “image of a deity” (4.13.41, 13.2.25, 27) and *devatādeha* “body of a deity” (12.5.5). These images were equipped with additional attributes, like for instance a *devatādhvaja* “banner of a deity” (12.5.5, 13.3.45) or a *devatāpraharaṇa* “weapon in an idol’s hand” (12.5.5).

The exact rituals performed in these temples are not known, but it has been established that people in those times were indeed worshipping certain deities. For example, whilst describing the layout of the city some divinities are referred to as the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra: ‘temples of god Śiva, Vaiśravaṇa, the Aśvins, Śrī, Madirā<sup>3</sup>’ and shrines of the god of victory Aparājita, Apratihata, Jayanta, and Vaijayanta (2.4.17, tr. Kangle 1972: 70).

Furthermore, deities are mentioned by different functional attributes, such as *deśadevatā* (13.2.15) or *deśadaivata* (13.5.8 cf. Kangle 1972: 491) “deity of region or kingdom”, *nagaradevatā* “city deity”<sup>4</sup>, *rājadevatā* “family deity of the king” (2.4.15).

Specified are famous deities of Brahma, Indra, Yama and Senāpati (Skanda), that were mainly presiding deities of city gates (2.4.19) and Saṃkarṣaṇa (13.3.54).

According to the administrative system of the Arthaśāstra there was a supervisor of temples called *devatādhyakṣa* (2.6.2; 5.2.38). Temples are said to own large property, i.e. “cattle<sup>5</sup>, images, persons, fields, houses, money, gold, gems, or crops” (4.10.16, tr. Kangle 1972: 283). Theft of this type of property was punishable by death (KA 4.10.16).

<sup>3</sup> Śrī is the goddess Lakṣmi, while Madirā “The intoxicating one” is probably referring to Kāli or Durgā.

<sup>4</sup> To have a city deity is originally a Greek idea and this is the first direct Indian literary reference to it.

<sup>5</sup> Both temple bulls (*devavṛṣāḥ*), and temple cattle (*devapaśu*) are mentioned (3.10.24, 4.13.20).

### 2.1.3. Indian religion in Greek literature

Greek sources about Indian religion are scarce and not always reliable because historians kept copying their predecessors' accounts. Megasthenes covers two legendary heroes, referred to as the Indian Heracles, and the Indian Dionysus by him. Later these deities have been connected with Kṛṣṇa<sup>6</sup> and Balarāma, sometimes also with Vedic Rudra and Śiva.

But the Indian Heracles can also be identified with Śiva, because in Hellenistic sources Indian Heracles is described with Sibae or Śibi (an Indian tribe)<sup>7</sup>, who characteristically wore lion skins, carried clubs and were mounted on oxen<sup>8</sup>. Other customs that have been mentioned by Greek sources are that of *satī* and the 'naked ascetic of Taxila' (see below).

### 2.1.4. Changing concepts of Kubera: From a Vedic god to a Buddhist deity

The influence of the Hindu religious substratum cannot be depicted from texts alone which explicitly refer to these beliefs and practices. The entire religious background of early Buddhism is decidedly determined by ideas which are based on Vedic or Brahmanic religious conceptions. Accordingly, many of the deities which appear in Buddhist stories can be identified with Vedic gods. Favourite cases are Brahman and Indra who are often depicted in Buddhist art. Other important figures are Kubera and his *yakṣas*. The following paragraphs will describe the development of this god and his entourage from a god of the Vedic-Brahmanical circles to a Buddhist deity according to the ground-breaking study of Ananda Commaraswamy (1993).

#### A. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa

In the Vedas this god is described as a chief of evil beings or spirits living in the shades, and is mentioned by his patronymic name Vaiśravaṇa (Dowson 1957: 173-4). Among his attendants along with *yakṣas*, are *guh yakas*, literally "the hidden ones" (Sutherland 1991: 63).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion see Lassen 1827 who for the first time relates this Heracles with the Indian Kṛṣṇa. Later, Narain (1973) also connected this Heracles and Dionysus with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma respectively, because Dionysus (son of Zeus) is Heracles' elder brother, like Balarāma is the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>7</sup> For detail study see MacCrindle 1969 and 1971.

<sup>8</sup> According to Strabo (15.1.58) Dionysus is worshipped in the mountains, while Heracles in the plains of northwest India. The Macedonians found a place where wine was growing; people worshipped Dionysus, and were drinking wine.

Generally Kubera is considered to be a developed form of a Vedic *yakṣa*, especially in his connection with evil and wrongdoing as well as in his association with the earth and her hidden treasures. During a later period, he is better known as the guardian deity of the north under the name of Vaiśravaṇa and is the god of wealth and treasures.

In the subsequent pages we shall follow the Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa developmental stages through the sacred literature, from Vedic to Brahmanical, and from Buddhist literature to Hindu Epics. In the end, we will describe his earliest iconographic appearance in Gandhāran Buddhist context:

### B. Vedic yakṣa and Kubera

According to A. K. Commaraswamy (1993: 35), *yakṣas* are mentioned as *ātmanvat yakṣa* in Atharvaveda (AV) X.8.43 and then open in XI.6.10 where the *yakṣas* are invoked in a list of deities. In Taittirīya Samhitā IV.4.3.2 the ruler of the northern Quarter, the “Self ruler”, is *samyadvasu*, “assembled wealth”, and the “leader of his hosts are *senajit* and *suṣeṇa*”.

In AV VIII.10.28 Kubera Vaiśravaṇa belongs to *itarajana* “other folk” or *puṇyajana* “good people”. The terms *itaraja* and *puṇyajana* reappear in AV XI.9.16 and 24 in lists of the “Five Kindred” and doubtlessly refer to *yakṣas*.

### C. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in Brahmanic and in other literature

Kubera is also existent in the subsequent period of Brahmanical literature. He is known to the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (13.4.3.10) as the lord of thieves and criminals (Comaraswamy 1993:35). Vaiśravaṇa is also mentioned in the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra (2.4,17, cf. Comaraswamy 1993: 41). The Gaṇapāṭha ad Pāṇini 2.4.14 mentions him together with Śiva in the *dvandva* compound *śivavaiśravaṇau*. Patañjali also referred to him as a; *piśācāc ca iti vaktavyampiśācakī vaiśravaṇaḥ, roge ca ayam iṣyate iha na bhavati, vātavati guhā*, (Patañjali. II 400:16).

### D. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in Buddhist literature

In Buddhist literature, he is generally known as Pāñcika and as Jambhala. As Pāñcika his wife is Nandā, Abhiratī, or typically Hārītī, as Jambhala Vasudhā, i.e. earth as the “giver of

treasure” (see Tanabe 1993-94, 1999-2000). Pāñcika and Hārīti form a tutelary pair, the objects of a widespread cult, and are constantly represented in Gandhāran Buddhist art as jointly patrons of wealth and fertility. The pot-bellied Kubera and Pāñcika frequently hold attributed objects of skin purse and drinking bowl, or in the case of Jambhala a mongoose and a citron. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa alias Pāñcika alias Jambhala is the god of wealth and his city is said to enjoy prosperity.

In Buddhist literature Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa is regularly the warden of the north and king of the *yakṣas*, the fullest account occurs in the *Āṭānāṭiya Suttanta* (DN III. 199-202, cf. Coomaraswamy 1993: 38).

The Buddhist *lokapālas* are Virūdhaka (south), who ruled over the Gandharvas; Dhṛtarāṣṭra (east), who ruled over the Kumbhāṇḍas, a grotesque group of demons with testicles in the shape of *kumbhas* or pitchers; Vaiśravaṇa-Kubera (north), the lord of the *yakṣas*, Virūpākṣa (west), the leader of the *nāgas*. The *lokapālas* figure actively in several events of the Buddha’s life, particularly during the great renunciation of Siddhārtha when his horse’s (*kāṇṭhaka*) feet were supported by *yakṣas* at the time of his great departure by the order of the four *Lokapālas* (see Tanabe 1993-94 and 1999-2000). Vaiśravaṇa was also present at the presentation of bowls to Buddha by the four *Lokapālas* (Fig.2.1).



Figure 2.1. Presentation of bowls to Buddha, Vaiśravaṇa standing first to Buddha’s left.

### E. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in Hindu Epics

The most interesting myths concerning the cult of Kubera are those which have to do with his genealogical links with the *rākṣasas* through his half-brother Rāvaṇa.<sup>9</sup> The story of this connection is discussed in both epics. The Mahābhārata version (Mbh. 3.258.10-260.1, cf. Bhattacharya 2001: 157-58) summarises the story of the two brothers and their diverging paths. This story also narrates the friendship of Kubera with Śiva (*īśāna-sakhi*). His fight with his half brother Rāvaṇa is explained in Mbh. 3.259.35.

Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in the epics obtains friendship with Śiva who resides on mount Meru in the neighbourhood of Kubera. He is the guardian of the north, therefore he is invariably known (like Indra) as the lord of wealth (*dhanapati*, *dhanēśvara*, *dhanada*). Vaiśravaṇa is surrounded and worshipped by the minor gods (Mbh. 12.274.5-17). Here he is known as the “great lord of *yakṣas*”.

In the epics Kubera is called *guhya* “belonging to the hidden ones” and *guhyaḍhipa* “ruler of the hidden folk”, *yakṣendra*, *yakṣarāja*: “the king of the *yakṣas*”. He replaces as guardian of the north the Mitra of Ṛg Veda (VIII.28), Soma of the TS (VI.1.5 and Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1.7), and Mitra of Taittirīyasamhitā (1.8.7 and II.4.14) (Coomaraswamy 1993:35).

### F. Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in Gandhāran Buddhist iconography:

The Gandhāran image of Vaiśravaṇa was modelled on the Greek Hermes and the Roman Mercurius. Initially during the Kuṣāṇa period, the images of Hermes or Mercurius were matched with the Kuṣāṇa and Iranian god of wealth Pharro. Subsequently, Pharro, in the appearance of Hermes/Mercurius, was identified with the Indian god of wealth, Kubera. Thus, it is clear that the Kuṣāṇa Pharro played an important role in connecting the Greco-Roman art with Buddhism (Tanabe 1999-2000: 119).

<sup>9</sup> Mbh. 3.87.3; 258.12; 259.34; Ram, 7.3.1ff, 7.15.30ff, cf. Bhattacharya 2001: 157-58

In the Gandhāran great departure scene, Vaiśravaṇa<sup>10</sup> functioned as the guide of Siddhārtha. In the presentation of bowls he is shown as a guardian of the north. However, when appearing in the couple of Pāñcika and Hārīti he is represented as a god of wealth as well as the leader of *yakṣas*. Perhaps owing to his attribute as a “god of wealth”, he found his place in the Kuṣāṇa iconography in Gandhāra.

## 2.2. Archaeological sources

### 2.2.1. Miniature votive tanks from Gandhāra

The region of the north-west of the subcontinent has a long tradition of votive worship. From nearly the time of the beginning of our era, the notion of ritual practice materialised in several archaic forms of worshipping objects. Before the advent of proper sculptural art, the veneration needs were probably fulfilled through terracotta female figurines and probably also aniconic objects. The sacredness of water, animals, birds, wind, and plants is attested through all phases of Indian literature. In the cultural history of South Asian religions, some early votive objects became integral parts of the religious canon, while others disappeared and their exact functions became unknown.

A special group of votive objects that shall be discussed here are votive tanks that were quite frequent in the Gandhāra region (Marshall 1975: 463).

These small terracotta tanks being absent in an earlier period suddenly appear at the end of 2nd c. BC and disappear around the 2nd c. AD. They are not mentioned in literature and they cannot be attributed to any particular religion. Most of them have been discovered in the early historical cities of Taxila and Charsadda. Interestingly these miniature tanks were not only found in Gandhāra, but also in the Mathura region where Härtel excavated several near complete pieces of them in Sonkh. He dated the bulk of the tanks to the 1st c. BC and called this period the most innovative phase for votive tanks (Härtel 1993: 195). Although, the excavators of the miniature votive tanks both in Gandhāra and in Mathura have made their main physical features known to us, however, they fail to supply satisfactory interpretations. Before any

<sup>10</sup> According to Chinese Sūtras, there are several reasons why the guardian of the North was called Vaiśravaṇa (Tanabe 1993-94: 157-185).

attempt is undertaken to assign these objects to any religious practice, a proper categorisation of their types and an accurate investigation into their places of discovery is most essential.

## **Archaeological evidence for votive tanks in Gandhāra**

Terracotta votive tanks from Gandhāra were mostly found in metropolitan centres of that period, like Taxila and Charsadda (Puṣkalāvātī). According to Marshall, “these votive or ritual tanks are new to the Indian archaeology” (Marshall 1975: 463). They are limited in number. Marshall mentions fifteen such examples from Taxila including broken pieces. Four of these votive tanks were found in situ near the *stūpa* base in Sirkap (Marshall 1927: 50).

There are mainly three types of votive tanks found in the Taxila excavation:

### **A. Rounded bowl shaped tanks**

The chronological classification of these tanks can be done through the archaeological levels in which they were found. The earliest forms of the votive tanks were in bowl shape. Such bowls with cups on the lips were recovered from the upper level of Bhir mound (2nd c. BC) and few from the lowest level of Sirkap (2nd c. BC) (Marshall 1975: 463, Pl. 136, s, accession number Sk.'30-312). Based on these early strata findings, the “rounded bowl” shape can be considered the earliest one. Two more round miniature tanks with oil lamps are displayed in the Peshawar Museum. They were unearthed from Charsadda and prove that this early type was also known in central Gandhāra. One of them (Fig. 2.2) is a unique piece and displays a tank which is accessible through steps; two oil lamps are placed on its lip, while one broken bird is placed on the rim of the basin. Features such as oil lamps, birds, snakes, and aquatic animals inside or around the lip of the tank are also common for the next, later square type of votive tanks.



Figure 2.2. Rounded Bowl shaped tank from Charsadda.

### B. Square shaped tanks

According to archaeological stratigraphy, the round shaped votive tanks were replaced by square shaped objects which are found only in the later phases of Sirkap. A good example is exhibited in the Taxila Museum. Although these votive tanks are different in shape, they are conceivably used for similar purposes. Generally, oil lamps are attached to each corner of the tank. Between these lamps, perched birds with open wings are placed. Inside the tank unusual types of aquatic animals and snakes are noticeable. A small shrine like structure is positioned near the wall which is connected with the base of the votive tank by staircases. Besides this small shrine type structure, is placed a primitive type of a female figurine (size: 14.75 x 14 inch). (Fig.2.3)



Figure 2.3. Square votive tank with female figurine from Sirkap.

### C. Miscellaneous shapes and fragments

There are few examples from Sirkap, where we have only fragments of miniature shrines, which are probably detached from their votive tanks. These miniature shrines are accessible through steps and their entrance is usually supported by pillars. They are mostly single storied, but sometimes also double storied. These fragments come generally from rectangular or triangular shaped votive tanks. There is another interesting item from Sirkap, which is described by Marshall as “a central part of the ritual tank with fragments of two cross-walls surmounted by a circular shrine. This shrine which comes from the Greek stratum in Sirkap, may have been circular. The shrine is bell shaped with an entrance on one side. Around it are broken stumps, five in numbers, of what that might have once been trees or pillars, and on the top of the roof is a broken stump, which looks like a Linga” (Marshall 1975: 464).

## Discussion

To determine the exact use of these tanks would be merely speculative, but at least it is evident from the above descriptions that they were likely used for certain rituals on a specific occasion. The small lamps on the rim of the basins indicate some kind of *pūjā* (Härtel 1993: 195). On the other hand, these models were perhaps architectural copies of ritual tanks with shrines which were popular in this region. We do not have any material evidence to further support this idea. However, the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra, which is approximately contemporary to this historical period, discusses such shrines and temples where figures of gods are enshrined:

“(2.4.17) He should cause to be built in the centre of the city shrines for Aparājita, Apratihata, Jayanta and Vaijayanta as well as temples of Śiva, Vaiśravaṇa, Aśvins, Śrī and Madirā. (2.4.18) He should install the presiding deities of the dwelling places according to their respective regions. (2.4.19) The city gates (should be) presided over by Brahman, Indra, Yama and Senāpati. (2.4.20) Outside (the city), at a distance of one hundred *dhanuses* from the moat, should be made sanctuaries, holy places, groves and water-works, and the deities of the quarters in the respective quarters” (tr. Kangle 1972: 70).

As referred to earlier, among the fifteen examples of tanks from Taxila, only three were found in situ near the so-called “stūpa base” in Sirkap (Fig.2.4). Marshall considered this stūpa to be a “Jaina stūpa” (Marshall 1975: 466) and associated the respective miniature tanks as Jaina ritual tanks. From the sizes and shapes of the votive tanks it is clear that they were used in certain rituals. It is highly unlikely, that these rituals were Jaina, as there is no authentic proof for any Jain establishment in Gandhāra. Furthermore, there is no single material evidence to prove that the stūpa in Sirkap was a “Jain stūpa”. Marshall, later validated by other researchers, argues that since there was no Buddhist sculpture recovered, and these votive tanks were never observed in any other known Buddhist sites, hence the stūpa in Sirkap could belong to the Jain religion (Marshall 1975:145 and 174). But this circular argumentation *ex silentio* can hardly prove the attribution of stūpa and miniature tanks to Jaina ritual practices. The exact function of the votive tanks is controversial, as Marshall, the pioneer excavator, too presents more than

one solution. To him “these tanks are symbolic representations of the four elements and of all creation: of earth, air, fire and water, and all the beings that live in them. The earth symbolised by the clay of which the tank is made, the air by the bird, the fire by the lamps, and the water by the aquatic creatures within, as well as by the water itself with which the tank was partly filled. Above all the goddess was the supreme above all four elements and all created things contained in them.” (Marshall 1975: 465). It cannot be said that these tanks were the continuation of a somehow primitive established faith because they only appeared at the end of the 2nd century BC. There is no evidence for related objects which can be dated prior to these votive tanks.

Furthermore, Marshall connected these votive tanks with rituals of the dead. He tried to compare them with a certain ritual in Bengal which is associated with Yama, the god of death. These rituals are known as “*Yama-pukur-brata*” (Marshall 1975: 467). Again there is no positive evidence to support Marshall’s suggestion.

The finding of three votive tanks in a row near the base of a stūpa<sup>11</sup> could possibly suggest that they were placed there for votive purposes only, just like a votive stūpa is to be found in the vicinity of a main stūpa in Buddhist architecture<sup>12</sup>. The small size of the terracotta tanks could also indicate a use in domestic rituals.

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<sup>11</sup> This so-called stūpa is somehow different from other contemporary Gandhāran stūpas, while there were no traces which help us to determine the exact religious nature of this building.

<sup>12</sup> We omit here the discussion about the votive character of the so called votive stūpas that has been elaborated by G. Schopen 1997: 114-147.



Figure 2.4. Votive tanks in situ near the stūpa base in Sirkap.

Tangible evidence from Gandhāra confirms that these ritual tanks were only unearthed from areas, where there were no predominantly Indian establishments. That could indicate their foreign origin with a possible adaptation to local ideas. The primitive female figurine at the rim of the basin, resembling some form of a mother goddess, appears to be a local element. The abundance of female figurines in a vast variety, and the otherwise absence of any sculptural evidence also indicate that these figurines served worship purposes. Cults of “goddesses” were

popular at that time (cf. below chapter 8). By joining both concepts together, namely: a) the “goddesses” from Gandhāra and b) the dedication in form of a tank from a foreign source, a new cult was introduced at the beginning of the Christian era. In any case, these tanks with female figures are the earliest objects of cultic significance feasible in Gandhāra. That dedication played an important role in religious life in Gandhāra is frequently attested by dedicatory inscriptions. To dedicate ritualistic objects to a stūpa or monastery was a common practice.

These bowls can be dated to the 2nd - 1st c. BC and are therefore nearly contemporary to the votive tanks. Such evidences support the fact that local cults were popular even among foreigners and that objects were dedicated to the local gods. We cannot say who was the recipient of the miniature votive tanks under discussion since they are not inscribed. But they must have been dedicated to a particular local cult, which was neither Buddhist nor Jain in nature.

Recently Harry Falk (Falk 2009: 25-42) discussed the idea of the mergence of foreign and local cults. He presented inscribed metal bowls from Gandhāra, which were donated and designed in Greek manner. The Greek word chaos is paralleled by the Gāndhārī term *boa* which according to Falk represents Skt. *bhava*. similar mergers may be the reason for the introduction of the votive tanks in this region.

## **2.3. Numismatical sources**

### **2.3.1. Short Note on the Early Coins of Gandhāra**

In numerous types of the local Gandhāran coinage the extensive use of different symbols can be observed. Little attempt has been made so far to trace the origin and meaning of these symbols. From the religious point of view, they indicate the beginning of aniconism in Gandhāra. The importance of local Gandhāra copper coinage has often been overlooked, despite their significance to the history of Gandhāran religion. Here we will consider two Puṣkalāvātī type coins for our discussion.

**Type A:**

The thick square copper coin was described by Cunningham (1891:61) as "the plan of a monastery with its cells, and a Stupa in its courtyard." The same interpretation was given by later scholars, such as Bühler, John Allan, Percy Gardner, and even Mitchiner(1973).



Type A Coin

**Type B:**

A thick compact square copper coin is depicting a *liṅga* inside a railing; the so-called *caitya* symbol is shown to its right. This type was published for the first time by John Allan as an example for the Taxila tribal coinage. He followed Cunningham's identification of type A and described this coin under his "variety e" as "the plan of a monastery with a Stupa at its entrance" (Allan 1936: cxxxiii). This symbol is now known to the modern researchers as a *caitya* or Hill or arched symbol (Handa 2007:68) and the symbol in railing is recognised as a "tree".



Type B Coin

## Discussion:

Most local coins from the north-western subcontinent were attributed to Taxila. The tradition was started by Alexander Cunningham and was followed by later scholars such as Allan, Gardner etc. Only Mitchiner(1973: 48) began to distinguish different local traditions and classified Taxila and other Gandhāran local coinage on the bases of coin fabric, designs and animal representation. If we follow Mitchner’s classification, the coins under discussion belong to the early period of the Puṣkalāvātī coinage (220 BC to 185 BC). Evidently, they do not come from Taxila.

These coins depict a monolith inside a railing. The railing itself confirms the sacredness of the place. The shape of the fenced object visible on the coin types A and B, allows its identification as a *liṅga*, the aniconic representation of Śiva. A similar but more distinct representation of a *liṅga* is known from later rock carvings in Chilas (Nasim Khan 1997-98: 35-46). (Fig.2.5)

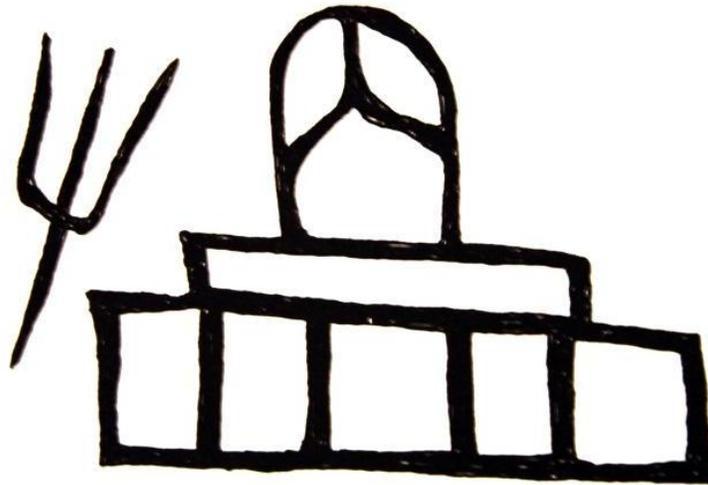


Figure 2.5. Rock carving Chilas (Thor North) after Nasim Khan 1997-98.

There are additional arguments to reject Cunningham’s *stūpa* identification. The argument that type A represents the plan of a monastery is far from convincing. There is no

example from Gandhāra for a stūpa located inside the residential area of a monastery in the way which is supposed to be depicted on this coin.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore we are also not sure if there was a monastery concept in such a period as early as the 3rd century BC.

### 2.3.2. The legacy of Indian “Gymnosophists” through Greek sources

The naked philosophers of India, the so-called “Gymnosophists” were mentioned frequently by the classical authors. This sole and direct encounter with an Indian doctrine left remarkable traces on the subsequent history of the Macedonians.

According to Greek classical sources at least two Brahman names are preserved, (a) *Calanus/Kalanus*, who joined Alexander in 326 AD near Taxila and (b) *Dandamis*, who refused to submit to the Macedonians. Some of the classical sources portray Alexander the Great as a seeker of truth, the reason why Calanus was present in Alexander’s court and enjoyed royal goodwill<sup>14</sup> for nearly two years.

Megesthanes, Arrian and Diodorus reported that *Calanus* accompanied Alexander to the West. Calanus was troubled by a constant abdominal complaint, and, rather than to seek treatment, he insisted on suicide. With Alexander’s unwilling permission he had a pyre constructed, wherein he jumped and was burned alive in front of a large audience. According to Diodorus (17.107.5, cf. Bosworth 1998: 179) the suicide evoked sharply contrasting comments. Some admired Calanus’s courage; other condemned his death as insanity or empty arrogance.

Consequently, to commit suicide by burning oneself into flames emerged as a formal and accepted manner of death among the Macedonians, especially when Calanus suicide was ceremonially re-enacted for Augustus in 20 BC. Similar was the case with the suicide of *Peregrinus* at Olympia (Strabo, 15.1.73, 720 cf. Bosworth 1998: 177).

<sup>13</sup> The only example is the Aziz Dheri *stūpa*, which is constructed inside a monastery. But it can be dated to the late Kuṣāṇa period.

<sup>14</sup> There are several Greek references mentioning Calanus’ meetings with Alexander and later his suicide, i.e. Strabo 15.1.68 (717). Arrian 7.3.1-2 mention Calanus’ illness and determination to die; for other general accounts see MacCrimdale 1969, 1971.

Megasthenes visited the Punjab in around 319 BC, and had discussions with Brahmans of Taxila. The Brahmans displayed an unsympathetic and generally hostile attitude towards Calanus due to his act of suicide.

So far, the legacy of a naked ascetic and the inspiration from an Indian doctrine to the Greek is confined to the literary evidence, but before taking this discussion into more detail, it should be remarked that the Sanskrit equivalent of Calanus is “*Kalyāṇa*”, which means the “auspicious” or “prosperous”.

A short paper published by O. Bopearachchi (1995) presents an unusual type of a coin, issued by the Indo Greek king Telephos (Fig.2.6, Fig. 2.6a). The date and succession of this king is subject to a controversial debate among numismatists. Cunningham placed him at 135 BC, succeeding Hippistratus. He was followed by Whitehead who dated Telephos contemporary to Maues. According to Mitchner’s view, he ruled between 80-75 BC. Interestingly W. Tarn called him an usurper (Tarn 1957: 313) and fell short of calling him a real king.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 2.6. Telephos coin showing ascetic on reverse.

<sup>15</sup> Even though Telephos used the title *mahārāja*, “great king”.



Figure 2.6a

Being more concerned with the iconography and palaeography of that coin, which was largely ignored so far, we may put him into about 80 BC.<sup>16</sup> The square copper is shown in figure 2.6 and can be described as follows:

**Obverse:** Zeus is sitting on a high throne and leaning to the left with a scepter in his left hand, while the right hand is outstretched. The Greek legend on the margin reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΘΗΛΕΦΟΥ.

**Reverse:** A naked ascetic is sitting on rocks, squatting towards the right and holding a branch of a tree as a knotted stick that is shown above his shoulder.<sup>17</sup> There are a *kamaṇḍalu* and a fire altar in front of him. The Kharoṣṭhī legend reads: *maharajasa kalanakramasa teliphasa*.

This interesting coin elaborates two major aspects, (1) the naked ascetic or *brāhmaṇa* (Gymnosophist) on the reverse, and (2) the legend inscribed on this coin. Generally on the obverse of Indo-Greek coins we find the portrait of the king, while a Greek deity is depicted on the reverse. In this case, we see the naked male figure instead of the Greek deity on the reverse. No other Indo-Greek coin is known as yet which depicts an Indian ascetic and uses the epithet “*kalanakramasa*” and *EΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ*.

<sup>16</sup> The problem of Telephos’ date and succession is beyond the scope of this discussion and will be taken up elsewhere.

<sup>17</sup> In Gandhāran iconography the Brahman is usually holding a tree branch as staff.

It should be noted that the altar depicted on this coin is not the usual Persian fire altar but is of a typical Indian kind. The ascetic is sitting on rocks and resembles the Indian “gymnosophists” of Alexander’s time. The legend used by Telephos “*kalanakramasa*”, the Sanskrit equivalent of *kalyāṇakarmasya*, can be understood as “doing beneficial/auspicious acts” as well as “acting like Kalyāṇa”. The combined evidences of the figure of a naked philosopher/ascetic/Brahman and the word Kalyāṇa cannot be mere coincidence. It indicates that the figure and Alexander’s Calanus are somehow connected.

Here, one may pose a question: why should Telephos as an Indo-Greek King depict an Indian brahman on his coin instead of a Greek deity? He may not have been a follower of a non-Greek creed, as Tarn suggests. However, he might have attempted to portray himself like Alexander as a seeker of truth through an Indian doctrine. Surely, the story of Calanus must have been known to him. Perhaps he simply want to commemorate Calanus. A plausible reason could be that Alexander’s Calanus was a native of this region and the ruler used his name and the depiction of an ascetic to get support of the local population, especially in the declining period of Indo-Greek power.



Figure 2.7. Telephos coin with Triton.

Telephos was the second Indo-Greek ruler after Antimachus Nikephorus who did not use his own portrait on his coins. Interestingly, the legend “*kalanakramasa*” is not only used by him on the “ascetic type” coin, but also on some of his other issues ( i.e., shown in Fig. 2.7) On the

obverse Triton is frontally standing with the Greek legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΤΗΛΕΦΟΥ and the reverse is showing Helios radiate and Selene, frontally standing. The Kharoṣṭhi legend reads: *maharajasa kalanakramasa teliphasa*. It can be safely concluded that the term *kalanakrama* (Skt. *kalyāṇakarman*) is obviously referring to the king who uses this translation of the Greek *terminus technicus* εὐεργέτης to refer indirectly to the legendary Indian wise Kalyāṇa. Similarly the Greek title *ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ* was perhaps used first by the Greek king Ptolemy VIII somewhere in around 3<sup>rd</sup> C. BC. (Poole 1883: plate IX). This title also appeared on the coins of Seleucid ruler Alexander I Balas (152-145 BC) (Houghton 2008:213). Alexander I Balas coinage reveals that his formal epithet was *Theopator Euergetes* (Divinely Fathered Benefactor) (see Houghton 2008: Part II, Vol. II, plate 21. Nr.1783a).

Telephos's coin is significant in many respects. It is the only example of an Indo-Greek ruler to have an ascetic depicted. It also offers a possible link between Alexander's Calanus and the Indo-Greek tradition. Moreover, it sheds light on the early popular religious customs of the Northwest. Based on the above, the Telephos era can be considered as an early phase of Indianisation of foreign religious ideas.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.4. Conclusion

The earliest evidence for beliefs and practices which can be associated to Hinduism come from different types of sources: archaeological (votive tanks), numismatic (coin symbols, Telephos coin) and literary (Alexander's historians).

These diverse sources do not allow reconstruction of a coherent picture of the religious situation in Gandhāra in the first centuries BC. But they do help in determining some characteristic traits.

Firstly, the worship of Hindu gods was restricted to aniconic objects, for instance the *liṅga* or several other auspicious symbols, like the so-called *caitya* symbol. Secondly, ritual activities which later became a popular part of Hindu ritualism – like ritual baths - seem to have been part of the popular culture of that time. Thirdly, the figure of the ascetic, which plays a

<sup>18</sup> Agathokles was the first one to depict Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva on his coin.

prominent role in different religious traditions (including Buddhism and Jainism) is represented on the coin of an Indo-Greek ruler. It not only indicates the popularity and status of this motif but also the role of foreign elements in the dissemination of Indian ideas.

## Chapter 3

### The Contribution of the Kuṣāṇas to early Hinduism in Gandhāra

The Kuṣāṇas were certainly one of the most important dynasties which ever ruled in Gandhāra. They contributed in many ways to the cultural heritage of the North West of the Indian subcontinent. Their simultaneous support of Indian, Greek, Roman and Iranian religious ideas had a considerable impact on the further religious development of Gandhāra. Mainly through this syncretic religious approach, they made Gandhāra a centre of multicultural activities. The Kuṣāṇas ruled a terrain which is situated at the crossroads of three cultural spheres: the Indian subcontinent, Iran and Hellenised Bactria and Central Asia. The Kuṣāṇas merged all these diverse cultures into the very special culture of Gandhāra that from the 1st century AD onward became the pivot point of variegated mythological ideas.

#### 3.1. The origin of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty

The Kuṣāṇa origin is connected with the Yüe-Chi tribe from Chinese Turkestan (Knobloch 1972: 220). It is a common supposition that a war broke out between two nomad hordes living on the borders of the Chinese empire, the Yüe-Chi and the Huns, in which the Yüe-Chi were completely defeated and were ousted from their territory (von Le Coq 1928: 21). From there they marched westward with their herds in search of land and pasture. They settled in Hellenistic Bactria (modern Afghanistan) in mid 2nd century BC (Fussman<sup>19</sup> 1996: 247, Litvinskiy & Pichikiyan 1981: 134). According to Chinese records, this migration coincided with a large scale migration of tribes traveling westwards from North-West China and southern Siberia. The Chinese imperial

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<sup>19</sup> Fussman was not fully convinced with the destruction of Bactria by the nomads, but on the other hand did not provide any other alternative chronology for Bactria.

archives (the *Shiji* and the *Han Shu*) provide us with texts based on a report made by a Zhang Qian, an ambassador of the Han ruler Wu-di to the western provinces between 138 and 126 BC. He tells us about the arrival in Central Asia of the Yüe-Chi in the second half of the 2nd c. BC (Watson 1961: 267-268, cf. Bopearachchi 1998: 196). According to Bopearachchi (1998: 196), who fostered this theory by his interpretation of excavation finds of Ai-Khanum, the Greek city of Ai-Khanum had been destroyed by this nomadic invasion of 145 BC, and the Greeks never occupied this place again. To him this invasion was done by the Yüe-Chi, who were later known as Kuṣāṇas (Bopearachchi 1998: 197) and it took place during the reign of the Indo-Greek ruler Eucratides I, as his coins were the last to be found in Ai-Khanum (Bopearachchi 1998: 196).

Bactria had been under Achaemenid rule since mid-sixth century BC and was taken by Alexander in the late fourth century BC. As conquerors of Bactria the Yüe-Chi encountered many different traditions. Some scholars identify the Yüe-Chi with the Tokharian people<sup>20</sup> (Knobloch 1972: 220).

## 3.2. The religious background of the Kuṣāṇas

### 3.2.1. The Kuṣāṇas in Bactria

We do not know much about the original religion of the Kuṣāṇas but it may be supposed that during their advance to Bactria they must have come into contact with many creeds. In Bactria itself they encountered religious groups from different cultural origins existing side by side influencing and to a certain extent tolerating each other and forming the very special Hellenistic Bactrian culture. The predominantly Greek cultured overlords and significant numbers of Greek settlers worshiped Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, Athena, Nike, and Heracles but many other gods and cults have been documented as well on Bactrian coins. At this time of mutual influence of Greek and Iranian religious ideas the Indian subcontinent was not isolated from the Bactrian cultural sphere. On the other hand the Hellenistic world was also open to Indian ideas, as attested from Agathocles' Samkarṣaṇa and Balarāma<sup>21</sup> coins as well as from the Telephos's "Gymnosophist coin" of the Taxila region (Samad 2009: 81-86). Greeks were also aware of the importance of local

<sup>20</sup> For the name "Tokharian" see Bailey 1970: 121-122.

<sup>21</sup> This early coin was recovered from the Hellenistic city of Ai-Khanum in Afghanistan.

deities, which they depicted sometimes in the form of city goddesses on their coins. The victorious Kuṣāṇas apparently followed the government philosophy of the Bactrian Greeks. Since they most probably did not have their own script, they also adopted the Greek system of writing<sup>22</sup>.

One of the major sources of legitimacy was their claim of kingship derived from divine support. As case example of this approach one may cite the Rabatak inscription where the king Kaniṣka is said to have obtained the kingship by the Mesopotamian goddess Nānā: “(...) of the great salvation, Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god worthy of worship, who obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods, (...)” (Sims-Williams 1995-96: 77-78).

The Rabatak inscription mentions the term *bagolaggo* “place of the gods”, probably a term meaning temple and used parallel to Skt. *devakula*. It is mentioned in the inscription that Shafar, the local Kuṣāṇa officer, built the *bagolaggo* to place the images of gods<sup>23</sup> (Sims-Williams & Cribb 1995-96: 109).

### 3.2.2. The Kuṣāṇas in Gandhāra

The name of “Kuṣāṇa” was not manifested in Indian historical tradition, however, the names of three Kuṣāṇa rulers were preserved in an Indian archives from Kashmir, and one of them, Kaniṣka, is also mentioned in a Khotansese chronicles, preserved in Tibetan Text (Petech 1968 cf. Cribb 2007: 179). The first substantial records of their extensive empire began to emerge in the early nineteenth century in the form of coins (Cribb 2007:179). With the advent of the Kuṣāṇas the Indo-Greek rule in Gandhāra gradually came to a close, as it did in Bactria before. The Kuṣāṇas started their ruling under Kujula Kadphises probably around 40 AD (for chronologies see detailed study of Cribb 2003: 222). Interestingly, they continued to use and strike coinage of the Indo-Greek king Hermaeus (Bopearachchi & A. ur Rehman 1995: 37-44). One of these overstrike issues by the Kuṣāṇa, Kujula Kadphises shows a large bust of a king on the obverse and on the reverse a Heracles frontally

<sup>22</sup> The script of the Kuṣāṇas that they used on their coins is Bactrian Greek; the Rabatak inscriptions dated to the Imperial Kuṣāṇa era, is also written in Bactrian Greek (Sims-Williams 1995-96: 75-142).

<sup>23</sup> The Kuṣāṇa sanctuary at Mat, called *devakula*, was also the place of worship for Kuṣāṇas. See Fussman 1989: 193-199.

standing, holding a club in his right hand. The Kharoṣṭhī legend reads: *kujula kasa kuṣana yavugasa dhramatidasa* (Bopearachchi 1998: 272, nr. 317-318).

When the Kuṣāṇas entered Gandhāra, they encountered Brahmanism, Iranian and Greek cults beside a dominant popular Buddhism. This fact is supported by their coins that show images of these cults simultaneously. The originally Sumerian goddess Nānā, the Persian gods Wād (Bactrian OADO), and Athš (spelled AΘPO in Bactrian script), the Indian Buddha and Skanda and a hybrid local god Wēś (Bactrian OHPO), Heracles of the Greek and Zoroastrian fire worship are depicted by their symbols and images. All these scattered evidences testify that Greek, Iranian, and Indian religions were flourishing side by side before the arrival of the Kuṣāṇas in Gandhāra.

The Kuṣāṇas apparently introduced the very first anthropomorphic representations of Indian gods for their coins in Gandhāra, even before an iconographical canon for these deities became standardised. The emergence of Gandhāran Hinduism can be observed by the rise and change of deities on Kuṣāṇa coins.

### 3.3. The religious policy of Kujula Kadphises

Hindu mythology was endorsed and shaped by the Kuṣāṇas through their coinage and by representing gods in sculptures. They depicted less known local deities for the first time on their coins and frequently added their names. Kujula Kadphises was the one who introduced the term “King of the Kuṣāṇas” in his legend.

He had only Greek and Roman deities depicted on the reverse, and started his own coin issue by reproducing that of his predecessor, the Indo-Greek ruler Hermaios in increasing barbarised variations. For example, one of his coins shows a diademed king on the obverse with the Greek legend BACIAEQΣ ΣΟΤΗΡΟΣΣΥ ΕΡΜΑΙΟΥ. The reverse of the coin shows the Greek goddess of victory Nike with wreath and palm and the Kharoṣṭhī legend *maharajasa rajarajasa mahatasa heramayasa* (Mitchiner 1975-76, no. 1048).

In the next phase, Kujula used the same obverse and the Greek legend of Hermaios, but the reverse showed a naked Heracles, frontally standing with a club and a lion’s skin. On this coin he introduced his real name in the Kharoṣṭhī legend: *kujula kasasa kushana yavugasa*

*dhramathidasa*. In his subsequent issues, Hermaios's name was also replaced by his own while the image of the king became a copy of that of the Roman emperor Augustus (Mitchiner 1975-76: no. 1053).

Apart from that, Kujula retained the Greek style of the coinage in certain developmental stages, and used the same few Greek deities (i.e. Zeus, Nike and Heracles) on reverses. Hence, from his coinage we cannot deduct any new developments in the Gandhāran religious scenario.

### 3.4. Innovation under Vima Kadphises

Under the next ruler Vima Kadphises the picture dramatically changed. While retaining the Greek idea of depicting a deity's image on the reverse he introduced a new god on his coinage. From the distribution and large number of coins it can be supposed that Vima Kadphises was ruling a vast area covering almost the entire North-West India. It is probable that he had himself designated as *mahiśvara* (Skt. *mahīśvara* "Lord of the Earth"). On the reverse of his coins a new composite deity is depicted which under his successor is designated as Wēś (cf. see chapter on OHPO). To create a deity from elements of other well established gods indicates a certain religio-political program of integration of a multicultural society.

Vima Kadphises, the war lord, might also have wanted to be regarded as being backed by a powerful deity with divine weapons of all sorts. He issued his Wēś type coins both in gold and in copper in different varieties, i.e. Wēś standing alone, holding attributes, Wēś standing in front of a bull with his attributes and one type shows him with attributes only, i.e. *liṅga*, trident and *arikuśa* (Göbl 1984: nr. 1-20).

### 3.5. Experiments of Kaniṣka

The ascent of Kaniṣka on the Kuṣāṇa throne brought about fundamental changes to Kuṣāṇa religious conceptions. Vima Kadphises might have given preference to Wēś as his deity on coins due to political reasons, but at the time of Kaniṣka, the Kuṣāṇa dynasty was politically strong and could afford to put its favourite Iranian cults at the centre of the religious policy (see Williams and Cribb 1995-96:75-142). So the majority of Kaniṣka's coinage shows gods of the Iranian sphere on its reverse, indicating their names in Graeco-Bactrian instead of the previously used Kharoṣṭhī

script. They comprise Iranian deities of Athš (spelled AΘPO in Bactrian script), Māh (Bactrian MAO), Mithra/Mihira (Bactrian MIIPO), Wād (Bactrian OAAO) etc.

The aforementioned Iranian deities appeared here for the first time on coins (see Göbl 1984: nr. 25-80). In spite of Kaniška's promotion of deities from the Iranian religion, Wēś remained an important god. Only under Kaniška this new composite god got his name. The iconography of Wēś became more and more elaborate with multiple hands holding a broad variety of attributes that reminded of other deities that used to habitually keep those items. This multiplicity being an Indian feature resulted in a transition that saw Wēś becoming more of an indigenous Indian deity. The gradual change of the Kuṣāṇa's religious policy from Kujula via Vima to Kaniška led to the incorporation of several local divinities into the Kuṣāṇa pantheon published on coins. The multiplicity of gods that are shown backing the Emperor Kaniška added to his status and importance and do not seem to indicate any of his personal religious preferences. (see chapter on OHPO).

### **3.6. Huviška and Early Hinduism**

The contribution of Kaniška's successor Huviška to the religious policy of the Kuṣāṇas has been less discussed so far. However, in many regards he can be considered the most important ruler of Gandhāra in this sphere. His numismatic idiosyncrasies and the vast number of gold coins present Huviška as an established emperor of glory with a considerable amount of religious concern. While Kaniška's religious suppositions were based on Bactrian creeds, Huviška followed more innovative religious strategies and admitted a wide range of Greek, Brahmanical, Buddhist and Zoroastrian gods for his numismatic pantheon (see below for his coin types). This innovative phase was mainly restricted to the beginning of his reign, when a great number of variant gods were depicted on the reverse of his coins. Somewhat later towards the middle of this reign Wēś became his main and favourite god. In addition to the deities on Kaniška's coinage new names appeared, that may be interpreted as developments of Iranian and Indian gods. Indeed, a great deal of majority, and also minority religious ideas were manifested in the coinage of Huviška's first ruling period.

The new gods include Zoroastrian deities of Wanind (Bactrian OANINDO) and Shahrēor (Bactrian PAOPHOPO), Greek deities of Serapis and Uranus, the Roman deity Roma (with Bactrian legend PIPTO) and Indian deities such as Skanda-Kumāra, Viśākha and Mahāsenā. After their appearance on Huviṣka's coins they are no longer represented on any of his successors' coinage.

### 3.6.1. Important coins of Huviṣka showing Hindu and local deities

**(A)** A deity which Huviṣka copied from Kaniṣka, is spelled MANAOBAGO, a male god seated with his head in profile to the right. He is wearing a Macedonian helmet, a lunar crescent attached to his shoulders, and has four arms. His upper left arm wields a spear; his lower left the *cakra*, plough, purse, and diadem (Göbl 1984: nr. 151). This is an interesting deity, combining all major gods' attributes thrust like those of a ruler, which demonstrates its high rank. The iconographic details of this deity still await interpretation. Scholars mostly identify this deity with the Avestan Vohu Manah (Rosenfield 1967: 80) that may be perceived as the Hindu god Viṣṇu in his earliest form with the attributes of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and the plough of Balarāma. The Vāsudeva which has four arms with different attributes is an important god in the Kuṣāṇa pantheon.

**(B)** Huviṣka initiated MAACHNO (*Mahāsenā*) type of coins. This category of coins shows a standing male, dressed in a tunic, wearing a short sword on his left and holding a standard with a bird finial and ribbons in his right hand (see chapter on Skanda). *Mahāsenā* is a well known Hindu god, popularly known today as Skanda or Kārttikeya. Skanda, Kumāra, Viśākha and Mahāsenā were four different gods to Huviṣka, which later on merged into one deity that became known under the name Kārttikeya in Hinduism (Göbl 1984: nr. 156-7 & 166).

**(C)** Huviṣka also introduced OAXPO in Bactrian script, an aquatic deity. His left hand is holding a large fork-tailed fish, while in the right there is a staff. He is interpreted as the river god of "river Oxus" (Göbl 1984: nr. 241).

**(D)** King Huviṣka demonstrated his innovative approach with a variety of deities and also introduced a new form of Wēś (Göbl 1984: nr. 155, 308-9). Before the time of Huviṣka, Wēś was shown with one or three heads (Perkins 2007) and two or four arms holding varying attributes. The Wēś of Huviṣka appears regularly with three heads, four arms and hands, holding a vase, a

thunderbolt, a trident, and a club. The central face has a third eye, the hairs are knotted. This form of Wēś became the model for Śiva in Gandhāra.

**(E)** Another important contribution of Huviṣka was the introduction of divine couples. In the pair Wēś-Nānā (Göbl 1984: nr. 167) both deities assimilate their Indian counterparts: Wēś assumes characteristics of Śiva and Nānā takes on features of Parvatī. Accordingly, this earliest representation of the divine couple influenced depiction of the Śiva-Parvatī iconography in Gandhāra. Similarly, the pair Wēś-Omm (spelled OHPO, OMMO) (Göbl 1984: nr. 310) influenced the idea of Umā-Maheśvara in Gandhāra.

**(F)** Huviṣka for the first time presented coins which featured gods that may have been locally important in Gandhāra and did not come from the mainstream Kuṣāṇa pantheon. There is a male figure holding a long bow and an arrow. Another figure with eight arms holds a conch, a wheel, a club, lotuses, and various other unidentified objects. The latter deity, owing to his characteristic conch and wheel, may be interpreted as the Hindu god Viṣṇu in his early form as Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa (see chapter on Viṣṇuism in Gandhāra, also Cribb 2008: 122-125).

**(G)** Huviṣka minted an interesting coin with a King holding a club in his raised right hand and riding an elephant to the right on the obverse. It shows the legend “ /// [Huvi]ska, the Kuṣāṇa” in Bactrian script. The reverse displays a two-armed god standing frontally. He is holding a long trident in his raised right hand and his left hand probably holds a water flask near the waist. The Kharoṣṭhī legend reads “*yodhavade*”. Although the identity of this deity as well as the meaning of the legend still remain unexplained, however the coin seems to represent another form of a local deity set in a probable Hindu context.

### 3.7. Conclusion

To fix the “official” or “state religion” and to ascribe the Kuṣāṇas to a particular personal faith with certainty is complicated. Different rulers favoured varying cults as depicted on their coins. Nonetheless, it is essential to note the fundamental function of religious institutions under the Kuṣāṇa rule. The Kuṣāṇa rulers patronised religious cults to claim their legitimacy of ruling the conquered societies. The Central Asian territory was influenced by Iranian religions, while Bactria

was under the influence of Iranian and Greek religious ideas. In Gandhāra, Brahmanism and Buddhism played a major role. The Kuṣāṇas were probably active supporters of the Buddhist institutions. In several Gandhāran Buddhist panels men and women dressed in Kuṣāṇa clothes are depicted as devotees or donors. However, this does not prove that the Kuṣāṇas were actual followers of this religion. They patronised Buddhism and other minor religions mainly for political reasons.

Kaniṣka, the sovereign ruler of the Kuṣāṇas built a big stūpa in Peshawar, which was acknowledged as the grandest monument in India. From the same site the famous perfume box (erroneously known as “Kaniṣka reliquary”) was found which shows Huiṣka in a central position (Errington 2002), mentioning Kaniṣka’s town as the site of the stūpa. According to popular Buddhist legends, Kaniṣka was proclaimed the patron of Buddhism and a second Aśoka because he convened a third Buddhist council in Kashmir (Puri 1977: 83-97, Mukherjee 1988: 410-11).

Religious syncretism began under the rule of Scythians who depicted diverse deities on their coins and reached its climax during the reign of the Great Kuṣāṇas. The syncretism resulted in the emergence of new forms and innovative ideas in the representation of images of Hindu gods and goddesses. In turn, it influenced the formation of the Hindu pantheon both in iconographical and conceptual respects.

## Chapter 4

### Analyses of the OHPO image on early Kuṣāṇa coins

Coinage is a perfect source for the study of the culture and religious changes in the area of Gandhāra. Coins were used for two purposes: as currency and as a means of propagation for religious and political matters. Greek tradition defined the depiction of gods on coins. In Gandhāra this tradition was continued by the Indo-Greeks. The Scythians followed this practice with certain changes: to Greek deities they added elements from the local religions. Then came the Kuṣāṇas with a different religious background, who apparently pushed Gandhāra into a more composite society. The Kuṣāṇas can be considered as more liberal invaders, who followed their predecessor's convention of making coins, while adding and mixing their own gods with local and Greek deities. These deities on coins must not have represented the faith of the majority in society. On the other hand they must not stand for the belief of the respective ruler, but may result from socio-religious considerations.

The religious change in the Kuṣāṇa period can be demonstrated by an interpretation of Wēś. This god is depicted on the reverse of many coins and his forms provide an explanation to the issues of early Indian art history as well as to early developments of diverse religious beliefs in the region. Here the word "OHPO" is copied as it appears on Kuṣāṇa coins, written in Bactrian language. It is pronounced "Wēś", as the final single "O" is always silent in the Bactrian language<sup>24</sup>. Discussion of Wēś divides researchers into two groups, those who strongly claim that this deity is the Indian Śiva, while others consider Wēś to be Iranian *Vāyu*.

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<sup>24</sup> Vayuś was transformed into Veś or Weś in the seventh or eighth century, and was probably called Vesh(u) or Wēś in the Kuṣāṇ period" (Tanabe 1997: 267). It is therefore suggested that Wēś got his name from the Iranian *Vāyuś*.

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Understanding the question of Wēś is of crucial importance for solving the riddles of early Gandhāran religious processes. Therefore, the issue has to be re-examined.

#### 4.1. Wēś iconography on Kuṣāṇa coins

A deity that under Kaṇiṣka was labeled as “OHPO” appeared first on coins of Vima Kadphises (c.a 100 AD). So far only Wēś has been found to be depicted on the reverse of Vima’s coins. Initially he is represented naked with an erect phallus, holding a trident in his right hand and a *kamaṇḍalu* in his left. There is an animal skin visible over his left arm. Vima Kadphises not only introduced this god with this special iconography but he also used *mahiśvara* (god of the earth) and *īśvara* as a title for himself (see example of Göbl 1984: nr.5,6). Most of the iconographic characteristics of Wēś were already available to Vima Kadphises as attributes of Greek and local deities represented on coins. However, no sculptural image of Wēś has been found so far. Therefore, the suggestion of Cribb (1997 and 2008) that coin images were copied from available sculpture might be true but is purely based on conjecture. In fact, there is not a single example of a sculptural image available for any other Kuṣāṇa deity until after the Great Kuṣāṇa period. Most probably, deities on Scythian coins served as models for the Kuṣāṇa engravers.

For understanding this phenomenon, one has to discuss the different iconographical elements of Wēś in detail.

#### 4.2. Elements and sources of the Wēś iconography

**Trident:** The trident Wēś is holding was copied from Poseidon images (Guiliano 2004: 51-96), that were available in the area either on Indo-Greek or Scythian coins. It appeared first with a deity on Maues and Azes I coins.

The trident remained the only constant attribute of Wēś throughout his depiction (Göbl 1984, Guiliano 2004 & Cribb 1997), while other attributes varied. This trident connects somehow Wēś with the Gandhāran Śiva whereas it is missing from Mathuran Śiva’s images.

Nakedness, diadem, club and animal skin: These characteristics of Wēś were borrowed from the Heracles on Indo-Greek and Scythian coins. For these attributes the closest parallel can be found

on the Heracles image of the Scythian king Azilises' coins (Senior 2001: nr. 44.1). Heracles is the only Greek god included in the Kuṣāṇa pantheon and most of his attributes can be found on the representations of Wēś.

**Thunderbolt:** The thunderbolt was an attribute of the Greek Zeus. It has been taken by the Scythian Poseidon and transmitted to the Gandhāran Wēś. This argument is based on the Poseidon's thunderbolt, which is strikingly similar to the one in Wēś's hand (for Scythian Poseidon and thunderbolt see Senior 2001: nr.24.1).

**Bull:** The bull has been frequently depicted in the arts since the earliest times and is also found on Indus valley seals. It is often mentioned in Vedic texts. In Gandhāra it is found on Indo-Greek and Scythian coins, and also on local issues. The bull behind Wēś may have been copied from Scythian coinage. Nevertheless, the frequent availability of that indigenous animal does not make it necessary to look for far-fetched models, i.e. as an emblem of an Iranian deity as suggested by Tanabe 1997: 270. However, the association of the bull with a specific god is a new feature which was first introduced on Wēś coins.<sup>25</sup>

**Aṅkuśa:** On some coins Wēś holds *aṅkuśa*, an elephant goad, in his right hand. This typical Indian instrument is also attested in earlier coinage, For example, it is held in the right hand of a deity on the reverse of a coin of the Scythian king Maues (Senior 2001: nr. 9.1). This deity has been wrongly identified with Balarāma who usually holds a plough (*hala*) in his hand not an *aṅkuśa*.

**Cakra:** The wheel is another attribute found in Wēś iconography which can be considered Indian, probably also appropriated from images on Scythian coins where an Indian deity of unknown identity is depicted (Senior 2001: nr. 22.1).

**Water pot and ascetic appearance:** These are again attributes of Wēś which have to be considered as Indian features. Water pot (*kamaṇḍalu*) and ascetic hair lock appeared for the first time on an Indo-Greek coin of king Telephos, that shows an Indian naked ascetic (Samad 2009: 81-86). It is, however, possible that Kuṣāṇa engravers copied both ascetic look and *kamaṇḍalu* directly from existing local naked ascetics and not from an available coin image.

<sup>25</sup> For a detail discussion on bull association with later Śiva see Bhattacharya 1977: 1545-1567.

**Third eye:** The idea of an eye on the central forehead is an indigenous feature, which may already have been available in the form of the Buddhist *ūrṇā*, the symbol of foresight. The third eye remained an attribute of the Gandhāran Śiva, but it is absent in contemporary Mathuran sculptures.

**Lotus:** Wēś holding a lotus can be seen on Vasudeva's coins. The lotus represents an indigenous feature.

**Diadem / wreath:** The diadem which Wēś is holding on some coin types can be connected with earlier Azilises coins (Senior 2001: nr. 44.1).

**Multiplicity of head and arms:** From Kuṣāṇa time onwards multiple heads and arms are found with deities (see Srinivasan 1997). In the coinage of Vima Kadphises, there is a copper coin preserved with a two-faced Wēś. There are other attempts to interpret this new feature of multiple heads, but a satisfactory answer on the basis of concrete evidence cannot be provided for the time being.

The custom of identifying a god by his weapon is a Greek one, which the Kuṣāṇas also followed. The multiplicity of arms enabled a deity to be represented with a multitude of weapons and attributes. Thus it was possible to depict Wēś as a supreme deity who holds the weapons/attributes of all major gods simultaneously.

Instead of showing individual gods, the Kuṣāṇas introduced a composite deity that represented individual religious conceptions.

### 4.3. The role of the Scythians in the genesis of Wēś's iconography

The Scythians played an important role in the formation of Wēś. Many characteristics of Wēś iconography can be traced back to the Scythian coinage. Zeymal (1997: 298) made the observation that the die engravers in Kuṣāṇa time used the same basic human figure and only changed the attributes of the gods for designating their identities. However, after studying Kuṣāṇa and Scythian coins, it can also be suggested that the "basic human figure" is of Scythian origin too. Because of the absence of any model for representing Kuṣāṇa deities in Bactria, Kuṣāṇa overlords

did not bring their own iconographical ideas from their homeland but made extensive use of the available iconographic canon.

On this basis the Kuṣāṇas introduced newly created images of their deities which were most probably only intended to be represented on coins (Zeymal 1997: 297). These images of Iranian and Mesopotamian gods were shaped after Scythian models and attributed with Bactrian names. On the other hand, the Kuṣāṇa coinage reflects the gradual merger of these gods into the indigenous religion of Gandhāra. This process which can also be traced in the development of the iconography did of course affect the identity of a god within a concrete religious environment. For Wēś two major identities have been suggested: an Iranian, which equates this deity with *Vāyuš*, and an Indian, which associates it with Śiva. As stated above, it is quite probable that none of these identifications are definitely true because they neglect the diverse character of the religious developments in this period. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to revisit both theories.

#### 4.4. Wēś as Vāyu

Some scholars identify Wēś with *Vāyuš* making this Iranian god a major figure in the Kuṣāṇa pantheon. This hypothesis is predominantly based on philological grounds along with some weak arguments from the iconographical point of view (Humbach 1975, Tanabe 1991, 1997). A repeatedly cited evidence to support this theory is the *Wešparkar* painting from Penjikent (Fig.4.1). However, the idea of associating a first century image of Wēś from a painting dated into the 7-8th century AD is not convincing. Etymological considerations are more valid. They are based on the hypothesis that “*Vayuš* was transformed into *Veš* or *Weš* in the seventh or eighth century, and was probably called *Vesh(u)* or *Vesh(a)* in the Kushan period” (Tanabe 1997: 267). It is therefore suggested that Wēś got his name from the Iranian *Vāyuš*. But does this imply that he also took over his religious identity as a “wind god”?

As a further argument for Wēś’s identity with *Vāyuš* Tanabe points to a water pot which in some images is held in one of the deity’s. According to Tanabe referring to Mary Boyce (1993), “the vase held by OHPO on Kanishka I’s coins is not an attribute of Shiva but of the Zoroastrian river-yazata, Anahitah and of Greek river-gods and symbolizing *Vayu* as bringing water through rain (Tanabe 1997: 274)”. However, the depiction of a water pot on an Indo-Greek coin of

Telephos in Gandhāra (Samad 2009) shows that the water-pot must not be taken for a proof of identifying Wēś with the Iranian Vāyu but can be considered as an indigenous attribute of an Indian ascetic.

On some of coin issues of Huviṣka Wēś is coupled with the goddess Nānā. There is no Iranian or Bactrian textual or iconographical evidence for a pair consisting of the Iranian Vāyuš and Nānā.

The same is valid for the pair Wēś and the bull. Here Wēś can at best be understood as replacing Verethragna - as Tanabe has it (Tanabe 1997: 270) - but not Vayu. The most striking argument against Wēś as Vāyu is the existence of the Iranian wind god 'OADO' on at least one coin, that Tanabe takes as a proof for his equation of Wēś = Vāyu. But why should the engraver write 'OADO' for 'OHPO' if he takes it for Vāyu? Although many of these associations strengthen the relation of Wēś to the Iranian context they show, that no direct identification of Wēś with a certain Iranian deity is possible.

#### 4.5. Wēś as Śiva

According to Cribb (2008: 124), from today's perspective Kuṣāṇa coin iconography Wēś is clearly representing the Hindu god Śiva. Although many of the attributes of Wēś are indeed identical with descriptions of this god from the time of the *Mahābhārata* onwards, there remains a number of open questions. Why did the coins not mention Śiva by his name or one of his usual epithets? Why Wēś is depicted with attributes which are otherwise unknown to Śiva iconography?

These questions forbid a direct identification of Wēś and Śiva, although they do not exclude a close relationship between the two deities. Even if Wēś is not Śiva, the image cannot be excluded from a discussion of early Śiva images (Cribb 2008:124) and plays a crucial role in the formation of that Hindu god and his cult.

The identification of Wēś and Śiva is mainly based on the attributes of the Kuṣāṇa deity. In many cases, however, the iconographical evidence of a later period has to be cited to establish this identity.

The main attribute of Wēś is the trident, a standard attribute of the later Śiva. The research of Giuliano (2004:51-96) shows that in early literary sources the trident is missing as an attribute with Śiva's early form, Rudra, who is holding only a bow. The trident is also missing in early Mathuran Śiva images. It becomes a usual iconographic attribute of Śiva only in the Gupta age.

The western roots of Śiva's *triśūla* are beyond doubt. It appears not only with Wēś, but also as an attribute of the king on the obverse of coins. According to Giuliano (2004: 59) the word *triśūla* is not mentioned in the Vedas, neither in association with Rudra nor in any other context. But already in the second century BC this kind of weapon seems to have been associated with the Śaiva cult. Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* commenting upon *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 5.2.76 names an object *ayaḥśūla* "iron staff" and designates it as one of the distinctive signs of a follower of Śiva (*śivabhāgavata*).

This explicit Śaiva connotation is however not always present. Thus the term *triśūla* is also used in Buddhist texts where it is not associated with Śiva (Giuliano 2004). In Buddhist visual art Māra is often holding this weapon.<sup>26</sup>

The diadem is another attribute that has led scholars to name Wēś as Śiva is (Cribb 1997: 11-66), which was wrongly interpreted as an Indian "noose". Like the trident, the diadem is a Greek symbol and came to the Kuṣāṇa coinage through the coins of the Scythian ruler Azilises.

There is no evidence that any of these attributes are especially linked to Śiva in this early period. As shown above, many of them are simply taken over from images of Scythian coins which usually depict Greek deities, like Poseidon, Heracles, or Zeus. In other cases the identity of the gods is less clear but points to an Indian background. Thus the deity holding an *aṅkuśa* (elephant goad) as well as the god holding a wheel (*cakra*) are not clearly identifiable, but seem to have served as models for the Kuṣāṇa Wēś (see above). Other problematic associations of attributes include the thunderbolt which has been confused with Śiva's *ḍamaru* and the antelope skin which appeared in Śiva images only as late as in the medieval period.

<sup>26</sup> Such an example is displayed in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin.

To sum up, the Scythian coins apparently acted as stylistic transmitter between Greek and Kuṣāṇa iconographies. The deity Wēś adopted three main features from classical divinities via the iconography of Scythian coinage: the club from Heracles, the trident from Poseidon, and the diadem from Zeus.

Other iconographical features are also borrowed from Scythian models but have their roots in indigenous Indian religious beliefs. These include the water-pot, the multiplication of heads and arms, the third eye, and the ascetic look of the deity.

The second argument for an identification of Śiva and Wēś is based on philological grounds. There have been different attempts to connect the Wēś with Indian Śaiva terms. One of these approaches associates the deities name with *vṛṣa* “bull” (for *Visha* see: Zeymal 1997: 265). However, *vṛṣa* has never been a designation of Śiva in any of the Indian literary sources. Zeymal takes Wēś as a spelling for *Visha* and does not answer the question why in the presence of the anthropomorphic form of the god, one should call him after his theriomorphic form. Similarly the Wēś connection with *bhūteśa* “lord of demon” which has been proposed by Gail (1992: 43-49) can also be rejected on philological grounds.

#### 4.6. The development of Wēś images on Kuṣāṇa coinage

The iconography and style of the Kuṣāṇa coins developed through different stages from that of their Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian predecessors. The king’s name and portrait was adopted from Kujula Kadphises onwards for the obverse and the mixed Kuṣāṇa and indigenous deity of Wēś on the reverse of the Vima Kadphises coinage. Kaniška changed the language from Greek to Bactrian and added many foreign, local and Bactrian gods to the Kuṣāṇa Pantheon. He also introduced Wēś with four arms and started to inscribe the name “OHPO”. Huviška followed most of Kaniška’s versions of coins and introduced pairing of Umā and Nānā. In fact that was the first and last time on Kuṣāṇa coins when Wēś appeared in a couple with another deity. Umā is holding a lotus flower on a Huviška coin (Cribb 1997) while Nānā is holding a Lion protome.

This presentation of Wēś with Umā shows that the Kuṣāṇas were aware of this divine couple, and wanted to present an Umā-Maheśvara image. Wēś and his consort Nānā became later

on Śiva-Pārvatī, while Wēś and Umā are the model for the pair Umā-Maheśvara. Both these couples were introduced by the Kuṣāṇas on their coinage and became very popular Hindu couples.

During Huviṣka's reign, more Brahmanical/Hindu gods appeared on coins. Wēś was given a typical Indian shape, with club, the third eye, and a turban knot giving him an ascetic look. These attributes became the main features of later Śiva images, but initially appeared on Wēś coins.

Huviṣka also introduced Wēś with six arms and with attributes including the wheel, club and lotus, which are most commonly associated with Vaiṣṇava religion. This fact underlines that Wēś in this early time cannot be firmly associated with Śiva or that the division of the religious creeds and groups were not yet iconographically fixed, at least not to the knowledge of the Kuṣāṇa overlords, who were foreigners. Only later on specific attributes were assigned to particular gods, but in the early Kuṣāṇa period gods might have been commonly worshiped. An opposite development can be observed in the cases of Skanda, Viśākha, Kumāra and Mahāsenā, who were considered separate deities in Kuṣāṇa time, but were later on worshipped only as one god.

Under Vasudeva Wēś appeared on coins with a lotus flower, which is also an indigenous element.

## 4.7. Conclusion

The depiction of Wēś on coins does not mean that Kaniṣka or any other ruler became converted to Śaivism, as the depiction of Buddha must not be indicative of the ruler's adherence to Buddhism. The Kuṣāṇas showed their respect for a broad selection of deities, obviously to serve the religious inclinations of their Hindu, Greek, Iranian and Buddhist subjects and to unite these diverging forces under one overlord. Propagating gods who back up the ruler coins has been a general numismatic feature in the ancient world.

If Wēś were a venerated deity of the ruling Kuṣāṇa family he would have probably been mentioned along with the other major Kuṣāṇa deities in the Rabatak inscription. But this is not the case. His absence from the list of Kuṣāṇa main gods indicates that Wēś was a relatively new god to the Kuṣāṇa pantheon introduced only recently.

According to Cribb (2008: 124-125), Wēś iconography was inspired by the contemporary sculptural images, but also has invented features. However, there is no sculptural evidence at all prior to Kuṣāṇa times in Gandhāra, not a sculptural image of Wēś and not for any other Kuṣāṇa deity. So we can suppose that Kuṣāṇa coin engravers found their models on Scythian coins, which were available when the Kuṣāṇas arrived. They adopted the Scythians' iconography for their coins and added characteristics for distinguishing the deities.

In the case of typical Kuṣāṇa deities with an Iranian or Near Eastern background there are almost no sculptures attested. One reason for this absence is probably the fact that these gods were deities of the royal class, not of the majority of people. That is why we don't have many images of Nānā<sup>27</sup>, the supreme deity of Kuṣāṇas, through whom they acquired their kingdom.

Gods which are based on indigenous religious beliefs are depicted much more frequently in sculptural form.

The position of Wēś is somewhere in between. Although his name seems to be foreign as also some of his characteristics, in most of his features he clearly goes back to diverse indigenous religious ideas from a Śaiva background, giving him the appearance of "many gods within one god".

If we compare later images of Śiva and his attributes, it becomes clear that all these images are closely connected with the Wēś images on the Kuṣāṇa coins. Prior to that there were no sculptural images of Śiva nor any literary evidence for his iconography. Thus it seems that the iconography of Śiva was developed on the basis of the Kuṣāṇa period Wēś.

There is no literary evidence for Wēś outside Gandhāra, which means that the Kuṣāṇas introduced this god, which became very quickly assimilated with local beliefs, especially those which were centered around the god Śiva with whom Wēś finally merged. Wēś's exact function in the formation of Śiva and the emergence of Hinduism in Gandhāra is difficult to define.

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<sup>27</sup> There are very few and small images of Nānā from Gandhāra, the details of which can be seen in Ghose's detail studies; 2006: 97-112.

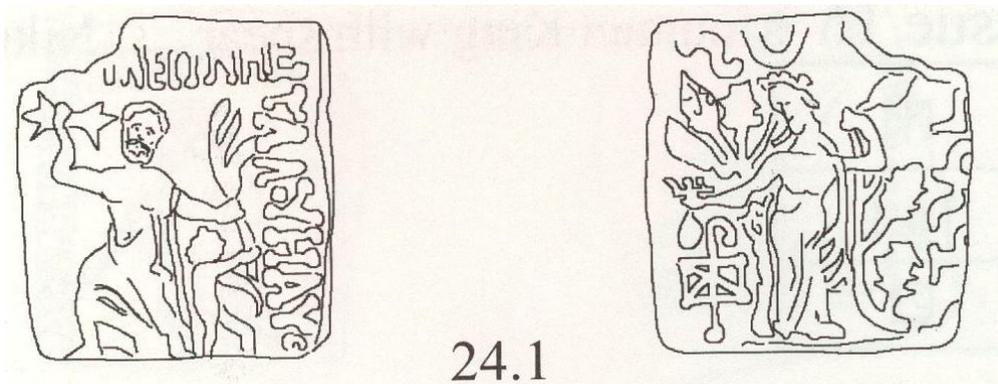
The image of Wēś on Kuṣāṇa coins may have had been the topic of debate even in Kuṣāṇa times. Perhaps some considered him only a local god, while other saw him as a foreign god. The Kuṣāṇas probably introduced this god as a composite deity to represent a minor religion in the region. They chose the name of an Iranian god, *Vāyuš/Veš*, as designation of this deity. Most probably, however, this god had never been worshipped under this name, but as Śiva.

Wēś was not a deity which was already venerated before the Kuṣāṇas. All efforts to find iconographic counterparts for it prior to this period are in vain. Instead of identifying Wēś with the Indian Śiva or with the Iranian *Vāyu*, Wēś should be regarded a newly born sovereign god of Gandhāra which represented a multitude of religious ideas. There were no boundaries or specific iconographic attributes assigned for Wēś. The only fixed features were the trident and erect *liṅga*. In addition to these he acquired additional attributes which not only allowed an identification with other local gods but also provided a base for the inclusion of local gods into a broader religious context. By being “part of Wēś”, they became incorporated into a supra-regional religious system released from their local boundaries. It might be questioned, whether this process traceable in the iconography reflects the developments in the emergence of early Hinduism when disparate local traditions had to become unified and harmonized within a more comprehensive concept which had to find a balance between local identity and the claims of supra-regional religion.

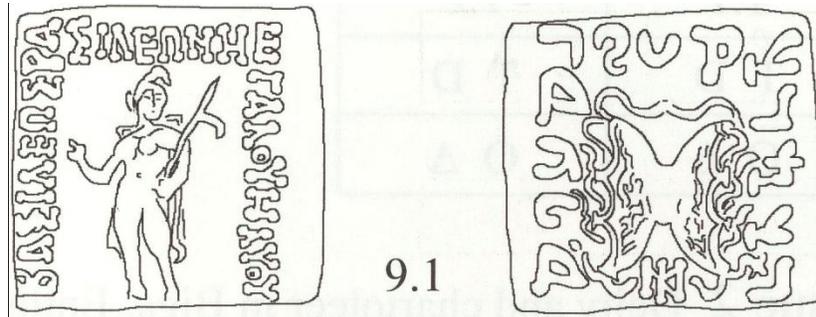


Fig. 4.1: Line drawing of the Wešparkar paintings (8th C. AD)

Some iconographic examples from Scythian coins

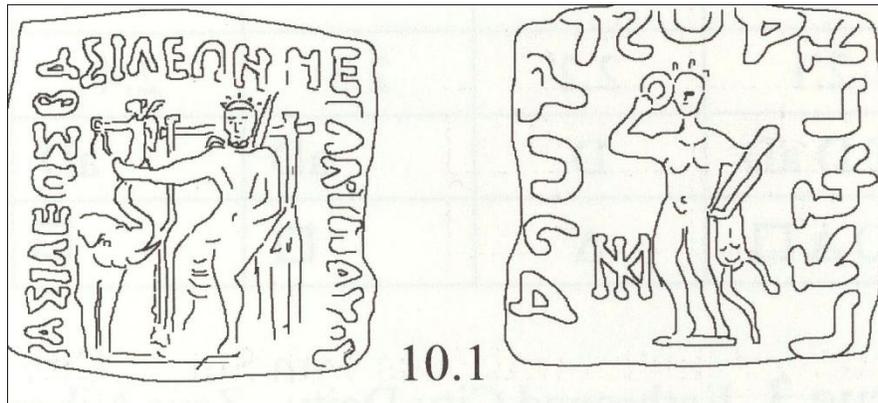


After Senior 2001; nr.24.1



9.1

After Senior 2001; nr.9.1



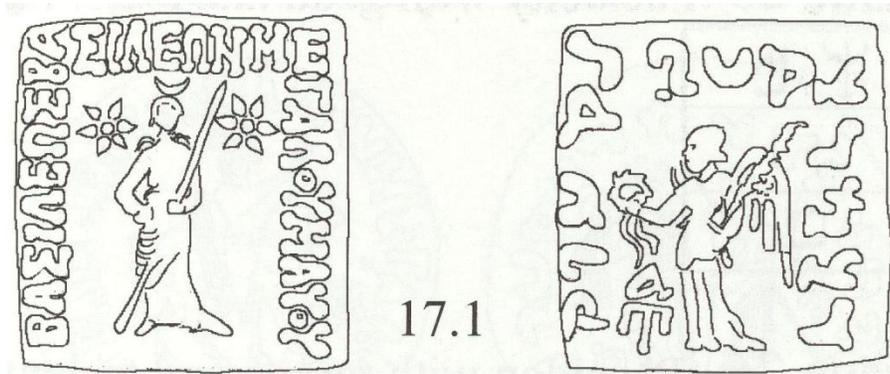
10.1

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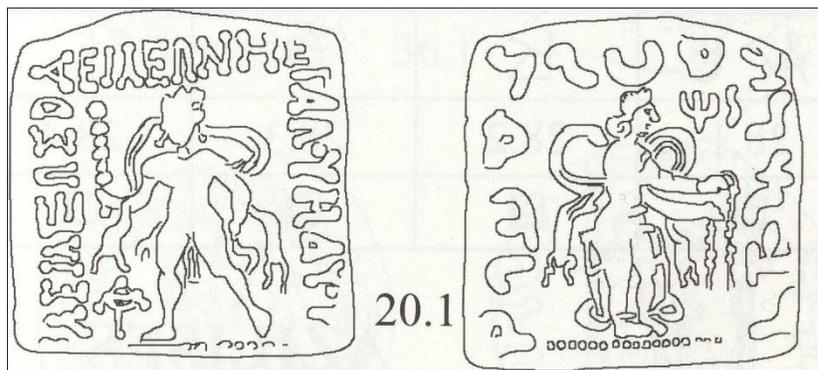


13.2

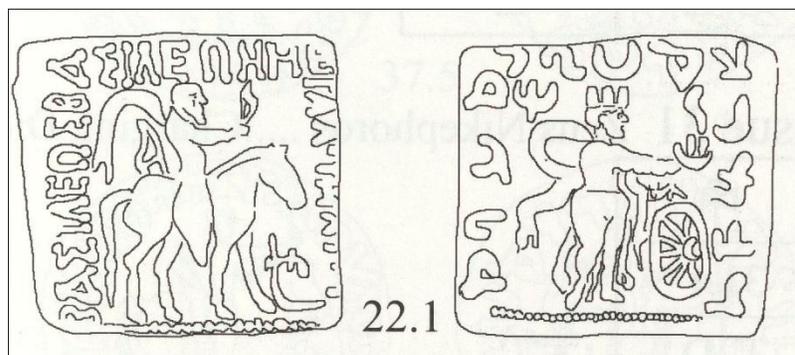
After Senior 2001; nr.13.2



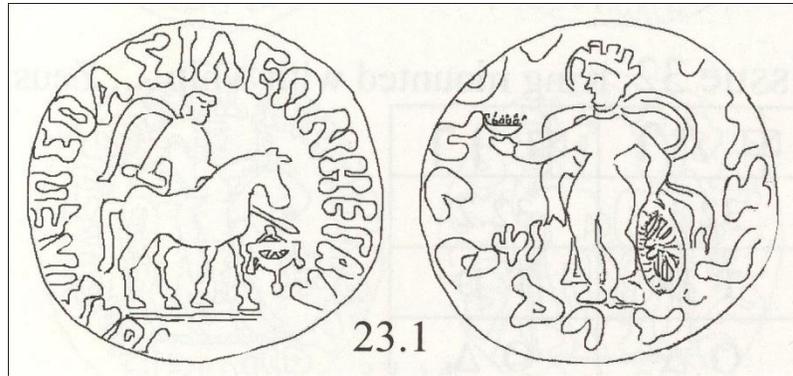
After Senior 2001; nr.17.1



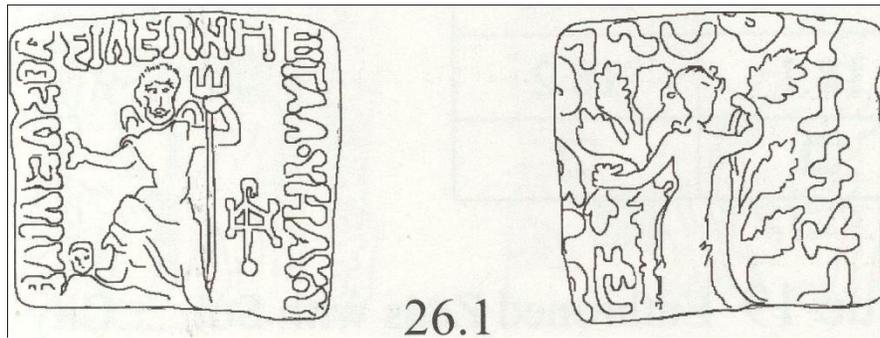
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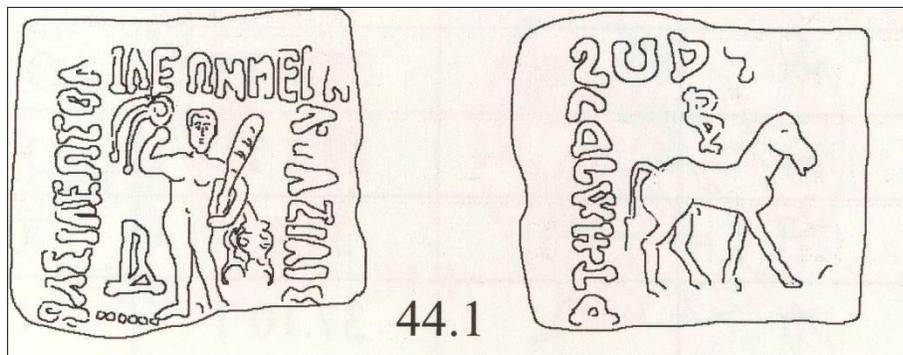


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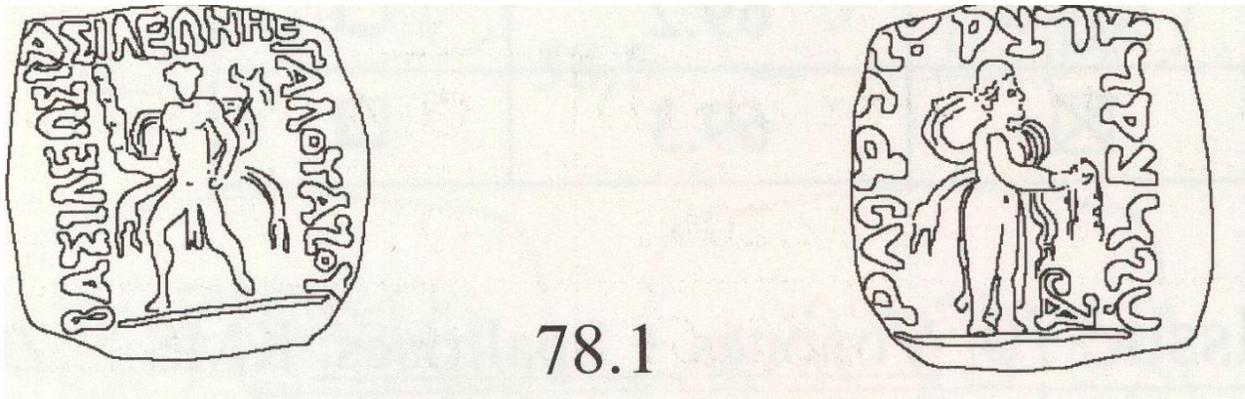
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Azilises

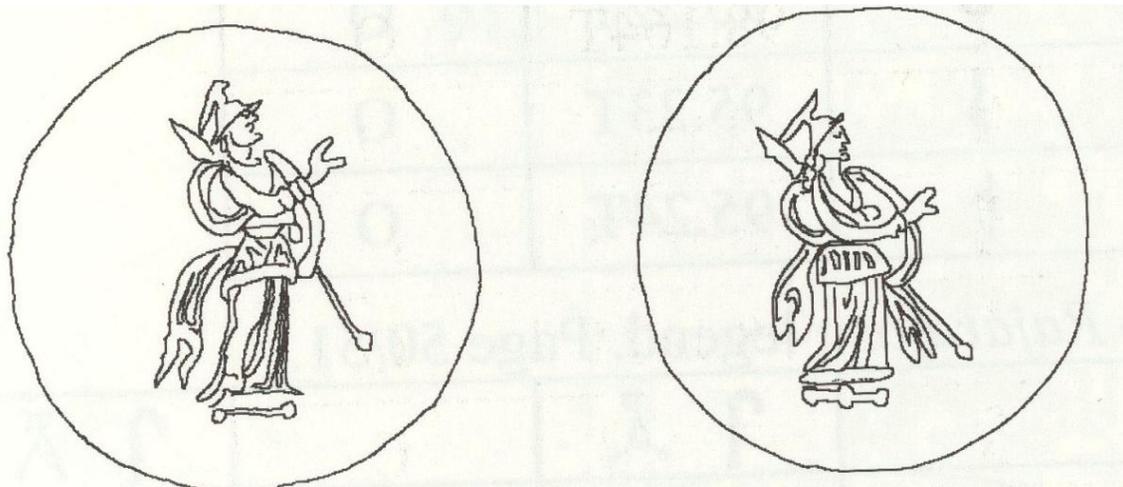


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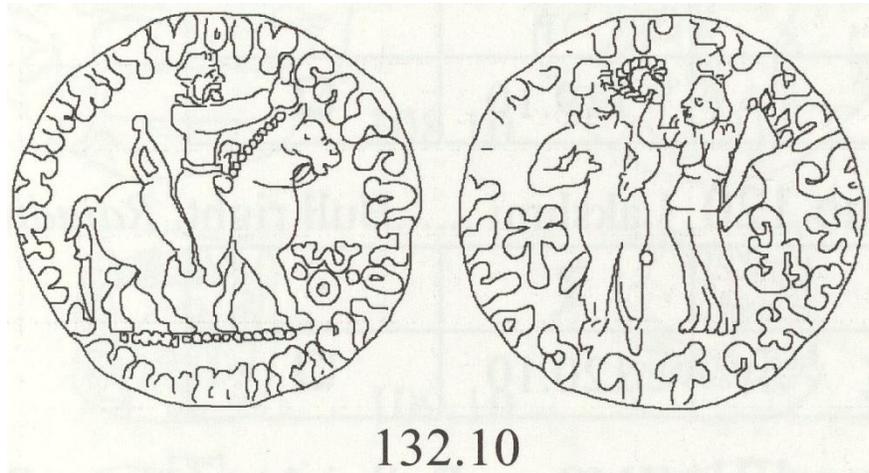
Azes



After Senior 2001; nr. 78.1



Protom like Nānā; After Senior 2001; Azes



First Ardoxsho image through Scythian coinage



Wēś on Vima coins.



**Wēś on Huviṣka coins.**



**Wēś on Vasudeva coins**

## Chapter 5

### Śiva Iconography in Gandhāra

Various religions, both native and foreign, flourished simultaneously in ancient Gandhāra. There is evidence that each one borrowed various iconographic components from the others. With regard to the early Hindu iconography of Gandhāra, it appears that the majority of the deities' attributes do not strictly belong to the Hindu canon. Rather, they seem to have borrowed components from Greek and Iranian religions. This doesn't mean, however, that Hindus were sharing mythological ideas or had some sort of alliance with those faiths. Instead it seems that "the art of making icons" in the religions inspired. On the other hand, making images of god is the easiest and quickest way for the propagation of religion<sup>28</sup>. In Gandhāra, the introduction of Śiva's iconography can be best explained as the consequence of iconographic syncretism. The visual appearance of Śiva is based on the iconography of the god Wēś, who is frequently depicted on the reverses of Kuṣāṇa coinage from the time of Vima onwards. Wēś, as introduced by the Kuṣāṇas, was the outcome of a syncretism by merging attributes of Greek, Roman, native and Iranian deities (see chapter 4). Thus, Wēś can be considered an intermediary deity who played a critical role in the formation of Hindu Śiva's iconography in Gandhāra. The visual manifestations of the Kuṣāṇa's Wēś, as depicted on coins and the stone images of the Hindu Śiva from the same period, share strong resemblances. These matching attributes do not mean that Wēś and Śiva are identical gods. It seems more plausible to suggest that Hindus borrowed Wēś attributes to present Śiva in stone sculptures. According to the philological interpretation, Wēś can be ascribed to an Iranian background. However, iconographical analysis indicates that, instead of idolizing a purely Iranian deity, Wēś represents a remarkable blend of local deities in Gandhāra. Accordingly, the

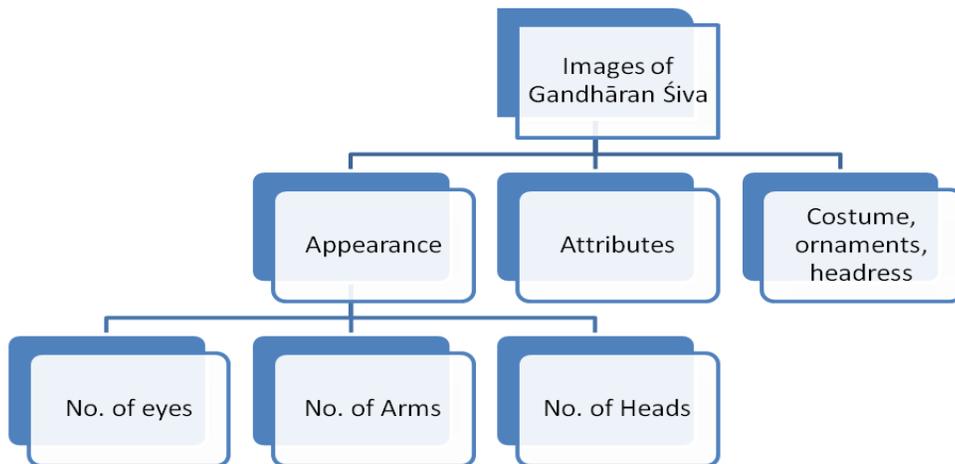
<sup>28</sup> This was already observed in Buddhism in Gandhāra, which spread fast and wide through its propagating art.

new composite appearance of Wēś facilitated its acceptance among the Gandhāran population and its identification with the local Śiva.

The emergence of images as objects of veneration in the different religions that flourished side by side in Gandhāra doubtlessly had a strong impact on local cults, such as that of Śiva. Accordingly, sculptors used the images of more advanced models for creating those of deities which did not yet possess their own distinctive iconography. This experimental phase cannot be traced in written records as the canons of early Hindu iconography were derived from the available cultural context and not from prescriptive texts. This could also be the reason why the iconography of the early Śiva is represented heterogeneously in early texts. Śiva is depicted as an amalgamation of different elements that are usually attributed to different gods. While dealing with the iconography of the images of the Gandhāran Śiva, which are not so abundantly available in sculptural art, it has to be kept in mind that Śiva has been adorned in various forms. Additionally, the iconography of the Gandhāran Śiva is a multifaceted issue, one that should be discussed with appropriate reference to each one of these forms.

Images of Gandhāran Śiva can be classified on the basis of the following appearances and attributes:

### 5.1. Images of Gandhāran Śiva



### 5.1.1. Number of heads

In Gandhāran Hindu art, images of Śiva with a single head are rare. There are relatively late period liṅgas that are carved with the human face of Śiva. This kind of liṅga with a single head is called *ekamukhaliṅga*. The best known example comes from Wanḍa Shahab Khel, 64 km north east of Bannu, Pakistan (Khan 1993: 87-91). This *ekamukhaliṅga* was found along with a stone sculpture of Varāha. The smiley faced Śiva is carved in limestone, which usually is not used for making art pieces in the ancient Northwest of the subcontinent. Farid Khan dated this one-headed liṅga on stylistic grounds to the 2nd-3rd Century AD (Khan 1993: 91).

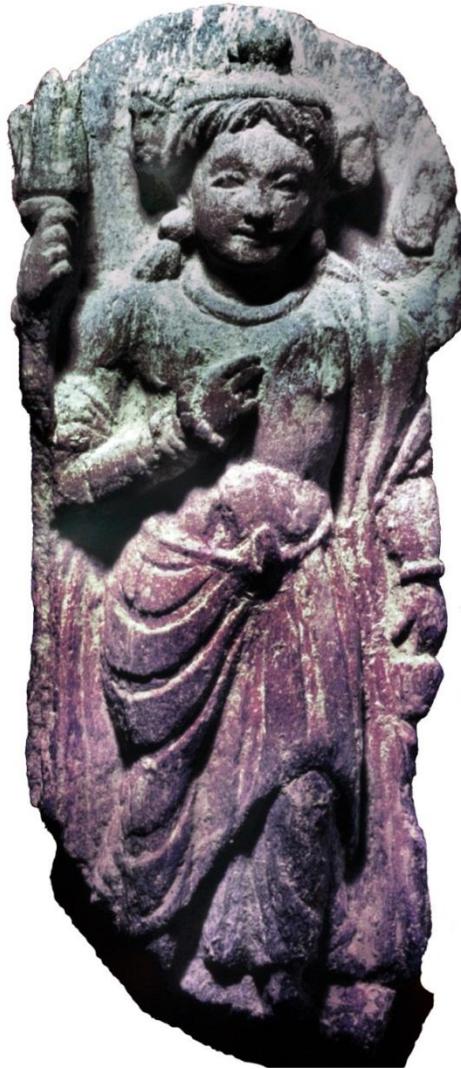


Figure 5.1. Julian Sherrier's collection (photo courtesy Dr. J. Bautze).

Three heads: This form has been depicted in Gandhāran Hindu art since early times. The earliest illustration of a god with three heads can be seen in Wēś figures on Vima Kadphises's coins.



Figure 5.2.Śiva from the Peshawar Museum.

In mostly cases, the central head is human. In the majority of the Gandhāran pieces, knobs of hair (*jaṭā*) are projected on Śiva's head on both sides of the central face. Usually, the central head is accompanied either by two other human heads or by two animal heads. An exception to this compositional principle is the *trimurtī* figure in the Peshawar museum (Fig.5.2), where one of the two additional heads is human and the other is clearly animal shaped.

As in the case of the one-headed figures, the three-headed variant is also depicted in the shape of *trimukhalingas*, like the piece from the Peshawar museum (Taddei 1962: 288-310).

Four heads: According to some traditions, the number of faces on a liṅga should mirror the number of the openings of the particular shrine in which it will site. Thus, for a shrine or a temple having four openings, an engraved liṅga should have four faces, each one facing one of the

entrances of the shrine. There is only example of a quadrilateral Śiva from Gandhāra. It is presently in the collection of the Linden museum Stuttgart, Germany (Fig.5. 3). This broken piece shows four ascetic heads of Śiva but the lower body is completely missing (Kreisel 1986, Srinivasan 2008: 130-134, cat nr. 108). The Linden museum piece's heads probably represent the different life stages of the ascetic Śiva, from young to old age.



Figure 5.3. Śiva heads from Linden Museum Stuttgart



Figure 5.3a. Umā-Maheśvara from Julian Sherrier collection (photo courtesy Dr. J. Bautze).

### 5.1.2. Headdress

Different forms of headdress for Śiva have been prescribed in various texts as *jaṭāmukuta* “hairtufted.” In Gandhāra, Śiva’s hair is usually designed to resemble the Buddhist *uṣṇīṣa*. A different style is seen on the Umā-Māheśvara statue from the Julian Sherrier collection. In this image, Śiva’s headdress is identical with the contemporary Gandhāran Bodhisattva’s headdress, where hairs are depicted in a snail-shell fashion (Fig.5.3a). Still another type is represented by the Śiva of the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin. Here the hair is bound in a conical shape and flames are emerging from the image’s head, demonstrating the ferocious aspect of the god (Fig.5.4).



Figure 5.4. Śiva from the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin.

### 5.1.3. Eyes

A third eye: In addition to the two eyes of his human face, Śiva is usually depicted with a third eye placed in a vertical position on his forehead. There is only one example from Julian Sherrier's collection, where this third eye is missing (Fig.5.1). The Berlin Śiva example is again unique in this aspect with its third eye in horizontal instead of the usual vertical one.

### 5.1.4. Arms

Most of the early texts agree with regard to the fact that Śiva has to be perceived as a deity with more than two arms (see Srinivasan 1997: 129-178 & 240-324). The multiplicity of arms indicates the power of the god.

#### Two arms

There are a few examples for Śiva with only two arms, most of which are related Wēś figures on the Kuṣāṇa coinage. There is only one known two-armed sculpture that can be interpreted as a representation of Śiva. It is now part of the collection of the Peshawar Museum (Umā-Maheśvara image) and shows a two-armed Śiva holding a trident in his right hand and a water pot in his left hand (Fig.5.5).



Figure 5.5. Umā-Maheśvara from the Peshawar Museum.

## Four armed

If the statues are sufficiently preserved, the four armed Śiva usually bears the following attributes: a *gaḍa* or “club”, which is considered a weapon of war; a *cakra* symbolizing the sun; a trident; a water pot; and a *vajra*. There is no consistent inventory of attributes, however.

## Six armed

There is one Śiva from Gandhāra, which is six armed. It is popularly known as the “trimūrti” of the Peshawar museum (Fig.5.2). This image can be compared to Wēś images of a six- and eight-armed deity on Huviṣka coins, holding different attributes.

### 5.1.5. Attire of Śiva

There are mainly two types of costumes used for Śiva images. The earlier one is the short Indian *dhotī* reaching down to the knee. The longer type reaching to the feet was probably introduced in a later phase. In most cases, the upper part of the body is exposed with the exception of a shawl covering the figure’s left shoulder.

### 5.1.6. Ornaments of Śiva in Gandhāran iconography

The usual ornaments of the Gandhāran Śiva are armllets, the *yajñopavīta* “sacred thread”, ear-ornaments and necklaces. With the exception of the explicitly Brahmanic *yajñopavīta* all these items are also found on the Buddhist sculptures of Gandhāra. The Śiva figures adorned with ornaments like armllet, ear rings and necklaces strongly resemble the Gandhāran statues of the Bodhisattva Maitreya.

### 5.1.7. Ithyphallic

Ithyphallic images are perhaps the most iconic features of Śiva in the myths. The Gandhāran sculptures depicting these are ascribable to the earliest phase in the development of the Śiva image. While in some Gandhāran examples, his raised *liṅga* is exposed from the *dhotī*, in other cases the erected *liṅga* is hidden under the cloth (Fig. 5,2 and 5.5).

In early Gandhāran art, Śiva is usually found in the form of composite images that represent his two major aspects: the *saumya* or *māṅgalika* aspect, where he is shown in a more peaceful, loving and polite mood, and the *ugra* – ferocious – aspect, where he is depicted with facial expressions showing his dreadful side.

Now, before coming to a general conclusion about the development of Śiva iconography in Gandhāran art, some relevant individual examples of early Śiva sculptures will be reinterpreted.

## 5.2. Śiva from Museum of Asian Art, Berlin

One of the finest examples of an early Śiva image is now displayed in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin (Fig.5.4). This small stone sculpture has frequently been dated to the Huvīṣka period (Härtel 1989: 392-396). The central head of the three-faced figure has a conical hair-dress. Śiva is shown wearing a *dhotī* and his upper body is bare with the exception of a drapery around his left hand. Two of his four arms are broken while the other two bear a trident and a water pot. The deity is shown with a phallus and a muscular body. His facial expression, as well as the flames emerging from his head, suggest the god's terrifying aspect.

Other significant characteristics of this icon are the sacred thread around his chest, which was a popular feature of Bodhisattva figures in Gandhāra, and a horizontal third eye, which was introduced into Wēś's iconography under Huvīṣka and appears here for the first time in sculpture. In later times, the horizontal eye was replaced with a vertical variant. Other features of this Śiva image can also be connected with the Wēś images on Huvīṣka coinage. Thus, the three-faced head as well as the multi-armed shape of the figure resemble Huvīṣka period Wēś images. These shared features of Śiva and Wēś, which naturally can be dated to the time of Huvīṣka, strongly suggest the close relationship and mutual interaction of the iconographical repertoires of both deities. While the concrete character of this interaction is difficult to establish, it cannot be denied that the form of the Berlin Śiva was inspired by the multi-armed figures of Wēś that first appeared on the coinage of Huvīṣka. The piece thus represents a phase in the development of the Śiva image when the iconography of Śiva begins to take shape.

In any case, this type of Śiva figure is not known from other contemporary examples outside the Indian Northwest and can quite safely be considered to be a result of independent local development. It is likely the earliest preserved figure of Śiva with multiple arms and heads.

It seems that the Berlin image is not a free standing figure. The absence of a halo around its head indicates that the image could have been part of a panel, like for example the Linden Museum's Śiva, which also lacks a halo. Accordingly, this image might have been depicted in a subordinate position to another deity and was not the central figure of a religious establishment. One can fully agree with Taddei who considered these images too small for worshiping purposes in a temple (1985:627-628).

### 5.3. Umā-Maheśvara

Although the number of Gandhāran Śiva images are rather limited and almost all of them have already been described by various scholars, there is one quite remarkable piece that has escaped attention for many decades, It is a relief displayed in the Peshawar Museum that has been hitherto labeled as Hārītī and Pāñcika (Fig.5.5). In fact, it can now be identified as one of the earliest representations of a Umā-Maheśvara composition with Śiva standing beside his consort. According to the records of the museum, this object was recovered in 1941 from Sheikhan Dheri in the Charsadda district.

The three-headed Śiva with heavy earrings is shown with two hands holding a now broken trident and a water-pot. The third eye on his central forehead can well be compared with that depicted on the contemporary sculpture of the Linden Museum's Śiva (Srinivasan 2008: 130-131, cat. Nr.108). The hair is arranged in an ascetic tuft. Although the two side-faces are quite abraded, it is possible to distinguish their animal shapes. The figure is haloed in the typical Gandhāran fashion.

Both Umā and Maheśvara are standing on a high pedestal. Śiva's head is turned slightly to the left. He is wearing only a lower garment reaching the knee (*dhotī*), while, apart from a shawl under his left arm, his upper body is exposed. A sacred thread crosses his chest from left to right. Śiva is shown with a phallus, protruding from the lower garment.

Śiva's consort Umā is standing to his left with her face forward. She is holding a bunch of flowers (?) in her raised right hand, while her left hand holds a mirror. The mirror is clearly identifiable by its long handle. Umā is wearing a traditional Indian *sārī*, covering her from top to bottom. She is also haloed and wears earrings and a necklace between her breasts. Her hair-decoration resembles that of Śiva.

This image is certainly one of the earliest representations of Umā-Maheśvara. The only comparable piece from Gandhāra is kept in the private collection of Julian Sherrier. Unlike the Peshawar piece, it shows clear Sassanian influences and therefore belongs to a later period (see next chapter). The Śiva of the Peshawar Museum shares a series of features with the images of the Linden and Berlin museums. Like the Berlin piece it is three headed, and the style and size of the *dhotī* are almost identical. Both the Peshawar and the Berlin Śiva are ithyphallic, hold water pots in their left hands, wear moustaches and have a sacred thread crossing from their left shoulders to the waist.

All of these features can be associated with Wēś images on the Huviška coinage (cf. Härtel 1989: 392-396). Furthermore, Huviška also introduced the composite image of Wēś and Umā into Kuṣāṇa coinage. Although this was not continued by his successors (see chapter three) it can clearly be related to the present Umā-Maheśvara sculpture from Peshawar.

Another chronological argument is provided by the short *dhotī*, which is typical for the Huviška period Wēś<sup>29</sup>. On the basis of this evidence, the Peshawar Museum Umā-Maheśvara statue has to be dated to the Huviška period, i.e. the end of the 2nd century AD.

The same date has been assigned to the Linden Museum's four-headed Śiva image, which shares with the Peshawar piece the ascetic hairstyle that is divided in the central part of the forehead and locked in a spiral shape.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, both images have open, almond-shaped eyes and identically vertical third eyes.

<sup>29</sup> Though this is a separate discussion whether coin image was the earliest or the sculpture was the first example.

<sup>30</sup> For Linden Museum's Śiva, see Gandhāra catalogue of the Bonn exhibition 2008: 130-131.

## 5.4. Śiva image from the Julian Sherrier Collection

Julian Sherrier collected a considerable number of early Gandhāran Śiva images (Sherrier 1993: 617-24). Since Gandhāra was an acknowledged center of Buddhist art, many of these seemingly Hindu images, which were in contradiction to established iconographical traditions, were considered fakes and dismissed from academic discussion. Among the pieces introduced by Sherrier is one that can be attributed to the early group of Śiva images and which deserves further discussion (Fig. 5.1).

This free-standing Śiva image exhibits some perplexing features that distinguish it from other Kuṣāṇa period Hindu images. To begin with the sculpture has a large halo. The four-armed figure holds in his right upper hand a trident and in his lower right hand (which touches his chest) a rosary. The upper left hand is broken, while the lower left is holding a water pot. The Śiva is ithyphallic and his *dhotī* reaches below the knee with heavy folds. The knee is slightly bent and visible through the drapery, thus giving the impression that Śiva is in a striding position. This kind of a long *dhotī* is characteristic for Wēś images from the time of Vasudeva onwards<sup>31</sup>.

Another point of reference is the so-called *trimūrti* image of the Peshawar Museum that was dated to the 3rd-4th c. AD<sup>32</sup>. It shows the same costume and is three-headed. Contrary to the six-armed Peshawar piece, Sherrier's Śiva lacks a third eye and has only four arms. Moreover, it is missing the sacred thread. The small face on the right is probably a human one while the left is clearly an animal head. The hair-dress is somehow unusual and the hairs are locked in a cap-knob shape. Similarly peculiar are the ear pendants. Despite these differences, the Sherrier piece is clearly related to the Peshawar Museum's so-called *trimūrti*. Especially the distinctive shape of its long *dhotī*, which is only found on these two sculptures and on coins of the Vasudeva period, which suggests the pieces should be dated to the 3rd-4th c. AD.

## 5.5. Conclusion

The liberal religious policies of the Kuṣāṇa rulers allowed local Hindu populations to access a flourishing artistic tradition and to have their own gods represented within the institutional

<sup>31</sup> As seen from Vasudeva coins iconography.

<sup>32</sup> see catalogue of the Gandhāra exhibition at Bonn 2008: 132, cat. Nr.110.

frameworks of operating Buddhist monasteries. The Hindu images representative of this period are characterized by a composite and experimental approach that is not yet based on a definite iconographic canon. They exhibit manifold influences from contemporaneous religions. Remarkably, this movement came to a sudden end after the decline of the Kuṣāṇas in the end of the 3rd c. AD.

It seems probable that the images of Śiva, which can be dated to the Huvīṣka Period onwards, are largely indebted to the iconography of the Kuṣāṇa god Wēś, which first appeared on coins of Kaniṣka. A discussion of the iconography of Śiva images therefore must be based on the iconography of Wēś.

It is quite probably that these new elements are the result of an “iconographic return” whereby the newly created Śiva images influenced the traditional Wēś iconography.

Among the identifiable influences that determined the iconography of both Wēś and Śiva, we can define the following groups:

1. Buddhist influences: Features like the water-pot, the *uṣṇīṣa*-like hair-dress, the *yajñōpavīta* and the ornaments can easily be connected with Buddhist Maitreya images (cf. also Taddei 1985: 615). Other types of imagery, like Śiva’s ascetic look or the halo, also go back to Buddhist models of Gandhāran art.
2. Greek influences: The attributes in Wēś/Śiva’s hands, like the trident (Poseidon), the thunderbold/vajra (Zeus), and the club (Herakles) can be identified as of Greek in origin.
3. Indian/local influences: The multiplication of heads and hands, the bull, the third eye, and the phallus (*liṅga*), cannot be traced back to Greek or Buddhist art. They are new contributions that were certainly rooted in the local Hindu perception of this god.

The preserved early Śiva images of Gandhāra are no doubt only the tip of the iceberg of a rather mighty local religious movement that is barely traceable in art-historical or literary sources. As far as one can judge on this rather weak material basis, it was a movement that was in search of adequate expressions of its own identity and, thus, was open to influences from other religious

and cultural traditions. This identity had to be defined in relation to established “mainstream” traditions, such as Buddhism, Greek religion, Iranian beliefs and conservative Vedic traditions.

Diverse, locally rooted religious practices, usages, and rituals became united under the umbrella of Śivaism – a religious system centered around the god Śiva. The new central position and growing popularity of Śiva called for anthropomorphic representations shaped after the models of surrounding traditions. This paved the way for the social acceptance of the new religious movement.

This iconographic development of the early Gandhāran Śiva image is the result of highly complex religious and cultural processes that occurred in the borderlands of the northwestern subcontinent and Iran in the early centuries AD. An understanding of this iconographical development is only possible against the background of this extended historical perspective. It cannot be based on the limited evidence of a single text or religious tradition. The early Śiva images from the time of Huvīṣka do not follow any of the prescribed standards that have been literally fixed for Hindu iconography.

Cultures are porous. They are open to intermixture with other cultures and they are subject to historical change precisely on account of such influences. This was no doubt the case in the Gandhāra region, especially during the Kuṣāṇa period. A recent example of cultural borrowing and interpenetration is the migration of Afghans into the North-west of Pakistan following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. They rapidly mixed with the local Pashtuns and adopted each other’s way of life. Today one can hardly distinguish between original and migrated populations. The formation of this “Pak-Afghan syncretic society” did not come suddenly into existence. Rather, it was dictated by historico-political events and contingencies that took place in the northwest of the subcontinent (ancient Greater Gandhāra). The introduction of Śiva Hindu iconography took place in a similar social-religious scenario during the Kuṣāṇa period. It resulted in the formation of new images of gods later came into existence in ancient Gandhāra.

## Chapter 6

### Viṣṇuism in Gandhāra

Viṣṇu is a minor god in the Vedic pantheon but he occupied a central position in classical Hinduism. Viṣṇu is a protector of the universe and appears in several incarnations to protect both the devotees and the society against *adharma* “disorder, chaos”. Viṣṇu consequently acts only as the main deity of a more complex religious system that comprises different gods and their respective ritual-mythological systems. One of the earliest of them is Vāsudeva, who is mentioned in Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *sūtra* 4.3.98 (Agrawala 1953: 361). But Pāṇini’s *sūtra* gives no clear evidence for the identity of this Vāsudeva, his commentator Patañjali 2nd BCE. identifies Vāsudeva with Kṛṣṇa (Agrawala 1953: 360). Furthermore, Patañjali mentions the existence of temples dedicated to Keśava (Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa), Rāma (Balarāma), and Kuvera.<sup>33</sup> It is evident that Patañjali knew Vāsudeva as Kṛṣṇa. Vāsudeva, who was probably a historical figure, became gradually deified on account of his importance in the clan history. Patañjali in his commentary on this *sūtra* referred to Vāsudeva as a “worshipful one, a god”. Gradually the Vedic solar deity Viṣṇu became identified with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The theory of incarnations developed somewhat later in the Kuṣāṇa Period. However it became popular only in the Gupta Age.

The important studies of Härtel revealed a new approach to the relationship between Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and that of the Viṣṇu cult (Härtel 1987: 573-587). On the basis of archaeological, numismatic, literary, and epigraphy sources he discusses the cult of the five heroes, *Pañcavīra*, that became known in sculptural art well before the appearance of Viṣṇu images. These five heroes consist of Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Pradyumna, Sāmba and

<sup>33</sup> Mahābhāṣya, 1.436 (ed. Kielhorn & Abhyankar): *prāsāde dhanapatirāmakeśavānām iti etat na sidhyati*. Cf. Agrawala 1953: 362, Srinivasan 1979: 50.

Aniruddha (Härtel 1987: 575). Only during the Gupta period did one of these *Pañcavīra* heroes, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, become associated and finally identified with Viṣṇu (Härtel 1987: 586-587). Prior to this these five heroes were worshipped individually.

Epigraphical references to Vāsudeva and Saṃkarṣaṇa date back to the 2nd century and originate from Ghosunḍi in Western India. At Besnagar the earliest images of these deities can again be found in northwest India. The oldest of them, on a Indo-Greek Agathokles coin (185 BCE), dates from the same period. Beginning from this evidence, the following discussion will deal with the emergence of Vaiṣṇava images in Gandhāra and their iconographical characteristics against the background of contemporary developments on the Indian subcontinent.

### 6.1. The beginnings: Agathokles coins from Ai-Khanum

The earliest visual evidence for early Hindu gods is found on six coins from the Hellenistic city of Ai-Khanum, Afghanistan. These coins date to the Indo-Greek ruler Agathokles, *circa* 185 BCE (Narain 1973: 73). These rectangular bronze coins illustrate the earliest forms of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva (Fig. 6.1) engraved on the obverse and reverse of the same coin. The name of the king appears both in Greek and in Brāhmī script. Saṃkarṣaṇa is found on the obverse with two hands, holding a club and a plough. Vāsudeva is shown holding a conch shell and a wheel in his two hands. Härtel draws the attention to the order in which these gods are represented. It is identical to the order found in early Indian inscriptions, where Saṃkarṣaṇa is always named first (Härtel 1987: 574). Both divinities can be associated with the *Pañcavīra* heroes Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa. Each figure stands under an umbrella. The coins from Ai-Khanum represent the earliest depictions of Hindu divinities discovered thus far in South Asia. The earliest textual reference for the cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa can be found in Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya which mentions Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa as joint leaders of an army: *saṃkarṣaṇadvīṭiyasya balaṃ kṛṣṇasya vardhatām* (ed. Kielhorn & Abhyanakar, I.426; cf. Agrawala 1953: 362). The text, however, does not provide any further details about these persons and their characteristics.



Figure 6.1. Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva on coins from Ai-Khanum.

Only a much later text, the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (circa. 5th/6th century AD) in its *viṣṇurūpanirmāṇa* section contains a more detailed description:

Similarly, in the hands of Saṃkarṣaṇa there should be the pestle and the ploughshare. Oh king, the hands of Pradyumna, likewise, should have the bow and the arrow (tr. Bhattacharya 1991: 24f).

Further on, the text states:

the ploughshare should be known as time, the pestle as death. With these two the frightful Saṃkarṣaṇa draws together all that is movable and immovable.

## 6.2 The Garuḍa Pillar of Besnagar

Cunningham first visited the Besnagar pillar in 1877. He documented the pillar but could not see the inscriptions that were under a thick layer of paint. Thirty years later, in 1909, John Marshall rediscovered this pillar along with the inscriptions (Vogel 1908-09: 126-129). The Garuḍa pillar in Besnagar in Madhya Pradesh, which dates to the 2nd century BCE, suggests that a Vāsudeva temple may have existed in the vicinity. The inscription states that Heliodorus son of Dion erected the Garuḍa pillar. He was a *bhāgavata* resident of Taxila and ambassador of the

Greek king Antialkidas. The term *bhāgavata* characterizes Heliodorus as a follower of a *bhagavant* and in this context most probably to be understood as “adorer of Vāsudeva” (Härtel 1987: 577).

The inscription on the Besnagar Garuḍa pillar is an indirect, but rather important piece of evidence in understanding the religious situation in the 2nd century BCE Gandhāra region. It clearly confirms the existence of Vāsudeva and Garuḍa cults and indicates that the Indo-Greek rulers of Taxila supported this religious movement. Härtel suggests on the basis of Khare’s excavation report that the site of Besnagar housed not only a Vāsudeva temple/sacred compound, but also temples for other heroes of the *pañcavīra* group (Härtel 1987: 573-587). Khare who excavated Besnagar in the years between 1963-65. He discovered pits parallel to the Garuḍa pillar and proposed that more columns must have been standing in this row (Khare 1967: 23-24). Härtel suggested that these additional pillars were dedicated to the other *pacavīra* heroes. With regard to this kind of ritual pillars one might again refer to the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*:

Oh descendant of the bhr̥gu family, I wish to know from you how to make the forms of the capitals of the standards of Suparṇa, Tāla, Makara, and Mṛga (i.e. the standards showing the capitals in the form of Garuḍa, Palmyra, Makara and Deer (tr. Bhattacharyya 1991: 70).

Even if this suggestion is true, the fact remains that Vāsudeva is the only god explicitly mentioned in the inscription. Vāsudeva’s brother, Saṃkarṣaṇa, is depicted on the Agathokles coins without being referred to by name.

Both the direct numismatic evidence from Ai-Khanum and the indirect evidence of the Besnagar pillar illustrate that the hero-worship began to appear as early as 2nd century BC in Greater Gandhāra. This material evidence is confirmed by the contemporary textual data from Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*.

Of the three sources that can be dated to the same period (i.e. the 2nd c. BC) are explicitly connected with the region of Gandhāra. One might wonder whether the cult of Vāsudeva originated in Gandhāra and spread to South India over time where it merged with the cult of Viṣṇu during the Later Kuṣāṇa and Early Gupta periods. There is not a single inscription which mentions

the god Viṣṇu before the Gupta period (Härtel 1987: 586). Consequently, one can suggest that Vāsudeva was the first god, who provided the base to the imagery of Viṣṇu in India.

### 6.3. Huviṣka coins with representations of Vaiṣṇava deities

The representations of Vaiṣṇava gods on Kuṣāṇa coins appear during the reign of Huviṣka. As discussed earlier, this king was the first to introduce Hindu gods with anthropomorphic shapes (see chapter 3). However an earlier example was also known through the Ai Khanum coins 2nd c. BC. This is a rather earlier anthropomorphic image from the time of Huviṣka 2nd c. AD, by almost 400 years. Since it is not possible to connect these two phases with each other it is therefore possible to regard the Huviṣka copper coinage as a new attempt to create an iconography of Vaiṣṇava gods.

#### Rāma

A copper coin, which is now kept in the British Museum, was published in the Gandhāran exhibition catalogue (Cribb 2008: 125, and 152, catalogue number 97). The obverse of this coin shows the king riding on an elephant facing to the right, while the reverse shows a figure standing frontally, holding a bow and an arrow in his hands. Cribb identified this figure with later images of the Hindu god Rāma. An inscription in Kharoṣṭhī can be read as *yodhavade*.

#### Vāsudeva

Another copper coin of Huviṣka appeared in the same catalogue under number 98. Its obverse is identical with that of number 97, but the reverse shows an eight-armed deity standing frontally. The deity holds a wheel, a club, a lotus, a conch and other unidentified objects. Cribb identifies this god as Viṣṇu in his Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa incarnation (Cribb 2008: 125). The coin bears the same Kharoṣṭhī inscription, *yodhavade*. This feature clearly distinguishes both coins from other Kuṣāṇa coins, which usually have only Bactrian legends and indicates the specific local character of the deities depicted here. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that Vaiṣṇava deities appear exclusively on the copper coinage of Huviṣka, which was probably intended for a more localized or regional distribution.

Rāma is originally also a hero, who later became an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Rāma in classical Hindu iconography usually holds a bow, an arrow, a sword, and a conch. The bow in his hand symbolizes the warrior aspect of the deity, and probably this aspect is also referred to in the legend *yodhavade* corresponding possibly to Skt. *yuddhavant* “fighting, fighter” or *yodha/yuddha-pati* “Lord of war, fighters.”

#### 6.4. Vāsudeva coinage

The next image of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa appears on a copper coin of the Kuṣāṇa king Vāsudeva (Fig. 6.2). In this coin type the deity Vāsudeva is standing frontally, wearing a short dress with long hair falling over his shoulders. He holds a club in his lower right hand, a thunderbolt (?) in the upper right hand, a wheel (*cakra*) in his upper left hand and a conch in his lower left hand. The god is labeled in Bactrian script as BAZODHO “Vāsudeva” (Cribb 2008: 124).

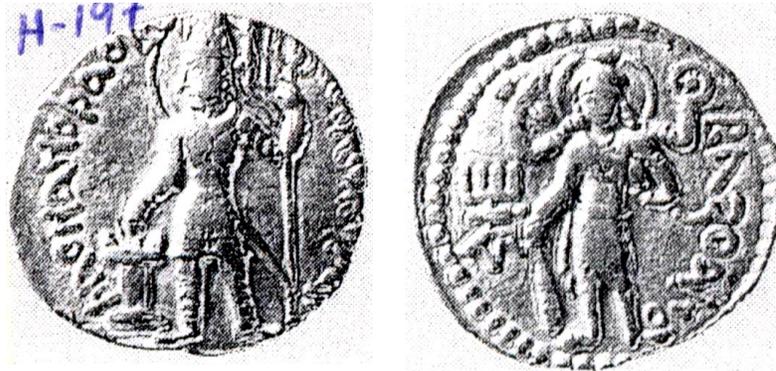


Figure 6.2. Vāsudeva I coin with deity Vāsudeva depicted on reverse

I suggest that based upon the numismatic evidence of Huviṣka and Vāsudeva’s coinage that these deities were a local hero cult which enjoyed continuous popularity in the later phase of the Kuṣāṇa rule in Gandhāra. None of the Kuṣāṇa images can clearly be identified with Viṣṇu, but rather have the attributes of individual deities that later became associated with the Vaiṣṇava religious complex. I further suggest that during the Kuṣāṇa period the gods Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu were not identified with each other. This hypothesis is based upon the absence of Viṣṇu’s name and the fact that deities are labeled either generally as “warrior, warlord” or specifically as “Vāsudeva”.

## 6.5. Garuḍa

In classical Hindu mythology, Viṣṇu rides a bird called Garuḍa, which is half man, half eagle. He is the son of a *Si* and *Vinatā*, a daughter of *Dakṣa*, one of the primeval gods. According to the legend Garuḍa abhors snakes and became the master of all serpents through the assistance of Indra. He is usually depicted as an immensely large and strong bird. He has the head of an eagle with a red beak and feathery wings. A large belly and human arms distinguish him. Garuḍa is usually portrayed devouring a snake.

Garuḍa first appeared in the Gandhāran Buddhist art as a huge eagle with expansive wings wearing ear ornaments (Fig.6.3). In most of the Hindu texts the mythical Garuḍa later became known as the mount of Viṣṇu. Prior to his appearance in Gandhāran art we have indirect evidence of his existence from the inscription of a “*garuḍadhvaja*” written on the Besnagar pillar. The prominence of the figure of Garuḍa in various religious and cultural contexts illustrates its popularity in the centuries before and after the beginning of our era.

In the Buddhist art of Gandhāra, Garuḍa is often depicted as fighting a *nāga*. According to Hindu religious text (e.g. Mbh 1.31) he was born the king of birds (as Indra was king of the gods) in order to rescue his mother who was captured by *nāgas*. The Gandhāran iconography is obviously based on this legend, and Garuḍa is occasionally shown fighting snakes and carrying a female figure in his beak. His enmity with snakes is also referenced in some Buddhist Jātakas (e.g. *Uragajātaka*, cf. Nagar 1992: 53).

In the Rāmāyaṇa (5.16.17; cf. Nagar 1992: 32) Garuḍa is directly associated with Viṣṇu as his vehicle. This function as Viṣṇu’s vehicle resulted in Garuḍa’s considerable popularity. Eventually he became regarded as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and being worshiped as a god.



Figure 6.3. Garuda in Gandhāra art.

The Gandhāran images of Garuda cannot be related to this rather late stage, but again are characterized as early experiments and certainly date before the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. In this text he is described as a vehicle of Viṣṇu having four arms carrying an ambrosia pot in one of his hands. In another passage the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* says: "Tārṣya (Garuda) looks like emerald. He has the back like that of an owl. He should be shown with four arms and with a face having round eyes" (Bhattacharyya 1991: 71).

As already stated above, in Gandhāran art Garuda is frequently shown carrying a female. Some scholars identify this female figure with one of the *nāginīs* defeated by Garuda.<sup>34</sup> But in all cases this figure is shown in relaxed gesture exposing no sign of fear. There is no indication that

<sup>34</sup> For detail discussion see Sahai 1975: 80 and Ingholt 1957:149

Garuḍa is holding her forcefully. Moreover, the female carried by Garuḍa has no snake hoods or other identification markers which would designate her as *nāginī*. Therefore it seems quite plausible to interpret the Gandhāran Garuḍa scenes as representation of the Hindu legend where Garuḍa frees his mother from a serpent tribe. Alternatively, one might consider the Buddhist *Kakati Jātaka* and *Sussondi Jātaka* in which Garuḍa is said to be responsible for carrying away the queens of a king (Nagar 1992:101).

## 6.6. Varāha

Whenever lawlessness prevailed on earth and evil forces became strong Viṣṇu assumed various forms to reestablishing law and order. There are numerous incarnations of Viṣṇu but the most important and classic ones are the ten discussed in the Mahābhārata (12.349.37; 12.389.77-90 and 140, cf. Pal 1970: 22). Viṣṇu appeared as a fish (*matsya*), a turtle (*kūrma*), a boar (*varāha*), a composite creature of a man and a lion (*narasiṃha*), a dwarf (*vāmana*), Paraśurāma, Rāma, Balarāma, the Buddha and as *kalkin*.<sup>35</sup>

One of the earliest and most popular of these incarnations is that of the boar (*varāha*). According to the legend the earth was submerged by a sea-demon (*asura*). Viṣṇu took the form of a boar and dived into the sea to recover the earth. Most of the early images of Viṣṇu refer to this legend. He is portrayed with his face to the left carrying the earth in his arm, after lifting her from the bottom of the ocean (Rao 1914-16: 144f). In the standard iconography *Varāha* is carrying a conch-shell (*śaṅkā*), a wheel (*cakra*), a club (*gadā*), and a lotus (*padma*). Often he is accompanied by the earth goddess or by *Lakṣmī*.

There is only one Gandhāran *Varāha* figure known so far. It was discovered at Waṇḍa Shahab Khel, Bannu (Fig. 6.4). The muscular human body of the figure has a left-facing boar-head. The fourhanded figure is depicted standing on the coils of the mythical serpent *Śeṣa*. *Varāha*'s upper right hand holds the tail of the snake, his lower right hand is resting on a wheel (*cakra*), the upper left hand carries a conch-shell, while the lower left hand rests on the figure's knee (Khan 1992: 68). The earth, personified as a female (*Vasundharā*), appears to have been raised by his

<sup>35</sup> The Buddha appeared rather late in this group. For the first time he is mentioned in the *Varāhapurāṇa* (Pal 1970: 22).

snout and is supported by his elbow.<sup>36</sup> The icon of Varāha from Waṇḍa Shahab Khel is made from light grey limestone and now housed in the National Museum, Karachi, Pakistan. An interesting feature of the statue is that the boar's face is bearded. According to Farid Khan, the sculpture can be dated into the 4th c. AD (Khan 1992: 67).



Figure 6.4. Varāha from Bannu.

Let us compare this Gandhāran figure with the slightly later reference found in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. The *varāharūpanirmāṇa* section of this text describes the Varāha incarnation as follows:

“The irresistible god *Hari* in the form of the Boar represents supremacy. With his supreme power he lifted up the earth on the tip of his tusk “(Bhattacharyya 1991: 202, 1A-B) In

<sup>36</sup> Various forms of Varāha are described in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, i.e. 3.79.2-4; 3.79.9.

another passage the text states: “on his left elbow should be shown the earth in the female form, her two hands being engaged in saluting him” (Bhattacharyya 1991: 203, 5A-B).

The *śeṣarūpanirmāṇa* section of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* refers to the snake *Śeṣa* as:

“Many hoods are to be shown. Oh delighter of the Yadu family, the bodily form of Vasudhā (earth goddess) should be represented on that hood which is the central one” (Bhattacharyya 1991: 110, 3A-B).

It is quite possible that the figure from Bannu is the earliest representation of the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu that matches the descriptions in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* to a considerable degree. This evidence suggests a rather consistent tradition of this type of image, which is not only reflected in the textual tradition but also in later Gupta period images of the Varāha (e.g. that in *Udayagiri*).

## 6.7. Kṛṣṇa fighting with Keśin

One unpublished panel at the Taxila Museum depicts a male fighting a horse. There is good reason to believe that this figure represents Kṛṣṇa fighting the horse-demon *Keśin*. Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw tentatively identified two other reliefs from Mathura dating from the Kuṣāṇa period as representations of the same event (Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1972: 26-43). According to Hindu mythology “*Kamsa*”, the evil king of Mathura, instructed Keśin to kill Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma (Banerjee 1978: 28). Keśin assumed the form of a terrible horse (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10, ch. 37, cf. Banerjee 1978) and assaulted Kṛṣṇa with his gaping mouth and struck him with his legs. Kṛṣṇa caught hold of Keśin by the legs and threw him a distance of one hundred *dhanus*. Again the animal stood up and attacked Kṛṣṇa with his open mouth. In the ensuing battle, Kṛṣṇa thrust his left arm into Keśin’s mouth. He attempted to bite the arm but the arm expanded in size and radiated great heat, until it finally chokes Keśin and he fell down dead.<sup>37</sup> The relief from the Taxila Museum seems to represent the same legend (Fig.6.5).

<sup>37</sup> Elaborate descriptions of this episode are e.g. found in the *Brahmapurāṇa* 190.22.-48; *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 16.1-128; *Padmapurāṇa* 149-157; *Harivamśapurāṇa* 81; *Rahmavaivartapurāṇa* 16.20-74; *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 29-33.

A closely related story is found in the myth of Heracles fighting with the horse of Diomedes. According to this myth Diomedes of the Bistones, a warlike people of Thrace. He owned man-eating horses which Heracles had to subdue (Kurze 1975: 171f. cf. Harle 1985). According to Kurze, Heracles' quest was not to kill the horses but to return them to Eurysthenes, who wanted to use them in his chariot. The number and sex of the horses is not indicated in the literary sources. However Kurze regards it as most likely that there were four horses, an ideal chariot team, and that they were likely mares.



Figure 6.5. Kṛṣṇa fighting with horse demon, Taxila Museum.

The Taxila panel is certainly not illustrating the Heracles story. In Gandhāran iconography, Heracles is typically shown holding a club and wearing a lion skin. Here both of these attributes are missing. The style of the Taxila panel suggests it is completely Indian. The male figure is wearing a *dhotī* and Indian style hairdress. Furthermore the positions of the figure's left arm and leg correspond completely to the story of Kṛṣṇa killing the demon Keśin. According to Harle (Harle 1985: 648) the Greek Heracles avoids direct contact with the horses. In contrast, the Taxila image depicts the figure clearly kicking the horse and has an arm lodged in its mouth.

Thus it seems quite probable that the relief from Taxila represents one of the earliest images of the Kṛṣṇa myth in Indian art. Moreover it is the only one known from the Northwest. It is not surprising that the god Kṛṣṇa was known and worshipped in this region in a relatively early period. Already Pāṇini 2.2.34 mentions in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī* Kṛṣṇa temples under the term *keśava* (cf. Banerjee : 338, 410, discussing Paṇīni sūtra 2.2.34).

## 6.8. Viṣṇu statue from the Julian Sherrier Collection

The damaged figure of Viṣṇu from the Julian Sherrier collection is another earlier example of Hindu imagery in Gandhāra (Fig.6.6). This image made of grey schist is executed in the typical Gandhāran Bodhisattva style. As far as we know this sculpture piece is yet unpublished. The only clue to identify this figure as Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva is the thick garland (*vanamālā*) he wears and the broken part of a wheel (*cakra*) near his left foot. Other than these features other elements of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa are missing.<sup>38</sup> This early figure of Viṣṇu is stylistically comparable to the contemporary Buddhist sculptures of Gandhāra, which date to 3rd- 4th century AD. The deity is wearing a long *dhotī* covering the lower part of his body. The upper part is bare and adorned with bracelets. His face is smiling, his eyes half-closed and the hairstyle is closely related to those typical of Bodhisattva images.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the figure is incompletely preserved. All of the four arms are broken, but he certainly once carried some of the characteristic items. Only one of these attributes is still partially

<sup>38</sup> According to Gonda (1954: 96-103) the general iconographic features of Viṣṇu are as follows: The god carries in his uplifted hand a sharp-rimmed battle-discus, the famous *cakra sudarśana* of the epic tales. According to Mbh. 1, 225, 23 it was given to (Viṣṇu) Kṛṣṇa by Agni: it was a fiery weapon, through which its owner should be superior in battle to any creature, and which could always return into his hands. According to another story told in Mbh. 13.14.74 ff. it was given to Kṛṣṇa by Mahādeva Śiva, when the latter had killed a daitya who lived in the water.

The second popular feature is the brilliant jewel on Viṣṇu's chest, the Kaustubha which is also called *maṇiratna* or *maṇir divyah*. It had emerged from the milky ocean when it was churned and was regarded a miraculous and powerful gem. Another feature is the *śrīvatsa*, a particular curl of hair on the chest of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and other divine beings. Viṣṇu's conch shell is a famous specimen of an auspicious object. Due to its resemblance to the vulva the shell is often regarded as representative of or identical with female fertility. It is a means of warding off evils, of destroying demons and of strengthening and delighting the divine power. It is believed to afford protection against the evil eye and is often an object of veneration.

Beside these features, Viṣṇu is usually holding a lotus in his hand. The lotus is a representative of the force and energy inherent in the waters and of the humidity of the soil.

<sup>39</sup> For comparison see Ingholt 1957: pl. 279.

visible: the wheel (*cakra*) near the figure's left leg.<sup>40</sup> The outlines of the left upper hand might suggest a conch shell. The head of the deity is haloed with a heavy hairdress tightened by a diadem. His ears are adorned with heavy earrings.



Figure 6.6. Viṣṇu from Julian Sherrier's collection. Photo courtesy Dr. J. Bautze.

<sup>40</sup> The style of this *cakra* is unusual with the spokes shown in a lotus leaves pattern.

An additional remarkable feature of this sculpture is a small second head emerging from the god's right side. This small head seems to be a lion's head. This observation is only based on the photographs available at present; further confirmation and discussion will be done after physical inspection the image. For comparison, one can refer to another example from Gandhāra that is now kept in the Taxila Museum. The small head of a lion broken is emerging from the right side of his haloed head of Viṣṇu (Ashraf 2008). Both figures probably represent Viṣṇu as the Man-Lion (*narasiṃha*).

## 6.9. Conclusion

The development beginning with Agathokles's coins, reaching to the late Kuṣāṇa sculptures defines the period when the iconographic tradition of Viṣṇu and his different aspects and incarnations began to emerge. Many of these early examples must be described as expressions of an experimental spirit. They are not a continuation of any earlier iconographical traditions. Each sculpture is unique and none constitutes a fixed iconographic precedent which is later copied. Each sculpture appears to be an original attempt to express complex abstract concepts in visual terms.

Nonetheless, all of the images described and analyzed here clearly forecast later developments and can consequently be characterised as part of a supraregional tradition. This tradition was continued in other parts of India during the subsequent Gupta and post-Gupta periods. Whether this tradition originated in Gandhāra or if it merely represents the local expression of a generalized pan-Indian development is difficult to say. Although certain elements of a Vaiṣṇava cult, such as the worship of Vāsudeva and Saṃkarṣaṇa, seem to be present in the early period, these elements never gained great popularity in Gandhāra. There even seems to be a large chronological gap between these early depictions and the later representations from the Late Kuṣāṇa period. Vaiṣṇava images are also rare in comparison to Śaiva, Skanda and Devī images. Additionally the extant Vaiṣṇava figures from Gandhāra share many common features with related pieces from other parts of the Indian subcontinent, including those from Mathura. It seems therefore possible to characterize these later images as reflections of an "imported" Viṣṇu cult rather than the result of an indigenous development.

## Chapter 7

### The Cult of Skanda in Gandhāra

#### 7.1. Skanda-Kārttikeya in literary sources

The concept of a “war god” was common to many ancient civilizations of the world. The Greeks had their own god of war called Ares, who was functionally equivalent to the Romans Mars. In early Vedic literature, Indra and Agni are reported as the typical leaders of the armies. According to Hindu mythology, the god Skanda-Kārttikeya was created by the gods themselves for protecting them from the demons and to be the general of the celestial army. Probably this is the reason why the epic Skanda-Kārttikeya is described as the son of Agni.

Our following discussion will be based on a combination of iconography, coinage, and textual accounts from the time of Pāṇini until the first five to six hundred years of the Christian era. During this specified time, images of the Hindu god Skanda in Gandhāra are much more numerous than those of any other Hindu god represented in the region.

According to Agrawala (1967: 1), “the word Skanda does not appear in the Ṛgveda, there are certain significant passages containing the germs of a few elements of mythology which should fully blossom only in later time in connection with the god Skanda.” By the time of Patañjali (2nd c. BC), however, the cult of Skanda-Kārttikeya seems to have been fairly well established. His frequent depiction in numismatic and in iconographical sources from Gandhāra is therefore hardly surprising.

### 7.1.1. The Brāhmaṇa literature on Skanda's birth

In early sources such as the Brāhmaṇas Skanda appears as Kumāra, literally “boy prince” (Skt. *kumāra*). However Kumāra in later literature was known by the names Skanda and Kārttikeya. A passage in the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB) gives a highly symbolic account of the birth of Kumāra (ŚB 6.1.3.7-20, cf. Agrawala 1967; Eggeling 1894: 158-61): The lord of the Bhūtas – who symbolizes six season-is *samvatsara*, “the years”. These Bhūtas release their semen in the dawn a year preceding the birth of Kumāra (ŚB 6.1.3.8-10, cf. Agrawala 1967). The *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* calls Kumāra the 9th form of Agni or Rudra. According to the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, Agni is given eight names: Rudra, Śarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Aśani, Bhava, mahān devo (= Mahādeva) and Īsāna (ŚB 6.1.3.10-17, cf. Agrawala 1967). These names subsequently designated the eight traditional forms of Rudra. The ninth form of Agni is called Kumāra:

*tāny etāny aṣṭāv agnirūpāṇi | kumāro navamaḥ saivāgnes trivṛttā* (ŚB 6.1.3.18, cf. Agrawala 1967).

Translation: These then are the eight forms of Agni. Kumāra (the boy) is the ninth: that is Agni's threefold state. (tr. Eggeling 1894: 160).

### 7.1.2. Skanda in the Upaniṣads

The word Skanda which was the popular reference of the god in this period, first occurs in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (7.26.2), where he is identified with Sanatkumāra who is instructing the wise Nārada (Agrawala 1967: 12):

*tasmai mṛditakaṣāyāya tamasas pāraṃ darśayati bhagavān sanatkumāraḥ | taṃ skanda ity ācakṣate, taṃ skanda ity ācakṣate ||*

Translation: “To such a one who has his stains wiped away, the venerable Sanatkumāra shows the further shore of darkness. Him they call Skanda, yea, him they call Skanda (tr. Radhakrishnan 1989: 489)”.

In later sources Sanatkumāra is also known as a son of Brahmā, just like Skanda in the epics and Purāṇas (cf. Mbh. 9.46.98).

### 7.1.3. Skanda in Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī and the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali

The name Skanda occurs in several sections of the *Gaṇapāṭha*, i.e. lexical lists related to sūtras of Pāṇini's grammar. In most of these cases it can be clearly defined, whether it stands for the god or just for an ordinary personal name (*Gaṇapāṭha* 53 ad 4.1.98; *Gaṇapāṭha* 72 ad 5.1.2; *Gaṇapāṭha* 232 ad 4.3.106). Other occurrences of the word *skanda* are completely doubtful with regard to their meaning (*Gaṇapāṭha* 226 ad 5.3.103). Only one passage, *Gaṇapāṭha* ad 2.4.14 clearly refers to Skanda as god. Here his name occurs together with that of Viśākha (*skandaviśākhau*) in a series of *dvandva* compounds, some of them formed from the names of gods (*brahmaprajāpatī, śivavaiśravaṇau*).<sup>41</sup>

More information about the cult of both gods is found in the commentary ad 5.3.99 where Śiva, Skanda and Viśākha are the names of gods which receive veneration. In case figures of gods are made for commercial purposes the suffix- *ka* can be added. The Sūtra and Patañjali allow formations such as *śivaka, skandaka* or *viśākhaka* if the idol was traded for money, but not if an idol was meant for serious worship only.

This commentary clearly shows that items representing these gods were in use by the time of Patañjali, i.e. in the 2nd c. BC. Moreover, he remarks that the images of Śiva, Skanda and Viśākha were turned into a source of income by the Mauryas. This indirectly indicates that images of this kind were in great demand and promised a certain profit.

From this record it is clear that these three gods were very popular in the 2nd c. BC and probably also in Gandhāra. Further, it also considers Skanda and Viśākha as two separate deities, at least nominally.

### 7. 1.4. Skanda in Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra

As shown above, Patañjali referred to the worship of the images of Skanda among other gods during the time of Mauryas. This fact is confirmed by Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. In the chapter on the layout of forts (*durganiveśa*), the Arthaśāstra prescribes the building of temples for various deities in the center of the city. Four of these temples are attributed to the gods Aparājita,

<sup>41</sup> Patañjali refers to Pāṇ. 8.1.15 and discusses the correctness of its formation, but adds nothing to its contents.

Apratihata, Jayanta and Vaijayanta. According to Meyer one can be identified with Skanda-Kumāra (see Kangle 1970: 70, f. 17). Moreover, the text prescribes that the gate of each city should be presided over by a god. One of the gates – probably the Western one – is attributed to the god Senāpati, another name of Skanda (Arthaśāstra, 2.4.17-19, cf. Kangle 1972: 70):

*aparājītāpratihatājayantavaijayantakoṣṭhān śivavaiśravaṇāśvīśrīmadirāgrhāṇi ca puramadhya  
kārayet // 17 yathoddeśaṃ vāstudevatāḥ sthāpayet //18 brāhmaīndrayāmyasaināpatyāni dvārāṇi  
// 19*

“17. He should cause to be built in the centre of the city shrines for Aparājita, Apratihata, Jayanta, Vaijayanta as well as temples of Śiva, Vaiśravaṇa, Aśvins, Śrī and Madirā. 18. He should install the presiding deities of the dwelling places according to their respective regions. 19.

The city gates (should be) presided over by Brahman, Indra, Yama and Senāpati (tr. Kangle 1972: 70).”

Remarkably, the god is not known to the Arthaśāstra by any of his usual names, like Skanda, Kumāra or Kārttikeya.

### 7.1.5. Skanda in Buddhist texts<sup>42</sup>

Skanda occurs in the Buddhist Sanskrit text Lalitavistara, probably written in North India in the first centuries AD. The text contains a passage in chapter 8 where the figures of Śakra, Śiva, Skanda, Nārāyaṇa, Kubera, Candra, Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Brahmā and the Lokapālas raised from the pedestals and bowed down in front of the infant Siddhārtha.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> According to Agrawala, in the Pāli Jātakas Skanda is referred to by the name Mahāsenā “one who has a large army” (Jātaka, Vol.II, p. 353, cf. Agrawala 1967: 17). However, his argumentation is hardly convincing and needs to be revised on the basis of a thorough evaluation of relevant text passages. In the passages examined by us, the attribute *mahāsenā* was exclusively used in its literal meaning and did not indicate any association with ideas connected with the god Skanda-Kumāra.

<sup>43</sup> *samanantarapratīṣṭhāpitaś ca bodhisattvena dakṣiṇaś caraṇayoḥ kramatalas tasmīn devakule atha tā acetanyo devapratimāḥ tadyathā – śivaskandanārāyaṇakuberacandrasūryavaiśravaṇaśakrabrahmalokapāla-prabhṛtayoḥ pratimāḥ - sarvāḥ svebhyaḥ sthānebhyaḥ vyutthāya bodhisattvasya kramatalayor nipatanti sma* (ed. Vaidya 1958: 84).

### 7.1.6. Skanda in epic literature

By the time the two epics were compiled Skanda had become a favorite god of the Indians. This is proved not only by the repeated references to his exploits in various places of the epics but also by the manner in which his name is mentioned along with other gods. With the exception of Viṣṇu and Śiva more verses have been devoted to him than to any other god (Chatterjee 1970: 14).

In the epic literature we observe, how several gods of a same or similar nature – all of them related to war – merged into one mighty figure: Skanda-Kārttikeya (see Mann 2007). The respective gods are Kumāra, the son of Agni, Ṣaṇmukha (Six-headed), Viśākha, Guha and Kārttikeya. The emerging composite god “Skanda-Kārttikeya” is represented as an adopted son of the mothers and Rudra-Śiva the leader and lord of numerous gods, who is felicitated by all gods who give him illustrious parents and convey on him the generalship of the divine army.

The study of Skanda in epic literature reveals the confusion and inconsistency of statements about Skanda’s birth and fostering. The different and sometimes contradicting versions obviously follow different pre-epic stories which were harmonized during the epic’s composition. It is probable that in achieving the status of a war-god Skanda was also assisted by the closely related mythological traditions gathered around Agni (ŚB 6.1.3.18, cf. Agrawala 1967).

#### Skanda killing Mahiṣa

Skanda-Kārttikeya was engaged to fulfill several military duties on behalf of the gods (*deva*) manifested prominently by the defeat of the demons Krauñca (Mbh. 3.214.31) and Śveta. However, he is mainly known as the disperser of the Asura army (Mbh. 7.159.32; 9.6.20) of several demons that include according to Mbh. 9.46 Tāraka, Mahiṣa, Tripāda, Hradodara and Bāṇa. Mahiṣa, the buffalo-demon was the most famous among them. His defeat is described in great detail in several portions of the Mahābhārata, like e.g. in the Tāraka story (Mbh.3.231.1, and in Mbh. 8.166.7421; 8.146; 9.46.2592).

This topic seems to be a common myth shared by all Śaiva deities, as the slaying of *Mahiṣa* is attributed also to Śiva (Mbh. 13.905) and Durgā (Mbh. 4.193).

According to Agrawala (1967: 31) the innovation of the epic mythology consisted in the idea that Skanda's birth was directly connected with and justified by the necessity to meet the need of a leader in the *tārakāmaya* war, where he was supposed to crush the enemies of the gods. The story of the cosmological Tāraka war occurs in different portions of the epic in slightly varying forms. Interestingly, it is completely missing in the Vanaparvan account, where Skanda-Kārttikeya is only depicted as the destroyer of the demon Mahiṣa, the archenemy of the gods (Mbh. 3.221.1 ff., cf. Chatterjee 1970: 15). In the Śalyaparvan account the killing of all the Asuras including Mahiṣa and Tāraka has been briefly described (Mbh.9.43-45). In the Anuśāsana book, he appears only as the destroyer of Tārakāsura (Mbh.13.83-84, 86).

### The problem of Skanda-Viśākha

It is said in Mbh. 3.216-7 that when Skanda was struck by a thunderbolt, a number of male and female children were produced. The males are described to be fond of stealing small children – either born, or in their mothers' womb. These newly produced children adopted Viśākha as their father, who himself was born from the pierced right side of Skanda.

In some places Viśākha is the second god in authority after Skanda (3.216.13-15); here Viśākha is also known as Skandāpasmāra (Mbh.3.219.25; cf. also *Suśruta-Saṃhitā*, *Uttaratantra*, ch. 29.2, 37.1; cf. Agrawala 1967: 34).

Nevertheless, the full story of Viśākha's emergence from Skanda is described in Mbh.3.227.16-7, when Skanda was fighting Indra, who hurled his thunderbolt on his right, which resulted in the emergence of a new deity who created terror among the gods (cf. also Mbh. 3.216.13).

As shown above, in the Gaṇapāṭha *ad* P. 2.4.14 and in Patañjali's commentaries upon the Pāṇini sūtras P. 8.1.15 and P. 6.3.26 the names of Skanda and Viśākha occur in *dvandva* compounds indicating that they were perceived as separate, but closely related deities. Skanda and Viśākha appear as separate deities also in the *Skandayāga* section of the Atharvavedapariṣiṣṭa (Agrawala 1967: 44) and – as seen above – this tradition continues well into the epic time.

## 7.2. The iconographic representations of Skanda in Gandhāra

In the mythology of various cultures we find that it is one of the chief functions of any god to help and protect his worshipper in war. The concept of a war-god in Indian mythology can be traced back to Indra, who in early Vedic mythology is the great god of battle and king of gods and is usually called upon by the Aryans to help them to conquer their enemies. According to the Buddhist mythology Indra is depicted in Gandhāran Buddhist narratives mainly in his function as the king of gods, along with Brahman. How the function of the warrior-god was transferred from Indra to Skanda is impressively shown in the myths found in the Mahābhārata where the gods headed by Indra handed over the military generalship to Skanda. Consequently, the Arthaśāstra calls him *senāpati* (“general”) (see above).

Skanda is also regarded as the chief of evil-causing elements such as *bāla-graha* (“child-snatchers”), *bhūtas*, *piśācas* and ferocious and awe-inspiring *mātrkās* (Joshi 1989: 6-7).

The earliest evidence for the cult of Skanda in Gandhāra which is in line with the literary sources is found as well in numismatic as art-historical objects. In Gandhāra, Skanda was the product of syncretistic processes based on Persian, Roman, Bactrian, and Indian myths.

Despite the various aspects of Skanda in mythology, images of Skanda in Gandhāra depict him mainly as a war-god. The deity is usually depicted standing and clad in armor dress (Fig.7.1).



Figure 7.1. Skanda Kārttikeya as a warrior (after Srinivasan 1997-98).

He is represented with one head; most of the images have two arms, in which he holds a spear in his right hand and a bird on his left hand. This is the earliest representation of the god where his image is emphasized with martial as well as Gandhāran characteristics.

Before discussing some selected pieces from sculptured art we will concentrate on the representations of Skanda and his mythology in the coinage of Gandhāra.

### 7.2.1. Numismatic sources

#### Scythian evidences

So far it is Huviska who introduces this god in its iconographic form by having Skanda's name on his coins and present in different forms. Moreover, it was believed that the Kuṣāṇas were the ones who emphasized the character of Skanda as a war god. This view largely ignored the fact that the warrior-dress he wears in Gandhāran iconography is of a typically Scythian character. At this instant, I am not arguing that the Kuṣāṇas were not responsible for the specific shape of Skanda's iconography acquired during the Kuṣāṇa period. But it has to be stressed that the Kuṣāṇas heavily relied on ideas which had already been developed in the preceding Scythian period. For our discussion two of Huviṣka's coin types are of particular interest: the one calling the god Mahāsenā (MAACHNO) and the other where a pair of gods is called (SKANΔA BIZAFO).



Figures 7.2 Azilises coin.



Figures 7.3. Mahāsenā on Huviṣka coin.

In a recent publication, Falk (2007) challenged the initial role of Huviṣka by discussing a new coin type of the Scythian king Azilises (Fig.7.2). This rare type shows the god standing and holding a spear in his right hand, while a sword is hanging from his left. The figure wears a long coat, but the most interesting feature is a bird which seemingly is shown on his head. Falk rightly compares this figure with the Mahāsenā of the Huviṣka type (Fig.7.3).<sup>44</sup> If this identification is

<sup>44</sup> Senior for the first time described this figure as a king holding a spear (Senior 2001, no. 36.1). Falk argued that the figure cannot be the king, who is already shown riding a horse on the obverse of the same coin.

correct then we determine this image as the precursor of the Huiṣka type of Mahāseṇa. This ultimately means that the first depiction of this god in Gandhāra can be attributed to the Scythians. This attribution is also supported by the armor dress he wears in the Gandhāran iconography which is typical of the Scythian warriors.

The same relationship can also be established for another Scythian coin type. The depiction of the so-called “Dioskouroi” on Azilises coins (Fig.7.4)<sup>45</sup> are the direct model of the later “Skanda-Viśākha” images of Huiṣka (Fig.7.5). It seems therefore possible to call these unnamed figures “Proto Skanda-Viśākha” images.<sup>46</sup> Their iconographical features hardly show any differences. On the basis of this evidence it can be claimed that the Scythians were the earliest to depict the god Skanda on their coins. This evidence pushes back the pictorial history of the Skanda cult in Gandhāra for at least two centuries.



**Figure 7.4. Dioskouroi (Prototype of Skanda-Viśākha) on Azilises coin (After Senior 2001: nr.37.14).**

From numismatic finds it stands to reason that Azilises was ruling mainly in the region of Hazara. In this connection one can also refer to the 4th c. AD “Abbottabad inscription” from Hazara (Falk 2004: 139-155, Sircar 1953-54: 59-62). It reports the construction of a Kumāra temple by a ruler/soldier with Iranian background. This short text from the third century AD is the earliest reference for a Skanda temple in the Indian sub-continent. If we combine both data – the introduction of Skanda images by Azilises and the construction of a Kumāra temple by an Iranian –

<sup>45</sup> Senior 2001, nos. 37.1, 37.5, 37.6, 37.14.

<sup>46</sup> The tradition to write the name of the deity started by the Kuṣāṇas. That is why we can see the name of Skanda-Viśākha only on Huiṣka coins, but not on Azilises coins.

it is possible to conclude that foreigners and the region of Hazara both played a vital role in development of the Skanda cult in Gandhāra.



Figure 7.5. Skanda-Kumāra-Viśakha on Huviṣka's coin.

### Skanda on Huviṣka coins

The earliest clearly identifiable visual representation of Skanda is found on the coins of Huviṣka (Fig.7.3). On the basis of these coins I will try to explore the early character and cult of Skanda in Gandhāra. Skanda is shown on Huviṣka's coins mainly as a warrior or general. As we will see, the different iconographic representations are accompanied by designations which largely correspond to most of the different names of Skanda as found in early literary sources. This clearly indicates a well established and broadly acknowledged religious terminology with regard to the Skanda cult.

Huviṣka introduced the Skanda image where the god is shown in an armor dress along with a bird – attributes that became favorite features for the representation of Skanda in Gandhāran iconography.

Huviṣka adopted numerous deities from different religions like Greek, Iranian, and Indian for his coins. The Indian god Skanda is represented by him under various names in five different types.

**Type 1:**

Series 1 shows Mahāsenā, facing, diademed, clad in coat and cloak, holding a standard in his right hand, which is surmounted by a bird (Fig.7.3). His left hand rests on the hilt of a sword which is tied to his waist. The legend reads Bactrian MAACHNO which is equal to Sanskrit Mahāsenā “having a great army”, a well-known epithet of Skanda. Huviṣka is himself usually clad as a warrior. This might indicate that he identifies himself to a certain degree with the local Gandhāran war-god. This particular Mahāsenā type appears to be the ultimate source for Skanda as a “commander of the army” in Gandhāran sculpture.

**Type 2:**

Two standing deities facing each other with three names in the legend: SKANΔO KOMAPO BIZAFO” (= Skt. Skanda, Kumāra, Viśākha) (Fig.7.6a). SKANΔO KOMAPO is usually written in double line which indicates that both names are describing only one deity (Skanda-Kumāra) while the remaining BIZAFO designates the second god Viśākha. Both deities are shown with a sword on their left, Skanda-Kumāra with radiate head, holding a spear in his right hand, while Viśākha holds a spear in his left hand.



Figure 7.6a. Huviṣka coin with two deities and three names, SKANΔO KYMAPO BIZAFO.

The Gaṇapāṭha *ad* Pāṇini 2.4.14 enumerates several pairs of gods, among them the pair Skanda-Viśākha (*skandaviśākha*). The depiction of this pair on Huviṣka’s gold coins is the earliest

appearance of Skanda and Viśākha in anthropomorphic form. As the coins show they were still considered as two different gods at least until the Kuṣāṇa period.

### Type 3:

Type 3 shows the same two deities as type 2 above, but this time the Greek legend is more legible, and SKANΔO is written on the bottom margin (Fig.7.5). In addition, here the head of Skanda-Kumāra is not radiate.



Figure 7.7. Huviṣka coin with three deities but only one name MAACHNO.

### Type 4:

This type shows three male hallowed deities standing under a pavilion, on a high pedestal. The pavilion is supported by pillars (Fig.7.7). The central figure is facing to the front, crowned and holding a spear in his right hand, while a sword is hanging from his left (no spear). The other two deities are looking towards him, both are holding a spear in their hands and a sword is hanging to their left. This is an unusual type, because despite the three figures on the reverse of this coin, there is only one Greek legend reading MAACHNO (Skt. *mahāsenā*).

### Type 5:

On this type again three male deities are depicted standing side by side under a canopy, accompanied by the legend SKANΔO KYMAPO BIZAFΘ MAACHNO (Skanda, Kumāra, Viśākha, Mahāsenā) (Fig.7.8). The figures are enshrined within a pavilion consisting of an ornamental

double basement within a linear representation of a superstructure, which possibly represents a Hindu shrine. The central deity is shown facing to the front, with a radiate halo and a sword hanging to his left. The two accompanying deities standing on each side are facing him; the one at the right holds a spear in his left hand, while the left one holds a stick on his left shoulder, to which one small bag is attached.



**Figure 7.8. Huviṣka's coin with three deities and four names SKANΔO KYMAPO BIZATO MAACHNO.**

The types of the three divinities enshrined differ largely from their representations on other coins of Huviṣka, which usually depict Mahāsenā holding in his hand a standard surmounted by a bird. Again, here the names of Skanda and Kumāra are written together indicating that they designate only one god. The names of Viśākha and Mahāsenā are written separately and evidently stand for two other gods. This may be the reason, why there are only two figures on the one and three figures on the other type. Similar to Wēś the image of Skanda as presented on Kuṣāṇa coins is a composite one. According to the different names given to the gods on the coins it is obvious that in the concerned period Skanda-Kumāra, Viśākha and Mahāsenā were not considered as one god, but as distinctively different – although closely related – deities. Their almost identical iconographical features clearly indicate their similarity or even identical character. We can assume that although in this early stage these gods were still perceived as separate deities under individual names the process of assimilation as witnessed by the concept of Skanda-Kārttikeya in the Mahābhārata had already started during the Kuṣāṇa period.

## 7.3. Skanda in Sculptures

### 7.3.1. Skanda as a war god

Skanda cult enjoyed great popularity not only within the local population of Gandhāra but also among the foreigners as shown by the large number of his sculptures of a war-god clad in armor dress (Fig.7.1).

Despite the various aspects of this god in mythology, the Gandhāran images of Skanda in Gandhāra stress his character as war-god. In the earliest representation of this kind, the deity is usually represented with one head, standing and clad in an armor dress. Most of the images have two arms, in which he holds a spear in his right hand and a bird on his left arm.

One of the best examples is represented by the sculpture shown in Fig.7.1 where the haloed Skanda stands on a high pedestal facing to the front, wearing an armor dress and holding a spear in his right hand, while a cock rests on his left arm. He wears no boots. This is the common shape, which is used from the early Kuṣāṇa period up to the Late Kuṣāṇas.

### 7.3.2 Skanda as a youth (Kumāra)

In Mathurā Skanda is usually shown in his form as a young boy (Skt. *kumāra*). This aspect is also present in one sculpture which was found in the court of the Dharmarājika stūpa at Taxila (Fig. 7.9). It is possible that this piece comes from an archaeological context which is characterized by the growing influence of Mathuran art and thus reflects the Mathuran conception of the god where the young “Kumāra” was the popular form of this god from the very beginning. This convention of borrowing the stylistic features from Mathura art can be ascribed to a later period of Gandhāran art, which once again demonstrates the openness of Gandhāra for new ideas. The Dharmarājika sculpture is the best example of this type. Skanda-Kumāra wears no armor dress, but has a spear in his right hand and a cock on his left. He also has high boots. Images of this type become common somewhere in the 5th century AD. This period can be determined as the transitional phase in Skanda iconography in Gandhāra, where the god’s image gradually changed from a distinct Gandhāran war-god to the pure Indian concept of Skanda-Kārttikeya.



Figure 7.9. Skanda-Kumāra from Taxila.

### 7.3.3. Skanda killing the Mahiṣa

The chief function of Skanda and the main reason for his creation (see above) was to lead the army of the gods against the demons. The earliest iconographic representation of the story of Skanda killing the *mahiṣa* is offered by a small relief from Sub-Regional Office Peshawar (Fig.7.10). Luczanits (2008) convincingly identified this unique piece as Skanda killing Mahiṣa.<sup>47</sup> So far, this is the only iconic illustration of a literary story about Skanda. It proves that at least parts of the Skanda mythology were known in Gandhāra. Moreover, Skanda is depicted in the typical Gandhāran style, with a halo, in an armor dress and holding a spear in his right hand.

<sup>47</sup> Earlier this image was published as “Durga Killing Maheṣa” by Ashraf Khan et. 2000: 7-10.

Thus this image throws important light on the early form of Hinduism in the Gandhāra region during the Kuṣāṇa period.



Figure 7.10. Skanda killing Mahiṣa.

#### 7.3.4. Skanda riding the peacock

In its last phase the Skanda iconography in Gandhāra adapted the Indian concept of the god. Images like those in the Peshawar University Museum (Fig. 7.11), and in the Julian Sherrier collection (Sherrier 1991: 617-624) demonstrate the amalgamation of the Gandhāran and Gangetic canons of iconography. These images, which cannot be attributed to the early Kuṣāṇa period, retained the distinctive features of Gandhāran iconography by having the god clad in armor dress, but experimented with Indian attributes of the god. Thus the Gandhāran “bird” is replaced by the peacock which was later acknowledged as Skanda’s vehicle (*skandavāhana*).

### 7.3.5. Conclusion

An assessment of the images discussed above clearly indicates that Skanda was a major Hindu god in Gandhāra during the early phase of Hinduism. He was popular among the indigenous population as well as among the foreigners who came to Gandhāra. As the relatively late Abbottabad inscription shows, the Skanda cult continued until late Kuṣāṇa times (Sircar 1953-54: 99-62, Falk 2004: 139-155).



Figure 7.11. Skanda riding the peacock, University of Peshawar Museum..

In Gandhāra Skanda was mainly worshipped as a warrior god. The roots of this god are unknown, but it cannot be excluded that he was the product of a religious syncretism, gathering Persian, Roman, Bactrian, and Indian myths. However, the Skanda concept gradually acquired a distinctive Indian character. This development was largely due to a growing influence of Eastern religious concepts as represented e.g. in the art of Mathura. In early Mathura Skanda is usually shown as a youth along with a peacock, a concept which clearly stresses the Kumāra against the Mahāsenā aspect of this god. While the earliest representation of Gandhāra clearly favour the Mahāsenā type – despite knowing Kumāra at least by name – (2nd-4th c. AD) they begin to introduce the Kumāra type along with his peacock by the middle of the 5th c. AD.

## Chapter 8

### Goddesses from Gandhāra

In the agricultural society of South Asia the land is considered as the factor of reproduction and fertility, and in most societies, women have been considered as the human counterpart of land-fertility and reproduction. On the base of this, the concept cult of females has always been part of South Asian culture since ancient times, although it hardly reflects the actual status of women in the respective societies.

Women as mothers of children, women as cultivators, women as guardians of the primitive community, women as the fecund and generative force became the head of the matriarchal clan and in the course of time, primitive people began to treat women as the symbols of fertility and generation. Women became the inspirers and the fulfillers of all the productive and reproductive acts and functions.

For all these reasons, women were always an object of veneration. Here some of the visual evidence from Gandhāra will be taken under consideration and will be discussed to evaluate the different developmental phases of goddess worship (See Willis 2009, Bhandarkar 1928 and Tiwari 1985).

#### 8.1. “Mother Goddesses”

##### 8.1.1. Terracotta female figurines

There are certain types of female figurines and sculptures recovered during excavations in Gandhāra. Most of them are simply female figures without distinct features which would allow to call them a mother goddess, i.e. women holding a child in their hands or any other attributes (cf. Härtel 1993: 88). The occurrence of female figurines in abundance and comparably less number of male figures, however, indicate that female figures were possibly used for worship purposes.

Already the finds of the earliest civilizations in the Indus valley reveal traces of a goddess cult. There are figurines of exuberant feminine deities in Moenjodaro and Harappa (Marshall 1973: 49-52). Afterward, during the early historic period, amongst the thousands of objects in different materials that came to light were terracotta figurines and plaques, mostly fashioned from clay. They are of varying degrees of sophistication, either handmade or produced from moulds and reflect a wide range of influence. The most common example is what Marshall described as a primitive mother goddess, a timeless, undifferentiated idol whose ancestry can be traced to prehistoric times, and whose basic form continued unchanged regardless of who was in power. Figurines of this type were found throughout the stratified levels at Bhir mound, Sirkap (see Marshall 1975: 442-450), and at Charsadda during excavations showing that the shape of these objects remained more or less and continue to change until the 3rd c. AD, at least. These figurines differ from contemporary examples found at Mathura which were discovered in stratified contexts in the course of Sonkh excavations (Härtel 1993: 88).

As inexpensive items of worship, they would have been found in the most modest household shrine. For being placed in a temple for worship they are too small. Moreover, there are no examples of Hindu temple structures in Gandhāra until the 6th c. AD (Meister 2001: 571-73). So, it can be suggested that these figurines were worshipped inside the houses and can be considered as objects of a domestic cult.

Connected with the mother goddess image is a flashy type of figurine found at Charsadda (Fig.8.1), which Wheeler called the “Baroque lady” (Wheeler 1962: 44-55). A great number of such terracotta’ were discovered at Charsadda at the site Bala Hisar, Sheikhan Dehri and Sar Dheri, which can be dated to the 3rd-2nd c. BC. On the other hand no example of this type was recorded from the Taxila region. In fact, Taxila had developed its own style, which can be designated as “moulded style”. It is closely associated with figurines of pot-bellied dwarfs (Fig.8.2). The discovery of these moulds at Bhir mound led Marshall to the suggestion that figurines of this kind were the result of a certain mass production. According to him, they were probably sold at the entrance of a temple to pilgrims or worshippers for blessing or dedication as they might be even today in various parts of India. Such commercial usage of religious images is also indirectly indicated by Pāṇini 5.3.99 and Patañjali commentary upon this sūtra (cf. chapter on Skanda).



Figure 8.1. Terracotta female figurine from Charsadda.



Figure 8.2. Dwarf-shaped figurine from Taxila.

The abundance of terracotta images of early Gandhāra shows that female goddesses, beside yakṣas, yakṣīs, nāgas and nāginīs formed important elements of the religious landscape. The terracotta figurines of females are commonly known under the convenient term “mother goddess”. They were used as objects of worship, as votive offerings, or as part the equipment of domestic rituals. Probably they were used only on specific occasions and then disposed of.

### 8.1.2. Ring Stone from Taxila

Female goddesses are also represented on two preserved examples of ring or disc stones which are now kept in the Taxila and British Museums (Fig.8.3 and see Marshall 1975: III, pl. 147, b,c,d,g).<sup>48</sup> The female figures on these carved stones usually have prominent breasts and broad

<sup>48</sup> It cannot be excluded that both pieces are originally part of the same object. Furthermore, almost identical ring stones are also found in Mohenjodaro, see Marshall 1973: 61, pl. XIII, 14.

hips, and wear ornaments such as ear-rings and girdles. They are shown along with serpent hoods. According to Ghosh, these stones can be dated to the Mauryan period, i.e. the 3rd/2nd c. BC (1989: 263f.). These ring stones from Taxila provide significant evidence of the status of the worship of female goddesses in the early historic period in Gandhāra. Although their concrete function is not known, the shift from terracotta figurines to rather elaborate and artistically valuable stone carvings certainly reflects a change in the perception of these cults. It has to be noticed, that comparable objects from Vaiśālī and other contemporary sites show that this development was not confined to Gandhāra (Ghosh 1989: 263-64).



Figure 8.3. Ring stone from Taxila.

## 8.2. A “City goddess” from Gandhāra

In the 2nd c. BC, a unique half stater was produced in Puṣkalāvātī. This coin is depicting the Puṣkalāvātī city goddess along with an inscription (see Rapson 1905). This coin can be compared to another coin type (in copper) which is depicting an identical city goddess. It was produced under Agathokles (185 BC) and under Pantaleon (170 BC). Both types can be described as follows:

### **Puṣkalāvātī gold coin of Agathocles/Pantaleon Copper Coins**

**Obverse:** A humped bull striding towards right. Greek legend “ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (Tauros) above, while “*uṣabhe*” is ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ” inscribed in Kharoṣṭhī below the bull.

**Reverse:** City goddess standing, holding a lotus in her right hand, while the left is on her waist. She is crowned with a laurel wreath, and wearing Greek dress, and Kharoṣṭhī inscription: *pukhalavadi devada drupasaya*.

On the obverse the Puṣkalāvātī gold coin has a bilingual Greek-Gāndhārī inscription ΤΑΥΡΟΣ- *uṣabhe* “bull” while the reverse can be read as *pakhalavadi devada drupasaya*, which can be construed as a “deity of Puṣkalāvātī”. The new specimen of the same type was discussed by Senior, where he saw part of the inscription that was missing on the earlier specimen, this inscription on the deity side’s was correctly read by Salomon as a *drupasaya* (= *duṣprasahya*) which mean “hard to overcome”, indicating to a city goddess (Senior 1998: 13) (Fig. 8.4).



Figure 8.4. City goddess from Puṣkalāvātī (photo courtesy Harry Falk)

But Mukherjee argues that the word *dropasaya* is Skt. *durvāsāyā*, (= *durvāsā*) which is the description for Durgā (Mukherjee 1997: 43-45).<sup>49</sup> According to him the bull on the other side can be associated with Śiva who is also known as vṛṣabha. Consequently, the coin would depict the divine couple Śiva and Durgā.

If we compare both coins (Agathokles and Puṣkalāvātī stater), the female deities are clearly shown in the same Greek shape. Moreover, the Greek inscription on the Puṣkalāvātī half stater

<sup>49</sup> Puṣkalāvātī coin can not be dated to 2nd Century BC, while there is no king’s name, neither through proper excavation, it was purchased in the Rawalpindi art market, see Rapson 1905.

indicates that this was an issue from a Greek ruler. Furthermore, the idea of a city goddess is also a Greek one. The Indian element is only represented by the bull on the obverse accompanied by a bilingual Indo-Greek text. Puṣkalāvātī coin can be dated on the basis of Kharoṣṭhī “sa”, which is half open, and can be dated to the 1st c. AD, while the coin of Agathokles is dated to 185 BC. Thus, coin engravers of Puṣkalāvātī already knew the idea to depict a city deity. Nonetheless, they used different Indian scripts. Probably, this fact points to the experimental character of this phase of introducing Indian religious ideas and cultural habits into the Greek context and – vice versa- of Greek concepts into the Indian cultural sphere.<sup>50</sup> In the case of city goddesses, there is hardly any evidence that this experiment yielded any substantial influence on Indian religious or iconographical developments.

Mukherjee’s hypothesis to associate the bull with Śiva and the city goddess with Durgā is rather problematic and cannot be accepted on linguistics grounds.

### 8.3. Towards the images of Hindu goddesses

#### 8.3.1. A female deity with an animal head

There are several examples where a female animal-headed haloed deity is seated and holding a cup or an animal head in one of her hands (Fig.8.5). In one case she is seated on a high throne and represented with an animal head that may be of a dog. The appearance and identification of this goddess in the Gandhāran Buddhist context has not yet been settled. Zwalf (1996: 123, nr. 195) describes this deity in detail without giving any proper identification. According to my view, it is possible to compare this deity in some aspects with the Vedic goddess Saramā (cf. Kramrisch 1975: 240-242). According to her,

“(...) mythically she was a bitch, the bitch of the gods (Nirukta 11.25). The Rig-Veda speaks of her as the messenger of Indra (...) She is a bitch and acts for Indra... She carries out a mission. Daring in her purpose, she achieves her end (...) The Paṇis, who were demons, robbers, and hoarders, had stolen "the cows" and other treasures (the Light) of the Aṅgirasas, the primeval fire priests and seers, and hid them in a mountain

<sup>50</sup> Other examples are represented by an Ai-Khanum coin with Vāsudeva and Samkarṣaṇa (see chapter on Viṣṇuism in Gandhāra), and Eucratides coins with the Kapiśa city deity.

cave deep down and far away on the other side of the Rasā. Saramā finds the track of the robbers; she discovers the cave where the Paṇis guard the stolen treasures, the horses and cows. The Paṇis ask her how it was possible for her to cross the waters of the Rasā: "Which was the decisive point?" (Paritakmyā; V. 10.108.1).



Figure 8.5. Animal-headed female deity, the British Museum.

Saramā replies that she came as Indra's messenger (dūtī); in fact she came as his forerunner. She tells the Paṇis that the Rasā, afraid Saramā would leap over her current, helped her across as she was flying over the ends of the sky (RV. 10.108.5). So she came, driven forward by celestial power on an otherwise insuperable way, to the stronghold of treasures at the bottom of the rock. She refuses the offer of the Paṇis to stay with them and to become their sister; her only concern is that the cows should leave their rocky confinement by the right way (*rtena*), according to the order in the universe.

Not in every version of the myth does Saramā act as detachedly. Although she persists in rejecting the offer of the demons to stay with them - at the further bank of the Rasā - and of becoming their sister, the Bṛhaddevatā (8.24-35) tells of her weakness for the milk of the hidden cows. She greedily drinks the milk which the demons serve her. Her strength stimulated, she returns and again crosses the Rasā. On her return Indra asks whether she had seen the cows. Under the influence of the milk served by the demons she replied "no" to Indra. Enraged, Indra struck her with his foot. She then threw up the milk and trembling with fear she went back to the Paṇis. Indra in his chariot followed her steps by the track of the spilled milk." ( Kramrisch 1975: 240f.)

The same characteristics of Saramā can also be found in epic and purāṇic sources (see Mani 1975 s.v.).

With the above discussion from Kramrisch's work it is possible to compare the animal headed goddess from Gandhāra with Saramā. Her identity as a bitch would be clear if we take the animal's head as a dog's head: her own central one and the puppy's head in her left. On the other hand, her habit of drinking milk can be linked with the beaker or cup she holds in her right.

### 8.3.2. Earth Goddess (Pṛthivī)

The Earth Goddess Pṛthivī appears in Gandhāra only in a Buddhist context. The only piece identified so far is a beautiful panel displayed in the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin (Shaw 2008: 24) and depicting the famous scene of Māra's attack (Fig.8.6). As a reaction to Māra's challenge to provide a witness for his enlightenment, the Buddha touches the earth, invoking her as a witness.

Then she emerged and dispersed Māra's army (Shaw 2008: 19-25) Pṛthivī is shown with her torso emerging from the earth with some foliage around her.



Figure 8.6. Earth goddess on Buddha's throne (Museum of the Asian Art, Berlin).

This evidence can now be supplemented by a yet unnoticed example from the Peshawar Museum. Here a female young donor is standing frontally holding an alcove type of object - probably a shrine - in her two hands (Fig.8.7). She is standing on a low pedestal, where one can see the emerging torso of the earth goddess who is shown in a gesture that gives the impression of supporting the donor's figure. Due to careless handling, the pedestal of this donor image is scratched and this unique representation of the earth goddess is not visible anymore. The earth goddess is wearing a crown shape headdress and emerges from a foliage with her both hands raised. The so-called female donor is wearing a thin drapery with heavy folds. Her dress is similar to the so called Hārītī image with fangs in the Peshawar Museum. Accordingly both objects can probably be determined as products of the same period and workshop in Shahri Bahlol.



Figure 8.7a & 8.7b. Female donor with earth goddess from the Peshwar Museum (left is present photo while the right one is original in situ photo).

The character of the association between the images of the “female donor” and the earth goddess on the pedestal is unclear and needs further investigation.

### 8.3.3. Lakṣmī

“The goddess Lotus or Padmā (...), śrī, the auspicious, Lakṣmī, “having wealth”, is extolled as lotus born, lotus eyed, standing on a lotus, abounding in lotuses. As mother of created beings she is called Earth (...). Like a lotus this earth of ours floats on the waters. The lotus flower was predestined to become divinized as woman.” (Kramrisch 1975: 251).

In Hindu art Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune, is frequently depicted in the form of the so-called *gajalakṣmī* showing the goddess sprinkled by two elephants<sup>51</sup>. This motif was not confined to a specific religious context, but can be found both in Buddhist and Hindu art. The earliest images of Lakṣmī in Gandhāra can be dated into the middle of the 1st c. BC. On coins of the Scythian king Azilises (50 BC) she is represented standing on a lotus pedestal, holding a cup near her breasts, with two other lotuses arising on either side of the pedestal. Two elephants stand on these two lotuses and pour water on the goddess (Senior 2001, 3: nr. 33.1, Fig. 8.8).

The sprinkling of water by the elephants can be associated to the *abhiṣeka* rite and might signify her royal and sovereign aspect. Her rather general character as popular goddess of fortune and wealth made her suitable for depiction on coins by the foreign Scythian kings.<sup>52</sup> A series of later comparable examples for *gajalakṣmī* shows that this motif was prevalent in Gandhāra at least until the 7th AD (see the detailed study by Srinivasan 2010).



<sup>51</sup> For a detailed discussion on the *gajalakṣmī* motif and its terminology see Srinivasan 2010: 77-95.

<sup>52</sup> As a goddess of wealth and fortune see Kauśāmbī example discussed by Srinivasan 2010: 80.

Figure 8.8.

Beside these images which are of a distinct Indian character there are other depictions which prove that the iconography of Lakṣmī was also subject to Greek and Iranian influences. Thus in Kuṣāṇa times Lakṣmī assimilated features of the Greek Tyche and the Iranian Ardoxšo, both being goddesses of fortune as well (Srinivasan 2010: 83).

One such image shows a goddess with cornucopia. It is labeled by an accompanying Kharoṣṭhī inscription as “*śiriye paḍima*”, “image of Śrī” (Fussman 1988:1-9, cf. Zwalf 1996: 117, nr. 95). So Ardoxšo’s cornucopia was used here as an attribute of the Hindu goddess Śrī.

It has to be noted, that there is no evidence from Gandhāra that Śrī or Lakṣmī are particularly associated with Viṣṇu or with a Vaiṣṇava context.

## 8.4. Durgā

### 8.4.1. Nānā to Durgā: assimilation in Gandhāra

Nānā, originally the mother goddess of the Near East which is first attested in the Ur III period (2100-2000 BC), became associated with the Sumerian warrior goddess Inanna/Ishtar. Inanna/Ishtar’s father Nanna (Sīn), the moon god, gave the crescent as an attribute (Ghose 2006: 97). Ishtar was also associated with love, fertility, marriage and is often depicted standing on a lion. This lion was taken over by Nānā and became a constant feature of Nānā in central and South-Asian iconography (see Ghose 2006, Azarpay 1976).

In Iran, Nānā is associated with Anāhitā, the goddess of the waters. In Hellenistic times is was partially identified with Artemis, the Greek goddess of hunting (Azarpay 1976: 537). Different forms of syncretism in different periods melted Nānā with local goddesses of different places. According to Ghose the diffusion of the Nānā cult from Near East into Bactria began already at the end of the 3rd millennium BC (2006: 98).

Thanks to the Rabatak inscription it became very clear that Nānā was one of the main deities during the early Kuṣāṇa reign. In this inscription, Nānā ranked as the supreme deity from whom the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka derived his kingship (Sims-Williams & Cribb 1996: 75-142). In

Gandhāra her popularity is only attested through coins and very few examples of stone images, most of which are broken and very small. A reason for this misbalance might be seen in her advancing assimilation with female Hindu deities which prevented her from being depicted in her original shape.

In sculptures Nānā is shown as a female deity seated on a lion throne and holding a cup and scepter in her hands, while a crescent is seen behind her head. The first images of Nānā on coins appear under Kaniṣka. There she is portrayed walking, with halo and crescent over her head, wearing a diadem, dressed in a long robe and holding in her right hand a scepter with a lion protome. On some coins she also holds a wine cup/ bowl in her left hand (Göbl 1984: nr 27, 35). The crescent and the lion have Mesopotamian roots.

This type is continued under Huviṣka, but supplemented by a type with Nānā facing left toward Wēś. Then she is holding a scepter in her right hand. Wēś is portrayed with dhoti and having four arms.

Another important coin issued by Huviṣka presents Umā with Wēś. She has been portrayed almost identical to Nānā, with the exception of a flower in her hand. The goddess is also named in the Rabatak inscription.

The combination of OMMO which can be identified with the Hindu goddess Umā with Wēś indicates that here probably the pair Umā-Maheśvara (= Śiva) was in the mind of the coin designer. Consequently, the pair Nānā- Wēś can be associated with the other well-known couple of Śaiva mythology, i.e. Pārvatī/Durgā-Śiva. That both female deities were depicted in almost identical styles and in the same functional contexts, i.e. as consorts of Wēś, probably indicates that they were associated and perhaps partially identified with each other at the end of the 2nd c. AD.

On some coins Nānā is holding a bow - a feature borrowed from the Greek Artemis, the goddess of hunting – characterizing her together with the lion as warrior goddess with close association of royalty. That may be the reason why the Kuṣāṇas chose her as their supreme deity.



**Figure 8.9. Durgā from Mathura in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin**

According to Ghose, during the later part of the second AD, towards the end of Huvīṣka's reign, the concept of Nānā was probably appropriated by the iconography of Durgā who took over her characteristic attributes, i.e. the lion and spear and became the goddess of war (Ghose 2006: 103). An early representation of this iconographical type can be seen in a sculpture from Mathura, kept now in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin. It shows Durgā standing on a lion. The figure now holds a trident in her hand. However, as convincingly shown by Härtel this trident has been

reshaped from an original spear, the typical attribute of Durgā taken over from Nānā (Härtel 1992: 88) (Fig.8.9).

So far, there have not been identified any sculptural images of Durgā in Gandhāra which could prove the suggested assimilation process. However, it seems possible to interpret the image of the so-called Hārītī from the Peshawar Museum along these lines (Fig.8.10).



Figure 8.10. Composite female deity in the Peshawar Museum.

Furthermore, the life-sized image might indicate that the image was used as an object of worship. Besides these assimilated type of deities, purely Nānā sculptural images are rare, the best un-noticed example of goddess Nānā is placed in the Taxila Museum (Fig.8.14). There is another example from Rānigāt, a Buddhist site in Gandhāra, where goddess Nānā is depicted on the base of the seated Buddha figure (Odani 2008: 27-32). The author dated this sculpture to 200 AD and considers this image as a rare banquet scene with a goddess. Nānā is seated here on stool-like seat with lunar crescent behind her shoulder and holding a bowl.



Figure 8.14. Headless image of goddess Nānā in the Taxila Museum.

#### 8.4.2. Mahiṣāsūramardīnī

The earliest evidence of an image depicting Durgā killing the buffalo demon Mahiṣa (*mahiṣāsūramardīnī*) comes from Sonkh, near Mathura. These terracotta objects can safely be dated to the Kuṣāṇa period (Härtel 1993: 122-123). We have so far only one example from Gandhāra, showing Durgā in this pose. This small broken schist piece is currently placed in the

Taxila Museum reserve collection. The four hands and the trident as weapon make clear that the statuette has to be attributed to the Kuṣāṇa period.

There are some other examples of goddesses shown in their furious aspect, with fangs and holding a knife in one hand and a small child in the other (Fig. 8.11 & 8.12). The exact provenance and context of these sculptures are unknown, but their subject comes certainly from a Hindu context. According to D.M. Srinivasan both iconographical features allow to interpret these images as “baby snatcher” or *grahās*.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 8.11 & 8.12. Female deities with fangs and holding daggers in their hands.

A beautiful example of the *Mahiṣāsūramardīnī* come from Tapa Sardar, Ghazni, Afghanistan where Taddei found a life size clay image of *Mahiṣāsūramardīnī* during his excavation

<sup>53</sup> We are waiting for the publication of her interpretation which she presented at the South Asian Archaeology conference at Vienna in July 2010.

of a Buddhist monastery (Taddei 1973: 203-214). Again there this 8<sup>th</sup> c. AD example was found from the Buddhist context and not from the Hindu temple or sacred area.

## 8.5. Bhīmā devī

Since the historical name of this goddess is unknown, images of the so-called “Lajjā Gaurī” type showing a female in squatting position are known under different names: 'shy woman', 'shameless woman', 'the nude squatting goddess', 'the mother goddess'. They are mainly known from South India (see Bolon 1992).

From Gandhāra images of this kind were unknown. Only recent discoveries from the early Hindu site Kashmir Smast indicate that deities of this kind were also known in the Gandhāra region, although the available evidence can be dated only to the 4th-5th c. AD.

Several inscriptions prove that the cave Kashmir Smast was dedicated to a goddess named Bhīmā (Falk 2003, 2006). Some of the many seals show this goddess in the typical “Lajjā Gaurī” posture and name her *śrī bhīmā*. Sometime she is even characterized as cave dweller (*guhavāsini*) (Falk 2003: 7) – an attribute which certainly refers to the cave Kashmir Smast itself. She is shown as the soles of the feet are turned upwards, the arms bent upwards and the hands - each holding a lotus bud - touch upon the petals of the large and open lotus blossom that crowns the image and form its neck and head.

Like the South Indian “Lajjā Gaurī” figures Bhīmā represents on the human level the women in her life-giving aspect – as woman giving birth to a child. This clearly points to her divine character as a goddess of fertility and connects her with the much older and more primitive “Mother goddesses” cults. Interestingly Bhīmā is always shown along with a trident. It is possible that this indicates her association with Śaiva conceptions. At least during the time of Xuanzang’s visit (7th c. AD) Bhīmā was perceived as wife of Īśvaradeva. According to him, her temple is in close vicinity of a Maheśvara temple (Falk 2003: 16).

## 8.6. A Vaiṣṇava goddess from the Peshawar Museum

The astonishing headless statue of a goddess preserved in the Peshawar Museum's reserve collection has received little attention so far (Fig. 8.13). This image was first discussed by Smith in 1911, and then by Paul in 1986 (136-37, pl. 66). Smith described this image which was discovered "near Shabqadar on the Mommand Frontier" as "a standing headless female figure, with four arms, executed more or less in Gandhara style " and as "a striking, and at present unique, illustration of the progressive indianization of the foreign type (Smith 1911: 124-125)."



Figure 8.13. Vaiṣṇava female deity from the Peshawar Museum.

This image is important by its execution, which is a blend of foreign and local features. Her dress sticks to her body in Greco-Bactrian manner, while the multiplication of her hands holding local attributes are characteristic for the Indian style. The deity is carved in schist standing on a high lotus pedestal. Its reverted lotus petals are a unique feature in Gandhāran sculpture. Usually, in Gandhāran Buddhist art the Buddha is shown seated on upturned lotus petals.

The contour of the goddess' bulky body is visible from her transparent dress. This feature is shared by the so called Hārītī of the Peshawar Museum. A necklace is hanging between her breast which are adorned by rosette patterns. She is four-armed; her upper right hand is holding a lotus bunch (?), which is damaged, while the lower hand is resting on a wheel. Her upper left hand is damaged, but was probably shown holding a conch, the lower left holding a club. All these attributes put her into a Vaiṣṇava context. She can be considered as the female counterpart of the god Viṣṇu. According to the stylistic features, the sculpture can be dated into to 4th to 5th century AD.

## 8.7. Śaṣṭhī

The goddess Śaṣṭhī is only rarely attested in Gandhāra and even rare as well in Mathuran art. There are altogether only two early examples of Śaṣṭhī from Gandhāra, both of them showing her as the consort of Skanda.

The Cleveland Museum of Art acquired a part of a portable shrine depicting this pair which was dated by Agrawala to the 2nd/3rd century AD (Agrawala 1993: 271-276). In this panel, which is divided into two parts, the lower male figure wearing a *dhotī* holds a bird in his left hand. There is no spear in his right hand, but a lotus flower. This might suggest that he cannot be identified with Skanda. To his left a female is shown wearing a unique crown with an interesting horn.<sup>54</sup>

A small arched panel with two seated figures is above her. According to her six heads the female in this upper panel can clearly be identified as Śaṣṭhī. She holds a lotus flower in her right

<sup>54</sup> By looking close, one can also see the fangs of this lower female figure. She holds a flower in her right hand and a bunch of leaves in her left. Flames are emerging from her head. These observations were not noticed by the author.

hand and a purse in her left. Her long transparent dress which sticks to her body is clearly influenced by the Bactrian-Greek style.

The upper male figure holds a spear in his right, while a bird is sitting on his left hand. Both attributes identify him as Skanda-Kumāra.

Agrawala's dating has to be revised. On account of the stylistic features of the Skanda-Kumāra figure which is shown without armour-dress the image can hardly be dated prior to the fifth c. AD (cf. chapter on Skanda).

In any case this is the earliest example of Ṣaṣṭhī in Gandhāra. It does not only provide another evidence for the popularity of the Skanda-Kumāra cult in Gandhāra, but also shows that Skanda and Ṣaṣṭhī were perceived as a divine couple, at latest in 5th c. Gandhāra.

A second example comes from the private collection of Julian Sherrier (1991: 617-624), where Ṣaṣṭhī is depicted standing along with Skanda-Mahāsenā. Once again, she is apparently shown as a consort of Skanda.

## 8.8. Conclusion

The cult around female images spread from Mehrgarh, Indus valley, and sites of the Gandhāra grave culture. These terracotta figurines, probably also were the models for the later mother goddess images. From the presented analysis, it is clear so far, that there were no specific female cults which prevailed for a longer time in Gandhāra. On the other hand, the concept of the female as a divine power remained constant in different characters.

The Scythians introduced Gajalakṣmī for the first time through their coinage, which somehow did not reappear in its iconographic form in early Gandhāra. Similarly, the Greek experiment of "city goddess" remained confined to Gandhāra in the early period but did not supplement in iconographic form. During the Kuṣāṇas, the concept of assimilation developed, Nānā ultimately influenced the creation of Durgā, while several "goddesses of fortune" like the Hellenistic Tyche, Iranian Ardokšo and Indian Lakṣmī were shown in composite forms.

The last phase of the goddesses was characterized by the influence from the east, where goddesses are shown in pairs with their male counter parts.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

The region of ancient Gandhāra, due to its geographical position, has always been used as a transitional hub between different areas including West Asia (Iran), Central Asia and the Gangetic valley. Gandhāra was greatly influenced by other cultures which came to this region through foreign invasions, migration and trades.

One of the most productive periods which witnessed the assimilation of Hellenistic, Iranian, Central Asian and Indian cultural complexes started shortly after the advent of Alexander the Great in the late 4th c. BC and lasted nearly 700 years up to the end of the 4th c. AD. Usually this period is known for the influence of Western art on Indian ideological concepts which caused the emergence of a distinctive artistic and iconographic canon. Since most of the preserved monuments belong to Buddhist communities including statues, reliefs and monasteries, this process has so far largely been studied from the perspective of Gandhāran Buddhism.

This dissertation focuses on a less well explored aspect of the Gandhāran cultural complex – the emergence and establishment of early Hindu beliefs and practices. This approach is mainly based on the material evidence which is available in form of coins, sculptures and other archaeological objects discovered from Gandhāra. These evidences from Gandhāra are not only compared with the similar and contemporaneous data from India proper but are also relevant to the literary sources which are essential for the early period of Hinduism, e.g. Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī and the Mahābhārata.

The data evaluated here show that despite the prominent role of Buddhism in the culture of Gandhāra, there was a strong and influential substratum of Hindu beliefs and practices which can be traced through a number of different objects. None of the Hindu images discussed in the preceding chapters were discovered from a proper archaeological context or from a temple area. Furthermore, most of the images are too small to be placed in a temple for worship purposes (as suggested by Taddei 1985: 615-628). Due to the absence of any kind of Hindu temple structures in early Gandhāran archaeology, it can be hypothesized that they were depicted in a subordinate position and were worshipped by the local Hindu population. By incorporating local Hindu deities into their own pantheon, the Buddhists displayed a remarkable tolerance towards these cults and also increased their own attractiveness.

Many other iconographic features appeared for the first time in Gandhāra in a later period. Hence, it can be assumed that their iconographical and functional analysis and the evaluation of their historical and conceptional roots provide a substantial contribution to the exploration of the early history of Hinduism. As a result of the present work, most of these elements cannot be perceived as merely Indian or Hellenistic or Greek features but represent the amalgamation of these different cultural notions into a new composite form.

In historical terms, the development of Hinduism in Gandhāra as traceable in the material sources can be divided into three different phases:

- 1. Initial stage (Indo-Greek period, 2nd c. BC – 1st c. AD)**
- 2. Formative stage (Kuṣāṇa period, 2nd c. AD – 3rd c. AD)**
- 3. Indianization (post-Kuṣāṇa period, 4th-6th c. AD).**

### **9.1. The initial stage and the Hindu temple**

The data discussed in chapter 2 characterize the initial stage as represented by objects contemporary to the Indo-Greek period. They include different ritual objects and symbols on coins and prove that ideas which can be related to Hinduism were present in the form of popular values.

The literary sources of this period mention a number of Hindu deities, like e.g. *yakṣas*, Vaiśravaṇa, Śiva, Brahman etc. The missing material data might indicate that they were not worshipped in anthropomorphic form. Alternatively, it cannot be excluded that gods were venerated in media other than stone, i.e. wood, which is a decomposable material. This is perhaps indicated by the Arthaśāstra's reference to a *kāṣṭhadevatā* "wooden deity" (KA 1.20.5).

The character of the early sources shows that Hindu beliefs and practices were mainly confined to the domestic sphere before they entered a Buddhist context as minor elements. Specific Hindu structures are attested only in a later period, i.e. from the 4th c. AD onwards. The earliest indirect evidence is demonstrated in the form of a Brāhmī inscription from Abbottabad datable to the 4th c. AD which mentions a *kumārasthāna*, i.e. "a temple of Kumāra" (Falk 2004: 147-152). However, the earliest material evidence for the existence of Hindu temple structures comes from a much later period from North Kafir-kot, where the earliest monuments of the Hindu period can be dated into the 6th century AD. The fort of North Kafir-kot was occupied from the late Kuṣāṇa period up to the Hindu Śāhi, i.e. from the 4th c. AD up to the 7th c. AD (Meister & Rahman 2001: 571-78). According to Meister, the architecture of the Hindu temples datable into the 6th c. AD was influenced by the still flourishing Gandhāran Buddhist establishments. Meister calls this temple style "Gandhāra Nagara" style. The use of kanjur stone, Indo-Corinthian capitals and distinctive mouldings continue traditional Gandhāran architectural conventions and differ from the North-Indian temple style (Meister & Rahman 2001: 571-72). Furthermore, these temples continue the use of an interior dome with triangular pendentives, as e.g. in the earliest shrine in North Kafir-kot, Temple B – an architectural device which originated in Gandhāra. According to Meister, this North-Western temple style is clearly derived from the Buddhist stūpa concept and did not follow the architectural conventions which were used in other parts of the subcontinent, including those which are based on the Arthaśāstra description of temple architecture.

## 9.2. The formative stage and the Kuṣāṇas

The third chapter focuses on the influence of the Kuṣāṇas' religious attitude on the formation of conceptual and iconographic elements of early Hinduism. Legitimizing the ruler by

depicting gods on the reverse of coins has been a general numismatic feature in the ancient world. The Kuṣāṇas used this method to show their support by the broad variety of gods venerated by all cultural groups of their realm also in view of uniting these diverging forces under one overlord. This does not mean that the Kuṣāṇa rulers were the followers of these particular deities. Unlike their predecessors, the Indo-Greeks, who mostly presented Greek gods on their coins the Kuṣāṇas presented themselves as liberal invaders. They depicted not only gods from the Iranian-Hellenistic world, but also started to illustrate local deities. Most of the non-Indian deities, appearing on Kaniṣka and Huviṣka coins, can hardly be characterized as popular deities which would have enjoyed in Gandhāra a vivid cult in the form of images or temples. However, those Kuṣāṇa images which were created to represent concepts of prevailing Hindu gods clearly influenced the iconographical development of anthropomorphic images of these deities as seen in contemporary and later sculptural art. Important representatives of Hindu gods on Kuṣāṇa coins include Skanda, Kumāra and Mahāsenā.

But the most interesting example representing a famous local god is the figure of Wēś which is discussed in chapter four. The analysis of the Wēś figures on Kuṣāṇa coins showed that most of the attributes he carries were already visible in the iconography of Scythian coins. According to these iconographical features, this god can be characterized as the blend of Greek, Iranian and local gods. In his Greek attribute, the trident was borrowed from Poseidon and Zeus (see Giuliano 2004). In Gandhāra the trident remained the constant attribute of Wēś. Later on, it was appropriated by Śiva. However, in early Hindu texts, Śiva is never mentioned with a trident (*triśūla*) as a characteristic attribute. Wēś was the creation of the Kuṣāṇas to which they could add or remove any attribute, depending on the specific context and required religious reference. According to our understanding, Wēś should be seen as a newly born sovereign god of Gandhāra, whose worship had not been practiced before. Therefore all efforts to trace concrete iconographic or linguistic counterparts for this god prior to Kuṣāṇa are in vain and the old approach to identify this god with Śiva or with Vāyu should be put off.

There were only a few distinctive iconographic attributes assigned for Wēś - his trident and erect liṅga. The coin image of Wēś became the model for the later Śiva iconography in Gandhāran art including those sculptures which show Śiva and Umā.

In the early period the Śiva images in sculptural art are clearly based on their numismatic models, from where they took the characteristic Śaiva features *trisūla* and phallus. Both image types - Wēś on coins and Śiva in sculptures - occurred almost simultaneously and can be interpreted as an attempt to find an anthropomorphic representation of an Indian religious concept.

The same relationship between coin and sculpture can be observed in the case of Skanda-Kumāra (chapter on Skanda). Initially this deity was depicted in Gandhāra as a warrior-god. His iconography can be traced back to the now identified “Proto-Skanda-Viśākha” coins of the Scythian ruler Azilises. The warrior aspect of Skanda is also prevailing in the sculptural art of this phase, where Skanda is mainly depicted as Mahāsenā. The unique image of Skanda killing Mahiṣa can also be explained as a representation of this warrior character. Moreover, it supports the evidence of the Mahābhārata according to which the credit for killing the buffalo demon went to Skanda. Only in a later period, this deed was ascribed to Durgā.

The number of Vaiṣṇava images from Gandhāra which can be attributed to the Kuṣāṇa period is rather small. Only few images of Vāsudeva and Saṃkarṣaṇa from the pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa time (Huviṣka) prove that elements of the Vaiṣṇava religious complex were at least present in Gandhāra, although they probably did not enjoy great popularity. There are no clearly identifiable Viṣṇu sculptures from the Kuṣāṇa period except few coins (see chapter on Viṣṇu). There is no evidence for the existence of the fully developed concept of incarnations. Deities like Vāsudeva or Kṛṣṇa are probably associated with Viṣṇu and his cult without being identified with him.

The most interesting piece among the Vaiṣṇava objects is a panel depicting the fight between Kṛṣṇa and the horse-demon Keśin which proves that this myth was prevalent in 2nd-3rd c. Gandhāra in almost the same form as it is reported in the purāṇic sources.

The last category of Hindu deities examined in the present work (chapter 6) – i.e. female deities – have to be considered on different levels. In the popular sphere one can observe a so-called “Mother Goddess” cult which is represented by small statuettes and other domestic ritual objects. These unspecified “Mother Goddesses” are to be distinguished from specific Hindu female

deities with an established identity and mythology. As in the case of their male counterparts, the iconography of the female deities, like Lakṣmī/Śrī and Durgā developed under the strong influence of Hellenistic goddesses, like Ardoxsho, Tyche and Nānā.

### 9.3. Indianization

The last phase in the development of Gandhāran Hinduism is characterized by a growing influence from the East which determines the conceptional and iconographical representation of Hindu deities. Despite these influences the Gandhāran Hindu sculpture retains most of its distinctive features, especially on the stylistic level where elements like the Greek dress, the Western appearance, etc. are continued.

The innovations in the conceptional field include the growing popularity of the pair concept which is e.g. found in the images of Umā-Maheśvara and Skanda-Ṣaṣṭhī. The forerunners of this concept can be traced in the preceding period where we find images of OHPO (Wēś) and OMMO (Umā) or Wēś and Nānā on coins of Huviṣka.

Closely associated to this concept are *śakti* type images of female deities, depicted with attributes of male gods like Śiva. One example for this is the unidentified sculpture from the Peshawar Museum showing a female deity holding Vaiṣṇava attributes in her four hands.

Another clear conceptional change which is evident from the changing iconography can be observed in the images of Skanda-Kumāra. His previous character of a warrior god was transformed into the *kumāra* type which is typical for the Eastern iconography as shown by the Kuṣāṇa period Mathura sculptures. In post-Kuṣāṇa Gandhāra, Skanda-Kumāra appeared predominantly as young prince in Indian dress along with his *vāhana*, the peacock.

During this phase (4th to 6th c. AD), “typical” Hindu gods like Viṣṇu started to appear in their conventional iconography and according to established Hindu mythologies, like e.g. Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha or as Varāha.

As archaeology shows, this conceptional and iconographical shift is accompanied by a change of the institutional foundations of Hinduism. The recently explored site Kashmir Smast

proves that Hinduism took over certain functions of Buddhist monasteries as centre of communication and commerce. The growing importance of pilgrimage in the religious activities of the Hindu communities favored the emergence of temple networks which facilitated the interregional exchange. Through these networks, Gandhāra became included into a pan-Indian concept of Hinduism.

The data analyzed show that the development of iconographical canons of Hinduism was heavily influenced by Gandhāra. On the basis of a unique adaptation of Hellenistic and Iranian (Placeholder1) iconographical features, the Gandhāran culture provided the basis for the further development of Hindu iconography. This element could become effective only in a period when Gandhāra was no longer dominated by Buddhist institutions, but witnessed the emergence of Hindu institutions as well which started to play a significant role in the religious, social, and economic life of the society.

Thus the post-Kuṣāṇa period can be characterized from two perspectives. The inclusion of Gandhāra in supra-regional Hindu networks ensured the continuation of Gandhāran iconographical and conceptual developments in India proper. On the other hand, the same process facilitated the harmonization of Gandhāran Hinduism and its gradual adaptation to the conventional “Indian standards”.

The end of this process can be seen at the period of the Hindu Śāhīs, i.e. the 7th-8th c. AD, where Gandhāran Hinduism is no longer distinctively different from what can be observed in other regions of India.

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