

ARSACID IRAN AND THE NOMADS OF CENTRAL ASIA – WAYS OF CULTURAL TRANSFER

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SOME PRELIMINARIES

In the mid-3rd century BCE a series of momentous events occurred on the steppes of the Transcaspian area and northeastern Iran. A group of nomads led by Arsaces I took control of Iranian Khorasan and laid the foundations of a kingdom which was to prove one of the most enduring states in the history of Asia (248 BCE – CE 226). It enjoyed a vibrant afterlife as the Sasanian Empire (226–651), founded by the princes of Persis, kinsmen of the Arsacids (Olbrycht 2013b; 2015). Under the early Sasanians there was no change in the social structure of Iran compared to the status quo in Parthian times.

The essential human resources at the roots of the Arsacid state were the Dahae, a community of Central Asian nomads. Nomadic clans overpowered the settled Iranian populace of Khorasan, imposing a monarchical structure on a nascent social amalgam of nomadic peoples of the steppes and settled Parthians (Olbrycht 2003). Arsaces was no brigand bent on hit-and-run looting; he was inspired by a vision of monarchy, the idea of a kingdom he systematically and successfully set about implementing. It turned out to be more enduring a reality than all the others that had preceded it, including the Achaemenid (550–330 BCE) and Seleucid (ca. 311–141 BCE in Iran) states. He did not reject the tradition of the Seleucids, but he also made deliberate reference to the historic legacy of the Achaemenids, the memory of which was still alive and cherished in Central Asia and eastern Iran (Olbrycht 2013c). When the Achaemenid Empire was slipping into decline around 331–330 BCE, the nomads of Central Asia – Dahae, Massagetae, and Saka – turned out to be its most dedicated defenders (Olbrycht 1996; 2004). The Arsacids showed a remarkable ability to adopt promptly and efficiently a number of the hallmarks associated with the sedentary peoples whom they had subjugated, including the establishment of new cities and the building of strongholds. Thus, already Arsaces I (248–217 BCE) founded a city called Dara, in the vicinity of the site where later (in the 18th century CE) Nader Shah established his fortress of Nader-shah-kala (called also Old Khivabad; 25 km south of Kaahka; Fig. 1).

The emergence of the Arsacid monarchy in Iran and in the Transcaspian steppes meant the ascendancy of the nomadic factor in the history of Iran and the whole of Western Asia. It was a momentous development. For the first time on record in history nomads from Central Asia had subdued parts of Iran and imposed their dynasty on it. Henceforth dynasties with nomadic roots – Seljuks, Ilkhanids and dynasties of Turkmen origin – would many a time come to power in Iran, albeit most of them in the Islamic era. In eastern Iran and Afghanistan waves of nomadic peoples established several states beginning with the Yuezhi and Saka through the Hephtalites. Perhaps the growth of the Arsacid state is in many respects comparable with that of the Seljuks, who originally were nomads in Central Asia and learned about Iran and the neighboring lands



Fig. 1. Nader-shah-kala (Old Khivabad), south Turkmenistan, belong to the first nomadic acquisitions in Parthia. In the neighboring mountains of Iranian Khorasan Arsaces I (248–217 BCE) established his first residence called Dara (photo M. Olbrycht).

by hiring their services as mercenaries until they finally overran the settled territories and established their own dominion. I have already considered this instructive analogy elsewhere (Olbrycht 1996). There is a general similarity between the historic processes involved in the imposition of nomadic rulers on Iran and what happened on several occasions in China, where newcomers arriving from the steppes were able to gain the upper hand politically¹.

Under Mithradates I (165–132 BCE), Parthia became the most significant state power in Iran and southwestern Central Asia. He subjugated Margiana, most districts of Bactria, western Iran and Mesopotamia. In the meantime, the attacks of the Xiongnu against the Yuezhi set in motion nomadic tribes of Central Asia. As a result of these movements, various steppe peoples appeared in the region of Transoxiana and were pushed into the borders of Graeco-Bactria and Parthia. Several steppe tribes including Yuezhi, Saka, and Asioi subdued Bactria (Olbrycht 1998a). Sogdiana had fallen prey to nomads already in the 3rd century BCE (Rapin 2007). The Yuezhi migration forced some tribes to move into the territory held by the Arsacids. As a result, two Parthian kings – Phraates II and Artabanos I – lost their lives in encounters against the Saka and the Tocharoi. Consequently, the Saka overran and plundered the eastern Iranian provinces of the Parthian Empire (Daffinà 1967; Olbrycht 1998a, 77 pp.).

¹ Jagchid 1977; Barfield 1989; Di Cosmo 2002.



Fig. 2. Old Nisa, Iran. Rider under fire. Part of a mural from the 2nd century BCE (discovered by V. N. Pilipko), showing episodes from Parthian-nomadic struggles in Central Asia and eastern Iran. Museum of the Academy of Sciences, Ashgabat (photo M. Olbrycht).

It was the Parthian king Mithradates II (122–88/87 BCE) who fought successfully several times with the nomadic tribes (Fig. 2) and renovated Parthian power in Central Asia (Olbrycht 2010c). He succeeded in subduing the areas of western Bactria and probably the middle course of the Amu Darya (including the Amul region). The dominant position in western Central Asia in the area from the Caspian Sea to the Amu Darya Basin belonged for two centuries to Parthia. Arsacid military conquests stimulated an interest in international trade. As a result, diplomatic and trade relations were established between Parthia and China after Mithradates II pacified the nomads (Pulleyblank 1991, 424 pp.).

Generally, around 130–110 BCE the Arsacids were faced with new challenges when Yuezhi, Saka, and Asioi tribes from the steppes of Central Asia overran Bactria and the neighboring territories. In outcome of these formidable waves of migration of peoples from the steppes new political entities arose on the eastern marches of Parthia (Olbrycht 1998a, 77–105; Benjamin 2007). One such entity entailed the Indo-Sakan principalities which may be termed Greater Sakastan, in

accordance with King Muki's inscription "in honour of the whole of Sakastan" (Bivar 1983, 195). The Indo-Sakan lands stretched from Sakastan to Arachosia, Kabulistan, Gandhara, and the Indus Valley (Fröhlich 2008). In Bactria the dominant group, apart from the Saka, were the Yuezhi, who set up the mighty Kushan state (1st–3rd centuries CE; Abdullaev 1995a; 2007). Nomads ruled Sogdiana continuously from the 3rd century BCE (Obel'chenko 1992; Rapin 2007). The entire eastern and north-eastern borderlands of the Parthian Empire were a patchwork of principalities created and ruled by nomads. In most of these territories the nomads in power contributed to the advancement of cities, trade, and craftsmanship. Western parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, the Indo-Iranian borderland, and Parthian Iran developed in a peculiar process of feedback.

The Caucasus was another region for contact between Parthian Iran and nomads. Around 110 BCE, when the Parthians expanded their dominions and assumed control of Armenia and Caucasian Albania, they encountered nomads from Ciscaucasia and the Caspian-Pontic steppes (Sarmatia) living in those territories (Olbrycht 1998a, 131 pp.; 2001a; 2001b). To understand the history of Parthian Iran we need to take into account its fundamental links with the peoples of Central Asia and the Caspian-Pontic steppes. This article presents only a selection of problems from the huge mass of phenomena relating to the mutual cultural relations between the peoples of Central Asia, the Caspian-Pontic steppes, and Arsacid Iran.

NOMADS AND THE SEDENTARY WORLD – THE SHAPING OF CENTRAL ASIAN CULTURES

The history of Central Eurasia is inextricably linked with relations between the nomadic and sedentary population. The specific features of the connections between these two groups were due to their differences in economic and social development. The Central Eurasian steppe expands with their rich grasslands and abundant rivers have traditionally been a land of roaming nomads². Ethnographic and archaeological materials document the seasonal migrations of nomads in the Eurasian steppes. The stability of the routes of nomadic meridional seasonal migrations between winter camps in the south and summer encampments in the north can be traced in many areas from antiquity up to modern times³. Traditional seasonal movements, e.g., those between the Ustyurt region, the Aral Sea area and the Syr Darya Basin to the south, and the Southern Urals in the north, contributed to the diffusion of cultural phenomena and trade between the peoples of Central Asia.

Unlike agricultural production, the pastoral nomadic economy was not self-sufficient. The nomads had to interact with the surrounding sedentary areas to gain access to food supplies as well as to products of urban manufacture⁴. In such circumstances, diverse relations between steppe and cultivated land determined the development of the ancient Eurasian steppe areas and the neighboring sedentary countries (Khazanov 1984; 2001).

The classical sources offer fragmentary information on the history of Central Asia (Olbrycht 1998a; Daffinà 1982). Valuable evidence for Central Asia and Parthia is provided by Chinese

² Khazanov 1984, 17; Sinor 1990; Cribb 1991, 9 pp.

³ Khazanov 1984, 50 pp.; Gorbunova 1993/94; Tairov 1993.

⁴ Khazanov 1978; cf. also Jagchid 1977; Barfield 1989; Jagchid/Symons 1990.

records (Watson 1961; Hulsewé 1979). The written evidence can be supplemented by archaeological data from Iran, Central Asia, the Southern Urals, and the Caspian-Pontic steppes⁵. The study of the history and culture of the ancient Eurasian nomads has advanced very considerably in the last decades, particularly through the accumulation of new archaeological materials⁶.

The nomadic migrations of the 2nd century BCE altered radically the political, ethnic and social situations of the invaded Sogdiana, Bactria, Chorasmia, and eastern Iran. From this period onwards, the Parthian Empire was faced on its eastern and northeastern borders by different tribes, kingdoms, and principalities of nomadic origin. As time passed, the most nomads, influenced by local populations, became sedentary, but their culture and organization of rule maintained in many respects closely linked to the tradition of their nomadic descent. At the same time, however, the development of commerce and urban growth are discernible under the nomadic suzerainty (Pugachenkova/Rtveladze 1990, 46 pp.; Olbrycht 1998a, 120–130).

While the specifics might be lacking in the evidence, there is plenty to indicate that nomads were a regular presence in Sogdiana and Bactria in the pre-Kushan period and made up a crucial cultural component. This applies to Chorasmia as well. Connections between nomadic and sedentary peoples may be demonstrated by considering some selected objects, including the artifacts from Orlat, the Temple of the Oxos (Takht-e Sangin), and Kalaly-gyr 2.

The Oxos Temple, a sanctuary located on the bank of the river Vakhsh (northern Bactria) at Takht-e Sangin, was discovered in 1976–1991 by B. A. Litvinskii's and I. R. Pichikian's expedition. It was built in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BCE and served as a repository for the treasure from a nearby Achaemenid temple (Olbrycht 2013a). The Oxos Temple remained intact in the 2nd-century nomad invasions, but its treasure was probably stowed away for safety on the banks of the river. Under the Kushans the sanctuary was redeveloped. Part of the treasure was washed up in the 19th century and many of the artifacts were transported to London (Dalton 1964). It is believed that another portion of the treasure was discovered in the 1990s, and this time taken to Japan. The Litvinskii expedition found a large number of artifacts from the Achaemenid, Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods in the temple precinct.

There are two interesting plaques (one of them damaged) from the Oxos Temple showing hunting scenes (Fig. 3). Hunters are using bows and arrows to shoot mountain sheep, a leopard, a fox, and a stag. The images also include hares, but not as part of the quarry. All these animals inhabited Bactria (Litvinskii 2001, 155); therefore the plaques must have been made in Bactria. The riders' faces are somewhat reminiscent of the images of the pre-Kushan ruler Herais (Litvinskii 2001, 142). Hunting was a subject addressed in Bactrian art already in the Achaemenid period: a disk from the Oxos treasure shows a hunt with a stag, a wild ram, and a hare as game (Dalton 1964, Pl. X). The hunters on the disk from the Oxos treasure are Bactrian aristocrats, whereas the Oxos Temple plaques show nomads hunting in Bactria. Their ethnic type, with their characteristic hairstyle and headbands, is similar to the figures on the Noyon Uul objects. The Takht-e Sangin plaques served as belt-buckles, just like the analogous items from Tulkhar (Ilyasov 2003, 283).

The dating of the plaques has not been settled and is still a matter of controversy for lack of clear indicators of their chronology. The plaques show bows of two types, one with a two-arched stave, and another with no arch in its outline. The bows are of the Sasanian type, asym-

⁵ Koshelenko 1985; Mel'iukova 1989; Moshkova 1992; Olbrycht 1998b; Iablonskii 1999; 2010.

⁶ Sinor 1990; Harmatta 1994; Olbrycht 1998a; Parzinger 2006; Brosseder/Miller 2011; Bemmman et al. 2009; Bemmman 2012; Paul 2012; Stöllner/Samašev 2013.

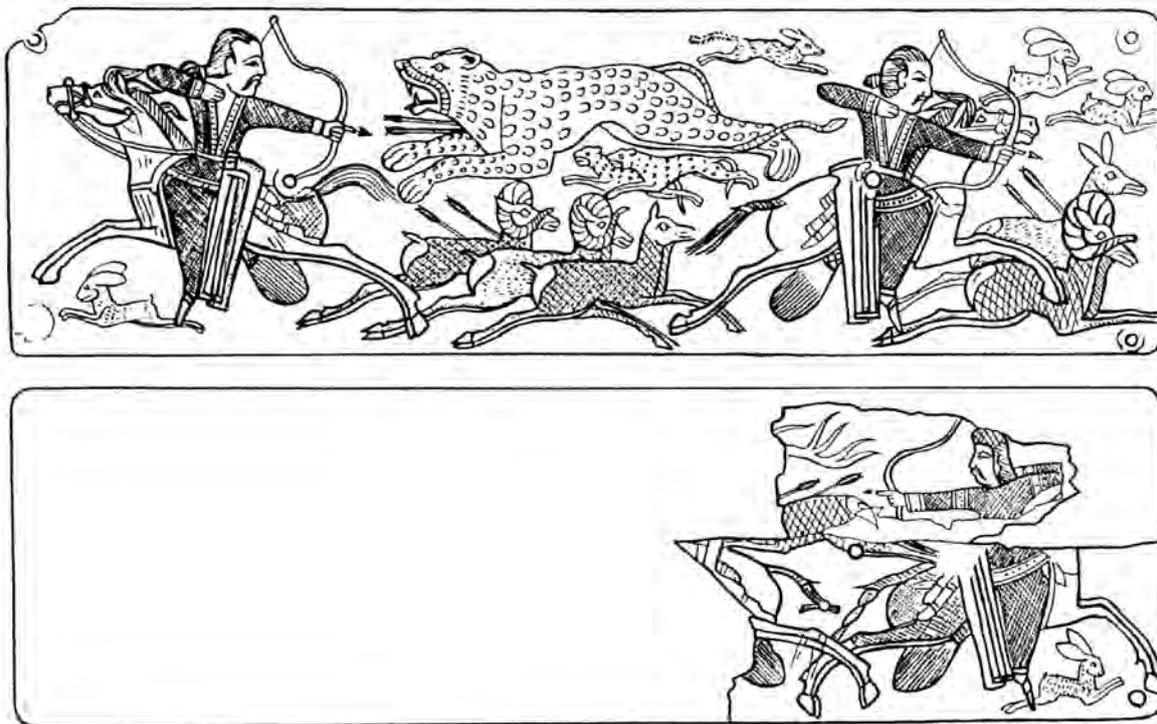


Fig. 3. Oxos temple, Takht-e Sangin, Bactria, Tajikistan. Hunting-scene plaques (after Ilyasov 2003, Pl. VI).

metrical with long, straight ears. The plaques also show very long, bipartite goryti. Litvinskii (2001, 155) dates the Oxos plaques (like the Orlat plates) in the 3rd century CE, and associates them with Sasanian political and iconographic influence. However, his argument for such a dating is not convincing, as the iconography does not entail any features which could be said to be specifically early Sasanian. J. Ilyasov (2003, 300), dates the Oxos plaques to the 1st–2nd centuries CE. Nikonorov (1997, II, 11 Fig. 27) argues for the 1st century BCE – early 1st century CE. In my opinion the composition of the scenes on these plaques is not very different from the Khalchayan battle scenes datable to the second half of the 1st century BCE and the beginning of the 1st century CE. Hence a dating in the interval between the middle of the 1st century BCE to the mid-1st century CE is quite feasible, and more likely within the first half of this interval.

The Orlat burial ground is situated 50 km south-west of Samarkand on the Saganak River (Sogdiana). In the early 1980s the Uzbekistan Fine Arts Expedition led by G. A. Pugachenkova examined the local catacomb graves, and in Grave 2 found five bone plates depicting hunting and battle scenes. Grave 2 was covered with a layer of earth beneath which there was a dromos with the skeletons of dogs. The catacomb contained a male and female burial, and two large bone plates (next to some smaller) showing a battle and a hunt, delivering a wealth of information on the arms and armor of the ancient nomads of Bactria (Fig. 4).

The dates attributed to the plates span a vast range, from the 1st century BCE to the 5th century CE, testifying to the difficulty in establishing an accurate date for artifacts belonging to the phase of Kangju domination in Sogdiana. The other artifacts discovered in the grave are no help in dating the plates, and the images they bear constitute the basis for attempts to date them.



Fig. 4. Bone plates from Orlat, Sogdiana (after Ilyasov 2003, Pl. VII).

G. A. Pugachenkova initially dated the material from the Orlat graves to the 2nd–1st centuries BCE, or possibly the 1st century CE. Later she changed her mind and opted for the period from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE, and more likely the 1st century BCE (see Pugachenkova 1987b). She identified the individuals portrayed on the plates as representing the Kangju people. Litvinskii put forward arguments for the 3rd century CE (Litvinskii 2001, 146–155). Ilyasov and Rusanov (1997/98, 130) date the plates on the basis of the armor and a scabbard slide from Grave 2 to the 1st–2nd centuries CE. K. Tanabe (1990) notes the presence of horse tassels attached to the saddles with puffy pommels and cantles, familiar from 3rd–7th centuries Sasanian sculptures. V. P. Nikonorov and Iu. S. Khudiakov (1999) went even further, dating the Orlat plates to the 3rd–5th centuries CE.

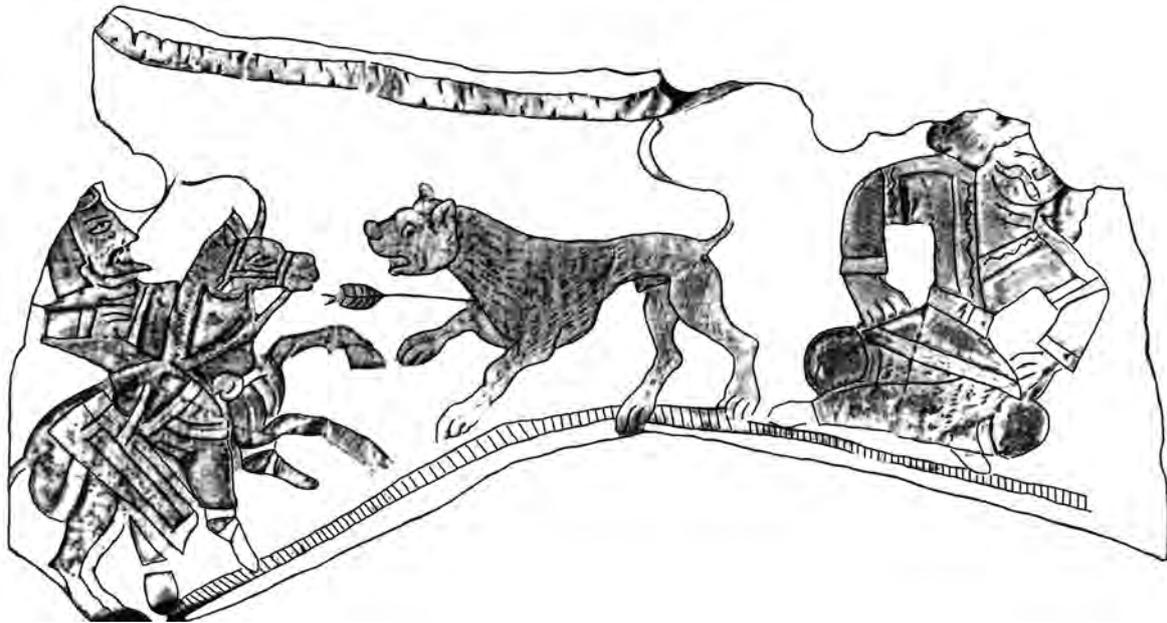


Fig. 5. Horn artefact from Kalaly-gyr 2, Chorasmia (after Ilyasov 2013, Fig. 1).

Undoubtedly, the big Orlat plates – serving as belt-buckles – were made by nomads. Specific covers on horses' tails, depicted on the Orlat plates, are to be found in the iconography of Pazyryk, Kushan, and in Indo-Parthian art (Ilyasov 2003, 303). Goryti had a tripartite structure, holding a quiver in the shape of a double tube. The Orlat people were under a strong influence of the Chinese military tradition, as evidenced by their plumed helmets and Sasanian bows, which had been adopted from China. The “flying gallop” of the horses was more of a Chinese style, too. Several arguments indicate a dating of these objects to the 1st–2nd centuries CE. The sword dated to the 1st–2nd centuries CE is an important point of reference (Ilyasov 2003, 280). The phalerae on the Orlat plates are like the ones on the Saksanokhur buckle (1st–2nd centuries CE; Ilyasov 2003, 286). A connection between the Orlat plates and Kangju, a nomadic dominion with a Saka substratum, but under a strong cultural influence from China, is clearly discernible (Ilyasov 2003, 296–299). In the 1st and 2nd centuries CE Sogdiana was under Kangju domination.

The region of Chorasmia was an agricultural area on the lower Amu Darya and the Aral Sea. It was a center of an urban civilization linked in many ways to the nomadic periphery in left-bank Chorasmia and in the area of the lower Syr Darya. Archaeological sources reflect Chorasmian ties with the nomads of the adjacent regions⁷. The political and strategic importance of Chorasmia for Arsacid policy in western Central Asia seems to have remained valid throughout the whole history of Parthia. The strong influence of the kings' chancellery of Arsacid Iran on the development of the Chorasmian script in the 2nd–1st centuries BCE must have been tied with the predominant position of Parthian power in Chorasmia. At the same time Chorasmia shows links to nomads of the southern Urals area.

In 1989 the archaeological expedition of Omsk State University discovered at the Isakovka burial-ground in burial no. 6 three silver bowls with inscriptions (Livshits 2003). The inventory

⁷ Itina 1979; Vainberg 1981; Iablonskii 1999.

of the burial can be dated to the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE, but some objects may be a little younger. Two of the bowls bear Chorasmian inscriptions. One of them (bowl no. 1) names king Amurzham, son of Wardan (the word *tašt* was used to denote the vessel). The second inscription is of poor condition. There is also a bowl (no. 3) with a Parthian inscription attributable to the 2nd century BCE. The execution in the pointille technique is similar to that of the Prokhorovka vessel. We know a similar bowl of gold with Parthian inscription (in the Eremitage). As to the Isakovka Parthian bowl it seems it was an Arsacid gift presented to the nomadic rulers. The same applies to the Chorasmian bowls.

The Arsacid control of Chorasmia with certain adjacent areas in Transoxiana may be surmised from Chinese records which claim that Anxi/Parthia bordered the Kuei River (Amu Darya) and even the people of Yancai being located on the northern Aral (*Shiji* 123: Watson 1961, 268). In the 1st century CE, Chorasmia experienced a period of decisive changes in its development. In the timespan between 10s and 30s of the 1st century CE, a new era was introduced in Chorasmia. At roughly this time (between about 20 and 34 CE) we are informed by Tacitus (*Annales* 6.31.1) about Parthia's victories in the east under Artabanos II. In such circumstances it would seem probable that the establishment of a new dynasty in Chorasmia took place in connection with Parthian military efforts in the northeast (Olbrycht 2013b).

Recently a horn item has been found in Kalaly-gyr 2 in left-bank Chorasmia (Vainberg 2004, Fig. 5.24; Ilyasov 2013). The image depicts a hunting scene with a rider shooting a tiger (Fig. 5). The rider has a gorytus consisting of two tubular sections with different lengths. Such goryti, datable to the 1st to 2nd centuries CE, were discovered in the Niya Oasis (Eastern Turkestan) in 1995 (Ilyasov 2013, 100). Similar goryti are known from the Orlat and Takht-e Sangin plates. Next to the hunting scene there is a sitting person shown frontally. The rider and the sitting person wear trousers with baggy leggings and crossed-over jackets. Their costume exactly corresponds to the Parthian clothes. In Parthia, baggy leggings were widely used: the figure from Shami (1st century BCE) wears such protective garb. The hair style, moustache and a pointed beard resemble some Parthian rulers of the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE, including Artabanos II (frontal image with a spiral necklace) and Vardanes (Wroth 1903, Pl. XXV–XXVI).

RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTHIAN IRAN AND THE PEOPLES OF CENTRAL ASIA (CASE STUDIES)

Archaeological evidence of a nomadic presence in Iran

A key question in the early history of the Arsacid kingdom is the extent and nature of nomadic penetration in northeast Iran. There is evidence that some nomadic clans, probably the Dahae, moved partially onto the sedentary territories of Parthia proper, and that their burial grounds were situated in areas inhabited by arable farmers (Olbrycht 1998b, 17). These burial grounds consisted mainly of catacomb graves, stretching in a north-south direction (a catacomb is an end chamber in conjunction with a dromos: Figs. 6–7). Such burials have been discovered in Parthia proper at the foot of the Kopeth Dagh Mountains (Bezmein, Kyzyl-Cheshme, and Khas-Kiariz; Marushchenko 1959), on the Sumbar River (Mandel'shtam 1963, 30 pp.; Khlopin 1975;

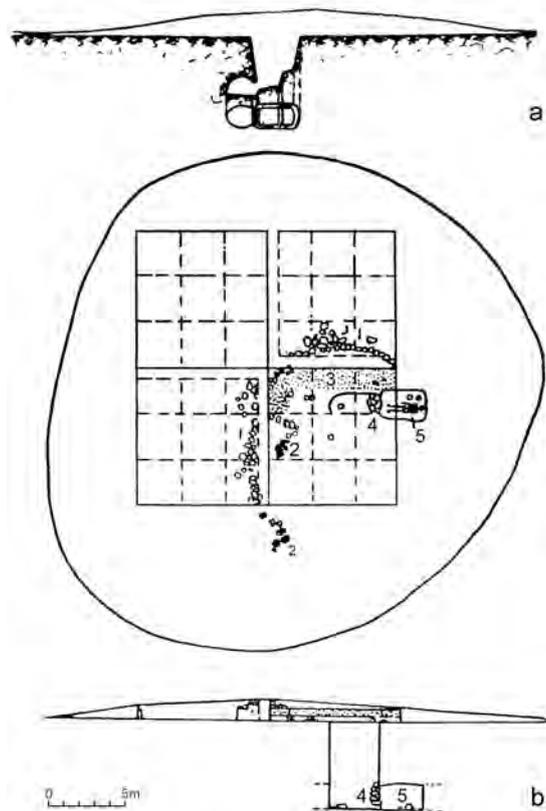


Fig. 6. Turkmenistan. a Kurgan 1, 23 km off the road from Ashgabat to Geok-depe: south-north cross section; b Kurgan in Kyzyl-Cheshme: Plan and south-north cross section. 1, 2 stone facing; 3 rubble; 4 catacomb's entrance; 5 catacomb with female burial (drawing by Lidia Olbrycht after Marushchenko 1959, 117 Pls. I–II).

1979) and at Meshrepi-Takhta near Chukur in the Khodzhakal Valley (not far from the Parthian stronghold of Old Nisa; Mandel'shtam 1963; 1971). The sepulchral inventory was modest and consisted of pottery, a few weapons, censers, and sheep bones.

The Dahae inhabited the area between the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya River Basin (Olbrycht 1998a, 243–252). Consequently, they were bordered by the agricultural areas of Iran to the south and by the centers of Chorasmia to the north. The Dahae presence on the periphery of Chorasmia and Parthia is attested in epigraphic sources. Thus, on an ostrakon from Kosha-depe in Parthia proper, the characteristic name *Dahzēn* (dhzyn) – “weapon of the Dahae” – is mentioned, and in an inscription from Burly-kala in Chorasmia the name *Δahākināk* (dh'kynk) – “sword of the Dahae” – is contained. The location of the Dahae on the border of Chorasmia may be also surmised from a passage by Pomponius Mela (1st century CE), which situates the Dahae astonishingly exactly in the great curve of the river Oxos (Amu Darya – Uzboi), i. e., in the western periphery of Chorasmia (Mela 3.42⁸). In this region, in the Sarykamysh Basin, a large

⁸ Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis*. Geography A.D. 43. Translated from Latin by P. Berry. *Studies in Classics* 3 (Lewiston 1997).

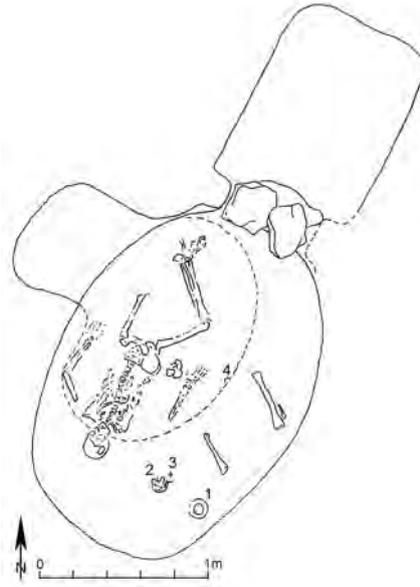


Fig. 7. Parkhai I, Turkmenistan. Catacomb grave no. P-I-20 (drawing by Lidia Olbrycht after Khlopin 1979, Fig. 3).

number of nomadic catacomb and side-chamber graves have been unearthed (Vainberg 1981; 1992). The tombs may be connected with the presence of the Dahae.

Some nomadic tribal groups advanced into Iran's northern province of Gilan. In this area, in the region of Dailaman, Japanese archaeologists have discovered burials with funerary structures datable to the Arsacid period (Esperi, Noruzmahale, Khoramrud, Shahpir; Egami et al. 1966). Burial structures, customs, and artifacts found in the graves (iron and bronze swords, daggers, horse equipment, and mirrors) exhibit close analogies with the culture of the Sarmatians (details in: Zadneprovskii 1971; Olbrycht 1998b).

The Uzboi area as a transit region between Iran and western Central Asia

A nomad culture was flourishing in the Uzboi Basin from the middle of the first millennium BCE (Iusupov 1986). Archaeological excavations have revealed dozens of nomadic burial grounds (Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 123; Olbrycht 1998b, 15–17). The graves consisted of stone chambers intended for multiple interments over a long period of time. These chamber graves have been found usually to contain 10–15 skeletons, but occasionally as many as 30. Similar burial sites have been discovered by A. M. Mandel'shtam (1975; 1981) north of the Uzboi at Gek-Dag 2 and Dzhanak 2.

The inventories of the Uzboi graves may be divided into two chronological phases: Phase I, 4th–2nd centuries BCE, and Phase II, 2nd century BCE – 4th century CE. In the 2nd century BCE great changes appear to have occurred in the culture of the nomads of the Transcaspian area, in connection with the vast Central Asian migrations of nomads, as happened in the Pazyryk Valley, the South Urals, and in the Caspian-Pontic steppes. There is a clear resemblance between Phase I-artifacts – weapons including iron daggers, iron and bronze arrowheads, and other metal items – and artifacts belonging to the Early Sarmatian (Prokhorovka) culture. For Phase II the

predominant archaeological finds are pottery, jewelry (bracelets, beads), human figurines of stone, and mirrors (Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 124–127). In this period ossuary burials appear in the Uzboi Basin, apparently as a result of a Chorasmian impact. There is a notable incidence of pottery in the nomadic graves, involving locally produced ceramics alongside imports from Parthia proper and Transcaucasia.

An idiosyncratic culture was developing on the lower Uzboi, on the Krasnovodsk Peninsula and on the Kelkor riverbed in the west. Its burial rite was like that practiced by the Zoroastrians: the deceased's flesh was removed and the bones were deposited in ossuaries or simple pits. In addition nomadic burial mounds were discovered there next to three settlements (Kelkor 2). Evidently some of the nomads had adopted a settled lifestyle. The materials from the Kelkor area are dated to the 2nd century BCE – 2nd/3rd century CE (Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 127–128; Iusupov 1992).

Alongside the stone chamber graves and ossuary or pit burials there have also been finds of small clusters of catacomb or side-chamber graves with smallish mounds in the Uzboi region, at places like Aginysh, the Dordul Plateau north of the Uzboi, in the Balkhan Mountains, and the Bekibent area. Bodies were oriented in a south-to-north direction. These graves are datable in the first centuries CE (Iusupov 1986, 37 pp.; Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 128).

Since catacomb graves have been observed both in the Uzboi Basin and in the Kopet Dagh zone, they may probably be ascribed to the Dahaeian influx into Khorasan from the Transcaspian steppes⁹. There is a high concentration of catacomb graves in the Sarykamysh Basin (Tarym-kaya I, Tyzgyr, Tumek-kichidzhik, Yasy-gyr, and Shakhsem: Vainberg 1981; 1992) and in left-bank Chorasmia (Gyaur-4, Tarym-kaya 1: Iablonskii 1999). Additionally, in most of these burial grounds, side-chamber graves (tombs with a side-chamber in the long side of the sepulchral shaft) occur alongside catacomb tombs.

Similar burials in southern catacombs were widespread in some areas of Central Asia (Gorbunova 1991), especially Sogdiana (the nomadic burial sites near Bukhara, at Kuyumazar, Kyzyl-tepe and Lyavandak), which their discoverer has dated to the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE (Obel'chenko 1992, 219 pp.; Mandel'shtam 1984, 175), albeit these dates do not seem to be precise enough. Catacomb tombs are frequent in the area of the Sauromatian and Early Sarmatian (Prokhorovka) cultures in the South Urals (Smirnov 1972; 1975, 78–80; 91). A southern orientation of the bodies, predominant in the catacomb graves of Central Asia, is fairly often attested in the Prokhorovka phase (Moshkova 1963, 21–22) and the Middle Sarmatian phase (Moshkova 1989, 179). Moreover, the furnishings of the graves from the Transcaspian region exhibit striking similarities to the tomb inventories of the Southern Urals cultural area.

The cultural genesis of the Dahaeian tribes was extremely complex. It was far from being linear. The funerary rites of the Dahae in the steppes of southern Turkmenistan show parallels with the cultures of the Sarykamysh area, the nomads of the Chorasmia's periphery and in Transoxiana. Furthermore, some similarities are visible in the culture of the Southern Urals area. Taking into consideration these parallels, it may be assumed that the Dahae originally came from an extensive community of different tribes inhabiting the steppe expanses from the Southern Urals to the area along the Syr Darya. The attribution of the Chirikrabad Culture on the Lower Syr Darya (Vainberg/Levina 1992, 60–61) to the Dahae is not convincing both from a historical and archaeological viewpoint. Some Dahaeian groups, for instance those from the Meshed-Misrian Plain in southwestern Turkmenistan (Ortadepe) adopted a settled lifestyle (Masson 1961, 38–39).

⁹ Marushchenko 1959; Mandel'shtam 1984, 174–175; Zadenprovskii 1994, 103; Olbrycht 1998b, 18–19.

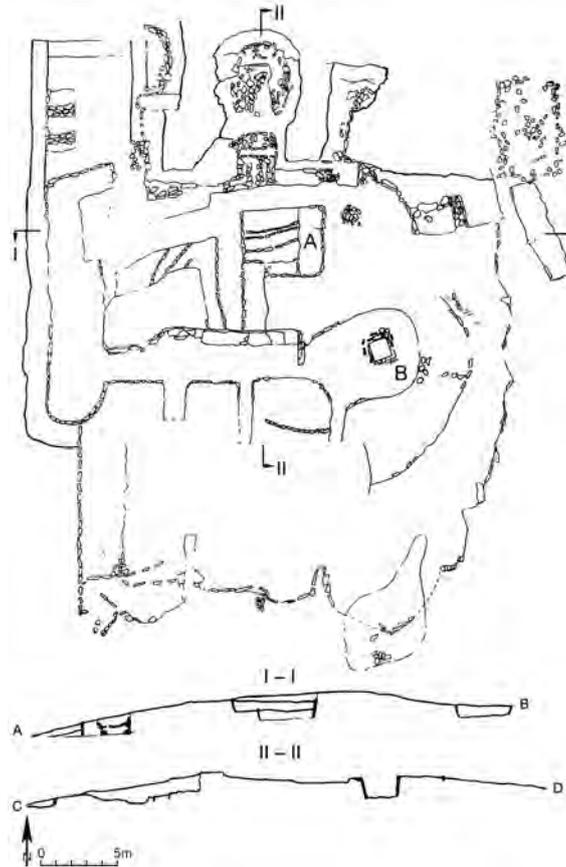


Fig. 8. Ichianly-depe, Turkmenistan. Plan and cross sections (after Vainberg/Iusupov 1990, Fig. 13).

From historical sources we know that the Transcaspien region was inhabited not only by the Dahae, but also by the Massagetae, who effectively occupied territories north of the Uzboi and along the western marches of Chorasmia. Hence the stone chamber graves in the area may reasonably be associated with the Massagetae (Iusupov 1986, 208), and in particular with the Derbikkai in the Balkhan region, and the Apasiakai (Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 128–129).

Close ties between north-eastern Iran and the Uzboi region are discernible in the archaeological evidence. Imports from Iran have been found in graves along the Uzboi (Olbrycht 1998b, 25). A considerable quantity of ceramics from Parthia has been unearthed from nomadic burial grounds on many sites of the Uzboi area (Pilipko/Koshelenko 1985, 224; Iusupov 1986, 146). Pottery imported from Iran is attested at Garaul-depe. Amongst the ceramics from Ichianly-depe there are imported objects from Parthia, sedentary areas of Central Asia, and probably from Transcaucasia (Figs. 8–9; cf. Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 125–126). Erotos-shaped ear-rings dated to the 3rd – 1st centuries BCE have been reported in a grave at Degirmenlidje (250 km NW of Nebitdagh; Bader/Iusupov 1995). Perhaps this artifact came from a Greek workshop in Babylonia. It may have been purchased and brought to the region by a Dahae mercenary serving in the Seleucid army. Or it could have been in the loot the Dahae took during one of their raids on Khorasan. Few weapons have been discovered in the Uzboi region but they represent types similar to the weaponry of the Sarmatian culture (Iusupov 1986, 146; Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 127).

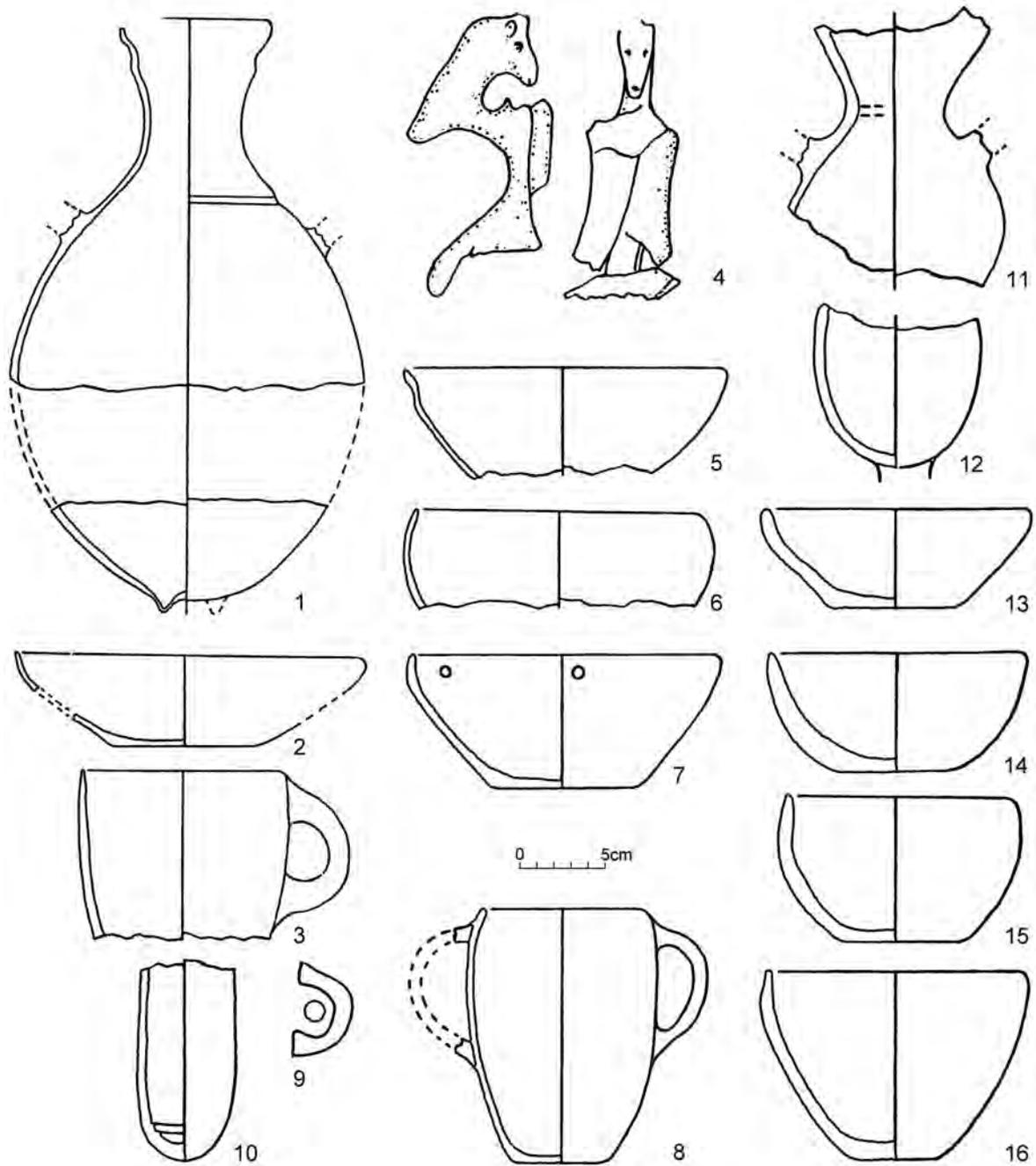


Fig. 9. Ichianly-depe, Turkmenistan. Imported pottery (after Vainberg/Iusupov 1990, Fig. 17).

On the whole, the Parthian-nomadic connections as discernible in the material culture of the nomadic tribes of the Uzboi Basin were strong. Bearing in mind the development of Parthian policy and the location of the Parthian fortress Igdy-kala on the middle Uzboi, we may conclude that the Arsacids remained the dominating power in the Transcaspian area including the Uzboi Basin. For some time the Arsacids managed to extend their predominance to cover Chorasmia, which in turn radiated its specific culture out onto the peripheral nomads (Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 125 pp.).

The excavations at Ichianly-depe on the middle Uzboi have revealed a burial ground and a huge religious complex (36 x 40 m) built of stone (Figs. 8–9). On the basis of arrowheads discovered in the complex the whole site can be dated to the 6th/5th to the 2nd centuries BCE (Iusupov 1979; 1986, 119 pp.; Vainberg/Iusupov 1990). It was a center for the fire cult. The upper part of the building was topped by a thick stone structure on which a fire went on for a long time. There were stone slabs around the central building. The surviving walls go up to 2 m in height. On the north side there is a precinct with two altars. A large number of animal bones, predominantly horse skulls and hooves, and a considerable number of bronze arrowheads have been found there. After Herodotus (1.216¹⁰) the Massagetae worshipped the Sun and sacrificed horses to that god. Ichianly-depe was clearly a Massagetaean place of worship. Another cultic place has been excavated at Garaul-depe in the Balkhan Mountains (dated within the Arsacid period: Vainberg/Iusupov 1992, 126). Incidentally, a Sakan king from Issyk (4th century BCE) had a ring with the image of a solar god (Akishev 1978). Most probably the worship of the Sun was the principal religious cult practiced by the Saka and Dahae tribes of Central Asia. Its continuation may be observed with the Arsacids, who were particularly devoted to Mithra, especially in his solar aspect (Olbrycht 1997b).

On the Uzboi, the Parthian fortress Igdy-kala has been revealed (Iusupov 1986, 154 pp.). The presence of Parthian pottery and ostraca place the fortress firmly within the political borders of the Arsacid Empire. Its establishment far from the sedentary areas of Parthia manifests the importance of the Transcaspiian area in the policy of the Arsacids.

Nomadic clans in Bactria – the Khalchayan sculptures

The figural scenes discovered in the palace of Khalchayan in the Surkhandarya Valley provide us with a substantial amount of information on the nomads of the Yuezhi period in Bactria (Figs. 10–11) and their military equipment. Khalchayan was excavated by G. A. Pugachenkova between 1959 and 1963 (Pugachenkova 1965; 1966a; 1971; 1987a), who discovered almost life-size painted clay sculptures there (Fig. 10). The sculptures were located in the entrance room and in three large compositions in the main hall of the palace. Two panels present frontal depictions of local (probably Yuezhi) princes, other members of the ruling aristocracy, and a Parthian ruler. They are accompanied by some deities. The third panel shows the victory of horse archers over a unit of heavily armored cataphract cavalry (Fig. 11), no doubt a force belonging to a conquered people (Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 31). In the audience scenes there is a man in typical Parthian apparel. A male figure clad in the Parthian manner also appears next to a carriage bearing a goddess. The remaining dignitaries are dressed in round-necked jackets with a straight frontal split or kaftans without a V-neckline. Pugachenkova identified the Parthian on the Khalchayan reliefs as a prince of Indo-Parthian origin from the Punjab (Pugachenkova 1971, 55 Fig. 59). However, this does not seem very likely. More probably the individual depicted came from Parthia proper and the message the relief conveys is that the Parthian prince was honored as an ally of the ruling clan of Khalchayan. His exact identification remains enigmatic, since the dating of the Khalchayan sculptures have not been established beyond all doubt.

¹⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*. Translated from the Ancient Greek by T. Holland. With an introduction by P. Cartledge (London 2013).

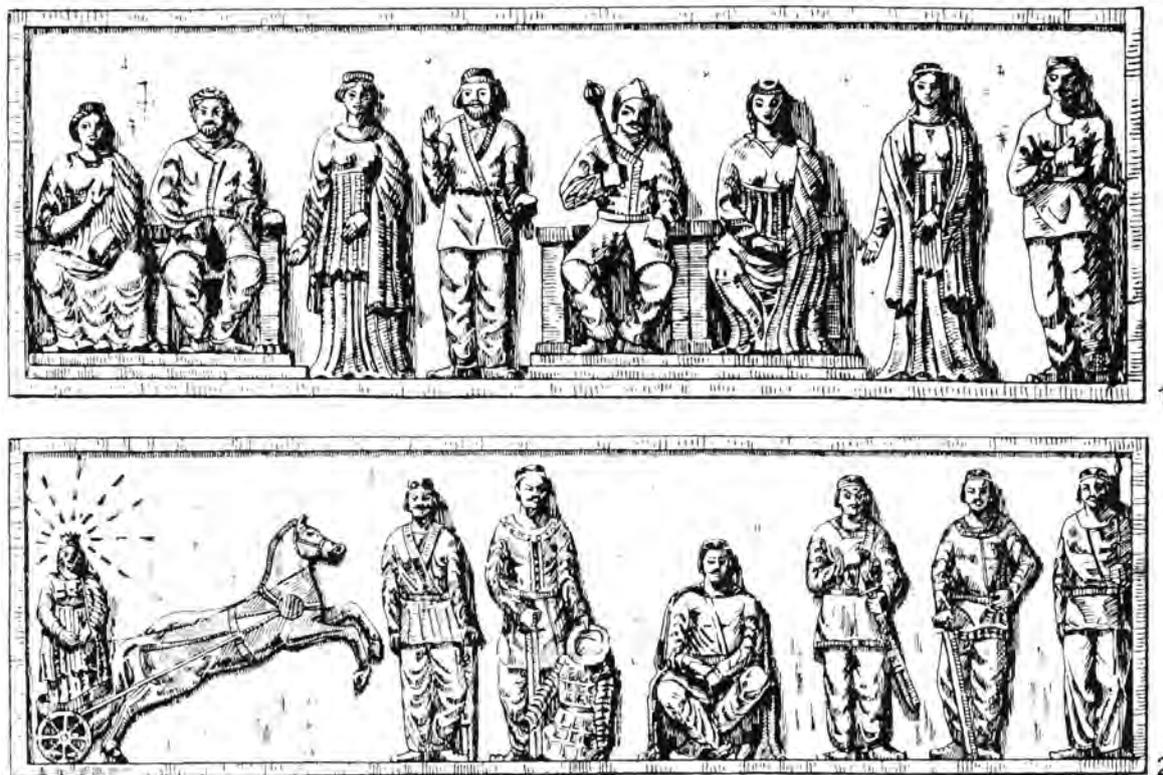


Fig. 10. Khalchayan, northern Bactria, Uzbekistan. Reconstruction of two sculptural panels (after Pugachenkova 1971, Figs. 51 and 61).



Fig. 11. Khalchayan, northern Bactria, Uzbekistan. Battle frieze (reconstruction after Pugachenkova 1971, 71).

Pugachenkova (1966a, 188–213) initially dated the Khalchayan sculptures to the 1st century BCE. Later she opted for the turn of the millennia (Pugachenkova 1987a). B. A. Litvinskii suggests a time after the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE (Litvinskii 2001, 153). This dating is certainly too late, as it would come into the Great Kushan period, while the Khalchayan site does

not have any of the features of the artistic and iconographic tendencies prevailing in the Great Kushan period. K. Abdullaev (2004, 30; 2007, 89–91) proposes the mid-1st century BCE for the reliefs, but ascribes the historical events they illustrate to the mid-2nd century BCE. It is hard to accept this theory on account of the long interval between the events commemorated and the making of the reliefs. L. Nehru (1999/2000; 2006) maintains that the palace at Khalchyan was built by the Kushan ruler Heraios in the mid-1st century BCE. V. P. Nikonorov (1997, II, 11) dates Khalchyan to the early 1st century CE. F. Grenet (2000, 132) draws attention to the iconographic similarity of the Parthian figure at Khalchyan to the Arsacid imperial portraits on the coinage of Vardanes I (39/40–46) and Vologases I (51–79), and concludes that the Parthian of Khalchyan must be Vardanes. The weak point in Grenet's hypothesis is his location of Vardanes' battles with Gotarzes. The Sindes, the river which Vardanes reached, is not the Tejen, as Grenet claims, but a river in the lower Amu Darya Basin (Olbrycht 1997a). This location, in turn, challenges Grenet's interpretation and dating.

The overall range in the dates put forward for Khalchyan is in excess of 200 years. The iconography of rulers of Parthia, such as hairstyle and type of diadem, proves useful. It corresponds to Arsacid images on coins from the period from 57 BCE to CE 51. The battle scene undoubtedly depicts a nomadic victory involving mounted archers over a people using cataphracts. This kind of heavy armored cavalry was in the service of the Saka and the Sakaraukai offshoot of the Saka. Saka armor pieces may be spotted among the trophies depicted on the relief. So most probably the relief shows a Yuezhi victory over the Saka in Bactria (Bernard 1987). Around 57 BCE the Sakaraukai sustained a major defeat in western Bactria (Olbrycht 1998a, 113–114). Another potential interpretation would be that the reliefs refer to Phraates IV's flight from Parthia during the rebellions of 30–20 BCE, and his attempt to solicit the support of neighboring peoples, perhaps including the rulers of Khalchyan. The Parthian prince on these reliefs needs not to have been the King of Kings; he could have been an Arsacid from eastern Parthia in the times of Orodes II (57–37 BCE) or Phraates IV (37–3 BCE). There is a striking similarity of the armor on the reliefs to the Sakan militaria on the Indo-Sakan coins of Azes and Azilises of the second half of the 1st century BCE (Bopearachchi/Sachs 2001). On the grounds of the historical context and the analogous armor the making of the Khalchyan reliefs may be dated to the second half of the 1st century BCE.

The cataphracts represented in Khalchyan used tight-fitting helmets with a peak over the forehead, corselets, leg- and arm-guards, gorgets, and shaffrons (for the armor of Khalchyan, see Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 28–30). They also had saddles with a rigid framework and an arched pommel and cantle (Pugachenkova 1966a, Fig. 95). Similar pieces of cataphract armor were found in the arsenal of Ai Khanum (eastern Bactria), in the layers dated to about 150 BCE (however, the date of the artifacts may be later). The Ai Khanum corselet consists of small rectangular plates like the Khalchayan armor (Bernard 1980, 452–459; Abdullaev 1995a, 171–176).

The art of Khalchayan, mirroring the culture of Bactria and the urbanized parts of Central Asia after the great nomadic invasions of the 2nd century BCE, presents a synthesis of Bactrian, Greek, and nomadic traditions. Its realistic portraits depict a variety of ethnicities. Politically Bactria was a land where Parthians encountered and rivaled nomadic newcomers from Central Asia¹¹. The predominant type of warfare presented in this art is cavalry, represented by two types, mounted archers and cataphracts.

¹¹ Rtveldze 1995; 2011; Litvinskii 2010; Olbrycht 2010b.

The Tillya-tepe archaeological complex and its cultural affinities

The discovery of a group of very abundantly furnished graves dated to the 1st century CE at Tillya-tepe in north-west Afghanistan is one of the biggest sensations in the history of archaeology (Olbrycht 1990; 2013b, 201–221). The discovery was made in 1978 by V. I. Sarianidi, a Russian archaeologist with Greek roots. The nomad graves of Tillya-tepe show that in the 1st century CE southern Bactria was ruled by princes who came from the Central Asian steppes. There have been no finds of Graeco-Bactrian coins or their imitations in western Afghanistan, which shows that this region's history was different from that of northern Bactria and the Surkhan Darya and Vakhsh Valleys after the demise of Graeco-Bactria. Western Bactria remained under Parthian domination until the 1st century CE. According to my recent research, the tombs at Tillya-tepe should be dated at ca. CE 40–52 (Olbrycht 2013b).

At Tillya-tepe seven graves have been identified, and six of them have been excavated (T1–T6). They were found to contain over 20,000 artifacts, including items made of gold, iron, bronze, semi-precious stones, wood, and silk, not only local products but also imports from various distant places – e.g., a Roman coin issued by Tiberius, a medallion from India, Parthian coins, and mirrors and silk from China. The artistic objects discovered in the graves are exceptionally eclectic, a mix of nomadic, Bactrian, and Greek elements with Chinese, Indian, and Parthian traditions. Fairly extensive reports on the Tillya-tepe discovery were published in the 1980s (Sarianidi 1985; 1989), but the artifacts, most of which were sent to the Soviet Union for conservation and subsequently kept in the National Museum at Kabul, were for a long time inaccessible for scholarly research owing to combat activities in Afghanistan. Only in recent years has the accessibility of the Tillya-tepe artifacts improved, with a series of exhibitions in several countries which has provided researchers with the opportunity to see and examine them¹². A number of studies have been published on a variety of aspects of the Tillya-tepe art, its cultural associations and ethnic interpretations¹³. However, the determination both of their date and origin, as well as of the ethnicity of the nomads who used these artifacts has proved an extremely controversial issue.

The motifs depicted on the Tillya-tepe jewelry and the techniques employed are quite diverse. V. I. Sarianidi classified the subjects into the “Bactrian”, “Hellenistic”, “Graeco-Roman”, “Siberian-Altai”, and “Scythian-Sarmatian” groups. There are good reasons for his classification, but it does not take properly certain aspects into consideration, such as Chinese affinities or Parthian connections. Despite the vast diversity of these artifacts, the collection may still be said to display certain common features and an eclectic character which endow it with a stylistic unity (Sarianidi 1998, 21; 1987, 272). For of course the art of the nomads inhabiting the Eurasian steppes had always been highly eclectic, and tended to assimilate a variety of foreign influences, inspirations, and features. Suffice it to mention the Greek influences in the art of the Black Sea Scythians in the 4th century BCE, or the Achaemenid impact on the nomads of Central Asia (Pazyryk) and Southern Ural (Filippovka). In the final three decades of the 2nd century BCE Bactria, Sakastan, Arachosia, Kabulistan, Gandhara and parts of the Indus Valley were conquered by a variety of nomadic tribes, including the Saka, Yuezhi, and Asioi, giving rise to a veritable melting-pot of peoples from different traditions. The cultural eclecticism of the no-

¹² Cat. Washington 2008; Cat. Bonn 2010; Aruz/Valtz Fino 2012.

¹³ Sarianidi 1984; 1987; 1998; Pugachenkova/Rempel'

1986; 1991; Jatsenko 1989; Pfrommer 1996; Boardman 2003a; 2003b; Rząddek 2007; Schiltz 2008a; 2008b; 2009; Mordvintseva 2010.

nomads encountered and blended with the influence of urban centers, as evidenced by the magnificent discoveries at Bactra, Taxila, Begram, Termez, and other cities (see *Cat. Washington* 2008). Not surprisingly, then, many of the features from the Tillya-tepe archaeological complex correspond to similar traits in jewelry and other works of art from northwestern India, Bactria, China, Parthia, and various nomadic areas of Central Asia.

Sarianidi has offered a variety of statements on the artworks found in the burial site and their makers. In his main publications on Tillya-tepe Sarianidi (1985; 1989) writes that these artifacts were manifestations of the Yuezhi dynastic art of the turn of the millennia, most of it locally made, and he stresses the predominance of the local, Bactrian substrate. At the same time he emphasizes the links with the Siberian–Altai art, especially the Pazyryk art, while also observing strong Greek influences and a somewhat weaker Indian impact. He draws attention to Indo-Parthian connections and associations with the finds from Parthian Niniveh as well.

M. Pfrommer (1996) defines three main cultural components in the Tillya-tepe artifacts. One pertains to the traditions of the nomads of Central Asia and artifacts reminiscent of the Siberian collection. The second component stems from the Achaemenid tradition, either from the urban centers of Bactria or assimilated in the art of the nomads and involving features such as the decorative portrayal of body build on the figures and some of the ornaments such as bracelets. As regards motifs, Pfrommer sees the figure known as the Master of Animals or Dragon Master (represented on a pair of pendants, tomb 2; *Cat. Washington* 2008, Fig. 61) as an Achaemenid subject, later adopted by the Graeco-Bactrian art (Fig. 12). His third component relates to Greek traditions, chiefly from Graeco-Bactria, such as the Cupid figures on the clasps. In the opinion of J. Boardman it is the “Chinese and Indian connections” that are “the most significant” aspect of the Tillya-tepe artifacts, not the Sakan and Parthian (Boardman 2003a, 371). Recently he has been envisaging the Tillya-tepe complex chiefly as “echoes of China and Greece” (Boardman 2012). G. A. Pugachenkova and L. I. Rempel have indicated connections between the Tillya-tepe complex and the art of Parthian Old Nisa, and the art of the Saka as well as of the Indo-Saka of Taxila (Pugachenkova/Rempel’ 1986, 22; 1991, 24). A similar hypothesis has been put forward by M. P. Bernard (1987).

A review of these theories demonstrates the radically divergent opinions that have been proposed on the nature of the Tillya-tepe artifacts. Nonetheless a few relevant conclusions may be drawn on the iconographic nature of the Tillya-tepe artifacts. There are undoubtedly several artistic traditions involved, which combined to give rise to the art of Bactria under nomadic supremacy in the 1st century BCE – 1st century CE. The main ingredient is the Bactrian, Greek, and nomadic Central Asian factor. There are also considerable contributions from the Parthian, Indian, and Chinese art, the latter in consequence mainly of the arrival in Bactria of the Yuezhi people, who were probably the creators of the Pazyryk culture in the Altai. We must bear in mind that the cultural processes in Bactria and other areas of Central Asia under nomadic supremacy in the post-Achaemenid period were extremely dynamic. It is impossible to disentangle the diverse traditions and straighten them out according to an artificial, static scheme, since the different motifs and stylistic fashions mixed and blended in the most extraordinary manner.

The Bactrian traditions constitute the principal component. But in the course of the turbulent centuries from Alexander the Great to the Kushans many peoples, each with their own culture, arrived and wielded power in Bactria. When the nomadic Yuezhi came they brought their own culture enriched with some Chinese traditions. Bactria had an ancient tradition of iron-working and goldsmithery going back to the Bronze Age (Sarianidi 1989). A strong Achaemenid influence was superimposed on these traditions ca. 540–330 BCE, followed by the Greek influences which



Fig. 12. Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 2. Master of Animals or Dragon Master, represented on a pair of pendants (after *Cat. Bonn 2010*, Fig. 61).

attended Alexander's conquests, the Diadochi, Seleucid, and Graeco-Bactrian periods. When speaking of the traditions of Bactria we must consider them as a conglomerate of a variety of factors. In a way Greek traditions also became part of the native culture of Bactria, the whole of Afghanistan, and Gandhara, and developed there for several centuries.



Fig. 13. Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 3. Gold clasps with the depictions of warriors (after *Cat. Bonn 2010*, Fig. 79).

The Tillya-tepe burial site came into being more than three centuries after the demise of the Achaemenids. Yet in spite of this an Achaemenid tradition has been noted in Tillya-tepe (Pfrommer 1996 writes in this connection of bracelets from graves T2 and T6 having protomae in the form of griffin's and bull's heads). Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of Bactrian-Achaemenid traditions which used iconographic features that had been popular in the art of Iran and Bactria under the Achaemenids, such as crenellated crowns ("Stufenzinnen": Sarianidi 1985, 77; 232 no. 2.13, Pl. 17).

Greek art exerted a strong influence on the traditions of various Asian cultures from Babylonia to India. Thus it comes as no surprise that elements of Greek art are present in Tillya-tepe. But as often happened in Asia, Greek motifs and iconographic schemes were subject to substantial modification. There are figures corresponding to Athena, Aphrodite, and other gods and goddesses from the Greek pantheon, but they are accompanied by characteristic changes in the style, symbols, and attributes. For instance, the Cupids on the ear-rings from tomb 6 (*Cat. Washington 2008*, Fig. 138) have crescents on their foreheads, which was certainly not a Greek motif. The warriors on a pair of clasps in tomb 3 (*Cat. Washington 2008*, no. 79) represent the Graeco-Bactrian tradition (Fig. 13).

Objects which were definitely imports from China were found among the artifacts in the Tillya-tepe tombs. The mirrors and the piece of silk discovered in grave T4 must certainly have come from China. But there are also Chinese influences in the iconography. These include the image of an official in a chariot led by two dragons (lion-like creatures: Fig. 14) on the boot-buckles from tomb 4¹⁴.

¹⁴ Rząddek 2007; *Cat. Washington 2008*, Fig. 106; Boardman 2012; Leidy 2012.



Fig. 14. Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 4. Official in a chariot led by two dragons (lion-like creatures) on the boot-buckles (after Cat. Bonn 2010, Fig. 106).

The iconography of the Tillya-tepe artifacts entails numerous associations with art from the Parthian territories (Sarianidi 1998). There is a Hatran analogy to the necklace with an Aphrodite pendant (tomb 6; Cat. Washington 2008, Fig. 135; Safar/Mustafa 1974, 9; 28). Even more relevant are the Parthian analogies of the prince's belt decorated with nine golden medallions from tomb 4.



Fig. 15. Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 4. A crown (h. 9 cm) made of gold and pearls in the shape of a tree (after *Cat. Bonn 2010*, Fig. 121).

Similar belts are known from Issyk (4th century BCE) and from Parthian Hatra (2nd century CE). The prince in tomb 4 was dressed in Parthian apparel. His gold shoe-buckles are indicative of a Parthian connection; similar objects are known from Palmyra and Masjid-e Soleiman (Ghirshman 1976, Pls. 78.1; 79.2).



Fig. 16. Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 6. A composite gold crown made of the models of five trees and birds (after Cat. Bonn 2010, Fig. 134).

The nomadic factor in the art of Tillya-tepe

Whole volumes could be written on the nomadic traditions in the Tillya-tepe complex; here I shall limit myself to some of the most spectacular examples concerning steppe traditions. Tomb 4 was found to contain a 9 cm-high crown made of gold and pearls in the shape of a tree (Fig. 15; cf. Cat. Washington 2008, no. 121). The figure of a standing ram was probably another piece of the crown (Cat. Washington 2008, no. 108). The grandest artifact from tomb 6 is a composite gold crown made of the models of five trees and birds (Fig. 16; see Cat. Washington 2008, no. 134). This type of insigne is known only from Central Eurasian nomadic finds, such as those from the burial sites at Issyk (near Almaty), Karagalinka (Kazakhstan), the Ustlabinskii necropolis (Kuban area), Kobiakovo, and Khokhlach. The Tree of Life adorned with birds and other animals was a popular topic in the mythology of Iranian and Indian peoples (Kuz'mina/Sarianidi 1982). The splendid composite crowns from tombs 6 and 4 are similar to headgear discovered in the nomadic tombs in the Altai (Ukok), at Issyk, in the Caspian-Pontic steppes, and in Korea (Francfort 2012, 96).

The Animal Polychromic Style is the factor integrating the diverse traditions encountered in Tillya-tepe. It is also the predominant element among them. The Animal Polychromic Style is to be found in the art of Central Asia and the Sarmatian peoples. Its Tillya-tepe variety may be termed the “Gold Turquoise Style”, due to the turquoise inlays lavishly decorating the different images on the gold jewelry and toreutic objects discovered here; whereas the variety which occurs in the Caspian-Pontic steppes is usually called “Sarmatian”. The term “Sarmatian Animal Style” was coined in the 1920s by M. I. Rostovtzeff to make it distinct from the “Scythian Animal Style” (Rostovtzeff 1922; 1929, 28; 55–57). The only formal feature Rostovtzeff described distinguishing this style is the polychromic effect produced by the color inlays employed in it. This concept was developed by Soviet and Russian scholars (Zasetskaia 1989; see the critical approach by Mordvintseva 2010; 2013). In her analysis of the Tillya-tepe objects manifesting this style Mordvintseva (2010, 187) emphasizes the advanced technique used to make them and writes: “all inlays, often very minute, are accurately cut to suit the sockets, which they were intended to fill. As a rule they are set in a relief socket. The cloisonné cells and wire frames are rarer. The main colour of the inlays is light blue (turquoise). For contrast deep blue (lapis lazuli) and transparent red (almandine, garnet, and carnelian) are also used”.

Animal Polychromic Style items are known from places as distant from each other as Tillya-tepe in Bactria, Sogdiana (Koktepe), Taxila in Gandhara, Sarmatian graves in the Caspian-Pontic steppes, and Transcaucasia (Sisian). We should therefore ask what were the style’s origins and how did it spread. Some of the objects discovered in Sarmatia may have a Bactrian provenance. Part of the phenomenon we are dealing with may be accounted for by migrations, but another factor must surely have been the diffusion of the style itself, the expansion of a fashion which was propagated over the vast distances of Central Asia and the Caspian-Pontic steppes.

Where was the Animal Polychromic Style created? The paramount materials in the Bactrian specimens of the style are gold and turquoise. Remarkably, in his discourse on *callaina*, or turquoise, Pliny the Elder (Nat. Hist. 37.110, 33) writes the following:

“[sc. *callaina*] occurs in the hinterland beyond India among the inhabitants of the Caucasus, the Hyrcani, Sacae and Dahae. It is of exceptional size, but is porous and full of flaws. A far purer and finer stone is found in Carmania. In both localities, however, ‘callaina’ occurs amidst inaccessible icy crags, where it is seen as an eye-shaped swelling loosely adhering to the rocks, as though it had been attached to them, rather than formed upon them [...]. This is the article that pays their taxes, this they acknowledge to be the most beautiful thing that can be worn on neck or fingers, from this they derive their wealth [...]. Subsequently, the stone is shaped by the drill, being in other respects an easy stone to deal with. The best stones have the colour of ‘smaragdus’, so that it is obvious, after all, that their attractiveness is not their own. They are enhanced by being set in gold, and no gem sets off gold so well. The finer specimens lose their colour if they are touched by oil, unguents or even undiluted wine, whereas the less valuable ones preserve it more steadfastly. No gemstone is more easily counterfeited by means of imitations in glass [...]”¹⁵.

Pliny’s account is an invaluable testimonial of the attitude of the nomads to jewelry. He is the only ancient author to mention *callaina*. According to him the chief location of turquoise was in the mountains of the “Caucasus”. He uses the expression *post aversa Indiae*, which suggests the region bordering on India, which would mean not the Caucasus in Iberia/Georgia or Azerbaijan,

¹⁵ G. Plinius Secundus, *Natural History*: in 10 Volumes. Translated by D. E. Eichholz. The Loeb Classical Library 419 (Cambridge/MA, London 1962).

but the Caucasus in the sense of the mountains of Khorasan and the Hindukush. Pliny enumerates three peoples, the Hyrcanians, the Dahae, and the Saka: *nascitur post aversa Indiae apud incolas Caucasi montis, Hyrcanos, Sacas, Dahas*. Then he adds Carmania. In other words Pliny is describing nomadic communities of horse riders skilled in archery, using jewelry ornamented with gold and turquoise. The Hyrcanians could have had access to the turquoise deposits in Khorasan; still today the finest turquoise comes from Nishapur in northeast Iran. The same applies to the Dahae, who also bordered on Chorasmia, a country reported in an Old Persian inscription as the source for the turquoise used to decorate a palace of Darius I (521–486 BCE) at Susa. Indeed, sources of turquoise have been discovered in Chorasmia, including the Sultanuzdag hills (Rapoport 1992). The Saka were masters of territories which included parts of Bactria (including Tillya-tepe) at the feet of the Hindukush. The lands on the other side of the Hindukush were Sakastan, Drangiana, and Arachosia, and they were also held by Saka peoples. Pliny's description, a eulogy of the "Gold Turquoise Style", may serve as a guidebook commentary to the Tillya-tepe discoveries and the specimens of the Animal Polychromic Style retrieved from this site.

Herodotus (4.71–72; see footnote 10) informs us that the Scythians made human sacrifices when their chieftain died, and that they deposited objects made of gold in his grave, shunning silver. Evidently the nomadic peoples, including Scythians and the Saka, held gold in high esteem, and the Tillya-tepe artifacts provide an excellent example of the phenomenon.

The birthplace of the Animal Polychromic Style lay on the territories of Greater Sakastan, Bactria-Sogdiana, and perhaps part of Khorasan (although in the last case there have been no finds so far). A combination of gold and turquoise was a style known in Central Asia for centuries before the Parthian period, but rather as a rare fashion. The Sakan king from Issyk (4th century BCE) had earrings with turquoise (Samašev 2007, 166). But a real birth of the Gold Turquoise Style took place in the 1st century BCE as a result of nomadic movements of the years 130–110 in Bactria and the Indo-Iranian borderland. The people who created this style were the nomadic elites ranging over these lands. Later, thanks to migration as well as penetration by means of commercial and cultural exchange, the style travelled and spread throughout the steppes, reaching the valleys of the Ural, the Volga, and the Don, and the Crimea as well (Mordvintseva 2003).

SWORDS AND DAGGERS IN PARTHIAN IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

The Parthians were famous for their formidable bows, but they also used dangerous shafted weapons – long spears and javelins. Horseriding epitomized the Parthians and their cavalymen used a set of weapons which as a whole was a novelty in Iranian warfare. The Parthian rider had a bow and a gorytus including a quiver and bowcase. The long sword was the Parthian's main offensive weapon in hand-to-hand combat. Furthermore, the Parthian warrior used one or two daggers worn attached to the thighs (Coulston 1986; Brentjes 1995; 1996; 1997).

Long swords and scabbard slides

The long sword with a double-edged blade was an essential offensive weapon of the Parthian and Central Asian cataphract cavalymen. Such swords were intended for thrusting and slashing



Fig. 17. Parthian prince. Bone plaque discovered by B. Kaim at Mele Hairam, Turkmenistan. Art Museum, Ashgabat (photo M. Olbrycht).

from the horseback and were often more than 80 cm long, reaching up to 130 cm. Usually such long swords were worn in wooden scabbards on the left side. Parthian long swords are known chiefly from iconographic materials (Winkelman 2003, 59–62). A fine example is a depiction of a Parthian prince on a bone plaque discovered at Mele Hairam near Serakhs, Turkmenistan (Fig. 17; 2nd – early 3rd centuries CE). Actual examples of swords are extremely rare. A long sword with a disc-shaped pommel made of gold was discovered at Tillya-tepe, tomb 4 (Afghanistan). It was not possible to determine the type of the cross-guard (Sarianidi 1989, 105).

The sword has been lost after the excavations. In Central Asia in the graves of the Tulkhar necropolis, Bishkent Valley, and at Dilberjin, several long swords of the period embracing end of the 2nd century BCE – 2nd century CE have been found (Nikonorov 1997, Figs. 33a–b; 34m).

The sword or dagger scabbards were often suspended from the waistbelt by means of a special device made of jade. The device, called the scabbard slide, was widely used in Central Asia and Parthia. It is represented on the Ashur relief (see below) and on the Arsu relief from Dura Europos (Mathiesen 1992, II, cat. no. 178, Fig. 57). The origin of the scabbard slide is disputable. Some scholars maintain that the scabbard slide was invented in the Southern Ural area, and then transmitted by the Yuezhi to China (Trousdale 1975, 70–71; 110–119). This is rather unlikely and a diffusion in an opposite direction should be preferred. Brentjes (1996, 29) claims that the scabbard slide may have been invented both in China and in Europe independently. Be that as it may, in Asia, the first scabbard slides were used probably in China and then this way of carrying the arms was adopted by Central Asian peoples. The earliest depiction of a scabbard slide in Bactria is on a gold clasp from tomb 3 at Tillya-tepe (Fig. 13; cf. Cat. Washington 2008, 254–255 Pl. 79; Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 24–25). The burial is dated to the years CE 41–52 (Olbrycht 2013b), but the clasps with warriors may be earlier, from the second half the 1st century BCE. In the Parthian art of the 1st – early 3rd centuries CE scabbard slides are often represented. Furthermore, this device is depicted in the art of the Kushan Empire (Winkelman 2003, 49–52; 59–69).

Daggers in Parthia and the neighboring areas

The most common type among Parthian elite's arms seems to be the ring-pommel dagger worn in an elaborate scabbard. Of special importance were the scabbards with four side applications or projections. In the iconography of monuments in the Parthian Empire (Shami, Susa, Hatra, Ashur), daggers in sheaths attached with straps to the thigh are depicted on a number of reliefs. Genuine daggers of that type have been found at Tillya-tepe (Afghanistan), ed-Dur (United Arab Emirates), in Transcaucasia, and in the Sarmatian burials of the Caspian-Pontic steppes. Such daggers, probably originating from Central Asia (Altai area) and China, demonstrate the range of cultural interaction from Inner Asia up to Iran, Palmyra in Syria and the North Pontic Sarmatian tribes in the Parthian period.

Achaemenid soldiers used the so-called “akinakes” and the “Elamite” daggers. The akinakes scabbards were fastened at the belt by means of a string from a loop in the form of a P. The lower end of the scabbard (chape) was fastened at the thighs. The P-loop was hanged up with a strip or directly to the belt. The “Elamite” daggers, with elaborate hilts, were carried at the belt and hidden in wide coats (Fig. 18). Unlike the Achaemenid Persians, Parthians usually used two daggers whose scabbards were often provided with four rounded projections intended for their attachment to the thigh by means of leather straps. The straps were led through holes in the projections. Sometimes the top pair of straps or an additional strap led to a belt hidden under the warrior's jacket, or to a strap suspended from the belt, allowing the top part of the scabbard to be fastened.

The best-known Parthian sculpture, the Prince from Shami, demonstrates typical Parthian costume and weapons (although the daggers have no ring-pommels). The figure shows a V-necked jacket, trousers, and leggings. The date of the sculpture is disputed – in my opinion a dating into the second half of the 1st century BCE is the most probable (dates range from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, see Mathiesen 1992, II, 166–167; Kawami 1987, 63, gives 50 BCE – CE 50). The prince has two daggers attached at the right and left hip (Fig. 19).



Fig. 18. Persepolis, Iran. Achaemenid soldiers with kinakes and “Elamite” daggers (photo M. Olbrycht).

The hilt of the right dagger is flat, tapering towards the top, without pommel. The hilt of the second dagger is broken and shows no narrowing shape. About the cross-guards one can say nothing for they are hidden in the scabbards that are partially covered with trousers. At both scabbards, two oblong projections are visible provided with knobs covering holes for straps. The scabbards have such projections on both sides respectively, thus each scabbard must have been provided with four side projections. Straps fastening the scabbards at the thighs are visible at the lower projections. The upper projections may have been fastened at the jacket but this seems improbable. No strap connecting the scabbards and the belt are visible, but the sculptor was perhaps not specific about such details. A strap may have been hidden under the jacket.

Dagger scabbards with four side projections are depicted on several Parthian reliefs. Thus, a relief showing a standing Parthian prince with a long sword was discovered at Ashur (now Iraq). The prince has a dagger at each hip (Mathiesen 1992, II, 191–192 cat. no. 160). The scabbards are provided with four side applications. The pommels seem to be drop-shaped (Fig. 20). The sculpture is firmly dated at the beginning of the 1st century CE. There is a number of other representations of Parthian daggers and scabbards in sculpture, including reliefs and round sculptures from Masjed-e Soleiman, Susa, and Hatra (Winkelmann 2003, 54–58). Depictions of daggers are visible on two belt clasps from the British Museum showing Parthian riders (Fig. 21). The horsemen wear ring-pommel daggers in the lobed sheaths (Curtis 2001, 306 Pl. XIIa–b).

For any analysis of Parthian weapons, numismatic material is of particular importance. The Arsacids often showed themselves with weapons as important royal emblems on their coins. K. Tanabe (1993, 42 Figs. 116–117) noticed that a dagger in an ornamented scabbard worn on the left thigh is depicted as a royal emblem on some coins of Phraates IV (37–3 BCE). In the



Fig. 19. The Shami Prince and his daggers. National Museum of Iran, Tehran. a right side; b left side (photos M. Olbrycht).

early Arsacid period the most essential emblem was the bow as an attribute of royal power. Under Orodes II (57–38 BCE), the daggers began to be presented as a special royal attribute. At the beginning, the ring-pommel daggers appeared, with scabbards usually provided with four rounded applications at sides and one at the chape. This type can be seen on the coins of Orodes II, Phraates IV, Phraatakes, and Artabanos II, i.e., in the period ca. 57 BCE – CE 40. A second type are daggers with a drop-shaped or slightly thickened grip. They appear on coins of Phraates IV, Phraatakes, Gotarzes, and Vologases I, i.e., ca. 37 BCE – CE 79. The scabbards show four side oblong projections and one application at the chape. Another type are daggers with disc-shaped or spherical pommels, known from the coins from Phraates IV to Gotarzes II (37 BCE – CE 51). The scabbards show four rounded disc applications, provided sometimes with short legs. At the chape there is a disc or a rounded element (Winkelman 2006, 143–144).

In sum, Parthian coins demonstrate that under Orodes II the Arsacid kings began to show a specific dagger type as an essential royal attribute and symbol of power. Emblems depicted on Parthian coins often were vehicles of important propaganda statements in political ideology and its individual nature often reflected the political program of a Parthian ruler. Orodes II stemmed from the line of Sinatrukes (approximately 78/77–71/70 BCE) who issued coins showing a tiara with stags. Sinatrukes ascended to Parthian throne with the help of Sakaraukai, with whom he had previously stayed (Lucian, *Makrobioi* 15¹⁶). Stemming from Central Asia, the Sakaraukai

¹⁶ Lucian in eight volumes. Edited and translated by Austin Morris Harmon, K. Kilburn and Matthew

Donald MacLeod. Loeb Classical Library 14 (London 1913).



Fig. 20. Parthian prince from Ashur, Iraq. Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, Turkey (photo M. Olbrycht).



Fig. 21. Parthian belt clasps. British Museum, a inv.no. 1981 II 7.1.139205; b inv.no. 1992-I-25-I (photos M. Olbrycht. © Trustees of the British Museum, London).

were among the nomadic tribes that invaded Bactria and Parthia in the second century BCE. Taking advantage of a turmoil in Parthia, they made the Arsacid Sinatrukes king of Parthia. The new king's tiara boasts emblems indicative of this development as they make references to religious symbolism of Central Asian nomadic tribes. Tiaras decorated with deer were used by Sinatrukes and his son Phraates III (a detailed analysis is provided by Olbrycht 1997b). But patricide Orodes II, who murdered his father Phraates III, needed new royal emblems. While fighting for the Parthian throne, he was supported by the Suren clan and some nomadic tribes, probably the Yuezhi and Asioi from Bactria. Thus, if we look for the origins of the dagger types used by Orodes II (57–37 BCE) and his successors, we must take into consideration nomadic tribes of Central Asia who conquered Bactria and became neighbors of the Parthians (ca. 130–110 BCE). In the light of available evidence until Orodes II no ring-pommel daggers and elaborate scabbards appeared in Parthian official art. However, it seems probable that the Parthians, having close contacts to the steppe peoples of Central Asia, knew ring-pommel daggers and scabbards with rounded applications before Orodes II. But it was under the Sinatrukids that the new weapons became popular as royal and elite attributes.



Fig. 22. Arsameia on the Nymphaios, Kommagene, Turkey. Dexiosis relief. Antiochos and Herakles-Verethragna (photos M. Olbrycht).

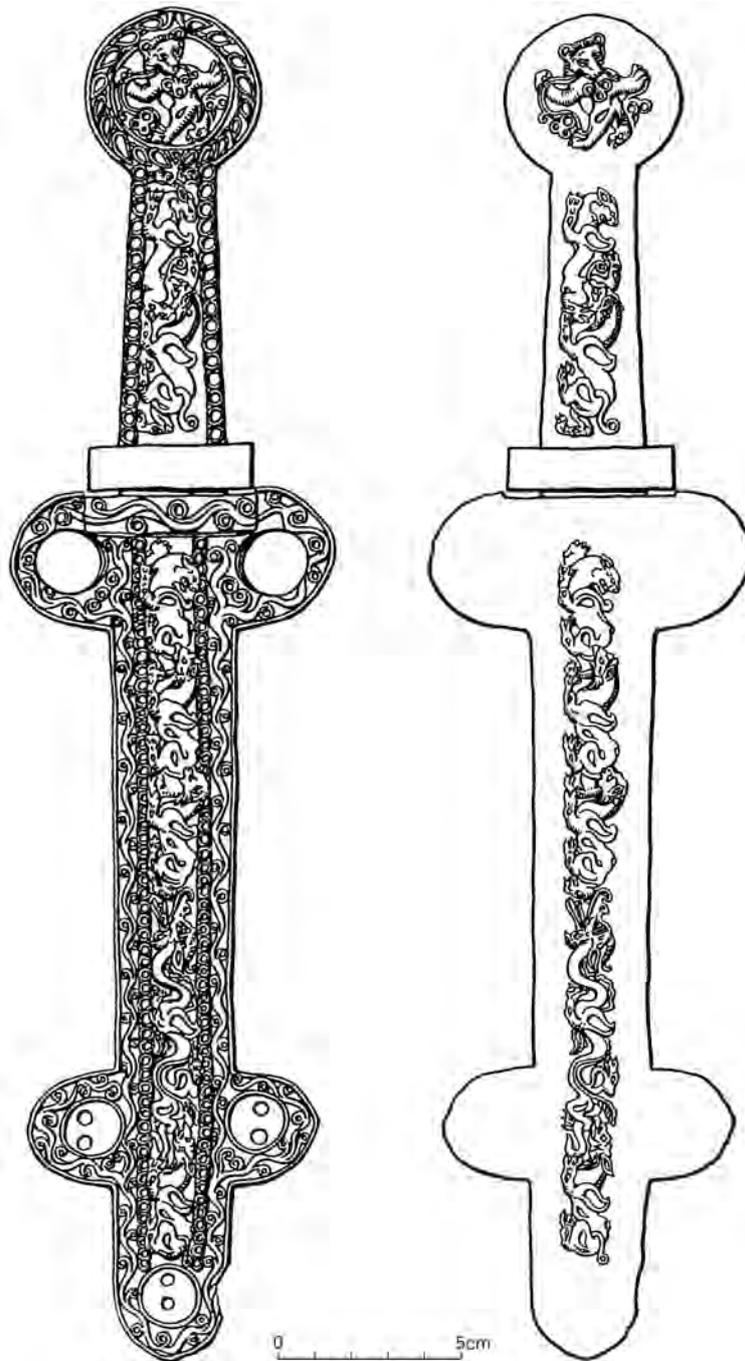


Fig. 23. Dagger and scabbard from Tillya-tepe, Afghanistan, tomb 4 (see also contribution Brosseder p. 223 Fig. 8; after Cat. Bonn 2010, Fig. 113).

There are several actual examples of ring-pommel daggers from within the Parthian Empire. Two dagger blades and a separate ring (originally probably a ring-pommel) have been found at Shami, Iran (Stein 1940, 154 Pl. VI). Genuine ring-pommel daggers (at least five artifacts) and their depictions on figurines are known from ed-Dur at the Persian Gulf (Delrue 2006), an area under Parthian political supremacy. Likewise, two ring-pommel-daggers were excavated on Bahrain in layers of the Parthian period.

Furthermore, Parthian type daggers were discovered at the necropolis Tillya-tepe in western Afghanistan (ancient Bactria). In tomb no. 4, a prince was buried. His splendid weapons indicate his outstanding status. Apart from a long sword at his left side, the deceased had a dagger with a rounded pommel on his right. Its handle is covered with gold. The dagger has a bar cross-guard. The hilt of the dagger and the scabbard are ornamented with scenes showing the mauling of the beasts. The lower, holed projections, were intended for straps as an attachment to the thigh (Fig. 23). The prince had to his left a sheath containing a short dagger and two knives. Similar sets of daggers and knives are known from nomadic tombs in Tuva and Mongolia in the 5th – 3rd centuries BCE (Sarianidi 1989, 101).

From Sarmatia to Gandhara

Aside from Iran, there is a number of sculptures in Kommagene showing splendid daggers in scabbards with four side applications. Kommagene, a country in eastern Anatolia on the Euphrates, was a small kingdom under Parthian political influence in the 1st century BCE. One of the Kommagenian kings, Antiochos I (ca. 70–36 BCE), erected several sanctuaries with outstanding sculptures showing him in conjunction with some heroes and gods. The king is often depicted in an ornamented royal garb, with a scepter and a special crown. But aside from these regalia, an ornamented dagger is visible on most of the monuments on the king's left thigh.

A ring-pommel dagger is clearly apparent on the famous Dexiosis relief, representing Antiochos and Herakles-Verethragna (Fig. 22). The scabbard, decorated with floral motifs, shows four side disc applications ornamented with lions' heads. A similar application is at the chape. The upper applications are connected to the belt by means of straps partially hidden under the ring-pommel dagger.

Similar ring-pommel daggers appear on several sculptures in Kommagene. Sporadically another type of dagger occurred. On the relief showing Antiochos (wearing a unique torque) and Apollo-Mithras the dagger has a voluted pommel, resembling the antennae pommels of Sarmatian daggers. But the scabbard is of the usual type – with five rounded applications (Winkelmann 2003, Fig. 12).

Antiochos of Kommagene used different emblems and specific costumes to demonstrate his connections to the Achaemenids, Seleukids, and the Parthians. It is in this political context that the Parthian type dagger was introduced in Kommagene. We know that Orodes II of Parthia married a daughter of Antiochos of Kommagene (Cassius Dio 49.23¹⁷). It seems that this alliance promoted a strong Parthian influence in Kommagene visible in royal attributes – the Kommagenian king adopted Parthian daggers as important vehicles of his ideology. A similar process of the adoption of Parthian type daggers and Parthian clothes is visible in Hatra, Edessa, Palmyra, and Armenia¹⁸.

Daggers in scabbards with four side projections or medallions were used in Palmyra, clearly as prestige attributes (statue from Kasr el-Abiad: Seyrig 1937, Pl. 1; Goldman 1993, 199; 212–213; Colledge 1976, 153). Some statues from the Palmyra necropolis show a ring-pommel dagger on the right thigh (Amy/Seyrig 1936, 239).

¹⁷ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*: in nine volumes. With an English translation by E. Cary. Loeb Classical Library 82 (Cambridge/Mass. 1917).

¹⁸ Seyrig 1937; Colledge 1987; Goldman 1993.



Fig. 24. Chrestion stele, Kerch, Ukraine. Detail (photo M. Olbrycht).

An ornamental scabbard with four side applications has been discovered in a tomb at Mstkheta in Iberia/Georgia (Tanabe 1993, 42 Fig. 119). Daggers with lobed sheaths were represented in Gandhara sculpture (Goldman 1993, 212).

Given intense contacts among nomadic steppe peoples of Central Asia and the Caspian-Pontic steppes it is not surprising to find ring-pommel daggers and richly decorated scabbards among Sarmatian tribes in the Black Sea area. In the 1st century BCE, a ring-shaped pommel began to appear as part of a one-piece iron-hilt. This type became dominant till 2nd century CE. Ring-pommel daggers and swords had a short straight metal guard.

From Sarmatian graves several richly decorated genuine daggers are known, including the objects from Porogi (second half of the 1st century CE), Dachi (end of the 1st century CE) and Gorgippia (mid-2nd century CE). Daggers with ring pommels were used in the Bosphoros (now the Crimea, Ukraine, and the Taman peninsula, Russia) in the period 1st – mid-2nd centuries CE (Treister 2008; 2010). These weapons, in conjunction with scabbards with side projections, are depicted on some funerary stelae stored at the Kerch (Pantikapaion) Museum. Such a dagger is to be seen on the Chrestion stele (1st century CE, Kerch). The dagger with a bar guard is attached to the thigh; the pommel is fastened to a strap on the hip. The scabbard is provided with side projections (Treister 2010, 487 Fig. 1). Chrestion proudly demonstrates his dagger and scabbard as his principal prestige attributes and weapons (Fig. 24). On the Atossos stele (Kerch) the ring-pommel dagger's scabbard has side projections (first half of the 2nd century CE; Treister 2008, 154). Ring-pommel swords were known in the Danube area, Central European *barbaricum*, and in the Roman Empire from the 1st century CE onwards (Bârcă 1999; Istvánovits/Kulcsár 2008).

Origins of the ring-pommel daggers and swords

The origin of the ring-pommel daggers and swords has been a disputed issue (Ginters 1928; Khazanov 1971, 8–9). In the light of the available data it is evident that the ring-pommel daggers were not used in Achaemenid Iran. Likewise, there is no evidence that Parthians made use of ring-pommel daggers in the early Arsacid period. At that time their weapons were probably similar to those appearing in the Ustyurt and Uzboi areas, inhabited by the kindred peoples of the Arsacid Parthians. In the 4th–1st centuries BCE, the tribes in the Ustyurt used daggers with antennae, crescent, and bar pommels¹⁹. Sometimes the double voluted pommel (similar to the antennae type) appeared (Brentjes 1996, 27). The scabbards were attached to the thigh and to the belt. In the Ustyurt and Uzboi area, scabbards with rounded projections or medallions did not occur (except for one item, see Iusupov 1986, 51).

Ring-pommel daggers were used in the Minusinsk Basin and in the Altai in the Karasuk period, and in China in the last phase of the Bronze age. Such daggers and swords were widely used in China, southern Siberia, Mongolia, and the Altai region in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE²⁰.

Scabbards with projecting side attachments, usually in the form of disks or medallions, occurred among tribes of the Pazyryk culture – they were discovered at sites like Ulandryk, Saygyulem, Iustyd, and Barburgazy (Kubarev 1981; Brentjes 1996, 25). The scabbards discovered on the cemeteries Ulandryk and Iustyd, dated to the 5th–3rd centuries BCE, had five projections with loops, one at the chape and four on both sides of the scabbard. The scabbards were made of wood, the daggers of iron and copper. There were also models of scabbards and daggers. A number of those objects can be dated at the 3rd century BCE. Recently several daggers and scabbards with four or five applications have been discovered in Mongolia in the area of the Pazyryk culture. They belong to the period 5th–3rd centuries BCE. An iron dagger in a wooden sheath with four side lobes was discovered in the warrior grave of the Pazyryk culture at Olon Güüriin Gol 10 (Parzinger et al. 2009, 203–220 Fig. 22).

In western Central Asia, including Bactria-Sogdiana, ring-pommel daggers and swords began to occur in the 2nd century BCE (Skripkin 2005, 182–183; cf. Obel’chenko 1978). Three daggers with ring-pommels have been discovered in graves of the Gjaur-4 necropolis in left-bank Chorasmia. They can be dated not earlier than to the 2nd century BCE. These daggers occurred together with long swords without pommels (Iablonskii 1999, 29–30 Fig. 34.5–7). A similar dagger (and a long sword) were found in Kelkor 2 on the Uzboi (Iusupov 1986, 150 Fig. 38.2,6).

In the 3rd century BCE, swords with ring-pommels and bar cross-guards became widespread in the Southern Urals (Gutsalov 2007, 14) and were predominating in the 2nd–1st centuries BCE. Such weapons were widespread in north Pontic Sarmatia from the 1st century CE onwards (e.g., a series of ring-pommel swords in Ust’ Alma in western Crimea).

Long swords and daggers with ring-pommels appeared in central Kazakhstan and in Uzbekistan during the 2nd century BCE. For some time they were used parallel to the daggers with crescent pommels. The ring-pommel daggers and swords must have been introduced in Bactria after the great migrations of the Yuezhi, Saka, and Asioi tribes in the second half of the 2nd century BCE at the latest. The Parthians adopted ring-pommel daggers and medallion-scabbards as royal emblems in the first half of the 1st century BCE.

¹⁹ Iusupov 1986, 51; Zuev/Ismagil 1996; Zuev/Ismagilov 1994.

²⁰ Skripkin 2005, 171–181; Khazanov 1971, 8–9; Kubarev 1981; Gutsalov 2007, 14; Bunker 1997, 182.

Arsacid Iran faced a number of invasions from Central Asia, and the invading tribes sometimes brought new arms types which were then adopted by the Parthians. Ring-pommel daggers and scabbards with side projections or applications demonstrate that types of weapons migrated across the political boundaries along paths of cultural movements. Ring-pommel daggers and ornamented scabbards became elite attributes in Parthia, Kommagene, among tribes of Bactria and among the Sarmatian peoples. Also the Sasanians used daggers with ring or disk pommels and elaborated lobed sheaths. There are several examples of such daggers depicted on reliefs and on silverware of the 3rd–4th centuries CE (Tanabe 1993, 91).

THE REVOLUTION IN WARFARE – THE CATAPHRACTS

In developing their cavalry, the Arsacids followed traditions of the Central Asian steppe peoples of the Dahae and Massagetae and, to some extent, of pre-Arsacid Parthia. At the same time, they adopted and improved some components of Hellenistic warfare. On the whole, the new tactics and arms, as employed by the Arsacids, proved astonishingly efficient and enabled them decisive victories over the Seleucids and other powers in Asia, including the Roman Empire²¹.

The cavalry units in the Achaemenid army (550–330 BCE) were made up of diverse peoples inhabiting the Persian Empire and diverse military traditions (Bittner 1987; Tuplin 2010). The best types of cavalry were in the hands of Iranian peoples: primarily contingents manned by the inhabitants of the steppes and soldiers from settled communities in Central Asia, including Dahae, Massagetae, Bactrians, Sogdians, and Saka, most of whom were javelin throwers or archers²².

To reinforce the striking power of their cavalry, Achaemenid commanders started to use better armor not only for the men but also for the horses. The military traditions of the Central Asian Massagetae provided Achaemenid commanders with a good model to follow: Herodotus (1.215) and Strabo (11.8.6²³) describe the breastplates the Massagetan cavalry used to protect its horses and body (thorax) armor for its men. Furthermore, long swords were used by the Saka and Massagetae as early as in the eve of the 6th/5th century BCE, as demonstrated by the sword from Tagisken, measuring 118 cm in length (Demidenko/Firsov 2007, 172).

The breakthrough in the development of the Iranian cavalry came with the reforms implemented by Darius III (336–330) and his commanders in the interval between the Battles of Issos (333) and Gaugamela (331). Darius III's new heavy cavalry combined armor for horse and rider with the use of long lances of the Macedonian type. The reformed army received intensive training (Diod. 17.55.1²⁴). Darius saw to the reinforcement of his cavalry's protective armor (Curt. 4.9.3²⁵). The Achaemenid forces which were of paramount significance at Gaugamela (331 BCE) were the cavalry units from eastern Iran (including Parthia) and Central Asia. Both the way

²¹ (Nikonorov 1994; 1998; Olbrycht 2010d; 2010e.

²² Litvinskii/P'iankov 1966; Nikonorov 1997, I, 18–28; Torday 1997; Olbrycht 2004.

²³ The Geography of Strabo, Geography in eight volumes. With an English translation by H. L. Jones. Vol. V. Loeb Classical Library 211 (London 1928).

²⁴ Diodorus Siculus. Works in 12 volumes. With an English translation by Ch. H. Oldfather et al. Vol. VIII, translated by B. Welles. Loeb Classical Library 422 (London 1963).

²⁵ Q. Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni*. Translated by J. Yardley. Penguin Classics. Reprint with updated bibliography (London 2004).

Darius's cavalry (men and mounts) was armed and armored, with the use of long spears, as well as the combat tactics (charges to break the ranks of Macedonian cavalry and infantry, and the combination of heavy cavalry with mounted archers) allow us to speak of the engagement of cataphracts at Gaugamela. The heavily armored cavalry armed with long spears must have been composed mainly of Massagetae with an admixture of Bactrians, Sogdians, and Arachosians.

To avoid confusion we need to define what we mean here by "cataphracts"²⁶, since not every type of heavily armored cavalry may be legitimately referred to by this term. On the basis of the accounts of battles in which they participated, and following the fundamental observations by A. M. Khazanov, we may describe "cataphracts" as a type of heavily armored and armed cavalry with riders using a long spear as their principal weapon, as well as a sword, a pair of daggers, and frequently a bow and arrows for offensive warfare (as stressed by Plutarch, *Luc.* 28²⁷). Moreover, cataphract mounts were usually clad in armor, although this was not a hard-and-fast rule (Khazanov 1971, 71–74). This is the definition as regards offensive weapons and armor, but another salient point concerning cataphracts were the combat tactics they employed, which were based on two principles: first, their fighting potential was determined by the fact that they attacked in tightly packed formations; and secondly, cataphracts were effective only if deployed in coordination with light offensive horsemen, best of all with mounted archers.

We may conclude with a firm assertion that the Achaemenid cavalry developed to a large extent under the influence of the martial tradition of the peoples of Central Asia, who set many of the trends including the development of horse armor. The Iranian heavy cavalry, which had reached a particularly high level of advancement among the peoples of Central Asia, especially the Massagetae, was now equipped with long spears resembling Macedonian lances. The emergence of the cataphracts was the result of the combination of Iranian military achievements (including the Central Asian nomadic traditions) and, broadly speaking, the Achaemenid military tradition, with the Macedonian martial experience.

After the defeat and death of Darius III his military reforms were continued by Spitamenes, the de facto Sogdian commander, who put up embittered resistance to Alexander's army in Sogdiana and Bactria (329–328; Olbrycht 1996; 2004, 128–150). His tactics were to combine the assets of the various types of cavalry, including – it would appear – the cataphract type. In a way Spitamenes continued the reforms initiated by Darius III's chief-of-staff, a relevant fact since in the satrapies of Iran proper under the rule of Alexander there were no opportunities for experimenting with the new type of cavalry. The victor preferred the Macedonian type of heavy or medium cavalry. That is why cataphract units developed beyond the frontiers of the Hellenistic states, on the peripheries of Iran and Bactria and Sogdiana, i.e., in the Transcaspian steppes (the territories controlled by the Massagetae and Dahae) and in Chorasmia. These were also the peoples (especially the Dahae and the Saka) who had the best mounted archers, and it was no coincidence that Alexander employed their services in his elite cavalry. The methods of offensive warfare Spitamenes used, involving a combination of mounted archers and heavy cavalry of the cataphract type with lancers, and the composition of his armed forces, were a prelude to the Parthian art of war under the Arsacids. The rising importance of heavy cavalry in the Western Asian art of war which became manifest as of the late Achaemenid period would reach its climax

²⁶ On the origins and occurrence of cataphracts, see Khazanov 1968; 1971, 71–80; Pugachenkova 1966b; Mielczarek 1993; Nikonorov 1994; 1998; Simonenko 2008.

²⁷ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives* in 11 volumes. With an English translation by B. Perrin. Vol II. Themistocles and Camillus, Aristides and Cato Maior, Cimon and Lucullus. Loeb Classical Library 47 (London 1959).

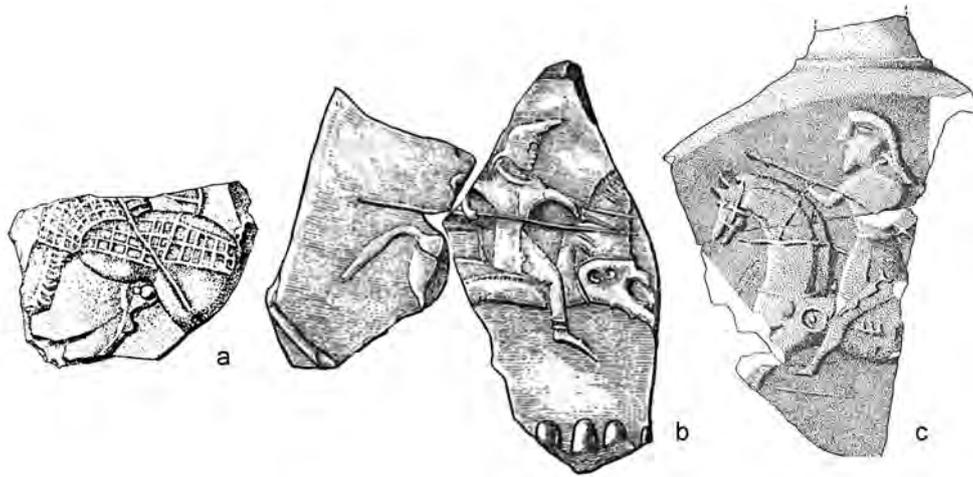


Fig. 25. a Khumbuz-tepe in Chorasmia, Uzbekistan. Fragment of a vessel showing an armored horse and a rider with a spear. End of 4th/beginning of 3rd c. BCE (after Mambetullaev 1977, 128 Fig. 1); b Koi-krylgan-kala in Chorasmia, Uzbekistan. Ceramic fragment showing a horseman with a long spear held with both hands (after Nikonorov 1997 II, Fig. 3d); c Kalaly-gyr 2 in Chorasmia, Uzbekistan. Depiction of a rider with a spear held with both hands (after Vainberg 2004, Fig. 7.14,15).

in Arsacid times, when the tactics which combined the deployment of cataphracts and mounted archers was gloriously triumphant. Armies composed in this manner proved able to frontally attack and shatter tight-knit ranks of infantry and cavalry.

The most important allied contingents in Spitamenes' army were supplied by Massagetae and Dahae. The Massagetae probably formed medium and heavy cavalry, the traditional force of their tribe. Not accidentally, the oldest depiction of a heavily armored horseman who may be called the cataphract comes from Chorasmia, an area traditionally connected with and even long subordinated to the Massagetae, a relief from Khumbuz-tepe shows an armored horse and rider with a spear. The object is datable to the end of the 4th – beginning of the 3rd centuries BCE (Fig. 25a). The site is located in southern Chorasmia on the border between farming soil and the nomads dominated steppes. From Chirik-Rabat to the east of the Aral Sea, some pieces of heavy armor come, having belonged to a nomadic warrior (Olbrycht 2004, 144–147).

There is pictorial evidence for the employment of unarmored mounted spear-bearers (*kontophoroi*) among Chorasmians. A depiction of an Iranian rider with the long spear comes from Koi-krylgan-kala in Chorasmia (Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 3d). This ceramic fragment shows a horseman with a very long spear held with both hands. The rider is not armored (Fig. 25b). Recently, another depiction on a ceramic fragment found at Kalaly-gyr 2 in Chorasmia has been published, showing a rider with a spear held with both hands (Vainberg 2004, Figs. 7.14–15). The object is datable to the late 4th – 3rd centuries BCE (Fig. 25c). The Massagetae were closely related to the Parthians and early Arsacids, so it is conceivable that the development of the Massagetaean armor and weapons influenced the military equipment of the neighboring Dahae and of the early Arsacids in Parthia.

The horse-archers of the Arsacids were principally of Central Asian origin, being evolved especially by the Dahae; their famous mounted bowmen distinguished themselves in the wars against the Macedonians and then, in the Hellenistic period, belonged to the best mercenary troops in the East (Olbrycht 2004, 158–170).

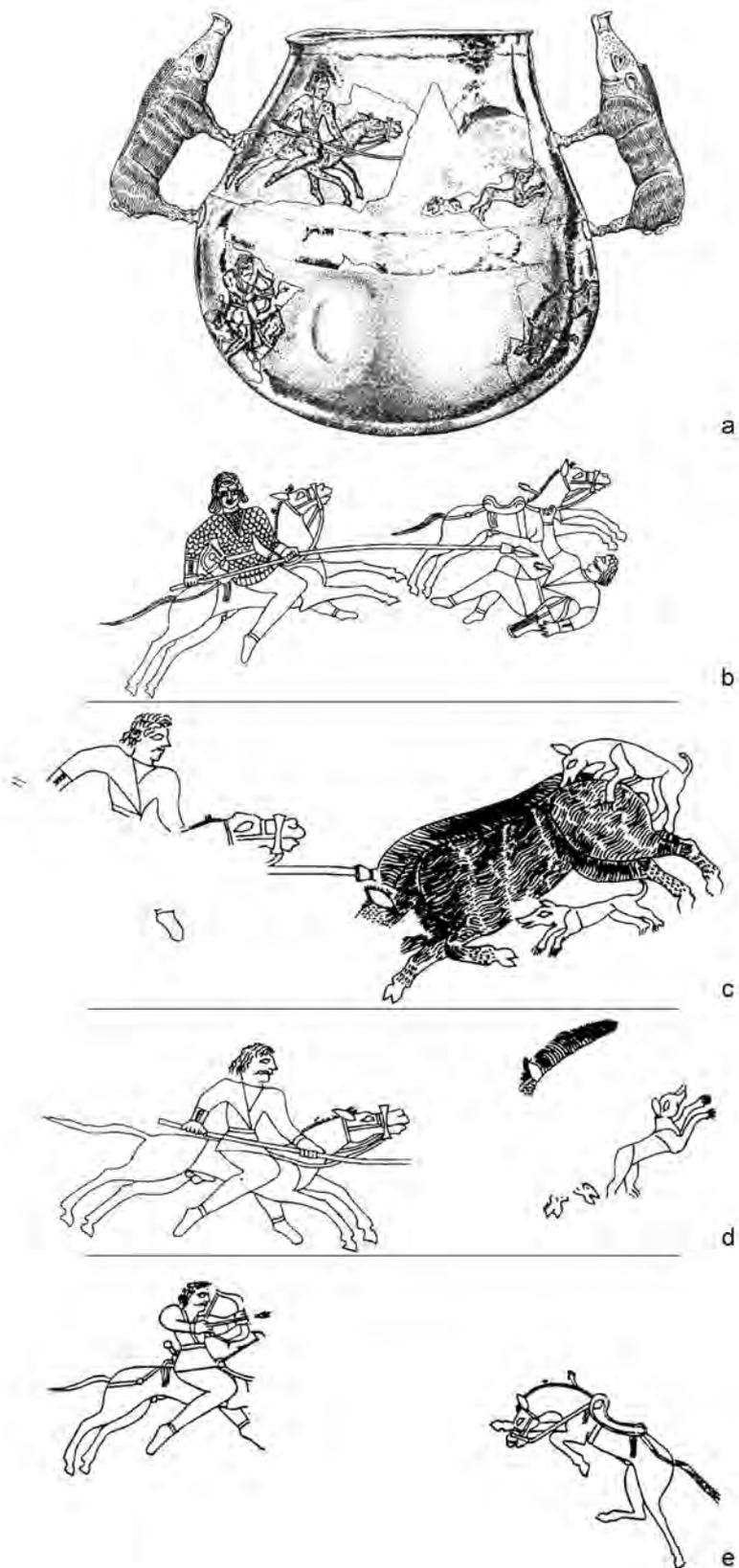


Fig. 26. Kosika on the Lower Volga, Russia. A vessel with scenes of a horsemen's combat (after Mordvintseva/Treister 2007, Vol. 3, Figs. 10–11).

Our knowledge of Parthian cataphracts and horse archers comes mainly from accounts of wars between Arsacid Iran and Rome. The most detailed description of the Arsacid cataphracts and mounted bowmen offers Plutarch in his account of the battle of Carrhae (53 BCE; *Plut. Crass.* 23.8–27.2²⁸; see also Cassius Dio 40.21.1–24.1). At Carrhae, the Parthians demonstrated the high effectiveness of the combined cavalry types tactics.

The development of the Arsacid cavalry before Carrhae can be reconstructed only fragmentary. There is some evidence of the early Arsacid influence on Seleucid military practices, including the employment of horse archers and cataphracts. Seleucus II was completely defeated (ca. 230 BCE; *Iust.* 41.4.9–10²⁹), and later (209 BCE) Arsaces II fought with “extraordinary valor” against Antiochos III (*Iust.* 41.5.7). Antiochos must have been deeply impressed by the efficiency of Parthian cataphracts and horse-archers, for such arms, being promptly adopted by the Seleucid army, were clearly intended to be the decisive offensive force at Panion (200 BCE) and at Magnesia (190 BCE). Parthian cataphracts are directly attested for first time at the battle of Tigranocerta in 69 BCE, fighting against a Roman army under Lucullus (*Plut. Luc.* 26–28; *Frontinus* 2.2.4³⁰; *App. Mithr.* 85³¹). The Parthian cataphracts were part of the army led by the Armenian king Tigranes. The Atropatenian Medes and Adiabeni constituted the bulk of the cataphracts (Olbrycht 2010a, 78–80).

During the 1st century BCE, cataphracts cavalry appeared in those areas of Western Asia, which were influenced or subjugated by the Parthians, including Adiabene (*Ios. Ant.* 20.86³²) and Osrhoene (*Arr. Parth. Fr.* 46³³). Artavasdes II of Armenia commanded a force of 10,000 cavalry in 53 BCE. Armenian cavalry consisted both of cataphracts and of horse archers (*Plut. Crass.* 18.3, 19.1; *Plut. Ant.* 50.5³⁴; *Strab.* 11.4.4, 11.14.9).

Cataphracts also developed amongst the Sarmatian tribes, the nomads of Central Asia and the Indo-Iranian borderland (including the Saka), and in Bactria of the pre-Kushan and Kushan period (Nikonorov 1997). The Sarmatians often employed cataphracts without horse armor, as depicted on a vessel from Kosika on the lower Volga (mid-1st century BCE; Fig. 26). The Indo-Sakan coins show two types of cavalry: unarmored mounted bowmen and cataphracts (Bopearachchi/Sachs 2001). This is clear evidence that the Saka employed the same tactics as Parthians and Sarmatians cavalry attack based on a combination of mobile archers and armored riders — cataphracts (Rosenfield 1967, 125). The Sakan king Sparilises is shown on his coins as the fully armored cataphract rider. On some coins he is dismounted, using battle-axe and a Scythian bow (Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 26a–b). Likewise Azes I is depicted as a cataphract (Nikonorov 1997, II, Fig. 26c–d).

Recently two phalerae (10 cm in diameter) with battle scenes have been published (Treister/Yatsenko 1997/98, 61–66). The roundels belong to a private collection and their provenance is not known. The scenes on both roundels represent the same composition but are not identical. The images are made of gold and turquoise inlays. The harness consisted also of 8 small plaques

²⁸ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives* in 11 volumes. With an English translation by B. Perrin. Vol. III. Pericles and Fabius Maximus, Nicias and Crassus. Loeb Classical Library 65 (London 1958).

²⁹ Justin, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, with an English translation by J. C. Yardley (Atlanta 1994).

³⁰ Frontinus, *Strategemata*. With an English translation by Charles E. Bennett. Loeb Classical Library 174 (Cambridge/MA 1925).

³¹ Appian, *Roman History*. Vol II, Books VIII–XII, with

an English translation by H. White. Loeb Classical Library 3 (Cambridge/MA 1912).

³² Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*. Book XX. With an English translation by L. H. Feldman. Loeb Classical Library 456 (Cambridge/MA, London 1996).

³³ Arrian, *Parthika*. Text and Translation by James G. DeVoto. In: F. A. Lepper, *Trajan's Parthian War* (Chicago 1993) 225–263.

³⁴ Plutarch's *Lives* in 11 volumes. With an English translation by B. Perrin. Vol. IX. Demetrius and Antony, Pyrrhus and Caius Marius. Loeb Classical Library 101 (London 1958).

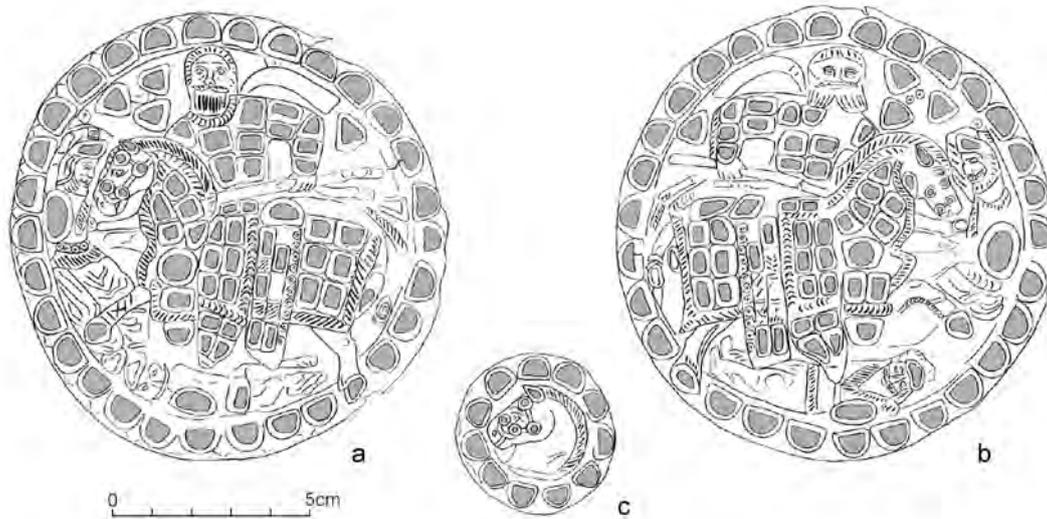


Fig. 27. a–b Two phalerae (10 cm in diameter); c plaque (horse protoma). Private collection. The phalerae depict a battle of a rider with two foot soldiers. The body of the rider and the horse is covered with rectangular inlays of turquoise reproducing lamellae of the body armor (after Mordvintseva 2003, Fig. 52).

with the images of horse protomes (Fig. 27). M. Yu. Treister and S. A. Yatsenko (1997/98) date the phalerae at about first half of the 1st century CE. V. Mordvintseva (2003, 62) suggests a slightly later date. Parallels with the coins of the Indo-Sakan kings allow a dating to the second half of the 1st century BCE. The phalerae depict a battle of a rider with two foot soldiers. The body of the rider and the horse is covered with rectangular inlays of turquoise reproducing lamellae of the body armor. A similar technique – foot soldiers wearing a thighs-long armor shirt decorated with rows of rectangular turquoise inlays – is known from Tillya-tepe (chest clasp with Ares/Pharro) and Kobiakovo. As to the horse, only his head and back are shown without armor plates. The rider holds his spear across the horse's neck. A big gorytus is visible with a quiver consisting of two parts.

The rider depicted on the phalerae is a typical cataphract. His armor is of the same type as that used in western Parthia³⁵. A similar cataphract rider is depicted on block 3 at Tang-e Sarvak in Iran, dated between 75 to the early 3rd century CE (Fig. 28; cf. Vanden Berghe/Schippmann 1985, 84–86). Parallels with the Indo-Sakan coins and the above mentioned objects allow a dating to the second half of the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE. Original cataphract horse armor of the 3rd century CE was found in Dura Europos (Nicolle 1996, 17 Fig. 10a.c).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout the whole timespan of the Arsacid epoch, the links between Iran and the peoples of the Central-Eurasian steppes were extremely differentiated and ranged from conquest and

³⁵ Wilcox 1986, Pl. A1; Kawami 1987, 106–107; Abdulaev 1995a, 175 Fig. 6.

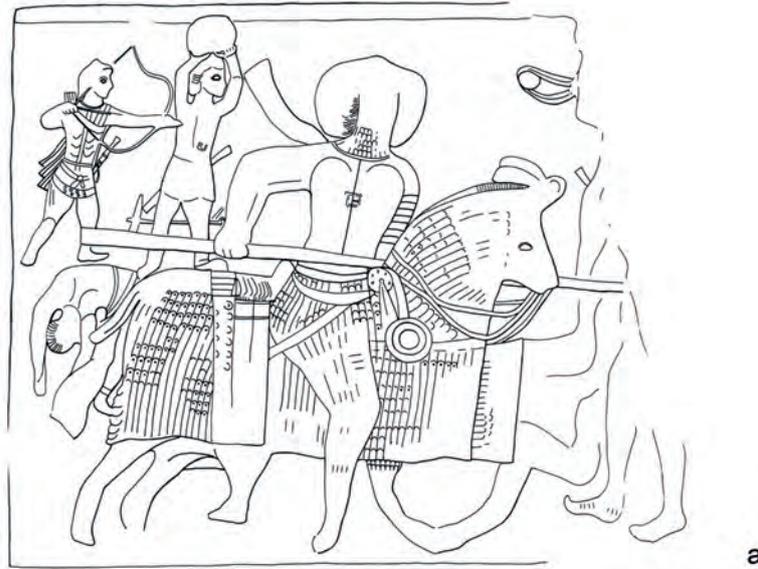


Fig. 28. Tang-e Sarvak, Iran. Relief depicting a cataphract rider (photo M. Olbrycht; drawing after von Gall 2000, Fig. 15).

political predominance to trade and profitable cultural relations. In reconstructing the history of Central Asia, the Caspian-Pontic steppes and Parthian Iran, it is necessary to keep in mind the existence of close cultural, ethnic and religious affinities between these areas – many phenomena in their civilization are rooted in a similar cultural background. In many respects the establishment and growth of the Arsacid Parthian state, which remained politically, economically and culturally linked with the peoples of Central Asia, had fundamental consequences for the history both of Iran and Central Eurasia. The Arsacids were often backed by nomadic tribes on the borders of their heartland. On the other hand the peace of the Parthian Empire was many times disturbed by invasions on its northern and eastern borders. Ancient historians point out

that the Parthians showed much concern for their relations with the nomadic peoples of the Central Eurasian steppes. Such testimonies can be supported by the evidence of archaeological discoveries in Parthia, the Uzboi Basin, in Ustyurt, Bactria, and the Indo-Iranian borderland.

Although of nomadic origin (or maybe precisely because of their experience as nomads), the Arsacids were able to create a successful socio-economic system. In this respect, there are certain similarities between the development of the Arsacid kingdom and that of the Kushans. To hold the mighty empire, paramount military power was indispensable and the Parthians were in a position to secure political stability in the Near East and Western Central Asia for several centuries.

A widely held theory claims that the alleged steppe traditions of the Parthians were no more than a legacy of the Achaemenid age, and that the so-called Parthian ethos, along with its archery and horsemanship, had been handed down from the Achaemenids. While it is true that riding and shooting with bows and arrows had played a salient part in the customs of the Medes and Persians long before the Arsacids arrived on the scene (Herodotus 1.136), nevertheless one fundamental difference distinguishes the Parthians in this respect. Alongside their cavalry the Medes and Persians had appreciated and deployed foot soldiers armed with spears, the infantry of Immortals who made up the core of the Achaemenid army. But we hear nothing of an substantial Arsacid infantry force (certainly not one consisting of native Parthians), only of a cavalry composed of heavily armored cataphracts and mounted archers (Olbrycht 1998a, 263). For the king of Parthia and the high-born in his closest entourage going into battle on foot would have been a disgrace. In contrast Darius I (521–486), Achaemenid king of Persia, had the Naksh-e Rostam inscription celebrate his martial skills as a horseman and infantryman: “As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a Bowman I am a good Bowman both afoot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback” (Kent 1953, 140). Compared with the Achaemenid period, a profound change ensued in the ethos of the elite. The nomadic subjugation of Iran under Arsaces I caused a shift over to reliance upon cavalry as the primary tactical arm (James 2006). A concomitant upheaval occurred in armor and weaponry. Long swords for combat on horseback came in, along with long spears designed for cavalry use and new, powerful bows (the Hunnic and Sasanian types), capable of piercing enemy breastplates. A revolution had been carried out in the military – cataphracts cavalry combined with mounted archers became the chief fighting force of the peoples of Iran, Central Asia, and Sarmatia.

One of history’s greatest paradoxes is the phenomenon of military needs serving as an essential spur to technological progress (thanks to the invention of new kinds of weaponry) and to the furtherance of numerous aspects of culture. Moreover, wars promote mutual contact and exchange between different peoples. This applies in particular to Iranian and Central Asian history, which has been determined to a great extent by warlike nomadic peoples (Coulston 1986; Torday 1997). Arsacid Iran faced a number of invasions from Central Asia, and the invading tribes more than once brought new types of arms which were then adopted by the Parthians. Mutual influences also resulted from peaceful contacts (the Silk Road trade, diplomatic contacts, tributes, bridal exchange between royal houses). The Parthians were not averse to assimilating new military technologies, such as enhanced types of the bow (the Hunnic and Sasanian types), swords, daggers, and scabbard slides, developed by the nomads of South Siberia, Mongolia, and Central Asia, or created in China.

The perennial contacts the Arsacids kept up with the steppe peoples and principalities under dynasties of steppe origin augmented the nomadic features in Parthia’s culture and aristocracy’s ethos. Principalities of this kind – the Indo-Saka of Greater Sakastan and the Kushans on the area of today’s Afghanistan and Pakistan – flanked Parthia on the east, while on the west the

Parthians neighbored on Arab nomads, troublemakers in Babylonia penetrating right into northern Mesopotamia, where they set up their local power centers at Edessa and Hatra (Funke 1996; Hauser 1998). The nomadic ethos, which remained strong even after the settlement of the Arab elites, made them ready to adopt salient elements of Parthian culture.

Throughout the Parthian Empire and along its marches the lifestyle of the nomadic shepherds proliferated, but at the same time trade, craftsmanship, agriculture, and life in the cities flourished. The Arsacids managed to combine all these different social and ethnic building-blocks into the core of a vast cultural community which R. Ghirshman has called an “Oriental *koine*”, stretching from Syria to the borders of China, from the Crimea and Sarmatia to the Indo-Saka (Ghirshman 1962, 257–280). The *koine* went well beyond the borders of the Parthian Empire. The culture of the ruling groups in the Arsacids’ vassal and neighboring states followed Parthian customs, hence the similarities in dress, arms, and ethos. We may speak of an peculiar network of elites looking up to and emulating the same cultural patterns³⁶.

As of the latter half of the 1st century CE Parthian political relations with Central Asia declined owing to the rise of a powerful Kushan state in Bactria. The Arsacids now concentrated more on the situation in Iran itself and on their western neighbors. Nonetheless the Parthian network marked by the features the Parthians had adopted from the peoples of Central Asia – arms including long swords, elaborated daggers in lobed sheaths, scabbard slides – continued to flourish, leaving its testimonials in the culture of Parthian centers such as Hatra and Elymais, and beyond Iran itself, at Palmyra, in Sarmatia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

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³⁶ The phenomenon may be compared with the Orientalisation of Polish customs in the 16th–18th centuries under the impact of Turkey and Persia, but without the repudiation of the cultural legacy of Latinate Christen-

dom. The Orientalist attire, weaponry, some aspects of lifestyle (such as fondness of horsemanship) of the Polish *szlachta* (nobility and gentry) made up vital components of the magnificent Sarmatianist culture.

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COMPLEXITY OF INTERACTION
ALONG THE EURASIAN STEPPE ZONE
IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM CE

Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology

Volume 7

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Jan Bemann

COMPLEXITY OF INTERACTION
ALONG THE EURASIAN STEPPE ZONE
IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM CE

Edited by
Jan Bemann, Michael Schmauder

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
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NOMADIC EMPIRES – MODES OF ANALYSIS

NIKOLAI N. KRADIN Nomadic Empires in Inner Asia	11
NICOLA DI COSMO China-Steppe Relations in Historical Perspective.....	49
J. DANIEL ROGERS Empire Dynamics and Inner Asia.....	73
CLAUDIO CIOFFI-REVILLA, WILLIAM HONEYCHURCH, J. DANIEL ROGERS MASON Hierarchies: A Long-range Agent Model of Power, Conflict, and Environment in Inner Asia	89
PAVEL E. TARASOV, MAYKE WAGNER Environmental Aspects of Chinese Antiquity: Problems of Interpretation and Chronological Correlation	115

XIONGNU, THE HAN EMPIRE, AND THE ORIENTAL KOINE

BRYAN K. MILLER The Southern Xiongnu in Northern China: Navigating and Negotiating the Middle Ground	127
URSULA B. BROSEDER A Study on the Complexity and Dynamics of Interaction and Exchange in Late Iron Age Eurasia	199
MAREK JAN OLBRYCHT Arsacid Iran and the Nomads of Central Asia – Ways of Cultural Transfer	333

INNER AND CENTRAL ASIA FROM THE TÜRKES TO THE MONGOLS

SERGEY A. VASYUTIN The Model of the Political Transformation of the Da Liao as an Alternative to the Evolution of the Structures of Authority in the Early Medieval Pastoral Empires of Mongolia.....	391
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MICHAEL R. DROMPP	
Strategies of Cohesion and Control in the Türk and Uyghur Empires.	437
ÉTIENNE DE LA VAISSIÈRE	
Away from the Ötüken: A Geopolitical Approach to the seventh Century Eastern Türks	453
SÖREN STARK	
Luxurious Necessities: Some Observations on Foreign Commodities and Nomadic Polities in Central Asia in the sixth to ninth Centuries	463
PETER B. GOLDEN	
The Turkic World in Maḥmûd al-Kâshgharî	503
THOMAS O. HÖLLMANN	
On the Road again – Diplomacy and Trade from a Chinese Perspective	557
MICHAL BIRAN	
The Qarakhanids’ Eastern Exchange: Preliminary Notes on the Silk Roads in the eleventh and twelfth Centuries.	575
JÜRGEN PAUL	
Forces and Resources. Remarks on the Failing Regional State of Sultānšāh b. Il Arslan Ḥwārazmšāh.	597
TATIANA SKRYNNIKOVA	
Old-Turkish Roots of Chinggis Khan’s “Golden Clan”. Continuity of Genesis. Typology of Power	623
NOMADIC INTERACTION WITH THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE WEST	
MISCHA MEIER	
Dealing with Non-State Societies: The failed Assassination Attempt against Attila (449 CE) and Eastern Roman Hunnic Policy	635
TIMO STICKLER	
The Gupta Empire in the Face of the Hunnic Threat. Parallels to the Late Roman Empire?	659
MICHAEL SCHMAUDER	
Huns, Avars, Hungarians – Reflections on the Interaction between Steppe Empires in Southeast Europe and the Late Roman to Early Byzantine Empires	671
WALTER POHL	
Huns, Avars, Hungarians – Comparative Perspectives based on Written Evidence	693
INDEX OF AUTHORS.	703

PREFACE

This volume combines contributions to a conference of the same title which was held February 9 to 11, 2012, in Bonn. Idea and format of the meeting had been developed through a process of intensive discussions among the editors in close cooperation with Dieter Quast, RGZM Mainz. Our original intention was to organize a conference with a focus on archaeology, bearing in mind questions concerning mobility and communication or – stated differently – exchange patterns in Eurasia. After having recognized that research in Eurasia is still dominated by site centric approaches which makes vast overviews as we imagined them somewhat cumbersome we deviated from our first outline.

As a consequence, we broadened the field for two further aspects which had been nearly neglected thus far. First, there are West–East ranging communications in the Eurasian steppe zone which lie beyond the overarching term “Silk Roads”. As written sources rarely throw light on interactions among steppe polities, these interactions are markedly less frequently subject to scientific discussions. This question is best approached via archaeological analyses with a wide focus in geographical terms. North–South contacts are by far more commonly discussed than West–East communications, as they encompass interactions between states with foremost sedentary population and nomads who live north of these territories. As a rule, it is the sedentary viewpoint which is being told, as these cultures opposed to the nomads left numerous written accounts¹. At the same time we wanted to encourage comparative perspectives. Characteristics often assumed to be typical of the relations between sedentary people and nomads are also true in comparable measures of those between Rome/Byzantium and their “barbaric” neighbors. What they all have in common is at least a distinct mobility in space, even though to varying forms and degrees. Furthermore, questions and themes long discussed in European archaeology and history entered the research of Inner Asia and Central Asia only recently, as, for example, identity, the emergence of new ethnic groups, frontiers, frontier societies, contact zones, elites, economies of prestige goods. We therefore wanted to invite colleagues of different disciplines and regions to join in a scientific dispute. Lively discussions during the conference and positive feedback by attendees show that this idea was appreciated.

The second aspect to be included can be summarized under the term “complexity”, which in this context should not be understood as a concept from the social sciences but metaphorically. Over long periods of time simple explanations of cultural phenomena were favored, be it statements on pure and poor nomads, the dependency theory or the bad habit of explaining every cultural change with large-scale migrations. “Complexity” is meant as a signal and reminder that the simplest explanations are not always the best, which is reflected by the contributions in this volume.

¹ Numerous projects within the framework of the Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich) 586 “Difference and Integration” at the University Leipzig and the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg dealt intensively with interactions between

nomads and settled people, a good overview of publications thus far is given by the center’s website <http://nomadsed.de/home/>.

We consciously limited the temporal scope of the papers to the time after the Scyths and before the Mongols, somewhat clumsily described as the “first millennium CE”, because these two eras have been traditionally paid enormous attention to and are represented in a corresponding flood of publications². At the same time interactions in the steppe zone witnessed only during the centuries around the turn of the era a hitherto unknown rise in intensity and dynamics.

Not all of the works presented at the conference are included in this volume as they were already noted for publications elsewhere. This applies to the presentations given by Enno Giele, Valentina Mordvintseva, and Matthias Pfisterer. However, other colleagues who could not attend the conference were invited to hand in manuscripts. All contributions were revised and partly expanded, which to our delight resulted in this comprehensive volume. We would have loved to have included a paper on the consequences of climate change and meteorological events on the politics of the Eurasian steppe as such conditions win more and more popularity as *explanans* of significant changes³, but it did not work out. To our dismay and because of different reasons the western steppes and Central Asia are less represented than we wished for.

We subdivided the contributions into four parts: “Nomadic Empires – Modes of Analysis” encompasses highly different approaches to interpretations and analyses of nomadic empires, ranging from computational agent-based models, over anthropological to historical methodology. Better than any perfect introduction this multi-faceted research shows how exciting it is to deal with this area much neglected in World History. Although the section “Xiongnu, the Han Empire and the Oriental Koine” assembles merely three contributions, it covers more than 260 pages. If nothing else, this certainly echoes the boom of Xiongnu archaeology of the past decades. By taking into account enormous amounts of archaeological, art historical, and written sources the authors surmount traditional and often too static schemes of interpretation. These new analyses detect an astonishing variety of interactions during the centuries around the turn of the era, which broadens our understanding of this epoch and provides new avenues for other regions and periods at the same time. In the third section, “Inner and Central Asia from the Türks to the Mongols”, nine contributions exemplify a multicolored and almost continuously changing picture of languages, ethnicities, and political affinities for Inner and Central Asia from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Political affinities, however, were changing so quickly due to situational demands as to almost refute all efforts to retrace them within the archaeological record. Decision makers were astonishingly well informed about even distant regions and they acted accordingly over vast distances. The studies at hand analyze exchange processes on varying

² See for the Scyths for example W. Menghin/H. Parzinger/A. Nagler/M. Nawroth (eds.), *Im Zeichen des goldenen Greifen. Königsgräber der Skythen. Begleitband zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung*: Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 6. Juli – 1. Oktober 2007; München, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, 26. Oktober 2007 – 20. Januar 2008; Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, 15. Februar – 25. Mai 2008 (München, Berlin 2007); H. Parzinger, *Die Skythen*. 3rd ed. (München 2009); J. Aruz (ed.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes* (New York, New Haven 2000); J. Aruz/A. Farkas/A. Alekseev/E. Korolkova (eds.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia. Perspectives on the Steppe Nomads of the Ancient World*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia (New Haven 2006). See

for the Mongol period *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben. Das Weltreich der Mongolen* (2005); W. W. Fitzhugh/M. Rossabi/W. Honeychurch (eds.), *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire* (Seattle 2009); see also the website of the European Research Council Grant “Mobility, Empire and Cross Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia” <http://mongol.huji.ac.il/>, which provides an extensive bibliography.

³ N. Pederson/A. Hessel/N. Baatarbileg/K. Anchukaitis/N. Di Cosmo, *Pluvials, Droughts, the Mongol Empire, and Modern Mongolia*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, 2014, 4375–4379; J. Fei/J. Zhou/Y. Hou, *Circa A.D. 626 Volcanic Eruption, Climatic Cooling, and the Collapse of the Eastern Turkic Empire*. *Climatic Change* 81, 2007, 469–475.

levels – from language to embassies – as well as aspects of mobility, from the integration of foreign symbols of power to large-scale migrations, or methods of state-building to the strategic destruction of complex states. The last section combines papers that focus on “Nomadic Interaction with the Roman and Byzantine West” traversing the Eurasian steppe zone from east to west. These case studies, either already comparative or suitable for further comparisons, give reason to assume that although there are certain encompassing communalities every conquest and struggle with the empires of the West is historically unique. At the same time it becomes apparent that the knowledge base of the decision makers in the Roman Empire had been greater than hitherto thought.

The variety of studies assembled in this volume leaves no doubt as to how dynamically and diversely the interactions, processes, and transformations developed in the Eurasian steppe zone. These changes cannot be studied under common schemes of interpretation which are more often than not inseparable from overcome clichés.

Chinese names and terms have been transliterated according to the Pinyin system, Russian names and references according to the system of the Library of Congress. Arabic, Persian, and Turkic names and terms appear in the form chosen by the authors of the individual chapters.

Acknowledgements

The conference had been jointly prepared and organized together with Ursula Brosseder and Timo Stickler. We thank both of them for their cordial and companionable collaboration. Susanne Reichert engaged to such an extent in the editing work of the papers that it was a delight for us to include her as co-editor. The edition of this volume in addition to ongoing obligations and projects could only be managed as a team.

Our heartfelt thanks also goes to Daniel Waugh, Seattle, who has helped us now repeatedly with translations and language editing. Without his honorary efforts we would never have been able to integrate Sergey Vasyutin’s thoughts in this book. Thanks to his enormous overview and language knowledge Peter Golden saved us from mistakes concerning the correct transliteration of names in the contributions of Tatiana Skrynnikova and Sergey Vasyutin. Image editing lay in Gisela Höhn’s sterling hands. She also promoted to create – as far as possible – a unified map basis for all contributions as to facilitate visualizing the different regions. Editing work was done by the proven team Ute Arents and Güde Bemann, substantially supported by Susanne Reichert. We owe Alicia Ventresca Miller, Kiel, as a native speaker many suggestions for improvement and stimuli. All authors and editors highly appreciate their painstaking efforts. For desktop publishing, which in the face of a multitude of different scripts demands unconventional solutions, we were able to win Matthias Weis. If not stated otherwise, images were provided by the authors and merely serve to illustrate.

The conference was made possible by the generous financial support from the Gerda Henkel Foundation. As always, it was our delight to collaborate with the foundation, a cooperation characterized by mutual trust. The meeting took place in the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn, which during the same time displayed the exhibition “Steppe Warriors – Nomads on Horseback of Mongolia from the 7th to 14th centuries” (“Steppenkrieger – Reiternomaden des 7.–14. Jahrhunderts aus der Mongolei”). Thus the participants had the opportunity to get insight into an on-

going cooperation between the Institute of Archaeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the Department of Prehistory and Early Historical Archaeology of the University of Bonn, and the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn. We thank the State Association of the Rhineland (Landschaftverband Rheinland) for the use of rooms and technical equipment of the museum and the financial support in printing this volume.

Our sincere thanks is owed to everyone who contributed to the success of the conference and the resulting book. With great joy we remember the inspiring and cordial atmosphere during the meeting.

Jan Bemann, Michael Schmauder

March 2015

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